

### Critically evaluate the psychodynamic approach.

The psychodynamic approach, developed by Freud, emphasizes the interplay of unconscious psychological processes in determining human thought, feelings, and behaviour. The basis of this approach is that psychological factors play a major role in determining behaviour and shaping personality. Freud divided the human psyche into three; the ID, ego and superego. He said you were born with ID which was in your unconscious and it comprised of selfishness and lack of awareness. The other two parts; the ego and superego were said to be in your conscious. The ego was comprised of awareness and consciousness and the superego of definite conscious where you begin caring about others.

Freud believed that personality develops in psychosexual stages; in each stage a part of the body becomes the child's main source of pleasure. Failure to resolve conflicts at any stage can cause fixation, an unconscious preoccupation with the pleasure area associated with that stage. Personality characteristics are a reflection of each person's fixation. The oral stage occurs during the first year of life because the mouth is the center of pleasure. Babies obtain gratification through sucking and biting. As adults, when you bite your nails, comfort eat, etc, you are regressing to the oral stage. The anal stage occurs during the second year when toilet training begins. The ego evolves during this stage as the child vacillates between id impulses and parental demands. It focuses on potty training and the expulsion and retention of faeces. Excessive retention means the child is likely to have been potty trained too early and in adult years will lead to being excessively tidy. The phallic stage emerges at three and lasts until age five. The boy experiences the Oedipus complex; he sexually desires his mother and wants to kill his father out of jealousy. The girl develops penis envy and begins to hate her mother for not providing a penis. The girl then transfers her love to her father, which is known as the Electra complex. Also in this stage the child gets gratification through genitals. After age five, the latency period ensues, during which sexual impulses lie dormant and the child turns away from anything sexually related. During the genital stage, which begins at adolescence and lasts until death, sexual desires reappear and boys and girls begin to get more involved with the opposite sex.

The ego uses defense mechanisms to protect the individual from feeling anxious about id impulses. Defense mechanisms distort or deny reality and protect the ego from distress and allow the person to cope with life. Defense mechanisms include; repression, where you prevent unacceptable desires by making them unconscious, therefore making you not aware of them. For example, victims of rape attacks may repress memories because they do not wish to remember them. Projection is another defense mechanism when people's own faults or wishes are attributed to someone else, for example, calling someone else angry when it is actually you who is angry at them. Rationalising is when rational reasons or excuses are found to justify actions that have unconscious motives, for example eating chocolate even when on a diet because you do not want to waste it. Denial is when people sometimes refuse to believe events, like alcoholics deny they have a problem. Regression involves people responding to anxiety by acting in a childish way like stamping their feet or speaking in a childish voice. Displacement involves diverting emotions to someone else because the emotions cannot be expressed to the person concerned, or alternatively because accepting faults in ourselves will cause anxiety. This can be shown in shouting at parents or after a bad day you have a go at someone because you have

bottled everything up. Sublimation is diverting emotions onto something or someone else in a socially acceptable way, for example some people paint, some punch cushions and some go to the gym to get rid of anything you do not wish to think about. The last defense mechanism is reaction formation where the conscious mind adopts the opposite of what is in the unconscious mind. This can lead to adopting certain outward behaviours in order to conceal unacceptable desires and urges. An example of this would be someone who is homophobic. It might be because they are afraid and may be questioning their own sexuality or they may be curious about homosexuality, but if they ask about it may be accused of being gay.

Freud developed one of the most influential personality theories ever proposed; his ideas shaped Western thinking from medicine to religion. Psychodynamic therapies introduced the use of personality assessments, including projective tests. Although the theory is bizarre, it does make a lot of sense when put together. It considers the unconscious and also considers your past, not just the present (your childhood and traumas). However, much of the theory has a sexual basis, where a number of behaviours may have a more rational, non-sexual explanation. In the oral stage, for example, babies may just be chewing because they are hungry or teething. Freud's psyche has no physical ID, ego or superego, they are all hypothetical constructs. In the theory Freud also suggests that abnormal behaviour is as a result of the parents. Saying this, by taking the responsibility of abnormal behaviour away from the patient, the psychoanalyst is also removing stigma to a certain extent. Freud's theory is also criticized for being based on an unrepresentative sample: his own patients, who were predominantly upper-class Viennese women with mental problems. Freud never examined patients from, or his theory with regard to, other cultures. I think that perhaps past mistakes, if an individual can learn from them, can help improve the future for those with problems in the future.

To conclude, I think that Freud's psychodynamic approach does make sense, although it may be explained in other ways, and does explain a lot about a person's personality and habits and why they have these certain traits. Even though Freud was known as being a bit too over the top and eccentric with his ideas and theories, they do make great sense and are of great use to finding out about a certain person's personality and why they are like the way they are. It can be useful in further research.