

The Psychodynamic Approach

Evaluation – Strengths and Weaknesses

Strength 1

The approach is **interactionist** (takes into account both sides of nature vs nurture debate). Freud claimed that adult personality and behaviour is the product of **innate drives** (nature) and **childhood experiences** (nurture).

For Freud, the **ID** is instinctual and is the nature (biological) aspect of our personality, the part we are born with. The ID is **driven by the libido and Thanatos drives**. Freud also argued that we are biologically programmed to go through the **psychosexual stages**.

However, our psychosexual development can also be influenced by our experiences (nurture) during these stages as in each stage if there is too much or too little gratification. This will lead to **predictable adult personality characteristics**. For example, insufficient breastfeeding can lead to an individual developing an orally aggressive personality and showing behaviours such as swearing.

Freud theory, therefore, considers the influence of nature and nurture. The interactionist nature of this approach is a key strength because it recognises that **human behaviour can be influenced by multiple factors** which cannot always be separated. This is a **more holistic explanation** of behaviour compared to other psychological approaches and does reflect the complexity of human behaviour and experiences.

However, the approach does **ignore** some important nature influences in behaviour, such as **genetics** and the **role of neurotransmitters**, so in some ways, it does still have the weakness of being an oversimplification.

Strength 2

The approach has been proved it be **useful** in several ways. One application has led to real life development.

For example, research has been useful in highlighting the fact that **childhood is a critical period** in our development. Research by psychodynamic theorists such as Bowlby as had **real-life implications for child-rearing**. For example, Bowlby illustrated the need for children to have developed a warm and continuous bond by the age of 3-6

Weakness 1

Freud's theory is **difficult to falsify (non-scientific)**. A good theory is one that can be tested to see if it is wrong, so we can discard it or amend it if necessary.

However, many of Freud's predictions cannot be falsified because of his belief that the root cause of our behaviours is to be found in the **unconscious mind** – which by definition is **inaccessible** and therefore **untestable**. For example, his views that all men have **repressed homosexual tendencies cannot be disproved** because it can always be argued that the tendencies are so repressed that they are not apparent.

Another example would be penis envy. Freud argues that all females have unconscious penis envy which leads to them having unconscious hatred of the mother and desire for the father (**Electra complex**).

This is a weakness because it means the theory cannot be proven wrong, therefore, the approach is not scientific.

On the other hand, it also means that **we can never entirely discredit Freud** as we can never conclusively discard his theory, and while it is difficult to generate a testable hypothesis from Freud's theory, it is not impossible. For example, Freud predicted a **negative correlation** between **guilt and wrongdoing**. Also, Mackinse (1938) did find that individuals who cheated at a task tended to express less guilt when questioned about life in general than those who did not cheat.

Weakness 2

The approach is **hard deterministic**, this means that we have no free will (choice) in who we become or how we behave. This approach, therefore, sees our **personality** as shaped or **pre-determined** by forces that we cannot change.

Freud suggested that our behaviour can be **controlled by the tripartite personality**. For example, if a person has a dominant ID they will have an unpleasant personality. This follows the seek of instant gratification ("Pleasure