

Describe and Evaluate Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Method

Sigmund Freud was the creator of Psychoanalysis which means analysis of the mind, Freud developed specific methods of analysing, all of them concentrating on the unconscious mind.

This essay will describe Freud's psychoanalytic theory, method and the techniques he used, describing, Methods of Investigation, Personality Development, Defence Mechanisms and The Psychosexual Stages of Development. Freud believed that because he could not find any physical cause for many of his patient's symptoms, that they must be linked to unconscious psychological disturbances. Freud attempted to uncover the psychological problems using Psychoanalysis.

Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality Development suggests that three components, The ID, The EGO, and The SUPER-EGO drive people. The ID is present at birth and works on the "Pleasure Principle" demanding immediate gratification, e.g. *"At birth a baby's mind is all Id - want want want. The Id is the primitive mind, containing all the basic needs and feelings"*.

. Available from [online] 19/10/04 <http://www.wilderdom.com/personality/L8-4StructureMindIdEgoSuperego.html>

The EGO develops soon after birth and works on the "Reality Principle", the conscience is formed which aids our decision making, *Davies and Houghton (1995 Pg 261) wrote... "once the ego has developed the infant no longer makes unreasonable demands on the caretaker, such as demanding food when they are out walking"*.

The SUPER-EGO develops at around the age of five, this works on the "Morality

Principle” our conscience warning us against allowing the ID to control us, *D E James (1970 Pg 275) explains...*” *the Super-egos function is to maintain standards of behaviour at a level demanded by society and its effect is to produce a feeling of guilt when it is not observed*”.

A person with a weak ego may resort to: - Defence Mechanisms

These operate unconsciously and are a key aspect of our personality, there are quite a few defence mechanisms, these are the ways in which we deal with trauma, horror, or unacceptable situations, three examples are Denial, Repression and Projection: -

Denial occurs when a person who has experienced horror blocks out the events from awareness, refusing to acknowledge reality.

Repression is explained as a person not being able to recall a threatening situation, person or a specific event in their lives for fear of alarm or anxiety, these incidents or times have been repressed into the unconscious.

Projection is a person attributing their own unacceptable feelings or characteristics onto someone else e.g. a husband, who is good and faithful, finds himself terribly attracted to the flirtatious lady next door, but rather than acknowledge his feelings he becomes jealous of his wife and worried about her faithfulness.

Freud believed that the personality developed through five Psychosexual Stages.

The Oral Stage (birth - 18 months), The Anal Stage (18 months - 3 years), The Phallic Stage (3 – 6 years), The Latency Stage (6 years – puberty) and The Genital Stage (puberty onwards).

In the Oral Stage, the child focuses on the mouth for stimulation and satisfaction achieved through sucking.

In the Anal Stage the child’s anus becomes the focus of stimulation and pleasure is

derived from expelling faeces, however at this age the Ego is developing so the child is becoming aware of the demands of reality and potty training is a major issue.

From the age of three the child enters the Phallic Stage, the penis and clitoris become the main areas of interest for stimulation and according to Freud the child becomes attracted to the parent of the opposite sex and dismisses the parent of the same sex, this is referred to as the Oedipus Complex in boys and the Electra Complex in girls.

Once the child reaches the age of six years onwards into puberty the child resolves these conflicts whilst he or she is in the Latency Stage, described by Freud as the stage in which social and intellectual development proceeds and gender identity is consolidated. The final Psychosexual Stage is the Genital Stage; this is the beginning of mature adult sexuality.

Our behaviour is always driven by Sex or Aggression according to Freud; these were the two elements that he based his Psychoanalytic approach on.

Freud used the Case Study method to analyse his patients, the techniques were varied, Hypnosis, Free Word Association, Clinical Interviews, Slips of the Tongue (Freudian Slips), and Dream Analysis.

Freud originally used hypnosis, this involved placing the patient into a trance-like state to enable him to investigate unconscious thoughts and memories. He abandoned this technique as he found it to be unreliable; people are very suggestible and can be made to manufacture memories of events, which never took place “False Memory Syndrome”.

However Freud continued to investigate the realms of the unconscious, developing the Clinical Interview, he would ask his patients to lay on a couch and talk openly in a relaxed atmosphere about their lives, concentrating on their childhood experiences.

Freud would attempt to gain the trust of his patients and analyse any emotional

memories or experiences that emerged from within the unconscious.

If a patient had very little to say during the Clinical Interview, Freud would use free word association. He would say a word aloud and the patient would respond spontaneously with whatever entered their thoughts, their responses could indicate unconscious motives or desires for him to analyse.

During the interview if an accident of speech occurred (the patient had a Slip of the Tongue, saying something they didn't mean to say), Freud would analyse such slips believing that they reflected the real unconscious thoughts – hence the term “Freudian Slip”.

For Freud, Dream Analysis was another way of exploring the unconscious, he would attempt to analyse his patients dreams, calling them “the royal road to the unconscious”, he referred to The Manifest Content – As what we consciously remember and The Latent Content – As the true meaning of the dream. Most of Freud's conclusions were sexual in nature e.g. Objects dreamt about such as Swords, Guns, Snakes etc suggested penetration symbolising the penis, where as Purses, Boxes, Caves etc symbolised the vagina.

Freud's theories have and still do receive criticism, *Davies and Houghton (1995 Pg 267) describe Freud as... ” inconsistent about some aspects of his theories, such as the Electra Complex on female development” “Freud did not use scientific methods even though he had been trained in these methods early in his career”*

Most critics believe he placed far too much emphasis on sexuality, and his patients were described as unrepresentative, being mainly Venetian women with abnormal behaviours, upper-class and single.

Case studies according to *Davies and Houghton (1995 Pg 267) were... ”retrospective,*

(that is based on what he could remember) *as he did not take notes, believing this would interfere with the concentration of both the patient and himself*".

Freud's theories did however contribute to show that childhood events and abuse can affect adult personality, and allowed us to realise that deep within our unconscious lays the true reasons for our behaviour.

Though the debate as to the reliability of the Psychoanalytic concept as a whole will continue to rage, it also will continue to produce a valuable insight into the area of human behaviour and motivation.

Bibliography

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