Chapter 8 Applied Psychodynamic Theory

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
   A. People have many perplexing experiences, moments of anxiety, and inner conflicts
   B. Psychodynamic theory helps us understand the workings and power of the psyche

II. Related Dialects, Associated Schools of Thought
   A. Psychoanalysis or classic psychoanalysis focuses on the sexual and aggressive drives, and the influence of the id and the unconscious
   C. Ego Psychology gives theoretical priority to the ego, ego functions, and ego functioning
   D. Objects Relations prioritizes interpersonal relationships rather than instincts and ego processes and study how experiences with others are internalized
   E. Self Psychology shifts theoretical focus to the self and the impact of the self-object environment on development, esteem, and narcissism
   F. Applied psychodynamic theory is an umbrella term to refer to all therapeutic approaches derived from the work of Sigmund Freud

III. Applied Psychodynamic Theory: Exemplary Models
   A. Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalytic approach and techniques, theorizing about the influence of psychodynamics especially related to the unconscious on behavior, and supported numerous free mental health clinics. Many psychodynamic theorists learned from Freud.
   B. Erik H. Erikson championed ego psychology, created the technique of psychohistory, theorized extensively about identity and ego identity problems, and formulated an influential psychosocial approach to human development
   C. Florence Hollis was a social work practitioner and theory developer who assimilated Freudian concepts and developed a typology of basic casework procedures

IV. Applied Psychodynamic Theory: Root Metaphors
   A. The person is like a mountain climber, a cave, a beast, and an energy user
      1. In Erikson’s theory, the person can be compared to the mountain climber who proceeds up a path (a life) meeting predictable challenges at various points during the climb (life stages) and becomes a better climber by meeting these challenges (adds ego strengths to the personality)
      2. The person’s unconscious is like the archeological digs of a buried city containing relics and artifacts that help explain the history of the site; or the underground caves which store the art and riches of a civilization
      3. The person is like a wild beast or barely tamed animal that is very difficult to control
      4. The person as an energy user, trying to regulate energy, energy builds up and breaks through sometimes like floodwater bursting through a dam
      5. The person is like an unwanted party guest (unconscious impulses intruding into a polite get together)
   B. The social environment is like a mountain, an archeological dig, and circus
      1. The environment is like a mountain and its levels with challenging climbing spots – life as a continuous ascent with the life stages as challenging climbing spots,
a. the climber must meet the challenge to go upward,
b. each challenge is different,
c. if we are only partially successful in climbing a tough stretch, injured for example, this injury effects us at later tough spots
d. change guides and supporting persons at various points in the ascent

2. The environment is like an archeological dig (remnants of earlier societies can be uncovered and used to help us understand the past, and its influence on later societies)

3. Society is like a circus or horse stable where the energies of wild and barely tamed beasts are apparent and animal trainers must channel animals’ impulses for the sake of an orderly and show

4. The society is like a hydraulic system, dam, regulating flow of water and converting water to energy

C. The social worker is like a guide, party host, spelunker, engineer, tamer

1. The social worker is like the mountain guide – recommends equipment, teaches technique, provides support and tailors advice to each of the climbing challenges
2. The social worker is like the expert party host who regulates the interaction of all participants
3. The social worker is like archeologist searching the past for clues to the present and a spelunker exploring the deep caves and their influence on the surface
4. The social worker is like an engineer at the dam maintaining safe conditions
5. The social worker is like the horse tamer breaking the unruly animal and riding it

V. Core Assumptions of Applied Psychodynamic Theory

A. Human mental life is characterized by conflict between components of the psyche, and between the psyche and civilization

B. Early life experiences have great formative power, and adult problems often have their source in childhood experiences

C. Others, especially caretakers, powerfully influence the person’s psychological development

D. The ego has intrinsic capacities for adaptation including moderating inner and outer conflicts

VI. Erikson’s Psychosocial Model of Human Development

A. Erik Erikson, exemplary role model

B. Assumptions

1. Classical assumptions – id, ego, and superego as major personality components, growth involves changing relationship to the body, earlier experiences influence later development
2. Development occurs in social and cultural contexts
3. Humans have potential to develop ego strengths
4. Psychosocial development is a lifelong process

C. Root metaphors

1. Epigenesis – the emergence of psychological strengths follows a biologically based unfolding
2. Development follows predictable stages

D. Erikson’s model of human development

1. Concepts of stages with each presenting a psychosocial crisis. These are opportunities to develop basic strengths, but failure results in basic weaknesses
2. Development is supported by a radius of significant relations and follows frameworks provided by societal institutions

3. Stages relate to basic dilemma or challenge
   a. Trust versus mistrust
   b. Autonomy versus shame
   c. Initiative versus guilt
   d. Industry versus inferiority
   e. Identity versus identity Diffusion
   f. Intimacy versus isolation
   g. Stagnation versus generativity
   h. Integrity versus despair

E. Critical comments included in overall appraisal of psychodynamic theory

F. Applications
   1. Theoretical foundation for psychosocial approaches to social work practice
   2. Used with elderly to guide reminiscence groups

