4.

Social Psychological Theories: Adler, Fromm, Horney, and Sullivan

The psychoanalytic theories of personality formulated by Freud and Jung were nurtured by the same positivistic climate that shaped the course of nineteenth century physics and biology. Man was regarded primarily as a complex energy system which maintains itself by means of transactions with the external world. The ultimate purposes of these transactions are individual survival, propagation of the species, and an ongoing evolutionary development. The various psychological processes that constitute the personality serve these ends. According to the evolutionary doctrine some personalities are better fitted than others to perform these tasks. Consequently, the concept of variation and the distinction between adjustment and maladjustment conditioned the thinking of the early psychoanalysts. Even academic psychology was swept into the orbit of Darwinism and became preoccupied with the measurement of individual differences in abilities and with the adaptive or functional value of psychological processes.

At the same time, other intellectual trends which were at variance with a purely biophysical conception of man were beginning to take shape. During the later years of the nineteenth century, sociology and anthropology began to emerge as independent disciplines and their rapid growth during the present century has been phenomenal. While sociologists studied man living in a state of advanced civilization and found him to be a product of his class and caste, his insti-

tutions and folkways, anthropologists ventured into remote areas of the world where they found evidence that human beings are almost infinitely malleable. According to these new social sciences, man is chiefly a product of the society in which he lives. His personality is social rather than biological.

Gradually, these burgeoning social and cultural doctrines began to seep into psychology and psychoanalysis and to erode the nativistic and physicalistic foundations of these sciences. A number of followers of Freud who became dissatisfied with his myopia regarding the social conditioners of personality withdrew their allegiance from classical psychoanalysis and began to refashion psychoanalytic theory along lines dictated by the new orientation developed by the social sciences. Among those who provided psychoanalytic theory with the twentieth century look of social psychology are the four people whose ideas form the content of the present chapter—Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Harry Stack Sullivan. Of these four, Alfred Adler may be regarded as the ancestral figure of the "new social psychological look" because as early as 1911 he broke with Freud over the issue of sexuality, and proceeded to develop a theory in which social interest and a striving for superiority became two of its most substantial conceptual pillars. Later, Horney and Fromm took up the cudgels against the strong instinctivist orientation of psychoanalysis and insisted upon the relevance of social psychological variables for personality theory. Finally, Harry Stack Sullivan in his theory of interpersonal relations consolidated the position of a personality theory grounded in social processes. Although each of the theories has its own distinctive assumptions and concepts, there are numerous parallels among them which have been pointed out by various writers (James, 1947; Ruth Munroe, 1955; and H. L. and R. R. Ansbacher, 1956).

Our choice of the major figure for this chapter, Harry Stack Sullivan, is dictated primarily by our belief that he brought his ideas to a higher level of conceptualization and consequently has been a more pervasively influential theorist. Sullivan was considerably more independent of prevailing psychoanalytic doctrines; although he earlier used the Freudian framework, in his later work he developed a theoretical system which deviated markedly from the Freudian one. He was profoundly influenced by anthropology and social psychology. Both Horney and Fromm, on the other hand, kept well within the province of psychoanalysis in their thinking; Adler, although a separatist from the Freudian school, continued to show the impact of his

early association with Freud throughout his life. Horney and Fromm are usually referred to as revisionists or neo-Freudians. Neither of them engaged in developing a new theory of personality; rather they regarded themselves as renovators and elaboraters of an old theory. Sullivan was much more of an innovator. He was a highly original thinker who attracted a large group of devoted disciples and developed what is sometimes called a new school of psychiatry.

