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Personality Development in Psychoanalytic Perspective: Literature Review

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Psychoanalytic theory seeks to explain how personality develops with a focus on motivation, emotions, and other internal aspects. Essentially, psychoanalysis is the result of Freud's ideas about the power of preconscious structures (id, ego, and superego) in controlling human behavior. The implication is that human behavior is controlled by preconscious structures, manifested as imitations, with their control lying in lost childhood memories. The method used in this writing is a literature review, involving a critical analysis of written sources (literature) on a specific topic, enabling the creation of summaries, classifications, comparisons, or even evaluations. Freud believed that humans are constantly driven by a desire for pleasure. However, what one encounters in the external world may not always be an ideal condition that supports these drives. Hence, the idea of a conflict between these drives and the external world arises. This notion led Freud to the concept most famous among his others: the three points of human personality as the Ego (Latin for "I"), Superego (Latin for "above/I above"), and Id (Latin for "this/it"). Freud categorized character development into three stages: infantile (0-5 years), latent (5-12 years), and genital (12 years). The psychoanalytic theory introduced by Freud helps understand human personality and categorize normal and pathological behaviors. Freud believed that humans always experience conflicts, both internal and external, that must be resolved to achieve balance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Discussing Psychoanalytic Theory feels impossible without discussing Sigmund Shlomo Freud, an Austrian neurologist labeled as the Father of Psychoanalysis himself. The author first encountered Sigmund Freud in a religious study, where one of the speakers criticized Freud's perspective, considering religious behavior equivalent to mental illness a viewpoint that seems to have been widely examined scientifically [1].

Sigmund Freud was born in Freiberg, Moravia, Austria, and passed away in London, England, at the age of approximately 80. Throughout his life, Freud held titles such as doctor, psychiatrist, scientist, and, of course, psychologist. Freud himself proposed that psychoanalysis falls under the realm of psychology; not medical psychology, nor mere psychology that investigates whether something is normal or abnormal. For Freud, Psychoanalysis is a theory of personality [2].

Psychoanalytic theory attempts to explain how personality develops with a focus on motivation, emotions, and other internal aspects [3]. In essence, psychoanalysis is the result of Freud's ideas about the power of the pre-conscious structures (id, ego, and superego) in controlling human behavior. The implications are that human behavior is governed by the pre-conscious structures, taking the form of imitations controlled by lost memories from childhood. Freud then attempted an analysis of an individual's empirical facts regarding their dreams, which he interpreted using a method later called psychoanalysis.

According to Freud, human personality consists of the id, ego, and superego. The id (biological aspect) is an impulse from the human subconscious to do something in the pursuit of satisfaction. The ego (psychological aspect) influences the actions of the id. The superego (moral aspect) provides guidance on values of right and wrong, determining whether the actions align with prevailing norms [4].

Freud constructed an understanding of human personality through his patients' experiences, dream analysis, and research on various literature. Despite the ongoing development of his theory throughout his life, Freud emphasized that psychoanalysis should not be eclectic. He staunchly defended his fundamental ideas, personally and professionally excommunicating disciples who deviated from the core concepts.

Freud saw himself as a scientist, although his approach to science differed somewhat from that of most modern psychologists. He relied more on deductive reasoning than rigorous research, employing subjective observations with limited samples. Freud also tended to use case studies to formulate hypotheses about the facts he encountered.

While psychology generally prioritizes research on consciousness, Freud emphasized that consciousness is only a small part of mental life. For him, the unconscious mind plays a larger role, acting like an iceberg where only a small portion is visible (consciousness) while the majority is beneath the surface (unconscious). Freud also viewed humans as beings determined by irrational forces, the unconscious, biological drives, and instincts from early in their lives.
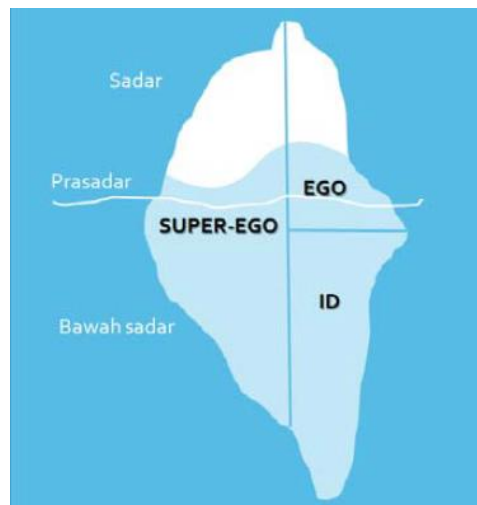

Figure 1. Illustration of id, ego and superego

Despite being controversial, Freud's psychoanalysis remains a subject of much criticism from experts with different perspectives.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The method employed in this writing is a literature review. In simple terms, a literature review involves a critical analysis of written sources (literature) on a specific topic. The composition of this article follows scientific writing standards in various ways, such as delving into, comparing, summarizing, and gathering literature sources [5].

