

Hidden Personalities According to Freud and Rogers

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Introduction

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Carl Rogers (1905–1987) are widely recognised as two of the most influential psychotherapists of the twentieth century (Ziegler, 2002). Both theorised that people have a ‘hidden’ personality of which they are not aware. Although both theories are developed through years of clinical experience, they are based on very different assumptions. In this essay, these assumptions will be discussed and it will be argued that Rogers’ theory is to be preferred over the Freudian model because it is more in tune with findings of contemporary scientific research.

Sigmund Freud

The basic assumption of Freud’s psychoanalytic view of the person is an energy system in which all mental processes are considered to be energy flows, which can flow freely or can get sidetracked or dammed up. Freud argues that the goal of all behaviour is the reduction of tension through the release of energy, which produces pleasure. People function in accordance with hedonistic principles, seeking unbridled gratification of all desires. The endless pursuit of pleasure is, however, in conflict with society and civilisation, as the uncontrolled satisfaction of pleasure is not accepted. In Freud’s view, humans are primarily driven by sexual and aggressive instincts. Sexual and aggressive energy prevented from expression in a more direct way are converted to cultural activities such as art and science. Energy used for cultural purposes is, however, no longer available to sexual purposes and Freud concludes that the price of civilisation is misery, the forfeit of happiness and a sense of guilt (Pervin & Oliver, 1997).

Freud’s theory of personality is based on the idea that much of human behaviour is determined by forces outside awareness. The relation between the person and society is controlled by primitive urges buried deep within ourselves, forming the basis of the hidden self. Freud argues that much of our psychic energy is devoted either to finding acceptable expressions of unconscious ideas or to keeping them unconscious. Freud constructed his concept of the unconscious from analysis of slips of the tongue, dreams, neuroses, psychoses, works of art and rituals (Pervin & Oliver, 1997). In psychoanalytic theory, mental life is divided into three levels of awareness. The largest portion of the mind is formed by the *unconscious-system* and only a very small part by the *conscious*. The *preconscious-system* stands like a partition screen between the *unconscious-system* and *consciousness*. (Ekstrom, 2004). The conscious mind is like the tip of an iceberg, with its greatest part—the unconscious—submerged. Psychoanalytic theory is fundamentally a motivational theory of human behaviour and Freud claimed that “psychoanalysis aims at and achieves nothing more than the discovery of the unconscious in mental life” (Cited in: Pervin and Oliver (1997, 71)).

Carl Rogers

Humanist psychologist Carl Rogers opposed psychoanalytic personality theory as he was dissatisfied with the ‘dehumanising nature’ of this school of thought (Pervin & Oliver, 1997). The central tenet of humanistic psychology is that people have drives that lead them to engage in activities resulting in personal satisfaction and a contribution to society: the *actualising tendency*. This tendency is present in all organisms and can be defined as the motivation present in every life form to develop its potentials to the fullest extent. Humanistic psychology is based on an optimistic view of human nature and the direction of people’s movement is basically towards self-actualisation. Some might criticise Rogers as

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being a naive optimist and point out the violent history of humanity. Rogers defends his view by referring to the fact that his theory is based on more than twenty-five years of experience in psychotherapy (Pervin & Oliver, 1997).

A person's identity is formed through a series of personal experiences, which reflect how the individual is perceived by both him or herself and the outside world—the *phenomenological field*. Individuals also have experiences of which they are unaware and the phenomenological field contains both conscious and unconscious perceptions. The concept of the self is, according to Rogers, however, primarily conscious. The most important determinants of behaviour are the one's that are conscious or are capable of becoming conscious. Roger argues that a definition of the self that includes a reference to the unconscious (as with Freud) can not be studied objectively as it can not be directly known (Pervin & Oliver, 1997).

