



# Adlerian Psychotherapy

Prioritizing relationships

# Adlerian Theory

---

## History of Adlerian Theory

- n Inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis.
- n Founded by Alfred Adler, championed in America by Rudolf Dreikurs.
- n Dissemination throughout American elementary schools during the guidance movement by Don Dinkmeyer.

# Alfred Adler 1870-1937

---

- n Born in Vienna: middle class, Jewish family
- n Converted and became a Christian
- n 2<sup>nd</sup> of six children-profound influence
- n Felt in shadow of his older brother
- n Invalid as child rickets, pneumonia
- n Very close to his father-no oedipal need
- n After World War I – *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* – deep-seated concern for others and need to associate with them
- n 1921-1934: 30 mental health clinics in schools- closed by Nazi's - drop in delinquency at time
- n Came to USA in 1934 till his death

# Nature of maladjustment

---

- n A person has a mistaken opinion of himself or herself and of the world.
- n A person engages in abnormal behavior to protect his or her opinion of self (e.g., when threatened with failure and insecurity)
  - n Inferiority complex: The individual is overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy, hopelessness
  - n Superiority Complex: very high opinion of self, quick to argue personal solutions to problems are right
  - n Family constellation: Mediates the genetic and constitutional factors brought by the child and the cultural factors that influence the child.
  - n Safeguarding: Symptoms are developed for the purpose of safeguarding the fictional goal.
- n The person becomes self-centered rather than other-centered
- n The individual is unconscious of these events

# Adlerian Therapy Focus

---

- n Importance of the feelings of self (ego) that arise from interactions & conflicts
- n Sense of self(ego) central core of personality
- n Start from Psychoanalysis
- n Emphasis on motivation & social interaction

# Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology

---

- n A phenomenological approach
- n Social interest is stressed
- n Birth order and sibling relationships emphasized
- n Therapy as teaching, informing and **encouraging**
- n Basic mistakes in the client's private logic
- n The therapeutic relationship — a collaborative partnership

# The Phenomenological Approach

---

- n Adlerians attempt to view the world from the client's subjective frame of reference
  - n Reality is less important than how the individual perceives and believes life to be
  - n It is not the childhood experiences that are crucial
    - ~ It is our present interpretation of these events
- n Unconscious instincts and our past do not determine our behavior
  - n It is not genes
  - n It is not environment
  - n It is not genes and environment
  - n It is *how* we choose to respond to our genes and environment

# Social Interest

---

- n Adler's most significant and distinctive concept
- n Refers to an individual's attitude toward and awareness of being a part of the human community
- n Mental health is measured by the degree to which we successfully share with others and are concerned with their welfare
- n Happiness and success are largely related to social connectedness



# Impact of Birth Order

---

- n Adler's five psychological positions:
  1. **Oldest child** ~ favored, spoiled, center of attention, pseudo-parent, high achiever
  2. **Second of only two** ~ behaves as if in a race, often opposite to first child (rivalry)
  3. **Middle** ~ often feels squeezed out
  4. **Youngest** ~ the baby (more pampered), creative, rebellious, revolutionary, avant-garde
  5. **Only** ~ does not learn to share or cooperate with other children, learns to deal with adults

# Encouragement

---

- n Encouragement is the most powerful method available for changing a person's beliefs
  - n Helps build self-confidence and stimulates courage
  - n Discouragement is the basic condition that prevents people from functioning
  - n Clients are encouraged to recognize that they have the power to choose and to act differently

# Other Adler Concepts

---

- n **Organ Inferiority:** everyone is born with some physical weakness-motivate life choices
- n **Aggression Drive:** reaction to perceived helplessness or inferiority-lashing out against the inability to achieve or master

# More Adler Concepts

---

- n **Masculine protest:** Kids work to become independent from and equal to adults & people in power
  
- n **Perfection striving:** people who are not neurotically bound to an inferiority complex spend their lives trying to meet their **fictional goals**.
  - n Elimination of their perceived flaws
  - n Gives motivation and focus
  