ALFRED ADLER

Alfred Adler was born in Vienna in 1870 of a middle-class family and died in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1937 while on a lecture tour. He received a medical degree in 1895 from the University of Vienna. At first he specialized in ophthalmology and then, after a period of practice in general medicine, he became a psychiatrist. He was one of the charter members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and later its president. However, Adler soon began to develop ideas which were at variance with those of Freud and others in the Vienna Society, and when these differences became acute he was asked to present his views to the society. This he did in 1911 and as a consequence of the vehement criticism and denunciation of Adler's position by other members of the society, Adler resigned as president and a few months later terminated his connection with Freudian psychoanalysis (Colby, 1951; Jones, 1955; H. L. and R. R. Ansbacher, 1956).

He then formed his own group, which came to be known as Individual Psychology and which attracted followers throughout the world. During the First World War, Adler served as a physician in the Austrian army and after the war he became interested in child guidance and established the first guidance clinics in connection with the Viennese school system. He also inspired the establishment of an experimental school in Vienna which applied his theories of education.

In 1935 Adler settled in the United States where he continued his practice as a psychiatrist and served as Professor of Medical Psychology at the Long Island College of Medicine. Adler was a prolific writer and published a hundred books and articles during his lifetime. *The practice and theory of individual psychology* (1927) is probably the best introduction to Adler's theory of personality. Shorter digests of Adler's views appear in the *Psychologies of 1930* (1930) and in the *International Journal of Individual Psychology* (1935). Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher recently edited and anno-

tated an extensive selection of passages from Adler's writings (1956) which is the best single source of information about Adler's Individual Psychology. Phyllis Bottome has written a book-length biography of Adler (1939). Adler's ideas are promulgated in the United States by the American Society of Individual Psychology with branches in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles and through its journal, *The American Journal of Individual Psychology.*

In sharp contrast to Freud's major assumption that man's behavior is motivated by inborn instincts and Jung's principal axiom that man's conduct is governed by inborn archetypes, Adler assumed that man is motivated primarily by social urges. Man is, according to Adler, inherently a social being. He relates himself to other people, engages in co-operative social activities, places social welfare above selfish interest, and acquires a style of life which is predominantly social in orientation. Adler did not say that man becomes socialized merely by being exposed to social processes; social interest is inborn although the specific types of relationships with people and social institutions which develop are determined by the nature of the society into which a person is born. In one sense, then, Adler is just as biological in his viewpoint as are Freud and Jung. All three assume that man has an inherent nature which shapes his personality. Freud emphasized sex, Jung emphasized primordial thought patterns, and Adler stressed social interest. This emphasis upon the social determinants of behavior which had been overlooked or minimized by Freud and Jung is probably Adler's greatest contribution to psychological theory. It turned the attention of psychologists to the importance of social variables and helped to develop the field of social psychology at a time when social psychology needed encouragement and support, especially from the ranks of psychoanalysis.

Adler's second major contribution to personality theory is his concept of the creative self. Unlike Freud's ego which consists of a group of psychological processes serving the ends of inborn instincts, Alder's self is a highly personalized, subjective system which interprets and makes meaningful the experiences of the organism. Moreover, it searches for experiences which will aid in fulfilling the person's unique style of life; if these experiences are not to be found in the world the self tries to create them. This concept of a creative self was new to psychoanalytic theory and it helped to compensate for the extreme "objectivism" of classical psychoanalysis, which relied almost entirely upon biological needs and external stimuli to account for the dynamics of personality. As we shall see in other chapters,

the concept of the self has played a major role in recent formulations regarding personality. Adler's contribution to this new trend of recognizing the self as an important cause of behavior is considered to be a very significant one (H. L. and R. R. Ansbacher, 1956).

A third feature of Adler's psychology which sets it apart from classical psychoanalysis is its emphasis upon the uniqueness of personality. Adler considered each person to be a unique configuration of motives, traits, interests, and values; every act performed by the person bears the stamp of his own distinctive style of life. In this respect, Adler belongs to the tradition of William James and Wilhelm Stern who are said to have laid the foundation for personalistic psychology.

