

Criminology

Psychoanalytical Theory

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Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the first person to initiate the thought of psychoanalysis. According to Friedlander (1947), classical Freudian psychoanalytic explanations of delinquency focus on abnormalities or disturbances in the individual's emotional development from early childhood. Since then many people have amended his original writings and presently there are numerous versions of Freud's original psychoanalytical theory. Many of these recent versions are similar to the original version with the exception that they are updated to current times. Few new models are extremely different from Freud's theory.

Adler, Mueller, and Laufer (2004) describe the psychoanalytical theory as follows: "In criminology, a theory of criminality that attributes delinquent and criminal behavior to a conscience that is either so overbearing that it arouses excessive feelings of guilt or so weak that it cannot control the individual's impulses" (p. G-6). Freud stated in the text "The Ego and the Id" (1961) that

it was a surprise to find that an increase in the Ucs. sense of guilt can turn people into criminals. But it is undoubtedly a fact. In many criminals, especially youthful ones, it is possible to detect a very powerful sense of guilt which exists before the crime, and is therefore not its result but its motive. It is as if it was a relief to be able to fasten this unconscious sense of guilt on to something real and immediate (p.52).

The psychoanalytic mind feels the need for immediate gratification. People of this type have feelings so strong that no matter what the consequences of their actions maybe, they feel a need to satisfy them. They will go to any means to fulfill this need for gratification. "Most analysts view delinquents as children unable to give up their desires for instant pleasure" (Adler, Mueller & Laufer, 2004, p. 86). The psychoanalytical theory focuses on the development of personality, the stages of development and the emotional problems reflecting some unconscious aspects of one's psychological functioning. Adler,

Mueller, and Laufer (2004) base this theory on three principles. First, “The actions and behavior of an adult are understood in terms of childhood development.” Second, “Behavior and unconscious motives are intertwined, and their interaction must be unraveled if we are to understand criminality.” Third, “Criminality is essentially a representation of psychological conflict” (p. 86).

Freud believes that criminality has a lot to do with the structural model of the mind. He breaks the mind down into three categories; the Id, Ego, and the Superego. “The Id is the unconscious seat of irrational, antisocial, and instinctual impulses which must be controlled and shaped for social adaptation to life in society” (Akers, 1999, p. 50). When newborn babies are born, they have biological drives that are unaffected by society. The Id can be considered the instructional forces, which focuses around sexual desires or drives. This is now the time when the infant knows nothing but the pleasure principle and when tension gets high it will only behave according to the pleasure it desires. The infant, at this point is very self absorbed. The Id is uncontrolled until the child is about three years old. At that point the Ego starts to take over the Id and is attempting to shape the child’s life to fit in with society (Gibbons, 1977).

The Ego is rational and conscious. When the Ego begins to develop, the infant is not so self-absorbed any more. It becomes aware of itself and views itself as a part of society. The Ego involves reality. It is now that the child is aware of its environment and begins to adapt to society. According to Gibbons (1977), “The Ego represents that outgrowth of the Id which adapts the instinctual urges to one another and to the demands of reality” (p. 161). It is the Ego that allows the child to commit an act or not. Here, the reality principle comes into play. The reality principle occurs when “... the Ego attempts

to allow or postpone instinctual gratification so as to minimize pain. Initially, the Id and the Ego are not in conflict, for the Ego works under the guidance of the reality principle to get satisfaction for the Id” (Gibbons, 1997, p. 161).

The last part of the mind to develop is the Superego. It is at this point that the Ego is the go-between for the Superego and the Id. The Superego develops out of the Ego during childhood. It mainly consists of morality and involves a conscious mind. Authority figures play an important part in the development of the Superego. It sees the standards set by parents and other people in authority and takes those standards into account. It decides which acts are viewed by the authority figures as acceptable and which ones are not. The Superego sets the individual’s own standards, norms, values, and beliefs of its environment. The Superego governs the way that the individual behaves. It sets rules and standards to follow. If the individual breaks those rules and does not adhere to the standards that it has set for itself, the Superego will punish the individual for its unruly acts in terms of guilty feelings and anxiety (Gibbons, 1977).

