

Introduction

Individual Psychology, to many, the term means the psychology of selfishness..... a remnant of the “me” generation. The truth couldn't be more different. Alfred Adler's biggest mistake may have been the name he chose to define his psychological framework. To him, Individual Psychology (IP) was the “psychology of the unique, undivided personality”. Yet, as so much of Adlerian thought, IP has been misrepresented and misunderstood. Adler's views could easily be seen as the first holistic psychology. In the framework of IP a person can only be understood in terms of his social context. According to Adler, no one exists in a vacuum, we are social beings. This is a stark contrast to how many view Individual Psychology.

Alfred Adler was born in Vienna, Austria in 1870. At that time, and for the next 40 years, Vienna was the center of intellectual advancement in western culture. The liberal atmosphere and rapid advancements in medical understanding provided a powerful backdrop for Adler. Adler began his career as a practicing physician. He saw that his patients often needed more than just medical support to resolve their problems, so he began to study both psychology and psychiatry.

When Adler was 30, Freud published his book *Interpretation of Dreams*. The book received very caustic reviews by the press (Turner and Pew, 1978). Adler realized this book opened up new avenues in psychiatry and wrote a strong defense of the book. In 1902 Freud invited Adler to join his discussion group, The Wednesday Discussion Group as it was to become called. Adler was a key member of Freud's growing group (Steckel joined in 1906 and Jung in 1907) until 1911. Freud and Adler while disagreeing on key issues, maintained their association during these years.

As the years progressed, the differences between Freud's and Adler's views become more and more obvious. The final break between the two came in 1911. Freud invited Adler to give a series of lectures. During these lectures, Adler was critical of Freud's sexual theories and laid out his own theory of Masculine Protest. Many of Freud's disciples had already grown frustrated with Adler and his constant questioning of Freud. They took this opportunity to put forth their attack upon Adler. As Wilhelm Stekel put it, "I was not prepared for what followed (after Adler's talks), one Freudian after another got up and denounced, in well prepared, the new concepts of Adler." Shortly after this Adler formed his own society. Once his own society was formed, he was asked to leave his association with Freud's group (by then called, The Vienna Psychoanalytic Society). Beyond his removal from the group, Freud also insisted that Adler was not to be quoted or referred to by any Freudian. The animosity between the two was never resolved, and became a full fledged war as psychoanalysis moved to the United States (Turner and Pew, 1974).

Adler published his first book on psychology in 1912, *The Neurotic Condition*. This book laid out the framework of Adler's theory. The book laid out a drastic departure from the views of Freud. Rather than viewing the human psyche as mechanistic, Adler saw humans as creative, capable of growing and changing, and able to function outside the realm of cause and effect. His views were a drastic departure from the Freudians, or as Victor E. Frankl phrased it, Adler---- "achieved and accomplished was no less than a Copernican switch. No longer could man be considered as the product, pawn and victim of his drives and instincts; on the contrary, drives and instincts form the material that serves man in expression and action." (Frankl, 1970)

Adler called his new school of thought “Individual Psychology (IP)”. Adler viewed his theory as a *social* psychology. The individual could only be understood in terms of his social context. It is within the social environment that a person plays out their drives and desires and the two could not be separated. Adler's view was the first holistic view of the human mind, he saw all as being interconnected and indivisible.

Individual Psychology views every individual as inherently worthy of respect and encouragement. In fact, encouragement is seen as a primary tool of IP Therapy. Sophia de Vries stated it this way, “As a therapist, you are a support and an encourager--every time the person leaves he has to have the feeling that he can do a little more than he has done the last time.” (From a transcribed, tape recorded consultation with Sophia de Vries on 5-31-77, in the AAISF/ATP Archives.). Adler also viewed equality, especially equality between the sexes as paramount to his framework. In countering Freud's view that women are inherently less than men, since they don't have a penis, Adler held that it was women's status in society, not her lack of a sex organ that causes her to rebel and feel deprived of her rights (Turner & Pew, 1974). Adler coined the term *Masculine Protest* to denote the problems that women face (and some men) when trying to live in a male dominated society (Life Course Institute, (2002). Respect, encouragement, social interest, and equality, these are the cornerstones of IP. Now let us look at some of the other basic concepts (keep in mind, this is only an overview).

