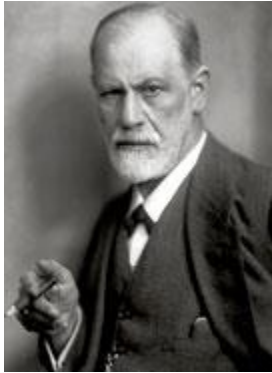


## ***Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality***

According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, personality develops through a series of stages, each characterized by a certain internal psychological conflict.

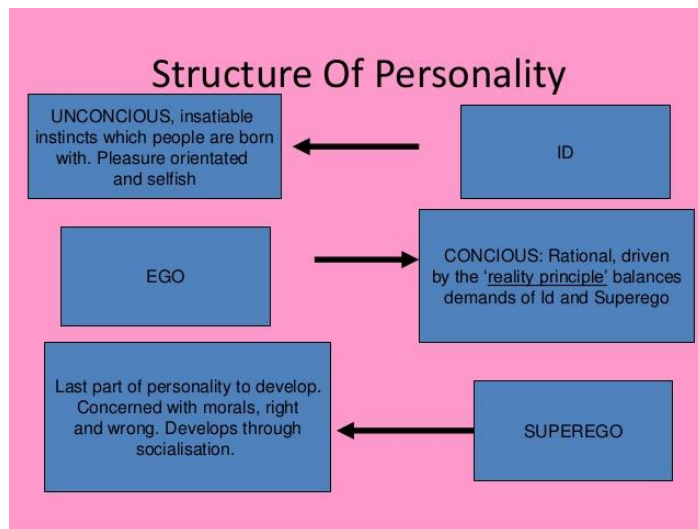


Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality argues that human behavior is the result of the interactions among three component parts of the mind: the id, ego, and superego. This theory, known as Freud's structural theory of personality, places great emphasis on the role of unconscious psychological conflicts in shaping behavior and personality. Dynamic interactions among these fundamental parts of the mind are thought to progress through five distinct psychosexual stages of development. Over the last century, however, Freud's ideas have since been met with criticism, in part because of his singular focus on sexuality as the main driver of human personality development.

### **Sigmund Freud**

Freud developed the psychoanalytic theory of personality development, which argued that personality is formed through conflicts among three fundamental structures of the human mind: the id, ego, and superego.

### **Freud's Structure of the Human Mind**



According to Freud, our personality develops from the interactions among what he proposed as the three fundamental structures of the human mind: the id, ego, and superego. Conflicts among these three structures, and our efforts to find balance among what each of them "desires," determines how we behave and approach the world. What balance we strike in any given situation determines how we will resolve the conflict between two overarching behavioral tendencies: our biological aggressive and pleasure-seeking drives vs. our socialized internal control over those drives.

## Conflict within the mind

According to Freud, the job of the ego is to balance the aggressive/pleasure-seeking drives of the id with the moral control of the superego.

## The Id

The id, the most primitive of the three structures, is concerned with instant gratification of basic physical needs and urges. It operates entirely unconsciously (outside of conscious thought). For example, if your id walked past a stranger eating ice cream, it would most likely take the ice cream for itself. It doesn't know, or care, that it is rude to take something belonging to someone else; it would care only that you wanted the ice cream.

## The Superego

The superego is concerned with social rules and morals—similar to what many people call their "conscience" or their "moral compass." It develops as a child learns what their culture considers right and wrong. If your superego walked past the same stranger, it would not take their ice cream because it would know that that would be rude. However, if both your id and your superego were involved, and your id was strong enough to override your superego's concern, you

would still take the ice cream, but afterward you would most likely feel guilt and shame over your actions.

