

Freudian Psychology
Structure of Mind:
Freud's Id, Ego, & Superego

Freud came to see personality as having three aspects, which work together to produce all of our complex behaviors: the **Id**, the **Ego** and the **Superego**. All 3 components need to be well-balanced in order to have good amount of psychological energy available and to have reasonable mental health.

However, the Ego has a difficult time dealing with the competing demands of the Superego and the Id. According to the psychoanalytic view, this psychological conflict is an intrinsic and pervasive part of human experience. The conflict between the Id and Superego, negotiated by the Ego, is one of the fundamental psychological battles all people face. The way in which a person characteristically resolves the instant gratification vs. longer-term reward dilemma in many ways comes to reflect on their "character".

THE ID ("It"): functions in the *irrational* and *emotional* part of the mind. At birth a baby's mind is all Id - *want want want*. The Id is the primitive mind. It contains all the basic needs and feelings. It is the source for libido (psychic energy). And it has only one rule --> the "pleasure principle": "I want it and I want it all now". In transactional analysis, Id equates to "Child".

Id too strong = bound up in self-gratification and uncaring to others

THE EGO: ("I"): functions with the *rational* part of the mind. The Ego develops out of growing awareness that you can't always get what you want. The Ego relates to the real world and operates via the "reality principle". The Ego realizes the need for compromise and negotiates between the Id and the Superego. The Ego's job is to get the Id's pleasures but to be reasonable and bear the long-term consequences in mind. The Ego denies both instant gratification and pious delaying of gratification. The term ego-strength is the term used to refer to how well the ego copes with these conflicting forces. To undertake its work of planning, thinking and controlling the Id, the Ego uses some of the Id's libidinal energy. In transactional analysis, Ego equates to "Adult".

Ego too strong = extremely rational and efficient, but cold, boring and distant

THE SUPEREGO ("Over-I"): The Superego is the last part of the mind to develop. It might be called the *moral* part of the mind. The Superego becomes an embodiment of parental and societal values. It stores and enforces rules. It constantly strives for perfection, even though this perfection ideal may be quite far from reality or possibility. Its power to enforce rules comes from its ability to create *anxiety*.

The Superego has two subsystems: *Ego Ideal* and *Conscience*. The Ego Ideal provides rules for good behavior, and standards of excellence towards which the Ego must strive. The Ego ideal is basically what the child's parents approve of or value. The Conscience is the rules about what constitutes bad behavior. The Conscience is basically all those things that the child feels mum or dad will disapprove of or punish.

Superego too strong = feels guilty all the time, may even have an insufferably saintly personality

Ego, Id, Super-Ego

The structure of the personality in psychoanalytic theory is threefold. Freud divided it into the id, the ego, and the superego. Only the ego was visible or on the surface, while the id and the superego remains below, but each has its own effects on the personality, nonetheless.

The id represents biological forces. It is also a constant in the personality as it is always present. The id is governed by the "pleasure principle", or the notion of hedonism (the seeking of pleasure). Early in the development of his theory Freud saw sexual energy only, or the libido, or the life instinct, as the only source of energy for the id. It was this notion that gave rise to the popular conception that psychoanalysis was all about sex, sex, sex. After the carnage of World War I, however, Freud felt it necessary to add another instinct, or source of energy, to the id. So, he proposed thanatos, the death instinct. Thanatos accounts for the instinctual violent urges of humankind. Obviously, the rest of the personality would have somehow to deal with these two instincts. Notice how Hollywood has capitalized on the id. Box office success is highly correlated with movies that stress either sex, violence, or both.

The ego is the surface of the personality, the part you show the world. The ego is governed by the "reality principle," or a pragmatic approach to the world. For example, a child may want to snatch a cookie from the kitchen, but will not if a parent is present. Id desires are still present, but the ego realizes the consequences of brazen cookie theft. The ego develops with experience, and accounts for developmental differences in behavior. For example, parents expect 3-month infants to cry until fed, but, they also expect 3-year-olds to stop crying when told they will be fed.