Adler's theory of the person minimized the sexual instinct which in Freud's early theorizing had played an almost exclusive role in the dynamics of behavior. To this Freudian monologue on sex, Adler added other significant voices. Man is primarily a social and not a sexual creature. He is motivated by social and not by sexual interest. His inferiorities are not limited to the sexual domain, but may extend to all facets of his being, both physical and psychological. He strives to develop a unique style of life in which the sexual drive plays a minor role. In fact, the way in which he satisfies his sexual needs is determined by his style of life and not vice versa. Adler's dethroning of sex was for many people a welcome relief from the monotonous pansexualism of Freud.

Finally, Adler made consciousness the center of personality. Man is a conscious being; he is ordinarily aware of the reasons for his behavior. He is conscious of his inferiorities and conscious of the goals for which he strives. More than that, he is a self-conscious individual who is capable of planning and guiding his actions with full awareness of their meaning for his own self-realization. This is the complete antithesis of Freud's theory which had virtually reduced consciousness to the status of a nonentity, a mere froth floating on the great sea of the unconscious.

MAJOR CONCEPTS

Alfred Adler, like other personality theorists whose primary training was in medicine and who practiced psychiatry, began his theorizing in the field of abnormal psychology. He formulated a theory of neurosis before broadening his theoretical scope to include the normal personality, which occurred during the 1920's (H. L. and R. R. Ansbacher, 1956). Adler's theory of personality is an extremely

economical one in the sense that a few basic concepts sustain the whole theoretical structure. For that reason, Adler's viewpoint can be rather quickly sketched under a few general rubrics. These are (1) fictional finalism, (2) striving for superiority, (3) inferiority feelings and compensation, (4) social interest, (5) style of life, and (6) the creative self.

FICTIONAL FINALISM. Shortly after Adler dissociated himself from the circle that surrounded Freud, he fell under the philosophical influence of Hans Vaihinger whose book *The psychology of "as if"* (English translation, 1925) had been published in 1911. Vaihinger propounded the curious and intriguing notion that man lives by many purely fictional ideas which have no counterpart in reality. These fictions, for example, "all men are created equal," "honesty is the best policy," and "the end justifies the means," enable man to deal more effectively with reality. They are auxiliary constructs or assumptions and not hypotheses which can be tested and confirmed. They can be dispensed with when their usefulness has disappeared.

Adler took over this philosophical doctrine of idealistic positivism and bent it to his own design. Freud, it will be recalled, laid great stress upon constitutional factors and experiences during early childhood as determiners of personality. Adler discovered in Vaihinger the rebuttal to this rigid historical determinism; he found the idea that man is motivated more by his expectations of the future than he is by experiences of the past. These goals do not exist in the future as a part of some teleological design—neither Vaihinger nor Adler believed in predestination or fatality—rather they exist subjectively or mentally here and now as strivings or ideals which affect present behavior. If a person believes, for example, that there is a heaven for virtuous people and a hell for sinners this fiction, it may be presumed, will exercise considerable influence on his conduct. These fictional goals were, for Adler, the subjective causation of psychological events.

Like Jung, Adler identified Freud's theory with the principle of causality and his own with the principle of finalism.

> Individual Psychology insists absolutely on the indispensability of finalism for the understanding of all psychological phenomena. Causes, powers, instincts, impulses, and the like cannot serve as explanatory principles. The final goal alone can explain man's behavior. Experiences, traumata, sexual development mechanisms cannot yield an explanation, but the perspective in which these are regarded, the individual way of seeing them, which subordinates all life to the final goal, can do so (1930, p. 400).

This final goal may be a fiction, that is, an ideal which is impossible to realize but which is nonetheless a very real spur to man's striving and the ultimate explanation of his conduct. Adler believed, however, that the normal person could free himself from the influence of these fictions and face reality when necessity demanded, something that the neurotic person is incapable of doing.

