

Freud's theory of personality and the filchers scientific criteria



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Psychology today is recognized as a science, and Sigmund Freud, the famous 19th century medical doctor, is considered by many to be one of the most influential in the field (APA, 1998). Yet recent developments have seen Freud's theory of personality come under attacks from critics.

Is it truly scientific? To be able to give a satisfactory answer, we subject his theory to a rigorous examination of soundness according to the FiLCHeRS scientific criteria of Falsifiability, Logic, Comprehensiveness, Honesty, Replicability and Sufficiency. Freud's Theory of Personality A theory could be considered a ' model of reality' which helps one understand, explain, predict, and control such reality (Gay, 1989). In the study of personality, these models are usually verbal. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the father of psychoanalysis, developed an intricate theory of how the psyche (mind) operates. Central to Freud's theory, and perhaps his greatest contribution to psychology, is the notion that the human psyche is composed of parts within and beyond our awareness - i. e.

it consists of parts that are conscious, preconscious, and unconscious (Gay, 1989). Freud came to view personality as having three aspects working together, and in the process producing all of our complex behaviors: the Id, the Ego and the Superego (Erwin, 1986). The ID (" It") functions in the irrational and emotional part of the mind. It is often referred to as the primitive mind containing all basic human needs and feelings, is the source for libido (psychic energy), and governed by only one rule - the " pleasure principle" which in layman's terms translates to " I want it and I want it all now" (Gay, 1989). The EGO (" I") functions with the rational part of the mind,

as it develops out of growing awareness that one can't always have what one wants.

The Ego relates to the real world and operates via the "reality principle" - the need for compromise - as it negotiates between the Id's instant gratification and the Superego's pious delaying of gratification (Gay, 1989). The SUPEREGO ("Over-I") is the last part of the mind to develop, the moral part embodying parental and societal values and constantly striving for perfection, though this may be quite far from reality or possibility (Freud, 1949). It has two subsystems, the Ego Ideal (provides rules for good behavior and standards of excellence towards which the Ego must strive) and the Conscience (rules about what constitutes bad behavior). The Id, Ego, Superego structure of mind complements Freud's structural ("iceberg") model of the unconscious, pre-conscious, and conscious, with the Ego and Superego playing roles in each of the three levels of consciousness, while the Id is entirely played out in the Unconscious (Wax, 1986). Evaluating Freud: Critique from the Scientific and Philosophical Community The criticisms of Freud's theory can be grouped into three general categories: (1) critics contend that Freud's theory is lacking in empirical evidence, relying too heavily on therapeutic achievements, whereas others assert that even Freud's clinical data are flawed, inaccurate, and selective at best; (2) the actual method or techniques involved in psychoanalysis, e.

g. interpretation of dream, free association, have been criticized; and (3) several critics claim that psychoanalysis is simply not a science and many of the principles upon which it is based are inaccurate (Greenberg, 1986). We

now recognize that Freud's theories are largely criticized for lack of <https://assignbuster.com/freuds-theory-of-personality-and-the-filchers-scientific-criteria/>

substantial corroborative data. Yet the model he used to describe observed behavior may still be used as metaphors for actual human developmental issues. A considerable number of psychoanalysts concede that psychoanalysis is not science, but is rather more like a worldview that helps people perceive connections that they otherwise would miss (Rand and Torok, 1997). Among those who think that psychoanalysis is not science is the philosopher Karl Popper, who holds that the demarcation criterion separating science from logic, myth, religion, metaphysics, etc.

s falsifiability, i. e. all scientific theories can be falsified by empirical tests. For Popper, psychoanalysis does not meet the falsification criterion as it does not rule out any class of events – it explains everything, therefore it explains nothing. Popper (1986) asserts that psychoanalysis has often maintained that every individual is neurotic to some degree due to the fact that everyone has suffered and repressed a trauma at one point or another in his or her life.

Yet this concept of ubiquitous repression is impossible to test as there is no overt behavioral method of doing so. This view is opposed by Adolf Grunbaum, who believes that Freud meant his theory to be scientific, that he made falsifiable predictions, and that those predictions proved false. This is exemplified by Freud's Master Proposition or the Necessary Condition Thesis (NCT): only psychoanalysis can produce a durable cure of a psychoneurosis (a mental illness caused by childhood trauma). Such a strong statement could be falsified if another form of therapy, e.

. behavior therapy, cured someone of a neurosis, or even if spontaneous remission occurred. Current knowledge assures us that neurosis yields to both. Therefore, as Grunbaum (1986) concludes, psychoanalysis is false. Other critics however, beg to disagree, insisting that though extra-clinical studies must and should be performed, clinical data are a reliable and necessary source of evidence because the theory of psychoanalysis would be impossible to test otherwise (Edelson, 1986, p. 232).

For Shevrin (1986, p. 58), " Freud's admirable heuristic hypotheses did not come out of the thin air or simply out of his imagination. " Instead, " extraclinical methods must be drawn upon in addition to the clinical method because the clinical method is the only way we can be in touch with certain phenomena" (Shevrin, 1986, p. 259). Only with quantification, many critics assert, can supposedly scientific theories even begin to be evaluated based on their empirical merits. Still other critics contend that Freud's clinical data are flawed or invalid.

