Rorschach & Freudians: Crash Course Psychology #21

Crash Course: Psychology
https://youtube.com/watch?v=mUELAiHbCxc
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=====Intro=====

What do you see in this image? A scary face, a couple of squirrels fighting, or this one: a squashed frog or tumbling poodles, a bleeding bat? Hermann Rorschach wants to know. He wanted to know; he's dead now. He believed that your answers, what you saw in the ink, said something about your personality.

Rorschach was a Swiss psychoanalyst who in his youth was fascinated by the childhood game of making pictures out of ink blots called Klecksography. As an adult, Rorschach was intrigued with Carl Jung's use of word association in attempts to access patients' unconscious minds. Jung would ask patients to say the first thing that came to mind when they saw words like 'dead' or 'window' or 'abuse', and Rorschach thought "why not do the same thing with amorphous blobs?". So he'd show a patient a series of ink blots and record what they saw to determine how people projected their personal associations onto random shapes. Assuming there were important differences between those who saw dancing bunnies versus those who saw severed screaming heads, he drew conclusions about a patient's personalty. And yeah, this was controversial.

Some clinicians still do think that the Rorschach test can be a helpful diagnostic tool when used correctly and cautiously. But others remain critical of the test, calling them unscientific and unreliable. It's even been called the 'Dracula' of psychological tests because no-one has been able to drive a stake through its heart yet.

So I guess this is the point where I apologize for the set design. Sorry.

But love it or hate it, the Rorschach test is one of the many methods psychologists have used in an ongoing quest to understand personality. And of all the concepts we cover in this course, personality is one of the most complex, and one of the most contested.

This is where we bring in the household names. Not just Rorschach, but Freud and Jung, as well as other influential figures like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. It's where some of the most familiar concepts in early psychology come into play, ones that people with even passing knowledge of the field have heard of. The Ego, The Oedipus Complex, Penis Envy, Inferiority Complexes, even the idea of self help itself.

Whether you've heard of these things as hard facts or simply historical curiosities, these notions represent the starting points for some of the biggest and most compelling questions in the field. But they all come back to the same question: What makes us who we are?

=====Personality Theory=====

(2:16) We've always got to start out with defining things;
Personality: you think you know what that means, but we're going to define it as "your distinctive and enduring characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving" and psychologists typically study personality in two broad ways:

1. By trying to understand differences in specific characteristics, like "introvertedness" vs. "extrovertedness."

and 2. by looking at how all of the various parts of each person mesh together as a whole.

Basically: what are our characteristics and how do they combine to make me "me" and you "you"?

And, guess what? As you might expect, there are a number of competing perspectives on personality theory; four to be exact.

=====Psychoanalytic Perspective=====

(2:53) The first, and one of the most influential, has been the Psychoanalytic Perspective. First championed by our coke loving, cigar chewing friend, Sigmund Freud.

It was through his clinical observation of patients that Freud came to theorize the existence of the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious represented "a vast reservoir of often unacceptable and frequently hard-to-tolerate thoughts, feelings, desires and memories." Usually involving lots of weird sex stuff.

Gotta point out, by the way, that the Freudian unconscious is a different thing from the contemporary idea of non-conscious information processing where we're, like, processing information that we don't know we're processing. Freud's thing is, you know, a lot more titillating, but non-conscious is, like, empirically validated, a real thing that we study now.

Anyway, Freud believed that our personalities are largely shaped by the "enduring conflict between our impulses to do whatever we feel like, and our restraint to control those urges," between our pleasure-seeking aggressive urges and our inner social control over them. He theorized our minds as being divided into three interacting parts:

=====The ID, the EGO and the SUPEREGO=====
(3:51)

The ID, The EGO, and The SUPEREGO
That provide the battleground for this internal conflict that shaped our personalities.

