

# Freud

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# Freud

Historically, the most prominent theory of personality is psychoanalytic theory, proposed by Sigmund Freud around 1900. Freud was a medical doctor who had patients with hysteria and, partly as a result of studying hypnotism, he began to believe that the unconscious level drives most of human behaviour.

Although Freud may not have been the first to propose the unconscious, he was the one who emphasized it as the largest component of the personality. This notion is now a major underlying concept that has led to many current policies and institutions. Freud also proposed that our personalities are made up of three parts.

- The id acts on a pleasure principle and, if unchecked, would cause us to behave in a hedonistic way.
- The superego operates on a moral principle and uses guilt to enforce rule-bound behaviour.
- The ego operates on a reality principle and mediates between the id and the superego to determine appropriate behaviour.

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- One of the major areas of psychology is the study of theories of personality, of which there are many.
  - A. For good or ill, the name most associated with psychology is Sigmund Freud, the father of the most famous personality theory, psychoanalytic theory, and psychoanalysis.
    1. Freud was born in Moravia in 1856; moved to Vienna, Austria, at the age of four when his father's business failed; and studied medicine at the University of Vienna.
    2. Freud was a rather unsuccessful physician in private practice until he began working with women having hysteria.
    3. He studied hypnotism in Paris with Charcot, which helped to convince him of the power of the unconscious.
    4. In 1900, he published *The Interpretation of Dreams* and, in 1901, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, both of which introduced psychoanalytic theory.

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**The major cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory is the notion that our behaviour is driven mainly by sexual and aggressive energy manifested at the unconscious level of the mind.**

1. The unconscious is sometimes characterized as the submerged part of an iceberg; the part above water is the conscious level; and the waterline is a censoring mechanism preventing thoughts in the unconscious from entering the conscious level.
2. Freud believed that at the unconscious level, there are instincts from birth, one of which is the life force, or libido. This is largely made up of sexual energy.
3. Freud also talked about the death instinct, which exists at the unconscious level and may cause suicide or lead to aggressive behaviour. Freud believed that efforts to suppress this instinct lead to conflict.
4. Although Freud is credited with inventing the notion of the unconscious, he was not the first to discuss the importance of the unconscious, as noted in an 1870 book by Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind*.
5. Freud believed that all of behaviour is determined, that there are no mistakes or accidents.
6. The notion of the unconscious permeates our society and forms the underpinnings of many of our institutions, such as our judicial system, prisons, and mental institutions.

# Freud - id

Beyond the concept of the unconscious, Freud proposed that our personalities were made up of three conflicting entities.

The earliest and most basic part of the personality is the id.

- 1. The id operates on a pleasure principle: If it feels good, do it.
- 2. The id is built in at birth and is part of our basic physiology.
- 3. If we were solely id, we would take whatever we wanted in life without any consideration of others.

# Freud - superego

- During childhood, with proper instruction from our parents and society, the **superego** is formed.

The superego operates on a moral principle and is a concept essentially equivalent to the conscience.

- The superego contains all the rules, the dos and don'ts taught to us early in our lives.
- The superego has guilt as its weapon against the pleasures of the id.
- Obviously, the id and the superego have major conflicts, because many of the ways the id wants to behave are against the rules of the superego.

# Freud - ego

- Acting as a mediator between the id and the superego is the ego.
  - The ego operates on a reality principle.
  - One role of the ego is to act as the referee between the id and the superego, giving each enough control to allow the game of life to be played.
  - As the ego develops strength, it begins to carry around a self-concept that can be used as a standard, so that each conflict between the id and superego does not have to be individually mediated.

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- Do you think that most of behavior is driven by an unconscious level, and if so, what evidence would you cite to support that belief?

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- Psychoanalytic theory proposes that psychosexual energy is focused on various anatomical parts during a series of developmental stages.

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During the oral stage, the energy is on activities of the mouth, such as eating, and insufficient gratification can lead to oral fixations, including overeating.

# Freud

- During the anal stage, the focus is on toilet training, and fixations can lead to compulsive or slovenly behaviours

# Freud

- During the phallic stage, the focus is on dominance and aggressive activities, and fixation can involve undue competitiveness.

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- During the genital phase, sharing, caring, mature relationships can occur. Boys go through an Oedipus conflict in which, unconsciously, they would like to sexually possess their mothers, but the father is in the way and might castrate them.
- This is resolved in the latent period, when boys learn to behave like dad in order to attract someone like mom. Girls discover they are missing a part and have penis envy, which leads them to want to possess dad or a boy child. During the latent period, they learn to act like mom as a wife and mother

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- Defense mechanisms are unconscious ways that we lie to ourselves to protect our psyches. These include: repression, rationalization, and projection. Some would argue that Freud's theory has outlived its usefulness in today's world, while others assert that parts of the theory are still applicable and that Freud's writings are valuable from a philosophical and literary point of view.

