

Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler

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It has always been this way! I should not be surprised that my boss thinks I didn't deserve that promotion. My parents always thought my older sister was so much better than me. Clearly, my ex-husband thought his colleague was better than me, which is why he left me for her! I just never measure up.

Michelle, the client quoted above, is demonstrating a style of life that is steeped in feelings of insecurity, possibly a result of early childhood experiences in which she was compared with her older sister. It is not likely, however, that the client's experiences are factually accurate. The client experiences her subjective understanding as truth. Until she begins to challenge her understanding of those experiences, her interactions with others will likely follow this same theme.

After reading this chapter about Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology, you will be able to do the following:

- Describe the core concepts of Adler's theory of individual psychology
- Apply Adlerian theory to case conceptualization
- Describe the role of a counselor when using an Adlerian approach
- Describe techniques this theory ascribes for intervening with clients

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

Alfred Adler was a pioneer of counseling theory who focused on social interest, family constellation, and the development of parenting style. He initially worked closely with

Sigmund Freud and was a regular participant in Freud's discussion groups, known as the Wednesday Psychological Society (Rattner, 1983), which ended after professional and personality differences developed. The primary disagreement between Drs. Freud and Adler rested on the concept of determinism. Psychoanalysts used the term *impulse* for the fundamental process behind behavior, while Adlerians preferred the word *will* (Adler, 1931). Adler "conceived man not only as an organism, but also and even principally as a social being. . . . The only function of existence that psychoanalysis ascribes to the other ego as being an occasion for satisfaction" (Allers, 1933, p. 31). Freud, however, believed that people had no capacity to make change in their lives. Conversely, Adler noted that while challenging, perceptions of problem-genic life circumstances can change and thus allow for mentally healthier individuals (Adler, 1931). In 1912, a year after Adler and Freud parted ways professionally, Adler began theory development for individual psychology, which adduced "the artificiality of Freud's psychoanalytic theory" (Rattner, 1983, p. xii).

Adler attended Universität Wien (the University of Vienna), studying medicine, and began his career as an ophthalmologist in 1895. After meeting Freud in 1902, he became interested in psychiatry and established Adler's School of Individual Psychology in 1912. He also desired for as many people as possible to be involved in the counseling process, including teachers, parents, bus drivers, principals, and coaches. During WWI, Adler was a physician for the Austrian Army, ultimately working in the children's hospital. This experience influenced his social activist efforts training teachers and working with clinics at a state school. Adler also published texts related to his psychological interests, lectured, and advocated for all people to learn the basic principles of psychology.

Areas of Development

Adlerian followers have expanded on the philosophical underpinnings of original Adlerian concepts while maintaining the integrity of Adler's original theory. Just as persons do not remain stagnant, Adlerian theory adapts to accept societal change and deeper understanding of the human condition. Whereas all areas of development cannot be given credit in this chapter, we will provide details about a few particular areas of change.

One example of these areas of change is life tasks. Adler was a pioneer in feminist-type theory and referred to the sex task as people's challenge in defining how to relate to the *other sex*, rather than the *opposite sex* (Adler, 1927/1998). His initial view of homosexuality reflected that of the times. He described gay and lesbian people as discouraged, using socially useless behaviors to meet their needs, and failing at the life task of sex. This view has since changed, and homosexuality is understood as a normal and natural biological phenomenon. Furthermore, Adler initially identified three life tasks: society/friendship, work, and sex/love. Some current Adlerian theorists ascribe to five life tasks; spirituality and self were later added and defined by Harold Mosak (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999).

Adler desired a simple and commonsense theory. He wanted all people to be able to understand and apply his concepts. Although Adler was opposed to labels, he recognized the importance of creating a common language for the sake of simplicity. One of his applicable concepts was personality types, of which he had 14 (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). In an effort to condense the types into a more useful system, four personality priorities were identified: pleasing, controlling, superiority, and comfort.

Another such example is child development. Adler originally identified the importance of childhood to one's development and lifestyle; he also described all behavior to be goal directed. Dreikurs (1964) developed his four goals of misbehavior as a way to delineate the goals of children's actions. By deciphering a child's goal of misbehavior, a counselor, teacher, or parent could hypothesize the child's fictional goal and develop strategies to help the child meet goals in a socially useful manner.

Adler was one of the first psychiatrists to identify the importance of working with school systems. In the late 1960s, Dinkmeyer noticed there was relatively no guidance curriculum for elementary-age children (Muro & Dinkmeyer, 1977). Dinkmeyer was instrumental in developing and implementing guidance counseling in school systems. An example of a popular school-based program is Positive Discipline in the Classroom® (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 2000). Nelsen et al. emphasize the importance of cooperation among all members of the school environment, attesting that schools have the resources to teach academics as well as provide an atmosphere for nurturance and positive social behavior. Many school-based curricula have been based on the foundation of Adlerian theory. Terry Kottman (2003) later expanded on Adlerian philosophy by creating Adlerian play therapy. Adlerian play therapists use play as a way to meet the developmental needs of children. It is used by school counselors as well as counselors in private and community settings.

In addition to furthering the application of Adlerian theory to the above, other developments have centered on applying it to crisis intervention (Tedrick & Wachter-Morris, 2011), leadership development (Ferguson, 2011), work hygiene (Shifron & Reysen, 2011), eating disorders (Belangee, 2007), and couples therapy (Peluso & MacIntosh, 2007), among other areas. Additionally, the fall and winter 2012 editions of the *Journal of Individual Psychology* were dedicated to research on the efficacy of Adlerian theory with a variety of nationalities.

OVERVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Individual Psychology

Adlerian theory is often referred to as individual psychology because of the holistic and subjective nature of individuals in relation to others and their environment. Individuals act within a social context (Mosak, 2005) and according to their subjective experience of themselves within the world. Individuals view their experience through the use of imagined (fictional) goals that act as a template for an adopted style of life. Mosak noted that

the conceptualization of humans as creative, choosing, self-determined decision makers permits them to choose the goals they want to pursue. Individuals may select socially useful goals or they may devote themselves to the useless side of life. They may choose to be task-oriented or they may, as does the neurotic, concern themselves with their own superiority. (p. 54)

Individuals are holistic in that they behave, perceive, feel, become, and strive for meaning in their interpersonal relationships and must be understood as an indivisible whole. Aslinia, Rasheed, and Simpson (2011) pointed out that Adler's German translation of the

term *individual* means “indivisible.” To reduce individuals to separate parts for the purpose of analysis or understanding misses their essence (Aslinia et al., 2011). Individuals engage in “cognitive organization,” which helps them manage their experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and aspirations and ultimately control their lives (Mosak, 2005). Life has no significance in and of itself, so individuals’ intrinsic subjective experience is reciprocally shaped and influenced by their encounters with the world. Each encounter has an additive effect. Mosak (2005) quoted Lawrence Frank, who succinctly captured this reciprocal evolution:

The personality process might be regarded as a sort of rubber stamp which the individual imposes upon every situation by which he [or she] gives it the configuration that he [or she], as an individual, requires; in so doing he [or she] necessarily ignores or subordinates many aspects of the situation that for him [or her] are irrelevant and meaningless and selectively reacts to those aspects that are personally significant. (p. 65)

Understanding individuals as inseparable in all aspects of their lives and how they impact and are impacted by their social environment is of primary importance to Adlerian theory. The following are concepts related to individual psychology.

View of Human Nature

Basic to individual psychology is Adler’s belief that the first 6 to 8 years of life influence adult life outcomes (Kottman, 2001), evident in behaviors and reactions to life situations. Thus, if a line could be drawn depicting behavior from childhood through adulthood, that line would remain relatively constant. Case Illustration 5.1 reviews the case of Michelle, the client with whom we opened this chapter, and provides her chart.

