CHAPTER 3: PSYCHOANALYTIC ASPECTS OF PERSONALITY

This chapter begins the presentation of the eight basic aspects of personality by discussing Freudian theory and its modern-day counterparts. The theory is seen neither as gospel nor as an archaic relic, but rather as a powerful set of ideas (some true, some false, some still disputed) that significantly influenced 20th-century thought. Despite the fact that many object to specific portions of Freud’s original theory, the impact his theory had on virtually every area of the modern field of psychology is inarguable.

Many students have, of course, heard about Freudian ideas, and they wonder where the mystique comes from. It is perhaps easiest to show the depth and meaning of the ideas by using real-life examples and controversies, such as the phenomenon of “recovered memories” (“recovered” from repression). These are good ways to show both the strengths and weaknesses of a powerful set of ideas. Students may also be directed to note how they frequently use “Freudian terminology” in their everyday interactions (e.g., telling someone not to be “so anal”). Note also that each chapter has a box on “Evaluating the Perspectives” (summarizing the advantages and limits of each approach) and “Classic to Current” boxes that help to elucidate the modern impact of traditional psychological theories of personality. Each chapter also has a “Sharpen Your Thinking” box (encouraging application to current societal issues), a “Changing Personality” box (applying the theory to personality change at the individual and societal level), and a “Famous Personalities” box (providing a discussion of a famous person in terms of the approach of the chapter).

This chapter illustrates defense mechanisms with modern-day examples of interest to students. Also distinctive to this chapter is a detailed explanation of how many of the important notions Freud studied are still being studied in modern cognitive psychology. These include unconscious motivation, hypermnesia, and infantile amnesia.

