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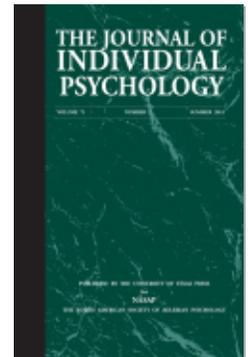
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Abstract

The relational nature of humans and the importance of human society as a stage for human actions and emotions are some of the core assumptions of Individual Psychology. The quality of one's ties to community is tested constantly, especially during transitions. This article explores the phenomenon of job transition in a context of general life transitions and the role of social media in maintaining one's ties to community and one's fulfillment of an Adlerian task of work. This article also investigates modern social media's ability to strengthen one's sense of a "net" and, ideally, to create a "netfeeling," or *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

Keywords: Individual Psychology, social media, Adlerian psychology, job transitions, social interest

There is a story about life transitions with which this article should begin. A middle-aged medical doctor was drafted as an army physician during the war, served his term, and then had to transition back to a civilian life in a country that lost the war. Years later, in his early 60s, that doctor went through another transition—immigration to a country across the ocean with a different life pace and language, with little prospect of coming back, while also being separated from some family members and many friends and colleagues (Bottome, 1939). That person was Alfred Adler, who knew a few things about life transitions.

The relational nature of humans and the importance of human society as a stage for human actions and emotions are some of the core assumptions of Individual Psychology (Adler, 1935; Dreikurs, 1989). Relationships, in Individual Psychology, are much greater than just an extension of human nature. They are that nature's essential content—both directing a person to change while themselves constantly changing as one attempts to solve life's difficulties through movement from a felt minus to felt plus (Adler, 1964; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). In that movement aimed to optimize individual survival and the survival of humankind, both changeability and stability of one's ties to community are equally needed for healthy adaptation to inevitable changes—and to go "beyond adapting" (Stein, 2008, p. 12). These qualities are especially visible during transitions.

In the West, graduating from high school, moving to a new area, and retiring from work are normative life transitions that cause changes in one's social ties (Bell & Lee, 2008; Grün, Hauser, & Rhein, 2010; Morgan & Openshaw, 2011; Shapiro & Yarborough-Hayes, 2008). When fragile or rigid, these ties may suffer damage under an outside stress and be tested for adaptability and their ability to regenerate. Healthy and flexible ties, however, help a person withstand current transitional stress and become a foundation for future growth.

As general life transitions (normative and nonnormative, or off-time) test one's resilience (Gerstorf et al., 2010; Perren, Keller, Passardi, & Scholz, 2010; Shlomo, Ben-Ari, Findler, Sivan, & Dolizki, 2010), unemployment is more often off-time, adding tangible financial strains and doubts about self-worth to other stresses. One's movement, whether climbing a promotional ladder or horizontal self-improvement, may seem arrested. A person may feel isolated and may see all the previous achievements useless and future goals pointless. In a country where high productivity is of utmost value, where the word *team* is associated with the word *work*, and where a sense of control over one's destiny is one of the most sacred traits, the loneliness of a newly unemployed person—which is often fueled by disappearance of routine, perceived lack of control, and feelings of hopelessness—may be especially profound. Many view social media as contributing to, if not solely responsible for, that sense of isolation (Marche, 2012; Olds & Schwartz, 2009).

This article explores the phenomenon of job transition in a context of general life transitions. The authors examine "netthinking" as interacting with communal feeling in shaping traditional networking processes in job transition. Netthinking in online interactions is defined as a unique process maintained by one's ability to form a net-minded strategy and relational tactics in online transactions of information. The authors explore modern social media in its ability to strengthen these net processes and to create a "netfeeling," or *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*.

