

The Psychodynamic Perspective

A perspective is a view that involves assumptions (beliefs) about human behaviour. Each perspective brings something different to our understanding of human behaviour.

Sigmund Freud is the founder of the psychodynamic perspective. The underlying principles and concepts are very much influential today, particularly in the field of therapy and counselling.

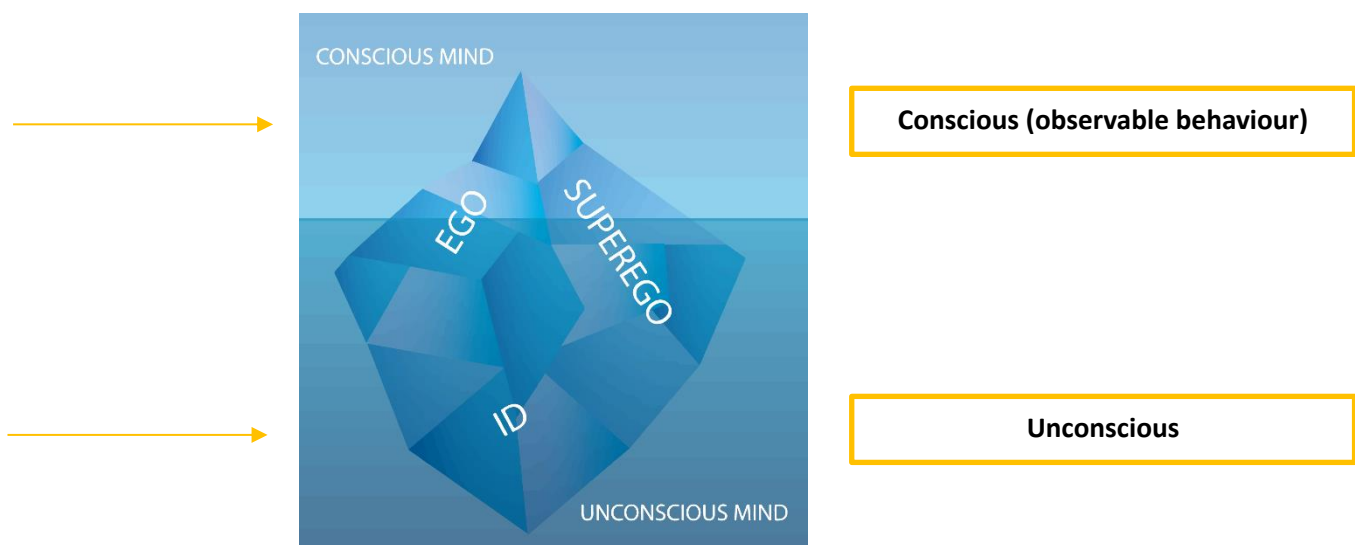
The psychodynamic perspective believes that our childhood can impact significantly on our behaviour as adults. As such, individuals have very little free will to make choices in life; instead, behaviour is determined by unconscious motives and childhood experiences.

Freud (1909) offered his case study of Little Hans as evidence of the Oedipus complex. Hans' use of defence mechanisms to cope with the continual castration anxiety was suggested and Freud saw Hans' phobia as an expression of the Oedipus complex with the horse symbolising the father.

THEORIES

The Iceberg Analogy

Freud explained that the human mind is like an iceberg with only a small amount being visible – this is our observable behaviour. It is the unconscious that has the most influence on our behaviour.



The Tripartite Personality

Freud saw the human psyche (personality) as possessing three parts: the Id, Ego and Superego.

Together they govern the way we think and act. Freud states that the majority of our personality comes from our unconscious mind and that abnormal behaviour occurs as the result of an imbalance between the 3 parts. For example, an overdeveloped superego may lead to excessive anxiety later on whilst a dominant Id may lead to psychotic behaviour.

Psychosexual Stages

Psychological development takes place in a series of fixed stages. In order for healthy adult development, individuals need to be able to leave one stage and move on to the next.

Fixation occurs when a stage is not completed or passed through successfully. The individual who is fixated will behave in a way that is characteristic of early childhood.

The five stages of psychosexual development are; oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital.

Freud (1909) offered his case study of Little Hans as evidence of the Oedipus complex, which occurs in the phallic stage of development.

Strengths and weaknesses of the Psychodynamic Perspective

The following table shows some strengths and weaknesses of the psychodynamic perspective. Your task is to complete the table by writing a statement explaining how or why each point is a strength or weakness.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Highlights the importance of childhood...	Deterministic...
Psychoanalysis is effective as a form of therapy...	Unfalsifiable...
Highly influential ...	Unscientific...
Has many practical applications...	Based on subjective interpretation ...

Applying debates to the Psychodynamic Perspective

Circle which of the following debates are relevant to the psychodynamic perspectives and then write a supporting statement stating why it is relevant.

Reductionism

vs

Holism

Free Will

vs

Determinism

Nature

vs

Nurture

Individual

vs

Situational

How the Behaviourist Perspective is different from and similar to the Psychodynamic Perspective

The following is a comparison of the similarities and differences between the two perspectives. Complete the boxes with the opposing view and decide whether the perspectives share the view or whether they differ.

Psychodynamic	Behaviourist	Similarity or Difference
Current behaviour is determined by past experiences		
	Objective measurements	
	Deterministic assuming behaviour is beyond an individual's free will	
Concerned with internal events (mental processes)		Difference
	Theory is based on animal research	
Unscientific		

