

ADLERIAN THERAPY

ALFRED ADLER



“A simple rule in dealing with those who are hard to get along with is to remember that this person is striving to assert his superiority; and you must deal with him from that point of view.”

Alfred Adler

Discussion

- In which ways could your family environment have impacted on your behaviour?
- Which born are you and how did this shape your upbringing and current behaviours?
- Are there any differences, for example, between those who are first, second or only children? What of those who are born of same gender?

Introduction

- Adlerian therapy(individual psychology) originated with Alfred Adler(1870-1937), a qualified doctor who practiced for a time in ophthalmology.
- Later he qualified as a psychiatrist, and in 1902 joined Freud's circle of admirers and friends.
- By 1911, his theoretical views were becoming more divergent from Freud's which forced him to resign as President of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and formed the Society for Individual Psychology in 1912.

- Opposed to Freud's emphasis on the sexual instincts and biological determinism as the basis for human behaviour. Believed in social determinism, and in the influence of family and environmental factors in shaping the individual's behaviour.
- Adler saw in humans something that was irrepressible & strong, and it was this strength, not fragility, that he wanted to harness and release during therapy.
- He referred to his explanation as **individual psychology** to convey a clear message that each person represents an individual, one holistic self, whose mental functions are cooperating, not competing.
- It's Adler, not Freud, who originated with prototypical structure of carrying out face-to-face counselling as is known today

View of Human Nature

- Much of who we are is the result of family and social interactions throughout early childhood and a **person's birth order** has a major influence on development of personality.
- All **behavior is purposeful**. Behavior is intended to overcome a sense of perceived inferiority (feeling less than) resulting from the inability to be “perfect” or as good as others during childhood.
- As children strive to compete with older siblings, friends, and adults in performing certain tasks, they often lack the developmental skills necessary for success and develop a feeling of inferiority.

- During the development years (0–10 years), children attempt to find their place or role in the family.
- Many factors influence this process, including birth order, intelligence, attractiveness, athletic ability, parental and grandparental preferences, and gender.

- As a result of this striving and the level of a child's perceived success, the child will draw conclusions as to what is valued in the family. Eg, a child may conclude that to be loved she must always please others, or accumulate great wealth and power, or play a traditional gender role, such as rearing children.
- Adlerian therapists will focus clients on their “private logic,” which includes mistaken goals and guiding fictions about themselves, the world, and others.
- If people can be helped to understand the purposefulness of their behavior, they have a much better chance of changing behaviors that are not useful or helpful.

- Adler believed in **teleological world** of final causes or purposes: Every human has a powerful motivational component that can energize them to discover and then embrace their unique purpose in life.
- Every person has the potential to overcome biological, environmental, and even imaginary constraints so we can rely on self determinism to create a world of our own making.
- Humans are neither good or bad - it's about the choices we make!

- Neither the past or the present owns us(unless we allow one or both to dictate who we are): We are meant by our nature to strive and overcome any bondage imposed by time! Our existence is neither determined nor totally free of surrounding influences.
- Human phenomena are guided not only by mechanical forces but follow a trajectory towards certain goals **capable of supporting self-realization.**
- **A genuine state of self-realization is a state that nourishes both the individuals and members of their social sphere.**

- Adler considered ***Gemeinschaftsgefühl*** (fellowship in human community or social feeling- from 2 German words ***Gemeinschaft*** which means community and ***Gefühl*** which means feeling)or connectedness to others as vital to fostering mental health, especially when confronted by earth shattering events.
- ***Gemeinschaftsgefühl*** helps overcome unhealthy detachments and move towards wider types social involvement, including social activism.

