

Adler Lecture

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Hola, everyone. Welcome to this lecture on Alfred Adler. Adler is an influential thinker in personality theory and that's why he's clearly in our course. He, along with Freud and Jung, who we've already looked at, was certainly in the psychodynamic or psychoanalytic area. But we do have to point out that Freud and Jung are kind of like the 800-pound gorillas, and Adler and Karen Horney, who's in our next lecture, are important but they're not as influential and dominating. I happen to like Adler's theory a lot. He and Karen Horney are kind of considered, how can I put this, hinge figures or bridge figures in that while they're in the psychodynamic school or area, they really anticipated quite a lot of the personality theory that emerges later on in the humanistic, and in the social cognitive, and even in trait theory and some of the others. Adler called his approach "individual psychology" and he did that on purpose. He wanted to focus on the individual. In fact, Adler would have stated that pretty much having a personality theory that applies to everybody is kind of a contradiction in terms because we're all individuals, we kind of need 7.8 billion, or however many people are in the world, personality theories. That's kind of interesting because that doesn't stop him from going along and saying that, well, putting us all pretty much in *his* pigeon holes. Adler's approach, though, is very much distinct from Freud and Jung, and I just want to begin by drawing some differences between Freud and Jung on the one hand, and Alfred Adler and later Karen Horney on the other.

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Perhaps the first of these is that for Freud and Jung, human motivation is pretty much inborn. We're born that way. I guess that's the Lady Gaga approach to personality. We're born that way whether it's by virtue of the Id or by virtue of the collective unconscious and the archetypes that result from that. They really focus upon nature—we're born that way. For Adler human motivation is very much learned, it's very much dependent upon our social interactions, particularly as you'll see our interactions with our parents, our interactions with our siblings, and how birth order affects those so that's kind of a pretty big difference.

The second difference...

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...is that for Freud and Jung, while the ego for Freud and Jung and the self for Jung are certainly important parts of the psyche, they are not at all the dominant, the strongest part of the psyche. For Freud it's the Id and for Jung it is the collective unconscious. So they're less powerful, if you will. Adler takes the opposite tack. Adler's idea, he doesn't use the word "psyche" but his word is the "creative self." For Adler, the creative self is powerful. There's not something hidden in the unconscious. No, you and I choose. We make our choices. We create ourselves. We make choices which in turn create an environment which shapes us. So that's a really big difference, too, between Adler on one hand and Freud and Jung on the other.

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A third theory, as we've already indicated, is that Adler, by virtue of calling his approach individual psychology, wants to emphasize human uniqueness, whereas Freud and Jung, and they might disagree with this, but Freud and Jung tend to emphasize how we're all similar. So for Freud we all have an ego, an id, a super ego, all of us go through the oral, anal, phallic, latency, genital stages. For Jung, pretty

much we all share the same, most powerful part of who we are, the collective unconscious. So again, this third difference is pretty substantial.

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Finally, Freud and Jung put a lot of emphasis on the unconscious and unconscious motivation. They articulate the theory in which basically most of our selves is hidden from us. Adler certainly believes in the unconscious but Adler sees it kind of opposite. He says, no, we're consciously aware of most of who we are and why we do what we do; yeah, there are times when we do lack insight into our own motives or own behavior, but mostly it's conscious. So I wanted to begin, because these are four pretty big differences, and we might want to think to ourselves those are four differences that would really place you in a very different approach. So that's why I call Adler and Horney, because Horney's theory is going to be similar to Adler's, as kind of "bridge" theorists. I guess one end of the bridge is still in the psychoanalytic island, but they really do anticipate later psychology and personality theories as well, and these four differences really tell you how different they are, Adler's and Horney's theories from Jung and Freud.

Okay, let's talk about Adler's theory.

