

Psychology à la Sigmund Freud

Core Assumptions

- the activities of the mind are primarily unconscious
- nothing in mental life happens by chance; unconscious motives and affective states are the engines that drive psychic activity and personality development.
- our personalities are formed from the sum total of our experiences.

The Conscious and Unconscious Mind

- symptoms of psychic distress derive from repressed unconscious instincts and desires
- the unconscious comprises the psychic processes that underlie conscious thought; we are unaware of their function; it is comprised of the entirety of the id and most of the super-ego
- ego = how we perceive ourselves to be (mostly conscious processes)
- we are able to analyze our own conscious thoughts and desires
- most thought processes are unconscious; most conscious thought remains so for only a short span of time
- we can only infer the workings of the unconscious mind; psychoanalysis does this by tracing associations of patients through talk therapy; the goal of psychoanalysis is to enlarge the ego--freeing it from too-severe criticism from the super-ego and the irrational drives of the id
- danger arises when unconscious processes are perceived as external reality (instead of internally generated content); this leads to pathology (such as paranoia and other delusions)

The Super-Ego

- the super-ego incorporates the values and morals of society which are learnt from one's parents and other authorities (personal and institutional)
- its function is to control the id's impulses, especially those which society forbids
- super-ego also has the function of persuading the ego to turn to moral goals, rather than simply realistic ones, and to strive for perfection
- it is autonomous of the ego (which comprises the majority of the conscious mind)
- the super-ego consists of two related systems: the conscience and the ideal self; behavior which falls short of the ideal is punished by the super-ego through guilt
- super-ego can develop to be a too severe critic of the ego (= pathology), e.g., depression, which can arise from a too severe judgment by the super-ego, leading to a sense of worthlessness; in manic phases, the super-ego is silent, and the depressive is unrestrained by conscience
- arises from reaction to external authority (nurture [socialization], not nature [biology])
- arises in part from anxiety about losing parental love; parents offer love, but punish as well
- only the punishment function of parental authority is internalized (in the super-ego); the love that parents offer is not
- identification based not on parents' ego, but parents' super-ego
- this process is the engine of dissemination of shared cultural norms and traditions

The Id

- id is the inherited (i.e., biological) components of personality, such as the sex drive (libido) and aggressive urges; it is also the repository of repressed experiences and desires

- completely alien to the ego (the ego does not recognize it; it is completely repressed)
- dark, inaccessible part of our personality, its workings are often inferred through dreams
- comprised of chaotic instincts and desires; not systematic or organized; contradictory and irrational
- it strives to achieve short-term, immediate pleasure; it is not affected by reality, logic, or the everyday world; operates on the Pleasure Principle (the idea that every wishful impulse should be satisfied immediately, regardless of the consequences)
- repressed instincts and desires exist in perpetuity, i.e., do not fade with time, but remain ever-present; in this sense, we are the sum of our experiences (no matter how distant in time)
- it is completely amoral; it seeks discharge of desires
- the majority of the mind is id

The Ego

- interacts with the external world; it is the way perceptions are processed in the mind
- the conscious mind resides here (though not all ego functions are conscious); memory too
- it mediates desires (arising from the id) and the external world, finding realistic means to achieve goals and desires
- synthesizes unconscious impulses into concrete thought
- Freud: "The ego stands for reason and good sense while the id stands for the untamed passions"
- relatively weak when compared to the id; energies are generated by unconscious desire (that is transformed by the ego into concrete thoughts and goals)
- takes unreasonable and socially unacceptable thoughts and desires and turns them toward productive ends; operates according to the Reality Principle, working out realistic ways of satisfying the id's demands, often compromising or postponing satisfaction (to enjoy long term happiness)
- the ego has no concept of right or wrong; something is good simply if it achieves its end of satisfying without causing harm to itself or to the id.
- ideas that cannot be transformed are repressed
- it is under assault by the world (as mediator of perception), the id (as synthesizer of instinct and base desire), and the super-ego (as object of censure)
- it is impossible to create harmony between these three forces; the result is anxiety

Repression and Displacement

- repression is the mind's attempt to repel unpalatable desires and impulses (actor: super-ego) towards pleasurable instincts by excluding those desire from one's consciousness (ego)-- holding or subduing it in the unconscious (repository: id).
- repression is the mind's defense mechanism; we repress that which causes mental discomfort; people resist having unconscious desires revealed to their conscious mind
- super-ego represses or orders the ego to repress; here the super-ego and ego act unconsciously
- displacement is also an unconscious defense whereby the mind substitutes either a new aim or a new object for goals felt in their original form to be dangerous or unacceptable' it is a sort of imperfect repression
- repression and displacement are means by which the unconscious is expanded at the expense of the conscious mind