Key Concepts

- Development of personality and family position
 - Inferiority complex
 - Style of life
 - Social interest
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The development of personality and family position

- An important departure from traditional Freudian theory concerned Adler's emphasis on the relationship between children and parents, and his focus on sibling relationships and ordinal position within the family.
- Freud did address the parent/child relationship, but only in so far as it affected the development of sexuality and the resolution (or otherwise) of the Oedipus complex. Adler's focus was much more comprehensive than this, and encompassed other variables, including family size and the way in which parents relate to individual children. Adler's interpretation of what he termed the 'so-called Oedipus complex' is that it occurs when the family is too insular and lacking in healthy relationships outside the home (Adler, 1931). In other words, victims of the Oedipus complex are, in Adler's view, people who have been constrained by the family in a way which inhibits the development of maturity and social skills.

- The Oedipus complex is, therefore, adapted by Adler to explain certain kinds of anti-social and selfish behaviour, and it is this shift away from the original, and much more specifically sexual definition, which marks the difference between Freud's views and the ideas expressed by Adler.
- Certain experiences within the family, and the position of each member within the group, could produce, according to Adler, unique problems for the individual. Distorted goals and life styles can also result from the influence of these factors.
- Formative childhood influences which are important in determining later adult behavior and therefore deserve attention in therapy include illness and physical disadvantage(disability), neglect, lack of affection and overindulgence(pampering).

According to Adler, there are four basic types of individuals;

1. **Dominant or ruling:** These individuals seek domination over others.
2. **Getting or dependent:** These individuals assume that others will take care of them.
3. **Avoidant:** These individuals seek to avoid problems.
4. **Socially useful:** These individuals cooperate, are socially useful, and contribute to the active world.

The first three types of individuals are unprepared to meet life's demands. They may experience addictions, neurosis, psychosis, or other issues. The **socially useful individual finds meaningfulness within society and is socially connected to others.**

The inferiority complex

- Unlike Freud, Adler did not accord sexual impulses the central position. To Adler, sexual problems represent another aspect of what he called the ‘inferiority complex’.
- People who confine themselves to the family, with little or no outside contact, are bound to lack healthy sexual and relationship interests. A sense of inferiority follows, therefore, and in adult life such people tend to strive for superiority through attachment to others they can dominate.
- Other factors in family life which can produce feelings of inferiority for the individual include a belief that one is not intellectually inclined and coming from an impoverished home environment.

- Adler believed that inferiority feelings are inevitable in childhood, since children are small, weak and subject to adults and their whims. His interest was in ways that people deal with inferiority and used **Compensation** to describe the mechanism whereby people strive for recognition or superiority.
- Viewed desire to compensate as a healthy one, since it motivates people to achieve their potential. When people are unable to develop successful compensation, an inferiority complex follows. To Adler, **all of us strive for superiority in some area of our lives, and it is this striving which moves us towards achievement and perfection**

Style of life/Lifestyle

- Lifestyle is a combination of outer and inner characteristics of a person that contributes to a person being distinct, independent and self contained entity, as well as the impression one makes upon others.
- It represent **the way we seek to act and think in a manner that is consistent with our view of the world.** It represents our own private logic that informs our actions. Each person develops a **strategy for living** and that this life style, is firmly established by about the age of five years.
- The strategy which each person adopts is **designed to cope with feelings of inferiority**, and may take the form of e.g. artistic or intellectual achievement. Other, less positive, strategies are also sometimes used.
- E.g. Through bullying or domination of others. Others may seek superiority through illness. This serves two purposes – one, the child who is ill receives a great deal of attention; Two, the illness can be used as a weapon to control others

Social interest

- The concept of social interest is an important one in Adlerian theory. The foundation for social interest is nurtured within the family, and **encompasses an interest in and a feeling for others.**

- Social interest is human predisposition and need. Altruism is another way of describing this specific Adlerian concept.
- People are, according to Adler, much more than a mass of conflicting biological needs.
- Because of early experiences, some people do not develop social interests, and the price they pay for their isolation is unhappiness and emotional problems.
- Many of the people who seek counselling are also frequently isolated and lonely

