

MA IN YOUTH AND COMMUNITY STUDIES

(DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMME)

YEAR 1

MODULE ED5111 : Psychology

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To work with people it is important to understand the
development of their sense of self and their unconscious
motivations. Discuss.

Sense of self is the profound emotion of our individual value. All workers, particularly youth orientated, should be familiar with the important part self esteem plays in the recognition of who we are and how we deal with the events of our lives. According to Heinz Kohut, sense of self is not something you would love to have but do not have. All of us need self esteem and adolescence is the time to balance and retain the level of sense of self gained during our childhood. "Good sense of self is important because it helps you to hold your head high and feel proud of yourself and what you can do. It gives you the courage to try new things and the power to believe in yourself. It lets you respect yourself, even when you make mistakes. And when you respect yourself, adults and other kids usually respect you, too." (McCombes, B. I. 1997)

This paper presents some concepts with regard to the study of human development. Primarily, it discusses the importance of understanding the development of self in working with young people by describing the psychodynamic theory of self and its development.

The first part of this essay deals with models of development and theories on consciousness, intelligence, learning, memory, motivation and personality. These theories on human development are based on biological, psychological, sociological and cultural forces. The second part tackles some assumptions in the psychodynamics of an individual. This section relates the theory in a youth work context. The last chapter discusses the implication of the knowledge of this theory on working with youth.

Early adolescence is considered the most difficult time due to intense physical, cognitive, and contextual changes. Throughout this period there are three main components: biological; focusing on intelligence, physical attractiveness, athletic

ability, onset of puberty, temperament, and resistance to disease and injury, psychological; peoples self perception, including levels of ego and moral development and cognition and social; family, ethnic culture, socio-economic status, friendships, schooling, and gender.

These changes take place at the same time, affecting a variety of avenues in the youths life in a manner that can be overwhelming. Middle adolescence takes place at some stage in the high school years, and late adolescence is an outcome of educational constitution that for many delays the theory of adult tasks.

Adolescence recognizes the development of a rational set of principles and life strategies as the chief individuality attainment. As mentioned above the three categories of changes in self-concept and sense of self prepare the young person for establishing an identity. Psychological theories give us more understanding of this.

Human Development

Atkinson and Hilgard (2003) summarize five contemporary psychological perspectives:

1. Biological - All behaviour and mental processes originate from neurological development.
2. Behavioural - Learning involves the association of stimulus and response, or secondary reinforces. Classical conditioning theory best exemplifies the behaviourist model.
3. Cognitive - studying behaviour to discover the underlying mental processes, “such as perceiving, remembering, reasoning, deciding and problem solving.” (Atkinson and Hilgard, 2003)
4. Subjective - Behaviour as from the perspective of self-perception. Through observations of the persons judgements and behaviours, which are affected by

issues such as their personal history and current motivational state, it is possible to comprehend the individuals social conduct.

5. Psychoanalytic - Man is viewed as an animal caught in a state of conflict between primal urges and civilized forms of behaviour. Unconscious motivation is a manifestation of sexual and aggressive urges.

According to Westen (1990), psychoanalytic approaches "take as axiomatic the importance of conflicting mental processes; unconscious processes; compromises among competing psychological tendencies that may be negotiated unconsciously; defence and self-deception; the influence of the past on current functioning; the enduring effects of interpersonal patterns laid down in childhood; and the role of sexual and aggressive wishes in consciously and unconsciously influencing thought, feeling, and behaviour" (p. 21). With such an inclusive definition, it is not surprising that discussions of psychodynamic approaches integrate findings from more experimental areas of psychology about self, unconscious awareness, and even biological distinctions in memory systems.

Theories of the Self

In his theory of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud explained how the unconscious mind operates by suggesting that it has a particular structure. He proposed that the self was divided into three parts: the Ego, the Superego and the Id. The Id, according to Freud, represents primary process thinking- our most primitive need gratification type thoughts. It constitutes part of one's unconscious mind and acts on primitive instinctual urges such as sex, hunger, and anger. The Superego, on the other hand represents our conscience and counteracts the Id with moral and ethical thoughts. The moral agent links both our conscious and unconscious minds, standing in opposition to the desires of the Id. The Superego is itself part of the unconscious

mind; it is the internalisation of the world view and norms and mores a child absorbs from parents and peers. What stands in between the Id and the Superego is the Ego. It balances our primitive needs and our moral beliefs. Freud stated that the Ego resides almost entirely in our conscious mind.

