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Psychodynamic Theories of Personality

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The psychodynamic theories of personality are mainly composed of famous theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson and Alfred Adler. The Object Relations Theory also belongs to this group of personality theories. Let's see how each theory explains the nature and process of personality.

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Sigmund Freud: Structural Model of Personality

Through his study of the psychosexual development of humans, Sigmund Freud was able to develop the Structural Model, which explains the three parts of a person's personality (id, ego, and superego).

Freud believes that a person is born with Id, the pleasure-seeker portion of our personality. He believed that as newborns, the Id was crucial because it drives us to get our basic needs satisfied. For instance, a child is hungry and his Id wants food; this causes him to cry until his need is gratified. The Id is said to be inconsiderate of other circumstances - all it cares about is its own satisfaction.

In a span of three years, the baby grows and starts to learn new things as he interacts with the environment. During this time his Ego develops. The ego is rooted on the principle of reality as it is the part of one's personality. It aims to satisfy Id but considers the situation at hand, thus balancing the Id and the Superego. .

When the child reaches the age of five, he begins to learn about the moral and ethical rules and restraints imposed by his parents, teachers and other people. This is the time the Superego develops. It is based on the moral principle as it tells us whether something is right or wrong.

According to Freud, the healthy person has his ego as the strongest part of his personality.

Alfred Adler: Inferiority and Birth Order

Alfred Adler's theory states that all of us are born with a sense of inferiority as evidenced by how weak and helpless a newborn is. By this, Adler was able to explain that this inferiority is a crucial part of our personality, in the sense that it is the driving force that pushes us to strive in order to become superior.

In addition to the Inferiority Theory of Personality, Adler also considers birth order as a major factor in the development of our personality. He believed that first born children may feel inferior and may even develop inferiority complex once their younger sibling arrives. The middle born children, on the other hand, are not as pampered as their older or younger sibling, but they have a sense of superiority to dethrone their older sibling in a healthy competition. Thus they have the greatest potential to be successful in life. The youngest children may feel like they have the least power to influence other members of the family. Because they are often the most pampered, they may develop personality problems of inferiority just like the first born.

Erik Erikson: Theory of Psychosocial Development

The stages of Psychosocial Development involves challenges that a person must overcome in order for him to become successful in the later stages. First, at age 0 to 1 year, the child must have the ability to trust others; else he will become fearful later in his life as he would feel he couldn't trust anyone. Second, at age 1 to 3, he must develop autonomy, or he will suffer from shame and doubt in the future. Third, at age 3 to six, he must learn to assert himself by planning and leading activities, or he will feel guilty and remain a follower and decline leadership opportunities. Fourth, at age 6 to 12, the child must nurture a sense of pride and confidence through his achievements; else he will feel discouraged and will always doubt about what he can do. Fifth, at adolescence, the teenager must have a strong sense of identity; or else he will have personality problems as he becomes confused of what he wants to accomplish. Sixth, the young adult may be optimistic of the things around him because he is involved in an intimate relationship, or he may become pessimistic because he may not be committed in a healthy romantic relationship. Seventh, during middle adulthood, a person feels productive when he is able to contribute to the society through hard work, while he may feel the other way around when he fails to do his job well. Lastly, ego integrity in late adulthood brings about a joyful, positive personality while despair is felt by those who looked back at their early years and saw that they were unproductive.

Object Relations Theory

Object Relations Theory states that an object (a person, part of that person or his symbol) relates to another through actions or behaviors that are influenced by the residues of past

interpersonal relationships. It is a theory that talks about the relationships inside a group of people, particularly that within a family.

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