

## Freud's Viewpoint

Sigmund Freud was born on May 6th 1856, and spent most of his life in Vienna where his parents taught him at home before entering him in The Spurling Gymnasium, where he was first in his class and graduated Summa cum Laude. After studying medicine at the University of Vienna, Freud worked and gained respect as a physician. Later his friend and mentor Dr. Josef Breuer introduced him to the case study of a patient known as Anna O., who was really a woman named Bertha Pappenheim. Her symptoms included a nervous cough, tactile anaesthesia and paralysis. Over the course of her treatment, the woman recalled several traumatic experiences, which Freud and Breuer believed contributed to her illness. The two physicians concluded that there was no organic cause for Anna O's difficulties, but that having her talk about her experiences had a calming effect on the symptoms. Freud and Breuer published the work *Studies in Hysteria* in 1895. It was Bertha Pappenheim herself who referred to the treatment as "the talking cure." Later works include *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

Freud also influenced many other prominent psychologists, including his daughter Anna Freud, Melanie Klein.

Freud's work and theories helped shape our views of childhood, personality, memory and sexuality. Other psychologists have contributed work to his theories, while others have developed new theories through being in opposition to his ideas. In 2001, *Time Magazine* referred to Freud as one of the most important thinkers of the last century. A 2006 *Newsweek* article called him "history's most debunked doctor." While his theories have been the subject of considerable controversy and debate, his impact on psychology, therapy, and culture is undeniable. As W.H. Auden wrote in his 1973 poem, *In Memory of Sigmund Freud*,  
"if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd,  
to us he is no more a person  
now but a whole climate of opinion."

Freud's theories although influential were subject to criticism, both now and during his own life. However, his ideas have become part of our culture, with terms such as "Freudian slip," "repression" and "denial" appearing regularly in everyday language. His ideas had such a strong impact on psychology that an entire school of thought emerged from his work. While it was eventually replaced by the rise of behaviourism, psychoanalysis had a lasting impact on both psychology and psychotherapy.

### The Conscious and Unconscious Mind

According to Freud, the mind can be divided into two main parts:

1. The conscious mind includes everything that we are aware of. This is the aspect of our mental processing that we can think and talk about rationally. A part of this

includes our memory, which is not always part of consciousness but can be retrieved easily at any time and brought into our awareness. Freud called this ordinary memory the preconscious.

2. The unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that outside of our conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety, or conflict. According to Freud, the unconscious continues to influence our behavior and experience, even though we are unaware of these underlying influences.

### The Id, Ego, and Superego

#### The id

The id is the only component of personality that is present from birth. This aspect of personality is entirely unconscious and includes the instinctive and primitive behaviours. According to Freud, the id is the source of all psychic energy, making it the primary component of personality.

The id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state of anxiety or tension. For example, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. The id is very important early in life, because it ensures that an infant's needs are met. If the infant is hungry or uncomfortable, he or she will cry until the demands of the id are met.

However, immediately satisfying these needs is not always realistic or even possible. If we were ruled entirely by the pleasure principle, we might find ourselves grabbing things we want out of other people's hands to satisfy our own cravings. This sort of behaviour would be both disruptive and socially unacceptable. According to Freud, the id tries to resolve the tension created by the pleasure principle through the forming of a mental image of the desired object as a way of satisfying the need.

#### The Ego

The ego is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality. According to Freud, the ego develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world. The ego functions in both the conscious and unconscious mind.

The ego operates based on the reality principle, which strives to satisfy the id's desires in realistic and socially appropriate ways. The reality principle weighs the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act upon or abandon impulses. In many cases, the id's impulses can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification--the ego will eventually allow the behaviour, but only in the appropriate time and place. The ego also discharges tension created by unmet impulses by trying to find an object in the real world that matches the mental image created by the id's primary process.

#### The Superego

The last component of personality to develop is the superego. The superego is the aspect of personality that holds all of our internal moral standards and ideals that we acquire from both parents and society, 'our sense of right and wrong'. The superego provides guidelines for making judgments. According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age five.

There are two parts of the superego:

1. The ego ideal includes the rules and standards for good behaviours. These behaviours include those which are approved of by parental and other authority figures. Obeying these rules leads to feelings of pride, value and accomplishment.

2. The conscience includes information about things that are viewed as bad by parents and society. These behaviours are often forbidden and lead to bad consequences, punishments or feelings of guilt and remorse.

The superego acts to perfect and civilize our behaviour. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the id and struggles to make the ego act upon idealistic standards rather than upon realistic principles. The superego is present in the conscious and unconscious.

