

How significant has Freud been to the development of Psychology ?

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Introduction

Although it is impossible to give here even a cursory account of the wide spread influence Freud's methods and ideas have had on psychology, I will endeavor to identify some areas where his ideas have been built upon, and some in which his theories were not wholly original; in order to establish how and in what form Freud has been significant to the development of Psychology. Freud himself believed his most significant discovery to be the 'sexual aetiology of the neurosis', the theory that infantile sexual repressions were the ultimate cause of most (but not all, see Freud's legacy, below) neurosis. Indeed it would be difficult to dispute the effect this sexualization of motivation has had on western society, if not on academic psychology.

Originality

Freud created a unified and coherent system for both the understanding of the mind and the treatment of neurosis (defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary as 'Relatively mild mental illness involving symptoms of stress.. without loss of contact with reality and not caused by organic disease'), but his work was heavily influenced by his precursors.

Solloway, in his book *'Freud: Biologist of the mind'* (1979), demonstrates the great debt owed by Freud to Charles Darwin, whose theories (especially those published post mortem) highlighted the importance of dreams, symbolism, infantile sexuality, and the primacy of the basic instincts of love and hunger.

In *'A history of Modern Psychology'* (2000), Duanne and Sydney Schultz suggest that Freud's ideas of forces acting on the unconscious mind (e.g.: the drives of the id, and the directions of the superego) mirror the recognition by physicists of the time of fields of force, such as magnetism, in much the same way that Wundts theories of perception as composed of 'elemental' sense impressions, had been inspired by the discovery in physics of the atomic structure of matter.

Schultz and Schultz additionally argue that ideas such as catharsis, oedipal attraction, and libido had been elucidated by psychologists and psychiatrists throughout the 19th century, preparing both the public and scientific establishment for the ideas of Psychoanalysis.

Freud never denied the debt he owed to the ideas of others, frequently directing attention to the works he perceived as influential, even when he disagreed with some of the further or later conclusions of the author, for example Stekel's work on dreams, quoted in 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement' (1914). Part of the significance of Freud's work

lies in its synthesis of pre-existing ideas into a practical philosophy and method of research which he believed to be a science; into Psychoanalysis.

Further developments of Freud's Theories

Freud's collaborators did not influence him as greatly as they may have wished, as his insistence that they agree with almost all aspects of his theory led to several splits and cessations rather than any outside modifications of the general theories of Psychoanalysis. Never the less, each of the well-known branches of thought which split from the body of orthodox Psychoanalysis have made lasting contributions to Psychology, contributions which may ultimately have more significance than that of Psychoanalysis itself.

Carl Jung, initially a disciple of Freud, built on Freud's identification of universal symbols in mythology with his own definition of archetypes (and combined them with his subdivision of the unconscious into personal and collective), which in turn led to developments in the fields of mythology and anthropology by researchers such as Joseph Campbell. He developed experimental technology which would eventually lead to the polygraph test, identifying in the process several thieves. Finally in attempting to discover a non-sexual aetiology of the neurosis he formulated theories of introversion and extroversion (further subdivided into 4 personality types) that have had a great influence on psychometric testing (the Myers-Briggs test used in career development is a direct application of this theory).

Although the '*Individual Psychology*' developed by Alfred Adler in the wake of his split with Freud currently has few if any proponents, Adler's ideas concerning the significance of birth order and his concept of an 'inferiority complex' are still influential today.

Karen Horney, initially an orthodox Freudian, challenged Freud's biological focus and stressed the part played by social factors in the creation of neurosis, ultimately splitting, like Adler and Jung before her, from the main body of Psychoanalysis. Her attribution of gender differences to social factors (a more Marxist, less deterministic and more palatable interpretation than Freud's) influenced feminism and the development of Social Psychology. Like the Jungian movement her neo-Freudian school (embodied in the American institute for Psychoanalysis which she founded) still exists today.

Freud's Legacy

Although his theories have been accused of inductive reasoning, subjectivity, generalisation and a generally unscientific approach, Freud has undeniably had a great influence on the development of both psychological research and therapy. His work, and the work of those who followed in the Psychoanalytic tradition both acted as a focus for research (as studies attempted to prove or disprove his well

known theories) and as a template for later psychotherapeutic approaches. According to the website of the American Psychoanalytic Association *'the insights of psychoanalysis form the underpinnings of much of the psychotherapy employed in general psychiatric practice, in child psychiatry, and in most other individual, family, and group therapies'*. While it is true that Freud was by no means the first to employ a 'talking cure', the spread of Psychoanalysis popularised the idea that talking, or more importantly listening to patients, could ameliorate mental trauma in general and neurotic illness in particular. In addition, later psychotherapeutic approaches have been strongly influenced by the importance Freud placed on childhood and familial relationships in the formation of personality; the idea that the roots of present psychological problems (with the exception of 'actual' neurosis - those with a contemporary traumatic aetiology, and somatic - physically caused - neurosis and psychosis) lie in past trauma; and the methods of resistance which Freud and later his daughter Anna identified patients using to avoid confronting the roots of their problems. Arguably Psychoanalysis would have achieved a greater respectability amongst psychologists had Freud not so vigorously opposed the co-opting of Analysis as a therapeutic practice by the medical profession (he, in fact, published an essay in support of lay analysis when Theodor Reik, a prominent lay Psychoanalyst was charged under an Austrian law prohibiting 'quackery'), and if the field itself had not been split so frequently in its history, something Freud believed occurred because of a tendency to *'eliminate what [was] objectionable'* (i.e.: infantile sexuality, the Oedipus complex etc) in Psychoanalytic theory. As regards the treatment of the 'insane', Freud helped to de-stigmatise mental illness through his insistence that neurotic and 'normal' states were closely related (an opinion necessary to support his generalisation of a theory of mind from analysis of primarily neurotic individuals).

Conclusion

Ultimately the significance of Freud's contribution to psychology can be seen as threefold. Firstly, in the creation of a therapeutic approach which, while far from universally accepted, continues to evolve (both within orthodox Psychoanalysis, and in its fragmented offspring) and to provoke research and debate. Secondly in focusing the attention of clinical psychology on personality and emotion, on the unconscious mind, and on the significance of sexuality in human development. Finally, he has provided in Psychoanalysis an incredibly ambitious psychological theory. A theory that can be applied to many disciplines, and provide insight into almost limitless facets of human behaviour, mythology, and art, which while arguably un-testable, has remained unrivalled as a model of mind.

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