

Adlerian Reading of *Everyday Use* by Alice Walker and *Good Country People* by Flannery O'Connor *Alice Walker'ın Günlük Kullanım'ının ve Flannery O'Connor'ın İyi Ülke İnsanları'nın Adleryen Okuması*

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Öz

Günlük Kullanım ve *İyi Ülke İnsanları* isimli kısa öykülerde karakterlerin çocukluk deneyimleri ve aile üyeleriyle ilişkileri yaşam süreçlerinin belirleyicisidir. Bu dinamikler ve farklı davranış kalıpları, akla, Alfred Adler'in, bireylerin çocukluk dönemindeki aşağılık komplekslerinden kaynaklanan mükemmellik mücadelesine odaklanan Bireysel Psikoloji'sini getirir. Adler, her bireyde var olan aşağılık kompleksine ve bunu telafi etmeye yönelik bir korunma eğilimi olarak üstünlük kompleksine vurgu yapar. Her iki öyküde de okuma yazma bilmeyen taşralı annelerin eğitilmiş kızlarına karşı hoşgörülü davranışları, her ikisinin de özgüvenden yoksun olmaları nedeniyle Adlerian bir bakış açısıyla değerlendirilebilir. Bu bağlamda, kalıtımın yanı sıra kültürel normları şekillendiren ortam ve dinamikler de önemlidir. Bu makale, Adler'in teorik çerçevesini, kahramanların psikolojik motivasyonlarını ve davranış kalıplarını eleştirel bir şekilde incelemek için uygulayarak, akademik bir bakış açısı ve teorik bağlamlandırma ile zenginleştirilmiş karşılaştırmalı bir analiz sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Keloğlan, Elektronik Çocuk Edebiyatı, Çoklu Mecra Anlatımı, Medyalararasılık, Dijital Kültürel Miras.

Abstract

The childhood experiences of the characters and their relationship with their family members are the determinants of their life processes in the short stories *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People*. These dynamics and their different behavioral patterns bring to mind the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler, which focuses on the struggle of individuals for perfection stemming from the inferiority complexes of childhood. Adler emphasizes the inferiority complex present in every individual and the superiority complex as a safeguard tendency to compensate for it. The illiterate rural mothers' tolerance toward their educated daughters in both stories might be evaluated from an Adlerian perspective since both are deprived of self-confidence. Within this context, the settings and the dynamics shaping the cultural norms, as well as heredity, are also significant. This paper applies Adler's theoretical framework to critically examine the protagonists' psychological motivations and behavior patterns, offering a comparative analysis enriched with scholarly perspective and theoretical contextualization.

Keywords

Alfred Adler, *Everyday Use*, *Good Country People*, inferiority complex, superiority complex

Introduction

Literature and psychology are interconnected due to the profound and multifaceted relationship between the two disciplines. Literature, focusing on human emotions and behavior, functions as a mirror that elucidates various psychological phenomena, while psychology provides scholars and readers alike with essential analytical tools, allowing the critical examination of characters or themes in literary works. Since psychology is a vast discipline dealing with human behavior and its possible motivations, it is used as a tool of literary criticism to enhance the understanding of the intricate motivations behind the behavior patterns of the characters in literature (Shahnaz, 2023, 36). As indicated by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature*, “sometimes a psychological theory, held either consciously or dimly by an author, seems to fit a figure or a situation” (Wellek & Warren, 1963, 89-91). Accordingly, based on the reciprocal relationship between literature and psychology and interrogating “human as a fully defined individual” (Adıgüzel, 2024, 1418), this study utilizes Adler’s concepts, such as social interest, inferiority complex, superiority complex, and striving for significance, to analyze the protagonists’ psychological processes. In other words, in the context of Alfred Adler’s *Individual Psychology*, these stories serve as case studies for examining how inferiority and superiority complexes shape character interactions. Although previous studies have explored Walker and O’Connor’s works through feminist, racial, or religious lenses, none have comparatively examined their characters through an Adlerian psychological framework. By situating this analysis within the socio-cultural contexts of the American South, this study reveals the complexities of identity, familial dynamics, and personal aspirations in *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People* from the lens of Adler’s theoretical framework.