Challenges of a New World:
Individual, Communal, and Global Transitions

Historically, humans' most meaningful connections were face-to-face with others. Throughout evolution, humans needed tangible, reciprocal, and safe others to survive and thrive (Buck, 2011). Cacioppo, Hawkley, Norman, and Berntson (2011) noted, "Early in our history as a species, we survived and prospered only by banding together—in couples, in families, in tribes— to provide mutual protection and assistance" (p. 20). Almost 100 years earlier Adler wrote, "In the history of human culture, there is not a single

form of life which was not conducted as social" (as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 128). In a contemporary Adlerian discussion, summarizing the meaning and the impact of human contacts, Bitter (2012) noted that "mental health and human contact have always been linked" and that "self-absorption and a retreat from human connection" are almost always implicated in psychopathology (p. 92). The powerful benefits from being in the physical presence of others, and the related tribal factors, are especially visible across the life span (Buettner, 2008; Norman, Devries, Hawkley, Cacioppo, & Berntson, 2012; VanderWeele, Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2012).

Challenges to a Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging, as explored in both classical and contemporary Adlerian literature (Gere & MacDonald, 2010), is an essential prerequisite of healthy survival and is believed to leave "an individual only under the severest pathological changes of his mental life" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 138). The idea of communal survival, through shared work, fellowship, and "continuance of our race" (Ansbacher, 2011, p. 9) must not have needed emphasis in a preindustrialized society, as the logical consequences of acting otherwise would have been grave (Adler, 1935, 1938). "An isolated individual would have perished," wrote Adler (2006, p. 45).

At the same time, historically, a survival unit was relatively small: a family, village, or tribe. Industrial (and even more so postindustrial) society presented a threefold challenge to the communal mode of survival. First, via division of labor, industrialization both expanded the physical bounds of community and erased its clear boundaries. Second, industrialization likely contributed to the constantly shortening of average job tenure as, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the average person born in the latter years of the baby boom, between 1957 and 1964, held 11.3 jobs from age 18 to age 46. Third, industrialization shifted the perceived centrality of traditional communal survival, by creating an abundance of individual (noncommunal) survival gears, literally and metaphorically. An emphasis on individual responsibility (R. Ansbacher's, 2011, reminder that "even the very ill must ring their bell," p.10) may seem, at least on the surface—before one remembers that there will be someone answering the bell—quite fitting for this individual mode of survival.

In the professional sphere, it may seem that a person, if he or she so chooses, can nearly make it through an entire adult life without physically bonding with anyone else, without needing the literal sense of an elbow, and with a total absence of even minimal Western communal functions (whether an office BBQ party or a farewell retirement potluck lunch). In the latter decades of the 20th century, that decrease in immediate and physical bonding was accompanied by a postindustrialized increase in relatively more diffuse

and less tangible e-connections. Texting, Skyping, and Facebooking quickly crossed a line between personal and professional use of the media (Fawley, 2013; Jones & Hayter, 2013; Roose, 2012), bending many boundaries and nearly obliterating "close circles" and any remaining informational exclusiveness that previous generations did not dare to question.

Social Networks and Social Media

Adler (2006) suggested asking of a person, "How far-reaching is his interest in others?" (p. 45). It seems that now, in the early 21st century, there are virtually no limits on how far one's interest may go and no limits on how far one may go physically. Yet, like 80 years ago, how far one is unafraid and chooses to go still depends on "the limits which he has set himself" (Adler, 1935, p. 5). How do humans cope with this massive challenge? In *The Lonely American*, Olds and Schwartz (2009) discussed the rise of social isolation and disconnectedness in society. The authors pointed to television and the Internet as two main contributing forces in shrinking social connections, along with suburbanization, longer work hours, longer commutes, and high mobility. Hampton, Sessions, and Herr (2011) observed that between the 1985 General Social Survey and the 2008 Pew research, the mean number of individuals in our core networks (defined as individuals with whom one can discuss important life matters) declined from 2.98 to 1.93.

