Adler: Individual Psychology

Adler’s individual psychology presents an optimistic view of people while resting heavily on the notion of social interest, that is, a feeling of oneness with all humankind.

Because of this breach in beliefs, the relationship between Freud and Adler was tenuous.

- Freud saw all human motivation reduced to sex and aggression while Adler saw people as being motivated mostly by social influences and the striving for superiority or success.
- Freud assumed that people have little or no choice in shaping their personality whereas Adler believed that people are largely responsible for who they are.
- Freud’s assumption that present behavior is caused by past experiences was directly opposed to Adler’s notion that present behavior is shaped by people’s view of the future.
- Freud placed very heavy emphasis on unconscious components of behavior while Adler believed that psychologically healthy people are aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Background tidbits:

- Born 1870 in Vienna
- Born sickly and nearly died
- Rivalry relationship with brother Sigmund
- Jewish family background
- Young brother died in childhood

Freud and Adler reacted differently to similar events in their lives.
- Death of sibling
  - Freud felt guilty and self-reproach
  - Adler felt a challenge to overcome death
- Relations to family
  - Freud felt close to his parents and other adults
  - Adler felt close to his siblings
- **Social relations**
  - Freud felt most comfortable in one on one situation
  - Adler felt most comfortable in group settings
- **Professional organization**
  - Freud had a tight organization
  - Adler had a very loose organization
- **Academic attitudes**
  - Freud was a hard working/good student
  - Adler was an unmotivated/poor student

Adler was an early member of the Wednesday group but left the group because of differences in what he saw as the motivating factor of the psyche. He saw physical deficiencies as the foundation of human motivation, not sex.

Formed the Society for Free Psychoanalysis Study which later changed to the Society for Individual Psychology

Adler suggested that social interest and compassion could be the cornerstones for human motivation.

Adler was impressed by Americans and admired their optimism and open-mindedness.

Adler was married and had four children, two of whom became psychiatrists.

Adler was interested and promoted *gender equality*.

**Adlerian Theory**

Adler’s theory suffered from a number of critical problems including:

1. poor organization
2. the fact that he was not a particularly good writer
3. and that much of his work was incorporated into other writers work.

His theory is simple and parsimonious.
Overview

- The one dynamic force behind people’s behavior is the striving for success or superiority
- People’s subjective perceptions shape their behavior and personality
- Personality is unified and self-consistent
- The value of all human activity must be seen from the viewpoint of social interest
- The self-consistent personality structure develops into a person’s style of life
- Style of life is molded by people’s creative power

Tenant one was Striving for Superiority.

Tenant two is the people’s subjective perceptions shape their behavior and personality.

- Fictionalism suggests that we create a goal early in life and the goal guides our style of life and gives unity to our personalities.
  - An example might be that men are superior to women.
  - This teleological approach is suggests that we are focused on our future goal or ends and not concerned about how the past produces some present effect.
- Physical deformities suggests that because we are small, weak and inferior, we develop a fiction or belief system about how to overcome these physical deficiencies and become big, strong, and superior. One might attain these, however, and still act as if they are the former.
  - Some people use these inferiorities and move toward psychological health and a useful style of life while others overcompensate and are motivated to subdue or retreat from other people.
  - Physical deficiencies alone do not cause a particular style of life; they simply provide present motivation for reaching future goals.
Tenant three is the *unity and self-consistency of personality* suggests that each persona is unique and indivisible and that the notion of inconsistent behavior does not exist.

- Adler suggests several ways that the entire person operates with unity and self-consistency
  - Organ dialect – The deficient organ expresses the direction of the individual’s goal.
    - Conscious and unconscious – Conscious thoughts are those that are understood and regarded by the individual as helpful in striving for success while unconscious thought are those that are not helpful.
  - Whether people’s behavior leads to a healthy or an unhealthy style of life depends on the degree of social interest they develop during childhood years.

Tenant four is *social interest* and that the *value of all human activity must be seen from the viewpoint of social interest*.

- A feeling of oneness with all humanity
- Social interest is the natural condition of the human species and the adhesive that binds society together
- It begins early in development with the family and the group of families that family belongs to
  - It originates in the mother-child relationship
  - It continues in the father-child relationship
  - It is believed that these parental relationships overwhelm the effects of heredity and the child’s social environment.
- Social interest is the “sole criterion of human values” and is the only gauge to be used in judging the worth of a person.
- Healthy individuals are genuinely concerned about other people and have a goal of success that encompasses the well-being of all people
How does one strive toward the final goal?

Innate striving force
↓
Physical deficiencies
↓
Feelings of inferiority
/
\
Exaggerated feelings
↓
Personal gain
↓
Personal superiority
↓
Final Goal dimly perceived

Normal feeling of incompletion
↓
Social Interest
↓
Success
↓
Final goal clearly perceived
Tenant five is that a *self-consistent personality structure develops into a person’s style of life.*

- The flavor of a person’s life
- It includes a person’s goal, self-concept, feelings for others, and attitude toward the world.
- It is the interaction of environment, heredity, and the person’s *creative power.*
- People with a healthy, socially useful style of life express their social interest through action.