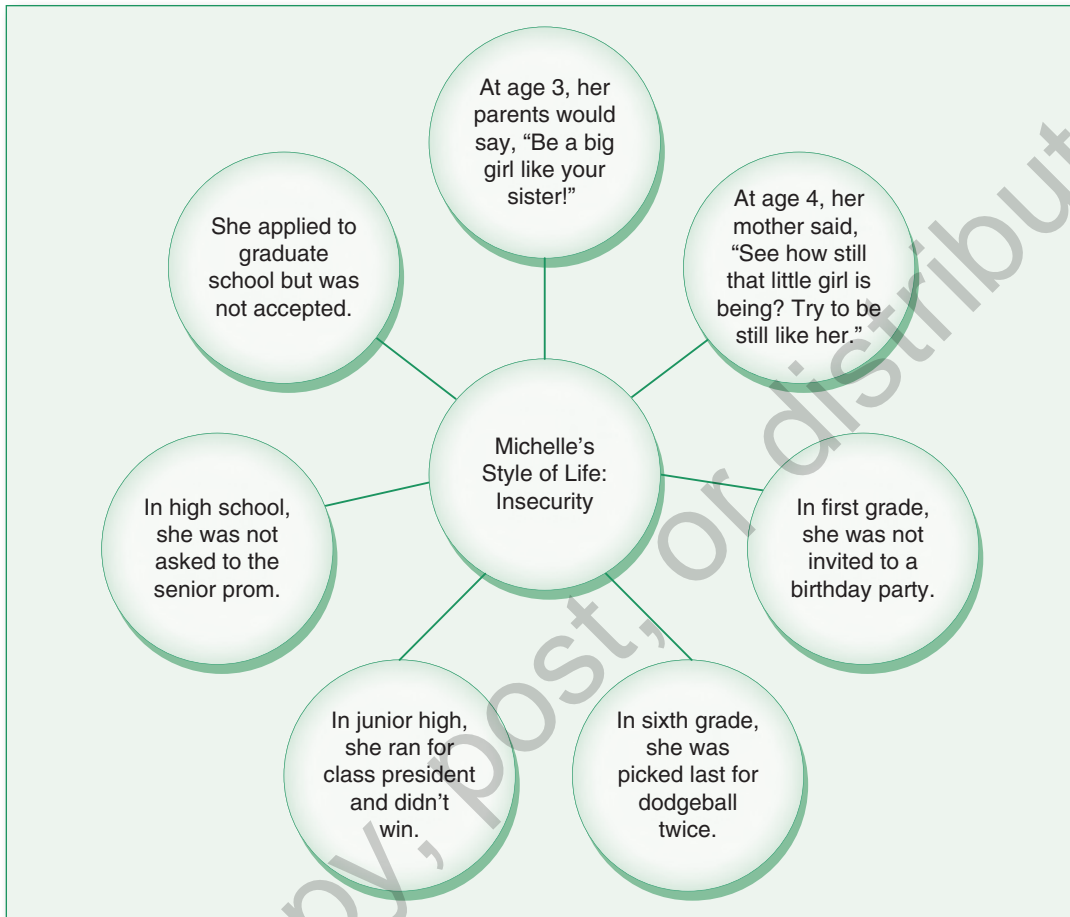
Free Will

According to Adler, people are neither exclusively preprogrammed by genetics nor solely shaped by environment; they are influenced by both. This freedom allows individuals the ability to make decisions based on an idiosyncratic personal style that results from this free will. Individuals are thus responsible for successes as well as mistakes and unhealthy decisions (Rattner, 1983).

CASE ILLUSTRATION 5.1

Michelle

The following chart highlights how Michelle perceives the various events in her life as evidence she is substandard to others. However, these events, in and of themselves, do not indicate that she is not “good enough.” She uses her subjective perception of events to support her style of life, which is insecurity. Adler also felt this line could help draw conclusions regarding the future of the individual. This insight is important to understand and then change faulty beliefs and behaviors.



Social Interest

Overriding all Adlerian concepts is *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*, or social interest. According to Adler, the root of all problems is failure of social interest. Further, the solution to mental health problems is to increase social interest (Adler, 1931, 1956/1964).

Inferiority Versus Superiority

Adler theorized a struggle between feelings of inferiority and feelings of superiority (Adler, 1927/1998) based on the motivation to find one's place in a social context (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). He found that feelings of inferiority are not accidental but, rather, inherently human and anchored in *organ inferiority* (Rattner, 1983). Organ inferiority is related to a perceived deficit that develops in childhood (e.g., unattractiveness, assessment of strength and/or ability, social and economic status, or other feelings of inferiority; Adler, 1927/1998). Consider again the case of Michelle, the client with whom we opened this chapter (see Case Illustration 5.2).

CASE ILLUSTRATION 5.2

Continuing With Michelle

That Michelle was picked last for dodgeball twice in sixth grade is not concrete evidence she was inferior to others. In this case, she did not consider all the other times when she *wasn't* picked last. Thus, the two negative occurrences are the memories she held on to as validation that she was deficient. A more objective perception is that while Michelle was chosen last two times, other times, she was not chosen last. Her subjective perception supported her belief that she could not measure up to others. Ultimately, feelings of inferiority are goal directed and provide motivation for growth toward belonging. Adler emphasized that these feelings were natural and become maladaptive only when fixated on and resistant to being tested and reexamined within relationships as a person develops (Rattner, 1983). In Michelle's case, she did not take being chosen last as an opportunity to improve her dodgeball skills; rather, she fixated on the event from a defeatist perspective.

As with Michelle, a struggle for compensation and personal power is evident in striving for superiority. Adler said that social interest is the balancing force for this struggle. "Social interest helps direct the striving of individuals toward the socially useful side" (Ashby & Kottman, 1996, p. 238). Adaptive manifestations of striving for superiority will yield high levels of social interest through beneficial actions that help the self and others. The individual will set flexible, high standards that lend themselves to objective self-evaluation (Ashby & Kottman, 1996).

On the other hand, maladaptive methods of striving for superiority will result in a critical self-evaluation process of actions based on disregard for others. If Michelle used maladaptation to strive for superiority, she might begin to arrogantly claim skills in a grandiose manner, which would likely result in a loss of friendships. These neurotic manifestations will demonstrate reduced feelings of social interest, increased pursuit for personal power, and a lack of consideration for the welfare of others (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). These individuals may battle with dissatisfaction and emptiness and may become overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority instead of being motivated by them. Dreikurs (1964) described individuals in this state as "discouraged."

Style of Life

Starting in childhood, people develop beliefs about themselves, others, and the world based on early perceptions of their experiences in their environment. These beliefs help them understand, predict, and control life. This is, in essence, their *truth*. That which is created based on these beliefs and the feelings and behaviors that result from them cumulate into the individual's style of life (Adler, 1956/1964). For example, a child who has been sexually abused by a perpetrator who suggested he couldn't resist how pretty she was may develop an erroneous belief that being pretty makes bad things happen, so it would be better to "hide" behind oversized clothes, unkempt hair, and poor hygiene. One's style of life is not

good or bad, right or wrong; it simply describes the consistency with which one navigates through the world toward one's fictional goal, described later (Adler, 1927/1998, 1956/1964; Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). A factor of specific importance to Adlerian theory is the concept of family constellation, including birth order (Adler, 1956/1964) and family atmosphere (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). Let's again turn to the case of Michelle (Case Illustration 5.3).

CASE ILLUSTRATION 5.3

Michelle's Feelings of Inferiority

For Michelle, while her feelings of being inferior to others caused her a great deal of distress, she felt incongruent if she did not engage in comparisons. She always asked her friends what grades they made on tests; when she walked into a room, she would look around to see who was skinnier than her. Never did she measure up, but she could always count on her ability to measure and compare herself with others. If someone paid her a compliment, she would find a way to discount it. For example, if a friend commented on her new outfit, she would respond, "Do you really like it? I wasn't sure when I tried it on."

According to Adlerian theory, there are no mistakes in style of life. One's habits and symptoms are precisely right for attaining goals determined by one's style of life. Every person experiencing alcoholism, neuroticism, and criminal behavior makes goal-directed decisions based on his or her chosen style of life and aim to attain unmet needs (Adler, 1931).

Purposeful Behavior

Adler (1931) believed that all behavior is purposeful to fulfill one's style-of-life needs. Recognizing the purpose of behavior is crucial due to possible insight into and identification of personal goals and needs. Adlerian theory assumes that individuals' decisions are based on past experiences that impact current behaviors.

Fictional Finalism

Fictional finalism, sometimes referred to as an imaginary or fictional goal, is a term used in regard to purposeful behavior and is a central focus of the style of life (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, & Sperry, 1987). It describes an imaginary aim that influences an individual's behavior and is a manifestation of that individual's beliefs about "how the world should be" (Adler, 1929). With this fictional goal, an individual has a subjective experience in which he or she chooses what is true, what is meaningful, what behavior will serve a purpose, and how to understand and perceive events. Fictional finalism also includes subjective goals that will result in feelings of self-worth (Adler, 1929). These goals are unconscious and not based in reality.