STRIVING FOR SUPERIORITY. What is the final goal toward which all men strive and which gives consistency and unity to personality? By 1908, Adler had reached the conclusion that aggression was more important than sexuality. A little later, the aggressive impulse was replaced by the "will to power." Adler identified power with masculinity and weakness with femininity. It was at this stage of his thinking (circa 1910) that he set forth the idea of the "masculine protest," a form of overcompensation that both men and women indulge in when they feel inadequate and inferior. Later, Adler abandoned the "will to power" in favor of the "striving for superiority," to which he remained committed thereafter. Thus, there were three stages in his thinking regarding the final goal of man: to be aggressive, to be powerful, and to be superior.

Adler makes it very clear that by superiority he does not mean social distinction, leadership, or a pre-eminent position in society. By superiority, Adler means something very analogous to Jung's concept of the self or Goldstein's principle of self-actualization. It is a striving for perfect completion. It is "the great upward drive."

> I began to see clearly in every psychological phenomenon the striving for superiority. It runs parallel to physical growth and is an intrinsic necessity of life itself. It lies at the root of all solutions of life's problems and is manifested in the way in which we meet these problems. All our functions follow its direction. They strive for conquest, security, increase, either in the right or in the wrong direction. The impetus from minus to plus never ends. The urge from below to above never ceases. Whatever premises all our philosophers and psychologists dream of—self-preservation, pleasure principle, equalization—all these are but vague representations, attempts to express the great upward drive (1930, p. 398).

Where does the striving for superiority or perfection come from? Adler says that it is innate; that it is a part of life; in fact, that it is life itself. From birth to death, the striving for superiority carries the person from one stage of development to the next higher stage. It is a prepotent dynamic principle. There are no separate drives, for each drive receives its power from the striving for completion. Adler acknowledges that the striving for superiority may manifest it-

self in a thousand different ways, and that each person has his own concrete mode of achieving or trying to achieve perfection. The neurotic person, for example, strives for self-esteem, power, and self-aggrandizement—in other words, for egoistic or selfish goals—whereas the normal person strives for goals that are primarily social in character.

Precisely how do the particular forms of the striving for superiority come into being in the individual? In order to answer this question it is necessary to discuss Adler's concept of inferiority feelings.

Inferiority Feelings and Compensation. Very early in his career, while he was still interested in general medicine, Adler put forth the idea of organ inferiority and overcompensation (English translation, 1917). At that time, he was interested in finding the answer to the perennial question of why people, when they became sick or suffer some affliction, became sick or afflicted in a particular region of the body. One person develops heart trouble, another lung trouble, and a third lumbago. Adler suggested that the reason for the site of a particular affliction was a basic inferiority in that region, an inferiority which existed either by virtue of heredity or because of some developmental abnormalty. He then observed that a person with a defective organ often tries to compensate for the weakness by strengthening it through intensive training. The most famous example of compensation for organ inferiority is that of Demosthenes who stuttered as a child and became one of the world's greatest orators. Another more recent example is that of Theodore Roosevelt who was a weakling in his youth and developed himself by systematic exercise into a physically stalwart man.

Shortly after he had published his monograph on organ inferiority Adler broadened the concept to include any feelings of inferiority, those that arise from subjectively felt psychological or social disabilities as well as those that stem from actual bodily weakness or impairment. At this time, Adler equated inferiority with unmanliness or femininity, the compensation for which was called "the masculine protest." Later, however, he subordinated this view to the more general one that feelings of inferiority arise from a sense of incompletion or imperfection in any sphere of life. For example, the child is motivated by his feelings of inferiority to strive for a higher level of development. When he reaches this level, he begins to feel inferior again and the upward movement is initiated once more. Adler contended that inferiority feelings are not a sign of abnormality; they are the cause of all improvement in man's lot. Of course, inferiority

feelings may be exaggerated by special conditions such as pampering or rejecting the child, in which case certain abnormal manifestations may ensue, such as the development of an inferiority complex or a compensatory superiority complex. But under normal circumstances, the feeling of inferiority or a sense of incompleteness is the great driving force of mankind. In other words, man is pushed by the need to overcome his inferiority and pulled by the desire to be superior.

