FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Psychodynamic Theories

Freud’s Psychoanalytic Perspective: Exploring the Unconscious

. . . “Freud would be the winner hands down.” Freud is familiar to many people and his name is the one most likely to be given if a person were asked to name a famous historical psychologist (“Freud would be the winner hands down”). His influence can still be seen (it lingers) in books, movies, and in the treatment of psychological disorders.

He [Freud] so loved reading plays, poetry, and philosophy that he once ran up a bookstore debt beyond his means. When he was young, Freud was a very serious student with an exceptionally intelligent mind and an intense interest in a variety of topics. To satisfy his curiosity about literature and the natural sciences, he obtained many books that he could not afford to pay for (he ran up a bookstore debt beyond his means).

Freud’s search for a cause for such disorders set his mind running . . . Patients came to Freud with strange neurological (nervous) disorders that had no obvious physiological explanation. Freud suspected that the problems were psychological in nature, and the questions raised by this theorizing caused him to think (set his mind running) in a way that changed how we view human nature.

Someone with an exceptionally strong superego may be virtuous yet guilt ridden; another with a weak superego may be wantonly self-indulgent and remorseless. In Freud’s theory, the superego (our conscience) develops when, around age 4 or 5, a child incorporates society’s values. A person with a well-developed superego may behave in an appropriately moral way (may be virtuous) yet still feel ashamed and anxious (guilt ridden). In contrast, someone with a poorly developed superego may be excessively and willfully (wantonly) selfish and guilt free. The superego guides us in determining right from wrong (it is our moral compass).

“If you can’t beat ‘em [the same-sex parent], join ‘em.” This common expression suggests that if you cannot win against your opponents (if you can’t beat ‘em), you would be better off forming an alliance with them (joining ‘em). According to Freud, the process of identification (becoming like the parent of the same sex) follows a similar path and gives rise to what psychologists now call our gender identity (our sense of being male or female).

. . . uttering biting sarcasm . . . If there are unresolved conflicts at any of the psychosexual stages, the person may become stuck (fixated) at that stage. This fixation will directly affect the development of a psychologically healthy personality. People fixated at the oral stage may become very dependent, or they may pretend to be the opposite by acting strong and independent and by using cruel and destructive humor (uttering biting sarcasm) to attack the self-respect of others. In addition, this personality type may have an excessive need for oral gratification (for example, smoking, nail biting, eating, or chewing on pens).

In such ways, Freud suggested, the twig of personality is bent at an early age. Freud believed that adult personality was formed during the first four or five years of life and was a reflection of the way the conflicts of the first three psychosexual stages (oral, anal, and phallic) were handled. Just as the shape of the grown tree is the result of how the young tree (twig) was twisted (bent), adult personality is a reflection of early childhood experiences.

Freud believed he could glimpse the unconscious seeping through when a financially stressed patient, not wanting any large pills, said, “Please do not give me any bills, because I cannot swallow
them.” Freud used the technique of **free association** to gain access to the **unconscious**. He also thought he got a fleeting look at (a **glimpse** of) the unconscious in jokes, the content of people’s dreams, and the verbal mistakes one might make while talking (**slips of the tongue**). For example, when a patient who was having money problems (**who was financially stressed**) mistakenly asked Freud not to give him any **bills** (rather than **pills**), Freud thought it was his unconscious anxieties leaking (**seeping**) into his verbal behavior. Freud also believed that dreams provided a route to the unconscious (a “**royal road to the unconscious**”) and dream analysis could reveal a patient’s inner conflicts.

**Assessing Unconscious Processes**

Others view it [the Rorschach inkblot test] as a helpful **source of suggestive leads**, or an **icebreaker**, or a revealing interview technique. Because of problems in scoring and interpreting the **Rorschach inkblot test**, most researchers question its validity and reliability. Some clinicians use the test to help generate hypotheses about a person’s problems (**a source of suggestive leads**); others use it as a point of departure to help get the interview underway and to get the person talking (they use it as an **icebreaker**).

**Evaluating Freud’s Psychoanalytic Perspective and Modern Views of the Unconscious**

. . . **cognitive gymnastics** . . . Freud’s idea that **defense mechanisms** disguise sexual and aggressive impulses has not received much empirical support. However, there is evidence that we use mental manipulations and distortions (**cognitive gymnastics**) to protect our **self-esteem**.

Psychologists also criticize Freud’s theory for its **scientific shortcomings**. For a theory to be considered scientifically acceptable, it must be able to explain observations and provide testable hypotheses. Freud’s theory fails on this account. In addition, his theory offers explanations only after the events or behaviors have occurred (**after-the-fact explanations**). Freud’s theory does not meet acceptable or desired scientific standards (it has **scientific shortcomings**).

