



FREUD'S PSYCHOSEXUAL THEORY

The main concepts of Freud's psychosexual theory

Freud developed his **psychosexual theory** over a very long time. As he furthered progress with his patients and conceived new ideas, he amended his theories until they become the psychosexual theory. There are several elements to the theory: the three parts of the mind, the three parts of the personality, defence mechanisms (all of which are covered in this document), and the five stages of psychosexual development (which is covered in the next chapter).

Three parts of the mind

Freud spent his career trying to cure his patients of **neurosis** (mental health issues). He believed that the way to do so was to access the *unconscious* mind, which most psychologists agreed is virtually inaccessible. Freud drew that there were three parts of the mind:

- the **conscious** mind holds thoughts, ideas, emotions and other aspects of thinking, of which the individual is aware
- the **preconscious** mind holds thoughts, ideas and emotions which are readily available to be accessed, but are not actually conscious at the time
- the **unconscious** mind is the largest part of the mind, which is where all thoughts originate from (some pass through to the conscious and others are allowed into the preconscious)

Freud used **psychoanalysis** to access the unconscious. Psychoanalysis was the method of therapy built by Freud which combined the use of dream analysis, symbol analysis, free association and slips of the tongue techniques to enter the unconscious part of the mind.

Three parts of the personality

Aside from the three levels of consciousness, Freud believed there to be three parts to the personality. These are:

- the **id** is the *primitive* part of the personality, often described as the *biological component* of the mind, as it is the one we are born with, which works on the **pleasure principle** and is the demanding aspect of our personality, which always wants our primitive desires (this part of the personality is unconscious only)
- the **ego** develops at around the age of 18 months and is the rational part of the personality which will try to obtain what the id wants under the **reality principle** – the ego is designed to try and work out how to satisfy the person
- the **superego** develops at around four years of age, and derives from the **morality principle** and is the “can't have” part of the personality, which is made up of two components: the **conscience** (which is structured based on learning from parents and outside society) and the **ego ideal** (the idea of what people think they should be like, also given by parents and society)

The superego consists of the conscience and the ego ideal, both of which are denoted by parents and society. The role of the conscience is to punish bad behaviour with *guilt* feelings. The ego has to find a balance between the conflicting demands of the id and the superego.

The *id* is only in the unconscious, and is known as the *biological component*. The *ego* is equally divided amongst all three parts of the mind and is known as the *psychological component*. The *superego* is in all three parts of the mind, but is mainly in the unconscious, and is called the *social component*.

Life and death instincts

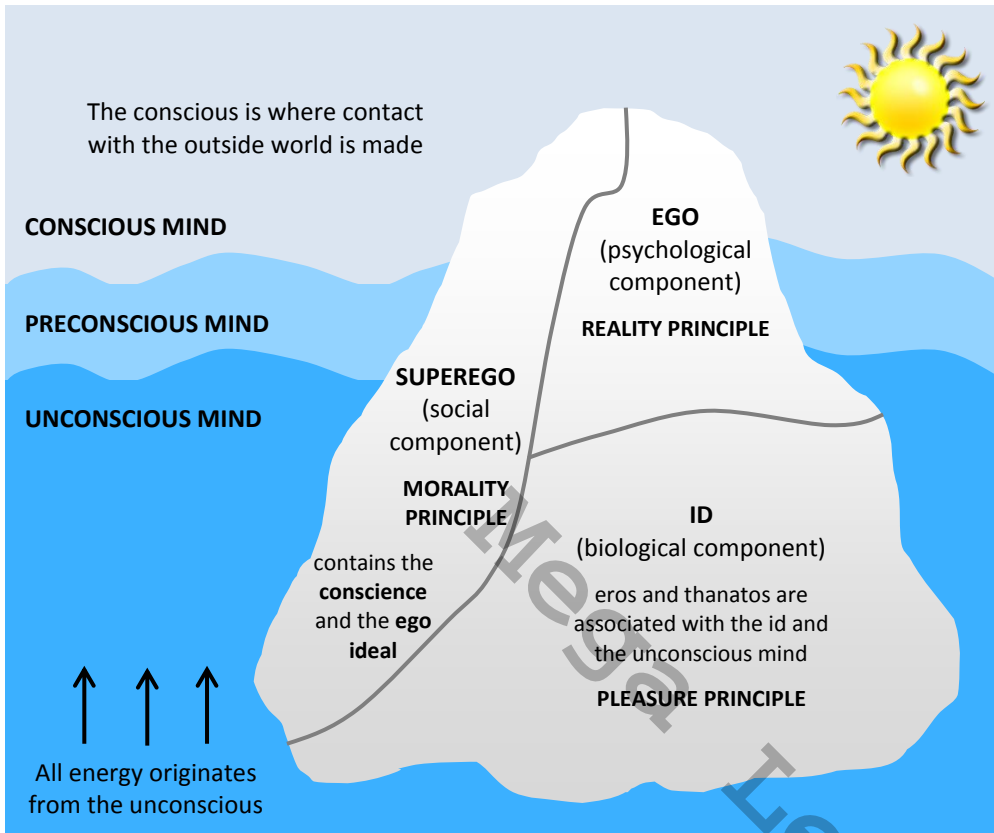
As well as all of these above parts of the mind, there are two more to consider. As you should know from **3.1 An Introduction to Freud**, Freud claimed that we are all born with a certain amount of energy. He said that this energy never increases or decreases, but a significant amount of it is **libido**. Libido is the term for sexual energy. Much of Freud's theory focuses on sexual points. However, Freud identified two other forces: **eros**, which he described as the *life instinct*, and **thanatos**, which he described as the *death instinct*.

