

Running head: ADLERIAN THEORY

12 Hour Project on Adlerian Theory

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Introduction to Counseling

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ALFRED ADLER

Alfred Adler, the second of six children born to Jewish parents, was a sickly child plagued by rickets, spasms of the glottis, pneumonia, and was run over twice! At the young age of three his young brother died while sleeping next to Adler. It is thought that Adler's illnesses, accidents and exposure to death were the catalyst for his desire to become a physician (Maniacci & Mosak, 1999). While growing up, Adler and his family lived in an area with few Jews, which made them minorities within their community. He was a clumsy, uncoordinated student with bad eyesight. Adler's numerous challenges left his psyche feeling weak, inferior, and an outcast. His sense of not belonging encouraged him to push himself so hard that he excelled in math. Following high school Adler studied medicine at the University of Vienna where he received his medical degree in Ophthalmology in 1895. He married and fathered four children.

Adler opened his private practice in a lower socioeconomic area where he soon noticed that many of his patients suffered from diseases that could be attributed to where they worked and lived. This awareness prompted him to switch to internal medicine. In one of his first publications he noted how much influence a person's living and work environment has on their health. During Adler's stint as a physician in the Austrian Army in World War I he personally observed the damages caused by war thus piquing his interest in social issues. His early psychological investigations looked at organic factors with his basic concepts being: significance of organ inferiority and feelings of inferiority, mechanism of compensations and over-compensation, inferiority, inferiority feeling, inferiority complex, and the goals to which a disability can be directed (Dreikurs, 1955). In 1907 Adler turned to Psychiatry and participated in a Freud discussion group.

Adler's paper on Aggression Instinct and his concept of man as a social being opposed Freud's biological way of thinking and instigated their separation. Adler made his initial visit to the United States in 1926 at 56 years old where his work became very popular. Adler is credited with several first: family and systems therapy, sibling birth order, group psychotherapy, feelings of inferiority, and the concept of "Individual" Psychology.

ADLER'S THOUGHTS ABOUT PEOPLE

We cannot judge a human being except by using the concept of social feeling as a standard, and measuring their thought and action by this standard. We must maintain this point of view because every individual within the body of human society must subscribe to the oneness of that society. We have to realize our duty to our fellow human beings. We are in the very midst of a community and must live by the logic of communal existence. This logic determines the fact that we need certain known criteria for the evaluation of our fellows. The degree to which social feeling has developed in any individual is the only universally valid criterion of human values. We cannot deny our psychological dependency upon social feeling. No human being is capable of ignoring her social feeling completely. For we all know we have a duty to our fellow human beings. Our social feeling constantly reminds us of the fact...Furthermore, social feeling is so universal that no one is able to begin any activity without first being justified by it. The need for justifying each act and thought originates in our unconscious sense of social unity...Interestingly enough, social feeling is so fundamental and important that, even if we have not developed this ability to consider others as fully as most people have done, we still make efforts to appear as if we had done so. This means that the pretence of social feeling is sometimes used to conceal the antisocial thoughts and deeds that are the true expressions of a personality. The difficulty lies in differentiating between the false and the genuine; it is this very difficulty that raises the understanding of human nature to the plane of a science (Adler).

Adler's fellow student and practitioner Sophia de Vries had this to say about about his techniques and encounters with people:

Much of this could not be put into textbooks: intonation, gesture, body expression, empathy, have to be witnessed. Adler had respect for his patients which created an air of openness and conveyed his willingness to help with a

fountain of knowledge. Respect always came first, followed immediately by encouragement, which made the patient feel worthy and hopeful. In presenting examples he often used the language he had used with his patients, the terminology adjusted to the patient's capacity for understanding. Here was a therapist who, in a careful approach, quickly came to the core of the problem and used very simple everyday language from the patient's own vocabulary. A human being in the first place who, seeing a person in distress, offered treatment which was easily absorbed because it was logically presented. Often, in one sentence, he reduced the patient's imaginary mountain to the molehill it really was (de Vries).

The always optimistic Adler had a high opinion of people and their ability to realize their full potential. He viewed humans as social beings connected to everything in nature. He recognized the creative ability of each person, that they determine their own goals, are self-directed, and have the ability to help themselves. Adler's central concept in his "Feelings of Community" is that everything is connected with everything else on earth – family, friends, plants, animals – everything (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Adler believed that everyone has the same basic desires and goals – to belong and feel significant. He believed that how one feels determines how one acts. Adler felt that adults are impacted by their childhood, birth order, heredity, cultural factors and much more. Adler was a holistic practitioner who felt that people are capable of changing themselves. He valued each person as a whole individual, continually creating and recreating themselves and constantly developing. He encouraged clients to take responsibility for their actions and work together for the common good. He avoided labeling people as good or bad and saw human nature as neutral (Maniacci, 1999). He viewed men and women as equals, as opposed to opposites.

