

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

Hysteria

- Thought to be a female disease – hypersexual, flirty, liars (19th Century)
- Affected males also (end 19th century)
- Researchers (e.g. Freud) considered it to be psychological
 - Freud thought that hysteria was a particular kind of neurosis – the other kind was ‘OCD’
 - 3 conditions proposed by Freud (early 1890s)
 - Presence of physical symptoms in the absence of physical pathology
 - The symptoms appeared to fulfil some psychological function – appeared to give the patient relief from anxiety and internal conflict (primary gain)
 - Forgetting of significant events
 - Second two based on Freud’s clinical data – symptom such as a facial twitch or blindness in someone who was optically normal or paralysis when there was nothing wrong with the nervous system (e.g.) would disappear using hypnosis or the cathartic method (less success with hypnosis)
 - Cathartic method (the Technical Procedure) – the discharge of pathogenic affects/emotions through a reliving of the traumatic event relieving the patient of the physical symptoms with no physical cause
 - Freud: How can we forget things that at some inaccessible level we know? What explains the forgetting of these traumatic experiences? How does the body express what the mind cannot fathom?
 - Put forward an explanation: psychoneurosis (hysteria and obsessional personality)
 - Hypothesis: the neurotic patient has experienced some kind of trauma (could be a series of events) and the affect associated with the memories of the trauma has adequately been expressed – the memory has to be kept out of consciousness because it clashes with the appearance and moral standards of the family and society at large – this adds to the patient’s nervous system excitation
- In the obsessional patient, the emotion is placed onto obsession and compulsions (e.g. hand washing)
- In the case of the hysterical patient – no organic basis
- Symptoms are the discharge of excess emotion – the spilling over of excess emotion that are diverted into the symptom (whether psychological or physical)
- Cathartic method: bringing the memory and the emotion attached to consciousness allows for a direct and complete purging of the expression – the symptom then disappears

The Origins of Psychoanalysis Through the Phenomena of Hysteria

Some fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis arrived at through Freud’s pre-1897 study of hysteria and the psychoneuroses generally

- the active repression of certain memories; the essential function of psychological defence mechanisms
 - up until 1897, Freud maintains that it was memories that were repressed, they were repressed because the expression of them would conflict with family (particularly mum and dad) values
 - stop you feeling what you can't bear to feel
- a division of the mind into conscious and a dynamic unconscious
 - the mind is not unitary, it is divided – unconscious and conscious processing
- dissociation – a splitting of the mind between a hypnoid state and the normal state
 - one part doesn't know what the other part is doing
- intra-psychic conflict: opposition between apparently incompatible forces within the individual
 - conflict between unconscious processes and consciousness
 - can cause terrible tension for the individual
 - on one hand there is the desire to express, on the other there is a fear of ridicule/judgement for expressing
- symptom-formation and conversion: the conversion of emotional energy attached to psychical conflict into a somatic response (energy is transmitted along a nerve pathway)
 - the symbolic meaning of conversion symptoms – the symptom gives expression to the repressed idea; somatic symptoms have a symbolic relationship to the repressed material
 - Freud believed that you could work out the meaning of physical symptoms (hysterical patient) – symptoms represent aspects of intra-psychic conflict
 - The symptom highlights/represents the nature of the repressed material

Freud's seduction (trauma) hypothesis

- Freud initially thought that traumatic events were of a sexual nature – seduction hypothesis

Freud's reasons for abandoning the seduction theory

- his relative lack of success in completing his self-analysis and the analysis of patients, and the possibility of explaining his partial successes in other ways
 - the high improbability of universal sexual abuse of children by their fathers
 - his discovery that unconscious mental processes are often about fantasy, not reality, and that there is no means of discriminating between the two
 - his discovery that even in severe psychoses when unconscious material floods consciousness, no childhood sexual seductions are revealed
 - Freud 1925: in most cases, what the adult patient is talking about is a fantasy/wish, not something based on reality
 - Adults suffering from a psychic neurosis were reporting about fantasies of being seduced in childhood
 - The most prevalent cause of psychoneurosis was a wishful fantasy about seduction which originated in childhood
 - Repressed material is not reality, but fantasies
 - The expression presents a real formal threat for societal function

Freud's (1905) theory of psycho-sexual development

- proto-sexuality
 - a childhood understanding of sexuality
 - readily observed in children
 - not in dispute, you do have to have exposure in children to observe it's obviousness
 - the sexual drive does not just appear when you are an adolescent
- psycho-sensual

- the sexual drive develops very gradually, forms and changes from birth
 - the sexual instinct in each individual has a very long history and provides us with potential for adult psycho-sensual relations
- pleasure
 - children can derive pleasure from any bodily activity
 - e.g. sucking or stroking
 - manipulation of an erogenous zone is a relief from tension - provides pleasure
 - the mouth, the anus and the genitals
 - it is linked closely with evolutionary theory
 - the three zones are the principle erogenous zones – they are associated with biological need (the body all over can be an erogenous zone)
 - at various stages of development, the child attends to each one of these areas and seeks pleasure

Freud established that neurosis was a genuine psychological problem

- A defence against unbearable ideas/wishful fantasies that cannot be expressed
- A condition that was not purely for woman
- Excess affect adds to nervous system excitation
- Theory of mind that is still used today (repression, conversion, intra-psychic conflict)
- Linked the physiology and neurophysiology to the outside world
- Neurosis differs only in degree, not in kind