As tempting as establishing causality between cyberprocesses and human isolation might be, any linear attempts to fault the Internet for various instances of contemporary human disconnect fail to be convincing, let alone offer any realistic solution beyond prohibition (King, 2012; Moore, 2012). Concurring with Adler's assertion that the "human mind is not merely appropriative" but also "assimilative and constructive" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 77), the contemporary research on connection and the impact of the physical presence of others on one's well-being repeatedly stresses the idea of perception as a major qualifier in one's position on a continuum of connectedness and disconnectedness (Bernardon, Babb, Hakim-Larson, & Gragg, 2011; Cacioppo, Hawkley, & Thisted, 2010; Catterson & Hunter, 2010; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Social Media Can Strengthen Weak Ties

Much has been written about the negative impact of social media on human development and communal relationships, on all levels (Lau, Gabarron, Fernandez-Luque, & Armayones, 2012; Murat, 2014; Reveley, 2013; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). People are not just lonely, as many

worry. People are, according to Marche (2012), becoming "more narcissistic" precisely because of the social media. The assumption is that online connections detract from time spent in the physical presence of others. In contrast, we propose that social media complements and enriches, rather than detracts from, meaningful face-to-face connections. We believe that social media does not displace face-to-face social connections but makes them stronger. Moreover, as Tufekci (2012) noted, "If anything, social media is a counterweight to the ongoing devaluation of human lives" as a "loud, desperate attempt" to connect in the face of the obstacles and disconnects of modern life (para. 4).

Metcalfe's Law and the Value of a Network

The major (and still underused) benefit of social media is its ability to tap into and capitalize on low-density ties, which Granovetter (2005) defines as a primary feature of larger networks. This aligns with Metcalfe's law, which proposes that, with a few exceptions, the value of a network increases when new interconnections are added (Ochse, 2014; Valerdi, 2013).

Simmons (2013) also discusses the density as the unique quality of these connections, and the community's capacity to filter these connections a mechanism for maintaining community health and integrity. Because of the two fundamental interlocking aspects of large social networks (connection, or who is connected to whom, and contagion, or what is connecting them), and their low density, which allows for more flexibility, the large networks may paradoxically possess a better ability to self-maintain, self-sustain, and regenerate. If it is that simple, however, why aren't we, as humankind, one big interconnected family? Why, on the contrary—and seemingly paradoxically—does it feel like the more connections people have, the less connected they feel?
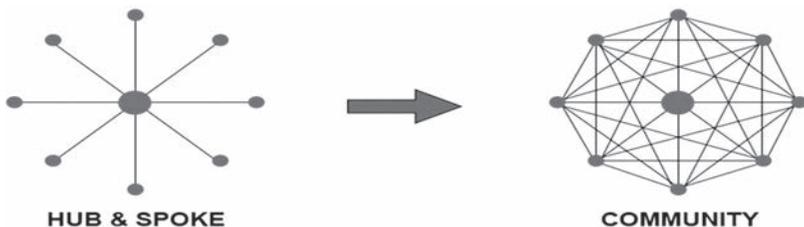

Figure 1. Hub-and-spoke paradigm. *Reproduced by permission of M. Simmons.*

Hub-and-Spoke Paradigm

Discussing human networks, Simmons (2013) brings in Adam Rifkin's success story and a "hub-and-spoke paradigm" (para. 7). According to the paradigm, most people subconsciously operate as the center of a network, and each added relationship is a spoke. The more connections, the more spokes are in such a system. The more spokes, the greater is the stress imposed on the system's center. The solution, in Simmons's (2013) summary of Rifkin's insight, is in removing self from that imaginary centered position and creating a decentralized community held together by a network, by relationships, and not by any centrally positioned individual. In Rifkin's case (and he was named *Fortune*'s Best Networker in 2011), his 14 million LinkedIn connections, 4,978 Facebook friends, and 5,673 Twitter followers (Shambora, 2011) are more than 21st-century cyberhype. They can be seen as the demonstration of a new *spokeless* wheel—a refurbished, Adlerian, procommunal movement. Rifkin has indeed reinvented the wheel. Here, too, is a recipe for one's readjustment in life if a hub (or a heart) becomes stressed by too many, too few, or too damaged and tangled spokes. Clearly, social (or what we might call communal) media has the potential to help those in career and other life transitions forge new high-quality, healthy connections.

Social Networks: From Netthinking to Networking to Netfeeling

In 1935, Adler wrote "These abilities and impressions, and the manner in which he [a person] 'experiences' them . . . are the bricks he is using in his own 'creative' way in building up his attitude toward life" (p. 5). One's ideal attitude of self-mastery and one's netfeeling of an ideal "unlimited community" (Feibleman, 1937) would come only in an environment in which netthinking would lay a foundation for networking and other net processes.