Possible Lecture Outline

1. The Unconscious
   1. Early in his career, Freud began using hypnosis to treat patients, many of whom he believed suffered from hysteria.
   2. Moved into the realm of suggestion, free-association, and dream interpretation
      1. Dreams called the “royal road” to understanding the unconscious
      2. Manifest vs. latent content (an iceberg is a very familiar analogy)
2. The Structure of the Mind
   1. Id (“it”): the undifferentiated core of personality; operates according to the pleasure principle
   2. Ego (“I”): the structure which deals with reality; operates according to the reality principle
   3. Superego (“over-I”): the structure which internalizes societal norms; operates according to the morality principle
      1. Freudian slips may occur when elements of the id “slip past” the moral guardian of the superego.
3. Psychosexual Development
   1. Oral stage: infants satisfy their needs primarily through oral means (suckling).
      1. The conflict arises when a child is weaned and must give up the comforting breast or bottle.
      2. Difficulty in transferring psychosexual energy (libido) to the next stage results in fixation at the oral stage.
         1. May lead to dependency
         2. May lead to preoccupation with oral activities (eating, smoking, chewing gum, smoking, fingernail biting, talking too much, etc.)
   2. Anal stage: young children derive pleasure from relieving themselves of bodily waste.
      1. The conflict arises when parents toilet train the child—the child may react by refusing to be trained or by refusing to relieve him- or herself at all.
      2. Difficulty in transferring the libido to the next stage results in fixation at the anal stage.
         1. May lead to excessive usage of bathroom humor and making messes.
         2. May lead to preoccupation with neatness and order
         3. Anal-retentive and anal-expulsive characteristics (**note**: these terms are not used in the text, but may be familiar to students)
   3. Phallic stage: children gain pleasure from exploring and stimulating their genitals.
      1. The conflict arises because overt sexual behavior is not socially acceptable.
      2. Oedipus complex (boys): during this period, little boys desire mother and fear that father will punish this desire by castrating them. Resolution requires that little boys transform their fears into admiration and identification.
      3. Electra complex (girls): during this period, little girls wish they had a penis and blame mother for their inferiority. Resolution requires that little girls identify with mother so they can obtain a man and have a baby (a penis substitute). Freud was not a fan of the term “Electra complex.”
   4. Latency period: in this period, psychosexual energy is channeled into academic and social pursuits; kids focus on making friends, cooperating with teachers, and developing other socially acceptable behaviors.
      1. Because there is no conflict to be resolved, fixation cannot occur.
   5. Genital stage: in this stage, the individual gains satisfaction from mature, heterosexual relationships. (Instructors should be prepared to answer student questions about how Freud might have responded to non-heterosexual relationships.)
      1. Normal development is characterized by marriage, sexual relations, and childrearing.
      2. Freud (incorrectly) identified anything other than a progression toward heterosexual marriage and sexual relations as being flawed and unnatural.
4. Males versus Females
   1. Freud’s focus on sexuality led to his extensive consideration of males’ and females’ different genitals.
      1. Women were considered inferior because they did not have a penis.
      2. Freud proposed that the mature sexual development of a girl involves shifting pleasure-seeking to the vagina (a “vaginal orgasm”); experiencing orgasm from stimulation of the clitoris (“clitoral orgasm”) was a psychologically and biologically inferior and less mature form of sexual satisfaction
      3. Modern research does not support Freud’s notions regarding different kinds of orgasms.
   2. Due in part to the historical period, Freud viewed men as inherently superior and women as deviant.
   3. One of Freud’s arguments was that women have an unconscious desire for suffering.
      1. Women in unhealthy or abusive relationships were viewed as masochistic.
   4. Freud’s observations about gender differences are not supported by modern research, but he is credited as being among the first scholars to try to understand psychological differences between men and women.
5. Defense Mechanisms: Ways of Protecting the Conscious Mind from Unacceptable Unconscious Content
   1. Repression: an ego defense mechanism that pushes threatening thoughts/ideas into the unconscious
      1. Post-traumatic stress disorder
      2. Repressed memories (as with incest); false memories
   2. Reaction formation: an ego defense mechanism that hides threatening impulses by overemphasizing their opposite in thought and action
      1. The conflicting message and personal action of some public figures (political and religious)
   3. Denial: an ego defense mechanism that refuses to acknowledge anxiety-provoking stimuli
      1. The sudden death of a loved one
   4. Projection: an ego defense mechanism that attributes anxiety-provoking impulses or thoughts to others
      1. Always being suspicious of others and their “selfish motives”
   5. Sublimation: an ego defense mechanism by which dangerous urges are transformed into positive, socially meaningful motivations
      1. An excessive desire to control/dominate others might lead to one to assume leadership roles in the community.
   6. Regression: an ego defense mechanism that protects by returning one to an earlier, “safer” time of life
      1. Distressed individual treating the spouse as if he or she were a parent
   7. Rationalization: an ego defense mechanism that creates logical explanations for behaviors that were impulse-driven
      1. A cross-country move to be with a current love interest is explained as a trip to “find oneself” and “look for new job opportunities.”
   8. Displacement: an ego defense mechanism that shifts the target of one’s unconscious fears or desires
      1. An individual is mad at his or her boss and goes home and yells at his or her spouse.
6. Cross-Cultural Issues
   1. Freud believed that the same basic psychodynamic forces underlie all cultures.
      1. Freud thought certain universal practices would influence personality development in all cultures.
   2. Freud also engaged in psychobiography to determine how cultural forces might impact personality development.
      1. Freud’s theories and methods prompted cultural anthropologists of the first half of the 20th century to examine the idea that variations in childrearing practices across cultures would produce systematic variations in personality.
   3. In contrast to some of Freud’s ideas, it makes much more sense to say that people in a certain culture learn common behaviors from their families and friends.
      1. Personality should rightfully refer to individual variations within a culture.
7. Major Freudian Contributions and Weaknesses
   1. Contributions
      1. Scientific exploration of personality and behavior
      2. Emphasis on sexuality in general, and on infant/child sexuality in particular; sexuality as a motivational force
      3. Importance of early childhood experience in molding personality
      4. Importance of the unconscious
   2. Weaknesses
      1. Freudian theory is very deterministic.
      2. Derived from study of pathology
      3. Difficult to study empirically and to disconfirm
      4. Not concerned with lifetime development
8. Application of Psychoanalytic Thought
   1. Unconscious emotion and motivation
      1. Emotional motivation states (e.g., anger) can exist independent of thought.
      2. Some emotions, as expressed facially, are hardwired at birth and recognized universally.
   2. Illusion of free will
      1. People believe that conscious intention precedes action.
      2. Not true in all cases
      3. Intentions can be unconscious, or follow initiation of an action.
      4. Intentions can be externalized (“hearing voices”).
   3. Hypermnesia (“excess memory”)
      1. Use of free association and hypnosis to access memories outside conscious awareness
         1. Are they real? Certainty doesn’t imply accuracy.
         2. Were they really inaccessible?
      2. Rewards and penalties associated with remembering have been shown to affect the ability to remember.
   4. Infantile amnesia
      1. Young kids learn a lot, yet as adults, we recall little from prior to age three or four.
      2. All memories are forgotten, not just the traumatic ones.
   5. Memory
      1. Memories are personalized, rather than mere duplications of reality.
      2. Memories change over time.
      3. Memories vary in their availability for conscious recall.
      4. Explicit vs. implicit memory
   6. Amnesia
      1. Behavior may be affected by experiences not remembered.
      2. Evidence for independently operating, unconscious memory systems in the brain
      3. Anterograde amnesia: the inability to form new conscious memories

