

Changing perspectives of psychological theories of human development:

Psychological perspectives:

Psychologists today do not believe there is one “right” way to study the way people think or behave. There are various schools of thought that evolved the development of psychology that continue to shape the way psychologists investigate human behaviour. For example some psychologists might attribute certain behaviour to biological factors such as genetics while other psychologists might consider early childhood experiences to be a more likely explanation for the behaviour. These schools of thought are known as approaches or perspectives.

The psychodynamic perspective:

Psychodynamic theory is an approach to psychology that studies the psychological forces underlying human behaviour, feelings and emotions and how they may relate to early childhood experiences. This theory is especially interested in the dynamic relations between conscious and unconscious motivation, and asserts that behaviour is the product of underlying conflicts over which people often have little awareness.

Psychodynamic theory was born in 1874 with the works of German scientist Ernst Von Brucke. During the same year medical student Sigmund Freud adopted this new dynamic physiology and expanded it to create the original concept of ‘psychodynamics’ in which he suggested that psychological processes are flows of psychosexual energy(libido) in a complex brain. Later these theories were developed further by Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Melanie Klein and others. By the mid 1940s and into the 1950s, the general application of the ‘psychodynamic theory’ had been well established.

The role of unconscious:

Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis holds two major assumptions;

1. That much of mental life is unconscious
2. That past experiences especially in childhood, shape how a person feels and behaves throughout life.

The concept of unconscious was central; Freud postulated a cycle in which ideas are repressed but continue to operate unconsciously in the mind and then reappear in consciousness under certain circumstances.

The Id, Ego and Super ego

Freud’s structural model of personality divides the personality into three parts----the id, the ego and the superego.

The id is the unconscious part that is the cauldron of raw drives, such as for sex and aggression.

The ego, which has conscious and unconscious element, is the rational and reasonable part of personality. Its role is to maintain contact with the outside world to keep the individual in touch with society, and to do this it mediates between the conflicting tendencies of the id and the superego.

The superego is a person's conscience, which develops early in life and is learned from parents, teachers and others.

When all three parts of the personality are in dynamic equilibrium, the individual is thought to be mentally healthy. However, if the ego is unable to mediate between the id and the superego, an imbalance is believed to occur in the form of psychological distress.

Psychosexual theory of development

Freud believed that each of us must pass through a series of stages during childhood, and if we lack proper nurturing during a particular stage, we may become stuck in that stage.

Psychosexual model of development includes five stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital. According to Freud, children's pleasure-seeking urges are focused on a different area of the body, called an erogenous zone, at each of these five stages.

Jungian psychodynamics

Carl Jung was a Swiss psychotherapist who expanded upon Freud's theories at the turn of the 20th century. A central concept of Jung's analytical psychology is individuation: the psychological process of integrating opposites, including the conscious with the unconscious, while still maintaining their relative autonomy. Jung focused less on infantile development and conflict between the id and superego and instead focused more on integration between different parts of the person. Jung created some of the best known psychological concepts, including the archetype, the collective unconscious, the complex and synchronicity.

THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVES

Basic principles of Humanistic Perspective:

The humanistic perspective is a holistic psychological perspective that attributes human characteristics and actions to free will and an innate drive for self actualization. This approach focuses on maximum human potential achievement rather than psychoses and symptoms of disorder. It emphasizes that people are inherently good and pays special attention to personal experiences and creativity. This perspective has led to advances in positive, educational and industrial psychology and has been applauded for its successful application to psychotherapy and social issue. Despite its great influence, humanistic psychology has also been criticised for its subjectivity and lack of evidence.

Developments in Humanistic Psychology

In the late 1950s, a group of psychologists convened in Detroit, Michigan, to discuss their interest in a psychology that focused on uniquely human issues, such as the self, self – actualization, health, hope, love, creativity, nature, being, becoming, individuality and meaning. These preliminary meetings eventually culminated in the description of humanistic psychology as a recognizable ‘third force’ in psychology along with behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Humanisms major theorists were Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers. Rollo May and Clark Moustakas; it was also influenced by psychoanalytic theorists, including Wilhelm Reich, who discussed an essentially good. Healthy core self, and Carl Gustav Jung who emphasized the concept of archetypes.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) is considered the founder of humanistic psychology. Maslow studied mentally healthy individuals instead of people with serious psychological issues. He believed that every person has a strong desire to realize his or her full potential-or to reach what he called ‘self-actualization’. Through his research he coined the term ‘peak experience’ which he defined as ‘high points’ in which people feel harmony with themselves and their surroundings. Self actualised people have more of these peak experiences than others.

At the bottom of Maslow’s need hierarchy are the basic physiological needs. The next level is safety. The third level is love and belongingness, the psychological need to share oneself to others. The fourth level, esteem, focuses on success, status and accomplishment. The top of the pyramid is self-actualization, in which person is believed to have reached a state of harmony and understanding. Individuals cannot reach higher stages without first meeting of lower needs that come before them.

Rogers’ Person-Centred Therapy

Carl Rogers (1902-1987) is best known for his person-centred approach, in which the relationship between therapist and client is used to help the patient reach a state of realization, so that they can then help themselves. His non-directive approach focuses more on the present than the past and centres on clients’ capacity for self-direction and

understanding of their own development. The therapist encourages the patient to express their feelings and does not suggest how the person might wish to change. Instead the therapist uses the skills of active listening and mirroring to help patients explore and understand their feelings of themselves.

Rogers is also known for practising 'unconditional positive regard', which is defined as accepting a person in their entirety with no negative judgement of their essential worth. He believed that those raised in an environment of unconditional positive regard have the opportunity to fully actualize themselves, while those raised in an environment of conditional positive regard only feel worthy if they match conditions that have been laid down by others.

May's Existentialism

Rollo May (1909-1994) was the American existential psychologist and differed from other humanistic psychologists by showing a sharper awareness of the tragic dimensions of human existence. May was influenced by American humanism, and emphasized the importance of human choice.

Advantages and disadvantages

It is holistic in nature. In this way people are not reduce to one particular attribute or set of characteristics humanistic psychology allows for a personality concept that is dynamic fluid and accounts for much of the change a person experience over a life time. It stresses the importance of free will and personal responsibility for decision making; this view gives the conscious human being some necessary autonomy and frees them from deterministic principles.

However, critics have taken issue with many of the early tenets of humanism, such as its lack of empirical evidence. Because of the inherent subjective nature of the humanistic approach, psychologists worry that this perspective does not identify enough constant variables in order to be researched with consistency and accuracy. Psychologists also worry that such an extreme focus on the subjective experience of the individual does little to explain or appreciate the impact of external societal factors on personality development in addition. The major tenet of humanistic personality psychology—namely that people are innately good and intuitively seek positive goals—does not account for the presence of deviance in the world within normal, functioning personalities.