Personality Theory

Psychology 101

Focusing on 4 Main Theories:
- Psychoanalytic Perspective
- Humanistic Perspective
- Trait Perspective
- Social-Cognitive Perspective

The Psychoanalytic Approach
- Sigmund Freud
- Observed patients with disorders that science could not explain
- Example: a patient with no feeling in their hand, but no neurological damage that would account for this
- Since there is no physical reason, there must be some mental block or tension the patient is experiencing

Enter The Unconscious
- Hypnosis:
  - Could access unconscious thoughts driving bizarre behavior
  - Not everyone can be hypnotized
- Free Association
  - “Relax and say the first thing that comes to mind”
  - Allowed Freud access to the unconscious

Personality and the unconscious
- Personality has 3 parts
  - Id
  - Ego
  - Superego

The Id, the Ego, and the Superego
- Id
  - Our drive of unconscious energy to satisfy basic sexual and aggressive desires
- Superego
  - Represents the rules and how we feel we should live our life: a set of IDEALS
- Ego
  - Tries to mediate between the Id and the Superego
The Development of Personality: According to Freud

- Psychosexual Stages of Development
  - Oral Stage: 0-18 months
    - Focus on the mouth: sucking, biting, chewing
  - Anal Stage: 18-36 months
    - Focus on bowel and bladder control
    - All about learning to gain control
    - Possibly could become fixated
      - Oral fixation: leads to smoking or overeating
      - Anal fixation: leads to a major desire for control

Psychosexual Stages: Continued

- Phallic Stage: 3-6 years
  - Focus on genitals: coping with desires
  - Possible development of Oedipus complex
  - Boys are attracted to their mothers
  - Jealous and hatred towards their fathers
  - Leads to guilt and castration anxiety
  - Children repress these thoughts and identify with their same-sex parent
  - Girls have the same problems: Elektra Complex
  - Girls develop penis envy too

More on Psychosexual Stages

- Latency: 6-puberty
  - DORMANT sexual feelings
- Genital: Puberty on
  - Maturation of sexual interests

What can happen during the stages?

- Fixation
  - If conflicts are unresolved at a stage, people can linger at that stage
  - Oral Fixation
    - Smokers or people that overeat
  - Anal Fixation
    - Control freaks
  - Genital Fixation
    - Homosexuality

Little Hans

- A Freud case study of a young boy
- Scared of horses
- Freud interpreted this as stemming from Oedipal desires
  - Loved his mother, scared of his father
  - Horses represented the father (both have larger penises)
- In reality this child had observed a horse crush a human when it fell
  - Freud knew this, but still believed it was something deeper

Defense Mechanisms

- The way our ego protects itself by reducing anxiety and distorting reality
  - Repression
    - Banish our unacceptable feelings to the unconscious
  - Regression
    - Retreat to an earlier (safer) time
    - College students long to move home
    - Kids beginning school start to suck their thumb again
More Defense Mechanisms

- Reaction Formation
  - A switch of unacceptable impulses to their opposites
    - “I hate him” becomes “I love him”
- Projection
  - Disguising one’s own feelings by attributing them to someone else
    - “I don’t trust him” becomes “He doesn’t trust me”

Psychoanalytic Tests

- Projective tests
  - Ambiguous stimuli
    - Allow the patient to interpret them
  - Rorschach Inkblot tests
  - Thematic Apperception Test
    - Interpret the picture

Inkblots

Enough with Freud

- The Humanistic Perspective
  - Maslow
  - Self-Actualization: fulfilling our potential
  - Few people reach this level: Lincoln, Jefferson, Eleanor Roosevelt

How do we reach our potential?

- Carl Rogers
  - Genuineness
  - Accepting our faults
    - Unconditional positive regard
  - Empathetic: show a real care and understanding of the person and their situation

The Trait Perspective

- Focuses on characteristics of personality
- MMPI: Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory
  - Most common personality inventory to evaluate traits
The Big Five

- Ocean
- Openness
  - Prefers variety – prefers routine
  - Imaginative - practical
- Conscientiousness
  - Careful - careless
- Extraversion
  - Outgoing - reserved
- Agreeableness
  - Trusting - suspicious
  - Helpful - uncooperative
- Neuroticism
  - Calm – anxious
  - Secure – insecure

Person Situation Controversy

- Depending on the situation, people may show different traits
- May be outgoing in one situation and not in another
- Hard to make solid conclusions and predictions about future behaviors based on trait theories

Social Cognitive Perspectives

- Emphasizes the interaction between nature and nurture
- Reciprocal Determinism
  - Personality and environment interact and influence each other

Reciprocal Determinism at work

- Different people choose different environments
  - Based on your desires, you choose your environment, which then changes you
  - Personalities shape how we react to environments
  - Anxious people are attuned to more potentially threatening events: they see the world as more threatening

Personal Control

- Internal vs External
- Learned Helplessness
  - Feeling hopeless, helpless, and depressed
  - A dog feels incapable of escaping a shock when never given that option
  - Then when given the option of escaping, the dog doesn’t even try to escape
- People are happier when they have more control
- Optimism vs Pessimism