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If you want to understand Adler, the idea of goals is such a big aspect to his theory. Adler talks about how as human beings, our behavior and, therefore our personality, is goal driven. Now I have to make some points here, and we'll make it with the lecture on Karen Horney as well, Adler says that our ultimate goal is superiority. In other words, all of us as human beings share one goal and that's superiority. However, Adler's notion of superiority gradually changed and mellowed over the 30 years or so that he was writing. Early on, when Adler was still in the kind of Freudian orbit and still very influenced by Freud, he saw superiority as a kind of competitive one, where, you know, it's you against me and one of us has to be superior which means one of us has to be inferior. In other words, that there's winners and there's losers and if I win, it means you have to lose. So that notion of superiority was very much fraught with kind of a you versus me competition. In his later years, he changed his notion of superiority more to one similar to Abraham Maslow later on (again, the humanist) in which superiority is not the thing where you and I compete against each other, rather we're competing against ourselves. I can be superior and you can be superior, and I can help you be superior, and you can help me being superior. In other words, instead of the idea of a marathon where there's one winner and everybody else is a loser, this is almost like the idea that all of us who are runners, we all compete against beating our old time and improving, and being the best runner we can, and I can improve on the last time by 3 or 4 minutes, and I've gotten superior. I don't necessarily have to come in first place. So that early understanding is something that you see in Adler. And again, as I said before, it's something that Horney changed significantly as she went more from being under the influence and orbit of Freud to, like Adler, being more of her own woman as Adler is his own man with his later, can we say more mature, understanding.

Adler talks about a concept which he calls "style of life," and style of life is just exactly what it says: it's how you live your life. But style of life is just the cumulative adding up (I guess that is cumulative), but it's the adding up of all your goals. So for instance, today--what are your goals for today? What do you want to get done today? Well, probably your goals for today are going to give us a good idea of your behavior for today. So certainly one of my goals for today was to do this lecture and when I'm done, I'll be happy that I got this done. And that goal explains why I'm sitting here in my office in front of my computer talking to myself, doing this lecture. So style of life is just your goals for today. Now you have goals for the next week; what do you need to get done for this next week? Chances are if we followed you around, it would kind of explain your behavior. What do you need to do for the next month? What do you need to do for the next year? What are your life goals? Where do you want to be 10 years from

now? Twenty years from now? On your deathbed, as you review your life? What are your goals? If your goals have been to have a good time and make a lot of money, well, that's a very different kind of set of goals than to devote your life to helping people. Your lifestyle is going to be very different if your goal is to help people as opposed to party and have a good time. So style of life is just simply Adler's way of saying that the way we are, our personalities, our behaviors are shaped by these goals, short-term, medium-term, long-term goals. I mean, why are you listening to this lecture? Because this lecture is a part of a course you're taking; as you sit at your computer or sit at your iPad and listen to this, why are you doing that? Well, your goal. To do well on the next test and to do well in this course and those goals fall into graduate from college, and why do you need to graduate from college, and so on and so forth. So that's style of life. It's the result of our goals.

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Adler has an interesting kind of idea that he swiped or borrowed, I guess nothing is really original, from a German philosopher named Han Vaihinger. You can see that there's the cover of Vaihinger's original book *Die Philosophies Des Als Ob*. It translates into English not as the Philosophy of As-If but *The Psychology of As-If*. Vaihinger's book is kind of interesting, and there are English translations out there if you are completely bored and have nothing to do. It's worth reading, actually. But what Vaihinger simply points out is in life, we tell each other and we tell ourselves lies, untruths. But the net effect of those lies are actually beneficial. So Vaihinger points out that most of human societies believes in God and have religion. And Vaihinger was an atheist and he said that it's all nonsense. I certainly don't think that God is nonsense, I believe in God. But Vaihinger said and yet it's a good thing. It's a good thing that people believe religious nonsense, according to him. Why? Because if everybody believes there's a god, and most religions have a modified view of the same thing which is that if there is a god, then we're kind of responsible and accountable to God, and that God desires that we do things like treat other people with dignity and respect, to quote Jesus' words, as you do unto others, you do unto me, you know, there's coming a day in which we'll give an account, responsibility to God about were we good, were we bad? And there's that idea in just about every religion. So what Vaihinger points out is that means that if all of us think there's a heaven or hell, or if all of us think that we have to account to God, we're more likely to be inclined to do good things and not just pretty much say to ourselves, well, I don't really care, I don't have to answer for my behavior, I'm just going to be a mean, nasty jerk. So the net result is that people act a little better, societies are a little kinder, more thoughtful, because we all believe, according to Vaihinger, this big, grand untruth that God exists. It's kind of a cynical way of looking at things.