Social Networks with the Communal Core

Several social networks seem to have a pronounced communal core, reflected even in their names. These are Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Meetup, among others.

LinkedIn is the top online social network for searching for professional associations and colleagues. One can search for individuals by employer, location, job title, and other criteria, and then invite them to become connections. LinkedIn members also can join professional association groups, networking groups based on career field or geographic location, alumni groups, groups based on special interests like TED talks, or skills groups like Toastmasters for public speaking. One can also tap into existing contacts in a new geographic area or field of experience in an effort to strengthen weak

ties. When used in conjunction with LinkedIn, Meetup can also add a lot of value.

Pinterest is yet another tool for building a sense of community. The site was designed to combine the functionality of virtual bookmarks with the visual and organizational principles of a public bulletin board. It has a multitude of uses: Members can save and "pin" resources, such as recipes and ideas for vacations and weddings. Members can also use it for career building, collecting and organizing résumé advice, interview tips, and ideas for successful salary negotiation.

Assisting Clients in Achieving a Netfeeling

Adler's (1931) *What Life Should Mean to You* starts with the phrase, "Human beings live in a realm of meanings" (p. 1). With many available networking options, the challenge of feeling isolated during a significant job transition may quickly become a challenge of feeling overwhelmed by seemingly boundless virtual networks. The following are suggested steps for those who assist clients in effectively using social media with a purpose not only of getting a job but also of attaining a lasting netfeeling:

1. Prepare by reflecting on past and present state (context); clarify goals for making connections.
2. Identify connections that align with goals; identify the tool for best connecting with the people identified in Step 1.
3. Connect with the people identified in Step 1 by sending personalized invitations via LinkedIn, engaging in discussions in LinkedIn groups, "friending" on Facebook, or retweeting on Twitter.
4. Engage in more in-depth conversations online; consider taking conversations "offline" if possible and desired.
5. Build your network (quantity) and relationships (quality) simultaneously.
6. Maintain existing relationships by staying connected either virtually or in person. Reach out regularly and share resources to help the other person.

Step 6 (to reach out and share) may become a litmus test for the true communal qualities of one's movement in cyberspace. Regardless of the tools employed and the intensity of the virtual engagement, to be truly successful, the observable networking would have to be preceded by and continuously filled with netthinking. Combined, both processes aim to enhance and maintain the core: netfeeling, one's feelings for the other, and one's feeling "with the heart of another" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 135). That will, eventually, build a virtual community of reachers and sharers, those who will be citizens of "an ideal community" (Adler, as cited in Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 107).

Conclusion

With occupation being "the most important for the maintenance of life" (Dreikurs, 1989, p. 91) that "no individual can escape" (Adler, 1935, p. 4), the loss of work or an occupation should be viewed as more than just a loss of a source of sustenance for a person and those who depend financially on that person. It must be seen as a threat to the very communal ties that, along with intimacy and human fellowship, should ensure the healthy continuity of humankind. When experienced on an individual level, the breakage of occupational ties, which may lead to a feeling of uselessness and a lack of calling for or need for one's contributions, could also result in feeling isolated, cut off from the world, and worthless and/or not belonging. In a cyberworld, all these feelings may be amplified and boundless. In a densely wired universe, an incongruent "a-virtual" approach to career support may alleviate some loss-related grief, add an immediate sense of support and safety, and instill a few new job-search skills to compensate for some "common human limits" (Adler, 1935, p. 5). However, it is unlikely that this approach will lift "the limits which [a person] has set himself" (Adler, 1935, p. 5) or restore a sense of communal connectivity, a netfeeling in a net community that makes up the very fabric of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, a communal feeling. The Individual Psychology of Adler (1935)—with its emphasis on individual creativity, its assertion that contribution is an essential ingredient in one's health, its commonsense appeal to a common life (Adler, 1970), and most important, its belief in humans being wired to belong to humankind—is uniquely equipped to do so. Social, or *communal*, media can certainly be a tool to achieve this.

Acknowledgment

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