Subjective Perception of Reality

Adler (1931) emphasized the need to analyze how an individual perceives reality, rather than actual events. If these meanings are aimed toward the good of society, then the individual is grounded in social interest. However, if the focus is on self, then the individual is engaging in what Adler (1929) called *private logic*, a hidden objective for not complying with societal norms. Adler believed that individuals resorting to a life of crime, those participating in neurosis or psychosis, those who turn to alcoholism or addiction, and other “failures” do so as a result of private logic (Adler, 1931).

Early Memories

Adler (1931) stated that early memories are the most revealing clues and are significant for uncovering the individual’s style of life. These memories a person carries serve as reminders of limitations and meanings of events. There are no “chance” memories, nor will they ever run counter to the style of life (p. 73). It is not the accuracy of the memories but the value the individual places on them that is important (Adler, 1931). Memories are chosen to support how the person perceives things, to serve emotions, and to represent the story of one’s life. This story is repeated to warn, confront, keep focused on goals, and prepare for the future through already-tested styles of life (Adler, 1931). If the style of life is altered, memories will be altered to fit.

Dreams

Adler (1931) wrote that dreams are similar to memories in their indication of style of life. The individual will pick out the parts of the dream with which he or she agrees and that express his or her chosen style of life. Adler stated that the purpose of the dream is to support the style of life. This support is offered through emotions that manifest in dreams. Adler (1931) stated that dreams always arouse feelings the individual needs to justify his or her style of life.

Basic Characteristics and Assumptions

The Role of the Family

Consistent with all of Adlerian theory, Adler posited that people are social beings. The family is the first social relationship an infant experiences, with intraparental relationships acting as an umbrella over the family. This relationship sets the emotional stage for traditional family norms (Dreikurs, 1964; Starr, 1973). The task of a father is to be a good “fellow man to his wife, to his children and to society” (Adler, 1931, p. 134). He is to strive to meet the three problems of life discussed earlier, and if he is meeting them in a productive manner, he is a good father and husband. The mother’s task is twofold: (1) to show love and (2) to guide the child to social interest (Starr, 1973). Children need to learn that the family unit is a part of society and that they can transfer trust, knowledge, and feelings to others outside of the family (Adler, 1931). It is important to note that current Adlerians acknowledge that Adler’s original statements do not mirror the family relationships of today. Family constellations can include nuclear or blended families, same-sex parents, single parents, and multiple-generational households.

Birth Order

The psychological order of birth provided a general guideline for expectations of how a person will behave and be treated within the family. Adler (1956/1964) identified typical behaviors based on one's birth order: oldest, middle, youngest, or only. Psychological rather than chronological order of birth is emphasized because of the subjective nature of human beings. For example, if the chronologically firstborn child has significant health impairments, he or she may not be functioning in the role of the firstborn and, thus, the next-born child may take the place and roles of the firstborn.

Oldest Children. The oldest child enters the family as the only child. Typically, this child is given a great deal of attention prior to the arrival of additional children. Upon the arrival of younger children, the oldest becomes a helper and contributor to the entire family (Adler, 1956/1964). Oldest children are often in leadership roles as adults in their careers, social groups, and families. Oldest children may also be aggressive, organized, compliant, logical, and scholarly (Leman, 2004). Examples of famous oldest children include Oprah Winfrey, Brad Pitt, Hilary Rodham Clinton, Bill Cosby, and Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge of Wales.

Middle Children. The second child enters the family as the youngest. This child has an older sibling who has paved the way for any future children. For a period of time, this child will be the youngest and receive attention as the baby, until another child arrives. The middle child is often fighting for his or her place in the family. Due to this child's attempt to "catch up" to the oldest child, he or she often becomes more talented than the older sibling (Adler, 1956/1964). It could also be that the second child finds a unique way to make meaning and stand out in the family. For example, if the firstborn is academically talented, the second child may choose to excel athletically (Leman, 2004). Because middle children may follow the same path as the older child or take a different route than the older child, and yet strive to stand separate from younger children, middle children are described to be in a paradox. They may be social or reserved, rebellious or compromising, diplomatic or peace seeking, and independent or stubborn (Leman, 2004). Examples of famous middle children include Donald Trump; Diana, Princess of Wales; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; Jennifer Lopez; and Bill Gates.

Youngest Children. The youngest child is in a unique position because his or her place in the family will not be taken; he or she will always be the youngest. This child is likely to be pampered and to become the star of the family. The youngest child is competitive, often overshadowing the older children and surpassing their talents (Adler, 1956/1964). Lastborns may even receive much of their life instruction and caretaking from their older siblings, creating a multifaceted sibling relationship. Youngest children may also be outgoing, relaxed, manipulative, entertaining, impatient, rebellious, affectionate, spoiled, and absent-minded (Leman, 2004). Examples of famous youngest children include Jim Carrey, Eddie Murphy, Whoopi Goldberg, Mark Twain, and Goldie Hawn.

Only Children. The only child is different from children with siblings because he or she has no sibling interaction, thus eliminating opportunities for social emulation and competition

(Adler, 1956/1964). The only child is the center of attention and may become demanding of this position. Additionally, due to the lack of other children living in the home, the only child may spend most of his or her free time alone—or with mother or father, modeling adult-like social interactions. Only children may be characterized as self-assured, perfectionists, self-centered, organized, cheerful, efficient, nitpicky, and dependable (Leman, 2004). Examples of famous only children include Tiger Woods, Laura Bush, Alan Greenspan, Lance Armstrong, Condoleezza Rice, and Betty White.

Because of the various compositions of families (e.g., blended, adopted, same-sex parented, single parented, traditional nuclear) and the phenomenological approach to Adlerian theory, children may perceive their role in the family to be different from what is implied by birth order. Adler (1956/1964) also described some caveats to the birth order influence, such as illness, death, gender, and gaps in age.

Consider Adler's description of the family constellation. He posited that birth order is quite influential in personality development. It seems that this is generally accepted in popular culture: People commonly reference the expected behavior of firstborns, only children, oldest children, and so on. What do you think? Take a moment to review the website of the Alfred Adler Institute of San Francisco. As you reflect on your own family-of-origin experiences and your self-concept, does it seem that your position in the family constellation impacted your personal growth? What evidence do you see?

Life Tasks

Adler (1931) identified three problems or tasks of life: task of love, task of community, and task of work. The three problems are never found separately, and all three reflect on the others; solving one aids in solving another (Adler, 1931). Adler believed that the individual's response to these three tasks reflects his or her meaning of life. He said that all three problems are aspects of the same human needs: to preserve life, to further life, and to further one's environment (Adler, 1931).

Task of Love

The task of love is based on cooperation between intimate partners: "It is only between the I and Thou and the surrender inherent in it that a person discovers his [or her] own self and his [or her] real nature" (Rattner, 1983, p. 52). This task emphasizes surrendering oneself completely to one's partner, to the point where one person is formed from the two. Mistakes in solving this task may lead individuals to ask, "What can I get out of this relationship?" rather than "What can I contribute?" (Adler, 1931, p. 265). The task of love has other benefits for society. Its primary purpose is preservation and furtherance of life (Adler, 1931). This task not only encompasses intimacy and reproduction but also encourages hygiene (Adler, 1931). Through this task or problem, individuals learn manners, how to dress, how to clean, and management or repression of desires.

Task of Community

The task of community also centers on cooperation and solving social problems. Adler (1956/1964) indicated that the family serves as the training ground for development of this

task, which is then externalized to the community. To solve the tasks of work and love, the individual must first examine the social task or task of community (Adler, 1931). “Social interest is required for the solution of all tasks of life because these are always social in structure and presuppose fellow feeling” (Rattner, 1983, p. 49). To solve the task of work, one must have learned cooperation (Adler, 1931). Cooperation allows for the division of labor, which then allows for organization of different training and abilities to contribute to the common welfare and increase opportunity for others (Adler, 1931). The task of love also relies on the task of community. Between partners, a sense of cooperation or division of labor needs to exist for a successful partnership (Rattner, 1983). Adler stressed that solving the task of community helps develop courage and confidence in meeting life’s problems, thus promoting the welfare of others (Adler, 1931).

Task of Work

The task of work is focused on preserving an individual’s environment (Rattner, 1983). In pursuing work, an individual gains a feeling of productivity and makes an attempt to contribute to the welfare of society. As with the social environment, the task of work has implications for the success of the family. If there is fair division of labor, a sense of cooperation will exist. Adler emphasized that the mother’s role, even if she works as a homemaker, is no less important than the father’s. In fact, Adler (1931) emphasized the mother’s decision to be a homemaker as an occupational choice.

