

Describe and evaluate any one approach to the study of Human behaviour.



The Psychodynamic Approach to Psychology

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It was in the early 1900^s when, **Sigmund Freud**, a neurologist living in Vienna, first published his psychoanalytic theory of personality, in which the unconscious mind played a crucial role. Combining the then current cognitive notions of consciousness, perception and memory with the ideas of biologically based instincts. He came up with a bold new theory now known as **psychodynamics**. This new theory, which forms the basis of the psychodynamic approach, represented a challenge and a major alternative to behaviourism. Freud's assumptions centred in and around the unconscious processes, which were important influences in our behaviour. He spoke of an INTERNAL id, ego and superego controlling our behaviour. In contrast, Watson had suggested that, since our mind was like a black box and we can't see inside it, we can only speculate about what is inside the mind. He preferred therefore the assumption that majority of behaviour is learned from the environment as a response to specific stimuli. In this essay we will look at Freud's theory of the mind, the stages we go through and evaluate his processes of treatment.

Freud believed that the human mind had both conscious and unconscious areas. The unconscious part of the mind was controlled by what he called was the "**id**". This was a primitive part of the personality that looks for nothing else than pleasure and gratification. The id is not concerned with social rules just self-gratification. This disregard for the consequences for behaviour is known as "primary process thinking". The second area of the mind is the "**ego**" and this controls the conscious mind. This is the part of our mind that is aware and is in contact with the outside world and which, hence, understands the consequences for behaviour and actions. This is known as "secondary process thinking". As well as these two parts Freud also claimed there was a third part, which developed later, called the "**superego**", the superego is conscious and makes us aware of the moral and social standards of society and in particular of our parents. It is our conscience and it guides us to socially acceptable behaviour. According to Freud the ego dwells in the conscious mind whereas the id exists in the unconscious mind. The superego, formed from unconscious identification with the father, inhabits both conscious and unconscious areas. In this theory, the mind or personality has been likened to an iceberg. The area of the iceberg, which is out of the water, is the conscious with the larger area, which is under the water the unconscious.

"The id lurks below the surface of conscious awareness and cannot be seen (i.e. we are not aware of its influence). As with an iceberg, the majority of the mass of the mind (and hence its greatest potential influence) is under the surface". (Caldwell et. al. 2000)

Freud believed we went through several different developmental stages in the primary years and that our personality was formed in the passage through these stages. He referred to these stages of development as the "**psychosexual stages**". During each stage the pleasure seeking impulses of the id focus on a particular part of the body. In the first year of life Freud called the **oral stage**. Babies get pleasure from sucking and tasting (hence the word oral). The second stage was known as the **anal stage**. It was believed that infants got

pleasure from withholding and passing faeces. At the age of three the child got pleasure from touching his or her genitals. Freud called this the **phallic stage**.

At the close of the phallic stage the child reaches a conflict called the **Oedipal conflict**. He describes this in the case of a boy whose sexual impulses are directed towards his mother. This leads him to perceive his father as a rival for affections. The boy fears the father will retaliate by castration. This anxiety is thought to be the basis of all later anxieties. The Oedipal conflict resolves at the **latency period**, which lasts from the age of seven to twelve. During this time children become less concerned with their bodies and turn their attention to life skills. Finally, adolescence and puberty bring about the **genital stage**, the mature phase of adult sexuality. Freud also suggested that a person could be fixated to any one stage throughout our lives. Here are a few different personality types suggested by Freud, oral receptive personality, Oral aggressive personality, anal-retentive personality, and anal receptive personality, for instance the miserliness of the anal retentive or over-generous and wastefulness of the anal receptive. The stages involve issues of personality – in the anal stage, we learn how giving or how self-contained we will be as personalities and these attitudes pass into our attitudes to money, sharing of feelings and so on.

The ego's role is very important to the balancing of the id and the superego, which are both very powerful. The ego will then put “**defence mechanisms**” into place. These said mechanisms protect the ego by denying reality and allowing the person to cope with life protected from stress. Everyone uses them and they have a very powerful influence upon our behaviour.

“Freud said that they are perfectly natural and normal and offer a way of satisfying the demands of the id without upsetting the superego” (ibid pg 92)

Though they are a useful way for protecting the ego, they are not a long-term solution. Psychological problems can also occur if the defence mechanisms are used too frequently. The main defences for protecting the ego are repression, this is when we have a painful or guilty thought kept in your unconscious mind. You might forget your goldfish died because you forgot to feed them. Denial is simply denying the existence of something that is threatening, for instance; an Elvis fan who believes Elvis didn't die, and there is a conspiracy behind it. Projection is unknowingly displacing your own bad feelings onto someone else. You might suspect others of dodging the metro fare because you did. Similar to projection is displacement. This time we unconsciously redirect an emotion from the person who has caused it onto a third person. You might shout at a friend because someone else has told you off. Then there is reaction formation and intellectualisation.