Forgoers of the psychoanalytical theory state that criminality occurs when the three basic components of the human psyche are imbalanced. Some even believe that criminality is in every human personality. Alexander and Staub (1931) stated that the only difference between a person that commits criminal acts and one that does not is that the non-criminal controls his motives to commit these deviant acts and they find socially acceptable ways around them. In delinquents, the Id, Ego, and Superego are in conflict. According to Akers (1999), conflict between the Id, Ego, and Superego arise from “... abnormal maturation or control of instincts, a poor early relationship with the mother or father, fixation at a stage of emotional development, and/or repressed sexuality of guilt”

(p. 51). In other cases, the Superego is underdeveloped. The abnormal Superego arises from unloving parents and from the lack of parent's involvement in the child's life. People with and underdeveloped Superegos commit criminal acts to show their repressed feelings. The goal they want to achieve is to get caught and seek punishment to elaborate their repressed feelings. According to the psychoanalytical theory, the major motives behind criminality rely on irrational and unconscious motives. Both juvenile and adult crimes that are committed are thought to arise from these irrational and unconscious motives.

When the Id and the Superego are in conflict, the Ego has various defense mechanisms to try and defend these struggles. Displacement is an ego defense mechanism and can be defined as the process for substituting an acceptable goal for an unacceptable goal of an Id motive. In displacement, the Ego resolves a conflict between the Id and the Superego in the real world by making an acceptable compromise. Another defense mechanism is sublimation. This is the process of substituting a socially desirable goal for a socially harmful goal. In sublimation, teenagers often sublimate their sexual energy into a sport. Adults may move themselves into their work rather than to pursue a divorce. The Ego uses many other defense mechanisms to protect it from conflict between the Id and the Superego. These defense mechanisms may be in the form of denial, projection, identification, intellectualization, reaction formation, and aggression. All together, there are about twenty defense mechanisms that the Ego uses. Everyone, at some point and time in their lives, will use some sort of defense mechanisms. Over using these defense mechanisms will, over time, result in the Ego becoming detached from reality and, in time, can cause psychological disorder. Psychoanalysis involves an effort

to understand defenses and unconscious motives during self-destructing behaviors (Ackers, 1999).

Also included in the psychoanalytical theory is psychosexual development. In psychosexual development there are five stages that humans normally pass. The five stages are the oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital stages. In the oral stage, which occurs until about one year of life, the Id gratification is fixated on the mouth. This is where the infant will receive its pleasure. A majority of the infant's effort is directed towards the gratification that the infant receives from his/her mouth. Fixations that occur in this stage can be either retentive fixations or expulsive fixations. In the anal stage, which occurs between one and three years of life, potty training, control, and delayed gratification can be issues at this stage. The erogenous zone is the sphincter muscles of the anus and urinary tract. Fixations at this stage include anal retentive personalities and anal expulsive personalities. In the phallic stage, which occurs between three and six years of life, the genital region becomes the primary source of Id gratification. Children will be observed handling their genitals from time to time. Although adults may see this as wrong and try to discourage the child from handling his/her genitals, parents should accept this action as normal. Fixations that occur during this stage are phallic retentive fixations and phallic expulsive fixations. In the latent stage, which lasts from six year to about eleven years, sexual desires are strongly suppressed during this stage through resolution of the Oedipus, which is the male, and Electra, which is the female, complexes. There are no major shifts in erogenous zones during this stage although many interests are shifted to social interactions. Problems that the child had during the previous stage will seemingly disappear. In the last stage, the genital stage, which occurs from about twelve years to the

end of life, sexual and romantic interests become directed towards one's peer group.

Normal adult heterosexuality emerges. In other words, erogenous zones switch to genital stimulation from the other sex.