Tenant six is that the *style of life is molded by people’s creative power.*

- It is the freedom to create her/his own style of life.
- All people are responsible for who they are and how they behave.
- Creative power places them in control of their own lives, is responsible for the final goal, determines their method of striving for that goal, and contributes to the development of social interest.
- Creative power is a dynamic concept that implies *movement.*
- People are much more than a product of their environment and heredity. They are creative beings who not only react to their environment but also act on it and cause it to react to them.
- **We are our own architects and can build either a useful or a useless style of life.**

Abnormal Development

- One factor that underlies all types of maladjustments in *underdeveloped social interest.*
  - Neurotics
    - Set their goals too high
    - Live in their own private worlds
    - Have a rigid and dogmatic lifestyle

- External factors that contribute to maladjustment include
  - Exaggerated physical deficiencies
    - Lead to exaggerated feelings of inferiority because they overcompensate for their inadequacy which leads to being overly concerned for themselves and a lack of concern for others.
Pampered lifestyle
- Lies at the heart of most neuroses
- Lack social interest because they want to perpetuate their parasitic, pampered relationships they had with their parents.
- They are extremely discouraged, indecisive, oversensitive, impatient, and have exaggerated emotions.
- They feel unloved and because their parents do too much for them they encourage feelings of being incapable of solving their own problems.

Neglected lifestyle
- These children feel unloved and unwanted.
- They too lack social interest
- With many of the same characteristics as the pampered individual with the addition of suspiciousness of others and seeing others as potentially dangerous.

Safeguarding techniques are protective devices that enable people to hide their inflated self-image and maintain their current style of life.
- These occur only with neurotics and shield the individual from public disgrace. These include:
  - Excuses (yes…but; only if
  - Aggression (to safeguard their exaggerated superiority complex)
    - Depreciation (undervalue others achievements)
    - Accusation (blame others for one’s failures and to seek revenge)
    - Self-accusation (self-torture and guild with the goal of hurting others)
      - It is the converse of deprecation with the same goal of superiority.
  - Withdrawal is halting personality development by running away from difficulties through distance. It includes:
    - Moving backwards (like regression; safeguarding one’s fictional goal of superiority by psychologically reverting to a more secure period of life)
    - Standing still (not as severe as moving backwards; not being responsible; not doing anything!)
    - Hesitating (vacillating, procrastinating, being too compulsive)
• **Constructing obstacles** (by overcoming self-created obstacles, the individual preserves their self-esteem and their prestige)

• Masculine Protest
  o Adler believed that the psychic and physical life of women is not much different than that of men and the culture and history help to create any differences that do exist.
  o The overemphasis on being manly is called *masculine protest*.
  o Boys and girls are taught these differences very early on.
  o Freud’s and Adler’s view on femininity are reflected in their choice of wives!

**Comparison of Safeguarding Techniques**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adler’s Safeguarding Techniques</th>
<th>Freud’s Defense Mechanisms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Limited mostly to the construction of neurotic style of life</td>
<td>1. Found in everyone</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Protect the person’s fragile self-esteem from public disgrace</td>
<td>2. Protect the ego from the pain of anxiety</td>
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<td>3. Can be partly conscious</td>
<td>3. Operate only on an unconscious level</td>
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<td>4. Common types include:</td>
<td>4. Common types include:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Excuses</td>
<td>a. repression</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Aggression</td>
<td>b. reaction formation</td>
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<tr>
<td>* depreciation</td>
<td>c. displacement</td>
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<td>* accusation</td>
<td>d. fixation</td>
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<td>* self-accusation</td>
<td>e. regression</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. withdrawal</td>
<td>f. projection</td>
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<tr>
<td>* moving backwards</td>
<td>g. introjection</td>
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<td>* standing still</td>
<td>h. sublimation</td>
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<td>* hesitating</td>
<td>i. rationalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>* constructing obstacles</td>
<td>j. undoing</td>
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What are some of the applications of Individual Psychology?

- Family Constellation
  - birth order

- Early Recollection
  - ER are always consistent with people’s present style of life and their subjective account of these experiences yields clues to understanding both their final goal and their present style of life
  - ER’s effect how one sees one’s self
  - ER’s does not determine the style of life but rather ER’s are simply shaped by present style of life

- Dreams
  - Cannot foretell the future but can provide clues for solving future problems
  - “Everything can be different”, that is, if one interpretation doesn’t feel right try another
  - Dreams can be self-deceptive and are best interpreted by someone besides the dreamer

- Psychotherapy
  - Psychopathology results from lack of courage, exaggerated feelings of inferiority, and underdeveloped social interest
  - The chief purpose of psychotherapy is to enhance courage, lessen feelings of inferiority, and encourage social interest.
  - This is difficult because patients hold on to their existing, confortable view of themselves.
  - To overcome resistance to change, the therapist asks questions like “what would you do if I cured you immediately?”
  - What people do with what they have is more important that what they have
  - Treated children in front of an audience
  - Adler was active and directive in therapeutic style
  - The therapeutic relationship is important in reawakening social interest
Critique

- not falsifiable (2)
- average in generating research (3-4)
- organizes research well (5)
- guides everyday action very well (5)
- low internal consistency (2) – Poorly defined terms
- emphasizes free will & choice (5)
- is a very optimistic theory (5)
- on causality this theory is teleological in nature (is moving forward and individuals are motivated by future goals) (2)
- is both conscious/unconscious (3)
- emphasizes social interests (5)
- while emphasizing the unique nature of each individual (5)