The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Module 44

Personality

The Psychoanalytic Perspective

- Exploring the Unconscious
- The Neo-Freudian and Psychodynamic Theories
- Assessing Unconscious Processes
- Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective
Personality

An individual’s characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Each dwarf has a distinct personality.

Psychodynamic Perspective

In his clinical practice, Freud encountered patients suffering from nervous disorders whose complaints could not be explained in terms of purely physical causes.

Sigmund Freud
(1856-1939)

OBJECTIVE 44-1 | Define personality.

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Psychodynamic Perspective

Freud’s clinical experience led him to develop the first comprehensive theory of personality which included, the unconscious mind, psychosexual stages and defense mechanisms.

Sigmund Freud
(1856-1939)

OBJECTIVE 44-2 | Explain how Freud’s experiences in private practice led to his theory of psychoanalysis.

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Exploring the Unconscious

A reservoir (unconscious mind) of mostly unacceptable thoughts, wishes, feelings and memories. Freud asked patients to say whatever came to their mind (free association) to tap the unconscious.

Dream Analysis

Another method to analyze the unconscious mind is through interpreting the manifest and latent contents of dreams.

Psychoanalysis

The process of free association (chain of thoughts) led to painful, embarrassing unconscious memories. Once these memories were retrieved and released (treatment: psychoanalysis) the patient felt better.

OBJECTIVE 44-31 Discuss Freud’s view of the mind as an iceberg, and explain how he used this image to represent conscious and unconscious regions of the mind.
Model of Mind

The mind is like an iceberg. Mostly hidden and below the surface lies the unconscious mind. The preconscious, stores temporary memories.

Personality Structure

Personality develops as a result of our efforts to resolve conflicts between our biological impulses (id) and social restraints (superego).

Id, Ego and Superego

**Id** unconsciously strives to satisfy basic sexual and aggressive drives operating on the pleasure principle, demanding immediate gratification.

Largely conscious, **ego** functions as the “executive” and mediates the demands of id and superego.

**Superego** provides standards for judgment (the conscience) and for future aspirations.

OBJECTIVE 44-4 | Describe Freud’s view of personality structure, and discuss the interactions of the id, ego and the superego.
Personality Development

Freud believed that personality formed during life’s first few years divided into psychosexual stages. During these stages the id’s pleasure seeking energies focus on pleasure sensitive body areas called erogenous zones.

OBJECTIVE 44-5| Identify Freud’s psychosexual stages of development, and describe the effects of fixation on behavior.

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Psychosexual Stages

Freud divided development of personality through five psychosexual stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREUD’S PSYCHOSEXUAL STAGES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral (0-8 months)</td>
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<td>Anal (8-16 months)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phallic (2-4 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latency (6-12 years)</td>
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<td>Genital (puberty on)</td>
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Oedipus Complex

A boy’s sexual desires toward his mother and feelings of jealousy and hatred for the rival father. Also Electra complex for the girl’s desire for the father.
Identification

Children cope with threatening feelings by repressing them and by identifying with the rival parent. Through this process of identification their superego gains strength incorporating parents’ values.

Defense Mechanisms

Ego’s protective methods of reducing anxiety by unconsciously distorting reality.

1. Repression banishes anxiety-arousing thoughts, feelings, and memories from consciousness.
2. Regression leads an individual faced with anxiety to retreat to a more infantile psychosexual stage.
3. Reaction Formation causes the ego to unconsciously switch unacceptable impulses into their opposites. People may express feelings of purity when they may be suffering anxiety from unconscious feelings about sex.
4. Projection leads people to disguise their own threatening impulses by attributing them to others.

OBJECTIVE 44-6 | Describe the function of defense mechanisms, and identify six of them.
Defense Mechanisms

5. **Rationalization** offers self-justifying explanations in place of the real, more threatening, unconscious reasons for one’s actions.

6. **Displacement** shifts sexual or aggressive impulses toward a more acceptable or less threatening object or persons... redirecting anger toward a safer outlet.

The Neo-Freudians

Jung believed in the **collective unconscious** which contained a common reservoir of images derived from our species’ past. That is why many cultures share certain myths and images such as the mother as a symbol of nurturance.

Carl Jung (1875-1961)

The Neo-Freudians

Like Freud, Adler believed in childhood tensions, however these tensions were social in nature and not sexual. A child struggles with the **inferiority complex** during growth and strives for superiority and power.

Alfred Adler (1870-1937)

OBJECTIVE 44-7! Contrast the views of the neo-Freudians and psychodynamic theorists with those of Freud’s original theory.
The Neo-Freudians

Like Adler, Horney believed in the social aspects of childhood growth and development. She countered Freud’s assumption that women have weak superegos and suffer “penis envy.”

Karen Horney (1885-1952)

Assessing Unconscious Processes

Evaluating personality from an unconscious mind perspective would require a psychological instrument (projective tests) that would reveal the hidden unconscious mind.

OBJECTIVE 44-8 | Describe two projective tests used to assess personality, and discuss some criticisms of them.

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

Developed by Henry Murray, TAT is a projective test in which people express their inner feelings and interests through the stories they make up about ambiguous scenes.
Rorschach Inkblot Test

The most widely used projective test with a set of 10 inkblots was designed by Hermann Rorschach. It seeks to identify people's inner feelings by analyzing their interpretations of the blots.

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Projective Tests: Criticisms

Critics argue that projective test lack both reliability (consistency of results) and validity (predicting what it is supposed to).

1. Even trained raters evaluating the same patient come up with different interpretations (reliability).
2. And projective tests may misdiagnose a normal individual as pathological (validity).

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Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective

Modern Research

1. Personality develops throughout life and is not fixed in childhood.
2. Freud underemphasize peer influence on the individual which may be as powerful as parental influence.
3. Gender identity may develop before 5-6 years of age.
Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective

Modern Research

4. There may be other reasons for dreams to arise than wish fulfillment.
5. Verbal slips can be explained on basis of cognitive processing of verbal choices.
6. Suppressed sexuality leads to psychological disorders. Sexual inhibition has decreased, but psychological disorders have not.

OBJECTIVE 44-9 | Summarize psychology’s current assessment of Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis.

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Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory rests on repression of painful experiences into the unconscious mind.

Majority of children, death camp survivors, battle-scarred veterans are unable to repress painful experiences into their unconscious mind.

Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective

Freud was right about the unconscious mind. Modern research shows the existence non-conscious information processing.

1. Schemas that automatically control perceptions and interpretations.
2. Parallel processing during vision and thinking.
3. Implicit memories.
4. Emotions activate instantly without consciousness.
Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective

Freud’s theory has been criticized on scientific merits. Psychoanalysis meagerly testable. Most of its concepts arise out of clinical practice which are after-the-fact explanations.