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INFERIORITY COMPLEX

A primary inferiority feeling is said to be rooted in the young child's original experience of weakness, helplessness and dependency. It can then be intensified by comparisons to siblings, romantic partners, and adults. A secondary inferiority feeling relates to an adult's experience of being unable to reach a subconscious, fictional final goal of subjective security and success to compensate for the inferiority feelings.

The perceived distance from that goal would lead to a negative/depressed feeling that could then prompt the recall of the original inferiority feeling; this composite of inferiority feelings could be experienced as overwhelming.

The goal invented to relieve the original, primary feeling of inferiority which actually causes the secondary feeling of inferiority is the catch-22 of this dilemma. This vicious circle is common in neurotic lifestyles. Feeling inferior is often viewed as being inferior to another person, but this is not always the case in the Adlerian view. One often feels incompetent to perform a task, such as a test in school.

Stemming from the psychoanalytic branch of psychology, the idea first appeared among many of Sigmund Freud's works and later in the work of his colleague Carl Jung. Alfred Adler, founder of classical Adlerian psychology held that many neurotic symptoms could be traced to overcompensation for this feeling. The use of the term complex now is generally used to denote the group of emotionally toned ideas.

The counterpart of an inferiority complex, a superiority complex is a psychological defense mechanism in which a person's feelings of superiority counter or conceal his or her feelings of inferiority.

An inferiority complex occurs when the feelings of inferiority are intensified in the individual through discouragement or failure. Those who are at risk for developing a complex include people who: show signs of low self-esteem or self-worth, of different ethnicity, have low socioeconomic status, or have a history of depression symptoms. Many times there are warning signs to someone who may be more prone to developing an inferiority complex.

For example, someone who is prone to attention and approval seeking behaviors may be more susceptible. Often, it is difficult to place an exact cause to the development of an inferiority complex.

Race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, mental health, physical appearance, or any character that is not within society's normative dominant traits can contribute to this.