A Summary of Freud’s Personality Development – Id, Ego & Superego

Id

As the baby emerges from the womb into the reality of life, he wants only to eat, drink, urinate, defecate, be warm. These urges are the demands of the id, the most primitive motivational force. In pursuit of these ends, the id demands immediate gratification: it is ruled by the pleasure principle, demanding satisfaction now, regardless of circumstances and possible undesirable effects. If a young child was ruled entirely by his id, he would steal and eat a piece of chocolate from a store regardless of the menacing owner watching above him or even his parents scolding beside him.

Ego

The eventual understanding that immediate gratification is usually impossible (and often unwise) comes with the formation of the ego, which is ruled by the reality principle. The ego acts as a go-between in the id's relations with reality, often suppressing the id's urges until an appropriate situation arises. The ego often utilizes defense mechanisms to achieve and aid this repression. Where the id may have an urge and form a picture which satisfies this urge, the ego engages in a strategy to actually fulfill the urge. The thirsty five-year-old now not only identifies water as the satisfaction of his urge, but forms a plan to obtain water, perhaps by finding a drinking fountain. With the formation of the ego, the individual becomes a self, instead of an amalgamation of urges and needs.

Superego

While the ego may temporarily repress certain urges of the id in fear of punishment, eventually these external sources of punishment are internalized, and the child will not steal the chocolate, even unwatched, because he now understands right and wrong. The superego uses guilt and self-reproach as its primary means of enforcement for these rules. If a person does something which is acceptable to the superego, he experiences pride and self-satisfaction. The superego is sub-dividable into two parts: conscience and ego ideal. Conscience tells what is right and wrong, and forces the ego to restrain the id in pursuit of morally acceptable goals instilled by society.

Examples of Id Ego and Superego

The id, ego, and superego are names for the three parts of the human personality which are part of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic personality theory. According to Freud, these three parts combine to create the complex behavior of human beings.

Id: Meeting Basic Needs

The id is the most basic part of the personality, and wants instant gratification for our wants and needs. If these needs or wants are not met, a person becomes tense or anxious.

- Sally was thirsty. Rather than waiting for the server to refill her glass of water, she reached across the table and drank from Mr. Smith's water glass, much to his surprise.
- A hungry baby cried until he was fed.
- A toddler who wanted another helping of dessert whined incessantly until she was given another serving.
- Michael saw a $5 bill fall out of Nick's backpack as he pulled his books out of his locker. As Nick walked away, Michael bent over, picked up the money, and slipped it into his pocket, glancing around to make sure no one was looking.
- On Black Friday, customers were so obsessed with getting a good deal that they shoved others out of their way and trampled them, not thinking twice about hurting people if it meant they could get want they wanted.
- In line at the salad bar, Amy was so hungry that she shoved a handful of croutons in her mouth as she waited for the line to move.
- Bart was stuck in traffic. He just wanted his vehicle to move! Enraged at the situation, Bart pulled his car onto the shoulder and sped forward, not caring that he was clipping people's side mirrors as he tried to get ahead of the cars in front of him.
**Ego: Dealing with Reality**

The ego deals with reality, trying to meet the desires of the id in a way that is socially acceptable in the world. This may mean delaying gratification, and helping to get rid of the tension the id feels if a desire is not met right away. The ego recognizes that other people have needs and wants too, and that being selfish is not always good for us in the long run.

- Sally was thirsty. However, she knew that her server would be back soon to refill her water glass, so she waited until then to get a drink, even though she really just wanted to drink from Mr. Smith’s glass.
- Even though Michael needed money, he decided not to steal the money from the cash register because he didn’t want to get in trouble.
- In line at the salad bar, Amy really wanted to shove a handful of croutons into her mouth. However, since her boss was there, she decided to wait another minute or two until she sat down to eat.
- Mary really wanted to borrow her mom’s necklace, but knew her mom would be angry if she took it without asking, so she asked her mom if she could wear it.
- Hillary was so sweaty after her workout that she wanted to change her clothes right there by the car. However, she knew the other people around her would not approve, so she waited until she was in the restroom to change.
- Katie’s mom had given her $25 to purchase groceries for dinner that night. At the mall, Katie saw shoes that she really wanted, and was tempted to use the money from her mom to make the purchase. However, if she spent the money on shoes, she wouldn’t have enough to buy the groceries, so she decided she better not buy the shoes.
- Tim really wanted to slug Mark for what he had just said. However, Tim knew if he hit Mark, he would be kicked off the baseball team, and since he loved baseball, he unclenched his fists and walked away.

**Superego: Adding Morals**

The superego develops last, and is based on morals and judgments about right and wrong. Even though the superego and the ego may reach the same decision about something, the superego’s reason for that decision is more based on moral values, while the ego’s decision is based more on what others will think or what the consequences of an action could be.

- Sarah knew that she could steal the supplies from work and no one would know about it. However, she knew that stealing was wrong, so she decided not to take anything even though she would probably never get caught.
- Maggie couldn’t remember the answer to test question #12, even though she had studied. Nate was the smartest kid in the class, and from where Maggie sat, she could see his answers if she turned her head slightly. When Mrs. Archer turned her back, Maggie almost cheated, but her conscience stopped her because she knew it was wrong. Instead, Maggie took a guess at the answer and then turned in her paper.
- While away on business, Tom had many opportunities to be unfaithful to his wife. However, he knew the damage such behavior would have on his family, so made the decision to avoid the women who had expressed interest in him.
- When Michael saw the $5 bill lying on the floor with no one around it, he turned it into the school office in case anyone came looking for it. He wouldn’t want to lose $5, and hoped that whoever had lost it would ask about it in the office.
- The cashier only charged the couple for one meal even though they had eaten two. They could have gotten away with only paying for one, but they pointed out the cashier’s mistake and offered to pay for both meals. They wanted to be honest and they knew that the restaurant owner and employees needed to make a living.
- On the playground, two kids were making fun of Joseph because he wore glasses. John was tempted to join in so that he could make himself look good, but when he thought about how bad Joseph must already feel, he knew that he couldn’t.
- Will had worked hard all season to break the school record in cross-country. During his last race he had the opportunity to cut a corner and therefore lower his time, because no officials were watching that part of the course. As much as he wanted to break the school record, Will knew he wouldn’t feel good about himself if he cheated, so he stuck to the course and ran as fast as he could.

The id, ego and superego work together in creating a behavior. The id creates the demands, the ego adds the needs of reality with the superego adds morality to the action which is taken.