Freud was instrumental in changing the way we looked at mental health. He suggested that physical symptoms may have psychological problems. He developed a new type of therapy called “**psychoanalysis**” which is often called the talking cure. From this many other forms of therapy have come about. All of these therapies try to uncover the unconscious psychodynamic processes in order to get an insight into the conflicts and anxieties that are

the cause of abnormal behaviour. (Where behaviourists believe it is determined by our environment, psychodynamics suggest it comes from our unconscious mind.) The belief is if someone can understand their past experiences inside their psyche, they can then deal with it in their conscious mind.

Freud had considerable success with the talking cure with a girl known as Anna O. This girl spent most of her life caring for her sick father. She developed coughs that had no physical reason, she developed speech problems became mute then only spoke in English not her native German tongue. When her father died she developed paralysis and suffered involuntary spasms. She also had severe vivid hallucinations and tunnel vision. Along with other hysteria symptoms after long treatment with the talking cure, which she called "chimney sweeping" she went on to be Germany's first social worker, but is remembered mostly for being the inspiration for the most influential personality theory we have ever had.

Freud's theory of child development seems to emphasize too much on body parts and the sexual nature of the child. (Later psychodynamic theorists such as Jung, Bowlby and Winnicott challenged this concentration on sexuality.) In particular he seems to have given much importance to the Oedipus conflict.

This may be because of Freud's main methodology, which was the case study, an idiographic method concentrating on the interpretation of individual cases rather than the nomothetic methods which aim to deduce universal laws, used in early learning theory. For instance, Freud developed his Oedipal theories in a case study in a five-year-old boy named Hans. Hans had a phobia of being bitten by a horse. Freud used his theory of the Oedipus conflict to interpret his phobia as an unconscious fear of being castrated by his father. It is worth mentioning that Hans' father was a follower and supporter of Freud's ideas. Furthermore, the boy's mother often used threats of violence or abandonment to curb the boy's behaviour. The mother of Hans once threatened to cut off his penis. It seems the mother was the aggressor not the father.

It seems difficult to take the case of little Hans as evidence of the Oedipus theory. There are a number of reasons for this. Freud had already published his theories of sexuality and had already made up his mind what was wrong with Hans. His father and not Freud conducted the psychoanalysis of Hans. Freud only saw the boy on one or two occasions. How could the father study the boy objectively when he was so emotionally involved? Surely the boy would be susceptible to his father's suggestions. Freud had an extreme patriarchal attitude and he could not conceive that a woman could be the main cause of fear. It also comes to light that little Hans' horse phobia may have resulted when he got a fright when he witnessed a horse collapse and die and not the unconscious thought of his father castrating him. In contrast to Freud's theory of phobias, Watson and Rayner (1920) carried out an experiment on a little boy named Albert who loved his pet rat. They let him see the rat, but every time he reached out to touch the rat Watson, who was stood behind

the boy, would hit two metal bars together making an awful loud deafening noise. The noise frightened Albert so he soon stopped reaching for the rat. He then developed a strong fear of the rat and anything that even resembled the rat. Watson and Rayner suggested that the phobia associated the rat with the noise and scared Albert. Therefore his phobia had been conditioned.

Other methods of treatment and analysis Freud used was free association, this was the uninhibited expression, no matter how strange or embarrassing, from patient to the analyst. The other is dream analysis, this is considered to be the main route to the unconsciousness, the therapist attempts to analyse and interpretate the hidden meaning of a dream. The contributions to psychology of these theories explained a vast amount of topics such as personality development, aggression and abnormality, and to society, the purpose of psychoanalysis was used to treat mental health problems. It can also be applied to art and literature as you can analyse someone's drawings or stories. Freud also used the technique of transference. This comes about when the patient redirects feelings of hostility towards the therapist, these feelings are unconsciously meant for a significant model in their life usually a parent or guardian figure. In order for this to work the patient and therapist act out acts of trauma.

Freud's theories unfortunately are unable to be scientifically tested as all psychodynamic tests only gather soft data, like dreams and jokes. Unlike the learning theory and biological theory where they use experiments and electro scans such as a CAT scan or a MRI scan of the brain to collect measurable hard data. Other weaknesses in Freud's theories were biased by a cultural sexist male view on female inferiority, especially in the concept of 'penis envy', and it is difficult to test the unconscious objectively. In Freud's defence his theories have made such an impact towards psychology and psychiatry his methods are still used after 100 years from when he first developed them. The psychodynamic treatments have uncovered a lot of the psychological causes of mental disorders.

In this essay we have described and evaluated Freud's theory of personality development and how he stresses the importance to the forces that drive us, and his idea of defence mechanisms, and the benefits of his therapy. There are a lot of weaknesses in his theories the main one being his use of soft 'unverifiable' data; you can't measure what you can't see, but the strengths are still plain to see. The treatment towards mental health would not be as sufficient today without Freud. We have also compared some of his theories against some of the other approaches in particular Watson's behaviourist approach. Unlike the theory of John Watson, who sided on the nurture side of the nature nurture debate or the biological approach which stresses nativism, Freudian theory suggests that it is BOTH nature AND nurture that drives our behaviour. He talks of BOTH predetermined stages & basic instincts AND experience of the family and social training, such as 'potty training'.

Reference:

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