

*The Following Text Excerpt from PERSONALITY, 3rd Ed., Jerry M. Burger*

Alfred Adler's career serves as an excellent example of one man's lifelong striving to overcome feelings of inferiority. Adler was born in Vienna in 1870, the third of six children (one older brother and one older sister). Adler spent much of his childhood in his older brother's shadow. A series of childhood illnesses, particularly rickets, left Adler physically unable to keep up with his brother and other playmates in athletic and outdoor games. He almost dies of pneumonia at age four and twice was almost killed when run over by carts in the streets. Because of his physical inferiority, Adler received special treatment from his mother. However, this ended with the birth of his brother. "During my first two years my mother pampered me," he recalled. "But when my younger brother was born she transferred her attention to him, and I felt dethroned" (in Orgler, 1963, p. 2)



Adler also experienced feelings of inferiority in the classroom. He achieved only mediocre grades and did so poorly at mathematics one year he had to repeat the course. His teacher advised his father to take the boy out of school and find him an apprenticeship as a shoemaker. But this episode only seemed to motivate Adler. He studied furiously and soon became the best mathematics student in the class. He went on to receive his medical degree from the University of Vienna in 1895.

Adler never studied under Freud, nor did he ever undergo psychoanalysis, as required for becoming a practicing psychoanalyst (Orgler, 1963). The two theorists' association began in 1902 when Freud invited Adler to attend his discussion group after Adler had defended Freud's theory of dream interpretation against attacks in the local newspaper. Adler eventually was named the first president of the group in 1910.

However, growing disagreements with Freud led to Adler's resignation in 1911. Several members joined Adler in forming what was originally called the Society for Free Psychoanalytic Research - a name intended to express their objection to Freud's required adherence to his theory. Adler later changed the name of the association to Individual Psychology, established a journal, and received wide acceptance of his alternate interpretation of strict Freudian theory. As in his other battles to overcome early feelings of inferiority, so did Adler succeed in climbing out of Freud's shadow.

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