But anyway, it's their ideas, they can be however they want, so Adler latches on to Vaihinger's idea and he calls it a fictional finalism and he applies it to us as individuals. So we tell ourselves things about how good it's going to be. So for instance, have you ever been studying for an exam and, if you're anything like me, I don't really enjoy studying for an exam. It's boring, it's hard work, it's tedious. I'd much rather be doing nothing, reading a novel, taking a hike. How do you get yourself to sit down and buckle down and study? Well, what Adler says is we engage in these fictional finalisms. We tell ourselves, "okay, if you could just study, it's going to be so good. It's going to be so good at the end of the semester when you are all done." Well, you know you study and the end of the semester comes and maybe it does feel a little good, but it's never as good as you thought it would be, right? It feels good not to study, but it's not as good as you imagined it to be in the midst of 2:00 AM when you're trying to drive yourself to keep studying. And that's what a fictional finalism is; it's the way we motivate ourselves. We promise ourselves that if I could only finish college, I'm going to be so relieved, it's going to be so great. Well, three days after you graduate, you're like "well, okay, I'm done with that." You're glad you finished it, and I was certainly glad when I graduated, but then what happens is you got other stuff you've got to worry about: if I could only get a job; if I could only get a better job; if I could only find a significant other; and for some people, if I could only find a better significant other; if I could only have 2.5 children; if I could only get a car; if I could only get a better car; if I could only get a house.; if, if, if, if. It's the

psychology of “as if”—things will be great if “x” happens or “y” happens. Now, the benefit, Adler points out, is that we do a lot of stuff we wouldn’t do, we get a lot done *by* promising ourselves how great it’s going to be, even if we get there and we’re a little disappointed. As a kid, the anticipation of Christmas was always kind of better than Christmas actually ever was. You look forward to it – “Ahh, it’s going to be so great. I can’t wait to open up my gifts.” Well, you open up your gifts, okay, it’s good but it just doesn’t...at some point it’s like, “Okay...I guess it’s all over now, so let me play with these toys,” and then right away the next day I was already anticipating the next Christmas. So that’s the idea of a fictional finalism.

In the final analysis how we motivate ourselves is often a fiction, and yet, it still has a positive outcome. We still engage in quite a lot of good behavior.

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Now, all of us, as I mentioned before, have this goal of superiority. And what that means, according to Adler, is we all have the opposite of superiority which is inferiority. Adler points out that we wouldn’t have a goal for superiority if we didn’t feel inferior. And so if you’ve ever used the phrase “inferiority complex,” you have quoted Adler and Adler’s idea. All of us feel inadequate about one or any number of things. You know, we all feel a little bit anxious that we won’t measure up. I was listening to a podcast this morning and the person was talking about the so-called “imposter complex” that at some point all of us feel, no matter how on the outside we look maybe as successful or competent, there’s always that voice inside of us that says “hey, you’re faking it. You’re kind of an imposter. Sooner or later people are going to find out that you’re not as smart as you look. You’re just an imposter.” I certainly have felt that. But anyway, Adler points out all of us feel inferiority, and he divides the inferiority into three big types, so let’s talk about...

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...these. The first is organ inferiority, and this is not like the organ at the Yankee game; no, these would be the organs in terms of your body. He probably would call it physical inferiority if he was writing his theory nowadays. Very few of us are perfectly happy with our physical makeup: we don’t have enough hair, we have too much hair; we wish our earlobes were shorter or longer; we wish we were heavier or skinnier; we wish this color eyes; there’s an infinite amount of things to be unhappy with. And, of course, we live in a culture which encourages us not to accept our bodies but to exercise and get plastic surgery and make up and on and on and on it goes. So organ inferiority would just be something physically doesn’t match up. Now, even if you’d say, “no, I’m perfectly happy, I’m the gorgeous person that ever lived and I love the way I look and I love everything about myself,” well, Adler says you still have some organ inferiority. Why? Because you were a child at one point and children, I don’t know if you’ve noticed, are small. And because they’re small, they can’t run as fast, they can’t jump as high, they can’t lift as much. So by virtue of the fact that we all started life smaller and compared ourselves to people that were bigger, could run faster, could jump higher, could do physical things greater, all of us do have some physical organ inferiority. Now you might be wondering why this is the Facebook profile picture of Demosthenes. He was a guy that lived in Athens and Demosthenes is kind of famous, I don’t know if you ever heard of him, but think about it. Athens was a city in Greece in which the most prestigious people in town were not basketball players or musicians, they were philosophers that could orate very eloquently and beautifully. So the impressive elite in Athens--Sparta of course had a different elite, you had to be a soldier, the military was the elite in Sparta--but in Athens your ability to orate, to give speeches, was the pinnacle of success. So Demosthenes grows up in Athens, he’s the youngest child, he has a bad stutter, and the youngest child was sent out to take care of the sheep and goats. And so Demosthenes with this bad stutter, you can imagine he would feel very inferior in a social context in which the way you speak, the eloquence of your words was considered to be--you would be the man or the woman. So Demosthenes is determined, he’s got this inferiority so he goes out and he’s going to

