

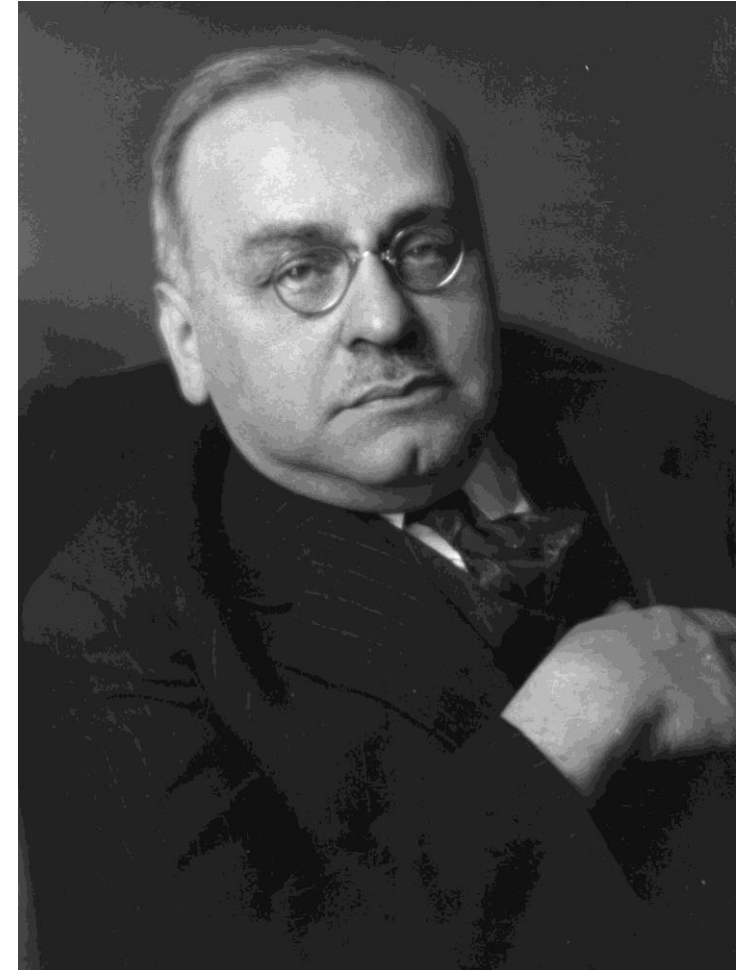
Adler & Individual Psychology

SIUE PSYC 340

Alfred Adler

Life of Adler

- Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was an influential Austrian psychiatrist and “neo-Freudian” psychotherapist.
- After his break with Freud in the early 1900s, he created **individual psychology**, which focused on the uniqueness of each person and denied the universality of biological motives ascribed to us by Freud.



Life of Adler

- Born in 1870 in Austria to Jewish parents
- Developed rickets and nearly died from pneumonia by age 4
 - Felt inferior to his older brother and other children due to his physical limitations
 - Worked hard to compensate for these limitations
 - Gradually achieved a sense of self-esteem and social acceptance

Life of Adler

- Earned a MD in 1895 from the University of Vienna
 - Specialized in neurology and psychiatry
- Began a 9-year correspondence with Freud in 1902
 - Was increasingly critical of Freud's theory by 1910
 - Was expelled from Freud's private club of disciples in 1911

Life of Adler

- Founded the Society for Individual Psychology in 1912
 - Organized government-sponsored child counseling clinics in Vienna
 - Introduced group training procedures, forerunners of modern group therapy
- Moved to NYC in 1929 and continued to promote his theory
 - Became just as embittered toward defectors as Freud
- Died unexpectedly in 1937

Adler's Theory

- Emphasized the importance of free will in personality development
 - Not unconscious, biological, or childhood forces
- Viewed human motivation in terms of conscious aspirations for the future
 - **Striving for superiority:** The lifelong process of perfecting the self and making the self complete or whole



Adler's Theory

- Suggested people strive for superiority by living their lives around **ideals** that develop in childhood and influence how they interact with others
 - E.g., All people are created equal; all people are basically good
 - **Self-ideal**: One's perception of their ideal self and their goals
- **Finalism**: The notion that we have an ultimate goal, a final stage of being, and a need to move toward it
 - **Fictional finalism**: The notion that fictional ideals guide our behavior as we strive toward a complete or whole state of being

Inferiority Feelings



- Common to all humans
 - Not a sign of weakness or abnormality
 - Caused by weak points in one's lifestyle or defective body parts/organs
- Begin to develop in infancy as a function of one's dependency on adults
 - Infants recognize their parents' power and their own helplessness to resist it.