Use With Diverse Populations and Children

Adlerian therapy has been characterized as compatible for working with diverse populations (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987). The straightforward approach of the theory and focus on the subjective view of reality from the perspective of the client does not alienate individuals or cultures. With the emphasis on encouragement and solving the three problems of life—love, community, and work—this approach is applicable to all.

Adler (1931) was an advocate for oppressed groups and developed his theory to promote social awareness. He was interested in encouraging society to appreciate people individually and accept each person as an equal (Adler, 1931). Adler (1931) advocated for the rights of everyone and dedicated some of his writings to encouraging the equal treatment of women. Key to Adler’s theory is the concept of social interest, which basically promotes the idea that people who value others will work toward social interest and solve problems for the benefit of others (Adler, 1931).

The focus on inferiority lends this theory to understanding the dynamics of oppressed people (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987). The therapeutic goal of increasing social interest and redirecting selfish manifestations of striving for superiority is conducive to working with marginalized and oppressed populations, and offers a productive alternative for societal participation.

People with disabilities and special needs can also benefit from an individual psychology approach. With its emphasis on the impact of organ inferiority, a greater understanding can be gained through identification of compensation methods, striving for superiority, and style of life (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987). Clients with disabilities can benefit by increasing

insight into this identification and directing compensation acts to productive areas, as well as increasing social interest.

Adler was an advocate for the teaching of gender equality in schools (Ansbacher, 1990; Rattner, 1983) and warned that maladaptive behavior patterns would develop, with boys believing they are superior to girls, resulting in decreased social interest and increased feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher, 1990). Adler (1931) further advocated for women by stressing the importance of nonhierarchical gender equity within the family, explaining that “there should be no ruler in the family” (p. 135). He suggested that many unhappy marriages are a product of role expectations that result in anger and resentment (Adler, 1931).

Strengths and Limitations

As with any theory, limitations of Adlerian theory have been identified. In particular, due to the length of time needed for assessment, there may be challenges using this work with individuals who lack insight, who are concrete thinkers, and who need immediate benefits. However, neo-Adlerians have worked to shorten this process. Others cite the need for insightful clients and inadequacy for lower-functioning clients as a problem with this theory (Allers, 1933). The simplicity of this theory is a focus of criticism in that it takes highly complex human behaviors and boils them down to need for superiority and need for community (Allers, 1933). Another criticism is the therapists’ responsibility to interpret. Interpretation of material in Adlerian counseling is an oft-debated topic, and no resolution has been reached.

Professional Identity

When asked the question, “Who are you?” most people will identify gender, profession, race and ethnicity, and family role, among other factors. It makes sense that for counselors, professional identification does not encompass only one’s credentials or clinical focus; it also includes theoretical orientation. Further, as it is ethically responsible for theory to inform practice, theory is at the core of *who* counselors are.

Counselors-in-training are often uncertain which theory feels right as they “try on” the various theories explored in graduate training programs. Asking these three simple questions can provide direction toward the theory that resonates most with one’s understanding of humans:

- What do I believe about human nature?
- What do I believe about how problems develop?
- What do I believe about how change happens?

The unique ways those with an Adlerian perspective would address each of these questions, and thus give shape to their professional identities, serves as the focus for the next section of this chapter.

THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS AND APPLICATIONS

The process of Adlerian therapy is a collaborative and educational one in which the primary goal is to foster and enhance social interest by helping the client become enlightened about his or her life patterns. The gained insight allows clients to intentionally make changes in their lives. The therapist begins by building a relationship with the client. As the therapist interacts with the client, he or she is collecting information from the client to understand and interpret the client's lifestyle. As the counselor begins to develop a picture of the client's way of navigating through life, he or she makes soft interpretations and relays that information back to the client so the client can become aware of some of his or her out-of-consciousness processes. Counselors educate clients about their personal freedom to make decisions about their lives, help them create alternate goals, and encourage them to become autonomous (Adler, 1956/1964).

Change Process

Individuals also develop *fictional goals* based on their style of life. A fictional goal is what each person believes must happen or he or she must accomplish to belong and have a satisfying life (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Examples of fictional goals are, "I must make everyone happy" or "I must be the best figure skater in the world" or "I must protect everyone." The individual believes that only by meeting these self-created objectives will he or she be loved (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). In most instances, fictional goals are not conscious. A focus of counseling would be to uncover the client's fictional goal so he or she can either redefine it or find more healthy ways to achieve it.

Lifestyle convictions are beliefs about the self, others, and the world created by one's lifestyle (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Lifestyle convictions that are not helpful in meeting the innate potential for social interest are called mistaken beliefs. Examples of mistaken beliefs are, "I am unworthy of trusting relationships," "Others are unkind," or "The world is unsafe." Therefore, the created justified behavior might be aggression used to protect oneself from the believed threat of others.

One goal of treatment is to challenge the lifestyle convictions—fictional goals and mistaken beliefs—formed in lifestyle development. Allers (1933) identified two aims of counseling: (1) to identify that an error exists in the style of life and how the error developed, and (2) to replace the error with goals in harmony with social interest.

Individuals' emotions and thoughts are conceptualized as purposeful and consistent with their created lifestyles even if the emotional expression, or behavior, creates problems in their lives (Adler, 1931). Behaviors can be changed if the style of life is changed. Thus, symptoms must not be the only focus of treatment. The therapist and client must cooperatively discover mistakes made in the style of life, the meaning given to life's experiences, and the actions used to fulfill perceived needs. The real task of psychotherapy, according to Adler (1931), is to uncover the development of the style of life and replace mistaken beliefs and misbehaviors with those in harmony with social interest. To uncover this, the therapist—like a detective—must gather hints from a multitude of signs, big and small, that the client provides. Adler stressed that the lifestyle is not easy to change and can be changed only by the client through

insight gained into the development of his or her lifestyle. In Exercise 5.1, Cynthia provides an opportunity to apply your understanding of fictional goals, lifestyle conditions, and mistaken beliefs. It may be helpful to discuss your perspective with a colleague.

EXERCISE 5.1

Cynthia is a 27-year-old, Mexican American, middle-class female. She is the oldest of three children and the only daughter. Her mother died after a short illness when Cynthia was 7 years old. Throughout the course of her life, she has been the caretaker and primary nurturer for her younger brothers and father, who never remarried. Cynthia graduated from high school at the top of her class and went on to a local community college to stay close to her family. After graduation, she worked odd jobs that paid poorly and she did not enjoy. Currently, she is considering returning to college to study nursing. Her friends and family say she would be a good nurse, although Cynthia is more attracted to engineering. Additionally, the closest university is 82 miles from her hometown and family. Cynthia comes to your counseling office reportedly seeking help in making a decision about her education and future career goals.

Given the limited information provided in this scenario, answer the following questions:

- What might be Cynthia's fictional goal(s)?
- What are some of her possible lifestyle convictions and mistaken beliefs?
- What information in the scenario led you to develop your ideas?
- What additional information would be helpful to you to determine potential lifestyle convictions and fictional goals?

Adler (1931) believed that people have the ability to make their lives better by changing their beliefs about themselves, others, and their environment. He believed that people control their destinies; they make their fate rather than becoming victims of fate. Thus, clients are primarily responsible for change. Adler wrote that a person has the ability to take both the good and bad in life and develop his or her feelings about it. Then, he or she must work to improve this world and assume responsibility for solving its problems.

A fundamental component in Adlerian counseling is encouragement (Sweeney, 2009). Encouragement, in Adlerian terms, is belief in oneself and the courage to take risks in life (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). With the essential element of encouragement being courage, the act of therapist encouragement empowers clients. This component of Adlerian counseling is important for success. Consistent encouragement enables individuals to accept shortcomings and focus on strengths. Sweeney (2009) promoted courage as a fundamental characteristic of truth, love, and religion, which is consistent with the Adlerian concepts of social interest and the three tasks of life.

Discouragement, negative thinking, and unrealistic expectations run counter to successful counseling (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987). Discouragement decreases an individual's faith in self to accomplish goals. Thus, these clients may feel unable to set goals and work toward them in the

therapeutic relationship. Clients with unrealistic expectations, such as expecting a “quick fix,” may be easily discouraged and blame the therapist for the lack of progress (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987).

An example of interaction in a counseling session is presented in Case Illustration 5.4, about Cynthia again. The case helps illustrate how fictional goals and mistaken beliefs influence actions, and how encouragement can be used to help a client see his or her beliefs more clearly.

CASE ILLUSTRATION 5.4

Cynthia

Cynthia: This is really hard. My family and especially my father want me to go into nursing and have made some big sacrifices for me to do that.

