

# Theory and application



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

As the founder of the school of individual psychology, Alfred Adler is admired as one of the greatest minds in his field. The Austrian medical professional based his theories on four basic personality types: Leaning, Avoiding, Ruling and Social Useful.

Based upon this psychological societal structure, Adler was able to formulate entirely new ways of looking at the human psyche that are embraced by students of the science today as they strive to understand motivations behind so many different illnesses and behavioral issues.

The principles of Adler have been implemented in different types of psychiatry and counseling, and in particular they have been responsible for the existence of Adlerian group counseling, a science used by many therapists in their endeavors to learn about patients and encourage them to understand their place within society (Sonstegard, 2001). Adlerian theories are one of the basic psychological building blocks in practice, rated as highly as Freud by many professionals.

Through his fundamental research and beliefs in medicine, Adler has successfully opened new doors of theory and perception in the field of psychology, and the resonance of his published works and theories can be heard throughout the modern world of psychiatric medicine. With the four basic pillars of human personality set out, Adler was able to formulate insightful theories about human nature and the fabric of society.

Alfred Adler

Adler was born in Austria in 1870, and was active in the psychological world until his death in 1937. Adler studied the group dynamic closely and was

responsible for an entirely new way of looking at psychological problems of patients from his time up until our own.

His work was published in conjunction with many others in his profession many times over, and indeed psychology students are still picking up his books to gain some insight into the inner workings of the human mind.

Like his colleague Sigmund Freud, Adler was a highly educated and respected man in his later life, although he did have his critics early on. It seems that the 4 pillar personality types as well as what he called “individual psychology” were not exactly popular methods of study early on, with more traditional psychological models taking precedent.

After his death, resulting from a heart attack while lecturing in Aberdeen, Adler’s theories were preserved by the Adler School of Professional Psychology in Chicago as well as the establishment of several other learning institutions carrying his name throughout the United States.

The works of the man were extensive, but it is generally agreed that his major accomplishment were the books *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology* and *Understanding Human Nature*, both published in 1927.

These outlined his theory of individual psychology and of his four basic personality types; it is from these research and theoretical models that his students and future Adlerians would gain their most poignant perspectives on the human psyche, and in this respect Adler has given more to the future of psychology than most in his profession can ever hope.

Theory

The book *Psychologies of 1930* was written by a large group of psychologists including Adler, and the book featured a chapter written entirely by him entitled “Individual Psychology”.

This was to be his major insight into the psychological field, and it was at first in direct conflict with the theories of that psychological giant, Sigmund Freud. As Adler remarks in *Psychologies*, the Freudian school at that particular time was focused entirely on sexual psychology, while Adler himself was concerned greatly with the relation of a child to a parent, and a parent to the outside world.

With perseverance, Adler convinced the Freudian school that although this theory structure was based more on the individual and his relationship with outer influences instead of simply the parent-child relationship, he did merit acknowledgement.

The basic difference between individual psychology and the better known Freudian school of thought was simply that Adler believed his patients were not only prone to major personality development through contact with their parents, but subsequently other people and personalities like teachers, external family members, friends and employers.

Adler believed, unlike Freud, that each individual person was the product of a different set of psychology variables, and so should be viewed not as a mere grouping but as a unique person with a completely new and as yet unseen character and mind.

Individual psychology was difficult to accept for Freud and his followers, who instead believed that each person was essentially the same and related

primarily to his or her parents; from whom he or she would develop a similar personality.