

# Critical thinking on psychoanalytical perspective of personality development

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



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## **Abstract**

In the present paper, the issue of personality development is discussed from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Since followers of psychoanalysis studied personality in its integrity of inner and outer worlds and dynamics of development, the phenomenon was analyzed from interdisciplinary and systematic perspectives. In order to understand the integrity of psychoanalytic approach to studying of personality development, three major psychoanalytical models of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Heinz Kohut are outlined. Freud's concept of personality development is analyzed on the basis of his structural model of personality and stages of psychosexual development. Klein's approach is based on her object theory. Kohut's interpretation is explained from the perspective of self and theory of narcissism.

## **Psychoanalytical Perspective of Personality Development**

The comprehension of human personality was the main topic for psychology. While some theoretical schools were studying separate aspects of human personality, psychoanalysis took entirely different way of the topic

interpretation. Followers of psychoanalysis studied the human personality in its integrity of inner and outer worlds and dynamics of development. In other words, it can be stated that psychoanalysts were the first to analyze the phenomenon of personality from interdisciplinary and systematic perspectives. In order to understand the integrity of psychoanalytical approach to personality development, it is essential to discuss the three major psychoanalytical models developed by Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Heinz Kohut. The main reason why those three theorists were chosen is that Freud represents classic psychoanalytic approach to personality development, Klein develops its new interpretation and Kohut rejects initial Freudian model. The interconnection and contrasting of those concepts contributes to multi-dimensional psychoanalytical analysis of the personality and its development.

Freud's perception of personality development can be found in his structural model of personality and stages of psychosexual development. According to Freud, personality is not an indivisible unit. Its structure is tripartite: id, ego and superego. Those three elements are not just strictly separated and triggered in various situations; they also appear on certain stages of human development (Levine, 2000). Id, being responsible for unconscious desires, instincts and primeval behavior, is the initial, inborn part of a personality. It is ruled by the pleasure principle, according to which all desires and needs should be fulfilled unconditionally and immediately (Carveth, 2010). In case of failure, anxiety and frustration follow. In order to cope with real means to satisfy the pleasure principle, the primary process of building mental images

of desired objects takes place (Debbie & Smith, 1999). Ego, being responsible for individual's interactions with the surrounding environment, acts on the basis of the realistic principle. According to this principle, the satisfaction of needs should be moral and socially acceptable. Ego develops within the first three years of child's development. During this time, the secondary process takes place - finding real objects which would correspond to the mentally-created ones (Levine, 2000). At the age of five, the superego develops. It is internal assimilation and acceptance of moral norms and prescriptions of parents and society, comprehension of good and evil bias (Carveth, 2010). During this period, an individual begins to value and comprehend consequences of his actions. Superego makes ego act on the basis of ideal principle of morality rather than possibilities of reality. At six-seven, individual's personality is relatively formed and its further growth would depend on life experiences and correlation between id, ego and superego (Levine, 2000).

The main contribution of Freudian structural model to the exploration of personality development is that it established the idea that personality was formed in the childhood. The stability of child's development contributes to the normalization of connections between id, ego and superego; thus, an individual is able to gain life experiences in normal, healthy ways (Debbie & Smith, 1999). On the other hand, if trauma occurs during any stage of personality development, it results in fixation which affects further adult life. Fixation can be also caused by frustration and indulgence during the ego formation (Carveth, 2010). Another contribution of Freud to personality

development is expressed in his stages of psychosexual development. In this framework, personality development is seen through the evolution of sexuality.

Again the first three stages are the most essential in personality development. On the first, oral stage (birth - to one year) perception is conducted mainly through mouth. Inability of parents to conduct tight relations with child might result in future dependence and aggression (Carveth, 2010). The anal stage (1-3 years), when children learn how to use toilet correspond for their ability to learn task accomplishment, development of independence and creativity. Failure might result in the formation of destructive personality (Carveth, 2010). The third stage is phallic (3-6 years). The essence of this period is in self-identification with a certain sex and desire to poses opposite sex parent through the same-sex parent. The future of child's sexuality and personal development depends greatly on how the Oedipus and Electra complexes are handled (Levine, 2000). The next stage - latent period (6- puberty) the intensity of sexual development is slowed and socialization in the surrounding environment becomes a primary goal. Development of communicational skills and self-confidence are crucial for further normal life in society. The final genital stage (puberty to death) directs toward harmonization of personal and common interests in private and social lives (Carveth, 2010).