Counselor: Yes, you have talked about your passion, which is to build bridges and design structures, and believe that you would be letting down a lot of people if you chose engineering instead of nursing.

Cynthia: Yes, but it is more than that. My mother was a nurse, and I remember the care she gave me and my brothers when I was little and telling me that nursing was not just a job but almost like a ministry. (*Mistaken belief*)

Counselor: So your belief is that you might be letting your mother down if you don't fulfill her destiny for you. (*Paraphrasing her a mistaken belief*)

Cynthia: Yes, I really do. It's so weird. It's like part of honoring her memory. All I really know is how to care for others, which is what my mother taught me, especially before she died. She told me that I would be the one to help the family get through and that my father needed me. I even remember having to defend myself occasionally with friends who were irritated that I couldn't hang out with them after school because I had to go home and take care of the house or work at the restaurant. (*Early recollections*)

Counselor: So even though your brothers are grown up, finishing school and getting ready for adulthood, it's hard to see beyond your mother's vision for herself and you. I am also learning that to honor your mom's memory, you feel you must choose nursing.

Cynthia: Yeah, I guess. She sacrificed so much for us. My dad and aunts and uncles have also sacrificed so much for me. I don't want to disappoint them.

Counselor: You said something really important about defending your actions to your friends about what you had to do to keep the family going. It seems like you are doing that defending here with me in trying to resolve your struggle about what direction you will choose.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Cynthia: Yes, I guess I am. I just don't want to make a mistake.

Counselor: You know, Cynthia, it occurs to me that you have had some significant challenges in your life that have really pressed you into becoming resourceful and figuring a way out even though the solution wasn't really clear at the time. I wonder if the same type of thing may be happening here and now.

Cynthia: What do you mean?

Counselor: Look at what you have accomplished so far as a mother to your brothers and a caregiver to your father. You stepped up at a very young age with no training in how to care for a family and run a household, yet you did it. You learned, asked for help from other family members and friends when necessary, connected with others when it became overwhelming, and managed to survive and provide while working outside the home. You also were able to do this while keeping good grades in school. *(Encouragement)*

Cynthia: I never really thought about it that way before.

Counselor: I wonder if you can be that resourceful on a different level as you consider what needs to be done to prepare for college and especially in considering your vision for yourself and what direction is best for your career.

Cynthia: I am scared of letting my family down.

Counselor: Yes, I really hear that, and I also hear that you are branching out into unfamiliar territory, making a decision about something you want to do rather than what has always been expected, or what you assume others want you to do. That takes a lot of courage to do something like that. Have you ever talked with your aunt and your dad about what you want to do, the way you have shared with me?

Cynthia: I really haven't, but I have imagined it.

Counselor: Let's practice what you might say in a conversation like that.

The counselor in this case illustration takes an encouraging stance through validating feelings, respecting Cynthia's need to honor her mother, and continually but gently confronting the struggle between considering the needs of others and listening to her own voice about what may be right for her. Though not spoken, the counselor is also aware of the cultural influences that contribute to the belief systems and inner conflict the client experiences. The counselor helps encourage Cynthia toward action by practicing a dialogue that would help her hear her own voice describe what she wants to do as a career.

Assessment Strategies

Because Adler described humans as social beings, an individual can be further understood by evaluating his or her attitude toward others (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987). This attitude will reflect the structure of the individual's personality and level of self-esteem. In assessing individuals, Adler (1929) focused on actions rather than words. Behaviors of focus should include problem-solving methods, style of life, and manifestation of the struggle of superiority versus inferiority. Adlerian counselors use family constellations, early childhood memories, current interactions, formal assessments, group interactions, and dreams to identify the client's lifestyle. This may be done through both subjective interviews and a lifestyle assessment (Sweeney, 2009). Adlerians believe that the client is the only one who truly understands his or her problems; the counselor relies on the client to be the expert (Bitter, 1997).

The Adlerian counselor is interested in the subjective and objective experiences of the client. The subjective experiences are the ways the client experiences life. Thus, the counselor is assessing how the client views his or her world from this unique perspective (Mosak & Manniaci, 1999). Cultural worldviews are included in the subjective assessment. Counselors investigate a client's objective experiences by evaluating how the client is functioning in daily life. That is, in what ways are the client's problems getting in the way of meeting life tasks? In the case of Michelle (the client with whom we opened the chapter), her perception of not being as valuable as others may interfere with her willingness to try new things or meet new people. For example, Michelle may want a romantic relationship but may believe she is not good enough and will be overlooked by a potential partner. Her perceptions, then, would get in the way of her taking the risk of meeting someone new. From an understanding of the client's subjective and objective functioning, the counselor can appropriately challenge the client regarding faulty thinking in her style of life and work to promote social interest. *In what ways are Michelle's beliefs about being second best compromising her chances of starting a relationship?*

FOCUS AND INTENTIONALITY: APPLYING THE THEORY IN EARLY, MIDDLE, AND LATE SESSIONS

Among Adlerian theorists, there exist many terms to describe the four phases of individual psychology. Despite the differences in terms used, Adlerians agree on the importance and process of each phase. The four phases are *building a collaborative relationship*, *investigating the lifestyle*, *gaining insight*, and *reorientation* (Adler, 1956/1964; Mosak & Maniaci, 1999, 2008; Sweeney, 2009). Here, we have chosen to use the word *phases* in place of *stages* to exemplify the fluid nature of the counseling relationship and client progress. Michelle's case will be used throughout this section to illustrate each phase of the counseling process according to Adlerian theory, and Y-Chun's case later in the chapter will provide further discussion.

In the first phase, *building a collaborative relationship*, the counselor and client start the process of building an egalitarian relationship. Different from Freud, Adler (1956/1964)

believed that the relationship between counselor and client should be one of mutuality and cooperation. The counselor is merely a passenger in the client's change process, rather than the ultimate, all-knowing driver. Through collaboration, cooperation, and mutuality, the client experiences a balanced relationship, witnesses social interest, and is encouraged to make her own decisions in the process. The counselor works to understand Michelle from her perspective. Time and care are taken to build a relationship in which Michelle feels safe and believes she is a contributor to the process rather than just a recipient of therapy. The Adlerian counselor infuses encouragement into each response to build trust and empower the client toward healthier functioning.

The therapeutic relationship between client and counselor is necessary but not sufficient for client change (Adler, 1927/1998). Mosak and Maniaci (2008) list the conditions of faith, hope, and love as necessary relationship attitudes. Faith is the feeling of security and trust in the relationship, as well as the client's and therapist's belief that the therapy can and will be effective. Hope is the client's belief in self and an inner feeling of encouragement that circumstances can be changed. Love is another necessary condition. The client must feel that the counselor genuinely cares about him or her. The counselor's role is to empathize with and support the client, not pity, console, or become a victim of the client. Although techniques are acceptable in Adlerian theory, they are not to replace empathy, understanding, and compassion (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Once the relationship has a steady foundation and the counselor believes the client is willing to collaborate in therapy, the counselor and client move to the next phase: investigating the client's lifestyle. However, the relationship is constantly being fostered and developed throughout the therapy process. See the guided activity in Exercise 5.2, where you will explore relationships in your own life to discover what qualities contributed to the success and meaningfulness of those relationships.

Investigating the lifestyle is the second phase of Adlerian counseling, in which the counselor and client work together by means of some of the interventions described above and possibly other interventions as well. The goal of this phase is to uncover the client's lifestyle, including goals of behavior, mistaken beliefs, feelings of inferiority, fictional goals, and

EXERCISE 5.2

Directions: Think about one of your closest, most emotionally intimate relationships, and then answer the following questions.

- How was the relationship established?
- What qualities does this person possess that contribute to the creation of a safe and mutual relationship?
- How do you know you can trust him or her?
- How do you know, or what proof do you have, that he or she cares about you?
- Of those qualities that characterize this relationship, what would you suggest a counselor provide to his or her clients?

deficits in social interest. As previously stated, Adlerian therapists frequently investigate the influences of early childhood and one's family of origin. Adlerians believe perceptions of early childhood experiences are paramount in how one perceives the significance of relationships throughout life (Adler, 1927/1998; Mosak & Maniaci, 1999; Sweeney, 2009).

Michelle is a second child who has consistently felt in competition for love and attention from her parents. She has maintained this lifestyle in a variety of her relationships, in which she continues to find proof that she is not valuable or as good as others. Michelle believes that she is not good if she is not the best. A counselor may use early childhood recollections or dream analysis (explained in the next section) to explore Michelle's lifestyle.

