

MOVIE THERAPY

“The King’s Speech”: an Adlerian formulation

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Adlerian Psychology views a person holistically as an adult living by a set of beliefs, adopted in childhood. Contrary to Freud’s determinism, Adler stipulates a soft-determinism, thus the ability to edit the childhood beliefs. This film simply makes a crisp comment about one’s present challenges as they are triggered by childhood beliefs.

“The King’s Speech”, an Academy Award winner. an historically based movie, can be reviewed through the lens of Adlerian Psychology. As mental health practioners, we adopt a modality, a theory, a general road map, for our treatment of clients. I am an Adlerian, but not exclusively. Using one approach limits the effectiveness of the therapy. Rogers and Freud are among the modalities from which I glean now and again.

In this film, Lionel (who was not a real doctor) exhibits an Adlerian approach in order to align with his client, none other than the King of England. From cognitive strategies, he treats George’s, symptom, stuttering as he manifests it outside of his identity. First and foremost however, therapeutic alliance is the foundation and prerequisite for effective outcome. Therefore, the therapist’s Adlerian approach and application sets the stage on which the King will be treated.

As the film progresses, it becomes obvious, that Alfred Adler’s cornerstone concepts are manifested. Some of those I will address are: family constellation, democratic alliance, organ inferiority and Gemeinschaftgefuh, that is, social interest. King George VI, or Bertie was he is nicknamed by his family, was a product of his Royal Family, a rather confining one. An autocratic father, a disengaged mother, and an extroverted older brother. The latter is portrayed as a tormentor to Bertie, a rebel of unorthodox life style. George

contrasts Edward, as is typical of 2nd born child, taking the responsible role, since Edward abdicated. George's personality is a stark contrast to Edward, he is the introverted son, forced to become King. Resentment and loyalty wrestle within the new King. His thin skin, brought on by years of victimization through teasing and critical fathering, has left him with feeble confidence low self-confidence and shattered self-esteem.

Theorized by Adler, organ inferiority addresses the physiological predisposition one inherits, the challenged part of one's person, possibly through a combination of nature/nurture. He himself, a sickly child, was considered a cripple, and as such socially inept. *Organ inferiority. Mosak. H. & Michael Maniacci, Adlerian Psychology: the Analytic. Taylor Francis, Philadelphia pp.34-35.* From this organ inferiority, sprouts the development of personality. The mix of nature/nurture creates the finished product. However as contrary to Freud's determinism, Adler postulated a soft-determinism, Manaster G. R. Corsini. *Individual Psychology. Adler School of Psychology. Chicago Il. 1982, p. 65-67.*

That is, there exists the possibility for a person to edit the basic weakness. As the shock is precipitated in one's adult life, the opportunity for editing becomes stark. The creed adopted as a child, needs to be changed to meet the present circumstances. George conquers his sense of inferiority towards Edward, manages his stuttering, and releases his father's tyrannical parenting. Around age 4, George began to stammer, a result of anxiety and a coping mechanism brought on by the pressure set upon him. Sweeney, T. *Adlerian Counseling: a Practitioner's Approach.* 1998. Taylor Francis, Philadelphia PA, Chapter 7. The more he is teased, the more he delves deeply in his escape, that is, stuttering. George used his voicelessness to manifest his perceived inabilities. As an adult, through behavioural and cognitive practices, the King commands his speech, sans stuttering.

An Adlerian therapeutic alliance is grounded in democracy. The two experts, the client in his narrative and the therapist in his knowledge and practice, align to discover and to deal with the issues. There is no pecking order. During sessions, Lionel, manifests as an equal to the King of England, this being controversial to say the least. However, through this egalitarian stance, George ceases to evaluate himself as a failing King, and transforms into a comrade at war against stammering. The therapist sets the tone for the alliance by his statement: "You may call me Lionel" he says, expecting, "you may call me George". From the lighthearted humour of building a model airplane, to owing a penny, it is on equal footing that Lionel meets with the King. The disappearance of echelons provides an equilibrium producing responsibility for each player, each in his own expertise.

The climax of the movie, is precipitated by the therapist confronting the King. Lionel perched on the King's throne no less, taunting George about his weakness and inability to take his own voice. It peaks with: "I have a voice!", declared with conviction and passion by George VI. At this point, George has aligned his self-ideal and his self-concept, taken his ownership of life tasks, triumphed over stuttering. As in Giroux. *Making Good Use of Illness*. Kendall-Hunt. 2002, "The proverbial dilemma between, 'I am' and 'I should be' plagues us as we grow in self-concept."

Complexes of inferiority and superiority are positioned appropriately, not in a reactionary way, but in a responsive, logical and grounded fashion. Lionel offers encouragement, makes it come alive for George. The power of encouragement is understated too often. The client manifests his own power, his recovery. It is not the result of the therapist's work. The latter offers, yet it is up to the client to work through it, if he chooses. Advice giving, convincing, or badgering the client on the contrary blocks a healthy encouragement in which the client self-determines by his own choices.

The noble King of England lacked faith in his ability, in his mandate, he lacked faith in his own voice. He stuttered. The seemingly simple comment from Lionel, "You don't need to be afraid of the things you were afraid of when you were five", is impactful. This permission by the therapist, invites George to conquer his stuckness.

This movie taught me that whether one is the King of England or a construction worker, or a business man, or for that matter a therapist, everyone carries childhood tapes. They run automatically when one is cast in a situation similar to a past difficulty. How simple, how hopeful for all of us. Rather than being motivated to erase, to eradicate or to deny our architecture, we meet the legacies, and edit. We take our voice.

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