

Sigmund freud and
alfred adler
psychology essay



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The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the fundamental theory established by Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. The areas of study for the theories they established were in personality and mental health. Sigmund Freud established the stages of personality and aspects of the human mind. Alfred Adler studied the individual as a whole. Their theories were quite different, but their main conflict was over the influence of sexuality in the human mind.

Compare and Contrast: Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler

Two of the well known and respected names in psychology today are Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler. As psychologists in the study of the human mind, their theories varied greatly. Freud began with his belief that much of the human instinct was sexual and many problems they suffered were related to some sexually-based conflict. Freud used free association with his patients and found “ that his patients’ memories reached back to childhood and that many of the repressed experiences they recalled concerned sexual issues” (Schultz & Schultz, 2008, p. 416) . Adler, on the other hand believed that much of the human personality was socially developed and placed emphasis on birth order as a factor in development. He did not totally denounce the influence of biology, he thought there was more to the individual.

Sigmund Freud is considered the father of psychoanalysis and is best known for his tendency to trace all psychological problems back to sexual issues (Freud. 2013 para. 1). Freud was strongly influenced by other psychologist such as Charles Darwin and Ernst Brucke, but Freud’s most influential

teacher was Jean-Martin Charcot. Charcot had influenced Freud through the use of hypnosis and by an offhand remark he made at a party the Freud attended. Freud overheard Charcot talking about the hysterical symptoms in a female patient". Charcot was attributed as saying, " But in this kind of case it was always something genital - always, always, always" (Hergenhahn, 2007, p. 552). This is one of the many factors that helped formed his belief that the relationship between neurosis and unresolved sexual issues were connected.

While in Paris, Freud was fascinated by Charcot's use of hypnosis to treat hysteria, but upon returning to Vienna, Freud experimented with hypnotherapy but found it to be ineffective as a long term treatment option. Freud decided to study and work alongside Josef Breuer. Breuer used a method of cathartic treatment where he hypnotized patients suffering from hysteria and then had them recall the first time they experienced the physical symptoms like one of the earlier symptoms she suffered from. This method of allowing the patient to speak uninhibitedly about her symptoms brought out repressed emotions. Following this catharsis the symptoms would disappear. (Fancher, 1990, p. 355) Freud tried the new cathartic method and found it to be far more effective in treatment than hypnotherapy. This area of study helped shape the new area of study called psychoanalysis. (Fancher, 1990, p. 356)

" But even as he was inventing and refining this new field of " psychoanalysis:, Freud was becoming increasingly convinced of the connection between neurosis and sexual conflict." (Sigmund, 2013). Freud used this connection to develop his theory of development in childhood. The <https://assignbuster.com/sigmund-freud-and-alfred-adler-psychology-essay/>

five stages of development are oral, Anal, phallic, latent, and genital and were instrumental to the construction of the human mind. Freud's psychosexual development theory is widely known and highly criticized.

“ Freud's earlier thoughts on the human mind consisted of the conscience and the unconscious mind” (Schultz & Schultz, 2008, p. 431). Later Freud expanded his theory and developed the Id, Ego and Super-ego. “ An organism acts in order to survive and reproduce, and is guided toward these ends by its needs. The organism's needs of hunger, thirst, the avoidance of pain, and sex” (Boeree, 2006, p. 19). The id seeks immediate satisfaction without the circumstances of reality, The ego is reason or rationality and superego is morality, the striving toward perfection. The ego exists to help the id and is constantly striving to bring satisfaction of the id's instincts, without being overthrown by the superego's strive for perfection (Schultz & Schultz, 2008, p. 431-433) The conflict arising from the id and the superego can lead to problems such as anxiety and guilt. Trying to keep inner peace, the human mind develops defense mechanisms.

Anna Freud, Sigmund's' daughter, helped develop a number of defense mechanisms. Some of these defense mechanisms are displacement, projection, intellectualization, denial, rationalization, sublimation and love. This theory helped to further show that we, as a creature, are driven by more than just biological demands. Societal influences and past traumas have a direct influence on shaping who we are, what we are to become and how we handle these influences. According to Fancer (1990), “ Freud's theory of the human mind led to the rather sobering conclusion that the best a person can

hope for is to make decent compromises among the conflicting demands of life” (pg. 389).