The next phase of counseling is *gaining insight*. Gaining insight can be considered an adjoining process to investigating lifestyle. Based on information learned about the client in the previous phase, counselors facilitate client awareness about the client's created lifestyle. When clients are aware of their goals and the purposes of their behaviors, they can consciously, and thus more effectively, make decisions as to whether and what they wish to change. Therefore, much of Adlerian therapy is concentrated on helping the client gain insight into his or her current patterns of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Sweeney, 2009). The counselor and client then explore how the client's current functioning is assisting or getting in the way of meeting longer-term goals. The counselor may employ a variety of techniques, which we will discuss later, to help the client become aware of his or her lifestyle, mistaken beliefs, and fictional goals. Consider Case Illustration 5.5, which provides brief examples of techniques applied to Michelle's case.

CASE ILLUSTRATION 5.5

Increasing Client Awareness

The counselor uses "spitting in the client's soup" (an intervention described in the next section) and confrontation to help Michelle become aware of her lifestyle, mistaken beliefs, and fictional goals. The counselor might say to Michelle, "You've described many instances when you were not chosen or were chosen last. It seems to me that it's easy for you to recall these occurrences. Yet you've also shared how you were captain of your high school debate team and won an art competition in college. I wonder what it does for you not to remember your successes."

Michelle becomes aware of feeling, thinking, and behavioral patterns of which she was previously unaware. Michelle and the counselor continue to cycle through describing her experiences (investigating lifestyle) and uncovering her unconscious (gaining insight) to help her become more aware of how she functions in daily life. Through this process, Michelle and the counselor also consider how her life patterns influence the greater world (social interest). The counselor also challenges Michelle to consider what mistaken goals she may be meeting by attending only to her historic "failures" rather than seeing herself in a more balanced and realistic way.

Reorientation is the final phase of Adlerian counseling. Unlike some other theorists, Adler (1956/1964) believed that insight alone is not an indicator of successful counseling. Action and change, or the intentional decision not to make change, are preemptive to successful termination. In this phase, the counselor may educate the client on specific skills or concepts, or clients may demonstrate or report changes they have practiced outside of sessions. One way Michelle might demonstrate her change is by going on a date set up by a friend. She might also make a list of examples of occasions when she succeeded. The counselor may choose to educate Michelle about Adlerian concepts of goals of misbehavior and personality priorities. Teaching Michelle about particular Adlerian concepts may help her make lasting change that she can apply throughout her life.

In the spirit of Adlerian theory, let's take action! Exercise 5.3 is designed to help you practice identifying lifestyle concepts—including mistaken beliefs, feelings of inferiority, social interest, birth order, and family of origin—and applying the Adlerian phases of counseling. You may wish to collaborate with colleagues to brainstorm your responses to the different Adlerian concepts. As you complete this activity, notice in what ways you agree and disagree with your peers. What might that indicate about understanding another person's lifestyle? How can that knowledge guide your practice?

EXERCISE 5.3

Directions: Think about a character from your favorite television show/movie that you believe you know fairly well, and then answer the following questions.

Investigating the lifestyle: What data have you collected about this character? How would you describe his or her lifestyle?

Gaining insight: What might be some effective ways to help this character gain insight into his or her lifestyle? (Note: Specific Adlerian interventions are discussed in the next section.)

Reorientation: Assume the character chooses to make changes in his or her life. What would be evidence that this person has successfully completed counseling? What, if anything, might you need to provide the client to assist in the change process?

Interventions

Catching Oneself

One technique used in the reorientation phase is catching oneself. This insight into behavior patterns can help clarify goals of behaviors that the client wants to change (Mosak & Maniacci, 2008). The purpose of this technique is to gradually learn to predict one's responses by gaining insight into the intended purpose of the behavior. Consistent with Adlerian concepts, by understanding the usefulness of one's behavior, one can choose to change it (Adler, 1931). Michelle might be instructed to monitor when she considers herself not good enough. Becoming aware of the frequency and circumstances surrounding her

feelings of inferiority is meant to help her be intentional about making different choices. Michelle can also be challenged to consider what mistaken goals continue to be perpetuated through viewing herself as not good enough.

Early Childhood Recollections

The events in the memories are not important; rather, the meanings associated with the memories are important. Adlerian theorists are interested in the memories people keep. Because the lifestyle is developed in childhood, Adlerians are particularly interested in those memories of events that happened prior to 8 or 9 years old (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). The details in the memories provide a window into patterns of beliefs the person holds. For example, a person who remembers the look of fear on his father's face as his mother belittled his father in public may have created the belief, "I must never let a woman control me," in an effort to reach his fictional goal, "I must be strong and powerful to avoid humiliation and ensure love." This intervention is commonly used during the investigation or insight phase of counseling. Michelle could be instructed to describe an early childhood memory of a time when she felt in competition with her older sister. The counselor would explore Michelle's perceptions and beliefs about this event. Through discussion with the counselor, Michelle would recognize patterns of her feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Exercise 5.4 can help you explore your own early childhood recollections.

EXERCISE 5.4

Directions: Think back to your earliest memories. Typically, these are memories of events prior to age 5. Discuss with a partner two of your earliest memories. Share them in present tense, as if they are happening now. As you discuss these memories, include the details you remember, such as what you see, who was there, how you felt, and what you were thinking. *Note: The accuracy of the memory is not as important as the perception of the experience.*

Example: I am 5 years old. My mother and father left to pick up my younger brother from a friend's house. It is winter and snowing. I am all alone. My parents left me and didn't tell me where they were going. I overheard them talking on the phone, which is how I knew they were leaving. My parents forgot about me. I'm worried I'm never going to see them again. I am hungry and unable to cook. I find the cookies and start eating. I have eaten the whole package of cookies, and my stomach hurts. I don't feel so lonely when I eat. My parents and brother return 10 minutes later, but it feels like it's been 10 hours.

Next, make a list of the themes you notice occurring in both memories. How do these themes relate to your current functioning and lifestyle? How have you seen these patterns occur in other areas of your life? What might this indicate about your fictional goal?

Example: The world is unpredictable. The world is cold. Others leave me. Others cannot be trusted. I am alone. I am not significant. To belong and be safe, I must always be prepared to take care of myself.

Spitting in the Client's Soup

The purpose of this technique is to draw attention to the motives of certain socially useless behaviors. When clients gain conscious awareness of the goals of their misbehaviors, those behaviors become less useful and less attractive. The soup (behavior) becomes less tasty, reducing the likelihood of the client continuing to eat it (to behave in that manner; Stein, 1988). An example of this is a counselor saying to her client, "I wonder if you ignore your mother to get more attention from her." This technique is often used during the final phase of counseling to aid in overcoming maladaptive solutions. An example specifically for Michelle might be, "It may be that by believing you're not going to succeed, you've given yourself permission not to take risks and try new things."

The Question

"The question" seeks an answer to what would be different in the client's life if the identified problems no longer existed (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). Clients respond to this question with answers to their own problems. The responses given can provide insight for a client as to what needs to change and/or how to make that happen. The therapist could ask, "How would your life be different if you didn't have this problem?"

Acting as If

"Acting as if" is often used in conjunction with "the question." When a client identifies how situations or behaviors might be improved to help his or her functioning, the counselor can encourage the client to act *as if* it is currently happening. For example, a child who wants to get good grades but believes he is not smart enough might be telling himself, "If only I were smart enough, I would get good grades." The counselor would encourage this child to act *as if* he is smart enough for the time between sessions. This allows for the client to take a positive approach in improving his perceptions of the situation. During the next session, the counselor will explore the client's interpretation of the experience. The underlying belief here is that when the client acts *as if* goals are being met, the client will perceive the situation differently and in turn change his or her behavior (Mosak & Maniacci, 2008). Michelle might be instructed to act *as if* she is the best, competent, and successful.

Dream Analysis

Counselors who subscribe to various theoretical orientations use dream analysis to assist the client in meeting his or her goal. Adlerian theorists consider dreams to be a person's attempt to solve problems (Mosak & Maniacci, 2008). Investigating dreams can assist the client in (a) gaining information about his or her style of life and (b) creating or practicing a solution to a problem. Remembering a dream may indicate readiness to take action, forgetting a dream may forecast postponement of solving a problem, and nightmares may be an indication of the direct intention to avoid something. Consistent with all Adler's teaching, dreams must be interpreted through the unique lifestyle of the client (Adler, 1927/1998). Counselors cannot understand the meaning and usefulness of the dream without understanding the dreamer.

