

New Therapist

Indispensable survival guide for the thinking psychotherapist

November/December 2015



The Centennial Edition

100

Features

10 Towards the collaborative activity that is life itself

By Kenneth J. Gergen

14 Just beginning

By Michael Eigen

18 Why we need plain old therapy

By Jon G. Allen

22 Overlooking Adler

By Jon Carlson

26 The three waves of psychotherapy

By Bill O'Hanlon

Regulars

3 Drug Watch

4 Research

29 Books

EDITOR

John Söderlund

MANAGING EDITOR

Lee-ann Bailey

FEATURES EDITOR

Sue Spencer

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Dylan Evans

Graham Lindegger

Julie Manegold

Tim Barry

Tom Strong

CONTRIBUTIONS

Submissions for inclusion in New Therapist are welcomed. New Therapist reserves the right to edit or exclude any submission. Names and identifying information of all individuals mentioned in case material have been changed to protect their identities. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of New Therapist, its publishers or distributors.

ADVERTISING

Advertising deadlines for New Therapist are six weeks prior to the first Monday of the month of publication. Please call or email for a media pack and rate card, or visit our web site at www.NewTherapist.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscription charges are \$48 per year to all international destinations (including postage). To South African destinations, subscription charges are R380 per year (including VAT and postage). If you would like New Therapist delivered to your door every second month, please send your payment (by Master or Visa card or cheque) and full postal address to New Therapist Subscriptions, 27 Kitchener Road, Clarendon, Pietermaritzburg, 3201, South Africa. For further information, call +27 (0)33 342 7644 or visit our website at www.NewTherapist.com to subscribe online. Please allow up to 10 weeks for first delivery.

CONTACT NEW THERAPIST

Tel/fax: +27 (0)33 342 7644

Email: datepalm@newtherapist.com

Web: www.NewTherapist.com

27 Kitchener Road, Clarendon, Pietermaritzburg, 3201, South Africa

New Therapist (ISSN 1605-4458) is a professional resource published by New Therapist Trust every second month and distributed to psychotherapists around the world.

Copyright © New Therapist 2015. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or disseminated by any means whatsoever without the prior permission of the publishers.

A publication of New Therapist Trust.



Overlooking Adler

By Jon Carlson

"Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."
- Edmund Burke

In the early years of psychotherapy monumental decisions were made in Vienna as to whose ideas were important and should be pursued and developed in this exciting new field. The therapy pioneers seemed to have been taken by the ideas of Sigmund Freud, rather than his colleague, Alfred Adler, and chose to study:

- what might be happening *within* the person;
- how to understand and fix people's problems;
- the sex instinct as the most important variable in understanding people;
- the biological over the social context;

I often wonder what might have occurred if Alfred Adler's ideas were the ones that were chosen.

For example, Freud advocated having his patients recline on a couch, while Adler plucked his clients off the couch and into chairs that faced one another. Adler believed in horizontal or equal relationships, while Freud accepted the vertical or superior-inferior view of the times. Adler enjoyed talking and listening to his patients. He saw them as capable of participating in the solving of their problems.

Many of Freud's patients were wealthy and privileged, while

Adler treated everyone, including common people or those from the working class. He even treated the "freaks" of society as his office was near where the circus performers lived, so they became his clients.

Freud focused on individuals and their unique problems while Adler saw all behavior as universal and saw people as alike or similar. Adler also noted the importance of the context in which people lived or worked, for example, that many of those who worked in the tailoring industry became blind as they aged and discovered that this could be avoided with better lighting, more breaks, fewer work hours, and better ventilation.

Freud saw his patients in the seclusion and privacy of his consulting room. Adler also saw patients individually, but he also believed that therapy could be delivered to the public. Because Adler saw problems as universal and similar, he would often work with people on a stage or in an auditorium full of people. Those in the audience could watch a demonstration family talk about problems and, through "spectator therapy", could learn how to deal with their own similar difficulties.

Adler's ideas were more positive about potential growth and based in encouragement. He tended to look for what was right and working in his clients' lives and could be credited as the originator

The psychotherapy profession seems to have gotten off on the wrong foot by choosing to spend so much time and energy on classifying and fixing what was disturbing or broken rather than learning how to facilitate healthy and optimal forms of behavior.

of positive psychology. At one staff conference Adler supposedly listened to his colleagues discussing a patient's myriad problems and the deep-rooted nature of his psychopathology when he boldly stated, "That is not what I see." When urged to explain himself, Adler stated that he saw a person who was trying very hard to belong and to fit in with others. This patient was discouraged and did not believe there was a positive way to belong so he has chosen to find his place in a negative manner and to engage in socially inappropriate behavior. In essence, he became the best at being bad. Adler focused on the assets of people and not their liabilities.

Perhaps the most significant difference was that Freud and his followers studied people as though they were a collection of parts, such as the id, ego and super ego. Adler viewed people as a whole and recognized that individual components must be understood as to how they relate to the whole person and that a person's functioning could not be fully understood solely in terms of his or her component parts. As an holistic psychology, Adlerians focus on the unity of behavior. All behavior is seen as goal directed and moving from a "felt minus" to a "perceived plus."

The psychotherapy profession seems to have gotten off on the wrong foot by choosing to spend

so much time and energy on classifying and fixing what was disturbing or broken rather than learning how to facilitate healthy and optimal forms of behavior. The field became overly focused on mental illness and disregarded the notion of health. Focusing on wellness, growth, and optimal wellbeing would have taken the world of psychotherapy in a much different, and hopefully more positive, direction. Adler's focus on the importance of encouragement and the positive never really caught on until more recently with the positive psychology movement.