Eros is the instinct for self-preservation and sexual energy, which leads to arousal. Freud believed that we have a drive to reduce arousal, and one way to do this is through death, and so *thanatos* provides the energy for the ego to inhibit sexual instinct. Therefore, thanatos provides energy to inhibit eros, and eros provides the energy to inhibit thanatos.

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All of these features can be easily displayed on a simple diagram. It is common to see the **iceberg analogy** which shows an iceberg (which represents the mind) floating in the water. The diagram below shows the three levels of consciousness and how the parts of the personality are divided between them.



Mentioned above was the fact that the ego has the job of trying to balance the id and the superego. It may also have to balance any conflicting demands in the id. One way in which it does this can be through the use of **defence mechanisms**. These are designed to push thoughts, feelings and desires out of the conscious mind, or can transfer a desire onto something safer. For your course, you must learn about *repression* as one defence mechanism as well as *one other* mechanism of your choosing.

Defence mechanisms

The one defence mechanism you must learn about is **repression**. Repression involves keeping thoughts in the unconscious mind so that they are not remembered, as they are not allowed inside the conscious. It is as if they are forgotten, or at least not remembered – so it is sometimes known as *motivated forgetting*. However, this cannot be done consciously, it is done subconsciously. The table below displays the five defence mechanisms covered in this course, their explanations and an example of when each one would be used. Remember you need to know about repression as well as one other one of your choice:

	Explanation	Example
Repression	involves keeping thoughts in the unconscious, and not allowing them into the conscious, so that they are not remembered (called “motivated forgetting”), a process which is not done consciously	<i>childhood sexual abuse</i> – often adults will not be able to remember their abuse; they will not deny it happening, but cannot remember the abuse
Denial	found when someone denies a traumatic event has occurred and acts as though nothing has happened, protecting the individual from unhappy or unacceptable thoughts	<i>denial of feelings</i> – often if somebody has inappropriate sexual feelings for another person, they will deny having such feelings
Projection	when somebody deals with having unacceptable thoughts by saying that they are somebody else’s thoughts, perhaps so that the ego can deal with the feelings without problems from the superego	<i>envy</i> – sometimes people who envy someone will actually claim that that person envies them

	Explanation	Example
Displacement	this occurs when thoughts or wishes that an individual finds to be unacceptable are transferred onto someone or something else, or the urges/thoughts are turned into something different	<i>sport</i> – anger might be turned into physical aggression in sport <i>aggression</i> – shouting at your wife as you get home because you're angry with your boss but don't want to shout at him
Denial	using the comforting behaviours of an earlier age to cope with something which is currently causing a significant amount of stress	examples include crying, thumb-sucking and refusing to accept responsibility

There are various strengths and weaknesses for the idea of defence mechanisms. It was actually Freud's daughter, *Anna Freud* who first talked about defence mechanisms. She was the sixth (and last) child of Sigmund Freud's, and she followed in his footsteps in establishing the at-that-time new form of therapy, psychoanalysis. The table below summarises just a couple of the strengths and weaknesses:

- ✓ There are everyday examples of all of the above defence mechanisms in real life (**anecdotal examples**), such as crime victims often experiencing repression, and denial being frequently found in everyday language
- ✓ When a defence mechanism is revealed to someone and they have it explained to them how defence mechanisms work, they tend to feel a bit better (this is because Freud claimed that the mechanisms keep the primitive urges of the id in the unconscious, but once revealed to the conscious, the problems stop)
- ✗ The concept of defence mechanisms cannot be tested scientifically, as the DV is not operationalised (whilst we do find everyday, real-life examples of them in action – this is not scientific testing)
- ✗ Because defence mechanisms are specific to an individual, they require the interpretation of the analyst (such as with projection, for example, whilst one person might claim that somebody else is jealous of them, and that's because they are in fact jealous of that person, for another person, it may actually just be that the other person is envious of them)