
MODULE 45

The Psychoanalytic Perspective

Module Preview

Personality is one's characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Sigmund Freud, in his psychoanalytic perspective, proposed that childhood sexuality and unconscious motives influenced personality. For Sigmund Freud, conflict between pleasure-seeking biological impulses and social restraints centered on three interacting systems: id, ego, and super-ego. Freud believed that children develop through psychosexual stages and that people's later problems are rooted in how they resolve conflicts associated with these stages.

The neo-Freudians agreed with Freud's basic ideas but placed more emphasis on the conscious mind and on social influences. Today, psychodynamic theorists agree with many of Freud's views but not his idea that sex is the basis of personality. Contemporary research confirms that, more than most of us realize, our lives are guided by unconscious information processing.

Module Guide

Introduction

- ▶ Introductory Exercise: Fact or Falsehood?
- ▶ Lecture: Issues in Personality Theory
- ▶ Exercises: Introducing Personality; Your Theory of Personality
- ▶ Feature Film: *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*
- ▶ Video: Module 26 of *Psychology: The Human Experience: Origins of Personality*

45-1. Define personality.

Psychologists consider **personality** to be an individual's characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Exploring the Unconscious

- ▶ Exercise: Fifteen Freudian Principle Statements
- ▶ Lectures: Freudian Slips; Freud's View of Humor; The Case of Little Hans
- ▶ Video: *Discovering Psychology, Updated Edition: The Mind Hidden and Divided*

45-2. Explain how Freud's treatment of psychological disorders led to his study of the unconscious mind.

In his private practice, Freud found that nervous disorders often made no neurological sense. Piecing together his patients' accounts of their lives, he concluded that their disorders had psychological causes. His effort to understand these causes led to his "discovery" of the unconscious.

Initially, he thought hypnosis might unlock the door to the unconscious. However, recognizing patients' uneven capacity for hypnosis, Freud turned to **free association**, which he believed produced a chain of thoughts in the patient's unconscious. He called the process (as well as his theory of personality) **psychoanalysis**.

Freud believed the mind is mostly hidden. Our conscious experience is like the part of the iceberg that floats above the surface. Below the surface is the much larger **unconscious**, which contains thoughts, wishes, feelings, and memories of which we are largely unaware. Some of these thoughts we store temporarily in a *preconscious* area from which we can retrieve them into conscious awareness.

► Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Personality Structure: Id, Ego, and Superego*

45-3. *Describe Freud's view of personality structure in terms of the id, ego, and superego.*

Freud believed that personality arises from our efforts to resolve the conflict between our biological impulses and the social restraints against them. He theorized that the conflict centers on three interacting systems: the **id**, which operates on the *pleasure principle*; the **ego**, which functions on the *reality principle*; and the **superego**, an internalized set of ideals. The superego's demands often oppose the id's, and the ego, as the "executive" part of personality, seeks to reconcile the two.

45-4. *Identify Freud's psychosexual stages of development, and describe the effects of fixation on behavior.*

Freud maintained that children pass through a series of **psychosexual stages** during which the id's pleasure-seeking energies focus on distinct pleasure-sensitive areas of the body called *erogenous zones*. During the *oral stage* (0–18 months), pleasure centers on the mouth; during the *anal stage* (18–36 months), it centers on bowel/bladder elimination.

During the critical *phallic stage* (3–6 years), pleasure centers on the genitals. Boys experience the **Oedipus complex**, with unconscious sexual desires toward their mother and hatred of their father. They cope with these threatening feelings through **identification** with their father, thereby incorporating many of his values and developing a sense of what psychologists now call *gender identity*. The latency stage (6 years to puberty), in which sexuality is dormant, gives way to the genital stage (puberty on) as sexual interests mature.

In Freud's view, maladaptive adult behavior results from conflicts unresolved during the oral, anal, and phallic stages. At any point, conflict can lock, or **fixate**, the person's pleasure-seeking energies in that stage.

► Exercises: Defense Mechanism Miniskits; Defense Mechanisms

45-5. *Discuss how defense mechanisms serve to protect the individual from anxiety.*

Defense mechanisms reduce or redirect anxiety in various ways, but always by unconsciously distorting reality. **Repression**, which underlies the other defense mechanisms, banishes anxiety-arousing thoughts, feelings, and memories from consciousness; **regression** involves retreat to an earlier, more infantile stage of development; and **reaction formation** makes unacceptable impulses look like their opposites. **Projection** attributes threatening impulses to others, **rationalization** offers self-justifying explanations for behavior, **displacement** diverts impulses to a more acceptable object or person, and **denial** refuses to believe painful realities.

The Neo-Freudian and Psychodynamic Theorists

► Lecture: Freud's Legacy and the Neo-Analytic Movement

45-6. *Contrast the views of the neo-Freudians and psychodynamic theorists with Freud's original theory.*

The neo-Freudians accepted Freud's basic ideas regarding personality structures, the importance of the unconscious, the shaping of personality in children, and the dynamics of anxiety and defense mechanisms. However, in contrast to Freud, the neo-Freudians generally placed more emphasis on

the conscious mind in interpreting experience and coping with the environment, and they argued that we have more positive motives than sex and aggression. Unlike other neo-Freudians, Carl Jung agreed with Freud that the unconscious exerts a powerful influence. In addition, he suggested that the *collective unconscious* is a shared, inherited reservoir of memory traces from our species' history. Contemporary *psychodynamic* theorists and therapists reject the notion that sex is the basis of personality but agree with Freud that much of our mental life is unconscious, that we struggle with inner conflicts, and that childhood shapes our personalities and attachment styles.

Assessing Unconscious Processes

45-7. Describe two projective tests used to assess personality, and discuss some criticisms of them.

Projective tests provide ambiguous stimuli that are designed to trigger projection of one's inner dynamics. In the **Thematic Apperception Test**, people view ambiguous pictures and then make up stories about them. Presumably, their accounts reflect their interests and inner feelings. The **Rorschach inkblot test** seeks to identify people's inner feelings and conflicts by analyzing their interpretations of 10 inkblots. Critics question the validity and reliability of the tests. Nonetheless, many clinicians continue to use them.

Evaluating the Psychoanalytic Perspective

- ▶ Exercise: The False Consensus Effect
- ▶ Lecture: Unconscious Insights
- ▶ Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Repression: Reality or Myth?*

45-8. Summarize psychology's current assessment of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, including its portrayal of the unconscious.

Critics contend that many of Freud's specific ideas are contradicted by new research and that his theory offers only after-the-fact explanations. Recent findings question the overriding importance of childhood experiences, the degree of parental influence, the timing of gender-identity formation, the significance of childhood sexuality, and the existence of hidden content in dreams. Many researchers now believe that repression rarely, if ever, occurs. Nevertheless, Freud drew psychology's attention to the unconscious and to our struggle to cope with anxiety and sexuality. Today's psychologists view the unconscious not as seething passions and repressive censoring but as information processing that occurs without our awareness. Research confirms the reality of unconscious *implicit learning*.

Recent research provides some support for Freud's idea of defense mechanisms. For example, his idea of projection is what researchers now call the *false consensus effect*. That we defend against anxiety is also evident in tests of **terror-management theory**. Findings indicate that thinking about one's mortality provokes enough anxiety to increase contempt for others and esteem for oneself.

Freud also focused attention on the conflict between biological impulses and social restraints. He reminds us of our potential for evil. Unquestionably, his cultural impact has been enormous.

