

Adlerian Theory: Ordinary People

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Alfred Adler was a contemporary of Sigmund Freud, and engaged with Freud in building psychodynamic theories. After some time of collaboration, Adler began to propose other theories that were different to Freud's line of thinking, which led to them parting ways. Adler was less deterministic in his view of human nature, and believed in choice. He asserted that though it is important where we come from, our biology and genetics don't determine our choices, and that we can reshape ourselves by social learning. It is important for the Adlerian therapist to understand the context of a person's life and the system they were brought up in, and what their perception or interpretation of reality is.

Adler believed in interpersonal relationships more so than internal psychodynamic, and believed that social influence and interest were the key to good mental health. If our sense of belonging is not fulfilled, anxiety is the result. (Corey, 2015)

In the movie, *Ordinary People*, the character of Conrad was suffering with guilt over surviving a boating accident that occurred with his brother. He felt inferior to his brother and carried a faulty notion that it was him who should have died rather than his brother Buck.

If I were employing the Adlerian modality with Conrad, I would start by forming a therapeutic alliance based on trust and mutual respect. I would ask about his early recollections, and look for any themes that might come up, particularly with his mother. I would want to understand his experience as the second and youngest child and how he experienced it within his family dynamic. Additionally, I would investigate his lifestyle to bring up his faulty assumptions, what past "mistakes" (in his perception) he is suffering from, and his feelings about his brother's death.

I would explain to Conrad that although events in our lives influence us, it is the interpretation of these events that shape our personality. We must address the faulty notions in his private logic to make changes to his lifestyle, and try and shift Conrad's thoughts to his strengths and assets.

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My main goal with the Adlerian treatment with Conrad would be to diminish his false notions about survival guilt, and provide encouragement and support in order to develop a new perspective (i.e. reorient and reeducate) and a sense of belonging in the world.

References

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