

WJEC Psychology A-level

The Psychodynamic Approach

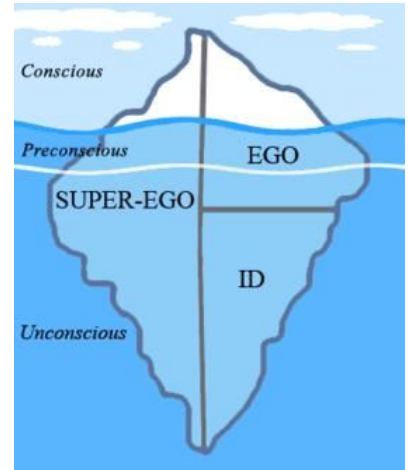
Notes



Part 1: An Introduction to The Psychodynamic Approach

A01 Introduction and Assumptions:

- Freud adopted the use of psychic determinism = This is the idea that all behaviour is caused by unconscious internal conflicts, over which we have no control.
- There are 3 levels of consciousness: The conscious, preconscious and unconscious.
- We are only aware of our conscious. Contents of the preconscious are revealed through parapraxes, slips of the tongue and dreaming. Therefore, since we are completely unaware of our unconscious, inferences of its workings can be made through the psychoanalysis (analysing symbols in dreams) and psychotherapy.
- The unconscious stores our biological drives and instincts (e.g. hunger, thirst and sex) as well as upsetting and disturbing thoughts repressed from the conscious.



Freud's Tripartite Personality:

- Freud viewed the personality as made up of three components i.e. 'tripartite'. These are the Id, ego and superego.
1. Id = This is the innate part of the personality, and operates on the pleasure principle. Therefore, the Id constantly demands instant gratification (e.g. to fulfill innate, biological instincts, such as hunger and thirst) and so is in conflict with the superego.

Stage	Ages	Focus of Libido	Major Development	Adult Fixation Example
Oral	0 to 1	Mouth, Tongue, Lips	Weaning off of breast feeding or formula	Smoking, Overeating
Anal	1 to 3	Anus	Toilet Training	Orderliness, Messiness
Phallic	3 to 6	Genitals	Resolving Oedipus/ Electra Complex	Deviancy, Sexual Dysfunction
Latency	6 to 12	None	Developing Defense Mechanisms	None
Genital	12+	Genitals	Reaching Full Sexual Maturity	If all stages were successfully completed then the person should be sexually matured and mentally healthy.

2. Ego = Formed during the first 3 years of life, and operates on the reality principle. The ego helps to resolve the conflict between the id and the superego through the use of defence mechanisms (repression, denial and displacement). The strength of the unconscious depends upon how efficiently the ego resolves this conflict.
3. Superego = Formed at the end of the phallic stage, and operates on the morality principle. This contains the child's internalised sense of right and wrong, based upon their same-sex parent. The superego is in constant conflict with the Id.

The Psychosexual Stages:

- Freud adopted a nomothetic approach by suggesting that there a series of developmental stages through which all children progress, and in the same order.
- Each stage is characterised by a conflict, which must be resolved to pass to the next stage, apart from latency.
- Failure to do so results in 'fixation' at that stage, where dysfunctional behaviours associated with that stage are carried forwards to adulthood.



The Psychodynamic Approach

- The ideas of the Oedipus and Electra Complexes were developed on the basis of case studies conducted on Little Hans, where Freud suggested that Little Hans' phobia of horses stemmed from a fear towards his father, due to having sexual desires for his mother.
- This is an example of the idiographic approach to research (i.e. the use of case studied), but with a nomothetic application (i.e. all boys experience the Oedipus Complex, whilst all girls experience the Electra Complex).

A02 Potential Application Questions:

1. Comparisons between the psychodynamic approach and humanism.
2. Explanation of the case of Little Hans, using the psychosexual stages.
3. Links between the psychodynamic approach and the current scientific status of Psychology (synoptic with Research Methods).
4. Psychodynamic explanations of mental disorders, making links with the tripartite personality and the role of the unconscious.

A03 Evaluation:

– **Unconscious Concepts** = Since we are unaware of the unconscious, then it is not possible to objectively and systematically measure it. Therefore, this means that, according to Karl Popper, that the psychodynamic approach does not meet the scientific criterion of falsification, leaving it unfalsifiable and a pseudoscience. This does little to improve the scientific credibility of psychology, and indeed has left many with an inaccurate view of psychology as a scientific discipline.

– **The use of an idiographic approach / Case studies** = Many of Freud's theories, most notably the Oedipus and Electra Complexes, were based on data from individual case studies and interviews. There are several problems with this. The first, is that participants selected to be subjects of case studies are often of some kind of special psychological interest, and so cannot represent the experiences of the general population, so the findings lack ecological validity. Secondly, mainly qualitative data is collected, which means that the researcher draws their own subjective conclusions. This is particularly the case if the researcher knows what they are looking for and/or the aims of the investigation, so the results will be affected by researcher bias. Therefore, Freud's data and theories suffer from limited applications and generalisability.

