

# THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

## II

Psychoanalytic Theory

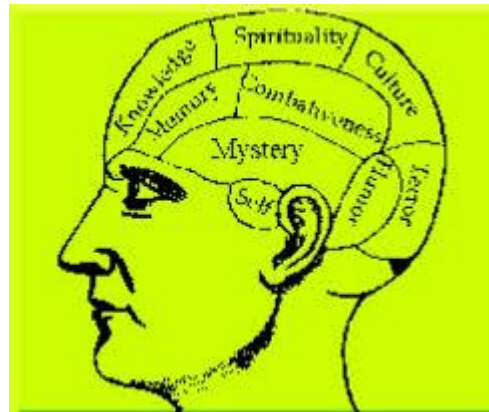
PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY  
SESSION 4

# THEORIES OF PERSONALITY II

## SESSION 4: Psychoanalytic Theory

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### Sigmund Freud's View of Personality



[Sigmund Freud's](#) life may be a classic example of psychoanalytic theory. Or, perhaps, psychoanalytic theory is a classic metaphor for Sigmund Freud's life. Growing up in Vienna, he was trained as a physician, completed medical school and hoped to make a name for himself in the medical profession. His attempts to do this were not forthcoming and after receiving a grant to study hypnosis in Paris, Freud changed his focus from the medical model of diagnosis and treatment to that of a psychological nature.

He is important as the first major theorist to write exclusively about non-biological approaches to both understanding and treating certain illnesses. These illnesses, specifically what was then called hysteria, were considered medical in his time, but were reshaped through his theories.

Although Freud's father had several children from a previous marriage, he was the first child of his mother. As such, it is reported that he was her favorite. He was given special attention and was the only of her children to have his own room and a reading lamp for studying at night. Their

relationship was very close although his relationship with his father was described as cold and perhaps even hostile.

After completing his hypnosis grant, he published his first book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and although it originally sold only 600 copies, it has become one of the most respected and most controversial books on personality theory. In this book, he described his views of the human psyche, introducing the concept of the unconscious to the medical world. In a world of biological theorists, this concept was not accepted by many of his colleagues.

Over the next 30 plus years, he continued to develop the theories discussed later in this chapter. He and his wife, Martha, had six children and it appears he treated his youngest daughter, Anna, much the same way his mother treated him. Anna later followed in her father's psychoanalytic footsteps and became a well known personality theorist, taking over Freud's psychoanalytical movement.

As you progress through his theories, keep in mind the time frame and location of Freud's life. Look at the relationship he had with his mother and father and you will see many aspects of his theories at play. The question remains, did Freud base the theories on his own life or has his insight into his own life allowed him to uncover the unconscious drives in all of us. Whatever your answer, Freud's theories are alive and well in the realm of personality development.

### **What Drives Us?**

According to Sigmund Freud, there are only two basic [drives](#) that serve to motivate all thoughts, emotions, and behavior. These two drives are, simply put, sex and aggression. Also called Eros and Thanatos, or life and death, respectively, they underlie every motivation we as humans experience.

As you learn more about Freud's theories, you'll start to see a sexual pattern develop, one that emphasizes sex as a major driving force in human nature. While this can seem overdone at times, remember what sex

represents. Sexual activity is a means to procreation, to bringing about life and therefore assuring the continuation of our bloodline. Even in other animals, sex is a primary force to assure the survival of the species.

Aggression, or the death instinct, on the other hand serves just the opposite goal. Aggression is a way to protect us from those attempting harm. The aggression drive is a means to allow us to procreate while at the same time eliminating our enemies who may try to prevent us from doing so.

While it sounds very primitive, it must not be looked at merely as sexual activity and aggressive acts. These drives entail the whole survival instinct and could, perhaps, be combined into this one drive: The drive to stay alive, procreate, and prevent others from stopping or reducing these needs. Looking at the animal kingdom it is easy to see these forces driving most, if not all, of their behavior.

Lets look at a few examples. Why would an adult decide to get a college degree? According to Freud, we are driven to improve ourselves so that we may be more attractive to the opposite sex and therefore attract a better mate. With a better mate, we are more likely to produce offspring and therefore continue our bloodline. Furthermore, a college degree is likely to bring a higher income, permitting advantages over others who may be seen as our adversaries.

