

Describe and evaluate one psychodynamic theory of personality development

The basis of Freud's psychoanalytic theory was that the mind contained three parts: The Id, Ego, and Superego. He argued that the Id controlled the primal instincts such as aggression and sexual desire ('libido'), and was found in the unconscious mind. Its purpose is to gain immediate gratification, according to the 'pleasure principle'. The Id, he said, was in competition with the ego. This is because the ego, working on the reality principle, is the more rational, and conscious mind. The superego oversees the Id and ego, and creates the sense of what is right and wrong. Freud believed that the Id was innate, that the Ego developed by the age of 2, and the superego by the age of 5. This aspect of Freud's theory is supported by research carried out by Dr. Solms. In his study, PET scans illustrated that during REM sleep (where the participant was dreaming), brain activity in the limbic system (the part of the brain that controls emotions, senses and long-term memory) was active, while the prefrontal cortex was not. Psychoanalysts would argue that this was because of the activity of the subconscious Id, and the inactivity of the Id. However, since the personality divisions are not physical, there is no way to prove that they do or do not exist.

As a result of the conflicts between the Id, ego and Super Ego, Freud argued that the mind prepared ego defence mechanisms to reduce anxiety. These were Repression, Displacement, Projection, Denial and Intellectualisation. Myers and Brewin provided support for this theory in their study. They identified a set of people as 'repressors', and found that it took them longer to recall a childhood event than the control group. The study indicates that repression can be used as a defence. However, there is no way of checking the data the participants gave, and no way of confirming that repression had occurred.

Freud also proposed that there were five distinct stages of psychosexual development, from birth until puberty. An innate driving force for satisfaction, called 'Libido', was responsible for the series of fixations on body parts. During the oral stage, the infant enjoys eating and sucking objects, during the anal stage, it develops an interest in the anal region, and during the phallic stage it gains satisfaction from the genital region. Afterwards, there is a latency stage and a genital stage. During the Phallic stage, it was proposed that boys developed the Oedipus complex. This involved a development of sexual desires for the boy's mother. They aim to get rid of their father, who is a rival, and develop a fear of him. Eventually, they identify with their father and the conflict is resolved. A similar situation occurs for girls, called the Electra complex. Some argue that this theory is supported by the case of Little Hans. However, the diagnosis was not made with the patient present,

but instead carried out through descriptions by the child's father. Also, Freud tended to focus on isolated cases, and therefore this cannot be representative of the entire population. The abstract nature of the definition that Freud made also makes it difficult to identify the features in a patient. This means the diagnosis is very subjective. Studies have supported the theory of stages. For example, Blum and Miller concluded that some children do have oral personalities. However, this study was carried out on children, and the theory should only apply to adults. Further study by Fisher and Greenberg showed that some people did have anal/oral personalities, but stated that there is no evidence to suggest this personality type was determined by childhood experiences.

Many argue that because sexuality was rarely discussed at the time of Freud's proposals, some patients may have been unable to express issues relating to it. Consequently, some may have become hysteric and his explanations may have overemphasised the importance of sexuality.