While Freud concentrated on the detailed explanation of personality development in the framework of tripartite structure and sexuality formation, thus, the essence of his model was constant development and changes;

Klein referred to the mind development in the framework of an individual's interactions with the surrounding world (Debbie & Smith, 1999). Unlike Freud, Klein studied personality development not as an individual development of each part of personality; she studied it through the "objects". "Objects" were other individuals both real and imagined, created by inner self as reflections of the real "objects" or their symbols. According to Klein, child's perception of reality and subsequent development of personality takes two stages or, how she called them, two positions. The first is paranoid-schizoid position (birth - second quarter of the first year), which is characterized by comprehension of the reality ("objects") in the positive and negative bias (Weininger, 1992). Hungry child sees his mother not as an integral creature, but as "good" or "bad breast". If she feeds him, she is good, and her inner reflection in child's mind is positive. On the other hand, when child is hungry, the absent breast is viewed by inner self as a "bad" one. At this stage, the mind cannot identify that it was the same breast, that an "object" can be both good and bad. Thus, "objects" are usually identified for the experiences rather than for themselves (Weininger, 1992). The main defense mechanisms from anxiety at this stage include splitting of object's characteristics, omnipotence and concentration on inner, mental images rather than on real ones (Carveth, 2010). The second position is depressive (the first year or there). At this stage "objects" begin to gain integrity. Fantasies are tested through the real world experiences and previous preconceptions develop into thoughts. The type of anxiety also changes; it is no longer directed inward but outward. The fear of being hurt is substituted by the fear to hurt others (Weininger, 1992). This is

conditioned by the guilt for previous destructive fantasies. This guilt also contributes to the comprehension of other people's autonomy, the space between mother and child is no longer seen as a "bad breast" (Carveth, 2010). This is a transitional stage for comprehension of social life and development of social skills. Further on two positions mix into one integral state of adult mind. Unlike Freud, who considered objects as means of achieving desires dictated by id, Klein saw "objects" as means of the subject's (individual's personality) development through the comprehension of part- and whole-objects (Debbie & Smith, 1999).

Kohut's approach to personality development is entirely different from the previous two. He rejected Freud's tripartite structure of the personality and its subsequent development. On the other hand, he continued to consider the issue of personality as dynamic and changeable phenomenon.

Nevertheless, his interpretation of narcissism entirely contradicts with Freudian and Object Theory flaws. The last two schools considered narcissism as fixation, which occurred on one of the first three stages of personality development (both in mental and sexual concepts), and that it is conditioned by the inability to create a concrete line between others and self (Balter, 1991). Kohut suggested that narcissism is part of personality development, that it is an inborn element of an individual's psyche.

Subsequently, narcissism as a part of personality develops together with it. Kohut outlined two stages of personality and narcissism development - infancy and adulthood. When the surrounding environment does not affect an individual substantially, and he is able to develop normally, infantile

narcissism develops into adult one. Kohut calls this transformation transmuting internalizations (Balter, 1991). In the process of maturing and environment cognition, an individual goes through various experiences and challenges, which result in certain frustrations and anxieties. Depending on individual's withstanding abilities and amount of frustrations, an individual would be able to compensate weaknesses of the outer structure by strengthening the inner carcass. In other words, when the surrounding environment is unfriendly and even hostile, an individual would work on the development of strong will and character (Balter, 1991). This happens when the level of frustration is optimal to individual's personal abilities and strengths. If they exceed the optimal level, the pathology of narcissism occurs. In this case, the transmuting internalizations does take place and infantile narcissism remains in the adult body and personality (Debbie & Smith, 1999). Subsequently, unlike Freud and Klein, Kohut shifts the origins of pathological states of personality development from the early to the late childhood and teenage years, when coping with the surrounding environment is most challenging for vulnerable children. Kohut had to reject tripartite concept and psychosexual development, because they would entirely disrupt the concept of inborn narcissism (Debbie & Smith, 1999). From the perspective of environmental influence on personality development, explored by Klein, Kohut had widened her perspective of "objects" to the events and activities, generalizing her experience identification to the experiences frustration and affects on inner world. In other words, he did not go into the depth of rational behind those affects,



their final impact on individual's self-perception were of the greatest value (Levine, 2000).

Overall, it can be concluded that the main characteristics of three psychoanalytical models are that personality development is a dynamic process, which is much dependant on the impact from the outer world. While Freud and Klein suggested that personality was tripartite and initial 5-6 years of child's development were crucial, Kohut considered that environment influenced an individual most severely during the late childhood and teenage years. Each model put a different corner stone for the explanation of individual's interaction with environment. While Freud concentrated on inner transformations of each elements of personality, Klein explored objectivity, and Kohut analyzed transmuting internalizations and adaptation of inborn narcissism to the surrounding environment. All three models create a multi-dimensional picture of personality development, which is in the integrity of all possible factors of influence experienced by an individual on the early stages of his life. The way those impacts were accepted by the personality affects individual's adult life.

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