## **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.

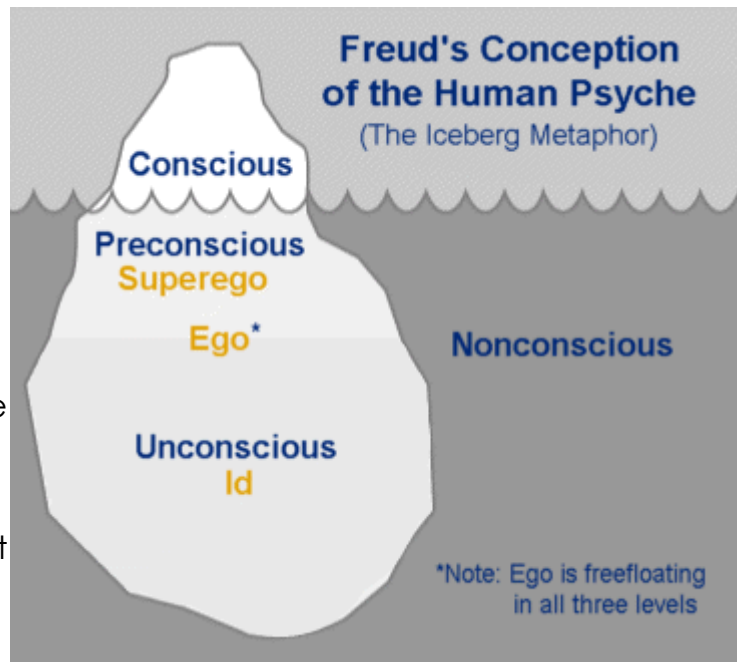
In a healthy person, according to Freud, the ego is the strongest so that it can satisfy the needs of the id, not upset the superego, and still take into consideration the reality of every situation. Not an easy job by any means, but if the id gets too strong, impulses and self gratification take over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

## **Freud's Stages of Psychosexual Development**

[Sigmund Freud](#) (1856-1939) is probably the most well known theorist when it comes to the development of personality. *Freud's Stages of Psychosexual Development* are, like other stage theories, completed in a predetermined sequence and can result in either successful completion or a healthy personality or can result in failure, leading to an unhealthy personality. This theory is probably the most well known as well as the most controversial, as Freud believed that we develop through stages based upon a particular erogenous zone. During each stage, an unsuccessful completion means that a child becomes fixated on that particular erogenous zone and either over- or under-indulges once he or she becomes an adult.

**Oral Stage** (Birth to 18 months). During the oral stage, the child is focused on oral pleasures (sucking). Too much or too little gratification can result in an Oral Fixation or Oral Personality which is evidenced by a preoccupation with oral activities. This type of personality may have a stronger tendency to smoke, drink alcohol, over eat, or bite his or her nails. Personality wise, these individuals may become overly dependent upon others, gullible, and perpetual followers. On the other hand, they may also fight these urges and develop pessimism and aggression toward others.

**Anal Stage** (18 months to three years). The child's focus of pleasure in this stage is on eliminating and retaining feces. Through society's pressure, mainly via parents, the child has to learn to control anal stimulation. In terms of personality, after effects of an anal fixation during this stage can result in an obsession with cleanliness, perfection, and control (anal retentive). On the opposite end of the spectrum, they may become messy and disorganized (anal expulsive).

**Phallic Stage** (ages three to six). The pleasure zone switches to the genitals. Freud believed that during this stage boys develop unconscious sexual desires for their mother. Because of this, he becomes rivals with his father and sees him as competition for the mother's affection. During this time, boys also develop a fear that their father will punish them for these feelings, such as by castrating them. This group of feelings is known as Oedipus Complex (after the Greek Mythology figure who accidentally killed his father and married his mother).

Later it was added that girls go through a similar situation, developing unconscious sexual attraction to their father. Although Freud strongly disagreed with this, it has been termed the Electra Complex by more recent psychoanalysts.

According to Freud, out of fear of castration and due to the strong competition of his father, boys eventually decide to identify with him rather than fight him. By identifying with his father, the boy develops masculine characteristics and identifies himself as a male, and represses his sexual feelings toward his mother. A fixation at this stage could result in sexual deviancies (both overindulging and avoidance) and weak or confused sexual identity according to psychoanalysts.

**Latency Stage** (age six to puberty). It's during this stage that sexual urges remain repressed and children interact and play mostly with same sex peers.

**Genital Stage** (puberty on). The final stage of psychosexual development begins at the start of puberty when sexual urges are once again awakened. Through the lessons learned during the previous stages, adolescents direct their sexual urges onto opposite sex peers, with the primary focus of pleasure is the genitals.

### **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
<b>denial</b>	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
<b><u>displacement</u></b>	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

<b>intellectualization</b>	avoiding unacceptable emotions by focusing on the intellectual aspects	focusing on the details of a funeral as opposed to the sadness and grief
<b><u>projection</u></b>	placing unacceptable impulses in yourself onto someone else	when losing an argument, you state "You're just Stupid;" homophobia
<b><u>rationalization</u></b>	supplying a logical or rational reason as opposed to the real reason	stating that you were fired because you didn't kiss up the the boss, when the real reason was your poor performance
<b><u>reaction formation</u></b>	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
<b><u>regression</u></b>	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
<b><u>repression</u></b>	pulling into the unconscious	forgetting sexual abuse from your childhood due to the trauma and anxiety
<b><u>sublimation</u></b>	acting out unacceptable	sublimating your aggressive impulses toward a career as

impulses in a socially acceptable way

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.