Rogerian personality theory distinguishes between two personalities. The *real self* is created through the actualising tendency, it is the self that one can become. The demands of society, however, do not always support the actualising tendency and we are forced to live under conditions that are out of step with our tendencies. The *ideal self* is the ideal created through the demands of society. Rogers does not see it as something to strive for (that is the real self) but an ideal imposed on us we can never fully reach (Boeree, 1998). Rogers' view of 'hidden' personality relates to the person one could be given the right circumstances within society and for an individual to be truly happy (and for self-actualisation to be realised) their public and private selves must be as similar as possible. For an individual to be truly happy and for self-actualisation to be realised, the public and hidden selves must be as similar as possible. Rogers believed that when all aspects of a person's life, surroundings and thoughts are in harmony and thus the ideal state of *congruence* is reached (Pervin & Oliver, 1997).

Foundations of Personality

Freud and Roger's theory of personality are based on some very different assumptions. Their concept of human nature and the role of rationality in human motivation are diametrically opposed. Although both theories include a hidden personality, both concepts are very different in that for Freud it

is our natural state, while for Rogers it is the self created by the demands of society.

Human Nature

Freud theorised that people have an unconscious mind that would, if permitted, manifest itself in incest, murder and other activities which are considered crimes in contemporary society. Freud believes that neuroticism is a result of tensions caused by suppression of our unconscious drives, which are fundamentally aggressive towards others (Pervin & Oliver, 1997).

Rogers agrees that we may behave aggressive and violent at times, but at such times we are neurotic and are not functioning as fully developed human beings (Pervin & Oliver, 1997). Rogers reverses Freud's concept of neuroticism and thinks that what Freud has construed as our natural state of being is actually unnatural and unhealthy behaviour. For Rogers, the core of our nature is essentially positive and aligned towards self actualisation, while for Freud, we solely are driven by sexual and aggressive instincts. Recent research support Rogers' point of view as it has shown that people with an optimistic style of thought tend to cope more effectively with stress than do people who have a pessimistic style (Gray, 2002).

Reason in Human Behaviour

Revolutions in the history of science have one common feature: they deconstruct our convictions about our own self-importance. Copernicus moved our home from centre of the universe to its periphery, Darwin relegated us to descent from an animal world and Freud discovered the unconscious and deconstructed the myth of a fully rational mind (Ekstrom, 2004). In Freud's view, human beings are basically irrational and the unconscious mind is alogical. We are forever driven by irrational, practically uncontrollable unconscious instincts that are the ultimate cause of all activity (Pervin & Oliver, 1997).

Rogers sees human beings as basically rational and behaviour is controlled through reason. Rationality and the actualising tendency are inseparably connected in Rogers' basic image of personality (Ziegler, 2002). Human behaviour is, according to Rogers: "exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals the organism

is endeavouring to achieve” (Cited in: (Ziegler, 2002, 82)). The natural course of the actualising tendency is, however, often blocked by psychosocial conditions. When this happens, people become estranged from their true nature and may behave irrationally through anti-social and destructive behaviour.

Hidden Personalities

The Freudian concept of the unconscious mind was never experimentally verified by him and remained a theoretical construct. Critical questions about what is available to immediate observation and what occurs unconsciously could never be fully answered by Freud as he did not possess any of the current day technological possibilities (Ekstrom, 2004). Through contemporary cognitive science, it has been discovered that most of our thought actually is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of cognitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too fast to focus on (Ekstrom, 2004).

Unconscious processing goes on in the mind of humans, not because we have to filter out threatening stimuli and impulses, but because many cognitive operations go on without conscious participation. The brain operates in this way in order not to flood the conscious part of the mind with impressions. The unconscious is a type of process, a way of constructing perception, memories and other kinds of cognition, not a portion of the mind (Ekstrom, 2004). This view agrees with Roger’s concept of the unconscious, who theorised that the unconscious is only a part of the phenomenological field and does not control our personality.

Conclusion

Both Freud’s and Rogers’ theory of personality are based on some very basic assumptions and occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of views on human motivation. When comparing both theories with contemporary research in cognitive psychology, Rogers’ personality is to be preferred over the Freudian model.

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