Not everyone is in favor of the psychoanalytic theory. Gibbons (1977) stated the following criticisms against the psychoanalytic theory:

1. *The theory is erroneous because it assumes biological motivation, particularly instincts. Evidence indicates that instincts or drives do not exist and that human behavior is not the product of biological forces.*
2. *The argument is defective because it stresses the impact of experiences of infancy and early childhood, particularly weaning, toilet training, and so on, for personality development. The data do not bear out these consequences of early and harsh toilet training and other experiences for later personality formation.*
3. *The theory is flawed because it minimizes the influence of social factors on human behavior. Personality patterns develop out of variations in socialization experiences among cultures, and within a particular society, so that the influences of culture and social structure represent more than simply precipitating forces in their effects. However, variations exist among psychoanalysts regarding the role assigned to cultural variables in personality development; in addition, the fact that psychoanalysts do not pay much attention to cultural variables does not by itself invalidate psychoanalytical arguments.*
4. *The theory overemphasizes sexual aspects of behavior and motivation. The supposition that most human behavior is linked, directly or indirectly, to erotic sources of motivation is erroneous. In particular, the Freudian claims regarding infantile sexuality are open to serious question (p. 165).*

As you can tell from the criticisms stated above, these are both charges against the general argument and its significance to criminality. Critics are trying to convince us that psychoanalysis is not the way figure out why people commit crimes. They want us to turn to more conventional and clear cut factual theories as to why crime occurs.

Samenow and Yockelson (1906) have stated that many critics also view the psychoanalytic theory as being too restricted. It is said that criminality and deviance

cannot be traced to one specific feature, such as the absence of the father. “It has been argued that a system that attempts to explain all mental life in terms of only a few concepts is too limited” (Samenow & Yockleson, 1906, p. 85). Critics also argue that when a practitioner is conducting his or her studies based on the psychoanalytical framework, he or she many times works with a closed mind. Because this theory only includes a few concepts it is hard for one to look outside the framework and open his or her mind to new concepts. Other criticisms point to the fact that psychoanalysis “...ignores individual choices and personal responsibility” (Samenow & Yockelson, 1906, p. 86) while others argue that it is extremely hard to point out criminal acts as a means of early childhood. Critics feel that criminals use interpretations they receive from practitioners to justify their criminal acts. These interpretations can be noticed by the criminal and therefore the criminal tries to defend their acts with how the practitioner works. The offender might notice that the practitioner looks at childhood to understand why the act was committed and further the criminal is likely to say that he committed the act because he had an unstable childhood.

Freud, himself, was aware that this process of thinking might produce different than expected outcomes. Freud (1948) stated that

So long as we trace the development from its final stage backwards, the connection appears continuous, and we feel we have gained an insight which is completely satisfactory or even exhaustive. But if we proceed the reverse way, if we start from the premises inferred from the analysis and try to follow these up to the final result, then we no longer get the impression of an inevitable sequence of events which could not be otherwise determined. We notice at once that there might have been another result, and that we might have been just as well able to understand and explain the latter (p. 226).

Empirical studies are having a hard time testing the stages of human development. Critics are agreeing with the studies; that with few little concepts it is hard to understand how different stages of human development lead to criminality and deviance.

Along with critics, there have been numerous people studying and advancing Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Two very prominent people are Stanton Samenow and Samuel Yockelson. Together these two men have studied Freud's theory inside and out. They have made numerous contributions to this theory that are still being practiced today. Thanks to these two men, and many others, the psychoanalytic theory is alive and active today. Without their contributions and the contributions of others, the psychoanalytic theory might have become out dated.

Many people have discouraged Freud's theory; that one could have psychological problems that dwell deep within the person. However, Freud did not let this hinder his work in any way. He has shown us that the mind is a powerful tool that is capable of many things. Freud's psychoanalytic theory has its advantages as well as disadvantages. Overall, it has made an impact on the study of criminality and deviance. This theory and others have been a building block for which we link crime and deviance to.

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