Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology

- Based on the *holistic concept* (a precursor to Gestalt Theory)

- A phenomenological approach ("schema of apperception") – precursor to Cognitive Psychology

- *Teleological* (Future oriented) explanation of human behavior

- The therapeutic relationship— is a collaborative partnership
Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology

- Social interest is stressed
- Birth order and sibling relationships
- Therapy as teaching, informing and encouraging
- Basic mistakes in the client’s private logic
The Phenomenological Approach

- Adlerians attempt to view the world from the client’s subjective frame of reference
  - How life is in reality is less important than how the individual believes life to be
  - It is not the childhood experiences that are crucial – it is our present interpretation of these events (our Schema of Apperception)
- Unconscious instincts and our past do not determine our behavior
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
  - Embodies a community feeling and emphasizes the client’s positive feelings toward others in the world
Social Interest

- Adler’s most significant and distinctive concept
  - 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
“Lifestyle” or “Style of Life”

- A life goal or strategy that organizes the client’s reality, giving meaning to life
  - "fictional finalism" or "guiding self ideal"
- Psychiatric symptoms are “failed attempts” at achieving our lifestyle
- Adlerian therapy helps clients to effectively navigate lifestyle tasks
“Lifestyle” or “Style of Life”

- Lifestyle is how we move toward our life goals
  - "private logic"
  - Values, life plan, perceptions of self and others
  - Unifies all of our behaviors to provide consistency
  - Makes all our actions “fit together”
Inferiority and Superiority

- **Inferiority Feelings**
  - Are normal
  - They are the wellspring of creativity.
  - Develop when we are young--characterized by early feelings of hopelessness.
Inferiority and Superiority

- Striving for Superiority (or competency)
  - Promote mastery – motivate change
  - Enable us to overcome obstacles

- Related Complexes if Social Interest is not learned:
  - Inferiority Complex
  - Superiority Complex
Common Unhealthy Strategies or Lifestyles

- People using control to avoid ridicule
  - Creates social distance and interpersonal problems

- People seeking comfort to avoid stress or pain
  - Low productivity, failure to achieve potential
Common Unhealthy Strategies or Lifestyles

- People who aim to please to avoid rejection by seeking constant attention and/or approval
  - Governed by fear of not being liked
- People seeking superiority or striving for significance through achievement
  - Complain of feeling overworked/overburdened
Birth Order

- A concept that assigns probability to having a certain set of experiences based on one’s position in the family
Birth Order

- Adler’s five psychological positions:
  1) **Oldest child**—receives more attention, spoiled, center of attention
  2) **Second of only two**—behaves as if in a race, often opposite to first child
  3) **Middle**—often feels squeezed out
  4) **Youngest**—the baby—expects others to care for them
  5) **Only**—does not learn to share or cooperate with other children, learns to deal with adults
Four Phases of Therapy

- **Phase 1: Establishing the Proper Therapeutic Relationship**
- **Phase 2: Exploring the Individual’s Psychological Dynamics**
  - Lifestyle assessment
    - Subjective interview – perceptions of family and the world
    - Objective interview – facts about family and life experiences
    - Family constellation – characteristics and coalitions
    - Early recollections – reveal Style of Life
    - Basic Mistakes – Private logic or beliefs that lead to maladaptive living
Four Phases of Therapy

- **Phase 3: Encouraging Self-Understanding/Insight**
  - Interpret the findings of the assessment
  - Hidden goals and purposes of behavior are made conscious
  - Therapist offers interpretations to help clients gain insight into their lifestyle – but always given tentatively.

- **Phase 4: Reorientation and Re-education**
Encouragement

- Encouragement instills self-confidence by expecting clients to assume responsibility for their lives and embrace the fact that they can make changes.
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
Contributions of Adlerian Theory to other Perspectives

- Emphasis on the phenomenological world (perceptions) of the client is a bridge to Humanistic Psychology.
- Emphasis on “private logic” and that thoughts affect how we act is a bridge to Cognitive Psychology.
- Holistic approach to each person is a precursor to Gestalt Theory.
- Adler was the 1st to try Family Therapy.
Adlerian Theory Today

- Child Therapy is the major arena for Adlerian Theory today
- Child Guidance Centers – non-profit counseling centers to help families deal with misbehavior in children
- Rudolf Dreikurs – a disciple of Adler, adapted Adlerian Theory to Child Psychology – book “Children the Challenge”
Dreikurs’ Theory of Mistaken Goals of Childhood

- If a child is discouraged – feels inferior – doesn’t feel useful
  - Their 1\textsuperscript{st} strategy is usually to seek \textit{Undue Attention} to feel important
  - If that strategy doesn’t work – they will move one of two ways:
    - They may switch to a goal of Power
    - Or they will intensify the seeking of attention by \textit{Demonstrating Total Inadequacy}
Dreikurs’ Theory of Mistaken Goals of Childhood

- **Mistaken Goal – Power**
  - Believes that the only person who matters is the one in control
  - Will defy authority and be uncooperative
  - If they are unable to win power struggle – will then escalate to a goal of **Revenge**
Dreikurs’ Theory of Mistaken Goals of Childhood

**Inferiority Complex**
- Seeking
- Undue Attention
- Demonstrating Total Inadequacy

**Superiority Complex**
- Power
- Revenge
Changing Mistaken Goals

Parenting

- Undue Attention
  - Give a child lots of due attention – when the situation allows for the child to be the center
  - If a child demands undue attention – when the situation does not allow for attention to be given – withdraw from and ignore the child

- Demonstrating Complete Inadequacy
  - Give a child lots of encouragement – you can do it!
  - Never do something for a child that they are capable of doing for themselves!
Changing Mistaken Goals

Parenting

- **Power**
  - Don’t play the power struggle game – withdraw from the situation – ignore tantrums
  - Give a child a choice between two acceptable alternatives, spell out the consequences of each choice, and calmly enforce their choice

- **Revenge**
  - This is a very discouraged child – give lots of encouragement at appropriate times
  - Work on building social interest – serve others together – affirm the child’s value and significance