As Greenberg (1986) believes, Freud's case studies do not place enough stress on revealing the outcome of the treatment and that Freud's aim was more to illustrate his theoretical points. Additional critics insist that psychoanalysis is not a science because of the lack of interpretive rules or regulations. These critics contend that Freud's evidence is flawed due to the lack of an experiment, the lack of a control group, and the lack of observations that went unrecorded (Colby, 1960, p. 4). In all likelihood one psychoanalyst could observe one phenomenon and interpret it one way, while another psychoanalyst will observe the same phenomenon and interpret it in a completely different way that is contradictory to the first

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psychoanalyst's interpretation (Colby, 1960). Colby (1960) concludes that if analysts themselves cannot concur that a certain observation is an example of a certain theory, then the regulations that govern psychoanalytic interpretation are undependable (p.

5). Moreover, critics also question the demographically restricted sample of individuals on which Freud based the majority of his data and theory (Holt, 1986, p. 242). To satisfactorily evaluate the strengths of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, one need consider several qualities that make a theory of personality useful and worthwhile. Such qualities include how it can be applied in practical ways, complements other theories, and withstands the test of time. In addition, according to many philosophers of science, a good theory is also falsifiable, able to generalize, leads the formulation of new theories and ideas, and is recognized by others in the field.

Despite critics' objections, psychoanalysis seems to meet many of these criteria. Despite the fact that it was formulated way back in the 1850s, psychoanalysis even today remains a valid option for people suffering mental ailments, though its credibility and convincing power in providing satisfactory explanations have been substantially eroded. Still, acceptance and popularity of psychoanalysis remains apparent through the existence of numerous institutes, organizations, and conferences established around the world centered on psychoanalysis. The theory of psychoanalysis, innovative and revolutionary in its own time, has clearly withstood the test of human history. It is also interesting to note that psychoanalysis served as a catalyst to many practitioners in the field of psychology, enlightening them to some extent on the aspects of the human mind and its inner workings, which in the <https://assignbuster.com/freuds-theory-of-personality-and-the-filchers-scientific-criteria/>

past have proven to be excruciatingly off limits to human knowledge and comprehension.

Moreover, in certain aspects it has also led to greater acceptance and understanding in society, particularly regarding human sexuality. As a direct result of psychoanalysis, approaches to psychological treatment now considered routine or commonplace were developed worldwide (Farrell, 1981, p. 202). One of the strongest points of the theory of psychoanalysis is its comprehensive nature - originally intended to explain therapeutic or psychological concepts, psychoanalysis attempts to explain the nature of human development and all aspects of mental functioning (Notturmo & McHugh, 1986). Other experts also contend that psychoanalysis can further be used to describe or explain other phenomenon outside the realm of psychology, e.

g. character analysis in art and literature, religion, among others (man's fascination with religion, a painting, sculpture or work of art, the Shakespearian character of " Hamlet," to some extent can all be explained by the principles of psychoanalysis). Such comprehensiveness is seldom matched by other theories, suggesting that the theory of psychoanalysis is, at least to some extent, pointing in the general direction of the truth (Farrell, 1981, p. 95). Applying the FiLCHeRS Criteria to Freud's Theory of Personality In terms of Falsifiability, Freud's theory certainly qualifies as ' scientific' though it has been proven false, thus rendering it a theory which is no longer satisfactory in terms of its explanatory power.

When it comes to testing the logical soundness of the theory, it would be problematic breaking it down to its most simple logical form, though it appears that the manner of stating Freud's arguments logically follows one another. For comprehensiveness, it would certainly pass as it tries to account for all aspects of mental functioning and human development. For the criteria of Honesty, there would be no objective tool to gauge this aspect, considering that Freud died a long time ago and there is no means to subject him to a lie detector test. However, there are some people who would certainly stand up for Freud's credibility as a medical doctor, and even as a writer and man of science.

In terms of Replicability, I think the theory would also pass muster. Similar cases as Freud described could be observed among certain individuals, and the modes of treatment could be successfully replicated, though this has already been also proven false due to the discovery of other more successful modes of treatment for mental ailments. The same goes for sufficiency - for a supposedly scientific theory, it ultimately fails to present sufficient explanatory power (as well as empirical evidence) to back up all its claims about human nature and psychological state of mind. Conclusion At this point, the researcher has to agree with the many other critics who insist on the invalidity of evidences provided by Sigmund Freud due to the lack of sound empirical data, as well as the restricted sample of individuals which cannot be considered as a demographically representative sample of the population to which he had wanted to generalize his theory (Farrell 1981).

Moreover, some aspects of Freudian theory on personality are far too generalized, thus failing to leave enough room for exceptions to the general <https://assignbuster.com/freuds-theory-of-personality-and-the-filchers-scientific-criteria/>

rule (Eysenck, 1986). In light of recent scientific breakthroughs and developments in the field of psychology, it becomes increasingly hard to accept that all mental problems could be traced back to aspects of sex and human libido. To some extent this would be merely gross exaggeration and overgeneralization of just an aspect of the complexity of human nature and the workings of the mind. Yet despite its weaknesses, the strengths (comprehensiveness, continuing relevance and applicability, etc. of the theory are still largely significant.

It is a comprehensive, falsifiable scientific theory which by modern accounts is sadly insufficient in terms of providing questions about the human psyche. Furthermore, it has already been proven false by the discovery of other effective methods of treatment, which directly or indirectly were developed based on the new insights garnered from or in reaction to Freud's psychoanalysis.