CLASSICAL ADLERIAN INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

During initial interviews Adler followed a guide that covered family background information which included ratings and descriptions of siblings and parents as well as early recollections, including dreams. He encouraged clients to talk about their conditions, symptoms, discomforts, dysfunctions, way of living, work, social relationships and relationships with the “other” sex. He would then follow up by asking “The Question”: “What would be different if you were well” (Dreikurs, 1955). The clients answer revealed against whom or against what condition the symptom is directed and whether symptoms have a psychological significance, giving Adler the background needed to move forward. Classical Adlerian Psychology is summarized by six principles: Unity of the Individual, Goal Orientation, Self-Determination and Uniqueness, Social Context, Feeling of Community, and Mental Health. Incorporated within the principals are five phases made up of twelve different stages. Within the stages, cognitive, affective and behavioral changes gradually occur. Spirituality can be incorporated during the final three stages. Classical Adlerian Practitioners are flexible, spontaneous, creative, and use encouragement and empathy throughout every phase. This is a simplified breakdown of the Five Phases and Twelve Stages of Individual Psychotherapy (Stein, 1997).

PHASES	STAGE NO.	STAGE	TASKS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED
<i>Support</i>	1	Empathy & Relationship	Providing warmth, empathy, and acceptance. Generating hope, reassurance, and encouragement. Establishing a cooperative working relationship.

	2	Information	Unstructured gathering of relevant information: Eliciting details of presenting problem & life tasks. Exploring early childhood influences and memories.
<i>Encouragement</i>	3	Clarification	Clarifying vague thinking with Socratic questioning. Evaluating consequences of ideas and actions. Correcting mistaken ideas about self and others.
	4	Encouragement	Helping generate alternatives. Stimulating movement in a new direction, away from life style. Clarifying new feelings about effort and results.
<i>Insight</i>	5	Interpretation - Recognition	Interpreting inferiority feelings & goal of superiority. Identifying what has been avoided. Integrating birth order, recollections, dreams, & daydreams.
	6	Knowing	Client fully aware of life style without help. Individual knows and accepts what needs to be changed. In spite of insight, client may feel emotionally blocked.
<i>Change</i>	7	Emotional Breakthrough - Missing Experience	When needed, promoting an emotional breakthrough. Offering corrective or missing developmental experiences. Creative use of role-playing, guided imagery, and narration.
	8	Doing Differently	Converting insight into new attitude--breaking old patterns. Fostering experiments, concrete steps based on abstract ideas. Making the unproductive feel unpleasant.

	9	Reinforcement	Encouraging all new movements toward significant change. Affirming positive results and feelings. Evaluating progress and new courage.
Challenge	10	Social Interest	Using client's better feeling of self to promote more cooperation. Extending feeling of equality, cooperation and empathy to others. Giving one's all, 100% in relationships and work--taking risks.
	11	Goal Redirection	Challenging client to let go of self and old fictional goal. Dissolving the old style of life--finding a new direction. Opening a new psychological horizon--living by new values.
	12	Support & Launching	Inspiring client to love the struggle and prefer the unfamiliar. Strengthening the feeling of connectedness & desire to share. Promoting a path of continual growth for self and others.
Meta-Therapy	-	Post-Therapeutic Dialogue	A philosophical and/or spiritual discussion of values, the meaning of ones' life, and the commitment to a mission.

EVALUTATION UNDER ADLERIAN THEORY

As is common in a theory that depends a lot on the development of insight by the client, evaluating when goals are reached under Adlerian practice is more subjective than objective. Success is reached when the client becomes more fully functioning as an individual and in relationships with people in their immediate circle and with the community as a whole.

The overall goal of Adlerian psychology is helping an individual develop from a partially functioning person into a more fully functioning one. Fully functioning means solving each of the areas of life more cooperatively, more courageously, with a greater sense of contribution and a greater sense of satisfaction. To do this, an individual must identify and work toward becoming her best self. In other words, the overall goal of therapy is to increase the individual's feeling of community. This is very practical. It is not merely a matter of gaining insight, but of using that insight to take concrete steps to improve relationships with family, friends, community, and work. In its largest sense, the goal of therapy is not to improve just the client's life; the therapist is working to improve the quality of life for everyone in the client's circle of contact, as well as improving society through the client. (Stein & Edwards, 1998)

So success is determined in Adlerian counseling if an individual gains insight into all areas of their life and learns to live at a higher functioning level which includes increasing the individual's feeling of community which leads to greater personal satisfaction.

