

Freuds  
psychodynamic  
approach and rogers  
humanistic approach



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For this essay I will be comparing and contrasting the psychodynamic approach concentrating on Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and humanistic approach looking at Carl Rogers theory (1902-1987) focussing on mainly the middle adult stage of human development.

“ The Psychodynamic approach emphasises unconscious dynamics within the individual such as inner forces, conflict or the movement of instinctual energy”

The founding father of the psychodynamic approach was Sigmund Freud, he believed that everybody has inner conflicts and was interested in how these can be resolved. Freud focused on the unconscious mind, believing that adult personality develops due to the passing through of five stages which he called ‘ psychosexual’ from birth to adolescence; the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latency stage, and lastly the genital stage. Any trauma suffered at one of these important stages Freud believed would result in ‘ fixation’, if that adult has greater underlying problems, stemming from childhood then this Freud felt showed as ‘ regression’ meaning the behaviour they then show is closer to that of when they were a child. (Gross 1996)

An example of ‘ fixation’ of a male in the phallic stage means that individual can “ become vain and self-assured” however a female fixated in the same stage “ may fight hard for superiority over men”. If an adult is lucky enough to avoid any problems during Freud’s early stages develop a ‘ genital character’ meaning they grow to be “ mature, and are able to love and be loved”. (Eysenck 2000: 318) (Bee & Boyd 2003)

Freud divided the mind in three parts; the id which is the unconscious, which he described as “ a cauldron full of seething excitations.... it is filled with energy...but...has no organisation...only striving to bring about the satisfaction of instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle...” it is an individual’s basic sexual aggressive impulses, and where the libido lies. The id has two major instincts Eros; the life instinct that motivates people to focus on pleasure seeking tendencies and Thanatos; the death instinct that motivates people to use aggressive urges to destroy. The ego works on the ‘ reality principle’ and is the thinking part of the personality it has the job of keeping, the id satisfied and happy. Freud described the ego as “...the part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world.... the ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id which contains the passions.... in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse.....” The third part of the personality is the superego which is the parent and moral judge. The ego must try and satisfy the id without disrespecting the superego’s rules. (Bee & Boyd 2003)

(Beckett & Taylor 2010: 22-23) (Changingminds. org)

The ego’s job is extremely hard, as it has to keep the id and the superego in balance if not then an adult can experience conflict, this can result in the ego breaching the superego’s rules, resulting in the ego producing ‘ defence mechanisms’. Examples are repression; the forcing of conscious memory into the unconscious, displacement; a substitute object takes the place for the expression of anger and denial; the refusal to acknowledge problems that occur, these are three from many forms of defence mechanisms the ego

triggers in order to reduce anxiety. Freud understood that without defence mechanism an individual would not be able to cope with the tensions within the personality. (Wade & Tavris 2006) (Gross 1997)

Carl Rogers was the founding father of humanistic psychology and client centred therapy, his theory was a reaction psychodynamic psychology. Rogers saw potential in every living organism and truly felt that everything organic had the potential to self-actualise. He gained this insight after seeing potatoes in a dark cellar that had begun to sprout stretching to the light from the window in his childhood. “ It is the urge which is evident in all organic and human life - to expand, become autonomous, develop, mature” (Gross 1997: 764)

Rogers felt differently to Freud, he felt individuals were born innately good, we have mental and social problems that are caused from external influences.

“ It is an approach that emphasises free will, personal growth, resilience and the achievement of human development”

(Wade & Tavris 2006)