Inferiority Feelings

- Serve as an important driver/source of all striving for superiority
 - Individual growth results from one's attempts to overcome real or imagined inferiorities (**compensation**).
 - Drive to compensate begins in infancy and continues throughout life
 - Failed efforts can lead to an inferiority complex.

Inferiority Complex

- **Inferiority complex:** Involves low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness, and finding it difficult to cope with life demands and trust others
- Develops when a person is unable to compensate for normal inferiority feelings
- Caused by organic inferiority, spoiling or pampering, or neglecting

Superiority Complex

- **Superiority complex:** Involves an exaggerated opinion of one's abilities and accomplishments
- Develops when a person overcompensates for normal inferiority feelings
- May feel self-satisfied and superior
- May be driven to demonstrate superiority with actual accomplishments

Style of Life

- **Style of life:** A unique pattern of characteristics, behaviors, and habits designed to compensate for inferiority
 - AKA personality, character, self
- Emphasized free will in the creation of a unique style of life
 - **Creative power of self:** The ability to actively create an appropriate style of life



Style of Life

- Firmly crystallized by the age of 4 or 5 and difficult to change thereafter
 - Influenced by our conscious attitudes toward ourselves
 - Impacted by social forces (e.g., birth order and relationships with parents)
- Becomes the guiding framework for all later behaviors
 - Four (4) styles of life for dealing with problems involving an individual's behavior toward others, problems of occupation, and problems of love

Style of Life

- **Dominant type:** Displays a ruling attitude; behaves without regard for others
 - E.g., sadists, delinquents, sociopaths, alcoholics, drug addicts
- **Avoiding type:** Avoids problem-solving and any possibility of failure
- **Getting type:** Expects to receive satisfaction from other people and so becomes dependent on them (most common)
- **Socially useful type:** Cooperates with others and attempts to meet their needs

Social Interest

- To realize personal and communal goals, people must learn to cooperate with and contribute to society.
- Mothers either foster or thwart the development of **social interest**, our innate potential to cooperate with others to achieve personal and societal goals.
 - She must teach the child cooperation, companionship, and courage.
- A host of evils (e.g., war, racism, public drunkenness) stem from a lack of community feeling.



Birth Order

- Even though siblings have the same parents and live in the same house, they do not have identical social environments.
- Birth order shapes personality and behavior.

First-Born Child

- Gets their parents' instant and undivided attention and has a secure, happy existence, until dethroned by the second-born
- May behave stubbornly or destructively or refuse to eat or go to sleep in an effort to recapture their former position of privilege
- Expected to play the role of teacher, tutor, leader, and disciplinarian
- Become intellectually mature, organized, authoritarian, conscientious, and conservative

Second-Born Child

- Never experiences the powerful position once occupied by the first-born
- Experiences a more relaxed parenting style as their parents
- Views older sibling as pacesetter
- Ambitious and motivated by competition with the first-born
- May become an underachiever

Last-Born (Youngest) Child

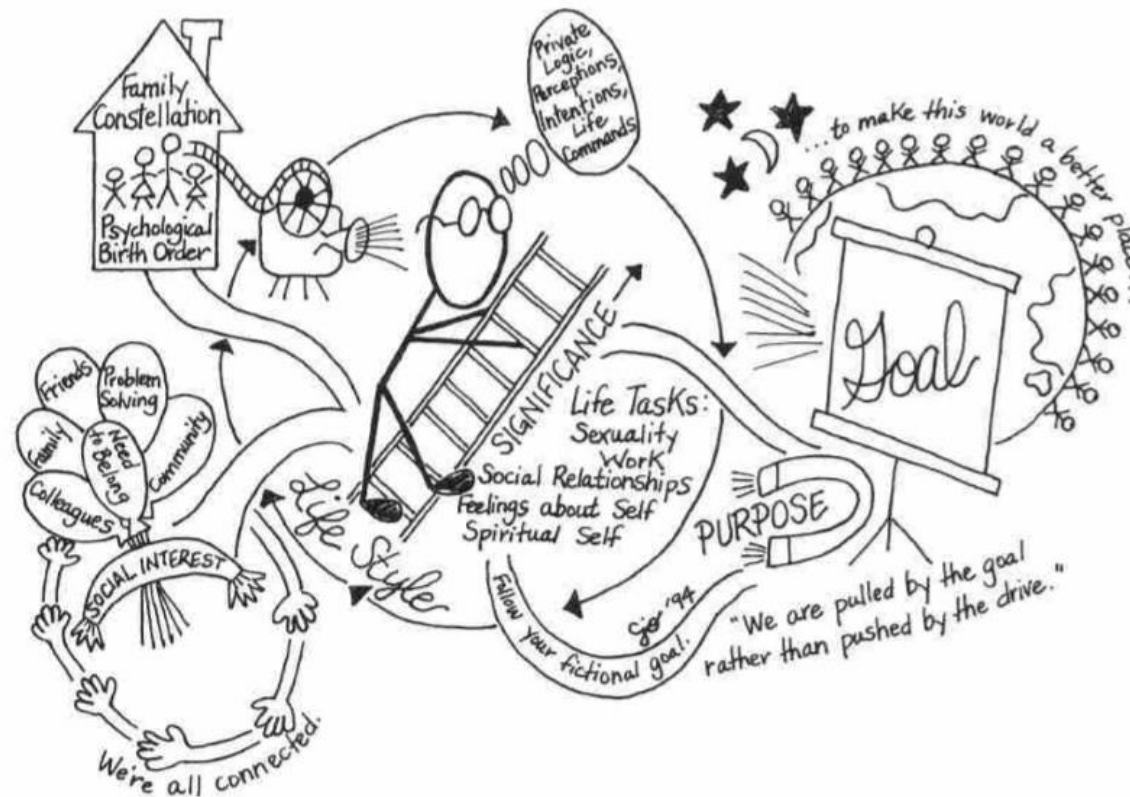
- Pet of the family
- Driven to develop at a remarkably fast pace and surpass older siblings
- Become high achievers
- May retain helplessness and dependency if excessively pampered