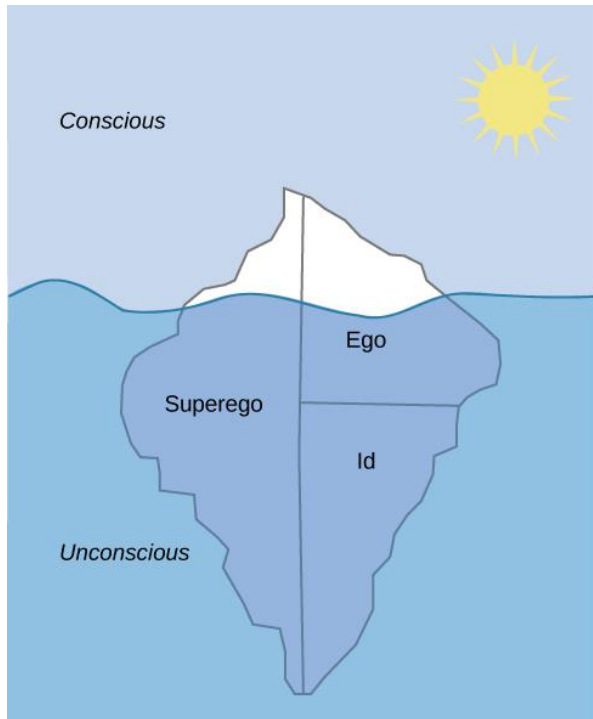
## **The Ego**

In contrast to the instinctual id and the moral superego, the ego is the rational, pragmatic part of our personality. It is less primitive than the id and is partly conscious and partly unconscious. It's what Freud considered to be the "self," and its job is to balance the demands of the id and superego in the practical context of reality. So, if you walked past the stranger with ice cream one more time, your ego would mediate the conflict between your id ("I want that ice cream right now") and superego ("It's wrong to take someone else's ice cream") and decide to go buy your own ice cream. While this may mean you have to wait 10 more minutes, which would frustrate your id, your ego decides to make that sacrifice as part of the compromise—satisfying your desire for ice cream while also avoiding an unpleasant social situation and potential feelings of shame.

Freud believed that the id, ego, and superego are in constant conflict and that adult personality and behavior are rooted in the results of these internal struggles throughout childhood. He believed that a person who has a strong ego has a healthy personality and that imbalances in this system can lead to neurosis (what we now think of as anxiety and depression) and unhealthy behaviors.

## **The id, ego, and superego**

According to Freud's structural model, the personality is divided into the id, ego, and superego. On this diagram, the smaller portion above the water signifies the conscious mind, while the much larger portion below the water illustrates the unconscious mind



## **Psychosexual Stages of Development**

Freud believed that the nature of the conflicts among the id, ego, and superego change over time as a person grows from child to adult. Specifically, he maintained that these conflicts progress through a series of five basic stages, each with a different focus: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. He called his idea the psychosexual theory of development, with each psychosexual stage directly related to a different physical center of pleasure.

Across these five stages, the child is presented with different conflicts between their biological drives (id) and their social and moral conscience (superego) because their biological pleasure-seeking urges focus on different areas of the body (what Freud called "erogenous zones"). The child's ability to resolve these internal conflicts determines their future ability to cope and function as an adult. Failure to resolve a stage can lead one to become fixated in that stage, leading to unhealthy personality traits; successful resolution of the stages leads to a healthy adult.

## **Criticism of Freud's Theories**

Although Freud's theories have many advantages that helped to expand our psychological understanding of personality, they are not without limits.

### **Narrow Focus**

In his singular emphasis on the structure of the human mind, Freud paid little to no attention to the impact of environment, sociology, or culture. His theories were highly focused on pathology and largely ignored "normal," healthy functioning. He has also been criticized for his myopic view of human sexuality to the exclusion of other important factors.

## **No Scientific Basis**

Many critics point out that Freud's theories are not supported by any empirical (experimental) data. In fact, as researchers began to take a more scientific look at his ideas, they found that several were unable to be supported: in order for a theory to be scientifically valid, it must be possible to disprove ("falsify") it with experimental evidence and many of Freud's notions are not falsifiable.

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