Rogers believed that the concept of ‘ self’ was of importance and mainly conscious, it consists of our thoughts and feelings, everyone has an organismic self; what we actually are, a self-concept; what the outside world has made us and an ideal self; the person we would most likely to be. Rogers believed that our driving forces are largely devoted to the lack of self-actualising our needs and potential. Everybody requires positive regard from

others, as well as positive self-regard from inside our own self, anomalies arise when there is incongruence between the adult's self-concept and the organismic self. In order for an adult to be truly happy and their actualising tendency to be fully functioning the organismic self and the ideal self must be as close together as it is possible. When an adult's life is happy and fulfilled Rogers saw this as reaching a state of absolute congruence. As an example of incongruence we could look at two scenarios; an adult male who has a mind-set that every woman he meets should fall in love with him however this is not the case whenever he meets a woman, they may feel that he has not got the qualities they are looking for, this would be incongruence. He may deal with this situation by criticising their decision's for not falling in love with him and justify this with thoughts such as 'she was not good enough anyway' or 'her loss'. In opposition to this if he did not have such high self-esteem and the woman did find him attractive, this is also incongruence. His thought patterns to deal with women liking him could be 'she does not really like me' or even find fault with the women, to find a reason for the action. (Eysenck 2000) (Gross 1997)

If we now compare and contrast the two theories we can initially see they are poles apart however some aspects can be viewed as very similar. Freud's view that when an adult has developed a 'genital character' and "are mature and are able to love and be loved" can, be compared with Roger's state of absolute congruence, both theories see that this is, where an adult is happy and well adjusted. (Eysenck 2000: 318)

Freud's id, ego and super ego can be viewed as similar to Roger's organismic self, self-concept and the ideal self. In each of the theories, there is one

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aspect of the personality that is required to keep a balance between the other two - id and superego are balanced by the ego in Freud's theory and organismic self and the ideal self by the self-concept in Roger's theory each having to maintain balance so that there is a sense of 'order' within the personality. (Gross 1997)

We can also look at Freud's defence mechanisms which are there to help in situations that cause anxiety. In my example with the adult male showing incongruence above, the reaction can be compared to Freud's 'projection' in which the male has placed his own unwanted feelings onto someone else or 'rationalizing' by finding an acceptable excuse for his behaviour, due to his reaction to the situation. (Gross 1997)

Both theories are similar in that they are both from an era when society was not so diverse in culture, sexuality and ethnicity, and was very male dominated at the time, each theorist could not have for seen these dramatic changes in society. Freud's psychosexual stages can be seen as not very flexible to other cultures as "...it does not always make much sense if you attempt to apply this model to adults that are not from western cultures" (Walker & Crawford 2010: 117)

Roger's saw the present and the conscious was the most significant part of an adult and focused on the 'here and now' instead of, trying to find relevance to the past and therefore did not incorporate childhood in his theories for problems that an individual may face in life. He felt that the negative actions of an adult do not remove their worth as an individual believing the ultimate goal was "personal growth, development and

understanding through constant self-improvement and self-understanding” and every person is capable of reaching this, adults were born innately good and had a positive outlook on everything organic, choosing to take a more holistic approach. In comparison to Freud who was more interested in negative aspects and concentrated on childhood development, the conflicts as an adult we face if we have not moved successfully through his psychosexual stages of development that can cause conflict in our unconscious mind. (www. humanism. com)

Rogers did not incorporate childhood into his theory, believing that a person can resolve any incongruence in their lives as adults and can therefore self-actualise no matter what the conflicts through childhood they had as we all have ‘ freewill’, whereas Freud’s theory only concentrated on childhood and what happens in childhood shapes the adult we become and are in the future (Gross 1997)

In conclusion there may be a few similarities within each approach however each approach could not be further apart in terms of the theories one believes in the unconscious and the other conscious drives in terms of a person’s growth and development. Freud’s theory appears to be more dated and not as flexible to change as Rogers humanistic approach it also feels more negative towards human development than Rogers who appears to see everything in a positive light, not all problems in childhood can be associated with the adult grows, development how they adapt to society and others around them. There are many outside influences that can shape a person for the future, not just the way in which an adult has been nurtured as a child

and the experiences they encounter. (Beckett & Taylor 2010) (Walker & Crawford 2010)

“ Psychoanalysis is founded upon acceptance determinism, or acceptance of aspects of our lives outside of our control, whilst humanism thought bases itself on the concept of freewill”

(www. humanism. com)

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