

Impact of conflict on structures of the mind



Discuss the impact on an individual of a conflict between the structures of the mind identified by Freud.

This essay will discuss what happens when there is conflict between the structures in an individual's mind. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) developed the Psychoanalytic model during the later stages of the 19th century and its main assumptions were that abnormal behaviour was caused by conflicts in the unconscious mind and these conflicts can usually be tracked back to early childhood experiences. Psychopathology is psychological resulting from the dynamic or changing of the personality rather than physical causes.

According to Freud humans do not have one personality, the psyche is structured in three parts, the id, the ego and the super ego and these three parts develop at different stages in a person's life and all three parts come together to create human behaviour. The id is the only part present at birth and it contains the biological components of a personality that are present at birth and are primitive and instinctive. Eros contains the libido which is the sex and life instinct, helping the person to survive. Thanatos is the death instinct and is aggressive, but Eros is considered to be stronger than Thanatos. The id is the unconscious and impulsive part of the psyche that responds directly to the instincts. According to Freud the personality of a new born baby contains only the id and nothing of the ego or super ego, which develops later in childhood. The id does not change over time and remains childlike throughout a person's life and is not in touch with the outside world. The id operates on the pleasure principle and is not affected by the outside world, logic or reality as it operates in the unconscious part of the mind. The id wants to act on all impulses and should be satisfied

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immediately without thought to consequences. When the id is satisfied a person will experience pleasure, when the id is denied, a person will experience tension. The id is very selfish and has no concept of object reality. The id is vital in a child's early stages ensuring that the child gets fed and changed and because a child is ruled entirely by the id, the needs are met because there is no reasoning with a hungry child, therefore the id's needs are met immediately.' The id tries to reduce the tension created by the pleasure principle through the primary process which involves mentally making an image of the desired item as a way of satisfying the need' [Cherry, 2018, online].

The ego is the voice of reason and squashes the id. It is present in the unconscious, the pre-conscious and the conscious mind. It mediates between the selfish id and the real world. Whereas the id is chaotic and unreasonable, the ego functions by reason and operates according to the reality principle. The ego tries to satisfy the id's needs in a realistic way but may avoid satisfaction in order to avoid negative consequences, it tries to avoid pain and comes up with realistic ways to get pleasure. Ego is part of the id that changes because of external influences and is considered weaker than the id. Rather than overriding the id, the ego changes it. Ego is geared towards solving problems and is rational and realistic and if one thing does not work it will look for another solution. The id's needs can still be met through delayed gratification where the ego eventually allows the behaviour but at the right time, in the right place. The ego calms tension created by unmet needs through the secondary process which ' the id tries to find an

object in the real world that matches the mental image created by the id's primary process' [Cherry, 2018, online].

The super ego can be a party pooper and includes morals and values learned from others, it develops around the ages of 3-5 and controls the negative impulses of the id, the difference between right and wrong. Parts of the ego also strive for perfection. The super ego is present in the unconscious, the pre-conscious and the conscious mind. The ideal self and the conscience make up the super ego and the conscience punishes the ego for giving in to the id creating feelings of guilt. The ideal self or ego-ideal is the best version of oneself and includes how to behave socially and how to treat others. Pride is the reward for behaviour that is consistent with the ideal self from the super ego. When the ideal self is too high a person can be left feeling like a failure.

A mentally sound person has a strong ego, whereas somebody with a dominant super ego restricts pleasure and this causes anxiety and phobias. Psychopathic behaviours stem from unchecked id impulses through a strong or weak ego. Imbalances between the three areas of the psyche can begin in early childhood and the ego which is still developing is not able to deal with trauma. These memories are then repressed or pushed into the unconscious mind because they are too painful for ego to bear. Repressed thoughts are then expressed through psychological disorders such as depression.

Freud suggested that there are stages of development that a child goes through where the id looks for gratification in different areas of the erogenous zone. If the child deprived or over gratified the child can become

fixated at this stage and this can affect behaviour as an adult. The oral stage is pleasure gained from the mouth, eating and sucking. Weaning is the most important developmental achievement. The anal stage is about control, specifically bladder and bowel control. The phallic stage is when the child becomes aware of genitals and gender focus. Oedipus complex when boys are afraid of castration and in love with their mothers. Electra complex is girls who have penis envy and are in love with their fathers. Successful development at this stage equals a firm gender identity. Latent stage focuses on social development- the calm before the storm of adolescence. Genital stage suggests that if conflicts from earlier stages are resolved then the greatest pleasure comes from mature heterosexual relationships.

