

# Constituents of Human Personality

The concept of unconscious mental processes was central to Freud's early description of personality organization. However, during the early 1920s he revised his conceptual model of mental life and introduced three basic structures in the anatomy of personality: id, ego, **and** superego.

## The Id:

The word "id" comes from the Latin word for "it" and refers exclusively to the primitive, instinctive, and inherited aspects of personality. The id functions entirely in the unconscious and is closely tied to instinctual biological urges (to eat, sleep, defecate, and copulate) that energize our behaviour. Indeed, Freud believed that it is a raw, animalistic, and chaotic, knows no laws, obeys no rules, and basic to the individual throughout life. Operating on a primitive basis, it is free from all inhibitions. The id, as the oldest and original structure of the mind, expresses the primary principle of all human — the immediate discharge of psychic energy produced by biologically rooted drives (especially sex and aggression) which, when pent up, create tension throughout the personality system. Immediate tension reduction is called the pleasure principle, and the id obeys it, manifesting itself in an impulsive, irrational, and narcissistic (exaggeratedly self-loving) manner, regardless of the consequences of its actions for others or its own self-preservation. Freud considered the id as a mediator between the organism's somatic and mental processes. Freud identified two mechanisms the id employs to rid personality of tension: reflex action and primary process. In the former, the id responds automatically to sources of irritation. Examples of such in born reflex mechanisms are coughing in response to a tickling throat and tearing in response to dirt in the eye. The id forms a mental image of an object previously associated with satisfaction of a basic need. In the case of the hungry baby, the primary process might conjure up an image of the mother breast or a bottle of milk.

## The Ego:

The ego (the Latin word for "I") is the decision-making component of the psychic apparatus that seeks to express and gratify the desires of the id in accordance with the constraints imposed by the outside world. The ego thus helps ensure the safety and self-preservation of the organism. In its battles for survival against both the external social world and the instinctual demands of id, the ego must continuously differentiate between a mental image of food and actual perception of food if tension reduction is to occur. That is, he or she must learn to acquire and consume food before the tension can be reduced. In contrast to the id's pleasure-seeking nature, the ego obeys the reality principle, the reality principle enables the individual to inhibit, redirect, or gradually release the id's raw energy. Unlike the id, the ego distinguishes between reality and fantasy, tolerates moderate amounts of tension, changes as a function of new experience, and engages in rational cognitive activity. The ego, then, is the "executive" of personality and the seat of intellectual processes and problem solving.

## **The Superego:**

In order for a person to function effectively in society, he or she must acquire a system of values, norms, and ethics that are reasonably compatible with that society. These are acquired through the process of "socialization," and in terms of the structural model of psychoanalysis, are developed through the formation of a superego. The superego is the last component of personality to be developed and represents an internalized version of society's norms and standard behavior. The superego results from the child's prolonged dependence upon parents. It makes its formal appearance when the child is said to know right from wrong, good from bad, moral from immoral (at around 3 to 5 years of age). However, as the child's social world begins to broaden, his or her superego expands to incorporate whatever behavior these groups also deem appropriate. Freud divided the superego into two subsystems—the conscience and the ego-ideal. Conscience is acquired through the use of punishment by the parents. It is concerned with things that parents say are "naughty" behavior and for which the child is reprimanded. It includes the capacity for punitive self-evaluation, moral prohibitions, and guilt feeling when the child fails to achieve what he or she should be doing. The rewarding aspect of the superego is the ego-ideal. It is derived from whatever the parents approve or value and leads the individual to pursue standards of excellence which, if achieved, generate a sense of self-esteem and pride. The superego is said to be fully developed when self-control replaces parental control. In short, it tries to persuade the ego that the pursuit of perfectionistic goals is better than the pursuit of realistic ones.