**The Id, Ego and Superego**

The Structural Model of Personality

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According to [Sigmund Freud's](http://psychology.about.com/od/sigmundfreud/p/sigmund_freud.htm) psychoanalytic theory of personality, personality is composed of three elements. These three elements of personality - known as the id, the ego and the superego - work together to create complex human behaviors.

[**The Id**](http://psychology.about.com/od/iindex/g/def_id.htm)

* The id is the only component of personality that is present from birth.
* This aspect of personality is entirely unconscious and includes of the instinctive and primitive behaviors.
* According to Freud, the id is the source of all psychic energy, making it the primary component of personality.

The id is driven by the [pleasure principle](http://psychology.about.com/od/pindex/g/def_pleasurepri.htm), which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state anxiety or tension.

Interaction of the Id, Ego and Superego

For example, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. The id is very important early in life, because it ensures that an infant's needs are met. If the infant is hungry or uncomfortable, he or she will cry until the demands of the id are met.

However, immediately satisfying these needs is not always realistic or even possible. If we were ruled entirely by the pleasure principle, we might find ourselves grabbing things we want out of other people's hands to satisfy our own cravings. This sort of behavior would be both disruptive and socially unacceptable. According to Freud, the id tries to resolve the tension created by the pleasure principle through the [primary process,](http://psychology.about.com/od/pindex/g/def_primaryproc.htm) which involves forming a mental image of the desired object as a way of satisfying the need.

[**The Ego**](http://psychology.about.com/od/eindex/g/def_ego.htm)

* The ego is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality.
* According to Freud, the ego develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world.
* The ego functions in both the [conscious](http://psychology.about.com/od/cindex/g/def_conscience.htm), [preconscious](http://psychology.about.com/od/pindex/g/def_precons.htm), and [unconscious](http://psychology.about.com/od/uindex/g/def_unconscious.htm) mind.

The ego operates based on the [reality principle](http://psychology.about.com/od/rindex/g/def_realityprin.htm), which strives to satisfy the id's desires in realistic and socially appropriate ways. The reality principle weighs the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act upon or abandon impulses. In many cases, the id's impulses can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification--the ego will eventually allow the behavior, but only in the appropriate time and place.

The ego also discharges tension created by unmet impulses through the [secondary process](http://psychology.about.com/od/sindex/g/def_secondarypr.htm), in which the ego tries to find an object in the real world that matches the mental image created by the id's primary process.

[**The Superego**](http://psychology.about.com/od/sindex/g/def_superego.htm)

The last component of personality to develop is the superego.

* The superego is the aspect of personality that holds all of our internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from both parents and society - our sense of right and wrong.
* The superego provides guidelines for making judgments.
* According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age five.

There are two parts of the superego:

1. [The ego ideal](http://psychology.about.com/od/eindex/g/def_egoideal.htm) includes the rules and standards for good behaviors. These behaviors include those which are approved of by parental and other authority figures. Obeying these rules leads to feelings of pride, value and accomplishment.
2. [The conscience](http://psychology.about.com/od/cindex/g/def_conscience.htm) includes information about things that are viewed as bad by parents and society. These behaviors are often forbidden and lead to bad consequences, punishments or feelings of guilt and remorse.

The superego acts to perfect and civilize our behavior. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the id and struggles to make the ego act upon idealistic standards rather that upon realistic principles. The superego is present in the conscious, preconscious and unconscious.

**The Interaction of the Id, Ego and Superego**

With so many competing forces, it is easy to see how conflict might arise between the id, ego and superego. Freud used the term [ego strength](http://psychology.about.com/od/eindex/g/def_egostrength.htm) to refer to the ego's ability to function despite these dueling forces. A person with good ego strength is able to effectively manage these pressures, while those with too much or too little ego strength can become too unyielding or too disrupting.

According to Freud, the key to a healthy personality is a balance between the id, the ego, and the superego.

**Observations**

* "In discussing the id, ego, and superego, we must keep in mind that these are not three separate entities with sharply defined boundaries, but rather that they represent a variety of different processes, functions, and dynamics within the person... Moreover, in his writings Freud uses the German personal pronouns, *das Es*, *Das Ich*, and *das uber-Ich*. Literally translated they mean "the it," "the I," and "the above-I." The Strachey translation into Latin pronouns has made them less personal, raising the issue of the desirability of attempting a new translation."  
  (Engler, 2009)
* "With the ego placed in the middle, and if all demands are met, the system maintains its balance of psychic power and the outcome is an adjusted personality. If there is imbalance, the outcome is a [maladaptive](http://socialanxietydisorder.about.com/od/glossarym/g/maladaptive.htm) personality. For example, with a dominant id, the outcome could be an impulsive and uncontrollable individual (e.g., a criminal). With an overactive superego, the outcome might be an extremely moralistic individual (e.g., a television evangelist). An overpowering ego could create an individual who is caught up in reality (e.g., extremely rigid and unable to stray from rules or structure), is unable to be spontaneous (e.g., express id impulses), or lacks a personal sense of what is right and wrong (e.g., somebody who goes by the book)."  
  (Carducci, 2009)

References

Carducci, B. (2009). *The psychology of personality: Viewpoints, research, and applications*. John Wiley & Sons.

Engler, B. (2009). *Personality theories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing.

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