

Psychotherapy Guidebook

ADLERIAN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Adlerian Psychotherapy

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DEFINITION

Adlerian theory is at once a model of personality, a theory of psychopathology, and the foundation of a treatment method. Adler's theory of Individual Psychology is based on a humanistic model of man. Among the basic principles are:

- 1.Holism. The Adlerian views man as a unit, not as a collection of drives or instincts divided against themselves.
- 2.Field. Theory. The individual can be studied only by his movement within his social field. Therefore, the Adlerian therapist is extremely sensitive to the client's interpersonal transactions. Especially examined are the "tasks" of work, sexuality, and the individual's feelings of belonging to the social group.
- 3.Teleology. (inferiority feelings and the striving for significance). While Adler's name is linked most often with the term 'Inferiority complex," toward the end of his career he became more concerned with observing the individual's struggle for significance or competence (later discussed by others as self-realization, self-actualization, etc.). He believed that, standing before the unknown, each person strives to

become more perfect and is motivated by one dynamic force — the upward striving for completion — and all else (traits, drives, etc.) is subordinated to this one master motive. Thus, all behavior can be observed as purposeful movement toward a final end point of significance. Behavior is understood as goal-directed movement (the teleological point of view), though the person may not be fully aware of this motivation.

4. **The Creative Self.** It is the creative self that determines the idiosyncratic nature of behavior. Adler postulated that it is neither the individual's genetic endowment nor his social environment that determines his behavior, but that each person responds in an adaptive, creative way to the social field in which he finds himself.

The concept of the creative self places the responsibility for the individual's personality into his own hands. It does not mean, though, that he is to be blamed for his creation, since we all believe we have chosen the best way of life under any given circumstances. But since the Adlerian therapist sees the client as responsible for himself, he attempts to show the client that he cannot blame others or uncontrollable forces for his current condition.

5. **Life-Style.** Adler believed that each individual's striving toward a guiding ideal of significance and social belonging could be observed as a pattern that manifests itself early in life and runs as a theme throughout one's lifetime. This life-style pattern is seen in all aspects of a person's behavior — it is

his perceptual style. If one understands an individual's life-style, his behavior makes sense.

HISTORY

Alfred Adler (1870- 1937) was an Austrian physician who was invited by Freud to become a charter member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. By 1911 he was president of the organization and editor of its journal, but he found himself differing from Freud in certain fundamental concepts of personality and pathology. He did not believe, for example, in Freud's idea that neuroses had a sexual origin. Their views were irreconcilable, and Adler was the first to break from Freud. In the areas in which his views differed from Freud, later developments in psychology (ego psychology, existential psychology) can be reconciled more easily with the basic assumptions of Adler than with those of Freud. The contributions of Adler have become increasingly important in modern psychology.

When Adler left the Psychoanalytic Society, he founded his own school, which he called Individual Psychology. Always interested in the practical application of psychological insights, Adler founded the first child guidance clinics in Vienna and lectured all over the world to both professionals and laymen.

TECHNIQUE

The Individual Psychologist works with the client as an equal to uncover the values and assumptions by which the client lives. He formulates the life-style and interprets it to the client.

As the individual is not aware that he is acting according to misperceptions, it becomes the task of the therapist to not only expose the “mistakes” but also to re-orient the client toward a more socially useful mode of behavior.

The Adlerian therapist seeks to establish a climate in which learning can take place. Thus, encouragement and optimism are key concerns for the therapist. Demonstration/analysis of the person proceeds to re-orientation toward a new philosophy of life based on social interest.

Individual Psychologists work one-to-one, or in groups, hospital psychiatric units, settlement houses, schools, corrections, and everywhere else in the mental health field. Much teaching is done through demonstrations in front of an audience, especially in the child guidance centers. However, there is no one way all Adlerians practice, for Adlerian psychotherapy permits the use of a wide variety of techniques, such as psychodrama and art therapy. Essentially, Adlerian therapists use methods to help the client relieve suffering and, second, to change.

Despite the technique used, a constant factor is the stress on social

interactions (including the relationship between client and therapist), and social contribution; the more social interest a client has, the less feelings of inferiority he has. The primary aim of therapy is to help the client increase feelings of belonging to the human group through contribution.

The other technique unique to Adlerians is the formulation of the lifestyle and the constant use of the information gathered to demonstrate the client to himself. It is the particular interpretation of the behavior and the teaching of a certain philosophy of life to prod clients into social usefulness that is uniquely Adlerian.

APPLICATIONS

Adlerian Psychotherapy is used not only for the change desired in classical neurosis but also in the treatment of psychosis and character disorders. Especially important to many Adlerians is the education of parents and children through the use of family education centers.

Since clients are treated in every conceivable setting, every type of disorder is considered grist for the Adlerian's therapeutic mill, including those people who are without symptoms but desire a personal growth. "Sickness" and symptoms are not required if one wishes to become the client of an Adlerian therapist — only a desire for understanding and a willingness to accept the responsibility for change.