This method is employed to analyze various research on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly those discussing the id, ego, and superego, as well as Freud's views on personality development (oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital stages). Several scholarly articles and other credible sources related to this topic were gathered, and the author synthesized them to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these sources in relation to the theory of personality development.

Every finding regarding personality development that has been previously researched will be critically examined with a focus on the personality development stages proposed by Freud.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Human Personality in Psychoanalytic Perspective

In Freud's view, human behavior in everyday life, whether manifested physically or in hidden thoughts, is determined by past mental events [6]. These events, some of which are conscious, others accessible but unconscious, and some challenging to bring into the unconscious mind.

In childhood, according to Freud, we are entirely governed by the id, and he refers to this phase as primary process thinking. Young children will seek substitutes if they cannot find something satisfying for their needs (such as a baby sucking their thumb if not breastfed or provided with a pacifier). On the other hand, the ego will develop more in older children and adults. According to Freud, this is the phase of secondary process thinking. People are capable of delaying the gratification of their desires (postponing playing with a ball because it's raining, for example). However, sometimes in adults, attitudes resembling primary process thinking may emerge, seeking substitutes for desire satisfaction (such as banging on a table when feeling upset for being scolded by someone feared, like the boss at the office).

3.2 Levels of Mental Life

Freud categorizes personality into three levels: consciousness (conscious), preconscious (preconscious), and unconscious (unconscious) [7].

1. Conscious: This encompasses an understanding of meaning in everyday life, everything we perceive at a given moment such as sensations and experiences that make us aware of every event we undergo. Freud considered only a small part of mental life (thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and memories) enters this realm of consciousness.
2. Preconscious: It is the region beneath consciousness, situated between the levels of consciousness and unconsciousness. The preconscious is a storage area for memories that can be accessed with little effort to bring them to the level of consciousness, such as easily accessible memories in conscious thought. This area is also referred to as available memory.
3. Unconscious: It is the largest layer, and Freud considers it the most crucial aspect of mental life beneath the surface. Sigmund Freud views humans as dynamic beings where there is an exchange of energy (id, ego, and superego) within their personalities. This is also considered abnormal behavior caused by intrapsychic factors. Freud believes that the core of an individual is not what is apparent during conscious moments but what is hidden in their unconscious [8].

3.3 Conceptual Framework

In simple terms, Freud believes that humans are constantly driven by the desire to seek pleasure. However, what they encounter outside themselves is not always an ideal condition that supports these urges. From this, the idea of a conflict between these urges and the external world arises. This concept then leads Freud to his most famous concept among others, the three points of human personality as the Ego (Latin for "I"), Superego (Latin for "above/I above"), and Id (Latin for "this/that").

In this scheme, the Id is considered the first and most fundamental among the three elements. It is rooted in the earliest stage, the animalistic phase of human evolution. It is a subconscious realm that is not self-aware. This is where the foundation of all physical drives lies, transforming into mental expressions in actions.

At the opposite end, what can be considered the top part of the personality is the superego. It represents the influences that have been gradually incorporated into an individual's personality from the external world since birth [9].

3.3.1 Id

The Id is the original personality system, present from birth. From the Id, the ego and superego will later emerge. At birth, the Id contains all inherited psychological aspects, such as instincts, impulses, and drives. The Id is located and operates in the unconscious realm, representing a subjectivity that is never consciously realized throughout life. The Id is closely related to the physical processes to obtain psychic energy used to operate the system of other personality structures.

The Id operates based on the pleasure principle, which seeks to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. The pleasure principle is processed in two ways: first, Reflex Actions, automatic reactions present since birth, such as blinking, are used to handle the satisfaction of simple stimuli and can usually be done immediately. Second, Primary Process, imagining/imagining something that can reduce or eliminate tension, is used to handle complex stimuli, such as a hungry baby imagining food or its mother's nipple.

The Id can only imagine something without being able to distinguish that imagination from the reality that truly satisfies needs. The Id is unable to judge or differentiate between right and wrong, lacking moral

awareness. This is the reason that leads to the emergence of the ego.

3.3.2 Ego

The ego develops from the id to enable individuals to handle reality, so the ego operates according to the reality principle, striving to obtain the satisfaction demanded by the id by preventing the occurrence of new tension or delaying pleasure until an object is found that can genuinely satisfy the needs.

