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The Psychanalitical Approach of Personality

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Abstract: Sigmund Freud considers that personality comprises three major subsystems that interact and control human behavior: the self, the self, the superhuman. S. Freud detected a series of consistent themes that were nothing but expressions of unconscious fears or desires, themes similar to those seen in the analysis of dreams or childhood memories. Sigmund Freud, as he is well known, placed great importance on becoming the personality of the first years of his life. Mostly, he spoke about the fact that the first five years of life are those responsible for establishing the psycho-behavioral base and for constituting the individual unconscious. Freud, at the time, did not enjoy a special collaboration with those in his professional guild. This was also due to the fact that, due to its histrionic structure, it did not accept any opinions from colleagues or disciples. On the other hand, it has restructured its conception of personality, but as some specialists show, also within the same dogmatism.

Keywords: personality; psychoanalytic; psychic processes; dynamics; development; stages; characteristic traits

Introduction

Founder of psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud is one of the leading figures of the last century. Whatever its decline as a scientific theory, the psychoanalytic view of personality remains the most comprehensive and influential personality theory of all time. Its impact has exceeded the limits of psychology, influencing the social sciences, humanities, art and society in general. Even if in contemporary psychology the psychoanalytic theory no longer has the same central role that it had 40 or 50 years ago, many of its ideas have been included in the fundamental current of psychological thinking. Even parents who have done nothing but raise their child by following the advice given by psychiatrist Benjamin Spock in his famous work Baby and Child Care are much closer to a Freudian psychologist than he thinks. S. Freud started his activity as a neurologist, treating patients with different "nervous" disorders through conventional medical procedures, since they were not always helpful, he also used the technique of hypnosis, but later abandoned this direction, in finally, he developed the method of free association, in which the patient is told to express all the ideas that come to mind, no matter how trivial or embarrassing they may be.

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By listening carefully to these associations, Freud detected a series of consistent themes that were nothing but expressions of unconscious fears or desires, themes similar to those seen in the analysis of dreams or memories from early childhood.

S. Freud compared the human mind to an iceberg. The part that can be seen on the surface of the water is the conscious experience; In the much larger part, under water, there are stored impulses, desires, difficult memories to evoke that influence our thinking and behavior. Even though he was not the first to notice the influence of unconscious psychic processes - to which there are references in Shakespeare's plays - Freud was the first to give them the utmost importance. Closely related to Freud's attention to unconscious processes is his deterministic perspective on human behavior. Psychological determinism is the conception that all our ideas, feelings and actions are provoked by certain causes. Freud, however, considers not only that all psychic processes have a cause, but that these causes are represented by unsatisfied tendencies and unconscious desires. In one of his first works, The Psychopatology of Everyday Life (1901), Freud argues that dreams, dispositions, omissions, lapses ("Freudian lapses") are nothing more than ways of releasing psychic tensions by satisfying oneself. forbidden impulses or unfulfilled desires. Freud's works are contained in 24 volumes. The first major work, Interpretation of Dreams, was published in 1900, and his last treatise, An Outline of Psychoanalysis, appeared in 1940, one year after his death. In the following we will present the ideas on which the Freudian theory of personality is based.

The Structure of the Personality

S. Freud believes that personality comprises three major subsystems that interact and control human behavior: the self, the self, the superhuman.

SELF. The self is the primary part of the personality, present even in the newborn child, being the part from which, subsequently, the ego and the supernatural develop. This part is the basis of biological impulses (or needs): the need to eat, drink, eliminate residues, avoid pain, obtain sexual (sensual) pleasure. Freud includes among these fundamental needs and aggression because, in his conception, the sexual and the aggressive needs are the most important instinctive determinants of the personality, throughout the life. The self seeks the immediate satisfaction of these impulses. Like the young child, the self operates on the principle of pleasure: regardless of the external conditions, it seeks to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. I L. Children learn relatively early that not all tasks can be met immediately. Being hungry, they have to wait until they are offered food. The need to urinate or defecate cannot be satisfied as long as the bath is occupied. Certain impulses - the desire to hit someone or investigate their genitals - are punished without delay by the parents.

The self obeys the principle of reality: the satisfaction of impulses must be postponed until the situation allows it. For this reason, he plays an essential role in the management of the personality, as it is the one who decides what actions are acceptable, what impulses come from himself will be satisfied and in what way. The ego mediates between the demands expressed by itself, the reality of the world and the demands expressed by the superego.