The superego consists of two parts, the conscience and the ego-ideal. The conscience is the familiar metaphor of angel and devil on each shoulder. The conscience decides what course of action one should take. The ego-ideal is an idealized view of one's self. Comparisons are made between the ego-ideal and one's actual behavior. Both parts of the super-ego develop with experience with others, or via social interactions. According to Freud, a strong super-ego serves to inhibit the biological instincts of the id, while a weak super-ego gives in to the id's urgings. Further, the levels of guilt in the two cases above will be high and low, respectively.

The tripartite structure above was thought to be dynamic, changing with age and experience. Also, aspects of adult behavior such as smoking, neatness, and need for sexual behavior were linked to the various stages by fixation. To Freud, fixation is a measure of the effort required to travel through any particular stage, and great efforts in childhood were reflected in adult behavior. Fixation can also be interpreted as the learning of patterns or habits. Part of the criticism of psychoanalysis was that fixation could be interpreted in diametrically opposite fashion. For example, fixation in the anal stage could lead to excessive neatness or sloppiness. As noted earlier, Neil Simon's play, "The Odd Couple", is a celebration of anal fixation, with Oscar and Felix representing the two opposite ends of the fixation continuum (Oscar-sloppy, Felix-neat).

Psychoanalytic criticism: Any form of criticism that draws on **psychoanalysis**, the practice of analyzing the role of unconscious psychological drives and impulses in shaping human behavior or artistic production. The three main schools of psychoanalysis are named for the three leading figures in developing psychoanalytic theory: Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan.

- **Oedipus complex:** Sigmund Freud's theory that a male child feels unconscious jealousy toward his father and lust for his mother. The name comes from Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, in which the main character unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Freud applies this theory in an influential reading of Hamlet, in which he sees Hamlet as struggling with his admiration of Claudius, who fulfilled Hamlet's own desire of murdering Hamlet's father and marrying his mother.

Freudian Theory in a Nutshell

By **Fabiola Hernandez**

Notorious for linking all human behavior back to sex and aggression, Sigmund Freud did actually make many advancements in the field of psychology despite controversy generated by his theories. He is known as the father of psychoanalysis and is credited with the concepts of free association, the unconscious, repression, and psychosexual

development ("Freud, Sigmund"). Most of his theories remain just that, theories, because they cannot be proven concretely to be true in all humans. Regardless, today he remains as one of psychology's most influential contributors.

Most of the things we experience in our lives, according to Freud, are inaccessible for they are in our unconscious. This includes things such as feelings, beliefs, impulses, and emotions. A metaphorical way to comprehend this is the Iceberg model, where the unconscious is the part of the iceberg submerged under water, things we are unaware of or may have not experienced; the tip of the iceberg out of the water is the conscious, what we are "conscious" of and know of ("Id, Ego, Superego, and the Unconscious in Psychology 101"). Many psychologists disagree with Freud's view, but still use the same terminology to describe what they believe is the unconscious (Bernstein and Nash 138).

Linked to the unconscious are Id, Ego, and Superego, the different parts of the mind according to Freud. These three terms define Freud's idea of human personality and how it operates.

The Id contains primitive impulses such as a child has when it cries when it is hungry or needs to be change. The Id demands what it wants, regardless of the circumstance or taking anything else into account. It can also be said, it is like an animal instinct. Its two main goals are "the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain", also known as the pleasure principle ("Freud's Personality Factors").

The Ego functions in reality and tries to find a solution to what the person wants, extracting itself from the Id's fantasy world. It operates on the reality principle, which "takes into account the constraints of the social world" (Bernstein and Nash 420). After trial and error with the Id, the ego comes to understand that it needs to compromise and negotiate rationally. Ego can roughly be translated to being an adult and maturity. It balances pleasures and commitment simultaneously to be in harmony with the Id. Anxiety is the result of clashes between the different sectors of the mind ("Structure of Mind: Freud's Id, Ego, & Superego").

Oppressing all unacceptable desires is the moral and just, Superego. It restricts what the Id finds natural and acceptable ("Freud's Theories"). Our parents or caregivers harvest the Superego within all of us by teaching us what is ethical and moral. Decision making such as "right or wrong" are attributed to the Superego ("Definition: Super-Ego").

