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| **The Psychodynamic Approach** |
| **The Psychodynamic Approach AO1** |
| **The role of the unconscious** Freud suggested that the art of our mind that we know about and are aware of – the conscious mind – Is merely the ‘tip of the iceberg’. Most of our mind is made up of the unconscious: a vast storehouse of biological drives and instincts that has a significant influence on our behaviour and personality. The unconscious also contains threatening and disturbing memories that have been repressed, or locked away and forgotten.Just bubbling under the surface of our conscious mind in the preconscious which includes thoughts and ideas which may become aware of during dreams or through ‘slips of the tongue’ (what Freud referred to as parapraxes). An example of such a slip is calling a female teacher ‘mum’ instead of ‘miss’. |
| **The structure of personality**Freud described personality as ‘tripartite’, composed of three parts:* The id is the primitive part of our personality. It operates on the pleasure principle – the id gets what it wants. It is a seething mass of unconscious drives and instincts. Only the id of present at birth (Freud described babies as being ‘bundles of id’). Throughout life the id is entirely selfish and demands instant gratification of its need.
* The ego works on the reality principle and is the mediator between the other two parts of the personality. The ego develops around the age of two years and its role is to reduce the conflict between the demands of the id and the superego. It manages this by employing a number of defence mechanisms.
* The superego is formed at the end of the phallic stage, around the age of five. It is our internalised sense of right and wrong. Based on the morality principle it represents the moral standards of the child’s same-sex parent and punishes the ego for wrongdoing (through guilt).
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| **Psychosexual stages** Freud claimed that child development occurred in five stages. Each stage (apart from latency) is marked by a different conflict that the child must resolve in order to progress successfully by the next stage. Any psychosexual conflict that is unresolved leads to fixation where the child becomes ‘stuck’ and carries certain behaviours and conflicts associated with that stage through to adult life. |
| **Defence mechanisms** The ego has a difficult job balancing the conflicting demands of the id and the superego but it does have help in the form of defence mechanisms. These are unconscious and ensure that the ego is able to prevent us from being overwhelmed by temporary threats or traumas. However, they often involve some form of distortion of reality and as long term solution they are regarded as psychologically unhealthy and undesirable.Repression – Forcing a distressing memory out of the conscious mind.Denial – Refusing to acknowledge some aspect of reality.Displacement – Transferring feelings from true source of distressing emotion onto a substitute target. |
| **The psychodynamic approach AO3** |
| **Explanatory power**P: On strength of the psychodynamic approach is that Freud’s theory has had a huge influence on psychology and Western contemporary though despite it being controversial and bizarre. E: For example, the psychodynamic approach (along with behaviourism) remained the dominant force in psychology for the first half of the 20th century and had been used to explain a wide range of phenomena including personality development, abnormal behaviour, moral development and gender. E: This is a strength because this approach has been significant in drawing attention to the connection between experiences in childhood, such as our relationship with our parents, and later development.L: Consequently, the credibility of the psychodynmaic approach is increased. | **The case of the method**P: One weakness of the psychodynamic approach is that Freud’s theory was based on intensive study of single individuals who were often in therapy. E: For example, Freud came up with the concept of the Oedipus complex through the case study on Little Hans. Hans was a 5 year old boy who developed a phobia of horses after seeing one collapse in the street. Freud suggested Hans’ phobia was a form of displacement in which his repressed fear of his father was displaced onto horses. Thus, horses were merely a symbolic representation of Hans’s real unconscious fear: the ear of castration experienced during Oedipus complex. E: This is a weakness because critics have suggested it is impossible to make such universal claims about human nature based on studies with such a small sample.L: This lacks scientific rigour, reducing the credibility of the psychodynamic approach. | **Untestable concepts**P: Another weakness of the psychodynamic approach is that a lot if its concepts are untestable.E: For example, the philosopher of science Karl Popper argued that the psychodynamic approach does not meet the scientific criterion of falsification, in the sense that it is not open to empirical testing.E: This is a weakness because many of Freud’s concepts (such as the id, ego, superego) are said to occur at an unconscious level, making them difficult, if not impossible to test.L: As a result, the credibility of the psychodynamic approach is reduced. | **Psychic determinism**  |