strive for superiority. So this is what he does. Every day he goes out with the sheep and as he gets out into the meadows, he would go down to a stream and he would find a lot of little pebbles and he would fill his cheeks up with pebbles (try this at home—find some pebbles) and he would speak to the sheep all day long because one of the things you had to do if you're going to be a great orator is project your voice because they didn't have microphones and you had 2,000 people listening to you. you can't talk in a low voice. You had to be able to say FRIENDS, ATHENIANS, COUNTRYMEN, LEND ME YOUR EARS. And you had to talk really loud. All day long he would talk to the sheep as loudly as he could...with pebbles. Now I don't know if you talk with pebbles in your cheeks, when you take the pebbles out, I don't know if that practice makes you good, but apparently it did for Demosthenes because he is considered the, or one of the top two or three, orators of all time in Athens, and he's considered...you know, you don't get your face made into marble unless you're quite important. And so it's an example of how Demosthenes' organ inferiority, his stutter, how he used that to pursue organ superiority.

The second type of inferiority would be social, and a lot of us probably have this. You know, social anxiety when we're in groups or when we have to give a speech. We're worried about what people think of us, we want to look good, we want to be funny, we want to be impressive, social situations, and again, all of us have social inferiority according to Adler, because we were all children and we were in situations and we didn't know how to comport ourselves, our parents had to teach us, or someone had to teach us. You know, say please, say thank you, you know, someone asks you a question, answer them, and so on and so forth. So gradually, of course, that sense of inferiority we had as children of not knowing what to do in most social situations we learn and for some of us, we use that inferiority to really, really want to pursue the ability to interact with people. I know someone and as a young girl, she felt very, very inadequate in social situations and she told me once she literally went to the library and got some books on how to be popular and read them and then practiced the stuff. And certainly I've known her for a long time, and she is one of the most socially adept people in group settings. So social is just talking to people in groups.

Psychological inferiority, again, when we're kids, this has to do with our inner life. We feel inferiority because we don't understand our emotions, we don't understand why we're upset. As a father with my kids I was constantly try and unpack what they were feeling and how to handle themselves if someone made them angry. Don't just punch your friend, you know, maybe say something. Again, dealing with our inner world we have to learn that as children and some of us as adults still struggle with that. You know, if you are very, very kind of puzzled, why am I anxious all the time, or why am I OCD, that sense of inferiority would and could propel you to really master that and become superior at understanding yourself and then managing your behavior.

So we all feel inferior and this is the reason why we all pursue superiority.

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Adler has a very positive view of human beings, though. Freud was very negative of humans. You know, Freud's view of human beings was most of us are crazy, we're pretty much nuts, neurotic, and by five years of age, you really can't change it. The best we can do, according to Freud is understand how crazy you are and attempt to manage it. Adler's view of humans, again, anticipates the later humanists, Rogers, Maslow and some of the others, who saw humans as basically good. And Adler has had a relatively high view of religion although he was an atheist. He saw religion not as so many early psychologists do just negatively, you know as the source of guilt and anxiety and war and whatnot. But Adler, and I always appreciate this as being someone whose religious beliefs are very important to me, but Adler looked at religion and saw it as positive aspects of it, you know, people helping each other, giving, you know so many religious groups have started schools, hospitals, and organizations to help orphans, you name it. And Adler called the innate goodness, or the innate desire we have to help other

