

# Psychodynamic approach - strengths and weaknesses: D.R.A.I.N.S

## DETERMINISM/FREEWILL

### Deterministic!

Behaviour determined by **innate drives**, as if a part of the tripartite personality, was so dominant, it could determine personality.

#### EXAMPLE:

- Id: **psychopathic** personality.
- Ego: **narcissistic** personality.
- Superego: **neurotic** personality.

Behaviour determined by **early childhood experiences**, such as being fixated at a psychosexual stage, can affect later adult behaviour. **EXAMPLE:**

- **Oral stage fixation:** pessimism, envy, sarcasm.
- **Oral stage overindulgence:** overindulgence - optimism, gullibility, and being needy in future relationships.

- + By implying that behaviour is determined by factors outside of one's control like innate drives and early childhood experiences, it gives a reason for the behaviours/illnesses and therefore takes the blame away from the individual which is a **strength** of the approach.
- However, one of the **problems** with this deterministic perspective is the choice of free will, that we have as human beings, is undermined as it suggests that our behaviour is pre-determined by forces or experiences we cannot change.

## REDUCTIONIST/HOLISTIC

### Reductionist!

Freud explained complex human behaviour in terms of the mechanics of the mind and how we progressed through childhood.

#### EXAMPLE:

- Adult **personality** influenced by innate drives (Id/Ego/Superego).
- Childhood experiences (psychosexual stages).

By focusing on explaining behaviour through innate drives and childhood experiences, other explanations such as genetics, biochemistry and neuroanatomy are ignored.

#### EXAMPLE:

- Psychodynamic explanation of schizophrenia: **schizophrenogenic mothers**. An overly dominant mother can contribute towards the onset of symptoms. Taking this explanation alone overlooks key biological factors in explaining schizophrenia.
- + Research can be focused, and a lot of detail can be garnered into the psychodynamic explanations of behaviour. Ultimately, this results in more focused treatments which is a **strength** of the approach.
- Reducing complex human behaviour to mechanics of the mind and the progression through childhood oversimplifies behaviour and overlooks other significant explanations of behaviour which is a **weakness** of the approach.

## APPLICATIONS

### Applied successfully!

Psychoanalytical therapies such as dream analysis, hypnosis, group analysis therapy and free association have been used to treat several disorders such as depression and anxiety disorders.

#### EXAMPLES:

- **Briggs et al. (2019)** finding that there was a significant reduction of suicidal behaviour and self-harm for patients undergoing psychoanalytical therapies.
- **The British Psychoanalytical Society** also provided evidence for the positive effects of psychodynamic therapies in treating several psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, PTSD and eating disorders, providing further support for the application in society.
- + The use of psychodynamic principles within society is viewed as a **strength** of the approach. It supports the assumptions of the approach and is considered a strength because, ultimately, psychologists conduct research and develop theories to improve the world we live in, e.g. treating/curing mental disorders.

# Psychodynamic approach - strengths and weaknesses: D.R.A.I.N.S

## IDIOPHGRAPHIC/NOMOTHETIC

Both!

**Nomothetic:** tripartite personality and psychosexual stages are universal and applied to everybody. **EXAMPLE:**

- Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation.

**Idiographic:** the way in which these universal processes are applied are subjective and unique to everyone. There is a great amount of emphasis on the subjective and unique experience of an individual and case studies are the method of choice for research. **EXAMPLE:**

- Freud uses **case studies** such as that of Little Hans, Anna O, Dora and Wolf Man to understand unique behaviour and disorders such as phobias, neuroses, and hysteria.
- + Considering both idiographic and nomothetic elements is a **strength** of the approach. Millon and Davis (1996) suggest that good research should start with a nomothetic approach to establish general laws that can then be supported and challenged by further research, therefore moving towards a more idiographic perspective.

## NATURE/NURTURE

Both! Interactionist.

**Nature:** Freud explains personality as a product of innate drives. **EXAMPLE:**

- He believed the Id is present from birth and is the biological aspect of our personality.

**Nurture:** personality and behaviour are explained through childhood experiences and progression through the psychosexual stages of development. **EXAMPLE:**

- Frustration or overindulgence during these stages will have an influence on personality traits in later life such as being oral aggressive and anal retentive.
- + As human behaviour is complex, it makes sense to consider a range of elements when explaining it. We know that both nature and nurture contribute towards adult behaviour and Freud's theory provides a framework for putting the two elements together. Thus, it contributes to the nature-nurture debate and is a **strength** of the approach.

## SCIENTIFIC/UNSCIENTIFIC

Unscientific!

As the psychodynamic approach largely focuses on the unconscious, it makes it very difficult to falsify (prove to be false).

**EXAMPLES:**

- It cannot be proven that the id, ego, and superego don't exist within the mind and we cannot disprove the existence of the psychosexual stages of development, therefore his theory of personality development cannot be falsified.
- Freud's suggestion that dreams are the via regia to the unconscious which represent fulfilment of repressed wishes and desires. Although, we cannot falsify this theory, dream analysis is still used in psychoanalytical therapy today with reported success.
- Psychology aims to produce scientific and objective theories which can be falsified and supported by research evidence. Without this element of scientific rigor, the theory and the assumptions that underpin it could be questionable. This is considered a **weakness** of the approach.