You can think of a classic Freudian mind like this iceberg. It's mostly hidden and that big underwater chunk is your ID, your unconscious, primitive and instinctive self. Freud thought the ID was all about sex and aggression, the so-called "Pleasure Principle" of immediate gratification.

To him, infants were all ID; that's in part why babies freak out when they don't get a snack, like, right now! instead of just taking a deep breath for a second. For that matter, a lot of the off-the-wall celebrities and dictators are "Big IDs." Needs like a Honey Badger; they don't care.

Eventually, kids develop the EGO part of their personality that largely conscious component that's charged with dealing with reality. The EGO works on getting the ID what it wants in a reasonable, timely and realistic way without, you know, getting arrested or beaten up.

The final aspect to form in Freud's personality trifecta is the SUPEREGO: the Jiminy Cricket voice of our conscience that represents not just the real, but also the ideal. As you can imagine, the SUPEREGO and the ID don't much like each other and it's up to the referee EGO to sort everything out. And it's hard to be the EGO.

=====Effects of the ID, EGO and SUPEREGO=====
(4:58) Freud believed that anxiety comes, in part, from the EGO getting all stressed out about losing control over the ID and SUPEREGO. So he proposed that our EGOS use a series of indirect and unconscious defense mechanisms to protect

themselves from this fear. And each person's particular configuration of defense mechanisms in turn makes up part of what we're referring to here as personality.

You might have already heard of repression, the defense that's thought to work by banishing any thoughts, feelings or memories that cause anxiety to the unconscious. And repression, Freud thought, allows our many other defense mechanisms to do their work.

Regression, for example, involves a retreat to a more infantile psycho-sexual stage. Like when a second grader sucks their thumb when they're nervous.

Reaction formation is kind of like passive aggression. It involves flipping unacceptable impulses, like the desire to punch someone in the face, with their opposites, like offering them cookies with a fake smile.

Projection is when you disguise your own impulses by calling them out in other people and rationalization is just what it sounds like; when we offer explanations and excuses for our behaviors instead of getting to the real, unconscious, reasons. Like "Yeah well I ate six hot pockets at the party just because I was being social."

Displacement is the typical you got yelled at by your boss and then came home and yelled at your roommate. It's when you shift your impulses toward a less threatening victim.

And then there's denial which is when you refuse to believe or sometimes even perceive some kind of painful reality. Like "Oh, my boyfriend isn't cheating on me," and "I'm not going to fail that class," and "These pants totally still fit!"

Our defense mechanisms, as theorized by Freud, are pretty tied in with our personalities. Someone who engages in a lot of denial and not as much projection would probably look and act a lot differently from someone who chronically does the reverse.

=====Psycho-sexual Stages=====
(6:32)Still, Freud was convinced our personalities form in our first few years as we pass through a series of five psycho-sexual stages, essentially during which the id seeks to get its rocks off in different pleasure-sensitive areas.

Infants start out in the oral stage because they get pleasure from eating. From there, a child enters the anal stage, focused on peeing and pooping, then onto the phallic stage as they discover their boy and girl bits. It was during this stage that Freud believed the infamous Oedipus complex reared up, characterized by a boy experiencing a form of sexual desire toward his mother and parallel jealousy or hatred of his father. Freud called from about age 6 to puberty the latency stage, marked by dormant sexual feelings which eventually evolved into the fifth and final adult genital stage of mature sexual interests.

Now, he believed if certain conflicts weren't resolved at any of these given stages, a person could develop a fixation, or a lingering focus on a younger stage, like if a baby was overfed or neglected and underfed, they might fixate in the oral stage. An orally-fixated adult might seek oral gratification through excessive eating or chain-smoking and may develop issues with dependency or aggression.

Now, of course, not everyone was onboard with Freud's model of personality development. Many of his ideas were controversial and remain so to this day. Even most modern psychoanalysts now dispute the whole Oedipal thing.