Projects

1. Suggest that students “keep a notebook and pen by your bed every night for one week. Each morning when you wake up (or in the night, if a dream awakens you), take a few minutes to write down your dreams in as much detail as you can remember. After a few days, you will probably find yourself remembering more details about your dreams than you did on the first day. Use Freudian theory to analyze your dreams. What themes do you see emerging? What symbols do you see? Distinguish between the manifest and latent content of your dreams. Do you think Freudian theory does a good job of explaining how your dreams reflect your unconscious? If not, what do you think your dreams mean?”
2. Have students think of an interpersonal problem they are currently experiencing (if not a current one, a past problem). If you asked Freud for help with this problem, what would he say to you? What would he say was the root of the problem? (Instructors may wish to adapt this assignment in consideration of students’ privacy.)
3. Have students identify, if they can, a time when they used each of Freud’s ego-defense mechanisms. If they cannot do so for every mechanism, allow them to identify when they have observed someone else using the mechanism. Discuss situations in which ego-defense mechanisms are helpful and situations in which they might be ultimately harmful.
4. Ask students to recall their earliest memory from childhood (one that they remember experiencing, not just hearing about from family). Poll the students about how old they were at the time of the event. Then have them think about why they might remember that particular incident.
5. Ask students to form small groups and come up with different jokes with which they are. Keeping in mind Freud’s notion that jokes allow our unconscious impulses to surface in a socially acceptable manner, have them think about what their jokes really mean. Have students share some of their conclusions with the class. (Note: It is important to carefully monitor this type of activity to ensure students are not offended; many jokes with easily accessible Freudian explanations contain potentially sensitive content addressing ethnicity and sexuality.)
6. Have students complete the “Draw-A-Person” test as discussed in the text. Discuss possible ways to interpret several students’ pictures. Have students debate whether or not the assessment actually taps into the unconscious. Use this exercise to begin a discussion of the utility of projective tests. Do students believe there is information in our unconscious that we are not aware of, but that might be assessed using projective tests?
7. Photocopy the worksheet in this instructor’s manual entitled Defense Mechanisms. Go through the answers to each question to help students better understand the different defense mechanisms discussed in the text.
8. Ask students to think about elements of Freud’s theory that they were familiar with before they studied Freud in an academic setting. It is likely students will be familiar with ideas such as “Freudian slips” and the latent content of dreams prior to studying personality psychology. Ask students to articulate why they think Freud has had such a pervasive influence on contemporary culture.
9. This class exercise is more effective if it is done before students encounter any of the material from Chapter 3. It can be posed as an exploration of students’ beliefs about personality prior to discussing any of the theorists. Ask students to rate their agreement with each of the following items on a 1–5 scale (1 = no agreement to 5 = strong agreement).
10. My parents have had a lot of influence over me.
11. Events that occurred when I was a very young child still have an effect on my life today.
12. Sometimes when I am faced with temptation (like an appealing-looking but not nutritious dessert, or an opportunity to go to the beach when I had planned to study), I have a hard time resolving what to do.
13. Sometimes, I notice that another person will strongly overreact to a minor conflict or disagreement with a level of emotion that doesn’t make sense for such a small issue.
14. I can get a better sense about what is bothering me if I pay attention to my dreams for a while.
15. Sometimes in a conversation, I will hear myself saying something that I hadn’t meant to say, which leaves me really surprised or embarrassed.
16. I have had the experience of wanting to go to a specific place or do some specific activity or be with some specific person just because it seemed fun or appealing and then realizing that, in fact, there were some other important benefits that would come from doing it.

After rating each item, and summing their score, students can report their sums (these should range from 7–35 points). Explain to the class that each of these statements corresponds with Freudian theory. Although many students may not think they agree with Freud’s ideas, this exercise can show them that Freudian theory may sometimes account for their own behaviors.

Defense Mechanisms

Read through the scenarios below and determine which of the defense mechanisms listed is being used in each.