The depth of this mistake can be understood when we sadly realize that only a few people in the healthcare industry have ever had a class, let alone advanced training, in health. Most practitioners have been trained in understanding and identifying problems, mistakes and pathology. Research on the common factors of change in psychotherapy has identified the client's strengths as a most significant factor. Other important variables are the ability to generate hope and to relate well to others. Therapists who can help clients see, value and use their own strengths will be more effective.

Adler's original ideas are the basis of so many of today's approaches to helping. What would have happened if people were to understand his complete approach? Adler's ideas are

also at the heart of most of the contemporary or neo-Freudian approaches to helping. There was so much similarity that one person even suggested that these approaches should correctly be called neo-Adlerian. These leading contemporary approaches stressed social relations and not the biological factors, striving for self-actualization and not being driven by the sex instinct; a subjective rather than objective approach to helping; and the present rather than the impact of early experiences. Adler stressed the importance of the relationship and using empathy as a key strategy for helping. Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956) showed how Adler's approach was at the root of existential, phenomenological, schema, humanistic and person-centered approaches. Yet, no one seemed to listen or care.

Abraham Maslow is credited with creating humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychotherapy. He studied with Adler and urged others during his lifetime to understand the practical brilliance of Adler's ways of understanding and helping others. Maslow, like Adler, worked to help the profession change its focus and to study what is possible and helping people to use more of their potential.

The words of contemporary Adlerian Richards Watts serve to summarize: "Adlerian psychology and psychotherapy was the first positive psychology and approach to therapy that emphasized prevention, optimism and hope, resilience and growth, competence, creativity and resourcefulness, social consciousness, and finding meaning and a sense of community in relationships. It was the original strength-based approach."

Whether or not they identify

themselves as Adlerians, nearly all contemporary counseling approaches now reflect many of Adler's concepts:

- The crucial importance an egalitarian, respectful, and cooperative counselor-client relationship (therapeutic alliance);
- The focus on social equality and social justice;
- The real or perceived impact of early childhood/family constellation (system) experiences on current functioning;
- The importance of taking a holistic approach that considers mind, body, and spirit;
- The need to view people contextually; in their family, social, and cultural contexts;
- The recognition that thinking influences emotions and behavior;
- The emphasis on strengths, optimism, encouragement, empowerment, advocacy, and support;
- The relevance of style of life and goals;
- The need to identify, understand the purpose of, and modify repetitive self-defeating behaviors;
- The importance and benefit of clinicians and clients developing realistic and mutually-agreed-upon counseling goals (goal alignment);
- The recognition that having problems, difficulties, and differences is a normal part of life and can be viewed as opportunities for growth rather than "pathology";
- The view that counseling and psychotherapy is an

educational, preventative, and growth-promoting process, not merely a remedial one. (Watts & LaGuardia, 2015).

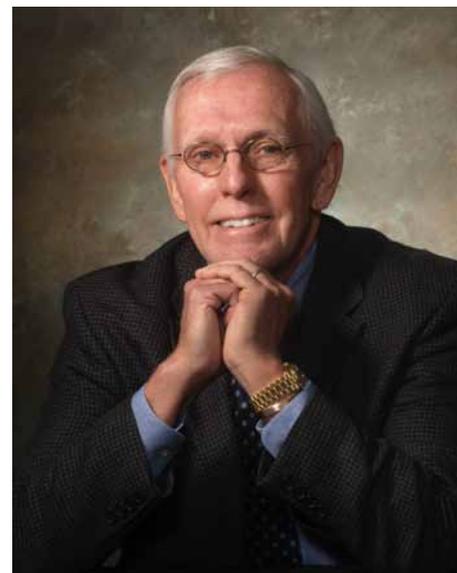
The most significant developments in the field of psychotherapy in the last 100 years seemed to have been ignored. I wonder how many more years will pass before people re-discover Adler's wisdom and begin to embrace his complete theory and approach rather than just bits and pieces? We miss so many opportunities by not understanding health and having a positive focus in our relationships with others. I am not optimistic as most psychotherapists are busy looking for ways to justify their not so effective ideas or to discover what will be the next panacea while failing to understand what has come before them.

References:

Ansbacher, H.R. & Ansbacher, R.R. (Eds.)(1956). *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler: A systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. New York: Harper Torch Books.

Watts, R. & Laguardia, A.C. (March, 2015). *Being a therapeutic chameleon: Integrative Adlerian procedures and techniques for effective brief counseling*. Presented at the American Counseling Association World Conference, Orlando, Florida.

return to NASAP home page
<http://alfredadler.org>



About the author

Jon Carlson, PsyD, EdD, ABPP is Distinguished Professor of Adlerian Psychology at Adler University in Chicago and psychologist at the Wellness Clinic in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. He has authored over 60 books, 175 articles and book chapters and created 300 professional training videos. Jon has received lifetime achievement awards from several organizations including the American Psychological Association, the American Counseling Association and the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology. Jon was formally trained in Adlerian psychology at the Alfred Adler Institute in Chicago where he received the Certificate of Psychotherapy and his doctorate in clinical psychology. He served as the Editor of what is now the *Journal of Individual Psychology* for seventeen years and the *International Journal of Individual Psychology*. Several of his books are among the main texts in Adlerian psychology and he has five commercially available videos demonstrating Adlerian psychotherapy with individual clients, couples, parents and teachers.