- From a cultural perspective, social interest includes factors such as helping, participating, cooperating, empathizing, and contributing.
- Culture “becomes a mediating factor that provides for the reconciliation of the individual’s internal, personal, subjective environment or frame of reference with the demands of the person’s external, common, objective environment or surroundings” (Milliren et al., 2007, p. 137). A balance exists with these factors in which a person can **achieve goals in ways that also improve the welfare of others.**

- The core of Adler's theory envisioned a person as capable of profound cooperation within society and striving for self-improvement and self-completion. Thus, the concept of social interest is both personally fulfilling and beneficial to others. At the same time, social interest denotes a recognition and acceptance of the interconnectedness of all people in positive ways. Greater personal development increases the ability to connect positively with others, learn from others, and develop the self. Social interest is a sense of community, a key to good mental health. If a child learns the importance of social interest, then he or she is more likely to continue to be mentally healthy throughout life. With a healthy foundation, a child is able to handle the life tasks of work and community.
- A discouraging family and unhealthy social setting create inferiority feelings, resulting in discouragement and an egocentric child.

The position of women

- Adler did not give sexual impulses a central role in his theory of human development.
- The experiences of men and women were, however, of great interest to Adler.
- He used the term **masculine protest** to describe an attitude which he felt was manifest in many aspects of male and female behaviour. This attitude **takes the form of chauvinism and macho behaviour in men, while it may be seen in aggressive and resentful behaviour in women.**
- Adler did not subscribe to the notion that men are in any way inherently superior, and he was concerned to point out that most relationship problems were, in fact, caused by this very attitude.
- To Adler, male dominance was not a ‘natural thing’.

Counselling skills

- The work of Adler is important because it sheds light on the **social factors which contribute to a person's development**. Counsellors interested in the work of Adler will use skills of listening, attending, reflecting content and meaning, asking questions and helping clients to set goals.
- Other skills and attitudes which are highlighted in the Adlerian approach include:
- **Confrontation and encouragement** are used in the approach: these are set within the framework of an empathic relationship.

- **Clients are encouraged to pay attention to dreams**, to record them and use them as a means of gaining further insight.
- Transference, while acknowledged, is not regarded as a problem in Adlerian counselling because the relationship between counsellor and client is seen as one based on equality.
- **Counsellor uses interpretation** to specifically help clients identify faulty attitudes and motivation

Counsellor client relationship

- The counsellor/client relationship is a **collaborative** one in which both people work towards agreed objectives and goals.
- The counsellor's role is therefore to establish a relationship with the client in which **mutual trust and respect permeate their interactions**.
- The counsellor is concerned to understand the client's **individual experience(subjective reality)**.

- The **counsellor's role is a teaching one** -There is an emphasis on helping clients identify self-defeating behavior and a corresponding emphasis on helping clients re-educate themselves for positive change.
- The Adlerian approach **encourages clients to become more socially involved** – relationship problems are identified and clients are encouraged to relate more effectively to others.
- Clients are encouraged to take increasing responsibility over the desired change

Goals of therapy

- **In a lifetime, a person will need to meet the three tasks of life: work, community, and love.** A key goal in counseling is to assist clients with challenges when dealing with life tasks and cooperating and contributing to others and the world.
- The major goal of therapy is the **achievement of insight and development of social interest.**
- Adler, like Freud, believed that **childhood experience may lead toward pervasive mental illness; however, he recognized that resolution at any point may lead toward recovery.** To meet this resolve Adler established the following goals:

Goals of therapy

1. Fostering community feeling(Encourage clients become more socially involved-develop social interest).;
2. Decreasing feelings of inferiority, and therefore, psychological symptoms;
3. Modifying the lifestyle to make it more adaptive, flexible, and prosocial;
4. Changing faulty motivation and destructive values(Identify & change self-defeating behavior and thoughts-mistaken goals)
5. Encouraging equality and acceptance of self and others; and
6. Helping the person to be a contributing member of the world community. (Corsini & Wedding, 2014; Flanagan & Flanagan, 2015)