Repression Reaction formation

Denial Projection

Displacement Sublimation

Regression Rationalization

* + - 1. After a long and frustrating day at work, Bob finds himself driving above the speed limit on the way home. When he is pulled over by a highway patrol officer, Bob lashes out, accusing the officer of picking on him.
      2. Selena has been involved with many casual sexual partners over the past several years, but has recently decided to end her sexual relationships and put her energy toward writing a novel.
      3. After flunking his chemistry final, Arnold called his mom and pleaded with her to comfort him and send him a care package of cookies.
      4. Jan went to the mall yesterday and spent a substantial amount of money on a new suit. When her roommate asked her about her purchase, she explained that the suit was going to come in very handy because she planned to apply for a new job very soon.
      5. Although Kathy has not menstruated in several months, she is confident that this is because she has been working out regularly and has nothing to do with the unprotected sex she had months ago.
      6. Lately, Stan has been experiencing memories of events from when he served in the army and saw combat. He doesn’t recall everything that happened when he was a soldier, but sometimes, an old memory flashes into his consciousness.
      7. Judy is now a grandmother, but she can’t seem to accept her age. She dyes her hair blond and wears her black leather pants almost every day.
      8. Tim feels that his youngest daughter, Christie, is not very bright. He accuses her siblings of picking on her.
      9. Bill is a “guy’s guy.” He watches sports every Sunday and always meets his friends at a local bar for a beer after work. Deep down, Bill is very insecure about his masculinity.

**Defense Mechanisms**

**Answer Key**

1. Displacement
2. Sublimation
3. Regression
4. Rationalization
5. Denial
6. Repression
7. Denial
8. Projection
9. Reaction Formation

Recommended Outside Readings

Brenner, C. (1957). *An elementary textbook of psychoanalysis*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Cohen, J. D., & Schooler, J. W. (Eds.). (1997). *Scientific approaches to consciousness*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Freud, S. (1924). *A general introduction to psychoanalysis* (J. Riviere, Trans.). New York: Washington Square Press. (Original work published 1917.)

Freud, S. (1963). *Three case histories: The "Wolf Man," the "Rat Man," and the psychotic Doctor Schreber*. (P. Reiff, Ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Freud, S. (1949). *An outline of psychoanalysis*. New York: W. W. Norton. (Translated by J. Strachey; originally published in 1940.)

Freud, S. (1927). *The interpretation of dreams*. Translation of 3d ed. with introduction, by A. A. Brill. New York, Macmillan Company.

Gay, P. (1988). *Freud: A life for our time*. New York: Norton.

Hassin, R. R., Uleman, J. S., & Bargh, J. A. (Eds.). (2005). *The new unconscious*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Masson, J. (1984). *The assault on truth: Freud’s suppression of the seduction theory*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

Sulloway, F. J. (1979). *Freud, biologist of the mind: Beyond the psychoanalytic legend*. New York: Basic Books.

Westen, D., Gabbard, G. O., & Ortigo, K. M. (2008). Psychoanalytic Approaches to Personality. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins, & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Films / Videos

*Biography: Sigmund Freud: Analysis of a Mind* (2004). 50 minutes. A&E DVD Archives: available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). A thorough biography, using personal, family, and archival sources of information. Discusses not only the important work Freud did, but also the weaknesses and limitations of that work.

*Freud: Hidden Nature of Man*. (1970). 29 minutes. Insight Media: 800-233-9910, [www.insight-media.com](http://www.insight-media.com). Addresses psychoanalysis, the Oedipal complex, structure of the psyche (id, ego, superego). Format is a dramatized interview with Freud.

*Freud Under Analysis*. Discusses Freud’s methods of analysis, the unconscious, and Freud’s self-analysis. Includes some criticisms of Freudian theory. 58 minutes. 1987. Produced by Nova. Coronet Film & Video: 800-777-8100.

*The Interpretation of Dreams*. (1996.) 52 minutes. <https://www.tubeid.net/watch/download-video/9N4c-_ntE_p/great-books-interpretation-of-dreams-freud.html>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/62277020>. Freud’s work on dream analysis, with commentary by current scholars and therapists.

*Freud's Interpretation of Dreams* (2005). 26 minutes. Produced by Discovery Channel School. Video can be found here: <https://www.academicvideostore.com/video/freuds-interpretation-dreams>. The publication of Sigmund Freud's Interpretation of Dreams revolutionized people's perceptions of their hopes, fears, and fantasies. Using dream-sequence reenactments, this program probes the meaning of dreams. Discovery Enterprises.

*Sigmund Freud: His Offices and Home*. (1975.) 17 minutes. Filmakers Library: 212-808-4980; [www.filmakers.com](http://www.filmakers.com); [www.Academicvideostore.com](http://www.Academicvideostore.com). This has pictures from Vienna and makes you feel like you are really on a guided tour of Freud’s living and working areas.

*Young Doctor Freud*. (2002). 120 minutes (in two parts). Produced by PBS. Available from PBS: <http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=2638460>. Libraries holding this title can be found at <http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/647996709>. The early life and work of Freud. (Note that this video has the same title as a feature-film account of Freud’s life, listed below.)

*Young Dr. Freud: A Film by Axel Corti* (2004). 120 minutes. Available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). A dramatization in the form of a feature-length film about Freud’s life and work, with special emphasis on his early years. (Note that this video has the same title as a more academic treatment of Freud’s life, listed above.)