Paradoxical Intention

Paradoxical intention is, in essence, prescribing the symptom. This technique is effective because the client's resistance is *met* rather than *opposed*; thus, the relationship is strengthened. Meeting the resistance also renders the behavior less attractive to the client. Furthermore, it allows the client to achieve a level of insight into the problem and encourages acceptance of responsibility for identified behaviors. The counselor might ask Michelle to keep a daily log for a week. She would track every time she does not succeed, is not chosen, or is second best. She might also be asked to consider it a success when she doesn't meet her own standards, for that is an indication she has the courage to face potential failure.

Task Setting

Although not unique to individual psychology, task setting is an intervention routinely used by Adlerian counselors (Sweeney, 2009). Homework assignments such as taking small steps to a larger goal, measuring one's progress, or applying skills learned in sessions to daily life situations are all examples of homework assignments. Counselors are creative when developing assignments. Assignments should meet the unique needs and desirable outcomes of clients; including clients in this process is an important part of providing encouragement. Follow-up at subsequent sessions is another important part of task setting. An example of task setting for a client who wants to lose weight and improve health is to direct the client to go on a walk at least three times in the next week. Follow-up sessions would include discussions about successes, failures, and beliefs about the experience. A task for Michelle might be to edit her résumé to apply for a promotion or different job, or to strike up conversations with a half dozen strangers during the week, with the intent to smile, be encouraging, and be supportive.

Consequences

The concept of consequences as an educational process is a focus of Adlerian theory. Adler described two types of consequences: *natural* and *logical* (Sweeney, 1989). Natural consequences occur spontaneously in one's environment without being forced by another person. People experience the natural consequences of actions regardless of their positions in society. For example, the natural consequence of not brushing one's teeth is poor oral health, which may include mouth pain, rotten teeth and gums, or need for frequent dental care. Logical consequences require intervention from another person, and the consequence is deemed to follow the behavior logically. Thus, social standing, morals, and laws will influence the responding logical consequence. An example of a logical consequence may be that a person who does not regularly attend work is fired from his or her job.

Modeling

Adlerians represent themselves as genuine, friendly, honest, and courageous enough to make mistakes (Mosak, & Maniacci, 2008). The interaction between the client and counselor is not an applied technique; rather, it is a consistent and real demonstration of social interest. To the client, the counselor constitutes what is *healthy* and *normal*. Therefore, modeling occurs

throughout the counseling process. The counselor might be intentional about making mistakes and not being perfect. Through this modeling of imperfection, Michelle might recognize that the counselor can be successful and valued even when he or she is not perfect.

Y-CHUN THROUGH THE LENS OF ADLERIAN THEORY

As discussed previously, Adlerian counselors work within four phases of the counseling process: *building a collaborative relationship*, *investigating the lifestyle*, *gaining insight*, and *reorientation*. Next, each of these phases will be applied to the counselor's work with Y-Chun.

Building a Collaborative Relationship

Y-Chun came to counseling at her doctor's suggestion and began to share some important information, including physical symptoms, current level of functioning, the quality of her relationships with family members and others, childhood memories, level of suicidal/homicidal threat, and perceptions about herself and others. This information comes at a rapid-fire rate and denotes Y-Chun's desperation and desire to understand herself better (i.e., "I don't want to be this way for the rest of my life"). The counselor is patient and supportive in facilitating the flow of information in the session and gently prompts Y-Chun in areas related to assessing early recollections, sibling constellation, and style of life, which are foundational to the Adlerian approach. The counselor does not become overwhelmed with the information but remains intentional about building an egalitarian relationship with the client through empathy and basic relationship-building skills, allowing Y-Chun to feel that she is being supported and validated in her concerns and that her experiences are important ("I just want to thank you for listening and being here for me"). In this manner, the counselor models encouragement, or the instillation of courage within Y-Chun that allows for a corrective emotional experience, such that she feels understood in a way she has never before experienced in her social interactions. The manifestation of these skills and the counselor's compassionate attitude are essential to deepening trust in the therapeutic relationship. One of the most powerful concepts in Adlerian theory is encouragement, and there is nothing more encouraging than for a client in distress to learn how to trust a gifted counselor and for a counselor to model risk taking, vulnerability, and a desire to change and grow.

Investigating the Lifestyle

As previously noted, relationship building is an ongoing process throughout counseling, and the Adlerian counselor remains vigilant to continue an encouraging attitude. An outgrowth of the therapeutic relationship is the counselor assessing the client's style of life. One important approach in this assessment is tapping into early recollections. Sweeney, Myers, and Stephan (2006) noted the importance of helping clients locate early recollections on a sensorimotor level (the physical location of the emotional response) to describe connections between events (sequence and causality) through a "concrete operational style" (p. 255); to move toward formal operation, which permits clients to analyze, synthesize, and gain

awareness of important connections between life events; and, finally, to develop a dialectic style of introspection, which “permits one to *empathize, understand, and analyze differing points of view*, their origin, and relative merits” (p. 256). This intentional focus on the part of the counselor parallels a developmental process that helps clients maximize past experiences in developing insight into present functioning. An important part of this insight is the ability to reconcile differences between the subjective experiences in childhood; the beliefs about self, others, and the world; and how these beliefs impact present functioning.

Y-Chun discusses her experience of not having a “normal relationship” with her parents and often feeling lonely and unwanted by them. She notes that she would often get in trouble just to be noticed by her parents, which is consistent with the concept of “goals of misbehavior” (Dreikurs, 1953) in seeking attention. It is apparent that Y-Chun has engaged in a series of dangerous and self-destructive behaviors (i.e., fighting, promiscuity, shoplifting, etc.) that emerge from her style of life and mistaken beliefs about herself and that continue to plague her life and interrupt important social relationships. The counselor could help leverage insight by focusing on early recollections and what they mean to Y-Chun, not just on reporting memories of her past. The counselor may say, “I’m wondering if you think there is any connection between these early experiences and your current situation.” Helping Y-Chun report her early recollection as if it is occurring in that moment could heighten her awareness of what mistaken beliefs she carries with her. For example, she may believe the following: “I am not really wanted by anyone, and I don’t really belong”; “My worth is what I can offer men sexually”; or “I am loved by my parents only if I am smart, succeed in school, and have a successful career.” The counselor can also ask Y-Chun to recount the memory as a series of sequential events having causality, and then paraphrase and summarize the memory for accuracy.

The counselor could ask what the memory or the series of events means to Y-Chun and what decisions she has made about herself, others, and the world as a result. A great example of this occurs when Y-Chun makes the following confession about her children. “I just feel empty . . . distant . . . like they are plants and I just water them. I know that sounds horrible, but that’s how it feels.” One interpretation of this statement could be that Y-Chun feels toward her own children much the way she believes her parents felt toward her—that she was an inconvenience and a burden. An important step is helping the client articulate what rules she has learned to live by as a result of her childhood, identify her goal, and assess how well her rules are helping her meet her goal. This process helps empower the client to make decisions about how to shape the rules she has lived by (Kern, Belangee, & Eckstein, 2004).

Finally, it is important for counselors to consider how to structure the lifestyle assessment. The assessment may range from an informal one, much like the initial interaction between Y-Chun and her counselor, or a more formal paper–pencil or computer-based assessment. Kaplan (1985) suggested a set of 10 questions that can guide such an assessment. The questions are for the counselor as well as the client to consider as the client shares early recollections:

- Who is present in the recollection?
- Who is remembered with affection?
- Who is disliked in the recollection?

- What problem(s) is (are) confronted in the recollection?
- What special talent(s) or ability is (are) revealed in the recollection?
- Is the recollection generally pleasant or unpleasant?
- What is the client's level of activity in the recollection?
- What emotion does the client feel and/or show pertaining to the recollection?
- What does the recollection suggest to you about the client's social interest?
- What fictional goal(s) is (are) implied in the recollection? (pp. 526–527)

These guiding questions help frame the sharing of the experience and assist the counselor in developing some tentative interpretations she or he can share with the client to help gain insight.