The protagonists of the two short stories, Dee and Hulga, are struggling to follow their unique ways despite their traditional familial structures. The ongoing conflict in both stories stems from the clash between the intellectual arrogance of the protagonists and the present conventional mindset in their familial structure. The childhood experiences of the characters and their relationship with their family members are the determinants of the characters’ ongoing life processes. These determinant dynamics in the lives of the characters and their different behavior patterns bring to mind the *Individual Psychology* of Alfred Adler, which focuses on the struggle of individuals for perfection stemming from the inferiority complexes of childhood. Adler emphasizes the inferiority complex present in every individual and the superiority complex as a safeguarding tendency to compensate for the inferiority complex (Adler, 2011, 56). Considering the American South background of the two authors, Alice Walker and Flannery O’Connor, the rural settings and the devoted mother figures in both short stories seem to have a great influence on the character development of the two protagonists. The mothers’ tolerance toward their educated daughters in both short stories might be evaluated from an Adlerian perspective since both are illiterate rural women deprived of self-confidence. Besides all these, the settings and dynamics shaping the cultural norms, environment, and heredity in both short stories are also considered significant. This study aims to compare and contrast the characters in *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People* from an Adlerian perspective related to the abovementioned issues.

The common setting in both stories is rural South America with its deep and diverse cultural heritage. To have an overall insight into the short stories and understand the possible motivations behind the behaviors and reactions of the characters, it might be proper to focus on the dynamics of the region shaped by Indigenous, European, and African traditions. Due to the transatlantic slave trade, South America hosts many people from certain countries, whose ancestors were brought to this region years ago by colonial powers. This unpleasant case, in a way, turns into a rich context for authors as Flannery O’Connor underlines: “The great advantage of being a Southern writer is that we don’t have to go anywhere to look for manners; bad or good, we’ve got them in abundance” (O’Connor, 1969, 103). Alice Walker was inspired by the rich context of South America as well and depicts the dynamics of the region in her works.

Sharing South America as a common setting, the families in *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People* lack a father figure, which compels the mothers to shoulder the whole responsibility of their families. Despite their numerous devotions, the self-sacrificing mother figures never succeed in pleasing their daughters. The protagonists, Dee and Hulga, are the only educated members of their families. They both look down on their mothers and have some conflicts with the others. The living conditions in their hometowns and their personal experiences significantly affect their attitudes. The reason for their scornful manners seems to stem from the fact that they are literate children of illiterate mothers. When the mothers are taken into consideration, their excessive tolerance toward their daughters is related to their own established perceptions closely related to the surroundings in which they live. Before analyzing the characters from *Individual Psychology* of Adler, brief background information about the stories will be given to reinforce the possible relationship between Adler’s concepts and the behavior patterns of the characters.

Alice Walker in *Everyday Use* (1973) delves into the issues of Black Americans, identity, heritage, and fashion via the conflict between two generations: Mama and her arrogant daughter Dee. In other words, “the story traces the integration and separation

of the Black African roots among the African-Americans who witnessed a redefinition of their cultural heritage and identity” (Sharma, 2022, 96). Mama’s two daughters, Dee and Maggie, differ in their talents and appearances. The story starts with a scene about Mama and Maggie’s long-lasting preparations and waiting for the arrival of Dee, the only educated family member. Mama’s description of her daughters reveals that she favors Dee despite her scornful manners from childhood. The mother describes Maggie as less beautiful than Dee. She is illiterate and timid, and remains in the background due to her appearance and the burns on her skin. While waiting for Dee, Mama dreams about her attendance at a TV program, and Dee gives many clues about Mama’s heavy responsibilities and low self-perception. The huge gap between real life and her fantastic dream shows that since she never succeeds in satisfying Dee in terms of her appearance or their poor conditions, she tries to cope with and compensate for her stress through her dreams. She attributes male characteristics to herself in real life, giving a male-like description of her body. She portrays how she kills and cleans a hog like a man. But in her dream, she appears as Dee wants her to be. She has feminine characteristics, with a lighter skin color and glistening hair.

Eventually, Dee arrives with his boyfriend, and throughout their conversation, she demands the butter churn to be used as a decoration and the quilt as their family heritage to show off. Remembering that once she was disdainful of these objects, the mother and Maggie surprisingly watch Dee’s transformation. The conflict between Mama and Dee occurs when Mama refuses to give the quilts to Dee. This is the first time Mama prioritizes Maggie over Dee. Confronting rejection, Dee gets angry at Mama and ridicules Mama’s intention of giving the quilts to Maggie. To Dee, Maggie will not appreciate the actual value of the quilts by using them daily. Dee leaves the house with his boyfriend in anger.

