

"Describe and evaluate Freud's psychoanalytical theory of development" (24 marks)

There are three aspects to Freud's theory of personality development. Firstly the structure of personality (id, ego, superego), defence mechanisms and the stages of psychosocial development. According to Freud personality develops as an outcome of these three aspects.

The id is located in the unconscious mind and is the source of innate sexual and aggressive instincts. The emphasis is on immediate gratification, for example, a young child wanting a toy NOW. The ego is the conscious, governing part of personality and develops in the first two years of life as a consequence of the infant's experience. The ego modifies the demands of the Id, deferring gratification until an appropriate time / place. The superego represents the child's conscience (morals, right / wrong) and develops at around the age of five. The superego is formed as a result of the process of identification with the same-sex parent, in order to resolve the Oedipus complex in boys and the Electra complex in girls.

Freud also suggested that conflict between personality structures creates 'ego defences', leading to personality characteristics. These include intellectualism (thinking about threats in ways that allow emotion to be eliminated), denial (refusing to accept the existence of a threat), projection (attributing undesirable impulses or characteristics to others), repression (keeping troublesome emotions out of conscious awareness) and displacement (unconsciously transferring impulses from a threatening object to a less threatening one).

Freud described early personality development in terms of five psychosexual stages. In each stage the child's energy or libido is focused on a different body region. The first being the oral stage (0-18 months) where satisfaction is from eating, sucking etc. In the anal stage (18-36 months) the child is interested in and gains satisfaction from the anal region. The phallic stage (3-6 years) is where the genitals become the source of satisfaction. In the latency stage (6 years - puberty) boys and girls spend little time together. In the final stage, genital (from onset of puberty), genitals are the main source of satisfaction. If a child experiences severe difficulties or excessive pleasure at any stage of development this leads to fixation at this stage. Freud suggests that early fixations result in enduring personality traits.

Freud's theory is strong because it is broad and can account for many aspects of behaviour; therefore it is universally applicable. It is also enduring and has sparked much further research into the area of personality development and feminists have used his ideas about gender development.

However, Freud has come into criticism as he based a theory of normal development around the study of abnormal individuals. The sample used was also unrepresentative as it was small and those included were middle class women. There may be a confirmatory bias as Freud may have disregarded information that did not fit his theory. Freud may have also been selective about the data he used. The notes Freud made were not during therapy sessions but afterwards, so they were retrospective. Another retrospective issue is that Freud was asking adults about their childhood. Critics also argue the theory is

unreliable, as it is not scientific.