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Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler¹⁾ was an Austrian psychiatrist and psychotherapist who is best known for his contributions to the development of individual psychology. Adler was a contemporary of Sigmund Freud and was initially a member of Freud's inner circle, but he eventually broke with Freud due to their differing views on the nature of the mind and human behavior.

Adler's work²⁾ was centered on the concept of the inferiority complex, which he believed was a driving force in human behavior. According to Adler, people are motivated to overcome feelings of inadequacy and inferiority by striving for success and personal growth. This striving for superiority, or "compensation," is what drives people to achieve their goals and reach their full potential.

"To be a human being means to possess a feeling of inferiority which constantly presses towards its own conquest. The greater the feeling of inferiority that has been experienced, the more powerful is the urge for conquest and the more violent the emotional agitation." *Alfred Adler*

Adler also believed that the individual's place in society, or their "social interest," played a crucial role in their development and behavior. He argued that people who feel connected to and valued by their community are more likely to be well-adjusted and successful. In contrast, those who feel disconnected or marginalized may struggle with low self-esteem and mental health issues.

One of the key tenets of Adler's theory is the idea of birth order and its influence on personality. Adler believed that an individual's position in their family of origin, whether they are the oldest, middle, or youngest child, can have a significant impact on their personality and behavior. For example, firstborn children may be more responsible and organized, while younger children may be more rebellious and independent.



Adler's work has had a lasting impact on the field of psychology and continues to be influential in modern approaches to therapy and counseling. His emphasis on the importance of the individual and the role of social connections has made him a key figure in the development of humanistic psychology. Adler's theories continue to be applied in a variety of settings, including education, business, and health care, to help people better understand themselves and their place in the world.

The Quest for Power

Alfred Adler's concept of the “quest for power” ([D. Robert Worley, 2021](#))

refers to the drive that he believed exists in all people to feel competent, capable, and in control of their lives. According to Adler, the quest for power is a natural and healthy aspect of human psychology, and it is a driving force behind many of our actions and decisions.

“The final cause of neurosis and psychosis is the superstition about the fundamental inequality of human beings. This forms the basis of the feeling of inferiority and the morbid striving after fictitious superiority. Alfred Adler (*From a newly translated journal article “Progress in Individual Psychology, Part II,” [1924] in the AAINW/ATP Archives.*)

Adler believed that the quest for power is related to our sense of self and our desire to feel effective and influential in the world. It can manifest itself in many different ways, such as through career achievements, creative endeavors, or personal relationships.

However, Adler also recognized that the quest for power can become unhealthy when it becomes obsessive or misguided. For example, if an individual is overly focused on their own success and ignores the needs and feelings of others, it can lead to social isolation and conflict. On the other hand, if an individual lacks confidence in their own abilities and constantly seeks validation from others, it can lead to low self-esteem and a lack of personal fulfillment.

Adler's concept of the quest for power highlights the importance of finding a balance between striving for personal growth and success, and considering the needs and well-being of others.

Typology

Alfred Adler developed a theory of personality that he referred to as a “typology.” This theory proposed that there are four basic personality types, each of which is characterized by a dominant style of behavior and coping with life challenges. These four types are:

- **The “organ inferiority” type:** This type is characterized by a strong sense of inadequacy and a focus on their own weaknesses and limitations. They may have a tendency to feel inferior to others and may cope with this by seeking validation and approval from others.
- **The “social interest” type:** This type is characterized by a strong sense of connection to and concern for others. They tend to be empathetic and considerate, and they are motivated by a desire to contribute to the well-being of their community.
- **The “compensation” type:** This type is characterized by a strong drive to overcome feelings of inadequacy and achieve success. They may be ambitious and competitive, and they may cope with feelings of inferiority by striving for personal growth and achievement.
- **The “overcompensation” type:** This type is characterized by an excessive drive to achieve success and a tendency to be overly competitive and aggressive. They may have a fragile sense of self-worth and may compensate for feelings of inadequacy by constantly trying to prove themselves to others.

Adler's typology is not meant to be a rigid categorization of personality, but rather a way to understand the different ways that individuals cope with feelings of inferiority and strive for personal growth.

Birth Order

Alfred Adler believed that an individual's position in their family of origin, or their "birth order," could have a significant influence on their personality and behavior. According to Adler, firstborn children may be more responsible and organized, while younger children may be more rebellious and independent.

Adler proposed that firstborn children often have a special status in their families and are often given more attention and responsibility by their parents. As a result, they may develop a sense of confidence and responsibility and may be more inclined towards leadership roles.

On the other hand, younger children may feel less pressure to conform to expectations and may be freer to explore their own interests and desires. They may be more independent and less concerned with pleasing others and may be more likely to take risks and challenge authority.

Adler's ideas about birth order have been influential in the field of psychology, but they have also been the subject of much debate and criticism. Some research has supported Adler's ideas, while other studies have found little evidence to support them. It is important to note that birth order is just one factor that can influence personality and behaviour and that individuals are influenced by a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and social factors.

Reading List

Adler, A. (1912). The neurotic constitution. Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company.³⁾

Adler, A. (1924). The practice and theory of individual psychology. Harcourt, Brace & World.⁴⁾⁵⁾

Adler, A. (1927). Understanding human nature. Greenberg.⁶⁾

Adler, A. (1931). What life could mean to you. Little, Brown & Company.⁷⁾

Adler, A. (1933). The education of children. Alfred A. Knopf.⁸⁾

Adler, A. (1936). Social interest: A challenge to mankind. Putnam.⁹⁾

Adler, A. (1937). Ansbacher, H. L., & Ansbacher, R. R. (Eds.). The individual psychology of Alfred Adler: A systematic presentation in selections from his writings. Harper Torchbooks.

Adler, A. (1946). Superiority and social interest: A collection of later writings. Basic Books.¹⁰⁾

Adler, A. (1956). The science of living. Doubleday.¹¹⁾

Note: This list includes some of Adler's most significant and influential works, but it is not comprehensive.

- ¹⁾ Alfred Adler [Wikipedia](#)
 - ²⁾ AdlerPedia: All Things Adlerian [Adlerpedia](#)
 - ³⁾ The Neurotic Constitution by Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ⁴⁾ The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology [Wikipedia](#)
 - ⁵⁾ The practice and theory of individual psychology (second edition) by Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ⁶⁾ by Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ⁷⁾ What life could mean to you. by Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ⁸⁾ The education of children by Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ⁹⁾ Social interest: A challenge to mankind. By Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ¹⁰⁾ Superiority and social interest: A collection of later writings. By Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
 - ¹¹⁾ The science of living by Adler, Alfred [Archive.org](#)
1. ^ D. Robert Worley, 2021. *Summary of Adler Understanding Human Nature 1923*. Johns Hopkins University.

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