The setting of Flannery O’Connor’s *Good Country People* (1955) is the same as in *Everyday Use*: a rural, isolated Southwestern town. Contrary to the black characters in *Everyday Use*, the characters in *Good Country People* are white in this story. A self-sacrificing mother and a rebellious, literate daughter are also present in this short story. Mrs. Hopewell, a divorced woman, is living with her 32-year-old Ph.D. daughter Joy Hopewell, who lost her leg during a hunting accident when she was a child. She has to wear a wooden leg. Due to her wooden leg and being overweight, Joy hates herself and officially changes her name to Hulga. She is against the patriarchal notion of objectifying women and constructs her identity as an independent female philosopher (Mohameed, 2022, 29). The ongoing conflict between Mrs. Hopewell and her daughter stems from the fact that, as a literal girl, Joy is not satisfied with whatever her mother does to make her happy. Mrs. Hopewell is an ordinary rural woman whose world is limited to her daily conversation with her tenant farmer, Mrs. Freeman, who has two daughters. Mrs. Freeman is proud that despite her age (15 years old), her younger daughter is married and already pregnant, and her older daughter (18 years old) has many suitors. As this is the case, Mrs. Hopewell compares Hulga with Mrs. Freeman’s daughters and aspires to her because Joy seems to disdain men. Despite her Ph.D. degree and age, Hulga does not work due to her wooden leg and heart disease. Her disability and health problems make her aggressive toward her mother. Hulga’s disability and health problems are also the reason behind Mrs. Hopewell’s pity and tolerance of her. To Mrs. Hopewell, Hulga’s education is useless, and she should have preferred to be a teacher, which is much more suitable for women. Contrary to her mother, Hulga is proud of her education, and she announces her being an atheist overtly. She is precisely against the female norms of the time with her education and marginal mindset.

The story’s central conflict occurs soon after a man who introduces himself as the Bible salesman named Manley Pointer arrives and tries to persuade Mrs. Hopewell to buy a Bible. Mrs. Hopewell does not like him, but after learning that he is an ordinary poor countryman with heart disease like Joy’s, she pities him. Upon seeing Manley at their dinner table, Hulga behaves rudely and pretends not to hear him. However, on the road back, Manley finds Hulga sitting alone and persuades her to meet again. Hulga fantasizes about their meeting, but after a set of events, it turns out that the Bible salesman is a deceiver since he steals Hulga’s wooden leg and escapes. The story ends with Hulga’s disappointment.

Despite their different contexts, Walker and O’Connor emphasize many facets of Southern country life via their characters. Analyzing these two short stories from Adler’s *Individual Psychology* will provide a deeper understanding of human nature for some possible reasons. Referring to some basic concepts and views of Alfred Adler will provide a better understanding of the comparison. Adler’s *Individual Psychology* overemphasizes inferiority and how the individual strives to achieve his life goal. To Adler, being human requires having an inferiority feeling and a constant struggle for perfection (Adler, 1997, 160). Everyone is faced with many obstacles, from childhood to adultery, and the feeling of inadequacy leads to voluntary acts to eliminate or surpass the inferiority feeling. The healthy process of striving for perfection is motivated by social interest. Namely, the welfare of others is taken into consideration in a healthy process of perfection. On the other hand, the feeling of inferiority becomes the basis of psychological maladjustment when the individual selfishly strives for superiority. Personal glory is at the forefront, and social interest is ignored (Ewen, 1998, 128).

1. A Comparative Analysis of *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People* from an Adlerian Perspective

This study adopts a comparative textual analysis method benefiting from the concepts of Alfred Adler's *Individual Psychology*. The characters' interactions, dreams, and internal monologues are evaluated as evidence of psychological constructs such as goal orientation, lifestyle formation, and social interest. Textual evidence from the stories is supplemented with insights from Adlerian psychology and recent scholarly studies. *Individual Psychology* prioritizes the social element. In other systems of psychology, there is a distinction between individual psychology and social psychology, but Adler does not dissociate them (Adler, 1969, 95). Adler's approach to conscious and unconscious is another point that should be considered. Contrary to the theories of Freud or Jung, which emphasize the significant impact of the unconscious on the psyche motivation of humans, in Alfred Adler's *Individual Psychology*, the conscious and unconscious mind "work together in the same direction and are not in opposition or conflict" (Adler and Brett, 1997, 17). Adlerian theory proposes that personality is mainly affected by some social determinants like the relationship between the individual and family during childhood, the life goals selectively preferred by the individual, and how the individual achieves them (Ewen, 1998, 15-16). According to Adler's theory, the experience of goal achievement is a way of self-perfection or striving for superiority. Adler's psychology regards human beings as a social unit, and "social interest" or "community feeling" is one of Adler's key concepts. The individual establishes a kinship with humanity via social interest, which provides proper personality development (Ewen, 1998, 128). Within this context, the problem exists when the individual denies his social interest and rejects cooperation. In *Understanding Life: An Introduction to the Psychology of Alfred Adler*, Adler puts forward that, being a member of a certain unit, the individual somehow has to cope with living together with others. Relatedly, social interest is simply defined as the phrase "me with you" as opposed to "me against you" (which would be the Adlerian definition of neurosis) (Adler and Brett, 1997, XII). Social interest will be a significant parameter in determining the social relations of the characters in *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People*. When the characters in both short stories are considered in terms of social interest, it reveals that some characters prefer to live in harmony despite harsh conditions, while others increase their tyranny to the extent that they are tolerated. In this article, the social interest of the characters will mainly be limited to their familial relationships since familial relationships can be regarded as miniature prototypes of extended social relations. His relation to others shapes the unique characteristic of a human being, and thus, social interest turns into a kind of parameter in the process of character formation:

A character trait is the appearance of some specific mode of expression and the part of an individual who is attempting to adjust himself to the world in which he lives. Character is a social concept. We can speak of a character trait only when we consider the relationship of an individual to his environment. (Adler, 2011, 116)

Considering Adler's views on the close relationship between the process of character formation and the necessity of socialization, the characters' social relations in the stories give many clues about their character traits from an Adlerian perspective. The mother figures in both stories are similar regarding their social interest since they shoulder the burden of their families, besides their dissatisfied daughters. Both protagonists, Dee and Hulga, constantly conflict with their families. It is especially their mothers who have to endure their arrogance and criticism. To start with, Dee, the protagonist of *Everyday Use*, her dissatisfied manners that start even from her childhood, as narrated by her mother. Upon describing how their house was burnt, she narrates how Dee hated their house and her sister. The mother raises money with the church's help and sends Dee to school. As the only literate member of the family, she humiliates her mother and sister with her scornful manner:

She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks' habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn't necessarily need to know. She pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away, like dimwits, at just the moment we seemed about to understand. (Walker, 1994, 26)

The "intellectual arrogance" of Dee toward her illiterate mother and sister clearly shows that the social interest or the innate potential present in any individual to communicate with others is problematic in Dee. Her arrogance also makes her indifferent since she does not care that, without her mother's struggle, it would not be possible for her to access education. Being aware of her privileged position as the only literate member of the family, she uses her privilege as a means of disdain against her mother and sister. Her scorning manners are not limited to the family members. Her relationship with her friends is similar as well. The reply of the mother to Maggie's question of whether Dee ever had any friends shows that she selectively chooses a few friends who adore her: "Impressed with her they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them" (Walker, 1994, 27). Dee's arrogance toward her family members and her friends shows that she tries to satisfy her social interest by humiliating others, which signifies the fact that the natural process of "me with you" is "me against you" in her relations.

Hulga, the protagonist of *Good Country People*, has a similar attitude toward her mother and others. Mrs. Hopewell needs someone to accompany her as she walks over the fields. This is a way of controlling whether the tenants are also working properly. "When Joy had to be impressed for these services, her remarks were usually so ugly and her face so glum..." (O, Connor, 1977, 106). Instead of appreciating the good service, her rude remarks and facial expressions are indicators of how she conflicts with others. Her reply to the reaction of her mother shows that she does not care about the others' views and resists her negative reactions: "Mrs. Hopewell would say, 'If you can't come pleasantly, I don't want you at all,' to which the girl, standing square and rigid-shouldered with her neck thrust slightly forward, would reply, 'If you want me, here I am – LIKE I AM'" (O, Connor, 1977, 106). Hulga's negative attitudes reveals that instead of living in harmony, she finds a pretext to conflict and transforms Adler's social interest or community feeling of "me with you" to "me against you" which is regarded as a kind of neurosis. To Mrs. Hopewell, the main reason for Hulga's aggressiveness is the accident she experienced years ago, which caused her to lose one of her legs and to use an artificial leg. Besides being disabled, her heart disease prevents her from living the life she dreams of:

Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about (O'Connor, 1977, 108).

Hulga's Ph.D. degree seems to be a kind of burden for her since she lives in rural land and among usual people who are unaware of education, her intellectual world is far away from the world of the people she is living with, as seen by the following sentences: "It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself – bloated, rude, and squint-eyed" (O, Connor, 1977, 108). Considering the conditions in South America described in both short stories, it can be inferred that the families' literal members have problems of communicating with each other. Within this context, as the only literate members of their families, the protagonists of the two stories resemble each other in terms of humiliating other people and thus having problems in terms of communication and integration. When their behavior patterns are analyzed from an Adlerian perspective, their denial of community feeling or social interest shows they are deprived of the necessary feeling of "adaptability" and "subordination," which causes their unrest. In *Understanding Human Nature: A Key to Self-knowledge*, Adler proposes that "Society has no place for deserters. A certain adaptability and subordination are necessary to play the game" (Adler, 2011, 170). The rude attitudes of Dee and Hulga prevent them from establishing proper personality development.

