

Approaches question
Psychodynamic approach

Henry is a man who often finds it difficult to distinguish between reality and fantasy. For example, he believes that he is better than anyone else at the job he does, and that rapid promotion will inevitably follow when other people realise it too. However, few of his colleagues believe this and they feel that Henry is not really facing up to the realities of his everyday life. How might this be explained?

(a) Describe how two approaches might try to explain Henry's difficulty in distinguishing reality from fantasy. (6 marks + 6 marks)

The psychodynamic approach states that unconscious urges are revealed in symbolic form. Thus, the unconscious mind 'leaks' into consciousness by means of irrational behaviour, in Henry's case he unconsciously desires a promotion, but because he consciously knows he may not get one, or others work at a higher standard and may be receiving one before himself he behaves irrationally. The irrational behaviour comes in the form of his illogical confident thoughts that everyone isn't as good as him at his job and he thinks that it is due to other people's foolishness that he has not yet been promoted, therefore, not placing any of the blame upon himself.

Another explanation offered by the psychodynamic approach comes from Freud's ideas on the structure of the personality, which is made through the development of the id, ego and super ego. The id is part of the unconscious and is the most primitive drive, which demands immediate satisfaction and is governed by the pleasure principle. The ego regulates the id, as it is part of the conscious and intellectual drives. The ego is governed by the reality principle. The super ego is the ethical and moral component that is learned from others, especially parents. It gives rise to the conscience. In terms of Henry's irrational behaviour, his personality structure may not have been properly developed which leads to him reacting a little differently to other people who have got a completely developed id, ego and super ego. For example, his conscience development is learnt particularly parents, but Henry may have had disrupted bonds with his caregivers and so wasn't able to learn this, therefore in his later adult life he is undeterred from acting so superior and boastful because he may not worry so much about the social consequences. Although this may seem a little far fetched psychodynamics are particularly concerned about the importance of early childhood on later behaviour. They are also influenced by the importance of the unconscious mind, and so it is possible that Henry's ego may not have developed properly either and so his personality isn't governed by any reality principle, and as his colleagues expressed he may not be facing up to the reality of things, he may not get promoted, others may be better than him and it may not just be that other haven't realised his potential, he may have some blame to place upon himself. If Henry's id isn't controlled by the ego then he is able to ignore reality and just expresses his desires of a promotion thus more money. As the pleasure principle demands immediate satisfaction and he has been unable to satisfy this unconscious desire so far, he thinks irrationally and childishly and just blames others.

On the other hand, the Behaviourist approach assumes that all behaviour is learnt and so his current behaviour may not have anything to do with an underdeveloped personality. Operant conditioning may have played a key role in stamping in his irrationally confident behaviour, for example as operant conditioning is learning through consequences Henry may have been continuously rewarded similar behaviour (i.e. maybe his irrational confidence has got him many of the things he has desired through life even though others didn't think it was possible) therefore positive reinforcement of getting what he wants has stamped the behaviour in and shaped his personality to match.

Another explanation offered by this approach is that of vicarious reinforcement, a concept brought into Behaviourism through the social learning theory, it was proposed by Bandura and it is a more powerful form of learning in which he states that humans watch when other people are rewarded or punished for certain actions and then take upon actions which would have made the outcome of what they watched a reward. For example, when schoolchildren are misbehaving the teacher will often punish them in front of other students, the other students would like to avoid similar embarrassment and so most continue to behave acceptably in order to be rewarded not punished. In Henry's case he may have watched another colleague behave in a similar manner and get the desired reward, a promotion. And so, through vicarious reinforcement he behaves in a similar way in order to get a similar reward.

Also, In Freud's psychosexual stages, of which there are five, one of them may be of great importance in order to investigate Henry's irrational behaviour as the phallic stage is thought to be the stage in a child's development where fantasies are normally developed. Therefore, if during this stage in Henry's sexual development he was unable to fulfil this experience (which occurs around the age of three) then he could be observed as someone who is 'stuck' in that part of his development and so he is unable to react 'normally'.