people “social interest.” Now, clearly other philosophers and psychologists point out, as Freud did, the innate animal nature, both Freud and Jung point this out, you know, the shadow or the id or whatever it is, and clearly it is hard to look at human nature and not see there is something innately, you know, we are violent, we are aggressive, human beings do kill and harm and hurt, wars seem to be almost inevitable in human history. So you can certainly do that angle. But Adler looked at the other side. He said, yeah, there’s all that but human beings are constantly doing good, helping each other, being kind to each other, giving, being thoughtful, being unselfish, altruistic, and this is the idea of social interest. And Adler simply said that religion, our religious beliefs, helps us not only to motivate us to do good things and to be kind and thoughtful and helpful, but it also channels us as individuals to use our social interests and combine it with a lot of other people get huge, wonderful things accomplished so that on my own I can’t do much, but when I join with a lot of other people. If I could just give you an example, one of my favorite organizations in the world is a group called, well, two groups actually, called Compassion International, I don’t know if you’ve heard of them, or World Vision. These are both Christian organizations which are devoted to helping orphans or poor children all over the world and one of the ways they do this is they just get sponsors. They just get people that have more money, let’s say, so, for instance, you give \$35 or \$38 to the organization and sponsor a child. And then I do it and other people do it. If I give 35 bucks to help one child, how’s that going to be done? But if I join with 5, 10, 12 million other people and they’re all giving 35 bucks, these 2 organizations have done huge amounts of good. I’ve seen and observed and visited some of the children I’ve sponsored all over the world. So religion, and again, these are Christian organizations, there are Jewish ones, there are Muslim ones, you know, every organization, certainly Catholic Social Services, and Catholic Charities is another one that does great work that I know of. But Adler simply says that social interest is often channeled to great benefit by religion. But of course, you don’t need religion. I can walk down the street and hand money to someone that asks me, I don’t need to be religious about it, but when I go to church, I’m often encouraged to give my time, to give energy, to be empathetic, to help victims of injustice, and so on and so forth.

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As I mentioned before, Adler’s idea of the creative self, I love it, it’s kind of cool. Basically, you kind of create your own personality. You make decisions, you have these goals, you make a decision to pursue a goal, and then you behave, and as you behave, it changes your environment which in turn affects how your personality develops. It becomes almost a circular evolution of you creating yourself which changes your environment, which in turn affects you and affects your choices. So the idea of creative self is Adler’s point that we are active decision makers. We set goals, we pursue them, we behave. We’re not like big pinballs in the pinball game of life. We’re not randomly affected by the environment. No, you and I make choices which impact us. I love this idea of creative self. I think it basically tells us, hey, you’re responsible for yourself, don’t just blame everybody else, blame your mom, blame society, blame Trump, blame whoever else, blame Obama, whoever else. No, makes some decisions, set some goals, and go out there and do it. Again, what Adler’s not saying is that we’re not affected by our environment, we clearly are, and as we talk about his idea of birth order, clearly some things affect us. But we not passive completely, we’re active as well.

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Birth order is what Adler’s most well known for. Clearly, although he’s well known for that, some people have criticized him as over-emphasizing birth order, but Adler himself didn’t say that birth order is the big influence on our personality and the only one. He simply said it was one of any number of factors, but it’s one that he talked about. Birth order for Adler isn’t that you’re the first one out of the womb so your personality is this, it’s just that the social interactions of being first born as opposed to middle born as opposed to last born, are such, in most families, that they shape our personalities. That’s what he’s really trying to say, so again, he, as I mentioned earlier on, focuses on social interactions. Now,

remember that Adler is writing his stuff in a time when most families were two parent families, most kids had siblings, birth control was not widely available so in the 1930's and '40's, he's looking at an idea of family which is just no longer true anymore, and so you just have to calculate that in. These days, plenty of us grew up in single parent households, in blended families with step siblings and half siblings, so certainly, birth order has to be seen in the context of Adler's day. But as you'll read in your textbook, if you haven't already read that chapter, there is still a fair amount of evidence to indicate that birth order is influential.

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Adler pretty much focuses on the first born as being initially the center of attention, you know, has all the glory to him- or herself and then later on must share the attention. And the adjustment from being the only kid around to now having a younger sibling for Adler is kind of a key psychological event for the oldest born child.

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If the parents handle it poorly, Adler simply said the child is likely to be jealous and insecure. You know, the good old days when I was the only kid. And Adler says that these poorly handled first-borns are most likely to become neurotics, drunkards, criminals and perverts, which seems a little bit dramatic. But if the parents handle it...