Adler strongly believed people could change and it was often in their best interest to do so. Some people have goals that are not appropriate for their best interest or have good goals but their methods are not helpful or harmful. At other times people might be blocked in pursuing their goals due to emotions that get in their way. To have success in

Adlerian counseling is to change for the better. Adlerian counseling methods which lead to change can be described as follows.

1. Through therapy you can learn about your mistaken goals. Once aware of these, you can make one of two choices, either to change or not to change.
2. Through knowing your mistaken goals you begin to recognize patterns in your motivation and, as a result, develop insight.
3. Because new behavior may work better in new situations than the old, you may be able to replace your old private logic with a new common sense.
4. As the new common sense grows you will also show more social interest. And the end result of this is that you also gain a greater sense of belonging.
5. Feeling a sense of belonging also means feeling equal to other people which also means that you are encouraged. In other words, you grow confident of your place in the world. You feel better about everything.
6. Because you feel better about things, you become brave enough to take risks even if it means making mistakes. You have gained the courage to be imperfect. ... Your new insights coupled with the new courage to act, add up to change. (Hooper & Holford, 1998)

This process of change requires a counselor who is empathetic and sensitive to the needs and background of their clients in order to guide them through. As will be seen, many of the techniques used by Adlerian counselors are most effective when used with great empathy and compassion for the client.

ALDERIAN THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUES

The techniques of Alfred Adler and Adlerians will be familiar to many people who do not even know about Adler's theories. Some very key concepts such as the inferiority complex and the influence of birth order on one's personality are fairly easy to trace to Adler and his theory. Many other aspects of his theories and the techniques used have been "borrowed" or "rediscovered" so many times that many people do not know

that the origins of these techniques are from Adler. It has been described that it is very difficult to come up with a theorist from whom so many ideas and concepts have been taken without being given the proper credit (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999, p.167). Even our text mentioned Adler as an “honorable mentioned” rather than the founding father of psychological thought that he truly was. What follows is a description of some of the many Adlerian therapeutic techniques.

Acting “As if.” Although most of the techniques that will be described originated from Adler himself, acting “as if” is actually a concept that Adler borrowed and expounded on that came from another theorist, Hans Vaihinger (Watts, Peluso, Lewis, 2005, p.381). This technique “can be defined as cognitive, behavioral intervention in which the client anticipates, pretends, and/or enacts a futuristic event, belief, or desired behavior” (Eckstein, Baruth, Mahrer, 1992, p. 117). This technique is an action-oriented procedure where the counselor encourages their client to act for the next week (or whatever period) “as if” they really could do the things they wish they were able to do. “This idea has been likened to the act of wearing a different suit of clothes which sometimes gives the wearer a different type of self-image and renewed confidence” (Hooper & Holford, 1998, p.83).

The Question. Another similar technique used by Adler is commonly referred to as “The Question.” “The Question” is essentially posed to the client from the counselor, “What would you do if I cured you immediately?” In the search to find out the cause of the client’s problem, the client’s answer can help to determine whether the problem is

organic in nature like a physical illness or whether it is psychological in nature like mistaken beliefs about life or about what they are faced with (Wingett & Milliren, 2004).

Spitting in the Soup. Although this technique does not sound good if you were sitting at the dinner table, it has proved to be a valuable Adlerian technique. This is a technique where the counselor tries to uncover the client's faulty goal which leads to their self-defeating behavior. The counselor tries to pollute the comfort food the client tries to enjoy which masks their negative behavior. "When the counselor is accurate with his/her observation, 'could it be that ...' and can illustrate this clearly to the [client], the [client] may continue this behavior but 'it won't taste so sweet' any longer! The [client] is no longer innocent of its hidden meaning" (Sweeney, 1989).

Psychological Birth Order. Finding out the circumstances that shaped who a client is and what factors were involved in developing that client's style of life is very important in Adlerian theory. Adler developed the concept of how the formation of an individual's personality can be affected by their birth order in the family. It is common sense to see that the different roles siblings play in a family could be a factor in how the siblings may turn out different psychologically when many other factors would be similar (Hooper & Holford, 1998, p, 95). As each child works to establish their place in this intimate group called a family, their personalities are developed from this experience. The experience translates over to how they interact with people outside of the family environment and in this translation they develop their style of life. It is important to emphasize that the patterns and characteristics attributed to a person with a certain birth order position in a family refers to the "psychological" birth order position which may be different from the

chronological position in the family (Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White, & Kern, 2003). This difference in order could occur, for example, if the oldest child had a significant disability which put most of the duties of the first born on the second born child. Another example could occur if a long gap in time exists between siblings which might create a new “first born.”

