

## Critically evaluate the psychoanalytic approach – Vicki Holgate

Sigmund Freud the founder of psychoanalysis (1896-1939) worked on many ideas and cases that were to do with the mind and the body. Freud spent most of his life in Vienna where he expressed and distinguished the concepts of the unconscious, infantile sexuality and repression.

Freud identified psychosexual stages, which are: -

**Oral stage** – (approx 0-2 years) During the first year of life the libido is gratified through stimulation of the mucous membrane of the mouth (breast feeding, sucking behaviour). The child will enjoy sucking and biting. Freud suggested that if a child is weaned too early or too late they can have a fixation by using sucking sensations. Freud though did not give any indication when the correct time is to wean a child in order to overcome these fixations. He did though suggest that the fixations could be apparent in later life in the form of pen sucking or biting of the nail and smoking, as they are all types of oral stimulation/activities. Freud also said that too little stimulation in this early age could lead to the child in adult life having uncaring, self-centred attitude. And the other way with too much stimulation can lead to self controlled, gullible and unrealistic goals. These are both long lasting affects in later life if this stage is not correctly overcome.

**Anal stage** – (approx 2-4 years) Pleasure is focused on the passing or excretion of feces. On this stage Freud said that if parents were too pushy and strict with toilet training then the child may become anally retentive – resulting in excessive tiredness and cleanliness and very self controlled. If the child enjoyed the training this could lead to an anally expulsive personality – messy, untidy and sadistic. However where did Freud provide this evidence that this is caused in later life if the child does not pass through this stage sufficiently?

**Phallic stage** (approx 3-6 years)– Child becomes aware of new pleasures – playing with themselves. Girls and boys development takes a different path from this stage as Freud believed that children now begin to have sexual feeling towards their parents and that the same sex parent is now a rival. (Known as Oedipus complex). Boys feel hostile towards their father as they fight for attention from their mothers. Boys feel that the father may castrate them but then turn the other way and act the same way as their father in order to possess his mother. This is where they learn the moral code of conduct and all sexual desire is now repressed. For girls (Electra complex) realise that they don't have a penis and experience penis envy and results in them looking at their mother as a rival. They do then identify with their mothers and begin to demonstrate their behaviour and moral grounds. Any fixation in the phallic stage can lead to obsession with power, authority a lack of feeling towards others and a variety of sexual problems.

**Latency/puberty stage** (6 years to puberty) - marks the beginning of adolescence. The period of latency is characterized by indifference to sexually related matters. During this time, the child's identification with the parent of his own sex becomes

stronger. The child imitates his or her behaviour -- speech, gestures, mannerisms, as well as beliefs and value systems. The child also incorporates more and more of the beliefs and values of his culture. Thus, the super-ego is developing to a greater extent. (It began to develop during the late anal and phallic stages. The child comes to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in his society.

The period of latency is also marked by the fact that children seek associations (or playmates) of their own sex. Boys prefer the company of boys and consciously avoid girls. Girls prefer contact with other girls and avoid boys. This period of sexual latency lasts five years, from ages six to eleven.

**Genital stage** (puberty onwards) Associations are stronger in the genital phase and Freud believed that they are homosexual in nature, even though homosexual activity may not take place. As this period progresses, however, the homosexual tendencies are supplanted by heterosexual ones and toward the latter part of this phase; the child makes contact and forms relationships with members of the opposite sex

He then also claimed that the mind is divided into three parts ID, EGO, and SUPEREGO.

**ID** - These are unconscious impulses that seek immediate expression and gratification known as the pleasure principle. A child would not survive long if they behaved solely in this selfish manner. Therefore, the next level of the mind grows out of the id

**EGO**: This part of the mind mediates between the savage ID and the rules of reality. This is Freud's reality principle. The Ego directs the individual's behaviour in two ways: Mediates between the greedy id and reality, motivates the individual to gain status/ power. By acting in its interest the ego will satisfy the demand of the ID.

**SUPEREGO** – this acts as the dominant one as it sees what the Id and Ego are up to and suppresses them. This is said to be guilt principle which 'pricks our consciousness' when we do wrong.

Freud's theory of the human mind was a bit like an iceberg – the tip being the conscious mind, the middle section being the Pre conscious, and the bottom section being the Unconscious. The conscious being the part of the mind that we are aware of, the preconscious being memories that are forgotten until we recall them and the unconscious which is the forgotten memories including trauma's that we try to forget for good.