Closely related to the Superego is another of Freud's theories, the Oedipus complex. It is "a set of feelings that young boys have including impulses involving sexual feelings for the mother and the desire to eliminate the father" (Bernstein and Nash 422). The complex is an unconscious antagonism sons develop towards their fathers, which all boys are supposed to experience at some point, according to Freud. The son sees his own father as a rival for his mother's care, affection, and attention ("Oedipus Complex"). The incestuous fantasies for his own mother create fear, but are suppressed by the Ego and soon, the Superego begins to develop as the son begins to mimic his father (Bernstein and Nash 423).

Similar to the Oedipus complex is its female version, the Electra complex. It is a part of girls' development and "describes unresolved conflicts during childhood development toward the father which subsequently influence a woman's relationships with men ("Definition: Electra complex"). Girls also developed a rivalry with their mothers for their father's affection.

Freudian repression describes the refusal of threatening impulses or urges into the unconscious, such as when people try to "forget" events that were less than pleasant to them (Fenichel). This is just one of Freud's many defense mechanisms, or devices he theorized are used by the Ego to reduce and mediate clashes between the Id and Superego. Among other mechanism are rationalization, sublimation, projection, reaction formation, denial, displacement, and compensation (Bernstein and Nash 422).

Rationalization is making excuses seem plausible or justified for a reason that really is not. Sublimation is giving a socially acceptable façade to sex and aggressiveness by deeming it athletic or artistic. Putting one's thoughts into someone else's mouth is projection while reaction formation is doing the opposite of unacceptable impulses to defend against them. Denial is verbatim to its nomenclatural definition, not accepting a threatening impulse. "Taking out your anger" on someone else in simple terms is displacement while compensation finding an excuse for unconscious fears (Bernstein and Nash 422).

Personality development was no longer looked at the same way after Freud was finished disassembling it, analyzing it, and putting it back together in his own terminology. He believed that there were stages that all children underwent in their path to becoming adults that transitioned as we moved through the psychosexual stages. Naturally, all of his theories lead back to his fixation on sex. In order to have a healthy personality upon reaching adulthood, one has to go through all of the stages. An unhealthy personality results when one gets "stuck" at one stage and does not grow out of it ("Freud's Theory of 'Psychosexual Development'").

Freud's theories have been controversial for decades and continue to be so. Most of his analysis does fit in with common sense and may explain some of the questions that surface in the field of psychology. The father of psychoanalysis makes a myriad of valid arguments for developmental psychology and gives straight forward, uncut answers.

More resources

- <http://changingminds.org/explanations/behaviors/freud.htm>

Psychology 101

Freud's Structural and Topographical Models of Personality

Sigmund Freud's Theory is quite complex and although his writings on psychosexual development set the groundwork for how our personalities developed, it was only one of five parts to his overall theory of personality. He also believed that different driving forces develop during these stages which play an important role in how we interact with the world.

Structural Model (id, ego, superego)