*They are seared onto the soul.* Traumatic events are likely to be remembered very well; they can occur as unwanted, persistent, and intrusive memories (**flashbacks**) that appear often (**they haunt survivors**). In a sense, they are indelibly impressed in memory (**they are seared onto the soul**).

More than we realize, we **fly on autopilot**. Our lives are **guided by off-screen, out-of-sight, unconscious information processing**. Similar to a plane that can be flown by its onboard computer systems (**can fly on autopilot**) and controlled by the processing of hidden hardware and software (**guided by off-screen, out-of-sight processing**), our behavior and conscious thoughts are the result of **unconscious information processing** that happens without our awareness (**out-of-sight**). Freud believed that we have limited access to all that goes on in our minds, and this idea has been supported by today’s researchers who conceptualize the mind as a dual-processing system with one part conscious and the other unconscious (**our two-track mind has a vast out-of-sight realm; the unconscious mind is huge**).

**Humanistic Theories**

**Abraham Maslow’s Self-Actualizing Person**

*(Photo caption)* . . . **crippled spirits** . . . Abraham Maslow, a humanistic psychologist, studied healthy, motivated, creative people. He came to the conclusion that once our basic needs are met, we all seek **self-actualization**. He believed that any theory of personality and motivation must be based
on more than the study of psychologically impaired individuals (crippled spirits); rather, it should also include those who have achieved or fulfilled their innate potential (self-actualized people).

**Carl Rogers’ Person-Centered Perspective**

Unless thwarted by a growth-inhibiting environment, each of us is like an acorn, primed for growth and fulfillment. Carl Rogers, another pioneer in humanistic psychology, believed that we are born with an innate striving (we are primed) for achieving our potential. Like the seed (acorn) of an oak tree, we will grow and develop unless we are blocked (thwarted) by an uncaring and unaccepting (growth-inhibiting) environment. Rogers believed that genuineness, acceptance, and empathy are the water, sun, and nutrients that enable people to grow like vigorous oak trees.

**Evaluating Humanistic Theories**

The prominence of the humanistic perspective set off a backlash of criticism. Humanistic psychology has been popular because it is consistent with individualism, which encourages one to trust and act on one’s feelings, to follow one’s beliefs and ambitions (to be true to oneself), and to develop one’s full potential (fulfill oneself). The high status (prominence) of the humanistic viewpoint has elicited a strongly adverse and disapproving reaction (it set off a backlash of criticism) from its critics. They have said that this perspective could lead to self-centeredness, egocentrism, and the weakening of moral inhibitions (an erosion of moral restraints) and could also promote an overly inflated sense of hopefulness (starry-eyed optimism) while ignoring the reality of the human capacity for evil (it is naive). As Myers notes, “action requires enough realism to fuel (motivate) concern and enough optimism to provide hope.”

**Trait Theories**

**Exploring Traits**

. . . blind date . . . When a social outing (date) is arranged with a person you have never met or seen before, the meeting or appointment is called a blind date. The person you are going out with is also called your blind date. Having the person (blind date) ranked or assessed by a personality inventory (for example, by the “Big Five” personality factors) would reveal quite a bit about the person’s character and personality.

**Assessing Traits**

*(Thinking Critically About: How to Be a “Successful” Astrologer or Palm Reader)* . . . scoff . . . This means to have a contemptuously mocking attitude toward something. Astronomers who study the universe scientifically scoff at astrologers, who believe that the planets and stars determine human affairs. Humorists similarly make fun of (mock) astrology. Dave Barry jokes that anyone who believes what his or her horoscope says has brain areas (frontal lobes) that must be very tiny—about the size of small chocolate covered raisins (Raisinets).

*(Thinking Critically About: How to Be a “Successful” Astrologer or Palm Reader)* . . . suckering methods . . . To get sucker means to be easily fooled and exploited. Psychologists, such as Ray Hyman, show us how astrologers, hand (palm) readers, graphologists (who allegedly analyze handwriting to reveal personality), and others fool and exploit people by the use of a few simple techniques (suckering methods).
A "stock spiel" is a well-rehearsed and glib story. Astrologers, horoscope writers, and such ("seers") often use statements that are generally true of almost everybody (their "stock spiel"); most people find it hard to resist believing the flattering descriptions of themselves. As a result, many view astrology as an authentic art. Myers warns, however, that those who use these methods exploit people and fraudulently take their money (they are fortune takers) but do not provide accurate predictions (they are not fortune tellers).

(Margin note) People have had fun spoofing the MMPI with their own mock items . . . Some people have created humorous but false (mock) items for a personality test that is a parody (spoon) of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Some items on the MMPI may appear nonsensical (sound silly); but, because they differentiate, say, depressed people from nondepressed people, they have been retained in the inventory.