Superego. Surprise is the third component of personality, the one that decides whether an action is right or not. More generally speaking, the superego is nothing more than the internalized representation of the moral values of the society and encompasses both the consciousness of the respective person and the image of his moral ideal. The surplus develops in response to the punishments and rewards of the parents.

In the beginning, parents control the child's behavior directly, through punishments and rewards. Subsequently, by incorporating the standards of the parents, the child gains control over his behavior. He no longer needs someone to tell him it's bad to steal; this will be done by his superior. Violating the standards of the superego, or just trying to violate them, creates anxiety - which initially represented the fear of losing the parents' love. According to Freud, this anxiety is largely unconscious, being felt as guilt. When parents' standards are overly rigid, the individual is overwhelmed by this feeling and will eventually inhibit any sexual or aggressive impulses. On the contrary, an individual who fails to incorporate these standards of socially acceptable behavior will impose too few restrictions, which is why he may become too self-indulgent, and his behavior may even become criminal. The surface of such a person is considered a weak superego.

Often, these three components of personality come into opposition: the self defers the fulfillment of the desires that the self considers imperious, and the superego faces both the self and the self, because they do not respect the moral code that he represents. In the case of a well-integrated personality, the ego exercises a firm but flexible control, and the principle of reality governs.

The Dynamics of Personality

Physics was the science with the greatest resounding in the last century. Influenced by German physicist Hermann von Helmholtz, Freud felt that psychic phenomena could be explained on the same principles as physical ones. Freud was primarily concerned with the principle of energy conservation, according to which energy can change its shape, but it can neither be created nor destroyed. As a result, he considered people as closed energy systems and named their psychic energy, the level of which is given to each individual, libido (the Latin term for "pleasure"), as an expression of the fact that, in his perspective, sexual needs are fundamental.

A corollary of the principle of energy conservation is the fact that any prohibited act or impulse is suppressed, and that energy will seek another exit from the system, eventually appearing disguised in another form. The desires expressed by themselves contain a mental energy that must be released, and the fact that their satisfaction is rejected does not mean that they disappear. For example, aggressive impulses can be expressed by participating in car racing, playing chess, or through sarcastic humor. Dreams and neurotic symptoms are also manifestations of a psychic energy that could not be directly expressed. Individuals who want to do something that is forbidden to them become anxious. They can express certain impulses in a sublimated form, thus avoiding both the judgment of society and that of their own superiors and reducing anxiety. Freud describes several strategies that the individual calls to prevent or reduce anxiety, strategies he calls self-defense mechanisms. The basic mechanism is repression, whereby a threatening or forbidden thought is taken out of consciousness and pushed into the unconscious. From the outside, the individual simply seems to forget that thought or impulse. Individuals differ both in terms of the threshold of anxiety and in the mechanisms they appeal to to deal with it. Anxiety and defense mechanisms are central elements of Freud's theory of maladaptive behavior.

Personality Development

S.Freud, as is well known, placed great importance on becoming the personality of the first years of life. Mostly, he spoke about the fact that the first 5 years of life are those responsible for establishing the psycho-behavioral base and for establishing the individual unconscious. And this time he attaches special importance to sexuality, defined in the broad sense of the word, as sympathy, universal love. In this sense, starting from genital sexuality, he considers that during the first 5 years of life, this psycho-sexual behavior goes through several stages of development. At each stage, the impulse of the pleasure-seeking self is concentrated on a certain area of the body and activities related to that area.

- *The oral stage* of psychosexual development is Freud's conception, in his first year of life. During this period children are dependent on the mother, on the contact with her, on the breast. This is actually the first object the child handles.

- *The anal stage*, develops during the second year of life. It coincides with the period when the child postpones the satisfaction of his / her needs, performs a series of psycho-behavioral inhibitions and imposes a certain form of self-control. Also during this period, a series of intrapsychic conflicts appear, conflicts whose development ends around the age of 6 years.

- *The phallic stage*, one of the first forms of manifestation of competition behavior in the child, is illustrated by the Oedipian conflict, a situation in which the child and the father dispute their mother's object.