Freud published his first book called The Interpretation of Dreams and this went on to be very successful. Freud analysed his own dreams in the first instance and found a way to connect them all to a sexual nature, then went on to say that dreams were always wishful thinking. Freud then went on to analyse his patient's dreams and again he suggested that these dreams were to do with a sexual nature. Freud's over emphasis on sex may be due to the fact that he wrote at a time of sexual repression. This swaying the way he interpreted the data and information he was provided with. I.e. he was free to apply it in any way he wished. Freud was said to have a messy

abstract throughout and put in his own life experiences, fantasies and conflict with his own father (Oedipus Complex).

A more general criticism of Freud's theory is its emphasis on sexuality. Everything, both good and bad, seems to stem from the expression or repression of the sex drive. A highly critical account of Freud's work is Jeffrey Masson's *The Assault on Truth*.

Freud dealt with understanding the unconsciousness - Freud deals with the unconscious mind, which he claims can only be understood through dreams, slips of the tongue, etc. But, do we really understand how the conscious mind itself works? The answer is No. Therefore, how can something that does not understand itself, begin to interpret what the unconscious mind generates. This is where Freud got criticised. If we can't see what is happening how this be 100% confirmed and proved.

Freud's work has been said to have an unstable theory built upon his own internal logic that cannot be proved either way. It can be internally consistent, but externally improvable having little or no scientific worth.

Freud invented many new terms, but rarely defined exactly what he meant – making it open to such wide interpretation (but some would see that as its great attraction). The more vague the terms, then the more people are free to apply them to their own needs. There has been a lot of research into Freud's theories but the major problem is the fact that they are difficult to test and if there is no way of showing that a theory might be wrong then there is no grounds for accepting it. His work is also internal which means it can't be observed so this cannot be proven.

Freud used case studies, which is a detailed study of a person or small group. This left Freud to be very open on how to interpret this as he observed because you can be biased if looking for certain information. This kind of study also relies on the people taking part to tell the truth. His lab was his office, his subjects were the patients and the data was what he interpreted

Freud was said to use a tiny sample theory. This means that it is not based on a large sample of people, or tested under experimental conditions with control groups, etc. Freud's patients were largely wealthy hysterical Victorian women in Vienna in the late 1800s that had abnormal behaviours, upper class and single. Therefore, from such a narrow group, the theory is applied universally. This could be a strong criticism, as the theory cannot be applied to all human nature, although Freud stated that all his theories are applied to all of the population. In order for Freud to say that his theories can be applied to everybody he must have worked with both sexes and all ages and not stuck to only one category of people.

Freud also studied adults and based his theory of childhood on the recollections of the childhood and this is not likely to be reliable. How can he advise and research childhood problems when he never actually spent time with them? His Ideas relied heavily on childhood and yet he had few child patients. The only child that was ever worked with was little Hans and yet Freud had so many ideas and child development. Freud also never made any notes at the sessions as he said lack of attention would interfere with its progress. He only went on to make the notes afterwards – this making it inevitable that he could selectively recall the information and also be bias when recording the cases. It is open to many types of distortion and uncontrolled influences as the memories of his patients are part of the basic data

When looking at a criticism in the Oedipus complex (Segal et al 1990) a concern is that its cultural bias. Freud presumed that the Oedipus complex was a universal phenomenon, but even if true for western cultures, the Oedipus complex may not apply to every culture or to all historical periods.

Grünbaum (1986) argues that free association is neither free nor validating evidence for psychoanalytic theory. Grünbaum (1986) concludes, "I find it unwarranted to use free association to validate causal inferences". He contends that free association is not a valid method of accessing the patients' repressed memories because there is no way of ensuring that the analyst is capable of distinguishing between the patients' actual memories and imagined memories constructed due to the influence of the analyst's leading questions. Grünbaum also criticised Freud's theory of dreams. In spite of Freud's view that this theory represented his greatest insight and success, it has very much failed in the eyes of most of today's critics.

Carl Jung (1875-1961) did not agree with Freud in the distinction between manifest and latent content as to Jung dreams had no deliberate disguised meaning but directly reflected the mind's current state. A major difference therefore was that where Freud emphasised the dark and destructive nature of the unconscious Jung was influenced on the positive and constructive nature of these influences.

Sigmund Freud has had a huge impact on psychoanalytic techniques and most of them are still used today i.e. dream analysis and the talking technique. Without Freud's ideas and findings maybe the world of psychoanalysis would not be where it is today as many theorists have used Freud techniques' as a base for their own modifications and contributions.