Gaining Insight

Like relationship building, the development of insight is a byproduct of all therapeutic tasks and actions taken by the counselor. Through assessment, interpretation of experience, and education, clients can gain insights into themselves that will promote stronger and more intentional decision making. Another important issue the counselor begins to touch on with Y-Chun is birth order and the quality of relationships among siblings. It is not clear at this point whether Y-Chun grew up with her siblings or whether there was shared physical custody with former spouses, but one thing is apparent: the real or perceived resentment from the older siblings toward the youngest. The paternal son is 3 years older, and the maternal children are 6 (son) and 5 (daughter) years older. That Y-Chun is the youngest and the biological daughter of both parents creates an interesting and troubling dynamic, as Y-Chun is viewed as favored (and possibly pampered) by the parents and is thus teased by her older siblings. It is also important for Y-Chun's counselor to assess Y-Chun's view of herself as a biracial woman and her subjective experience of being teased by classmates and marginalized by her siblings. What racial identity does Y-Chun accept for herself? To what degree does she still feel ambivalent about who she is, and how does that impact her? Educating Y-Chun about family constellation and birth order may prove efficacious in assessing and treating her to develop insight and make tentative assumptions about her style of life and how it has influenced her present functioning. A secondary benefit is that Y-Chun might identify with positive characteristics that would trigger possibilities she had never considered.

An important area for assessment and education is Y-Chun's rape. This event is powerful and complex and accompanied by the shame she has carried throughout her life, as well as her anger and sense of betrayal from not being protected by her parents. The connection between the rape and her current sexual relationships may be clear, but normalizing this trauma through educating Y-Chun about risk factors for abuse survivors, reactions to rape, and assessment for symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder is an important process in gaining insight. How does Y-Chun view her own vulnerability? How might her sense of helplessness be reflected in the helplessness and vulnerability of her special needs daughter? Where might Y-Chun be stuck, and where might this impasse have occurred? What is her mistaken goal, and how has she gone about achieving it? From the information gathered so far, it appears that Y-Chun has restricted her own social influence, wherein she feels she has no one to turn to and nothing much to offer.

Reorientation

In subsequent sessions, the counselor can continue to assist and support Y-Chun in building insight and examining her assumptions about herself in the context of her personal history. *Reorientation* builds on the therapeutic gains made in previous phases and allows for the client to engage in a change process that is both risky and empowering. Often, clients who are discouraged are restrictive in their social interactions and limit their risk. They see themselves as having nothing to offer and don't feel permitted to ask much of others. An important therapeutic task would be for the counselor to help Y-Chun explore areas of her life where she has felt afraid to engage, such as being a good parent to her children, negotiating her adult relationship with her parents, and learning how to choose partners who will be positive and supportive. Reframing "failures" is an important skill to help clients continue to try on new behaviors.

Helping Y-Chun prepare to talk with her parents and choose which aspects of her life she will share with them, become an effective and loving parent to her children, and contribute meaningfully to other relationships will foster a sense of social interest that will ultimately help decrease her felt sense of isolation and contribute to the social interest of her family, friends, and society. This tentative but attainable position will help Y-Chun view her present and past more realistically and help strengthen her ability to take charge and make decisions rather than be a perpetual victim of her past. A strong therapeutic relationship allows for courage to take action; understanding the past as framed within a lifestyle helps clients anticipate how they may likely respond when discouraged; gaining insight into the past and present ways of functioning helps clients anticipate how they may get in their own way in their efforts to change. Finally, reorientation allows clients to put into practice what they learn and experience much more control and self-efficacy in their relationships.

KEYSTONES

- Adler believed that humans exercise control over their behavior, having "will" and goal orientation—in contrast to the psychoanalytic conceptualization of determinism.
- Modern-day Adlerians continue to incorporate into their work Adler's philosophy that humans continuously grow and develop while adapting to societal changes that allow clinicians an opportunity for greater understanding of the human condition.
- Early Adlerian theory expressed some postmodern views. The conceptualization of the sex task is one such example, engaging an almost feminist conceptualization of homosexuality since modernized by contemporary Adlerians to reflect current understanding.
- Adlerian theory was one of the first counseling orientations to consider, and support, the importance of school systems, professional identity, and workforce treatment. School-based programs and employee assistance programs are just two examples of continuing efforts with Adlerian roots.
- Inferiority versus superiority is a core concept that encourages the Adlerian clinician to consider an individual's motivation to understand how he or she fits in the larger societal context and move toward personal growth and social affiliation.

- Style of life is a salient tenet of Adlerian theory that describes a valence-free self-perception that influences emotional reactions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- Adlerian theorists believe all behavior to be *purposeful* and useful for providing insight into a person's goals and needs.
- Among the concepts embraced by contemporary Adlerians is *fictional finalism*. This concept, along with the *subjective perception of reality*, describes an imaginary goal held by all people that is based on their understanding of "how the world *should* be" and thus influences their beliefs, behaviors, and feelings.
- *Birth order* is a prominent principle in Adlerian theory that is not based on the sequential birth chronology of a child as much as on role perceptions, treatment, and a sense of importance within the family.
- Adlerian theory identifies three important life tasks that symbolize the human needs to preserve life, further life, and further one's environment: the task of love, the task of community, and the task of work.
- Known for its support of equality and equity of all humans, Adlerian theory strongly advocates reducing social hierarchies and providing support for marginalized and oppressed groups and individuals.
- Specific techniques are involved in Adlerian work, including insight-oriented interventions such as those in which a counselor encourages the client to recollect childhood experiences, calls attention to socially useless behavior, models constructive behavior, sets goals, and assigns tasks.
- One of the ultimate goals of Adlerian theory is for the client to gain insight into his or her concerns and style of life. Adlerian therapists work to *build a collaborative relationship* with clients, *investigate the style of life*, and *gain insight*, while helping *reorient* the client toward therapeutic gains made in the previous work that are both risky and empowering.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE CONTRIBUTOR'S CHAIR

Robyn L. Trippany-Simmons

One of the most important beliefs I hold for clients is that, like Dorothy with her red slippers in *The Wizard of Oz*, they have everything they need to "get back home." As an Adlerian counselor, recognizing the power in Dorothy's red slippers is akin to clients discovering they have the ability within themselves (and have all the while) to reorient their style of life. This positive and encouraging method of helping others aligns with who I am as a person and a professional.

Matthew R. Buckley

Adlerian theory has informed my counseling practice in a variety of ways and is essential to my identity as a professional counselor. I am continually assessing how the past impacts the present through facilitating clients' sharing of early recollections. This practice is not

an invitation for a client to remain a victim of the past or for a counselor to reinforce helplessness but, rather, an opportunity to understand how growing up influences the choices we make. I believe that a significant step for clients is to say out loud their awareness of what life is (present), what it was (past), and what decisions they have made about themselves, others, and the world. Clients can begin to draw their own conclusions about their decisions and be encouraged to make different ones if the results of their behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes are not satisfactory.

I work to encourage (and thus empower) my clients to take responsibility for their choices and to see themselves as agents of change for the benefit of others around them. I believe that at the heart of most problems and distress is the belief, “I have nothing to offer anyone in my life,” which relates directly to the concept of social interest. In the relationships I establish with my clients, I actively attack and help my clients attack the belief that they have nothing to offer anyone. Helping clients take a break from themselves and actively serve others in some small way is therapeutic and can have powerful results. I have witnessed life-changing behaviors in the lives of those who resolved to step outside of their own suffering and make a difference in another’s life.

Kristin Meany-Walen

As a counselor-in-training, I struggled to identify with a theory that most closely aligned with my beliefs about people—how people developed and changed. I knew from my first theories course that I valued much of what Adler said about people, communities, and the world. Throughout my early professional career and training, I intentionally sought to explore all theories. I found myself back at Adler time and time again.

For me, Adlerian theory was a natural fit. It confirmed much of what I already believed about people and stretched me to consider new ideas about human experiences. In all my helping relationships, I work from an Adlerian perspective. As a professional counselor, supervisor, teacher, leader, and mentor, I apply the foundational tenants of Adlerian theory.

Tiffany Rush-Wilson

My clinical work is with clients who have eating disorders. As a consequence, many of them indicate having difficulty in their interpersonal relationships. These difficulties are often related to an expressed inability to interact socially with others, feelings of inadequacy in their personal relationships, and not being able to navigate feelings of inferiority. Adlerian counseling principles allow for incorporation of several key factors into client treatment planning and delivery. The beauty of this modality is that it allows for the acknowledgment of how important social roles, as well as defining one’s own place and purpose, can be for clients. That this modality encourages an understanding of the whole person—his or her concept of self, worth, goals, and what has been useful in his or her journey to alleviate pain—has proven quite useful.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Print

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Websites

- Adler Centre: <http://www.adlercentre.ca/casc.html>
- Adler Graduate School: <http://www.alfredadler.edu/about/theory/international-associations>
- North American Society of Adlerian Psychology: <http://www.alfredadler.org/>

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