

Classical Adlerian Psychology

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Classical Adlerian psychology is a values-based, fully integrated theory of personality, model of psychopathology, philosophy of living, strategy for preventative education, and technique of psychotherapy. Its mission is to encourage the development of psychologically healthy and cooperative individuals, couples, and families in order to effectively pursue the ideals of social equality and democratic living. A vigorously optimistic and inspiring approach to psychotherapy, it balances the equally important needs for optimal development of the individual as well as social responsibility.

With a solid foundation in the original teachings and therapeutic style of Alfred Adler, it integrates several resources: the contributions of Kurt Adler, Alexander Müller, Lydia Sicher, Sophia de Vries, and Anthony Bruck; the self-actualization research of Abraham Maslow; and the creative innovations of Henry Stein.

Theory of personality

Primary and secondary feelings of inferiority

The primary feeling of inferiority is the original and normal feeling in the infant and child of smallness, weakness, and dependency. This usually acts as an incentive for development. However, a child may develop an exaggerated feeling of inferiority as a result of physiological difficulties or handicaps, inappropriate parenting (including abuse, neglect, over-pampering), or cultural and/or economic obstacles. The secondary inferiority feeling is the adult's feeling of insufficiency that results from having adopted an unrealistically high or impossible compensatory goal, often one of perfection. The degree of distress is proportional to the subjective or felt distance from that goal. In addition to this distress, the residue of the original, primary feeling of inferiority may still haunt an adult. An inferiority complex is an extreme expectation that one will fail in the tasks of life that can lead to pessimistic resignation and an assumed inability to overcome difficulties.

Striving for significance

The basic, common movement of every human being is, from birth until death, of overcoming, expansion, growth, completion, and security. This may take a negative turn into a striving for superiority or power over other people. Unfortunately, many reference works mistakenly refer only to the negative "striving for power" as Adler's basic premise.

Compensation

A tendency to make up for under-development of physical or mental functioning through interest and training, usually within a relatively normal range of development. Over-compensation reflects a more powerful impulse to gain an extra margin of development, frequently beyond the normal

range. This may take a useful direction toward exceptional achievement, or a useless direction toward excessive perfectionism. Genius may result from extraordinary over-compensation. Under-compensation reflects a less active, even passive attitude toward development that usually places excessive expectations and demands on other people.

Feeling of community

Translated variably from the German, Gemeinschaftsgefuehl can mean community feeling, social interest, social feeling or social sense. The concept denotes a recognition and acceptance of the interconnectedness of all people, experienced on affective, cognitive, and behavioral levels. At the affective level, it is experienced as a deep feeling of belonging to the human race and empathy with fellow men and women. At the cognitive level, it is experienced as a recognition of interdependence with others, i.e., that the welfare of any one individual ultimately depends on the welfare of everyone. At the behavioral level, these thoughts and feelings can then be translated into actions aimed at self-development as well as cooperative and helpful movements directed toward others. Thus, at its heart the concept of "feeling of community" encompasses individuals' full development of their capacities, a process that is both personally fulfilling and results in people who have something worthwhile to contribute to one another.

Style of life

A concept reflecting the organization of the personality, including the meaning individuals give to the world and to themselves, their fictional final goal, and the affective, cognitive, and behavioral strategies they employ to reach the goal. This style is also viewed in the context of the individual's approach to or avoidance of the four tasks of life: other people, work, love and sex.

Fictional final goal

Classical Adlerian Psychology assumes a central personality dynamic reflecting the growth and forward movement of life. It is a future-oriented striving toward an ideal goal of significance, superiority, success or completion. The early childhood feeling of inferiority, for which one aims to compensate, leads to the creation of a fictional final goal which subjectively seems to promise total relief from the feeling of inferiority, future security, and success. The depth of the inferior feeling usually determines the height of the goal which then becomes the "final cause" of behavior patterns.

Unity of the personality

The position that all of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets of the individual are viewed as components of an integrated whole, moving in one psychological direction, without internal contradictions or conflicts.

Private logic (vs. common sense)

Private logic is the reasoning invented by an individual to stimulate and justify a style of life. By contrast, common sense represents society's cumulative, consensual reasoning that recognizes the wisdom of mutual benefit.

Safeguarding tendency

Cognitive and behavioral strategies used to avoid or excuse oneself from imagined failure. They can take the form of symptoms--such as anxiety, phobias, or depression--which can all be used as excuses for avoiding the tasks of life and transferring responsibility to others. They can also take the form of aggression or withdrawal. Aggressive safeguarding strategies include deprecation, accusations, or self-accusations and guilt, which are used as means for elevating a fragile self-esteem and safeguarding an overblown, idealized image of oneself. Withdrawal takes various forms of physical, mental, and emotional distancing from seemingly threatening people and problems.

Psychology of use (vs. possession)

The perspective that an individual uses his thinking, feeling, and actions (even his symptoms) to achieve a social end. He does not merely inherit or possess certain qualities, traits, or attitudes, but adopts only those characteristics that serve his goal, and rejects those that do not fit his intentions. This assumption emphasizes personal responsibility for one's character.