Basic Concepts

All behavior is purposive, goal directed In Individual Psychology all behaviors and acts serve a persons goals. There are no random or senseless action. Once

a persons goals are understood, all behaviors will be seen to support this goal. It is the goal, not the action that is incorrect. Adler called this the *Fictive* goal.(Grey, 1998).

Adlerians do not ask, “what *made* you behave this way?” but rather, “What do you seek to gain from that behavior?” (Life Course Institute, 2002)

Behavior is based on our perception of reality, not necessarily reality itself People view the world through the lens of their fictive goal, then act as if their perceptions are true and act accordingly. (Gray, 1998). In Adler's view experience is subjective and only makes sense within a persons individual framework.

Consequences Natural consequences---- Touch something hot, get burned...
move to slow, be late Logical consequences---- (arise from the logic of the social world), act nasty, be avoided, act out when shopping with mom, leave the store.

Cooperation: A biological necessity Adler viewed cooperation and interconnectedness as a key component in human development. We don't exist in a vacuum nor can we function without the help and support of others. We all have a need to belong and will go to great lengths to create and/or maintain this need. The level of cooperation one has with others dictates the quality of their relationship's. (Grey, 1998)

Family Constellation Attitudes and behaviors are learned in the family. There are 3 primary influences on a child in a family structure: Sibling Position (psychological & numerical), Parental Examples, and Family Atmosphere (social status, emotional climate, family mores, etc.)

Fictional Finalism Of all the problems a child has, one stands out as so important that a child decides the she must spend her life solving it. This problem is fictional since the child is in no position to judge real problems and final since it becomes the goal of

one's life to solve it. Adlerian belief holds that people arrange their lives to justify and enable ones fictional final goal. A purpose of therapy is to reveal the goal so it can be revised (Life Course Institute, 2002).

Individual Psychology (IP) Adler's term for his psychological framework. Individual Psychology has been often misinterpreted and may be part of the reason so many people are not familiar with Adler and his work. Individual Psychology is the “psychology of the unique, undivided personality” (de Vries, 1951). Adler was adamant that you could not understand a person or her situation with out looking at all aspects of his or her life. Adler's was the first “holistic” psychology. Not only was the individual considered as a whole, but also as an integral part of his society.

Inferiority and Superiority Adler's best know concept is that, as children, we feel inferior to others, resulting in an *inferiority complex*. He said that our “minus rating” lead us to compensate with a *will to power* which becomes a *superiority complex*.

Life Style This is the unified pattern of beliefs, perceptions, actions, attitudes, and relationships which make up the total person. IP uses the term to refer to the central core of a persons life.

Mistaken Goals Rudolf Dreikurs theory that children (and adults) operated out of 4 mistaken goals: Attention, Power, Revenge and Avoidance. By understanding the goal, one can apply the proper corrective action.

Movement In Adler's view, “all is movement”, towards the fictional final goal. All events, thoughts, and action are points on a line leading to this final goal.

Private Logic This is Adler's term for the internal framework one creates to support ones goal and Style of Life. Private Logic is often in opposition to societies

agreed upon communal logic

Purpose: Goal-directedness Behavior is governed by, serves, and expresses a person's goals. As movement towards a goal, behavior is explained by the result it seeks, and not events that preceded it in the past. IP doesn't ask "What made you behave this way?" instead, the question is "What do you seek to gain from that behavior?"(Life Course Institute, 2002)

Social Embeddedness People are as much a creation of their social setting as of their personal choice or genetic makeup. IP believes you can't know a person in a vacuum, but must place her in context of her social surroundings.

Subjectivity All events and experiences are filtered through a persons beliefs. This creates a highly personal framework for our perception. We then act as if this framework is true.