In addition to social interest, "inferiority complex" is one of the significant concepts in Adler's Individual Psychology. Adler's view related to the process of an individual's perception of life and its influence on the construction of some specific behavior patterns is closely associated with the inferiority complex:

One realizes that the beginning of every life is fraught with a more or less deep feeling of inferiority when one sees the weakness and helplessness of every child. Sooner or later every child becomes conscious of his inability to cope single-handed with the challenges of existence. This feeling of inferiority is the driving force, the starting point from which every childish striving originates. It determines how this individual child acquires peace and security in life, it determines the very goal of his existence and prepares the path along which this goal may be reached (Adler, 2011, 54).

From his views above, Adler clearly emphasizes that the feeling of inferiority in every individual is closely related to how he perceives the world. Namely, the life map of an individual is determined by his conception of the world and events, which are, in a way, the source of the inferiority complex. To Adler, the process of the later stage of life is shaped according to this feeling of inferiority and the ways the individual finds to overcome his complex. Childhood memories and prototypes are significant in Adlerian reading as well. To Adler, to overcome the present difficulties or to move forward from the status quo, every individual formulates a particular future goal. The future goal or plan makes the individual feel superior or safe against the negative case. The fixing of this goal dates back to early childhood, and the individual shapes his later life accordingly. "When the prototype – that early personality embodying a goal – is formed, the individual becomes oriented towards a certain direction. This enables us to predict what will happen later in life" (Adler and Brett, 1997, 3-5). In this sense, childhood memories and prototypes are significant determinants in the individual's life, which help them perceive the events and act accordingly. Because the established early childhood patterns will shape the individual's later perceptions. Adler is concerned with the feeling of inferiority as a natural process. To Adler, the feeling of inferiority has some advantages and disadvantages. He proposes that everybody sometimes doubts his "equal social value" as a social unit member by comparing himself with others. We develop some forms of superiority to hide this feeling of inferiority from others. That is to say, "We are moving from a felt minus to a desired plus, from a feeling of not being good enough to a belief that we are indeed good enough - a natural development, and one which can be encouraged" (Adler and Brett, 1997, XIV). The inferiority complex motivates us to develop our talents and upgrade within this context. This is the advantage of the inferiority complex. It turns into a problem when it prevents the progress of the individual or when the "felt minus" prompts the individual to a useless or dangerous "desired plus."

From an Adlerian perspective, both stories' characters strive for perfection to overcome their inferiority complexes. In *Everyday Use*, the scene about Mama's dream points to the possible reasons for her inferiority complex. The dream reveals that she "doubts her equal social value," as depicted above, since she is an African American woman, and throughout her life, she struggles to survive due to poverty and discrimination. That is why in her dream, she looks a strange man in the eye, which is impossible in real life (Walker, 1994, 25). Her "felt minus" of not daring to communicate with a white man turns into a "desired plus" via her dream since she overcomes her inferiority complex by experiencing her desires in her dream and thus coping with the burden of slavery, discrimination, and their ongoing influences. "The denial of the social identity of blacks and their invisibility" (Akman, 2023, 34) is a common suffering reason for African Americans living in America. Her appearance in her dream is another parameter that determines her inferiority complex. In real life, she describes herself as the following: "I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man" (Walker, 1994, 24). But in her dream, she appears as Dee wants her to be: "A hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights" (Ibid). The stark contrast between the feminine characteristics Mama attributes to herself and her appearance in real life shows that Mama is not happy with her appearance, and she desires to be accepted by Dee. Dee's scorning manners and attitude make Mama feel insufficient. That is why, in addition to the heavy household work, she has some aesthetic concerns to be appreciated by Dee, which turns into a goal for Mama to achieve and overcome her inferiority complex. Rooted in social class and illiteracy, Mama's feeling of illiteracy, her unrealistic dream of appearing on a Tv show, and her desire to be approved by Dee bring to mind Alfred Adler's long-term goal or the fictional final goal:

We all have a myriad of short, medium and long-term goals in our lives, and all these goals will have one thing in common. This is what Adler referred to as the 'long-term goal' or the 'fictional final goal'. It is in a way unfortunate that he uses this term, because this 'theme of themes' is not so much a goal, as a recurrent melody in the music of our lives, or a repeated master-pattern. An example of a 'fictional final goal' might be: 'I want to be good'; it is final, because it is the ultimate achievement of our lives, and fictional because we can never achieve it (Adler and Brett, 1997, XIII).