- n **Social Responsibility & Understanding**
  - n Occupational tasks-career-self-worth
  - n Societal task-creating friendships-networks
  - n Love tasks-life partner
  
- n **Positive & Goal Oriented Humanity-** people striving to overcome weaknesses to function productively-contributing to society

# How an Adlerian does Therapy

---

- n Comprehensive Assessment using:
  - n Family Constellation-questionnaire-social world assessment
  - n Early Reflections-single incidents from childhood
  - n Lifestyle Assessment-develop targets for therapy by identifying major successes and mistakes in the client's life
  - n "The Question" -- If I had a magic wand that would eliminate your symptom immediately, what would be different in your life?"

# What Clients do in Therapy

---

- n Explore private logic-concepts about self, others, & life – philosophy lifestyle is based
- n Discover purposes purposes of behavior or symptoms and basic mistakes associated with their coping
- n Learning how to correct faulty assumptions & conclusions

# Therapeutic Techniques & Procedures

---

- n Establishing the Relationship
- n Exploring the psychological dynamics operating in the client-assessment
- n Encouraging development of self-understanding-insight into purpose
- n Helping client make new choices-reorientation & reeducation

# 1. Establishing Relationship

---

- n Therapist get to know the client as a person
- n Therapy is collaborative
  - n Goals established together prior to start
  - n Awareness of goal discrepancies during
    - n Scripts (“Have you ever seen a patient like me before?”)
    - n Games (“My previous therapist said the opposite...”)
  - n Realignment of goals, when necessary
- n Supportive, caring human connection
  - n Faith
  - n Hope
  - n Love



## 2. Exploring Individual's Dynamics

---

- n Subjective interview

- n Client tells own story as expert on own life
- n Therapist listens for clues to client's coping and approach to life
- n The Question:

- n Objective interview ~ Life Style Assessment

- n Family constellation
- n Early Recollections
- n Personality Priorities
- n Integration and Summary

# 3. Encouraging Self-Understanding & Insight

---

- n Insight = understanding of motivations (the whys) that operate in client's life
  
- n Therapist offers open-ended interpretations to:
  - n Bring conscious awareness to unconscious processes
  - n Identify and confront resistance
  - n Explore purposes of symptoms, feelings, behaviors or blocks
  
- n Types of interpretation
  - n Of nonverbal behavior: to bring the client's nonverbal behavior to the attention of the client and interpret it.
  - n Of the therapeutic process: Dealing with what is in the here and now.
  - n Active Wondering: Proposes an alternative to the presenting problem.

## 4. Helping with Reorientation & Reeducation

---

- n Encouragement process – “to build courage”  
personal growth is encouraged and reinforced
- n Change and search for new possibilities
- n Making a difference-through change in  
behavior, attitude or perception

# Advantages of Adlerian Theory

---

- n It can be used for numerous issues and disorders.
- n Uses encouragement.
- n It is phenomenological.
- n It does not consider people to be predisposed to anything.
- n Applicable to diverse populations and presenting issues

# Disadvantages of Adlerian Theory

---

- n Difficult to learn (e.g., making dream interpretations)
- n Works best with highly verbal and intelligent clients. This might leave out many people who do not fit that category.
- n Might be too lengthy for managed care.
- n Adlerians do not like to make diagnoses

# Adlerian Approaches today

---

- n Education
- n Parent Education
- n Marriage Counseling
- n Family Counseling
- n Group Work

# Adlerian Therapy demonstration

---

- n Can you diagnose Gina using the DSM?
- n What were her strengths?
- n What did she need to work on?
- n What did Carlson do to build the relationship?
- n How was the intervention individualized?
- n Was the therapy helpful to Gina?
  - n If not, why do you think it wasn't?
  - n If it was helpful, what about it made it helpful?
- n Would you want to work with an Adlerian if you were seeking therapy/counseling?