(b) Assess one of these explanations of Henry's difficulty in distinguishing reality from fantasy in terms of its strengths and limitations. (6 marks)

Freud changed the Western view of human nature; in particular it led to the recognition of the importance of early childhood experience on later behaviour. In terms of Henry's behaviour the psychodynamic approach could explain that he may have had a failure to maintain or even get a close bond with a role model and so this may have caused him not to have a properly developed personality. Therefore, causing him to react differently to others in terms of getting things they desire.

However, this approach was developed in the interest of mental disorder and psychological forms of treatment, but Henry's behaviour could just show ignorance and that isn't a mental disorder, just a personality flaw. Also, even if early childhood experiences play an unconscious role in the development of Henry's flawed personality Freud's model doesn't give any explanation about the effects of current problem on his behaviour, he may just really need the promotion to deal with money problems for example, and so when he thinks that he may not get one he 'buries his head in the sand' and blames others for problems which he has caused.

Psychoanalytic's place a lot of emphasis on sexual factors as the cause of later problems, but it would be difficult to describe any part of Henry's behaviour in terms of sexual factors in a convincing way. Also, by emphasising the sexual factors the approach therefore, deemphasises the importance of social factors which may have caused his irrational behaviour, in terms of the money idea, Henry may be too proud to let others aware of his problems and so in an attempt to cover it up he acts as if everything is fine and that he will get what he wants and no-one will be none the wiser.

Another weakness of the psychodynamic approach is the fact that anything that the therapist says will be unfalsifiable because any interpretation but the therapist is impossible to deny, since denial is taken as a sign of the unconscious mind. Therefore, if Henry denied that early childhood experiences didn't stutter his personality growth he would have been thought to have been trying to use the defence mechanism of denial to protect himself from unconscious memories, when in reality he may be correct.

(c) How would one of these approaches investigate Henry's difficulty in distinguishing reality from fantasy? (6 marks)

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Typical methodology of the psychoanalytic approach is that of case studies, especially with the use of clinical interviews. A long and detailed description of about five young children could be conducted. The children used would be those who are viewed not to be able to fully experience the phallic stage, and so the study would begin at about the age of three. During the phallic stage the children's libido focuses on their genitalia and their opposite sex parent. Resolution is formed through identification with the same sex parent and is important in the development of a conscience. Thus, if the participants were unable to identify with any kind of opposite sex role model then it might be viewed that they could become stuck in the phallic stage as resolution could not commence. The children's caregivers could give interviews about the child's behaviour throughout their lives including up until they were in adulthood for a more detailed longitudinal example. The behaviour could be compared to five other children, in the control group, who are able to fulfil the phallic stage. When in adulthood the ten participants would undergo hypnosis to reveal any unconscious information about their personality and the affect which childhood had upon it, also clinical interviews would be held with them. All of this combined would give an idea of whether being 'stuck' in

this stage of development makes people behave irrationally in later life. For example, if Henry is 'trapped' in this stage of psychosexual development then his irrational confidence and fantasy of obtaining a promotion when others see that this is probably not going to go ahead, then his behaviour is due to a personality temperament that comes from being 'trapped' in the phallic stage.

(d) Evaluate the use of this method of investigating Henry's difficulty in distinguishing reality from fantasy. (6 marks)

This theory is very deterministic; it sees childhood behaviour as dependant on innate forces, and adult behaviour dependant of early childhood experience and its effect on the unconscious mind. This allows little, if any, room for free will. In terms of Henry the psychodynamic theory would suggest that none of his behaviour reflects a current social factor, just his unconscious mind influencing his fantasy driven life, whether that be in the terms of being 'stuck' in the phallic stage or having an underdeveloped ego and super ego leaving his unconscious uncontrolled id to run riot. However, this may be a little too simplistic and unable to account for many other things throughout life which shape and build personality. Henry's fantasy thought processes may be driven by an adult experience not just early childhood experience, i.e. if an adult has a scary experience with a spider like it crawling upon their bed they may develop an irrational fear of spiders even when no such event was experienced in childhood and so this fear can't be linked to any childhood experience, and so this theory fails to offer an explanation.