We are more alike than different This is one of the root concepts in IP. While we all act and behave in unique ways we are still more alike than different. (Grey, 1998)

Therapeutic Techniques

Therapists trained in IP techniques practice both a Brief Therapy model or a more extensive psychoanalytic model. The Brief Therapy model was initially seen as a tool for dealing with current problems in a time limited fashion. In-depth psychoanalysis, in contrast, was seen as the way to develop deep personal insights and understandings. Recent studies have shown that Brief Therapy can be as effective as time-unlimited therapy, and much more cost effective (Steenbager, 1992). With the advent of Managed Care, many IP Therapists (along with Therapists from all schools) find themselves

focusing more on the Brief Therapy aspects of IP.

Therapy (brief or extended) is seen as a creative process. While the Practitioner has their framework and bias, the interaction between client and practitioner is viewed as a creative undertaking by both. There are four main strategies that an IP Practitioner uses to guide therapy. (Stein and Edwards 1998)

Assessment The therapist will use Life Style assessment techniques to gain a sense of the client's world and his place in it. A key tool in assessment is the Early Recollection (Adler 1993). Early Recollections, or ER's, are an invaluable tool for gaining insight into the client. IP believes that the earliest memories that we have available directly relate to our current life situation. These ER's can quickly give the practitioner an understanding of the client's beliefs, experience, patterns and movement.

Socratic Questioning The Socratic method is at the heart of IP. A Socratic dialogue is a respectful, diplomatic and gentle way for the therapist to engage the client in the process of therapy. Through Leading Questions, the therapist guides the client on his path of self exploration and understanding. The therapist plays the role of guide and co-thinker.

Guided and Eidetic Imagery Guided imagery is used to help the client to reframe past events, develop a new self image and develop a view of where they are headed.

Role Playing Role playing is an effective way for a client to play out past experience and practice future ones. It is a safe way for a person to try on new behaviors, before trying them in the "real" world. Role Playing is especially

effective in group work.

During therapy, the practitioner focuses on 6 core principles. These 6 principles are the guiding framework all additional IP concepts:(Ansbacher and Ansbacher 1956)

Unity of Individual the individual is not a battleground of conflicting forces. Thoughts. Feelings and behaviors are consistent with a persons Style of Life.

Goal Orientation We are goal oriented beings, and will strive towards our goals. During childhood, one un-solvable problem becomes a persons overriding goal. This goal, often unconscious, is the source that drives a persons life.

Self-Determination and Uniqueness Ones goal may be shaped by hereditary and social factors, but is shaped by the individuals unique creative powers and opinions.

Social Context The individual can only be properly understood in relations to his social background. IP views all as part of the whole, starting with the individual, it moves out to her community, culture, nation, planet, cosmos. With in this context is placed the three major tasks life: community, work, love.

Feeling of Community Each person has the capacity to create interconnectedness with others. Our personal sense of security is rooted in our belonging.

Mental Health Social usefulness and contribution are the criteria for mental health. Inferiority/superiority self-enhancement, and ego-centric self protection block our feelings of interconnectedness.

Closing

Individual Psychology and the work of Alfred Adler have gone relatively

unnoticed in the United States. There are many reasons for this, including Adler's rather quiet, non-self promoting style. Most who studied with Adler have said that his style of teaching didn't translate well to the written word. One best learned Adlerian techniques from observing how he worked with clients. Beyond that, there was a concerted effort among the American Psychiatric Association (APA), for years dominated by Freudians, to block IP from gaining a foothold in America. This took the form of systematically blocking appointments of IP leaning professionals from positions in academic and clinical facilities. Additionally, the training of psychiatrist was controlled by the APA, therefore IP theories were not taught or ridiculed. (Turner and Pew, 1974)

That Adler and Individual Psychology were so overlooked by the mainstream psychological community is not surprising. What is, is that so much of Adler's teaching has been incorporated in to modern psychology, without proper reference. As Henri Ellenberger (1970) put it, "It would not be easy to find another author from which so much has been borrowed from all sides without acknowledgment than Alfred Adler." (p 645). It could be said that plagiarism is the highest form of flattery. Adler would be happy to know that his ideas have had a far reaching effect on modern thought. Unfortunately, the school of Individual Psychology has suffered. Thankfully, IP is still around, working quietly but making its impact known. People like Rudolph Dreikurs have taken Adler's beliefs into the school and community mental health programs. Others have kept the practice of IP as a therapeutic technique alive and growing.

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