Alfred Adler was the second-born child and being unhealthy child Adler found competition with his older healthy brother and rejection by his mother to be difficult. “ Alfred felt eclipsed by his model older brother and resented his favored status in the family” (Hoffman, 1994. P. 11) Adler strove to change his poor academic abilities at the bottom of the class and was able to rise to the top. This ability to rise through persistence and dedication he was able to overcome his inferiority and handicaps paving the way for an early example of his theory of the necessity of compensating for one’s weaknesses.

(Schultz & Schultz, 2008, p. 461)

“ Adler thought that the basic psychological element of neurosis was a sense of inferiority and that individuals suffering with the symptoms of this phenomenon spent their lives trying to overcome the feelings without ever being in touch with reality” (Stone, 2011, para. 3) “ He also believed that if neurotic symptoms began in childhood, some of the adult behavior would continue to reflect the age at which the individual stopped developing” (Stone, 2011, para. 3). Adler defined his inferiority complex as “ a condition that develops when a person is unable to compensate for normal inferiority feelings” (Schultz & Schultz, 2008, p. 463). The inability to set aside the motivating forces of competition between peer groups or within normal sibling rivalry.

This lack of compensation helped Adler develop the main tenants of his therapy model. " To Adler, people are born with weak, inferior bodies-a condition that leads to feelings

of inferiority and a consequent dependence on other people. Therefore, a feeling of

unity with others (social interest) is inherent in people and the ultimate standard for

psychological health" (Feist, 2002, p. 69). The main points of this therapy model are: The one dynamic force behind people's behavior is the striving for success or superiority. People's subjective perceptions shape their behavior and personality. Personality is unified and self-consistent. The value of all human activity must be seen from the viewpoint of social

interest. The self-consistent personality structure develops into a person's style of life. Style of life is molded by people's creative power.(Feist, 2002, p. 69-70)

The combination of Adler's childhood experiences and his own feelings of competition, he made superiority or success the first point in his model. He later divided these to make superiority described as those who want to achieve power over another person and success to apply to a general group of people who want to achieve control of their own lives and be socially successful. Adler spent most of his life developing and modifying his theories.

Another theory that was developed from his experiences as a child was birth order. According to Boeree (2006):

“ Adler must be credited as the first theorist to include not only a child’s mother and father and other adults as early influence on the child, but the child’s brothers and sisters as well. His consideration of the effects of siblings and the order in which they were born is probably what Adler is best-known for” (p. 84)

Adler’s birth order theory states that the order in which children are born influences their attitudes and outlook on their life. A first born child receives all of attention from the mother and father all to themselves. This helps shape the attitude that they are the most important and if they are the only child they continue receiving all of the attention. If another child is born the attention shifts and competition begins, the first born fights to regain the attention lost. A second born or middle child ends up competing with the older child in order to measure up or surpass the expectations already established. Then if another child is born and is the last child, then they have no one to follow them and by that time the other children have used up most of the parents time and attention usually allowing them greater freedom.

Sigmund Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler’s theory of individual psychology are different in many ways. One difference in the two theories of Freud and Adler was that Freud split the personality into components and Adler thought the individual should be studied as a whole. Freud believed that the conscience and unconscious were separate and the individual’s unconscious could not be controlled. Freud believed the analyst

would have to use techniques such as free association to bring the needed information from the unconscious out. Adler, on the other hand, believed that the conscious and unconscious worked together in harmony. the conscious was what the individual understood and the unconscious was that the individual did not understand yet. Adler believed the two could switch at any time.

Freud's theory was further revised and " Freud theorized that the human mind had three basic components: the id, the ego, and the superego, and these individual parts often conflict, shaping personality and if not treated, caused neurosis" (Stone, 2011, para. 5). " Adler had published a book of his own a few years prior which had set forth, amongst other things, the need to perceive the patient as a whole person. Thus Freud's increasing tendency to carve the person up into rigid and highly abstracted concepts, such as Ego and Id and Oedipal Complex, did not sit well with Adler" (Adler para. 4) This was possibly a driving force behind the name individual psychology.

Adler, a former colleague of Freud's, believed Freud overemphasized sexuality in his theory and proposed an alternative system emphasizing social and cultural factors. Adler left the psychoanalytic school of thought and developed his own theories and eventually his own therapeutic model. Based off of his own childhood experiences Adler believed inferiority and birth order helped to influence the person when it comes to social interaction.

Even though there are notable differences between the two, one significant similarity the two have in common are that they both sought to address the underlying issues a person faces in life. They tried to find a way to diagnosis

and treat the different mental illness people have. Freud and Adler are two pivotal names in the history of psychology today. The school of thought that each established and the theories within have been an area of study for psychologists to study and adapt their own school of thought.