Adler was not a proponent of hedonism. Although he believed that inferiority feelings were painful he did not think that the relief of these feelings was necessarily pleasurable. Perfection, not pleasure, was for him the goal of life.

SOCIAL INTEREST. During the early years of his theorizing when he was proclaiming the aggressive, power-hungry nature of man and the idea of the masculine protest as an overcompensation for feminine weakness, Adler was severly criticized for emphasizing the selfish drives of man and ignoring his social motives. Striving for superiority sounded like the war cry of the Nietzschean superman, a fitting companion for the Darwinian slogan of survival of the fittest.

Adler, who was an advocate of social justice and a supporter of social democracy, enlarged his conception of man to include the factor of social interest (1939). Although social interest takes in such matters as co-operation, interpersonal and social relations, identification with the group, empathy, and so forth, it is much broader than all of these. In its ultimate sense, social interest consists of the individual helping society to attain the goal of a perfect society. "Social interest is the true and inevitable compensation for all the natural weaknesses of individual human beings" (Adler, 1929b, p. 31).

The person is embedded in a social context from the first day of life. Co-operation manifests itself in the relationship between the infant and the mother, and henceforth the person is continuously involved in a network of interpersonal relations which shape his personality and provide concrete outlets for his striving for superiority. Striving for superiority becomes socialized; the ideal of a perfect society takes the place of purely personal ambition and selfish gain. By working for the common good, man compensates for his individual weakness.

Adler believed that social interest is inborn; that man is a social creature by nature, and not by habit. However, like any other natural aptitude, this innate predisposition does not appear spontaneously but has to be brought to fruition by guidance and training. Because he believed in the benefits of education Adler devoted a great deal of his time to establishing child guidance clinics, to improving the

schools, and to educating the public regarding proper methods of rearing children.

It is interesting to trace in Adler's writings the decisive although gradual change that occurred in his conception of man from the early years of his professional life when he was associated with Freud to his later years when he had achieved an international reputation. For the young Adler, man is driven by an insatiable lust for power and domination in order to compensate for a concealed deep-seated feeling of inferiority. For the older Adler, man is motivated by an innately given social interest which causes him to subordinate private gain to public welfare. The image of the perfect man living in a perfect society blotted out the picture of the strong, aggressive man dominating and exploiting society. Social interest replaced selfish interest.

STYLE OF LIFE. This is the slogan of Adler's personality theory. It is a recurrent theme in all of Adler's later writings (for example, 1929a, 1931) and the most distinctive feature of his psychology. Style of life is *the* system principle by which the individual personality functions; it is the whole that commands the parts. Style of life is Adler's chief idiographic principle; it is the principle that explains the uniqueness of the person. Everyone has a style of life but no two people develop the same style.

Precisely what is meant by this concept? This is a difficult question to answer because Adler had so much to say about it and because he said different and sometimes conflicting things about it in his various writings. Then, too, it is difficult to differentiate it from another Adlerian concept, that of the *creative self*.

Every person has the same goal, that of superiority, but there are innumerable ways of striving for this goal. One person tries to become superior through developing his intellect, while another bends all of his efforts to achieving muscular perfection. The intellectual has one style of life, the athlete another. The intellectual reads, studies, thinks; he lives a more sedentary and more solitary life than the active man does. He arranges the details of his existence, his domestic habits, his recreations, his daily routine, his relations to his family, friends, and acquaintances, his social activities, in accordance with his goal of intellectual superiority. Everything he does he does with an eye to this ultimate goal. All of a person's behavior springs from his style of life. He perceives, learns, and retains what fits his style of life, and ignores everything else.

The style of life is formed very early in childhood, by the age of four or five, and from then on experiences are assimilated and utilized

according to this unique style of life. His attitudes, feelings, apperceptions become fixed and mechanized at an early age, and it is practically impossible for the style of life to change thereafter. The person may acquire new ways of expressing his unique style of life, but these are merely concrete and particular instances of the same basic style that was found at an early age.