The relationship between mother and daughter in *Good Country People* is problematic as it is in *Everyday Use*. Mrs. Hopewell tries expects her daughter to act exactly according to the social norms ignoring her personal choices. Her critical eyes are always on Hulga in *Good Country People*. Because her daughter is far from society's standards. Though not directly depicted in the story, the "ideal girls" of her tenant farmer increase Mrs. Hopewell's concerns since one is married despite her early age and is pregnant, and the other already has many candidates. Hulga's artificial leg, heart disease, and Ph.D. education marginalize her in a society that prioritizes marriage as essential. From Mrs. Hopewell's views, it is clear that she is not satisfied with either the appearance or the attitudes of Hulga:

Mrs. Hopewell would look at her – a kind of indirect gaze divided between her and Mrs. Freeman – and would think that if she would only keep herself up a little, she wouldn't be so bad looking. There was nothing wrong with her face that a pleasant expression wouldn't help. Mrs. Hopewell said that people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not. Whenever she looked at Joy this way, she could not help but feel that it would have been better if the child had not taken the Ph.D. It had certainly not brought her out any and now that she had it, there was no more excuse for her to go to school again. (O'Connor, 1971, 107-108)

From the sentences above, it can be inferred that, not having an "ideal daughter" like Mrs. Freeman, Hulga's appearance and attitudes do not satisfy Mrs. Hopewell and turn into a kind of inferiority complex for her. Hulga's dissatisfaction with her life is reflected in her facial expression. Mrs. Hopewell indirectly gazes at Hulga and Mrs. Freeman simultaneously and criticizes her daughter's manners and education. In almost all scenes, including those between Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell, there is a direct or indirect conflict stemming from Hulga's attitudes and Mrs. Hopewell's dissatisfaction. Considering the social context of *Good Country People*, Mrs. Hopewell's critical attitudes may be evaluated from the fact that she "doubts her equal value" in society for having a daughter like Hulga, who does not conform to society's standards. She feels incompetent when comparing herself with Mrs. Freeman, whose daughters are "ideal" according to the norms of society. Mrs. Freeman becomes a representative of society, and even though she physically makes life easier for Mrs. Hopewell, her conversations and intrusive manners put Mrs. Hopewell into an inferiority complex. She repeats her favorite saying: "Nothing is perfect" (O'Connor, 1971, 105), to overcome her stress.

Closely related to the inferiority complex, the "superiority complex" is another significant concept in individual psychology that should be considered when analyzing the behavior patterns of the characters in the stories. Inferiority complex is regarded as a healthy stimulant for the development of any individual, while striving for perfection might result in a healthy process or pathological one: "Healthy striving for superiority (or perfection, or significance) is guided by social interest, and gives due consideration to the welfare of others. Conversely, the selfish striving for dominance and personal glory is distorted and

pathological” (Adler, 1958, 8). Adler points out the fact that to overcome the feeling of inferiority, individuals strive for perfection, which results in either a healthy process via social interest/ community feeling or a pathological one by selfish concerns. As a pathological consequence of striving for perfection, the superiority complex is defined when an individual persuades himself that he is superior, even though he is not, which is a kind of false success. Thus, the individual compensates for the feeling of inferiority. Ordinary people strive for superiority but do not have a superiority complex; this is just an ambition to succeed (Adler and Brett, 1997, 43-44). Adler describes the individuals suffering from the superiority complex as follows: “Such people are arrogant, impertinent, conceited, and snobbish. They attach more weight to appearances than actions” (Ibid, 130).