– **Psychic Determinism** = Freud suggested that all behaviour is the product of unconscious, internal conflicts (between the Id and the superego, whilst being mediated by the ego) over which we have no control. This means that every action, even 'accidental' slips of the tongue, has some kind of meaning and can give us insight into our unconscious. However, this adds to the subjectivity of interpretations of these meanings, and therefore is not in line with scientific methods of investigating behaviour. This is all in contrast to the hard determinism approach used by behaviourism, reciprocal determinism used by social learning theory, soft determinism used by the cognitive approach and biological determinism used by the biological approach.

+ **Practical Applications** = Psychotherapy and psychoanalysis are both rooted in the psychodynamic approach and still have modern uses. For example, Kohlenberg et al



(2002) found that ¹“FECT / Functional Analytic Cognitive Therapy produced a greater focus on the client-therapist relationship and is a promising approach for improving outcomes and interpersonal functioning. It also appears that a focus during sessions on clients’ problematic cognitions about the therapist adds to the efficacy”. Therefore, Freud’s psychodynamic approach has made a long-lasting contribution towards treatment of various mental disorders, such as depression.

Part 2: Classical Research - Bowlby’s 44 Juvenile Thieves

In order to assess the effects of maternal deprivation, Bowlby conducted his 44 juvenile thieves study. He found that out of 44 thieves, 14 displayed signs of affectionless psychopathy and 12 of these had suffered from maternal deprivation during the critical period of attachment formation i.e. the first 30 months of life. This was compared to only 5 affectionless psychopaths in the remaining 30 thieves. Therefore, on this basis, Bowlby believed that early maternal deprivation caused affectionless psychopathy and consequently, criminality!

— Lewis et al disagreed with Bowlby’s conclusion that affectionless psychopathy and maternal deprivation caused criminality. Through collecting qualitative data from interviews conducted with 500 juveniles, the researchers found no link between maternal deprivation and a difficulty in forming relationships in later life. This suggests that Bowlby may have made incorrect causal conclusions.

— Bowlby’s 44 juvenile thieves study suffers from several methodological limitations. One of these includes researcher bias - Bowlby was aware of what he wanted to find and so may have phrased the interview questions in a way which influenced the respondents to reply in a certain way i.e. leading questions. Secondly, Bowlby also based his theory of maternal deprivation from interviews collected from war-orphans. This does not control for the confounding variable of poor quality care in orphanages or post-traumatic stress disorder, which may have had a larger influence on the children’s development rather than simply maternal deprivation.

— The effects of the critical period may not be as concrete as Bowlby originally believed. For example, the case of two twins locked away in cupboards in Czechoslovakia for the first 7 years of their lives was reported by Koluchova. Despite the obvious trauma and maternal deprivation which occurred for an extended period of time, even exceeding the critical period, the researchers found that with appropriate fostering, the twins made a full psychological recovery. Therefore, the effects of maternal deprivation are not always so clear-cut.

Part 3: Dream Analysis

- Freud believed that the majority of the mind was unconscious and so cannot be consciously accessed. The contents of our unconscious are revealed through dreams, according to Freud.
- These dreams represent repressed unconscious desires and drives. Dreams also contain symbols which have special meanings, such as the presence of a snake or the phenomenon of an individual’s teeth falling out.
- Therefore, Freud used highly qualitative and subjective methods in order to analyse people’s dreams. He would take notes on the patient as they underwent the process of free association i.e. when a person talks ‘freely’ and replies to a specific stimulus word or phrase, based on the assumption that all language (including seemingly accidental slips of the tongue) have some

¹ Robert J. Kohlenberg, Jonathan W. Kanter, Madelon Y. Bolling, Chauncey R. Parker, Mavis Tsai, Enhancing cognitive therapy for depression with functional analytic psychotherapy: Treatment guidelines and empirical findings, Cognitive and Behavioral Practice, Volume 9, Issue 3, 2002, Pages 213-229,





symbolic meaning. The contents of an individual's unconscious would be revealed through such dream analysis.

– The highly subjective judgements made will differ significantly between different therapists. This may be confusing for the patient or even frustrating, especially if they have suffered from a persistent nightmare or problem. The added problem of unconscious concepts being unable to be studied objectively only adds to the issue of validity!

+ **Nevertheless**, dram analysis is unique and was one of the pioneering methods in the early 20th century. Therefore, dream analysis can be said to have considerable utility and practical applications.

– Freud developed his ideas of the symbolic

meaning of some dream symbols on the basis of a select, small sample of middle-class and wealthy Viennese families. This means that his findings are unlikely to be generalised to the wider population, and so potentially lack ecological validity.

