

**How useful is psychoanalytical approach to understanding a person? Choose one of Freud's case studies. How credible and useful do you find Freud's way of making sense of this person's problem? Which, if any, limitations of the theory do you see?**

Much controversy surrounds the psychoanalytical approach to personality. The psychoanalytical approach is primarily based on Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) theory of personality. Freud was, and still is, a great figure in personality psychology; he was one of the first to state a personality theory. He suggested that unconscious regions of the mind exist and aid in everyday living, this is somewhat supported through cognitive psychology (Cooper). His theory primarily explained the workings of a patient with 'hysteria', but was later noticed to be a broad theory which could explain a variety of behaviours.

The psychoanalytical theory was based on the idea that internal forces drive human behaviour. The two main drives were known as Eros (life drive) and Thanatos (death drive). The Libido was thought to control the life drive and depending on the personality could be very different from person to person. This drive was assumed to determine all behaviours, depending on the people present and the ideas presented to the individual.

Freud focused a lot of his workings on childhood development and split the development into stages. The first stage is known as the Pre-Oedipal stage. He suggested that all human beings are born with certain instincts, such as the need to eat or drink. These needs are necessary for the biological development of any human being. When these needs are satisfied both satisfaction and relief are felt. Freud believed that at a very early age, a child's sexuality is realised, this can be activated by the sucking of a mother's breast. This feeling is then rediscovered in later life through various experiences. This is where the sexual drive develops. This is then followed by the oral stage (examining objects through the mouth), the anal stage (where the child takes pleasure in defecation) and then the phallic stage (where there

is an interest in the genitals). These stages are in no way fixed, one stage can overlap or replace another and they occur at various times during the child's development. Freud thought of these early stages as the Id, the pleasure seeking impulses, which seeks immediate gratification.

The next stage is referred to as the Oedipus complex and is at the centre of Freud's development theory. According to Freud a boy's love for his mother leads to the need for a complete union with her, whereas the same feeling in a girl would lead to homosexual thoughts so there closeness is directed towards their father. This means them same sex parents are in rival with those of the opposite sex for the affections of their children. Later in life the boy grows out of the closeness with his mother, and focuses on reality and then looks to his father as a role model. The girl then turns to her mother but envies the male body as it makes her feel inferior as they have something she will never have. This is where Freud's idea, that all women's psychological problems come from repressed sexual desires, comes from.

The Id was mentioned earlier, but there are two other constructs that Freud believes makes up personality. These are the Ego and the Superego. The ego is the rational self and develops early on in childhood. The Id progresses into the Ego. Unlike the Id this shows delayed gratification through rational means and involves problem solving and realistic thinking. Daydreaming also occurs primarily through the ego. The superego occurs later in development, around three to four years. This looks for the ideal rather than the real.

In the 1880's, Freud travelled to Paris and took in interest in the work of a neurologist named Charcot. Charcot was investigating hypnosis. Freud found great similarities between Charcot's participants and his patients who suffered from 'hysteria'. 'Hysteria' was classed as any disorder which had no reasonable physiological cause, for example memory loss or convulsions (Cooper). Also these people were completely unaware of the causes of their behaviours. He figured if he could hypnotise his patients he could find the root of their problems and therefore rid them of their certain disorders. On discovering that, he went back to Vienna and began work with Breuer. They

began the 'studies in hysteria'. This is where the psychoanalytic theory is based. He reported remarkable cures of hysterical symptoms through hypnosis;

"When she had related a number of these phantasies, she was as if set free, and she was brought back to normal mental life....." (Freud, 1959)

This was also when Freud's theory became a broad theory for personality rather than a theory for 'hysteria' patients; this was because he believed these findings to be universal.

I feel that the psychoanalytical theory can be useful in some ways as it appears to help the patients by retrieving repressed memories. There are many psychologists and other professionals who believe that these memories are planted by the therapist and therefore not an accurate reading of how the patient actually feels. There are also many parts of Freud's theory that cannot be tested empirically which suggests a major flaw somewhere along the line.

A much discussed case study of Freud's is that of Dora, her real name was Ida Bauer (1882-1945). She was sent to Freud at the age of fourteen with so-called 'Hysteria' symptoms, depression, anxiety and a nervous cough. According to Freud, this behaviour began when Dora refused to go on holiday to the "K's" family home. These people were friends of the family and nobody understood why Dora did not want to go. She claimed that "Mr K" had made a pass at her and that she wanted her father to stop seeing the "K's". Her father refused as he claimed he was good friends with them, in actual fact, her father and "Mrs K" was lovers. This, according to Freud, was the start of Dora's 'hysteria'. Dora then went on to tell Freud that "Mr K" had kissed her and she felt disgusted by the sexual feelings she felt. Freud said that Dora was concerned about the affair between her father and "Mrs K", due to the fact that her father was very important to her. Freud explained Dora's nervous cough as an Oedipus love for her father. Dora then explained in great detail two dreams she had had. According to Freud, dreams show repressed memories or desires so this was where the real 'healing' began.

The first dream involved there being a fire and her father was stood over her while her mother tried to save the jewellery box, but the father

helped the family escape. This dream showed Dora's desire for her father's love and affection. The second dream showed love towards "Mr K". This dream, according to Freud showed Dora's repressed desires and possibly memories. As with all women Freud analysed, the root of the problem came down represses sexual desires. This was always the case when Freud analysed women. Dora did not return to see Freud after the second dream. Freud thought that Dora looked towards him as a father figure and felt that this may have distorted the 'healing' process;

"did not succeed in mastering the transference in good time....At the beginning it was clear that I was replacing her father in her imagination, which was not unlikely, in view of the difference between our ages" (Freud, 1905)

This is Freud's way of explaining why he failed Dora, he believed that he did not fully understand transference. Transference is the way in which feelings from a previous relationship are transferred onto a new relationship (Stratton & Hayes). This happens recurrently during psychoanalysis. I did not find this a very useful way of approaching Dora's problems as the analysis was very vague and Freud did not get to the root of the problem which could have been solved a physiologist or a doctor.

All of Freud's theories were based on the idea that women's problems progressed from inner sexual desires. All his theories were very vague and sexually orientated. They were gender specific and did not give a true insight into the patients' problem. I feel his workings were appreciated at the beginning of the century, but in mainstream psychology these days, Freud's views are behind times and need a lot of investigating. This is due to the fact that very few of his theories can be empirically tested, which means that there are major flaws in his workings.