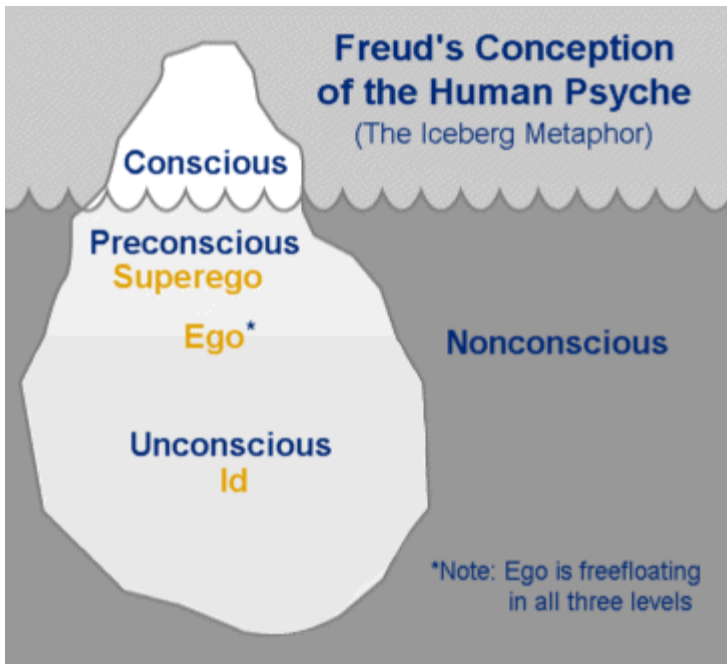
According to Freud, we are born with our **Id**. The id is an important part of our personality because as newborns, it allows us to get our basic needs met. Freud believed that the id is based on our pleasure principle. In other words, the id wants whatever feels good at the time, with no consideration for the reality of the situation. When a child is hungry, the id wants food, and therefore the child cries. When the child needs to be changed, the id cries. When the child is uncomfortable, in pain, too hot, too cold, or just wants attention, the id speaks up until his or her needs are met.

The id doesn't care about reality, about the needs of anyone else, only its own satisfaction. If you think about it, babies are not real considerate of their parents' wishes. They have no care for time, whether their parents are sleeping, relaxing, eating dinner, or bathing. When the id wants something, nothing else is important.

Within the next three years, as the child interacts more and more with the world, the second part of the personality begins to develop. Freud called this part the **Ego**. The ego is based on the reality principle. The ego understands that other people have needs and desires and that sometimes being impulsive or selfish can hurt us in the long run. It's the ego's job to meet the needs of the id, while taking into consideration the reality of the situation.

By the age of five, or the end of the phallic stage of development, the **Superego** develops. The Superego is the moral part of us and develops due to the moral and ethical restraints placed on us by our caregivers. Many equate the superego with the conscience as it dictates our belief of right and wrong.

In a healthy person, according to Freud, the ego is the strongest so that it can satisfy the needs of the id, not upset the superego, and still take into consideration the reality of every situation. Not an easy job by any means, but if the id gets



too strong, impulses and self gratification take over the person's life. If the superego becomes too strong, the person would be driven by rigid morals, would be judgmental and unbending in his or her interactions with the world. You'll learn how the ego maintains control as you continue to read.

Topographical Model

Freud believed that the majority of what we experience in our lives, the underlying emotions, beliefs, feelings, and impulses are not available to us at a conscious level. He believed that most of what drives us is buried in our **unconscious**. If you remember the Oedipus and Electra Complex, they were both pushed down into the unconscious, out of our awareness due to the extreme anxiety they caused. While buried there, however, they

continue to impact us dramatically according to Freud.

The role of the unconscious is only one part of the model. Freud also believed that everything we are aware of is stored in our **conscious**. Our conscious makes up a very small part of who we are. In other words, at any given time, we are only aware of a very small part of what makes up our personality; most of what we are is buried and inaccessible.

The final part is the preconscious or subconscious. This is the part of us that we can access if prompted, but is not in our active conscious. It's right below the surface, but still buried somewhat unless we search for it. Information such as our telephone number, some childhood memories, or the name of your best childhood friend is stored in the preconscious.

Because the unconscious is so large, and because we are only aware of the very small conscious at any given time, this theory has been likened to an iceberg, where the vast majority is buried beneath the water's surface. The water, by the way, would represent everything that we are not aware of, have not experienced, and that has not been integrated into our personalities, referred to as the nonconscious.

Ego Defense Mechanisms

We stated earlier that the ego's job was to satisfy the id's impulses, not offend the moralistic character of the superego, while still taking into consideration the reality of the situation. We also stated that this was not an easy job. Think of the id as the 'devil on your shoulder' and the superego as the 'angel of your shoulder.' We don't want either one to get too strong so we talk to both of them, hear their perspective and then make a decision. This decision is the ego talking, the one looking for that healthy balance.

Before we can talk more about this, we need to understand what drives the id, ego, and superego. According to Freud, we only have two drives; sex and aggression. In other words, everything we do is motivated by one of these two drives.