The peculiarities attributed to those suffering from the superiority complex are present in the protagonists of the two stories: Dee and Hulga. To overcome their inferiority complexes, they try to achieve their glory selfishly. Dee’s arrogant attitudes are the dominant factors determining the positions of her mother and sister. Even from her early childhood, Dee is dissatisfied with their poor financial situation and rejects this by struggling to seem different via her style, and hates the house they live in. After their house is burned, they move to another one, which is described as a “pasture.” Upon moving to the new house, which is a sign of their poverty, Mama thinks that when Dee sees it, she will “tear it down” and “never bring her friends” since her inferiority complex is closely associated with their financial situation. She tries to compensate for her complex via her arrogance and impertinence. Dee hates her sister Maggie before she goes to school, and after she returns, she scorns Maggie, claiming that she will not appreciate the actual value of the quilts, which are a cultural heritage for them. She demands the quilts she rejected while going to school since they were “old fashioned, out of style” (Walker, 1994, 33). Now she claims that they are handmade and priceless and she will hang them to show off, contrary to Maggie who, according to Dee, will be “backward enough to put them to everyday use” (Ibid.). Dee’s superiority complex prevents her from understanding others; selfishly, she only deals with her concerns. Her mother rejects her demand since she promised to give them to Maggie. Upon realizing that her insistence is in vain and her mother is decisive enough to reject her demand, she scorns her mother, claiming they will not understand the actual value of their heritage. Her last words are proof of her arrogance and superiority complex: “It’s really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you’d never know it” (Walker, 1994, 34-35). As stated above, Adler’s theory holds that every human being is born into a state of inferiority and strives toward a perceived superiority. This striving can be either constructive, guided by social interest, or pathological, leading to isolation and arrogance. In *Everyday Use*, Dee’s desire to elevate herself through education and cultural appropriation illustrates a superiority complex. Her scorn for her mother and sister suggests a compensatory mechanism for her internalized inferiority rooted in racial and socioeconomic marginalization

Hulga seems to be suffering from a superiority complex like that of Dee as well. To compensate for her artificial leg and heart disease, she gets a PhD, which is a rare case for the woman living at the time, but her advanced education isolates her from other people. Like Dee, she is arrogant and selfish. She cannot affiliate with either nature or the people around her. Though she does not like Mrs. Freeman, she “had learned to tolerate Mrs. Freeman, who saved her from taking walks with her mother” (O’Connor, 1971, 107). Even Glynese and Carramae were useful when they occupied attention that might otherwise have been directed at her.” Hulga’s systematic isolation reveals that she is deprived of social interest. According to the principles of Individual Theory, alienation or isolation drives the individual to vain life: “Lack of social interest tends to orientate people towards the negative, or ‘useless’ side of life” (Adler and Brett, 1997, 14). Related to Adler’s views, the lack of community feeling disconnects Hulga from nature and people and restrains her in arrogance, besides isolation:

All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn’t like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity. (O’Connor, 1971, 108)

The superiority complex of Hulga prevents her from connecting with other people and nature. Instead of enriching her mind and providing a rich context of nature and life, her advanced education and ongoing readings prevent her from establishing proper relations. She shouts at her mother and scorns her: Woman! Do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are not? God!” She further insults her mother, referring to a philosopher who does not make sense in Mrs. Hopewell’s world. Hulga’s vain and arrogant thoughts point to the possibility that she might be suffering from a superiority complex based on Adler’s views:

The superiority complex is one of the ways people who feel inferior try to escape from their difficulties. They persuade themselves that they are superior when they are not, and this false success compensates them for the state of inferiority that they cannot bear. (Adler and Brett, 1997, 43)

Hulga tries to escape from her reality related to her absent leg and heart disease. She tries to convince herself that she is intellectually far beyond other people, which can be explained as a kind of superiority complex that compensates for the feeling of inferiority. Most probably, the false success in her disillusionment leads to Hulga’s superiority complex. Hulga’s intellectual

level, which is far beyond that of the other people around her, is undeniable. The problem is that her intellectual background turns into an issue of pride and prevents her from communicating with others. Throughout the story, there is no single person with whom she communicates directly and willingly, except the Bible salesman. Her vicious circle stems from the fact that to compensate for her defect (her disability), she gets an advanced education, which might be defined as her “felt minus” to a “desired plus,” and achieving her goal leads to her feeling of impertinence and conceit. Living in her private world and not having any connection with others, Hulga’s isolation “is not a normal mental process,” according to Adler (Adler and Brett, 1997, 54). As indicated above, according to social interest, integration with society and having good relations are the usual processes for every individual. Hence, total isolation is problematic in the process of life. The arrogant manners of Hulga, her health problems, her physical defect, and her illusion of “success” prevent her from integrating with society. Hulga’s intellectual pride masks deep-seated feelings of inadequacy stemming from her physical disability and heart condition. Her PhD and atheism become tools of alienation rather than connection. In both cases, the protagonists’ behavior can be interpreted as pathological outcomes of failed social integration, reflecting Adler’s notion that true mental health involves cooperation and mutual respect.