The Interaction of the Id, Ego and Superego

With so many competing forces, it is easy to see how conflict might arise between the id, ego and superego. Freud used the term "ego strength" to refer to the ego's ability to function despite these duelling forces. A person with good ego strength is able to effectively manage these pressures, while those with too much or too little ego strength can become too unyielding or too disrupting.

According to Freud, the key to a healthy personality is a balance between the id, the ego, and the superego.

Life and Death Instincts

Life Instincts (Eros)

Sometimes referred to as sexual instincts, the life instincts are those that deal with basic survival, pleasure, and reproduction. These instincts are important for sustaining life as well as the reproduction. While they are often called sexual instincts, these drives also include such things as thirst, hunger, and pain avoidance.

The energy created by the life instincts is known as libido.

Behaviours commonly associated with the life instinct include love, cooperation, and other prosocial actions.

Death Instincts (Thanatos)

Initially described in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud proposed that "the goal of all life is death" (1920). He noted that after people experience a traumatic event (such as war), they often re-enact the experience. He concluded that people hold an unconscious desire to die, but that this wish is largely tempered by the life instincts.

In Freud's view, self-destructive behaviour is an expression of the energy created by the death instincts. When this energy is directed outward onto others, it is expressed as aggression and violence.

#### Psychosexual Development

According to Freud, personality is almost established by the age of five. Early experiences play a large role in personality development and continue to influence behaviour later in life.

Freud's theory of psychosexual development is one of the best known. Freud believed that personality develops through a series of childhood stages during which the pleasure-seeking energies of the 'id' become focused on certain erogenous areas. This psychosexual energy, or libido, was described as the driving force behind behaviour. If these psychosexual stages are completed successfully, the result is a healthy personality. If certain issues are not resolved at the appropriate stage, fixation can occur. A fixation is a persistent focus on an earlier psychosexual stage. Until this conflict is resolved, the individual will remain "stuck" in this stage. For example, a person who is fixated at the oral stage may be over-dependent on others and may seek oral stimulation through smoking, drinking, or eating.

#### Defence Mechanisms

Defence mechanisms are the ways that we protect ourselves from things that we don't want to think about or deal with. The term got its start in psychoanalytic therapy, but it has slowly worked its way into everyday language. When someone is referred to as being "in denial" or accused of "rationalizing." Both of these examples refer to a type of defence mechanism.

In Freud's model of personality, the ego is the aspect of personality that deals with reality. While doing this, the ego also has to cope with the conflicting demands of the id and the superego. The id seeks to fulfil all wants, needs and impulses while the superego tries to get the ego to act in an idealistic and moral manner. What happens when the ego cannot deal with the demands of our desires, the constraints of reality and our own moral standards? Anxieties arise. According to Freud, "anxiety is an unpleasant inner state that people seek to avoid". Anxiety acts as a signal to the ego that things are not going right.

Freud identified three types of anxiety:

1. Neurotic anxiety is the unconscious worry that we will lose control of the id's urges, resulting in punishment for inappropriate behaviour.
2. Reality anxiety is fear of real-world events. The cause of this anxiety is usually easily identified. For example, a person might fear receiving a dog bite when they are near a menacing dog.
3. Moral anxiety involves a fear of violating our own moral principles.

In order to deal with this anxiety, Freud believed that defence mechanisms helped shield the ego from the conflicts created by the id and superego. Researchers have

described a wide variety of different defence mechanisms. Sigmund Freud's daughter, Anna Freud described ten different defence mechanisms used by the ego.

Denial, Refusal to admit that anything is wrong

Repression, Unconsciously Keeping things out of our awareness, keeping things down.

Suppression. Consciously keeping things out of our awareness, I don't want to know

Displacement, Taking our feelings out on others

Sublimation, Using other ways of getting rid of frustrations, e.g Kick boxing

Projection, Believing someone hates you when in fact you hate them, turning things

Intellectualisation, Thinking of things coldly or clinically

Rationalisation, Finding an easy way of explaining away a situation

Regression, reverting back to childhood methods of dealing with things, crying.

Reaction formation, doing the opposite of what is expected

Contributions to Psychology:

Regardless of the perception of Sigmund Freud's theories, there is no question that he had an enormous impact on the field of psychology. His work supported the belief that not all mental illnesses have physiological causes and he also offered evidence that cultural differences have an impact on psychology and behaviour. His work and writings contributed to our understanding of personality, clinical psychology, human development and abnormal psychology. He died September 23, 1939