

# Interpersonal theory



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Interpersonal Theory To Freud, the personality consists of the id (the source of libido or sexual energy and the aggressive instinct), the ego (the source of reason), and the superego (the source of conscience which guides us towards being more in line with the demands of society). Defense mechanisms protect the ego from unconscious anxiety. They include, among others, repression, projection, displacement (one form of which is sublimation), reaction formation, regression, and denial (Wade, C. & Travis, C, 1993).

Freud believed that personality develops in a series of psychosexual stages, with the phallic (Oedipal) stage the most crucial. During this stage, Freud believed, the Oedipus complex occurs in which the child desires the parent of the other sex and feels rivalry with the same-sex parent. When the Oedipus complex is resolved, the child identifies with the same-sex parent, but females retain a lingering sense of inferiority and "penis envy"—a notion contested by female psychoanalysts like Clara Thompson and Karen Horney (Wade & Travis, 1993).

Carl Jung believed that people share a collective unconscious that contains universal memories and images, or archetypes. Personality, in this view, includes many archetypes, such as the shadow (evil) and the anima and animus. The object-relations school emphasizes the importance of the first two years of life, rather than the Oedipal phase; the infant's relationships to important figures, especially the mother, rather than sexual needs and drives; and the problem in male development of breaking away from the mother (Guntrip, 1961). Thus individuals who are at various stages of development can experience problems in having a well adjusted personality as well as having positive relationships with other people who are around

them.

Most of us have come in contact with people who seem to successfully irritate or frighten people away with their clinginess, significant lack of self esteem, and even anger and threatening behavior. Psychodynamic theories suggest that these individuals adapted this personality style by going through a childhood which was filled with anxiety (Guntrip, 1961). While this manner of dealing with others may have been beneficial in their youth, as adults it serves to almost guarantee their needs will not be met. There are three identified ways of dealing with the world that are formed by an upbringing in a neurotic family: Moving Toward People, Moving Against People, and Moving Away From People (Guntrip, 1961).

Psychodynamic approaches have been criticized for violating the principle of falsifiability; for over generalizing from atypical patients to everyone; and for basing theories on the unreliable memories and retrospective accounts of patients, which can lead to an illusion of causality. However, some psychodynamic ideas have received empirical support, including the existence of nonconscious processes, mental representations, and defenses (Wade, & Travis, 1993).

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Works Cited:

Guntrip, H. (1961). *Personality Structure and Human Interaction*. Hogarth Press.

Wade, C. & Travis, C. (1993). *Psychology*. Harper Collins College Publishers.