Kohut (1977), who extended his theories from those of Freud, believed that self is "our sense of being an independent centre of initiative and perception...of being integrated with our most central ambitions and ideals... and with our experience that our body and mind form a unit in space and a continuum in time" (155). Kohut stresses the role of empathy, that is, sympathetic understanding of the introspection of the other, although he never says exactly what it is. He intends empathy not only as a therapeutic agent, but also as an instrument of theoretical knowledge. Kohut mentions three stages necessary for a child to develop a strong sense of self:

1. Mirroring - focused on the earliest caregiver, usually Mum. The need is for a mirroring response which works towards the building of self esteem, self assertion, goal directed behaviour, and personal fulfilment.
2. Idealisation - Secondly, the child acquires cohesion, the ability to soothe her- or himself and a capacity for ideals through experiences of merging with the perceived greatness and calm of an idealized selfobject, who is often Dad, but can be mother in a different role, or grandparents, etc.
3. The need to be like others - A gratifying sense of belonging and of continuity in place, space and time through twinship. Selfobjects, both adults and peers, alongside whom one engages in simple parallel play. This resembles mirroring, but mirroring has to do with our sense of uniqueness; twinship relates to our sense of likeness.

Failure of the primary care giver to provide these responses brings about a lack of

cohesion of self, a low self esteem, a diminished sense of vitality, and a functional disharmony deteriorating from a sense of order to that of a chaos.

Implications

In dealing with young people, one must know the psychodynamic theories advanced by the likes of Kohut, Freud and Maslow. This is important for the effective caring of these youths. By knowing the attitude, personality, perception, learning and motivation of the young people, youth workers can approach the behaviours that concern them such as self-esteem, self-discipline and productivity in a manner constructive to the individual. This is important for all workers, whether working in specialized subject areas or not.

Understanding the development of self enables workers in any setting to provide motivations to fulfil certain felt needs. A basic assumption of all need theories is that, when need deficiencies exist; individuals are motivated into action in order to satisfy them. The best known of the Content Theories of Motivation is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This is based on the assumption that people are motivated by physiological, safety, social, ego and esteem, and self-actualisation needs. These needs are ranked, according to the order in which they influence human behaviour, in hierarchical fashion.

Empowerment, on the other hand, is a technique for improving self-esteem, which is being undertaken by many social organisations. This empowerment results in increased competence, self-discipline and self-respect, all of which are very important to one's well-being. Moreover, knowledge of an individual's self development can create an environment that results in the person feeling better about themselves when they are in it. Having this, it is possible to consider skills and abilities when planning future work and to make sure that the young person is satisfied with the procedures

and processes involving the program.

To meet the needs of its youth, the community needs to respond by developing intervention services for them that focus on building self-esteem, alternative leisure patterns, redirecting inappropriate lifestyles or behaviours, developing personal skills, assisting with pre-employment training, development of morals and values and enhancing the quality of life through positive recreation experiences (Brown & Sevcik, 1999).

The building, maintaining, and utilizing self-esteem to achieve personal growth and success, is one of the most important, yet overlooked qualities a young person can have. Raising low self-esteem can be a difficult process but one that is surely successful with the intervention of an effective program-- empowering and counselling young people to visualize themselves as productive members of their communities. Moreover, teaching self-esteem becomes a process that is continued by the young people themselves, as their positive and productive attitudes permeate their interactions with those around them.

Studying development of self enables a worker to give clearer direction on how a young person can pursue their lives. An environment that constantly raises a youth's self-esteem, above that she/he experiences anywhere else in her/his life, will be where she/he most desires to spend their time, yields very high satisfaction with the program being provided, and costs next to nothing. People do more of what they enjoy and less of what they do not enjoy.

Through understanding a persons developing sense of self and their unconscious motivations, workers can design programs to compliment and enhance their self-esteem, self-discipline, commitment and teamwork skills. These programs may include therapeutic recreation programs which play an important role; cultural

activities which build self-discipline and perseverance in youth, for example by learning to play a musical instrument, rehearsing a play or executing a mosaic.

A well-organized youth project first establishes its clientele. It is then possible to create an effective service with the most appropriate kinds of designs and policies. As Lofquist (1992) observes, the reliance on a deficit-focused, diagnosed problem model to frame behaviour has fostered an overly negative perspective and a limited vision. The overly negative treatment of the current generation of young people is evident in several areas (Astroh, 1993).

Effective work with young people involves broaching both their behavioural and psychological needs. By assuming behaviour is potentially predictable and lawful, is learnt and can therefore be altered by relearning; that dysfunctional and functional conduct reflects the same mechanisms and that existing behaviour patterns are maintained by current circumstances, workers can focus on well-defined targets. Substantial attention can then be paid to the young persons sense of self when describing their own behaviour and environment. Kohuts insistence on the use of empathy has become one of the most valuable and effective working tools. Enabling a young person to feel understood, for perhaps the first time in their lives, can knock down many rhetorical walls that have been constructed and are preventing their sense of self from developing constructively. The success of this approach is evident in youth projects throughout Great Britain.

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