Hi.  My name is Les White.  I am from Chicago.  Welcome to *Stability of Personality: Revisiting “Life Style Variables of Holocaust Survivors.”*

 My talk is in three parts:

The first part concerns a study I conducted well over 20 years ago and presented at the IAIP in Munich in 2002.  For that study, I conducted structured Life Style interviews with Holocaust survivors who had become successful in the workplace – in the United States.  The interview consisted largely of questions related to Family Constellation and Early Recollections.  The subjects were all from eastern Europe, many from the region, called Galicia, of which Lviv was the capital and principal city.

The second part of my talk is about my revisiting that study expressly for this conference, since as I just said, many of my subjects were Galiciano, including my father who was born and raised about an hour south of Lviv.

The third part of my talk is about the Social Interest that is exhibited by many of the current citizens of my dad’s hometown of Krosno, Poland.  Though Krosno is in Poland and Lviv in Ukraine, both cities were part of the old kingdom of Galicia.  Lviv, when my father was growing up, was Polish.

**Part One – My Original Study**

 Almost 30 years ago, I had the opportunity to attend the university reunion of my father, “Jewish Alumni of German Universities, 1945 to 1955. “

 In the aftermath of World War II, approximately half a million Jewish refugees managed to get to the Western or Allied occupied zones in Germany, settling at first in Displaced Persons Camps.  Of that number, approximately only 750 to 1000 received or started a university education there, most at the University of Munich, which was in the American zone.  Please know that this was not an easy endeavor.  For example, my father’s formal education ended when he was 14 years old, two years before the war.  He was born in 1923.  He was 21 when liberated from a concentration camp, the only survivor of his family.

When I decided to do this Lifestyle study, approximately 200 of these alumni were still alive.  Thirty agreed to take part in my study, 20 men and 10 women.  The majority at that time were in their late 70s, early 80s.

Unlike most interviews with survivors, which focus on wartime atrocities, mine was a structured Lifestyle interview, based on the Lifestyle questions that Alfred Adler published in the late 1930s, in his book, *Social Interest: The Challenge of Mankind*.  The questions focused on what one wanted to do when grown up, Family Constellation, and Early Recollections: in other words, the material that reflects a person’s identity, the narratives people “hold on to,” which guide their lives from early on: their perceptions of world, self, and others, including “how do I make myself significant.”  Could this data give us an idea regarding how these individuals had become successful or thrived, including even survived?

The interviews were recorded and transcribed.  A group of independent readers or raters coded the material.  **Variables or qualities that linked many of the subjects were, for example:**

**1. Oldest or only children, from wealthier or comparatively wealthier families.**  By that, consider my father: He grew up a fundamentalist Jew, wearing long side curls and a prayer shawl.  His family wanted him to be a rabbi.  However, his family also believed that in addition to studying Torah each day, the men should have a profession.  My father’s family were glaziers: they distributed and put in windows.

**2.  A devaluing of religion, though not a Jewish-ethnic identity.**  Religion was considered old-fashioned and dogmatic – even when they were young.

**3.  The subjects forged their identities – found significance – through education.**  This value was not necessarily a family value as some subjects described how they liked school, but their brothers or sisters did not, or that their families valued simple labor over school.

**4.  A focus outside their immediate family.** That is, their descriptions of self, others, and their Early Recollections sometimes reflected wanting to be with others outside the family.

**5.  An influence of the arts.**  Oh, the number who, in their Early Recollections, recalled a poem or poet or painting or theater piece!  Maybe this is reflective of them being European (and all the art there?).  I should add that only one subject became an artist (though she had started medical school).  The majority of my subjects became medical doctors, dentists, and engineers.  But, let’s consider the arts or interest in the arts.  When one considers a work of art, one raises questions, such as “why would the artist choose to paint or write this, or do this or compose or construct this in this manner?”  Considering a piece of art, one must consider another’s view of the world; the viewer or observer or listener or reader becomes rather displaced from the art.  Could this – this raising of questions, this … this appreciation of creativity and other views – have helped them to be flexible, to look at life from different perspectives?  (Of course, I'm just conjecturing.)

**6.  The subjects, as children, reported being very consciously future-oriented, in terms of their careers**, saying for example, “this is what I wanted to be when I was growing up and I achieved it” or “despite quotas and prejudice against Jews in Poland, Lithuania, I was going to go to France or England to study. Someone I knew or heard of, a friend or relative, had gotten out.  Somehow I would get out, too.”  Many of the women said that they had aspired to achieve (in a profession) to compensate for their mothers who – remember the prejudice of the times – had been prevented from realizing their talents or goals.

Ah, I should mention: imagine my surprise when I learned that my talk on my study had been chosen to be the keynote, opening night talk at IAIP in Munich in 2002!  No one had told me!  Who am I?  A nobody.  I imagine that it was chosen to open the conference -- in Germany -- because of the subject matter: the Holocaust.