Only Child

- Remains the focus of their parents' attention
- Spends more time with adults and matures early and manifests adult attitudes and behaviors
- Have not yet learned to share or compete; selfish
- May be disappointed when recognition or attention is insufficient outside the home (e.g., at school)

Visual Summary of Adler's Theory



Adler's Methods

- Relied on the case study method
 - Analyzed his patients' verbalizations and behavior during therapy sessions
 - Used a more relaxed and informal approach than Freud's
- **Early recollections:** One's earliest memories
 - Assumed to be the best indicators of personality (regardless of whether content is of real events or were fantasies)

Adler's Methods



- Said dreams involve people's feelings about and intentions toward a problem
 - Argued interpretation requires knowledge about the person
 - Found common interpretations:
 - Flying = A sense of striving upward
 - Falling = A sense of demotion or loss

Social Interest Tests

- Although Adler argued that personality tests create artificial situations that provide ambiguous results, his theory inspired several self-report inventories:
 - **Social Interest Scale (SIS):** Test-takers choose one of two adjectives that best describes an attribute they would like to possess
 - **Social Interest Index (SII):** Test-takers judge the degree to which statements represent their personal characteristics
 - **Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success (BASIS-A):** Test-takers answer 65-items across 5 dimensions

Research on Social Influences

- Adults who scored low on inferiority feelings tended to be more successful, self-confident, and more persistent in trying to achieve their goals than adults who scored high on inferiority feelings.
- Neglected children tend to experience more shame, depression, symptoms of PTSD, and lower socialization skills than children who were not neglected.
- Pampered children tend to experience one of four types: overindulgence, overpermissiveness, overdomination, or overprotection.

Research on Birth Order

- Older siblings tend to score higher on IQ tests than younger siblings.
- First-borns tend to be more suggestible, dependent on others, and anxious in stressful situations.
- Second-borns tend to be influenced more by older siblings than by parents.
- Only children are not more selfish than other children (contrary to Adler); they tend to have greater initiative, aspiration, industriousness, and self-esteem.

Strengths of Adler's Theory

- His theory influenced theorists in multiple areas of psychology.
 - His emphasis on social forces are reflected in Karen Horney's theory.
 - The creative power of people to shape their own styles of life, and the insistence that future goals are more important than past events, influenced the work of Abraham Maslow.
 - His focus on the whole person and the unity of personality is reflected in the work of Gordon Allport.

Strengths of Adler's Theory

- His theory was more optimistic than Freud's and Jung's theories.
- His theory disputed Freud's views on women, arguing that there was no biological basis, such as penis envy, for women's alleged sense of inferiority.
- Specific Adlerian concepts of lasting importance to psychology include the early work on organic inferiority; the inferiority complex; compensation; and order of birth.



Criticisms of Adler's Theory

- Some suggest his theory is oversimplified and does not capture the complexity of personality.
- His observations cannot be repeated and duplicated, nor were they conducted in a controlled and systematic fashion.
 - He did not attempt to verify the accuracy of his patient's reports or explain the procedures he used to analyze the data.
- Some experts disagree with his dismissal of determinism.