Process of Therapy

- There are generally four stages of the counseling process. The overall counseling process is designed to assist a client with growth. The stages are;
 1. **Relationship:** The focus is on building the therapeutic relationship.
 2. **Investigation:** The therapist's focus is on understanding the client.
 3. **Interpretation:** The therapist's focus is on explaining client behavior in a way that makes sense to the client.
 4. **Reorientation:** The therapist's focus is on strengthening client social interest.
- Adler did not propose specific interventions because of the uniqueness of each client. Instead, he emphasized counselor intuition and creativity. However the following interventions are a useful guide to therapy;

Lifestyle analysis: What successes, failures, beliefs, and life goals does the client have?

Family constellation: How does the client describe his or her family? How does the client describe his or her relationship with parents and siblings?

Family atmosphere and values: What values and cultural experiences did the client experience in the family?

Gender roles in a family: What gender roles were modeled to the client by parents or siblings? How did gender influence family relationships?

Early developmental experiences: How do early developmental experiences affect the client's experience of life goals, lifestyle, and inferiority feelings?

Encouragement: What inferiority feelings does the client have, and in what ways can the therapist encourage the client to increase social interest?

Clients who benefit from the approach

- There is a wide spectrum of clients who would probably benefit from this approach. These include people with relationship difficulties, those with problems of addiction or substance abuse, and clients who specifically need marriage and family counselling.
- It can also be used to help older people who have reached a stage in life where change is imperative.
- Adlerian counselling is applicable to group work: in fact Adler and his colleagues used group work extensively, especially when he worked in the field of child guidance.
- Group work is the ideal medium for this approach, since the educative or learning aspects of it are reinforced in a group work setting. When there are a number of people present to give feedback and encouragement – two important elements in the Adlerian approach – participants are more likely to gain positive results from the experience.

Limitations of Adlerian Approach

- The approach may not be suitable for some clients. A person who is in the middle of a **crisis situation**, for example, will want immediate help and may be unwilling to engage in the process of looking at the past and the influence of family position and relationships.
- Cultural expectations: **People from different cultural backgrounds will have different views about family relationships** and may indeed not wish to discuss them as a part of counselling.
- Although the Adlerian approach is phenomenological in the way that the Person-Centred approach is, the former is nevertheless more directly educative in a way which may not suit everyone.
- Clients who are in **deep distress**, or those who are **grief stricken**, will probably not benefit (initially at least) from this approach. This is not to say that they might not benefit later on, because in many instances they could well do so.

SUMMARY

- In contrast to Freud, Adler was an optimist. Individual psychology considers each client to be a unique, whole individual who strives toward completion and toward achieving his or her personal goals.
- Psychopathology develops when clients construct a belief system or lifestyle that is maladaptive, inaccurate, and dysfunctional.
- The goal of therapy is to help clients develop a more adaptive lifestyle by therapist helping clients have insight into the “basic mistakes” imbedded in their lifestyle.
- Once this insight is attained, clients are naturally motivated to change in positive ways, and therefore more directive techniques, including guidance and advice, can be used.
- Therapy is effective because of a friendly, collaborative relationship, insight into maladaptive aspects of the lifestyle, and education about how to remediate the maladaptive lifestyle.

- Adlerian therapist will **focus clients on their “private logic” (person's unique evaluation of self, others, and the world, and what is required of him or her).....This includes mistaken goals and guiding fictions about themselves, the world, and others.**
- Adlerian therapist believe that **if people can understand the purposefulness of their behavior, they have a much better chance of changing behaviors that are not useful or helpful. They also help clients to develop social interest- An interest in and a feeling for others.**
- Adler's theory also included many concepts that can be applied to social justice issues in counseling.
- The emphasis on a person's subjective view of the world supports respect for an individual's values and culture.
- Adler believed in equality, civil rights, mutual respect, advancement of social values, and the importance of nurturing feelings of belonging in everyone.

I MAKE THE WORLD BETTER!
I'M A POSITIVE FORCE!



The End