Anti-suggestion or Paradoxical Intent. This technique was called the anti-suggestion by Adler and was called paradoxical intent by a man that Adler strongly influence and had worked with, Viktor Frankl, the father of existentialism (Eckstein, Baruth, & Mahrer, 1992, p. 116). “This technique encourages clients to ‘emphasize their symptoms’ on the grounds that either the client will see them to be ridiculous, or will see the reality of the situation and be prepared to accept the consequences” (Hooper & Holford, 1998, p.145). This technique should be used with humor to make it light hearted and not a critical attack. An example of this would be of a person who comes to a counselor afraid they are going to lose consciousness in certain situations. The counselor would suggest that the next time the situation came up to pass out on purpose. And to keep passing out whenever that situation arises (Eckstein, Baruth, & Mahrer, 1992, p.116). For a client who comes in stating they always get tense when they speak to a member of the opposite sex, the counselor would advise they should make a concerted effort to make themselves as tense as they can when the situation comes up in the future. “The irony, of course, is that when invited to do their “thing” they find themselves incapable of doing it. It has lost its value. Most [clients] openly smile at their new predicament” (Sweeney, 1989, p.262).

Bibliotherapy. This is a term that refers to therapeutic use of books with clients. It is important for counselors using this method to get reading material that matches the level and interest of their clients. In Adlerian counseling, bibliotherapy can be used in any of the phases. “For example, bibliotherapy may be used to help establish a relationship, to explore a client’s lifestyle, to help promote client insight, or to help reorient and reeducated a client” (Jackson, 2001, p.291). An extra benefit for Adlerian counseling is that talking about characters in a book helps make the client “walk in the shoes” of another person and therefore helps develop his social interest (Jackson, 2001, p.289). Another form of bibliotherapy that has been useful in Adlerian counseling is the use of poetry. Poetry also has a particular strength in drawing people toward greater social interest. In addition to the aesthetic value poetry can bring, it can aid in emotional healing and personal growth of the client (Anderson, Kopp, & Maniaci, 1999). It is also important in poetry to match the selection with the interest and reading level of the client.

Early Recollections. Similar to using family birth order, eliciting early recollections of a client can help the counselor understand the development of the client’s style of life. An illustration of the value of this technique in Adlerian counseling is demonstrated through workshops developed to help build skills at bringing out these early recollections (Eckstein, 1999). By searching a client’s earliest memories a counselor can get a grasp on what was influencing the client in this very critical time of their personality development. Everyone has positive characteristics that helped shaped them from these early times. It is good to build up the positive building blocks that have led to the development of a client’s lifestyle. Group activities designed for adolescents to share their early memories and have the group come up with strengths and creative abilities

demonstrated by the individuals who shared their memories is a powerful tool to build self-esteem for these individuals. Adolescents who go through this group process find the process encouraging and supportive (Shifron & Bettner, 2003). Early recollection exploration has also been found to be a useful tool in determining whether a previous diagnosis was accurate (Bettner, 2005).

Journaling. Journaling is a way for an individual to bring their own story to life. It is a useful tool for the counselor to understand their client's lifestyle and their ways of coping. "Journaling is not a magic solution for coping, but it is a useful adjunct to treatment. Writing is still the best way to record thoughts and make plans. Reflecting on one's writing is beneficial and generally produces more considered reasoning" (Stone, 1998, p. 545).

Therapeutic memoir technique. This technique also involves aiding the counselor in finding out more about the client's early psychological development. This technique "involves the use of childhood photographs. The selection and description of specific childhood pictures is another valuable means of gathering formative childhood information" (Eckstein, Baruth, & Mahrer, 1992, p.117).

The techniques described above are only a sampling of the techniques that Adler and those that follow Adler have used. I believe Adler would be very pleased at how widespread the use of his theories and techniques are today. He would also not be ignored or put in the "honorable mentioned" category if he was still here. Adler continuously improved and developed his theories. He did not ostracize those who might have different theories as Sigmund Freud had done. Alfred Adler was a warm and

affable individual who took the United States by storm when he first visited in 1926. His easy going manner and common sense was well received and embraced in America. We will have to do without the man in person, but his theories and techniques live on.

Maybe if the new theorists would not spend so much time “reinventing” theories and techniques that are so similar to Adler and would just embrace Adler as a foundation from which to expand his concepts, we could truly develop new theoretical structures.

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