S.Freud calls this situation an Oedipian conflict, referring to Sophocles' play in which King Oedipus kills his father without wanting to marry him and then marries his mother. In Freud's conception, the boy fears that the father will avenge, castrating him. This fear, called fear of neutering, is considered the prototype of all subsequent anxieties, caused by forbidden desires. In the case of a normal development, the boys reduce this anxiety and try to resolve the satisfaction of the feelings towards the mother, while identifying with the father - in other words internalizing an idealized image of the father's attitudes and values. The girls go through this process - resulting in the identification with the mother - with the only difference being that in this case the process is more complicated and even more problematic.The Oedipian conflict manifests itself until around the age of 7, a period until the phallic stage described by Freud.

The latency period after the age of 7 years, both S. Freud and other psychologists describe a latency period that lasts until around the age of 12 years. The most visible behavior during this period is given by the ability of children to interact with the environment. The genital stage coincides with the adult phase of mature sexuality.

S. Freud believes that the way in which the child develops during the psychosexual stages determines how the personality is structured. This is because the activity style, the attitudes, the human conceptions are dependent on the answers offered to the child by the environment during this period of life. The notes of excess of some behaviors, those of abstinence, propensities or avoidant behaviors, all are closely linked to the lifestyle of the child during this period, as the parent of psychoanalysis argues. Such a person is called an oral personality. If fixation occurs in the anal stage of the development of psychosexuality, the person may be overly concerned with cleanliness, order, economy and will tend to resist resistance to external pressures - what is called an anal personality. An oedipal conflict that is improperly resolved can lead to a poor sense of morality, difficulties with the authorities and many other problems. It is thus noted that Freud's theory also includes a theory of types - namely a psychosexual typology.

Examples of Psychological Defense Mechanisms

1. Denial: Refusal to admit the existence of some aspects of reality that cause anxiety; denial can be either the anxiogenic events or the anxiety caused by them. Example: the driver who continues to drive at high speed after witnessing an accident, denying that this could happen to him;

2. Rationalization: Constructing false but plausible explanations for anxiety-provoking behaviors or for events that have already taken place. Example: A student who passes an exam justifies his behavior by arguing that the teacher himself is incorrect and that all other colleagues have done the same;

3. Suppression: An active defense process by which impulses that generate anxiety or memories are driven into the unconscious. Example: A person who has suffered a severe childhood trauma develops an amnesia, "forget", this event;

4. Reactional formation: The mechanism by which a person gets to manifest, and on a conscious level, even believes that they possess, feelings, attitudes opposed to those they possess on an unconscious level. Example: an individual becomes boastful and aggressive in order to hide his feelings of inferiority;

5. Projection: an unacceptable impulse is suppressed, then it is attributed (designed) to another person. Example: A woman who has intensely repressed her desire to have an extramarital relationship accuses her husband of having such a relationship;

6. Sublimation: A suppressed impulse is discharged in a socially accepted form.

Example: An aggressive young man becomes a "detective" reporter who ruins political careers with his stories. In general, these defense mechanisms may be considered inadequate or have negative effects on mental health, only if used in an extreme manner.S. Freud's theory was criticized, in particular, because it did not give a greater role to the socio-cultural factors in the development and dynamics of the personality, and that it placed too much emphasis on sexuality and experiences experienced by the individual in early childhood.

Modifications of Freudian Theory

During his life, Freud changed his theory. Like any true scientist, he remained receptive to the new data obtained, revising his initial position to the extent that new observations appeared that could not be incorporated into the original theory. For example, one of these changes occurred when Freud realized that his patients' reports of seduction in early childhood were not real, but reflected their own early sexual fantasies. (Although, at present, the increased attention paid to sexual abuse of children has also suggested that Freud's assumptions about the reality of these seductions may be correct (Masson, 1984). Another, relatively late, revision. , focused on his theory of anxiety. Freud's theories were later deepened by his daughter, Anna Freud, who played a particularly important role in clarifying the problem of defense mechanisms (1946-1967) and in applying psychoanalytic theory in the practice of child psychiatry (1958).