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- Psychoanalytic theory is a developmental theory and proposes that a person's psychosexual energy, called the libido, is cathected, or focused, on various anatomical parts; this process produces stages of development of the personality.
- In the earliest stage, the oral stage, energy is focused on the mouth, and oral activities give the most pleasure. Especially during the first year of life, the baby is active in seeking out food and engaging in other oral activities, such as thumb sucking and teething. If oral gratification is not sufficient, the person can get fixated on the oral stage, which might lead to such later-life activities as overeating, compulsive smoking, nail biting, and so on.

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- The second stage, the anal stage, occurs at ages 2 to 4, and the energy is fixated on the anus.
- During the anal stage, the child derives pleasure from anal activities, particularly those associated with toilet training.
- If parents are too strict with toilet training, an anal compulsive fixation can occur, which in later life might be manifested in such behaviors as compulsive neatness.
- If parents are too lenient in toilet training, the person might in later life be slovenly and disorganized.

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- The third stage is the phallic stage, occurring about ages 3 to 5, in which the energy is focused on the (male) genitals.
- During the phallic stage, energy is focused on the genitals, at least in little boys, and pleasure is derived from masturbatory behaviours and in behaviours related to dominance and aggression.
- In the phallic stage, little boys begin to play aggressive games, such as war and king-of-the-hill, and to show dominance.
- A fixation in the phallic stage can lead to adult behaviour that overemphasizes competitiveness and treats women as trophies

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- After the third stage is the latent period, which is not really a stage and will be discussed later in this lecture. The last stage is called the genital stage and occurs around the time of puberty. During the genital stage, energy is still focused on the genitals, but the focus is on developing caring/sharing relationships with significant others (of the opposite sex, according to Freud).
- According to Freud, one cannot develop full maturity as a person unless the genital stage is achieved.

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- During the phallic stage and into the latent period, Freud proposed that some complex dynamics occur and that these dynamics are different for boys than for girls. During the phallic stage, when little boys are engaging in competitive activities and looking for prizes to be won, at the unconscious level, they discover that mom is the biggest prize and have yearnings to possess her sexually. This is called the Oedipus conflict.
- 1. An obvious impediment to the little boy's desire for his mother is his father.
- 2. At the unconscious level, the boy is afraid of his dad even to the point that, if his desire were known, dad might castrate him; this fear causes castration anxiety.
- 3. The resolution of this Oedipus conflict the desire for mom with the fear of dad s that the boy resolves to be like dad so that he can attract someone like mom.
- 4. The boy begins to behave like dad, and the latent period is needed to give the boy sufficient time to learn the sex-typed behaviour to be like dad.

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- During the phallic stage, the little girl discovers she is missing an anatomical part and develops penis envy. Her unconscious tells her that one way she can gain this missing part is to possess dad sexually; thus, she develops the female equivalent of the Oedipus conflict, sometimes called the Electra conflict. A second way she could get a penis is to have a boy child. Because mom is in the way, preventing her from possessing dad and having a child, she resolves the Electra conflict by deciding to become like mom, both as a wife and as a mother, and uses the latency period to learn the sex-typing that allows her to do this.

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Because there is so much conflict present in the personality, such as the conflict among the id, superego, and ego, our personalities have developed unconscious ways of defending ourselves against the anxiety generated by conflict.

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- The way we deal with this anxiety is to use what are called defense mechanisms, which are lies we tell ourselves at the unconscious level.
- Freud proposed a number of defense mechanisms, one of the most important of which is repression. This mechanism is used to keep unacceptable thoughts, feelings, and memories at an unconscious level and prevent these from reaching consciousness.
- A second widely used defense mechanism is rationalization, which makes unacceptable and irrational behaviors appear rational.
- Projection is a third defense mechanism, in which we deny our unacceptable characteristics and assign, or project, them onto other people.

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- Although some might argue that all defense mechanisms are bad because they are dishonest, others assert that when used in moderation, defense mechanisms lead to positive mental health outcomes. A way to illustrate defense mechanisms is to draw a continuum from bad to good and have people indicate where on that continuum they fall.. The fact that the vast majority of people place themselves in the upper half (“good”) of that continuum shows the power of defense mechanisms.

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- Do you think that psychoanalytic theory offers a language and conceptual structure that helps you understand behaviours and events in your life?