**Part 2: Revisiting My Study**

When I learned that the IAIP would be in Lviv, I immediately decided to revisit my study, given the number of subjects – including my father – from that region.

But, remember: when I did my study, mid to late 1990s, few had email!  I had contacted my subjects via telephone.  And if my subjects were in their late 70s and 80sthen: how many would still be alive today?

I tracked down six.  One, unfortunately, died before I could re-interview him – using the same or similar interview I had used more than 20 years earlier.

Another had Alzheimer’s.

Another told me she did not want to revisit the war years – though my questions and study did not focus on the war years.

Therefore, I was only able to interview three of the original subjects. All were now in their nineties.

What was most amazing was how similar their responses were, which speaks of the stability of personality.

For example, the subjects used practically the same phrases to describe themselves while growing up: one described himself as having an excellent memory, another as happy-go- lucky, the third as a “tom-boy,” a girl who liked playing with boys.

When describing what they wanted to be while growing up, their responses were, again, remarkably similar. One wanted to be a scientist (one of his Early Recollections focused on his reading about Madame Curie): he became a medical doctor. Another did not know what he wanted to be, imagining he would become an accountant like his father. He became an electrical engineer. The third wanted to be a medical doctor because her mother was not able to become one. But when she got the chance to immigrate to the United States after two years of medical school in Munich, she took it. Because she did not speak English, her schooling was interrupted, and instead, years later, she became a medical librarian.

But what was most amazing were these subjects’ Early Recollections. The medical doctor gave eight Early Recollections in 1998 and eight Early Recollections twenty years later. Five were of the same incident. (The Early Recollections that were not of the same incident had similar themes: of learning and absorbing information).

Here is one of the first Early Recollections he gave in 1998:

Age 6

In the secular school, I was admitted one year younger than the general public very simply because my parents thought that since we did not speak Polish at home but only Yiddish that I probably would not pass the first grade, (and I would) have to stay over an extra year (to learn Polish) so as not to get retarded in my graduation. …

Having known little Polish: when the (Polish) teacher recited a poem … I, without even understanding what it meant, could recite it as I came home.…

(It) was a Polish song by Maria Kolinistka *(sic)*, (who) was a Polish poet. And I remember that song until today.

Now, let’s read ab Early Recollection he gave more than twenty years later:

Age: 6

My mom took me to school, introduced me to the teacher, Mrs. …(Hevro)skova … and I was assigned a seat in the first row because I was the smallest … the first lecture started with a song…..“Run, you little mouse into the hole …. A cat will catch you … and when the cat will catch you, it will tear your skin off.” I remember that first song. I barely understood Polish then, but when I came home I repeated it but didn’t know what it meant. My mom then told me what it was.

(I remember) Me just reciting it without knowing what it meant. … I liked the song, the melody.

The electrical engineer recalled six Early Recollections in 1999 and seven Early Recollections twenty years later. Three are of the same incident; again, the recollections that are not of the same incident have similar themes: that no matter if bad things happen, you’ll be okay.

Here’s the first Early Recollection he gave in 1999:

I was caught smoking cigarettes. (My father) found out about it. … He talked to me about it, (saying) “It’s bad (what I heard) about you. If you want to smoke, here are some cigarettes.” He did not smoke but kept them for his clients. And that did it for me. The fun, the thrill was gone.

And, here’s the first Early Recollection he gave twenty years later:

Two friends got me… to buy cigarettes. So, I did. Somehow my father recognized the smell from cigarettes. And he said to me, “we have cigarettes in our home” – because my father occasionally entertained. He says, “You can smoke all the cigarettes you want at home.” … He had actually a logical approach. (He didn’t) scream at me.

Regarding the Early Recollections of the medical librarian: it was very difficult to “extract” them from her. She tended to give general reports about her family life. In 1999, I could only get her to recall two specific incidents or Early Recollections; twenty years later, she gave, again, only two. These Recollections, however, are very similar. In one, her mother is watching her dress; twenty years later, she is watching her mother dress. The other Early Recollection from each “set” sees her surprised at the anti-Semitism of others.

**Alfred Adler’s ERs.** These survivors’ repeating their Early Recollections over the decades reminded me of Alfred Adler’s Early Recollections. To the best of my knowledge, Adler’s Early Recollections were published twice: in an article he wrote in 1912 and those he gave in the mid-1930s to his chosen biographer, Phyllis Bottome, which appear in her book, *Alfred Adler: Apostle of Freedom*.