S. Freud, at the time, did not enjoy a special collaboration with those in his professional guild. This was also due to the fact that, due to its histrionic structure, it did not accept any opinions from colleagues or disciples. On the other hand, it has restructured its conception of personality, but as some specialists show, also within the same dogmatism. This dogmatism caused the break between him and his most brilliant disciples, some of whom even developed competing theories, paying more

attention to other motivational processes, other than sexuality. This is the case of close friends like Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, or, later, theorists like Harry Stack Sullivan, Karen Horney and Erich Fromm. These dissidences, like a series of more recent psychoanalytic theories, emphasize the role I play: the self is present from birth, develops independently of itself, and has other functions besides finding the most realistic way to it satisfies the impulses expressed by itself. For example, the self intervenes when learning how to respond to environmental demands or to capitalize on experience. Such a perspective approximates the concept of self with cognitive processes. An important part of this orientation is the theory of object relations, which follows the attachment manifested by the child towards different people, during its development. The concept of self or the importance of biological needs in motivating behavior is not ignored, but equal attention is paid to aspects such as the degree of psychological separation from parents, the degree of attachment or involvement with others as compared to the preoccupation with the face. of self, the level of the feeling of self-esteem and competence. Although I did not treat it as such, Erik Erikson's theory of developmental stages is an example of a psychoanalytic theory undergoing such a review. Erikson was trained as a psychoanalyst by Anna Freud himself and, in his opinion, his theory represents an extension of Freudian theory, rather than a modification of it. In its conception, the stages of development are no longer stages of psychosexuality, but psychosocial stages, which involve primarily the processes of the ego. Thus, the most important aspect of the first year of life is no longer the focus on obtaining oral satisfaction, but the fact that during this period the children learn to what extent the environment may or may not meet their own needs. The second year of life is no longer characterized by the focus on the anal area, for example the formation of the ability to use the toilet, but on the acquisition of personal autonomy. In this context, the formation of the ability to use the toilet is only one in which the requirement of autonomy of the child collides with requirements imposed by parents, requirements to which they must be subjected. At the same time, in order to be able to follow the whole life of the individual, Erikson adds a series of new stages.

Human Personality from a Psychoanalytic Perspective

At the beginning of this chapter I said that each approach to personality incorporates a certain intrinsic philosophical perspective on human nature. To what extent are we free and to what extent do we depend on causes beyond our control? Is man fundamentally good, bad or neutral? Is its structure constant or can it be modified? Is he active or passive in terms of controlling his own destiny? What does psychological health mean? The description of Freud's theory implicitly included his point of view on these aspects. Freud is often compared to Copernicus or Darwin. Like them, Freud was accused of undermining the stature and dignity of humanity. As an astronomer, Copernicus moved Earth from the center position of the Universe to the position of a secondary planet, rotating side by side, around a minor star. Ch. Darwin placed the man in the descent position of the monkeys. Freud took the next step, showing how human behavior is determined by forces that we cannot control, thus depriving us of our free will and our psychological freedom. By emphasizing the unconscious side of motivation, he deprives us of rationality and, underlining the sexually-aggressive nature of this motivation, gives a grace blow to human dignity. Psychoanalytic theory draws a dark portrait of human personality, which it considers fundamentally bad. Without the restrictions imposed by the company and the internalized representation of these restrictions, that is, the superego, people would self-destruct. Freud was a deeply pessimistic character. He was forced to leave Vienna in 1938, when the city was invaded by the Nazis, and he died in September 1939, the same month that World War II began. From his point of view, all these events were only natural consequences of the fact that the

aggressive human tendencies were no longer kept under control. Also, the structure of the human personality is relatively fixed. According to the psychoanalytic theory, our personality is determined primarily by innate tendencies and events that occurred during the first year of life. Only an extensive psychoanalysis can undo the negative consequences of some early experiences, and this within certain limits. Also according to this theory, man is relatively passive.

Even if the self is an active structure, struggling with the tendencies expressed by the self or the super, as long as most of this confrontation occurs at the level of the unconscious, our possibility of intervention is extremely limited. For Freud, psychological health requires firm, but flexible control, exerted by myself on the impulses of the self, and the purpose of psychoanalysis is that "where the self is, the self is established" (1933).

Evaluation of the Psychoanalytic Approach

The purpose of psychoanalytic theory being so vast, it is difficult to say simply whether it is true or false. In addition, the correctness or incorrectness of certain particular aspects of this theory becomes irrelevant in relation to the overwhelming impact it has had on our culture and its scientific value. For example, the free association method developed by Freud offered the opportunity to obtain new observable data, which had never been systematically studied until then. Secondly, the fact that, according to this theory, human behavior reflects the trade-off between the individual's wishes and fears, may explain better than other theories of personality the apparent contradictions that arise in this behavior: as a theory of ambivalence, psychoanalytic theory does not is equal. Thirdly, at present, it is almost unanimously accepted the role that unconscious processes play in determining most human behaviors, even though these behaviors are often reinterpreted in terms of learning theory or information processing.