The Big Five Factors

A slightly expanded set of factors—dubbed the Big Five—does a better job (Costa & McCrae, 2009). The Eysencks used two personality dimensions or factors—introverted–extraverted and emotional stability–instability—to describe personality. Other research offers a slightly expanded set of factors (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and extraversion), which is named (dubbed) the Big Five. The Big Five may not be the definitive description (the last word on) personality traits, but at the moment it provides the closest estimate (approximation) of the basic trait dimensions.

Evaluating Trait Theories

If we remember such results, says Mischel, we will be more cautious about labeling and pigeonholing individuals. Research has shown that some behavior can be context specific (that is, determined by the situation and not by the personality) and that personality test scores are poorly correlated with people’s actual behavior on any particular occasion. For this reason, Walter Mischel warns that we should be careful about classifying individuals (labeling) and concluding that they belong in one particular slot (pigeonholing).

I have repeatedly vowed to cut back on my jabbering and joking during my noontime pickup basketball games with friends. Alas, moments later, the irrepressible chatterbox inevitably reoccupies my body. When playing basketball with friends, Myers does a lot of talking, often about funny or unimportant things (jabbering and joking). Despite efforts to reduce these constant verbal utterances (his vows to cut back on them), he typically does not succeed because his natural tendency to be talkative reasserts itself (the irrepressible chatterbox inevitably reoccupies my body). This illustrates the stable and persistent nature of some personality traits.

Is a personal website or a Facebook profile also a canvas for self-expression? Just as an artist paints a realistic image of a person on paper or cloth (a canvas), we too reveal much about ourselves online—in our personal websites, e-mails, or Facebook profiles (they are a canvas for self-expression). Myers demonstrates this with the use of exclamatory punctuation ("!!!") in the text— . . . you are right!! (What a cool, exciting finding!!!) Did you notice?
Social-Cognitive Theories

Reciprocal Influences

If we expect someone to be angry with us, we may give the person a cold shoulder, touching off the very anger we expect. The way we are (our personalities) may influence how we are treated by others. If we believe that someone has hostile intentions toward us, we may ignore that person and treat him or her with indifference (give the person a cold shoulder). This in turn may cause (touch off) the angry behavior we predicted or expected from that person. As Myers notes, “we are both the products (results) and the architects (creators) of our environments.”

Assessing Behavior in Situations

. . . without blowing their cover. To predict how people will behave, social-cognitive psychologists suggest observing those people in realistic situations. One example of this occurred when the U.S. Army used a strategy for assessing spy-mission candidates during World War II. In this strategy, the candidates were tested on their ability to handle stress, solve problems, maintain leadership, and withstand intense interrogation without revealing the true nature of their mission as a spy (without blowing their cover).

(Margin note) Most didn’t, out of the blue, “just snap.” The best means of predicting future behavior is to look at a person’s past behavior patterns in similar situations. Most people who engaged in uncontrolled violent and deadly behavior (rampage murders) had, in the past, frequently demonstrated outbursts of rage (exploded in anger) or indicated a deliberate intention to cause harm or injury (threatened violence). Most did not suddenly and without indication (out of the blue) create havoc and mayhem (snap). As Myers notes, the best predictor of future aggressiveness is past aggressiveness.

Exploring the Self

Even after a blunder . . . we stick out like a sore thumb less than we imagine (Savitsky et al., 2001). A person who “sticks out like a sore thumb” is someone who is very noticeable to everyone as odd or different. If we make a clumsy mistake (a blunder), we think that everyone is paying attention to us (that we stick out like a sore thumb), but this is often not the case. For example, students who had to wear very unfashionable T-shirts with the picture of a singer (had to don Barry Manilow T-shirts) thought that many people would notice their odd attire (dorky clothes). But very few did. This is a good illustration of the spotlight effect.

The Benefits of Self-Esteem

But is high self-esteem the horse or the cart? The expression “putting the cart before the horse” means to reverse the usual order of things or ideas. Myers is asking, do high feelings of self-worth (high self-esteem) create benefits (pay dividends) by motivating people to do well and be successful? Or, instead, does being successful and overcoming challenges give rise to feelings of high self-esteem? Is high self-esteem the cause (the horse pulling the cart) or the result (the side effect) of surmounting difficulties and overcoming challenges (is it the cart coming before the horse)?

In other studies, people who were negative about themselves also tended to be oversensitive and judgmental (Baumgardner et al., 1989; Pelham, 1993). People who have low self-esteem (are negative about themselves) are more likely to be anxious, depressed, insecure, and very aware of
and responsive to criticism (oversensitive). In addition, they are more likely to disparage and be critical (judgmental) of others. People who have low self-esteem (are down on themselves) tend to be less accepting and more critical of other things and people (they tend to be down on others).

