

A meeting of giants

Psychology, Behaviorism



Imagine that you are a participant in a panel discussion with Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Albert Bandura, and Albert Ellis.

The discussion is facilitated by a moderator who asks questions for each of you to answer according to your different theories of personality development and change. How would you and each of the other four panel members answer the following questions? (Note: Construct the answers for the other panel members based on your understanding of their theories. Your own answers will reflect your personal opinions and beliefs, and may include “bits and pieces” of other theories).

The panel was finally assembled on that wet cold day in December. I was feeling a bit sheepish to be in the company of such great scholars. Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, Albert Bandura, and Albert Ellis were mighty powerful company for me to lock wits with. However, I believed that my opinion was just as important and plausible as their own. I was just reaching for my water glass when the moderator called us to order and begin immediately with the first question.

Question 1

How would you explain the differences in persons regarding their reactions to authority? Why do some persons appear to follow all the rules of others, while other persons appear intent on living by their own sets of rules?

Dr. Freud:

The human being is essentially a sophisticated energy system. That energy is channeled, flows, or is blocked by a number of different behaviors. The goal

of all these behaviors is of course pleasure. Energy will always find the path of least resistance that leads to pleasure.

When this energy is constrained or rerouted by societal demands, such as rules and taboos, that energy must be vented in some way. Some individuals are more apt at releasing this energy in a positive manner, while others are more confounded by it.

Some individuals forfeit their pursuit of pleasure and lead guilt ridden and often miserable lives although they appear to be socially compliant. Others allow their natural propensity to pursue pleasure to guide their lives and are normally much happier, although society may feel they are living by their own rules.

Dr. Rogers:

I beg to disagree with what my colleague Dr. Freud has stated. His theories are often rooted in sexual drives and motivations. However, the greatest human drive is the single goal towards self-actualization. It is not necessary to postulate on which particular pleasure principle an individual is seeking to understand why they buck authority.

Those individuals that resist authority have simply grown from a less complex being into a more complex one. The less complex we are, the more authority we may feel we need.

As an individual matures and develops, they become more complex and may seek to break the bond of authority for a greater life experience. Those who go along with the status quo perhaps see their lives in the light that they have achieved what they can and there is no need to push further. We all

simply seek to maintain and improve who we believe we are and the live experience in general. (Pervin, Cervon, & Oliver, 2005)

Dr. Bandura:

Self-efficacy has a great affect in self-development, perseverance in the face of resistance, resilience to trauma, and decision choices at crucial junctures in life. The rejection of authority is no greater than it is seen among adolescents and young adults.

The ability to control and regulate self-efficacy is core to the ability to self-manage ones motivations, desires, and responses. Beliefs of personal efficacy are what cause an individual to adopt certain self regulatory standards (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003) If a person believes that they are useful in society they are apt to be more law abiding and compliant of authority (Bandura et al., 2003). When other individuals feel as if their self-worth is low they are less likely to respect authority and will live as they see fit because of their standing in society. (Pervin et al., 2005)

Dr. Ellis:

Self-evaluation leads to depression and repression, and avoidance of change. The best thing for human health is that we should stop evaluating ourselves altogether. There is often concern for individuals because of their self image and societal pressures.

These two are more likely to be in agreement than in conflict. The key is to see behaviors for what they are. Is there anyone who likes authority? Of course not we all have some disagreement with being told what to do by

someone else. However true this may be it is not the authority that causes problems for most individuals it is the irrational beliefs that adherence or rejection of this authority will lead to some dire consequence.

This in itself may cause individuals to have one reaction or the other to the rule makers. Some may choose total compliance in hopes that life remains stable, or what appears to be total anarchy and disrespect for any authority because it has no affect.