However, the psychoanalytic perspective has long been criticized for its inadequacy (for example, Grunbaum, 984). One of these criticisms concerns the ambiguity of many concepts and the difficulties that their objective definition or measurement faces. Thus, psychoanalytic theory assumes that at the basis of very different behaviors can be found identical motives. For example, a mother who rejects her child will either behave abusively or deny her hostile impulses by becoming overly protective and caring towards the child - what Freud would call a reactionary formation. However, when one considers that the same motive is based on opposite behaviors, it becomes difficult to confirm the presence or absence of this motive or to make empirically verifiable predictions. Even there, where the researchers have succeeded in empirically testing the theory, mixed data have been obtained. For example, efforts to find the link between adult personality traits and relevant psychosexual events in childhood have generally had negative outcomes (Sears, Maccoby and Levin, 1957; Sewell and Mussen, 1952).

Even when relevant traits can be identified, these traits appear to be related to certain traits of parents (Beloff, 1957; Hetherington and Brackbill 1963). Thus, even if a link has been established between the ability to use the toilet and certain characteristics of the adult personality, this may be due to the connection between these two aspects and the attention that the parents paid to the order and to the cleanliness. In such a case, a simple explanation, such as that provided by the learning theory - parental reinforcement and reproduction by the child of the model provided by parents, is more appropriate than that obtained on the basis of psychoanalytic hypotheses. Often, as additional evidence that supports some of Freud's ideas, psychoanalyst theorists cite observations made by anthropologists. For example, the transcultural taboo of incest is as proof of the universality of the

Oedipian complex; the taboo thus appears as an attempt by the society to control the oedipal situation. On the other hand, however, not all anthropological evidence supports psychoanalytic theory. A very good example is given by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1927).

B. Malinowski had started from Freud's accounts of the fact that, often, the Oedipian hostility that boys feel towards their father is symbolically expressed through the dreams in which they kill him. In Freud's opinion, such dreams symbolically satisfy the desire to dominate the rival with whom his mother's affection is disputed. Malinowski studied the dreams of adolescents from Tobriand Islands, where uncles are the ones who take care of boys' education, without being told dreams in which fathers are the ones who suffer. In contrast, there were numerous such dreams in which uncles were involved in such tragic events, which proves that hostility is generated by the imposition of discipline and not by the Oedipal rivalry. Since Freud made his observations in the context of a culture in which the father is both the mother's lover and the one who imposes discipline on his son, he has not been able to determine what exactly determines the hostility of the child. For Malinowski, the culture of the natives of Tobriand Islands played the role of a laboratory in which the two elements could be separated. (Psychoanalytic theoreticians counter-argue by saying that Malinowski's study cannot be considered conclusive, since his subjects were predominantly older boys, whose Oedipal conflict was already resolved, not boys of 4-6 years, who were in the maximum period of this conflict).This result should also remind us that Freud's observations included a very limited number of people, predominantly members of the middle class, residents of Victorian Vienna, affected by different forms of neurosis. In addition, at present, many of Freud's cultural prejudices are evident, especially with regard to women.

For example, his theory that women's psychosexual development is strongly influenced by "penis envy" - the girl's feeling of inadequacy due to the fact that she does not have a penis - is rejected almost unanimously, as it reflects the sexual prejudices of the Victorian era. , the development of a girl's personality was certainly much more strongly influenced by the awareness that she would never benefit from her brother's independence, power and social status, than envy for his penis. However, despite these criticisms, it is remarkable how Freud's theory has overcome the drawback of a narrow observational basis. For example, data from many experimental studies on defense mechanisms and reactions in conflict situations, although conducted in contexts very different from that in which Freud's theories were developed, came to their support.

In general, the structural theory (myself, superhuman), the psychosexual theory, the concept of energy have been affected by the passage of time. There are even a number of psychoanalytic authors willing to change or abandon them. On the other hand, Freud's dynamic theory - in particular his theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms - has passed the test of time, research and observation. At present, there is a sustained interest to reformulate psychoanalytic theory in terms more accessible to testing and to continue its experimental evaluation (Silverman and Weinberger, 1985).

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