

Theoretical position paper

Psychology



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Theoretical Position Paper Based on extensive research, different scholars within the field of psychology proposed different theories in their attempt to understand, explain, describe and predict human behaviors. Discussed below is an analytic comparison between theories advanced by Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung and William James.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) remains one of the most profound psychologists of all time with his contributions used by other scholars as building blocks for their theories. Freud's psychoanalytic theory placed great emphasis on the role of childhood experiences, and unconscious thoughts in influencing behaviors manifested by individuals in their adult life. He identified the Freudian slip (slip of the tongue) and dreams as tools for gaining insight on the role of unconscious thoughts in shaping behaviors. Freud viewed the human psyche from a sexual perspective whereby, he identified psychosexual stages of development (oral, anal, phallic, latency and genitals stages) in his attempt to explain children's development. He theorized that children developed a preoccupation towards different erogenous zones as they developed whereby, failure to accomplish tasks specific to a psychosexual stage resulted in fixation on that stage. Freud also inferred that human minds have three basic components: id, ego, and super-ego, which co-exist counteractively, shaping a person's personality. According to him, the ego played a pivotal role in safeguarding individuals against undesirable situations by forming defense mechanisms such as repression, projection, and transference among others. He explained neurosis as a product of a weakened ego. Finally, Freud theorized that the life and death drives encompassed the only drives responsible for motivating an individual's behaviors (Putnam, 1917).

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Alfred Adler (1870-1937) was a former student of Freud and a fellow supporter of Freud's psychoanalytic theory. However, he branched out and formed his own theory after disagreeing with some tenets of psychoanalysis. Adler advanced his theory of personality, which provided a holistic view of an individual and emphasized on the self-consistency of personality (individual psychology). He theorized that the human psyche is best understood within a social context. According to Adler, the inferiority complex develops from a very early age characterized by a child's awareness of their physical inadequacies. He inferred that children strive towards getting rid of the inadequacies either in a healthy or unhealthy manner with the latter characterized by the development of a superiority complex. In addition, Adler was of the opinion that subjective perceptions of the future rather than experiences motivated an individual's behaviors (White, 1917).

Carl Jung (1875-1961), founder of Jungian Psychology developed his theory of personality as an alternative to Freud's psychoanalytic theory after disagreeing with some principles advanced by the latter. He identified two personality types: introversion and extraversion claiming that each individual belonged to either of the two types. In addition, Jung proposed the concept of individuation, which encompassed the integration of the conscious and unconscious mind aimed at facilitating an individual's wholeness. Jung agreed with Adler also positing that the human psyche functions within a cultural framework; therefore, analyzing behaviors required one to analyze one's society of origin (Burrow, 1919).

A functionalist at heart, William James (1842-1910) proposed that consciousness existed as a function but not a separate entity as was proposed by Freud and his colleagues. He theorized that consciousness was

dynamic guided by the process of natural selection in evolution. Unlike proponents of structuralism, James and his colleagues focused on the underlying functions of behaviors, thoughts and emotions, and further placed great emphasis on conscious awareness. James also proposed the “ theory of self” distinguishing between “ me” self (emerges from experiences) and “ I” self (the soul or mind of a person) (Goodwin, 2008).

In conclusion, the above theorists saw childhood as crucial to the development of an individual’s personality. However, Adler, Jung, and Williams placed minimal emphasis on the role of sexual motivation in influencing behaviors or development. In addition, Adler and Jung proposed analyzing the influence of society on an individual’s behaviors and not the unconscious and personal experiences. Conversely, Williams advocated for the study of conscious awareness and the functions of behaviors, thoughts and emotions in favor of the study of unconscious thoughts in influencing behaviors (Goodwin, 2008).

References

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