VII. Bowlby’s Attachment Theory and its Implications for Human Development
   A. John Bowlby, exemplary role model was a psychoanalyst who focused on disturbed children and how their problems were caused by relationship difficulties with their mothers; developed attachment theory and stimulated much further research and theorizing by others

   B. Assumptions
      1. Intimate bonds have biologically-based role in human development
      2. The quality of attachments with caretakers influences a child’s development
      3. Development can follow numerous different pathways

   C. Root metaphors
      1. Ducks and other animals need to maintain access to the mother, and follow them closely for this security. Humans are similar.
      2. Mother’s love is like vitamins and proteins necessary to mental health

   D. Bowlby’s model of human development
      1. Attachment theory builds on concepts including attachment, attachment phases, secure base, attachment behavior, internal working models, and attachment types (secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure ambivalent, insecure-disorganized)
      2. Child attachment experiences influence later intimate relationships
      3. Attachment problems may be transmitted across generations
      4. Those who are unequal politically and economically are especially vulnerable to attachment problems

   E. Critical comments – theory is highly regarded and has much empirical support but is not suited to all client issues; compatible with Erikson’s theoretical approach to development

   F. Applications – to many human service settings, to many human problems especially those related to loss, provides specific guidelines for practitioners

VIII. Mapping Applied Psychodynamic Theory
   A. Figure 8.1: Eco-Map: The Applied Psychodynamic Theory Version
   B. Applied Psychodynamic Theory Translations
      1. How are connections conceptualized?
         a. attachments or cathexes (emotional bonds)
         b. internalization of the representations of attachment figures
2. How is the quality of connections differentiated?
   a. positive = loving and good attachments
   b. negative = hateful and punitive attachments, increase likelihood of transference problems
   c. tenuous = indifferent relationships

3. What is the typical unit of attention or focal system?
   a. the individual client (and sometimes the couple, family)
      1. id, ego (and ego functions), superego,
      2. conscious, preconscious, unconscious
      3. ego defenses (adaptive and maladaptive)
   a. Table 8.1 Swanson’s Analysis of Selected Self-Defenses

4. How is the environment conceptualized?
   a. Outer world (social reality, civilization) is constraining, personalized
   b. Inner world (psychic reality) is subjective and individualized

5. Is particular emphasis given to any systems?
   a. the family and its role in human development and problem causation
   b. Erikson gave attention also to larger social systems and entire culture, and to the historical moment

6. How are resources and their flow conceptualized?
   a. Resources take the form of ego support – love, reassurance, exploration (Hollis’ typology: ego support, sustainment, exploration, ventilation, person-situation reflection, pattern-dynamic reflection, developmental reflection)
   b. the bidirectional flow of resources generates mental health for the interacting persons

7. What descriptive words are used?
   a. a unique vocabulary builds on Freud’s pattern of coining new terms, a diagnostic terminology, a set of words that focus on abnormality and deficits

8. How is change conceptualized?
   a. corrective emotional experiences
   b. making the unconscious conscious

9. How are actual and ideal eco-maps contrasted?
   a. ideal
      1. personal level – psychic harmony, ego strengths
      2. social level – generational harmony, support for developmental needs of next generation
   b. actual eco-map
      1. personal level – many intrapsychic conflicts, reality distortions
      2. social level – excessive repression and minimal support for development

10. How are issues of diversity, color and shading addressed?
    a. theoretical history of disparaging religious activity as infantile, characterizing homosexuality as arrested and pathogenic development, conceptualizing women as inferior to men, neglect of racism and social class
    b. contemporary developments include a strengths-oriented self-in-relation theory of female development, the use of psychodynamic theory to understand racism and homophobia, and the psychological processes associated with oppression
11. What would be added or deleted?
   a. generations
   b. historical and cultural forces

IX. The Limits of Psychodynamic Theory: A Social Work Appraisal
   A. Erikson advanced Freud’s theories in many useful ways but
   B. assumption of universality to developmental stages not diversity
   C. acceptance of institutions as beneficial not a social justice orientation questioning
      the institutions
   D. many untested ideas

X. A Psychodynamic Model of Corrective Emotional Experiences and Grief Work
   A. Introduction to Scheff and his theory of catharsis
     1. Table 8.2: Scheff’s Model of Catharsis: Emotions, Corrective Experiences, and
        Psychosocial Functioning
     2. Loss requires health catharsis (emotional and physical working through
        reactions) with a shuttling between id, ego, and superego processes, and an
        aesthetic distance to one’s grief experiences, with community support for
        emotional expression and release
     3. Maladaptive grieving can lead to many problems
   B. A psychodynamic practice model of grief work
     1. Psychodynamic ego psychological problem formulation – loss as the severing of
        vital attachments and the destruction of the sense of self based on internalized
        images of the lost one
     2. Psychodynamic ego psychological assessment – changes in the network of
        attachments following the loss and coping responses to these changes
     3. Psychodynamic ego psychological intervention – group support to help with the
        reconstruction of the sense of self and of the social network of attachments