What determines the individual's style of life? In his earlier writings, Adler said that it is largely determined by the specific inferiorities, either fancied or real, that the person has. The style of life is a compensation for a particular inferiority. If the child is a physical weakling, his style of life will take the form of doing those things which will produce physical strength. The dull child will strive for intellectual superiority. Napoleon's conquering style of life was determined by his slight physical stature, and Hitler's rapacious craving for world domination by his sexual impotence. This simple explanation of man's conduct which appealed to so many of Adler's readers and which was widely applied in the analysis of character during the 1920's and 1930's did not satisfy Adler himself. It was too simple and too mechanistic. He looked for a more dynamic principle and found the creative self.

THE CREATIVE SELF. This concept is Adler's crowning achievement as a personality theorist. When he discovered the creative self all of his other concepts were subordinated to it; here at last was the prime mover, the philosopher's stone, the elixer of life, the first cause of everything human for which Adler had been searching. The unitary, consistent, creative self is sovereign in the personality structure.

Like all first causes, the creative self is hard to describe. We can see its effects, but we cannot see it. It is something that intervenes between the stimuli acting upon the person and the responses he makes to these stimuli. In essence, the doctrine of a creative self asserts that man makes his own personality. He constructs it out of the raw material of heredity and experience.

> Heredity only endows him with certain abilities. Environment only gives him certain impressions. These abilities and impressions, and the manner in which he 'experiences' them—that is to say, the interpretation he makes of these experiences—are the bricks which he uses in his own 'creative' way in building up his attitude toward life. It is his individual way of using these bricks, or in other words his attitude toward life, which determines this relationship to the outside world (Adler, 1935, p. 5).

The creative self is the yeast that acts upon the facts of the world and transforms these facts into a personality that is subjective, dynamic, unified, personal, and uniquely stylized. The creative self gives

meaning to life; it creates the goal as well as the means to the goal. The creative self is the active principle of human life, and it is not unlike the older concept of soul.

In summary, it may be said that Adler fashioned a humanistic theory of personality which was the antithesis of Freud's conception of man. By endowing man with altruism, humanitarianism, co-operation, creativity, uniqueness, and awareness, he restored to man a sense of dignity and worth that psychoanalysis had pretty largely destroyed. In place of the dreary materialistic picture which horrified and repelled many readers of Freud, Adler offered a portrait of man which was more satisfying, more hopeful, and far more complimentary to man. Adler's conception of the nature of personality coincided with the popular idea that man can be the master, and not the victim, of his fate.

CHARACTERISTIC RESEARCH AND RESEARCH METHODS

Adler's empirical observations were made largely in the therapeutic setting and consist for the most part of reconstructions of the past as remembered by the patient and appraisals of present behavior on the basis of verbal reports. There is space to mention only a few examples of Adler's investigative activities.

Order of Birth and Personality. In line with his interest in the social determiners of personality, Adler observed that the personalities of the oldest, middle, and youngest child in a family were likely to be quite different (1931, pp. 144–154). He attributed these differences to the distinctive experiences that each child has as a member of a social group.

The first-born or oldest child is given a good deal of attention until the second child is born; then he is suddenly dethroned from his favored position and must share his parents' affections with the new baby. This experience may condition the oldest child in various ways, such as hating people, protecting himself against sudden reversals of fortune, and feeling insecure. Oldest children are also apt to take an interest in the past when they were the center of attention. Neurotics, criminals, drunkards, and perverts, Adler observes, are often first-born children. If the parents handle the situation wisely by preparing the oldest child for the appearance of a rival, the oldest child is more likely to develop into a responsible, protective person.

The second or middle child is characterized by being ambitious. He is constantly trying to surpass his older sibling. He also tends to be rebellious and envious but by and large he is better adjusted than either his older or younger sibling.