In both 1912 and the mid-1930s, Adler gave six Early Recollections. Five of the situations repeat in both sets. However, there are slight differences. Obviously, life and personality are not static. In the mid-1930s, he appears to be more aware that he reacts to the behavior of others. In the earlier, 1912 set he is more a “lone hero,” devising “behavioral exercises” of a sort, such as “shoving” himself before crying (so as not to) and running through a cemetery, to overcompensate for his feelings of inferiority, both physical (for example, his having rickets or bone disease) and his thinking that he did not measure up to the courage of others.

Of course, we don’t have the time here to consider Adler’s and these survivors’ Early Recollections in full: to read them and assess their movement and patterns. However, I think these examples give an idea of the stability of personality over the years and the “beauty” of using a structured Life Style instrument to gauge and measure personality. A Life Style Assessment can be used to help clients become more conscientious of their guiding narratives, helping those clients how to consciously “use” their narratives: to “edit” them or “re-write” them in a sense – to choose differently, practice different responses and enact behavioral change.

I host a group, called *“What’s the Story?”: Life Style Narratives Study Group* over zoom in which we “string together” a person’s Early Recollections so that they form a short story. The Family Constellation is a kind of “Cast of Characters” since many of them appear in the recollections. We then, as a group, asses that “story,” applying methods used to analyze literature, such as character development, challenges, and story arcs. If you are interested in joining us, please send me an email. I’ll put my email in the chat.

**Part 3: Social Interest and my Father’s Hometown**

The third part of my talk has to do with the Social Interest exhibited by some of the citizens of my father’s hometown of Krosno, Poland. After the war, after my father was liberated by the Russians – on the very last day of the War, May 8th, 1945 – he made his way back to Krosno. No one else from his family had survived. The town had been one third Jewish before the war. With nothing to offer him there – the family home had been taken over by others – he eventually made his way as a refugee to the American zone in Germany and lived off Red Cross and American Jewish aid packages in a Displaced Persons Camp. Eventually, even without a high school or gymnasium education, but with the help of tutors, he became a medical doctor – which shows us what can be accomplished in the face of great tragedy. He even taught at the same medical school that Dr. Dreikurs did here in Chicago.

My father does not have animosity toward Germans or Poles. Many times, when he was targeted to be killed – a gun put to his head, a threat to be hung – a “good” German or “good” Pole came to his aid. He – we – have been back to Poland many times: I, at least nine times. Citizens there started to seek him out. Now 98, his mind is still crystal sharp.

Because of the war, his town and others in Poland were decimated. The Communists moved others – from Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, other parts of Poland, Russia – to repopulate them. These “new” people had no connection to their “new” towns. However, their children and grandchildren, being born and raised there, did. With the fall of Communism, young people in particular, started to get interested in their backgrounds:

“How did we get here?”

Others discovered that they had Jewish or patriotic or prejudice roots that were not talked about.

A history teacher in Krosno discovered that the field in which he had played as a child had been a Jewish cemetery. He and other teachers, with their students, restored the cemetery, finding gravestones knocked over or gravestones that had been used for pavement, for sidewalks. These teachers have had my father talk to the town practically each year since 2014: at galleries, in classrooms – these past few years over Skype or Zoom. He has even given walking tours of the old town center or “rynick” in Polish. Despite some people writing or screaming “stuff” like “Jew, go home!”, the teachers and schools invite him again and again. The reception, especially by the young students, has been unbelievable. They want to connect and know the truth of their country, where they live, and who they are.

We think of Social Interest – or Gemeinschaftsgeful (I cannot even pronounce that word!) – as developing community feeling, or of having empathy, or treating others as equal – as a behavioral ideal. I think we need to “add” something to its meaning. It should also be about being honest and seeking truth.

These teachers and students in my dad’s hometown exhibit that behavior.

Here in the United States, in grade school I was taught that it was good to take over the land of Native Americans, that the southern plantation bosses treated Blacks as family, that the slaves needed to be treated as chattel or children. Though supposedly the U.S. welcomed all, whites – especially Christian whites – were really the only ones who were truly welcomed.

The survivors’ stories that I collected showed how far they came from being oppressed in their home countries: think of how much they contributed. Just think how much they – and others – could have accomplished and contributed if they had been accepted at the beginning.

Seek the truth.

Thank you.

If you’re wondering how I, with Jewish and eastern European roots, got a name like “Les White,” which is a very “Anglo” name: my parents wanted to assimilate in the general culture. My father’s real last name, “Bialywlos,” means “white hair” in Polish.

Ah, I should add one more thing: my research supports the theory of Adlerian Viktor Frankl: that those had had given themselves a purpose or consciously strove to be future oriented in Auschwitz tended to have a better chance of survival. Yes, I’m describing Frankl as an Adlerian. He gave the keynote address to the third IAIP conference, held in Dusseldorf, Germany, in 1926.

Les White (handout)

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*Stability of Personality:*

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