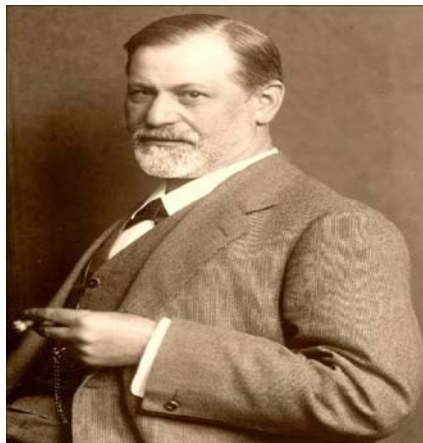


## THE PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH TO PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

### Introduction

This model is closely associated with **Sigmund Freud**, an Austrian physician who became interested in mental disorders. Freud accepted that *some* mental disorders had physical causes. However, he believed that for other mental disorders it was impossible to find a physical cause, and therefore the cause must be *psychological*. This disorder he used to make this point is called *hysterical neurosis (conversion type)*. In this, a person might claim to be paralysed, but when medically examined no physical cause for the paralysis can be found. However, the person behaves just like someone who really is paralysed. For example, when a sharp needle is used to test their paralysis, they show no reaction to it. Someone who was faking paralysis would react!



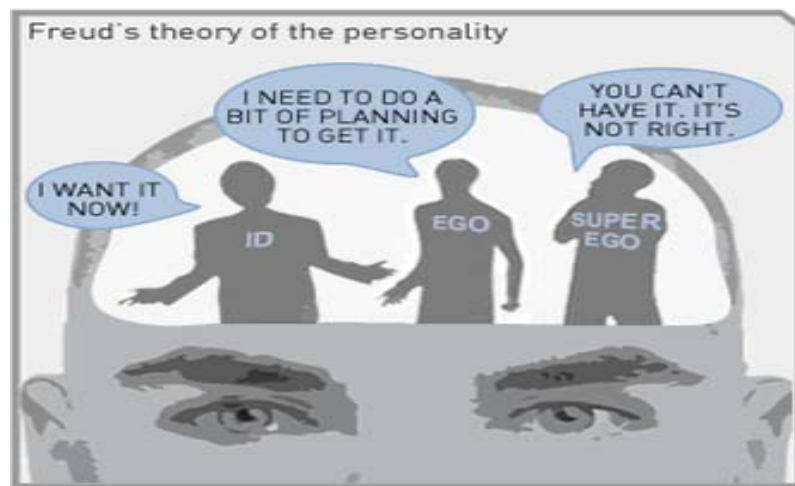
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

### The psychodynamic approach to the causes of abnormality

Freud argued that human personality and behaviour are determined by the interaction between 3 structures (the '*psychic apparatus*'). These are:

- (1) **The Id:** This is the *selfish* part of personality which is present at birth. It demands *instant gratification* of its desires, and operates on the *pleasure principle*
- (2) **The Ego:** This is the part of personality that develops in response to the id, and attempts to satisfy its demands, but in socially acceptable ways. It operates on the *reality principle*

(3) **The Superego:** This is the *mora*/part of personality, and develops last. It consists of two components. The first is *conscience*, which punishes the *ego* when it gives in to the *id*'s demands. The punishment is in the form of *guilt*. The second is *ego-ideal*, which rewards the *ego* when it resists the *id*'s demands. The reward is in the form of increased *self-esteem*

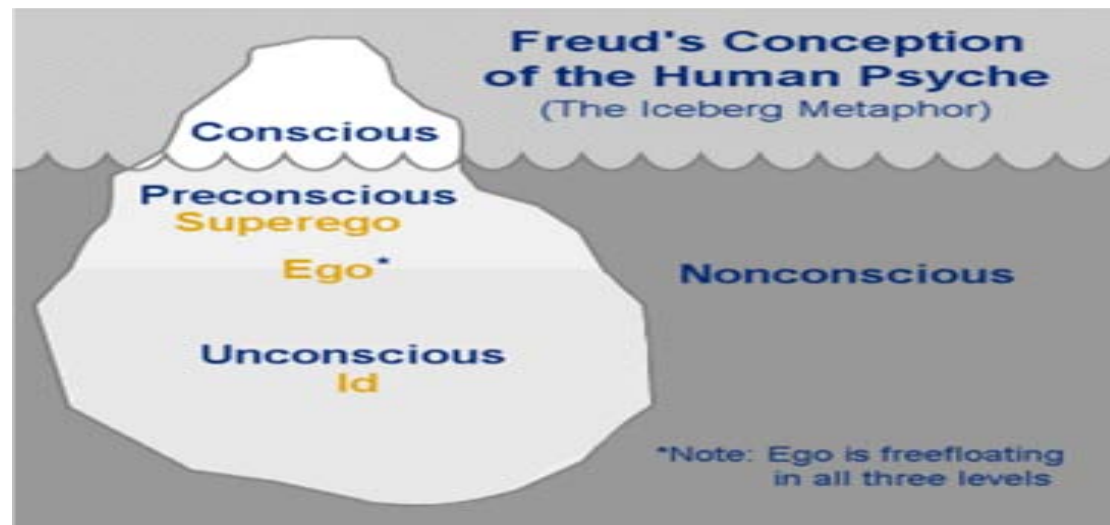


According to Freud, normality and abnormality are determined by the interaction between these structures. For Freud, psychological normality is when there is a balance between the psychic apparatus. However, some kinds of abnormality occur when either the *id* or the *superego* becomes dominant, and the **intra-psychic conflict** between them cannot be managed.

Freud believed that the some of the conflicts between the psychic apparatus arose as a result of things that occurred during *childhood*. The way the *ego* deals with these things is to use **ego-defence mechanisms**. One of these is called **repression**. Freud believed that certain thoughts or impulses were *so* unacceptable that they had to be banished from consciousness, because the mere act of remembering them would give rise to intense guilt and/or anxiety.

These unacceptable thoughts or impulses are banished to a part of the mind Freud called the **unconscious**. For Freud, the mind was like an iceberg, with only about 10% being 'conscious'. The remaining 90% is 'unconscious'. However, just because the thoughts or impulses have been banished to the unconscious does not mean they disappear. Instead, they try to express themselves in our adult behaviour. Thus, some

abnormalities are an expression of a repressed impulse, but because the impulse is buried deep within the unconscious we are not aware of it.



### Evaluating the psychodynamic approach to the causes of abnormality

The strength of the psychodynamic model is that it can seemingly explain the causes of some abnormalities. For example, **dissocial personality disorder** is characterised by a lack of guilt over behaviour, even when this behaviour is destructive. Freud would argue that this occurs when the superego either fails to develop, or is not strong enough to punish the ego for giving in to the demands of the id. By contrast, **anxiety neurosis** is characterised by extreme guilt and anxiety even over trivial behaviours. Freud would argue that this is a result of a superego which is *too* dominant compared with the other structures.

However, although there is no doubt that Freud was one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, the psychodynamic approach does have its weaknesses. First, it does not explain the causes of all mental disorders. For example, even Freud accepted that it was difficult to use his psychodynamic approach to explain schizophrenia, and that this condition was better explained in biological terms.

Second, scientists do not like Freud's approach because of its emphasis on the unconscious mind. Since we cannot scientifically study something we cannot see and are not aware of, Freud's approach is much weaker than other approaches which can be studied scientifically.

Third, critics also argue that Freud sees peoples' behaviour as being governed by a 'psychic apparatus' over which we do not have any control.

Many people do not like this *deterministic* approach, since it seems to deny us *free will* over our behaviours.