Conclusion

Considering the healthy and pathological process of self-perfection in Adler’s *Individual Psychology*, a comparative Adlerian reading of *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People* shows how the behavior patterns of the characters of both stories seem to be pathological. The constant conflicts of the protagonists with others show that, in Adlerian terms, they both lack the necessary criteria of adaptation and subordination in their relations. The psychological motivations of the characters through the lens of Alfred Adler’s *Individual Psychology* emphasize their striving for superiority, besides their inferiority complexes, social interests, and life goals. In *Everyday Use*, Dee’s social relations with her friends and family members seem problematic since her transition from the “felt minus” to “desired plus” is based on her humiliating manners toward others. The final discussion between Dee and her mother reveals that she privileges herself and ignores others based on her selfish illusion of appreciating the actual value of the quilts. Additionally, keeping in mind the social context based on the hierarchy of whites over blacks and the poverty the family has to endure, Dee copes with her inferiority feelings of being born as a poor black in South America through her humiliating manners, her new mindset, and style. Dee’s erroneous way of life is fundamentally anchored in the pursuit of external validation. She privileges cultural prestige yet remains devoid of an authentic affiliation with her ancestral roots. Hulga of *Good Country People* might be categorized as pathological as well. Like Dee, she humiliates Mrs. Hopewell and the others, emphasizing her PhD. She lost one of her legs in an accident she experienced during her childhood, and her subsequent process is based on this tragic event. Besides, her mother narrates that she does not have the chance of living long due to her heart disease. Her artificial leg and illness seem to be the most influential factors in her construction of an inferiority feeling. From Adler’s viewpoint, her advanced education, on which she bases her success and privilege, is a kind of superior feeling to overcome her inferiority complex. Hulga rejects faith and embraces nihilism, but she is ultimately unprepared for real-world manipulation. In South America at the time, Hulga was against the dictated traditional stereotypes and cultural codes of the society related to the life of women, which primarily gave particular importance to marriage for girls, even at an early age. As for the devoted and submissive mothers from the Adlerian perspective, their life goals seem to be shaped according to the circumstances in which they are living. They tolerate their daughters to some extent, but underneath this tolerance lies a desire for common courtesy. The dream of Mama in *Everyday Use* is the signifier of her feelings of inferiority.

Dee is ashamed of the poor conditions of their house and prioritizes herself over her mother and her sister due to her education. Mama’s dream reveals that she is confronted with Dee’s dissatisfaction several times; she feels insufficient and tries to satisfy Dee’s expectations in her dream. In addition to her inferior position in South America, the relationship between Dee and her mother determines Mama’s “felt minus” and her “desired plus” is to be a mother like Dee wants her to be and to communicate with a white on equal terms. When it comes to the other self-sacrificing mother, Mrs. Hopewell of *Good Country People*, she tolerates Hulga for her disability and heart disease. However, from her dialogue with Hulga and Mrs. Freeman, it seems that Hulga is not the “ideal” girl according to the norms of society, which reinforces Mrs. Hopewell’s inferiority. That is why she is uncertain about her “equal social value” in society in Adlerian terms. To overcome her “felt minus,” she consoles herself with the illness of Hulga, which, according to doctors, will shorten Hulga’s life, and repeats her favorite saying: “Nothing is perfect.” Besides, Mrs. Hopewell gets on well with Mrs. Freeman despite her constant wonder and difficulty in getting her farm work done and satisfying her community’s feelings, even if it turns into a vicious circle.

A comparative analysis of *Everyday Use* and *Good Country People* from an Adlerian perspective provides a deeper analysis of the main characters in the short stories based on their behavior patterns. It also reveals how feelings of inferiority and superiority shape the characters’ behavior. Hulga and Dee compensate for their insecurities by constructing identities that ultimately alienate them from others, whereas characters like Mama and Maggie find fulfillment through authenticity and social

interest. The South American setting of both stories has a different influence on the educated but arrogant protagonists in illiterate surroundings. Even if the inferiority complexes of both Dee and Hulga stem from their private environments related to the families' positions in society, they both prioritize themselves, emphasizing their education and mindset. They both contribute to the feeling of inferiority in their mothers via their dissatisfaction and marginal attitudes. An Adlerian analysis of these stories reveals how feelings of inferiority and superiority shape the characters' behavior. Hulga and Dee compensate for their insecurities by constructing identities that ultimately alienate them from others, whereas characters like Mama and Maggie find fulfillment through authenticity and social interest. Still, considering the conflicts in both short stories, the egoist striving for superiority and insulting manners of the protagonists to get individual glory may be evaluated as pathological in Adler's terminology. Their psychological growth is left unfinished as their incapacity to cooperate and adjust indicates a rejection of Adler's ideal of social interest. The maternal figures, on the other hand, exhibit socially significant behavior patterns that are more in line with Adlerian values despite their flaws.

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