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...well, and kind of incorporate the first born as kind of, you know, you're the older child, and you need to help just, and this child doesn't know what he's doing and we're going to give you responsibility and you get privileges, then that change happens in a way that the first born isn't jealous and insecure but rather they're protective of the younger siblings, they're responsible, you know, they're given these responsibilities and privileges, then they're secure. Their parents' attention didn't just disappear one day, the parents explained, "Hey listen, you're a big kid now so you're going to help us. So sometimes it might feel like we're ignoring you but we love you, but babies can't do much." You know, that kind of thing.

Middle-born...

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...children. I'm a middle-born so I like this aspect of Adler's theory. They're usually the best adjusted and the reason for that is the middle-born children never had a time when they were alone, they always had to share everything from the very beginning, with the older kids and then with the kids that come after them. So they're well-adjusted in that that's pretty much life. You know, you are not the only one that everyone fawns over and pays attention to. Life is sharing, and you've always had to share so you know how to do it. Sometimes middle-born children, though, can become competitive with their older born, I certainly was competitive with my older brother. And if the older sibling is particularly, you know, they're the good one, they're the smart one, and as the middle-born competes with them, they feel "I'll never be as good as them." Then they may stop giving up and say "I'm not going to be the good one, I'm going to be the bad one." Or "I'm not going to be the smart one, I'm going to be the dumb one." And the idea here is "hey, you're going to pay attention to me, Mom and Dad, and if I can't get the attention my older sibling did for being good or smart or polite, I'm going to go the opposite way. So while it may be negative attention, you're still going to give me attention." So while we're usually the best adjusted middle-born, there's some potential problems there, too.

Last...

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...born often has the most unrealistic view of the world. While last borns have to share everything, in some ways the last born always benefits: they don't have two parents to give them attention, but in some ways, maybe the older siblings also give them attention, and also protect them, care for them. So if you're the last born, you know that you're most likely to be the problem child simply because when you get out into the world, you're not going to have all these people giving you attention and protecting you. I have two brothers, a younger brother and an older brother, and then I have a sister. She was born a lot later than the rest of us. I promise you, we protected her. The school I went to, anyone that looked sideways at my sister, I was in their face threatening them, beating them up and my brothers were, too. So you know, she never had to, and this was boarding school as well so you know, you're kind of on your own at age 6, so we joke around that she never really had to be thrown into the *Lord of the Flies* situation because she always had these three older brothers that looked out for her. Anyway, so that's his...

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...order theory. It's one of the various factors that could be significant. Now, Adler points out that childhood is foundational because that's where we learn all of our social interactions, and he points out further that three things are so important to learn, have healthy attitudes as we go through childhood and that is how to love, the place of work, and friendship. Think about this. Love, our work environments, and our friendship environments: these are social contacts that are so important for all of us. All of us seek out love, and I'm not talking about LOVE love, but all of our love relationships—family, significant other ones. Most of us work, whether your work is a job or school. And again, friends. The social lessons that we learn on how to comport ourselves, the attitudes we bring from childhood in these three areas are going to go a long way toward being relatively successful, healthy psychologically in terms of our personalities as opposed to less so.

Adler also...

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...points out that if you wanted to write a book on how to ruin your children, those of you that are parents, this would be the way to start. He says there are simply three major areas of problem for human personality, and, again, this would come in perhaps how our parents treat us. And he would simply say the first one would be to create a severe inferiority in children. Sadly, some people grow up with this, they have parents or people in their lives that go out of their way to constantly point out "you're not as smart as your sister," or "you're ugly," or "you'll never amount to anything"; and clearly most of us can see, it's kind of a no-brainer, that if you come out of childhood with huge senses of inferiorities such that you feel beaten down in life that you don't even try anymore, it's going to cause problems. But the opposite is true, too. Adler says that if you're pampered, or you as a parent pamper your children, you give them everything they want, they don't have to learn to work for things themselves, when they get in trouble in school, you're helicopter parent intervening, taking the child's side, you're doing your child's homework, you're pampering them, they're not going to learn for themselves, they need to practice how to make decisions, how to be on their own, so don't be surprised when they never move out and they're still at home living with you at age 30 or 40. And finally, just plain all out neglect. The parents just aren't there for you, maybe they're not there physically, maybe they're not there emotionally, they just seem to be absent in one way or the other. So Adler's just stating the obvious, you know, that these three things will cause problems in adult life.