Self-Serving Bias

Athletes often privately credit their victories to their own prowess, and their losses to bad breaks, lousy officiating, or the other team’s exceptional performance. Athletes, like the rest of us, want to feel that desirable outcomes are due to their own abilities (prowess), and that failures are due to factors beyond their control, such as poor luck (bad breaks), unfair refereeing (lousy officiating), or their opponents’ unexpectedly outstanding efforts. This is called the self-serving bias.

The world, it seems, is Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegon writ large—a place where “all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.” Lake Wobegon is a fictional but ideal community satirized by comedian Garrison Keillor. Most abilities follow a bell-shaped distribution—or a normal curve—so approximately half the population will be below average and half above average on any given trait (for example, strength, looks, or intelligence). The self-serving bias, which prompts most of us to rate ourselves as above average, appears to be almost universal. Thus, the world is a magnified reflection of the Lake Wobegon community.

An adolescent or adult whose swelled head is deflated by insults is potentially dangerous. Overly self-confident people with high self-esteem (swelled heads or large egos) do more than retaliate in kind when criticized, insulted, or rejected. Instead, they are more likely to react violently and aggressively (they are potentially dangerous). Researchers suggest that this negative aspect (dark side) of self-esteem is the result of threatened egotism rather than low self-esteem and has been called defensive self-esteem. Roy Baumeister concluded that arrogant, vain, self-satisfied people become spiteful and malicious (turn nasty) toward those who question their exaggerated (inflated) self-image (those who puncture their bubbles of self-love).

“Aryan pride” fueled Nazi atrocities. Our conceit and self-important attitudes (pride) often precede a harsh reality lesson. As Myers notes, it was nationalistic pride—the conceited belief that the Aryan race was superior—that facilitated and fostered (fueled) the growth of the Nazi movement and legitimized their inhumane and cruel deeds (atrocities).

(Margin quote) The enthusiastic claims of the self-esteem movement mostly range from fantasy to hogwash. The popular belief that having high self-esteem is essential to being a happy, well-adjusted, caring person is not supported by research. Roy Baumeister (1996) suggests that the claims of the self-esteem movement vary from being imaginative, wishful thinking (fantasy) to sheer nonsense (hogwash)—that the effects of self-esteem are not very large or important.

...hookups... The expression “hooking up” refers to casual sexual encounters that can range from kissing and cuddling to sexual intercourse—all with the understanding that the sexual intimacy is not accompanied by the expectation of a committed relationship or any other future interaction. Researchers who have tracked self-importance (narcissism) over several decades have found that the generation born in the 80s and 90s (Generation Me) is more self-centered and self-absorbed. In that generation, materialism, the desire to be famous, uncommitted sexual encounters (hookups), gambling, and cheating have all been increasing as narcissism has increased.

Self-directed put-downs can be subtly strategic: They elicit reassuring strokes. When people disparage themselves with criticisms aimed at themselves (self-directed put-downs), they sometimes have a dishonest or hidden purpose (they are subtly strategic). They may want to have people
reassure them that the opposite is true (they want *reassuring strokes*). Or, they may want to prepare for the worst possible outcome so that they have a rationalization for failure ready, just in case. In addition, self-ridicule or self-mocking is often concerned with past bad behavior, not with how the present *self* is perceived (*in their own eyes, chumps yesterday, champs today*).

**Culture and the Self**

... *lose face* ... The expression to “*lose face*” means to suffer some disgrace, embarrassment, or loss of prestige. In *collectivist* cultures, there is an emphasis on communal togetherness (*solidarity*). This means giving priority to (placing a premium on) the maintenance of group cohesion and harmony (*group spirit*) and making certain that others are not belittled or made to feel inadequate or disrespected (*ensuring that others never lose face*).

*When the priority is “we,” not “me,” that individualized latte—“decaf, single shot, skinny, extra hot”—that feels so good to a North American might sound more like a selfish demand in Seoul* (Kim & Markus, 1999). In many coffee shops, it is possible to specify exactly how you want your coffee made. In this example, which illustrates the individualist nature of North American society, the request is for a custom-made (*individualized*) coffee prepared with milk (*a latte*)—specifically a coffee made with skim milk (*skinny*) and one serving of coffee (*a single shot*), containing no caffeine (*decaf* or decaffeinated), and brewed at a high temperature (*extra hot*). Such a request might sound like a very self-centered order (*a selfish demand*) in a place with a more collectivist culture such as Seoul, South Korea. There, the emphasis is on social harmony and not the needs of the individual (*where the priority is “we,” not “me”*).