=====Neo-Freudians=====
(7:44)In fact, while many pioneering psychoanalysts built on Freud's theories (these are so-called Neo-Freudians), many disagree with lots of his ideas and instead either emphasize the role of the conscious mind or focus on non-sexual motivations.

Take Karen Horney for instance, a German-born psychoanalyst credited with founding feminist psychology. She wasn't down with the idea that our personalities are primarily shaped by sex and aggression. She especially rejected the notion of penis envy which she thought was more than a little insulting to women. She actually proposed that womb envy may occur as much in men, who are envious they can't give birth. She encouraged patients to take charge of their own mental health and engage in self-help and analysis, believing people were often able to sort of be their own therapists.

We mentioned Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychoanalyst. Jung was a friend and disciple of Freud, but eventually theoretical differences took them in different directions. He agreed that the unconscious was a powerful force, but he believed that it was more than just a holding cell for repressed sexual thoughts and feelings and memories. Jung believed sexual drive was only part of the equation, and that we're also driven by a need to achieve a full knowledge of self.

He also suggested that we have a collective unconscious, a group of shared images or archetypes that are universal to all humans, and this was why different cultures share similar myths and imagery.

Vienna-born Alfred Adler was another former-collaborator of Freud who struck out on his own. Adler agreed with Freud that childhood was important but he emphasized ongoing social tensions, not sexual ones, as most crucial to the formation of sexuality. He coined the term "inferiority complex" and believed that much of our adult behavior is linked to childhood struggles of feeling inferior.

In the end, not all of their theories have endured, but Freud and his contemporaries were key to the evolution of psychoanalytic theory because they explored ways in which our mental life and personality may be submerged beneath the veil of consciousness.

=====Humanistic Theories=====

But the psychoanalytical approach is only one perspective on what makes us who we are. Rather than focusing on how messed up we can be, humanistic theorists focus on the basic goodness of people and how they strive to achieve their full potential. In other words, they believe in the potential for personal growth.

Abraham Maslow is one of these guys. He believed we're motivated by that pyramid-shaped hierarchy of needs and that once basic needs are met, like food and shelter and whatnot, we're able to achieve higher goals.

Maslow believed the top two rungs of that pyramid are where the real growth and personality takes place. First, with self-actualization, or the need to live up to our full, unique potential, and then with self-transcendence, or finding meaning and purpose and identity beyond ourselves.

Rather than study only troubled patients, Maslow looked at healthy, creative types with whom he discovered this common thread of self-actualization. Bolstered by a secure sense of self, these people were more sure of themselves, more compassionate, caring, driven,

and uneasy around cruelty and pettiness.

American psychologist Carl Rogers was another pioneer of humanistic theory who proposed a person-centered perspective on personality. Like Maslow, Rogers believed we're all basically good eggs so long as we're nurtured in a growth-promoting environment that he thought required three conditions. The first is genuineness, just the idea that parents and teachers should be transparent and open with their feelings. Then, there's acceptance. When folks are accepting, people around them won't be afraid to be themselves or make mistakes, and the third requirement, according to Rogers, is empathy, or the ability to share others' feelings and reflect their meanings.

Rogers thought of these traits as the nutrients required to make a personality grow and to a healthy self-concept, that mix of thoughts and feelings that answer the fundamental question, "Who am I?"

So, psychoanalytic and humanistic theories of personality were and are incredibly influential, even if one was a little sordid and the other a little sunshine-and-rainbows. But they didn't always lend themselves to clear measurement, and as empirical standards began to take hold in the mid-20th century, this became a major concern. How did we deal with that? Well, tune in next week when we explore some of the newer ways of looking at personality and how we started measuring it.

=====Conclusion=====

Today, you learned about personality theory and two of its early schools of thought: the psychoanalytic theory, including Freud's three-part model of the mind and defense mechanisms, along with the Neo-Freudians. You also learned about the humanistic theory, including Maslow's model of self-actualization and Rogers' person-centered perspective.

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