Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality

- Sigmund Freud
- Levels of Awareness
- Components of Personality
- Defense mechanisms
- Psychosexual stages
- Criticisms and take home message
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

- Jewish background, though avowed atheist
- Lived in Vienna until Nazi occupation in 1938
- Had medical background—wanted to do “neurophysiological research”
- Private practice with specialty in neurology
- Josef Breuer and Anna O.
- Private practice in nervous and brain disorders
Freud (cont.)

- Early 1900s published many works--
  - Interpretation of Dreams (1900)
  - The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1901)
  - 1905 concept of sexual drive being most powerful personality component
- 1906 Psychoanalytic Society formed
- Many works burned in Nazi occupation (starting 1933)
- Left Austria, fled to England 1938
- Died of jaw cancer 1939

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/bhfreu.html
3 Levels of Awareness

- Conscious
- Preconscious
- Unconscious
Conscious

- Current contents of your mind that you actively think of
- What we call working memory
- Easily accessed all the time
Preconscious

- Contents of the mind you are not currently aware of
- Thoughts, memories, knowledge, wishes, feelings
- Available for easy access when needed
Unconscious

- Contents kept out of conscious awareness
- Not accessible at all
- Processes that actively keep these thoughts from awareness
Freudian Components of Personality

- The Id
- The Ego
- The Superego
Id

- Resides completely at the unconscious level
- Acts under the pleasure principle
  - immediate gratification, not willing to compromise
  - Generates all of the personality’s energy
Ego

- Resides in all levels of awareness
- Operates under “reality principle”
- Attempts negotiation between Id and Superego to satisfy both realistically
Superego

- The moralist and idealistic part of the personality
- Resides in preconscious
- Operates on “ideal principle”
  - Begins forming at 4-5 yrs of age
  - Initially formed from environment and others (society, family etc)
  - Internalized conventions and morals
- Essentially your “conscience”
Conflicts of Personality Components

- Conflicts between the Id, Superego and Ego arise in unconscious mind
- Can’t be reached bc in unconscious
- Come out in various ways
  - Slips of tongue (“Freudian slip”)
  - Dreams
  - Jokes
  - Anxiety
  - Defense Mechanisms....
Denial

- Refusal to accept external realities because too threatening to enter awareness
Repression

• Internal impulses and memories too threatening so bared from entering awareness
Projection

- Attribute unacceptable thoughts or impulses onto others (project these inappropriate thoughts etc onto others)
Displacement

- Shifting attention from one target that is no longer available to a more acceptable or “safer” substitute.
Sublimation

- Healthiest defense mechanism
- Compromise
- Takes socially unacceptable impulses and turns them into something positive & acceptable
Reaction Formation

- Converting unacceptable and dangerous impulses into something positive to reduce anxiety.
Rationalization

- Explaining an unacceptable behavior in a way that overlooks present shortcomings or failures
Regression

- Reverting to behavior that is characteristic to an earlier stage of development when confronted with stress or anxiety
Psychosexual Development

• Stages of development in which conflict over Id’s impulses plays out
• Ego must control these impulses
• If not resolved, psychological issues can emerge later in life
Psychosexual Stages

• Oral Stage (0-18 months)
  – Pleasure centering around the mouth (sucking, biting etc)
  – Focus: weaning- becoming less dependent
  – Not resolved? aggression or dependency later in life-- fixation with oral activities (smoking, drinking, nail biting etc.)
Psychosexual Stages

• Oral (0-18 months)

• Anal (18-35 months)
  – Fixation on bowel and bladder elimination
  – Focus: search for control

• Not resolved? anal retentive (rigid and obsessive personality) or anal expulsive (messy and disorganized personality)
Psychosexual Stages

• Oral (0-18 months)
• Anal (18-35 months)
• Phallic (3-6 years)
  – Focus: genital area and difference between males and females
  – Electra Complex or Oedipus Complex
Complexes in the Phallic Stage

• **Oedipus Complex** (boys)
  – Unconscious sexual desires towards mother, father is competition
  – Simultaneously fears the dad- “castration anxiety”

• **Electra Complex** (girls)
  – Unconscious sexual desires towards father and mother is competition
  – Penis envy

• **Resolution?**
  – Kid identifies with same sex parent
Psychosexual Stages

• Oral (0-18 months)
• Anal (18-35 months)
• Phallic (3-6 years)
• Latency (6 yrs to puberty)
  – Sexual interest is repressed
  – Kids play with same sex others-- until puberty
Psychosexual Stage

• Oral (0-18 months)
• Anal (18-35 months)
• Phallic (3-6 years of age)
• Latency (6 yrs to puberty)
• Genital (puberty and beyond)
  – Sexual urges awaken
  – If developed “properly” develop these urges towards opposite sex members with fixation on the genitals
Freud: criticisms and critiques

• He studied very few people so not representative sample
• Process of psychoanalysis interviewing exhibit preconceived notions and biases
• His measures/methods were untreatable
• Definitions don’t lend themselves to experimentation
• One’s personality is fixed and unchanging
• Obsessed with sex and aggression