

Outline and evaluate the psychodynamic model of abnormality.

One of the most difficult tasks for those working within the field of psychology is to define abnormality. However, it is possible to try and define abnormality by using a range of models to help us, the psychodynamic model being one of them.

It was Freud who developed the concept of the psychodynamic approach. The idea behind this was to use 'talking therapy' to bring past memories from the unconscious to the conscious. The unconscious is when you are doing or thinking something without being alert or aware that you are doing it. Along the idea of the unconscious Freud also developed the concept of the ID, the Ego and the Superego. The id is described as an impulsive, selfish side to our personality which is ruled by a pleasure principle, the superego is the moral part of our personality which recognises right from wrong; and our ego is the part of our mind which tries to rationalise and arbitrate both sides of our thoughts. Freud believed that there were two main causes of abnormality in general. One of these was childhood traumas and the idea that a bad memory from our childhood is so traumatic that it buries itself in our subconscious. This is what is believed to cause problems later on in our adult life. The second cause was the concept that our mind has not learned to rationalise our id and our superego, and that our ego is undergoing unconscious conflict which causes us anxiety, and excessive use of defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms are powerful, unconscious influences on our behaviour which are used as coping strategies. These distort or deny reality allowing us to cope with any problems in our lives. Without them the anxiety would become a threat to our mental health. It is believed that a psychologically healthy person is able to develop a capability to balance the id and the superego without encountering any psychological problems. There are six recognised defence mechanisms: repression, denial, projection, regression, displacement, and sublimation.

There are many advantages to using the psychodynamic model to help us to define abnormality. The psychodynamic model consists of purely 'talking therapy' which means it is physically non invasive. No drugs or medication have to be used to solve the underlying mental disorder, unlike the biological model which consists purely of drug treatment and physically carrying out medical procedures. The psychodynamic model also helps us to find the root cause of the problem in the unconscious which helps the patient find a long term permanent cure, whereas in the biological model, the symptoms disappear in the patient but the underlying problem still exists. Another advantage of the psychodynamic model is that it's the first model which focuses on the importance of childhood. In the days of Freud it was thought that children were 'seen and not heard,' however after Freud's theory the importance of a child's first five years of childhood was recognised. The psychodynamic model is not culturally relative as you are directly focusing on one individual. This gives empowerment to the patient, and takes away the status divide between the doctor and the patient as the patient has all the answers in opposed to the doctor. This makes the patient feel more comfortable and takes away the social stigma along with the idea that even normal people can be abnormal sometimes.

As well as the usefulness of the psychodynamic model to help us to define abnormality there are also several limitations. This model is extremely subjective, which means is very dependant on the psychoanalyst. This consequently makes it scientifically invalid as the method of psycho analogy cannot be proved or disproved

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making it very abstract. Consequently, there is also the criticism that our dreams may not be very reliable or relevant to the cause of our behaviour as this too cannot be proven. In addition to this the patient may not be very honest with you about their thoughts or dreams. Being resistant, guarded, dishonest or not wanting to go for treatment in the first place will mean that any underlying problems will not be resolved as it would be impossible to bring the subconscious to the consciousness without patient co operation. The treatment for psychoanalysis is long, expensive, time consuming and is not always proven to be effective. Furthermore, bringing peoples past to the consciousness may cause more problems, making this model psychologically invasive to the patient. Another limitation to using this model to define abnormality is that the method of relying on the first five years of a person's life is very specific as it dismisses all the problems after those five years such as menopause or the teenage years which makes this model too simplistic.

In conclusion the psychodynamic model is a good way of defining abnormality as it uses more natural, physically non intrusive methods of treatment which are just as effective of dealing with the root problem. The basis of the treatment given regarding the id and the superego is one we can all understand and identify with, making the psychodynamic model favourable compared to the biological model, which deals with drugs as a method of treatment as well as possible chemical imbalance leading to mental illness. However there are a few limitations to this model such as the idea of it being very abstract and scientifically invalid which has been argued against by Kline (1980), and the idea of it causing more than the original problems, as well as the time, cost and money involved in the treatment.