Sex, also called Eros or the Life force, represents our drive to live, prosper, and produce offspring. Aggression, also called Thanatos or our Death force, represents our need to stay alive and stave off threats to our existence, our power, and our prosperity.

Now the ego has a difficult time satisfying both the id and the superego, but it doesn't have to do so without help. The ego has some tools it can use in its job as the mediator, tools that help defend the ego. These are called **Ego Defense Mechanisms** or Defenses. When the ego has a difficult time making both the id and the superego happy, it will employ one or more of these defenses:

DEFENSE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
denial	arguing against an anxiety provoking stimuli by stating it doesn't exist	denying that your physician's diagnosis of cancer is correct and seeking a second opinion
displacement	taking out impulses on a less threatening target	slamming a door instead of hitting a person, yelling at your spouse after an argument with your boss
intellectualization	avoiding unacceptable emotions by focusing on the intellectual aspects	focusing on the details of a funeral as opposed to the sadness and grief
projection	placing unacceptable impulses in yourself onto someone else	when losing an argument, you state "You're just Stupid;" homophobia
rationalization	supplying a logical or rational reason as opposed to the real reason	stating that you were fired because you didn't kiss up the boss, when the real reason was your poor performance
reaction formation	taking the opposite belief because the true belief causes anxiety	having a bias against a particular race or culture and then embracing that race or culture to the extreme
regression	returning to a previous stage of development	sitting in a corner and crying after hearing bad news; throwing a temper tantrum when you don't get your way
repression	pulling into the unconscious	forgetting sexual abuse from your childhood due to the trauma and anxiety
sublimation	acting out unacceptable impulses in a socially acceptable way	sublimating your aggressive impulses toward a career as a boxer; becoming a surgeon because of your desire to cut; lifting weights to release 'pent up' energy
suppression	pushing into the unconscious	trying to forget something that causes you anxiety

Ego defenses are not necessarily unhealthy as you can see by the examples above. In fact, the lack of these defenses, or the inability to use them effectively can often lead to problems in life. However, we sometimes employ the defenses at the wrong time or overuse them, which can be equally destructive.

Oedipus Complex

Freud believed that the Oedipus complex was "...one of the most powerfully determinative elements in the growth of the child" (Richter 1016). Essentially, the Oedipus complex involves children's need for their parents and the conflict that arises as children mature and realize they are not the absolute focus of their mother's attention: "the Oedipus complex begins in a late phase of infantile sexuality, between the child's third and sixth year, and it takes a different form in males than it does in females" (Richter 1016).

Freud argued that both boys and girls wish to possess their mothers, but as they grow older "...they begin to sense that their claim to exclusive attention is thwarted by the mother's attention to the father..." (1016). Children, Freud maintained, connect this conflict of attention to the intimate relations between mother and father, relations from which the children are excluded. Freud believed that "the result is a murderous rage against the father...and a desire to possess the mother" (1016).

Freud pointed out, however, that "...the Oedipus complex differs in boys and girls...the functioning of the related castration complex" (1016). In short, Freud thought that "...during the Oedipal rivalry [between boys and their fathers], boys fantasized that punishment for their rage will take the form of..." castration (1016). When boys effectively work through this anxiety, Freud argued, "...the boy learns to identify with the father in the hope of someday possessing a woman like his mother. In girls, the castration complex does not take the form of anxiety...the result is a frustrated rage in which the girl shifts her sexual desire from the mother to the father" (1016).

Freud believed that eventually, the girl's spurned advanced toward the father give way to a desire to possess a man like her father later in life. Freud believed that the impact of the unconscious, id, ego, superego, the defenses, and the Oedipus complexes was inescapable and that these elements of the mind influence all our behavior (and even our dreams) as adults - of course this behavior involves what we write.

Typical questions:

- How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work?
- Are there any oedipal dynamics - or any other family dynamics - are work here?
- How can characters' behavior, narrative events, and/or images be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example...fear or fascination with death, sexuality - which includes love and romance as well as sexual behavior - as a primary indicator of psychological identity or the operations of ego-id-superego)?