The ego is the executive or executor of the personality, with two main tasks: first, choosing which stimuli to respond to and which instincts to satisfy based on priority needs. Second, determining when and how those needs are satisfied according to the availability of opportunities with minimal risk. The ego essentially works to satisfy the id, so an ego without its own energy will obtain energy from the id.

3.3.3 Superego

The Superego is the moral and ethical force of the personality, operating using the idealistic principle as opposed to the satisfaction principle of the id and the realistic principle of the ego. The Superego develops from the ego, and like the ego, it does not have its own source of energy. However, the Superego differs from the ego in one crucial aspect: the Superego has no contact with the external world, so its demands for perfection become unrealistic.

The idealistic principle has two sub-principles: conscience and the ego ideal. Freud did not clearly distinguish these principles, but generally, the conscience arises from experiences of being punished for inappropriate behavior and teaches us about things that should not be done. On the other hand, the ego ideal develops from experiences of being rewarded for appropriate behavior and guides us toward things that should be done.

The Superego is nonrational in demanding perfection, harshly punishing the ego for both committed and newly conceived errors. There are three functions of the Superego: (1) encouraging the ego to replace realistic goals with moralistic goals, (2) hindering id impulses, especially sexual and aggressive impulses that conflict with societal values, and (3) pursuing perfection.

3.4 Personality Growth

Freud grouped character development into three stages: infantile (0-5 years), latent (5-12 years), and genital (12 years) [10]. The infantile stage is further divided into three phases: oral, anal, and phallic. This character growth is primarily influenced by biological development, also referred to as the infantile intimate stage. The growth of sexual instincts signifies a shift toward erotic zones in the body that will become the center of intimate satisfaction.

Oral Phase (Ages 0–1 year), this phase occurs in the early years of life and focuses on the mouth as a crucial sensitive area for satisfying food or drink needs. Stimulation of the mouth, such as sucking, provides satisfaction to the baby.

Anal Phase (Ages 1–2/3 years), this phase starts from the age of 2 to 3 years. The libido's focus shifts from the mouth to the anal area, and satisfaction is obtained through actions like holding or withholding feces.

Phallic Phase (Ages 2/3–5/6 years), occurring around the age of 4 or 5 years, this phase marks the transition of libido from the anal area to the genital area. Children become interested in their own genitalia and experience satisfaction in certain activities. This period also involves the Oedipus complex and symptoms of castration anxiety (in males) as well as the desire for having a penis (in females).

Latency Phase (Ages 5/6–12/13 years), taking place from around age 5 to early adolescence, this phase includes a period of reduced sexual impulses due to the absence of new erotic zones emerging from biological growth. Children begin to develop sublimation, redirecting sexual urges into non-sexual activities like intellectual pursuits, sports, and friendships.

Genital Phase, begins with the biological changes in adolescence. Hormones that stimulate the development of secondary sexual characteristics are produced by the endocrine system. Genital cathexis in this phase indicates narcissistic traits: satisfaction from self-stimulation and manipulation of one's own body, as well as the desire to receive physical satisfaction from others. Sexual impulses start to be directed towards external objects, such as participating in group activities, planning for the future, romantic relationships, marriage, and family

4. CONCLUSION

The psychoanalytic theory introduced by Freud helps in understanding human personality and categorizing normal and pathological behaviors. Freud believed that humans constantly experience conflicts, both internal and external, that need to be resolved to achieve balance. Conflict and its resolution are central points in the development of human personality.

Freud emphasized that the unconscious or subconscious is a primary factor influencing human behavior, especially pathological behavior. In the context of psychoanalysis, therapy aims to assist clients in recognizing their unconscious processes so that they can be more easily resolved through consciousness. This therapy also considers childhood experiences to understand disturbances that may occur in adulthood.

Currently, classical psychoanalysis has largely been abandoned in the study of psychology because it is considered not empirically convincing enough. Utomo states that psychology, as a scientific discipline, has now shifted away from psychoanalysis towards trends that tend to be positivist [10]. This shift is also believed to be due to a less comprehensive understanding of Sigmund Freud, which is one of the main reasons why he is heavily criticized for his thoughts on personality and psychology concepts.

Nevertheless, the fact that Freud is one of the most influential figures in the history of the development of psychological science is undeniable. The theories and psychotherapeutic techniques he developed are still applied in modern psychology practice. For instance, the Non-logical Thought Process is an extraordinary breakthrough offered by Freud as a refutation of the old notion that humans are beings who are always conscious and rational. Defense Mechanisms are also concepts that are still widely used, especially in the context of psychopathology. Freud's work, "Psychopathology of Everyday Life," is still extensively discussed, for example, to explain trivial matters such as someone's 'slip of the tongue,' which Freud considered a form of unconscious expression of unfulfilled desires.

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