Adlerian Psychotherapy

Prioritizing relationships
Adlerian Theory

History of Adlerian Theory

- Inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis.

- Founded by Alfred Adler, championed in America by Rudolf Dreikurs.

- Dissemination throughout American elementary schools during the guidance movement by Don Dinkmeyer.
Alfred Adler 1870-1937

- Born in Vienna: middle class, Jewish family
- Converted and became a Christian
- 2nd of six children - profound influence
- Felt in shadow of his older brother
- Invalid as child: rickets, pneumonia
- Very close to his father - no oedipal need
- After World War I – *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* – deep-seated concern for others and need to associate with them
- 1921-1934: 30 mental health clinics in schools - closed by Nazi’s - drop in delinquency at time
- Came to USA in 1934 till his death
Nature of maladjustment

- A person has a mistaken opinion of himself or herself and of the world.
- A person engages in abnormal behavior to protect his or her opinion of self (e.g., when threatened with failure and insecurity)
  - Inferiority complex: The individual is overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy, hopelessness
  - Superiority Complex: very high opinion of self, quick to argue personal solutions to problems are right
  - Family constellation: Mediates the genetic and constitutional factors brought by the child and the cultural factors that influence the child.
  - Safeguarding: Symptoms are developed for the purpose of safeguarding the fictional goal.
- The person becomes self-centered rather than other-centered
- The individual is unconscious of these events
Adlerian Therapy Focus

- Importance of the feelings of self (ego) that arise from interactions & conflicts
- Sense of self(ego) central core of personality
- Start from Psychoanalysis
- Emphasis on motivation & social interaction
Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology

- A phenomenological approach
- Social interest is stressed
- Birth order and sibling relationships emphasized
- Therapy as teaching, informing and **encouraging**
- Basic mistakes in the client’s private logic
- The therapeutic relationship — a collaborative partnership
The Phenomenological Approach

n Adlerians attempt to view the world from the client’s subjective frame of reference
  n Reality is less important than how the individual perceives and believes life to be
  n It is not the childhood experiences that are crucial
  ~ It is our present interpretation of these events

n Unconscious instincts and our past do not determine our behavior
  n It is not genes
  n It is not environment
  n It is not genes and environment
  n It is how we choose to respond to our genes and environment
Social Interest

- Adler’s most significant and distinctive concept
- Refers to an individual’s attitude toward and awareness of being a part of the human community
- Mental health is measured by the degree to which we successfully share with others and are concerned with their welfare
- Happiness and success are largely related to social connectedness
Impact of Birth Order

Adler’s five psychological positions:

1. **Oldest child** ~ favored, spoiled, center of attention, pseudo-parent, high achiever

2. **Second of only two** ~ behaves as if in a race, often opposite to first child (rivalry)

3. **Middle** ~ often feels squeezed out

4. **Youngest** ~ the baby (more pampered), creative, rebellious, revolutionary, avant-garde

5. **Only** ~ does not learn to share or cooperate with other children, learns to deal with adults
Encouragement

- Encouragement is the most powerful method available for changing a person’s beliefs
  - Helps build self-confidence and stimulates courage
  - Discouragement is the basic condition that prevents people from functioning
  - Clients are encouraged to recognize that they have the power to choose and to act differently
Other Adler Concepts

- **Organ Inferiority**: everyone is born with some physical weakness—motivate life choices

- **Aggression Drive**: reaction to perceived helplessness or inferiority—lashing out against the inability to achieve or master
More Adler Concepts

- **Masculine protest**: Kids work to become independent from and equal to adults & people in power.

- **Perfection striving**: People who are not neurotically bound to an inferiority complex spend their lives trying to meet their *fictional goals*.
  - Elimination of their perceived flaws
  - Gives motivation and focus

- **Social Responsibility & Understanding**
  - Occupational tasks-career-self-worth
  - Societal task-creating friendships-networks
  - Love tasks-life partner

- **Positive & Goal Oriented Humanity**: People striving to overcome weaknesses to function productively-contributing to society
How an Adlerian does Therapy

- Comprehensive Assessment using:
  - Family Constellation-questionnaire-social world assessment
  - Early Reflections-single incidents from childhood
  - Lifestyle Assessment-develop targets for therapy by identifying major successes and mistakes in the client’s life
  - “The Question” -- If I had a magic wand that would eliminate your symptom immediately, what would be different in your life?”
What Clients do in Therapy

- Explore private logic-concepts about self, others, & life – philosophy lifestyle is based
- Discover purposes of behavior or symptoms and basic mistakes associated with their coping
- Learning how to correct faulty assumptions & conclusions
Establishing the Relationship
Exploring the psychological dynamics operating in the client-assessment
Encouraging development of self-understanding-insight into purpose
Helping client make new choices-reorientation & reeducation
1. Establishing Relationship

- Therapist get to know the client as a person

- Therapy is collaborative
  - Goals established together prior to start
  - Awareness of goal discrepancies during
    - Scripts (“Have you ever seen a patient like me before?”)
    - Games (“My previous therapist said the opposite…”)
  - Realignment of goals, when necessary

- Supportive, caring human connection
  - Faith
  - Hope
  - Love
2. Exploring Individual’s Dynamics

- **Subjective interview**
  - Client tells own story as expert on own life
  - Therapist listens for clues to client’s coping and approach to life
  - The Question:

- **Objective interview ~ Life Style Assessment**
  - Family constellation
  - Early Recollections
  - Personality Priorities
  - Integration and Summary
3. Encouraging Self-Understanding 
& Insight

- Insight = understanding of motivations (the whys) that operate in client’s life

- Therapist offers open-ended interpretations to:
  - Bring conscious awareness to unconscious processes
  - Identify and confront resistance
  - Explore purposes of symptoms, feelings, behaviors or blocks

- Types of interpretation
  - Of nonverbal behavior: to bring the client’s nonverbal behavior to the attention of the client and interpret it.
  - Of the therapeutic process: Dealing with what is in the here and now.
  - Active Wondering: Proposes an alternative to the presenting problem.
4. Helping with Reorientation & Reeducation

- Encouragement process – “to build courage” personal growth is encouraged and reinforced
- Change and search for new possibilities
- Making a difference-through change in behavior, attitude or perception
Advantages of Adlerian Theory

- It can be used for numerous issues and disorders.
- Uses encouragement.
- It is phenomenological.
- It does not consider people to be predisposed to anything.
- Applicable to diverse populations and presenting issues.
Disadvantages of Adlerian Theory

- Difficult to learn (e.g., making dream interpretations)
- Works best with highly verbal and intelligent clients. This might leave out many people who do not fit that category.
- Might be too lengthy for managed care.
- Adlerians do not like to make diagnoses
Adlerian Approaches today

- Education
- Parent Education
- Marriage Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Group Work
Adlerian Therapy demonstration

- Can you diagnose Gina using the DSM?
- What were her strengths?
- What did she need to work on?
- What did Carlson do to build the relationship?
- How was the intervention individualized?
- Was the therapy helpful to Gina?
  - If not, why do you think it wasn’t?
  - If it was helpful, what about it made it helpful?
- Would you want to work with an Adlerian if you were seeking therapy/counseling?