There are no clear boundaries between the three parts of the psyche and the parts are not three separate entities, they work together influencing a person's overall personality and behaviour. The id, ego and super ego also compete against each other creating conflict. Freud coined the term ego strength to refer to the ego being able to work despite the conflicted forces fighting against it. A person with good ego strength is able to manage these pressures whilst those with too much or too little ego strength can become unyielding or too disrupting [Cherry, K. 2018. Online].

The key to a healthy personality, according to Freud is a balance between the three parts of the psyche. The ego must be able to act as a referee between the selfish id, reality and the super ego to enable the person to have a healthy and well- adjusted personality. Freud believed that imbalances between the three parts would lead to an abnormal personality, for example someone with a massively dominant id might be overly

impulsive, out of control or a criminal. This person acts on the id's every impulse regardless of the consequences or whether the behaviour is acceptable in society. Someone with an extremely dominant super ego can have an overly judgmental attitude and be highly moralistic and are not able to accept anyone who they deem lacking in morals or bad.

A person with a dominant ego can also have problems. This person may not be able to do anything spontaneous because this type of personality is overly tied to rules, reality and behaving appropriately. This person may seem overly rigid and unable to accept any changes whatsoever and may also be lacking an internal sense of right from wrong [Cherry, K. 2018. Online]. The ego has a tough job but it does not work alone, anxiety can play a role in helping to mediate between the demands of the id, the morals of the super ego and the real world. When a person experiences anxiety, the ego's defence mechanisms may kick in to help ease the anxiety.

A defence mechanism is a tactic used by the ego to help protect the person from anxiety and this is thought to protect the mind from thoughts or feelings that are too much for the conscious mind to cope with. Defence mechanisms are thought to keep the conscious mind safe from unwanted thoughts and impulses. In order to deal with anxiety, Freud suggested that these defence mechanisms help to shield the ego from the conflicts created by the id, the super ego and the real world. When the ego cannot cope with the demands of the id and the super ego, anxiety appears. Anxiety acts as a warning to the ego that everything is not alright and it employs it's defence mechanism.

Freud suggested that there were three types of anxiety and not all were equal or came from the same place. Neurotic anxiety is the unconscious idea that the person will lose control of the id and end up getting punished for the inappropriate behaviour. Reality anxiety is the fear of things happening in the real world and this is usually easy to identify, for example a person may be afraid of getting bitten by a snake when they see a poisonous snake. The easiest way to reduce this anxiety is to remove themselves from the situation. Moral anxiety is a fear of breaking the person's moral principles.

In many cases these defence mechanisms work unconsciously to distort reality, for example being tasked with a job a person may not want to do, the mind may choose to forget about that person's responsibility. There are other defence mechanisms that the ego uses including displacement, which is taking anger out on someone else. Denial is a refusal to admit that something has happened because it is too painful for the person to face. Projection is projecting the person's bad thoughts onto someone else, making it their fault instead. Repression is putting something that is painful or traumatic into the unconscious part of the mind, these memories do not disappear and continue to influence the persons behaviour, for instance if there is child abuse in the persons early years then the person may have difficulty forming relationships. Sublimation is the mechanism that changes the behaviour in to something more acceptable, for instance, getting anger out in a sport such as karate. Regression is acting out behaviour from the psychosexual stage of development that they are fixated on, for instance someone fixated on the oral stage may be verbally aggressive or eat too

much. Somebody fixated on the anal stage may be overly tidy or overly untidy.

In conclusion, the human body uses the ego's defence mechanisms to enable the person cope with the challenges of everyday life. Fixation at any of the psychosexual stages affects the person's behaviour in later life.

Conflict between the parts of the psyche affects the person's personality and behaviour and the ego's defence mechanisms keep the selfish id and the moralistic super ego in check. Without the ego acting as a referee the selfish id would act on every impulse, appropriate or not and the super ego would be overly judgemental and moralistic. There is, however no scientific proof to back up Freud's theories because there is no way of measuring what goes on in the unconscious mind.

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