Although people have speculated about the nature of personality throughout history, the first acknowledged personality theorist did not emerge until the late 1800s. Then an Austrian neurologist began proposing such outrageous notions as the existence of sexual desires in young children, unconscious causes for baffling physical disorders, and treatment through a time-consuming, expensive procedure in which patients lie on a couch while the doctor listens to them talk about seemingly irrelevant topics. That neurologist, Sigmund Freud, continued to develop, promote, and defend his ideas despite intense criticism. By the time of his death in 1939, Freud had written numerous volumes, had established himself as the leader of an important intellectual movement, and had changed the thinking of psychologists, writers, parents, and laypeople for years to come.

Freud's influence on 21st-century thought is so widespread that most of us fail to appreciate the extent to which his theory has become part of our thinking. For example, if you are like most adults in this culture, you freely accept the idea that what you do is sometimes influenced by an unconscious part of your mind. Most of us have said something like "I must have done that unconsciously" or pondered what sort of hidden psychological meaning might be behind a friend or loved one's unusual behavior. Although Freud was not the first to talk about the unconscious, no one before or since has placed so much emphasis on unconscious processes in explaining human behavior. Similarly, when we wonder whether our dreams reveal our inner fears and desires, we are espousing an idea Freud popularized. Although people have interpreted dreams for thousands of years, Freud was the first to incorporate dream interpretation into a larger psychological theory.

References to Freudian theory permeate our culture. As one writer put it, "Freud's theories of the subconscious mind … have had a dramatic impact on contemporary film, theater, novels, political campaigning, advertising, legal argument and even religion" (Fisher, 1995). English students learn Freudian psychology when studying the themes in great literature; theology students debate Freud's views on religion. Even our language has not escaped. It is not uncommon to hear people mention Freudian slips, denial, libido, repression, and other Freudian concepts in everyday conversations. But perhaps the most telling tribute to Freud's impact is that nearly every major theorist covered in this book has felt compelled to use Freud's works as a point of comparison for his or her own ideas about the nature of personality. Appropriately, this chapter begins with an examination of Freud's theory of personality.

Freud Discovers the Unconscious

How did a Viennese neurologist come to change the way we think of humankind? There is little in Freud's early history to indicate that greatness awaited him. Although Freud was a respected member of the medical community, his interests began to drift. In 1885, he went to Paris to study with another neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot. Charcot was experimenting with early versions of hypnosis and its use in curing what were then believed to be unusual physiological problems. Shortly thereafter, Freud returned to Vienna and began work with a prominent

physician, Joseph Breuer. Like Charcot, Breuer was using hypnosis to treat hysteria. Hysterical patients display a variety of physical symptoms, such as blindness, deafness, and an inability to walk or to use an arm. Physicians of that day treated hysteria as if it were a physically based illness. However, Breuer and Freud developed another interpretation.

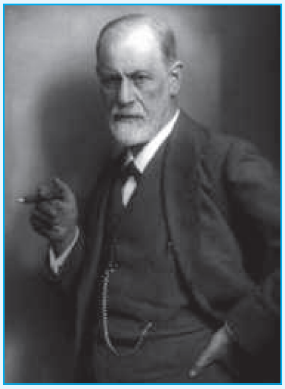
Their discussions about one of Breuer's patients, Anna O. (real name, Bertha Pappenheim), probably set the direction for the rest of Freud's career. Anna O. experienced a number of hysterical symptoms, including paralysis of her left arm, hallucinations, and the ability to speak only in other languages even though her native tongue was German. Under hypnosis, Anna O. would talk about her daydreams and hallucinations and about past traumatic events. During her final hypnosis session, she discussed her dying father and some associated hallucinations about a black snake. After this session, the paralysis in her arm was gone, and she could once again speak German.

In 1895, Freud and Breuer published *Studies in Hysteria*, in which they presented the case of Anna O. and discussed their use of hypnosis in treating hysteria. Freud continued to use hypnosis to treat his hysterical patients, but he soon grew disillusioned with its limitations and began looking for alternative methods. Slowly, he recognized the importance of allowing patients to say whatever came into their mind. He discovered that, even without hypnosis, under the right circumstances patients would describe previously hidden material that seemed related to the causes and cure of their hysterical symptoms. Refinement of this technique, called **free association,** was a significant step in the development of Freud's theory.

One startling discovery Freud reported in his early patients was that memories uncovered during free association often concerned traumatic sexual experiences, many of which supposedly had occurred in early childhood. He gradually concluded that these early sexual experiences were responsible for the hysterical symptoms expressed by his adult patients. At this point, Freud was well along the way in his transition from neurologist to psychologist. He continued to work with hysterical patients and wrote about his observations and the development of his theories, convinced that he was on the threshold of important psychological discoveries.

But Freud's writings sold poorly at first. In fact, his work met with great opposition in the academic and medical communities. Freud's open discussion of infantile sexuality and omnipresent sexual motives did not sit well with the puritanical standards of Victorian Europe. His approach to treatment was so radical that many respected physicians considered it absurd. Nonetheless, Freud continued his work and his writing and soon developed a small following of scholars who traveled to Vienna to study with him. These scholars formed the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, with Freud as its great figurehead and leader. Later, many members of the society would come to disagree with Freud and leave the ranks to develop their own personality theories and form their own professional organizations. However, as described in Chapter 5, the flavor of their theories remained unmistakably Freudian.

Sigmund Freud 1856–1939



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Sigmund Freud was born in 1856 in Freiberg, Moravia (now part of the Czech Republic). In 1860, his family moved to Vienna, where Freud spent virtually the rest of his life. Freud's ambition to amount to something important surfaced early. He enrolled in medical school at the University of Vienna determined to make an important discovery and thereby a name for himself.

Freud began his quest while working in his instructor's medical laboratory. But immediate scientific breakthroughs were not forthcoming, and he soon became discouraged at his chances for advancement. In addition, he had fallen in love with Martha Bernays and wanted to earn enough money to marry her and give her a comfortable lifestyle. So, upon completing his degree, Freud left the lab and went into private practice.

During his subsequent 4-year engagement to Bernays (they were finally married in 1886), Freud won a research grant to travel to Paris to observe Jean-Martin Charcot's work with hypnosis. It was during this time that he began to develop his ideas about the power of the unconscious mind. His work with Joseph Breuer, observations of his own patients, and a great deal of introspection led to his 1900 book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Although it took several years to *sell* the 600 original printings, the book's publication was the first step toward achieving the widespread recognition Freud had sought back in medical school.

Something about Freud has attracted the attention of numerous biographers. The most complete of these is the three-volume biography by Ernest Jones (1953–1957). Although he sought fame, in many ways Freud was a private person. Consequently, most biographers have glued together the facts we have about Freud's life with a large amount of speculation. Perhaps, the most interesting part of this speculation concerns the extent to which Freud's description of human personality reflects his own personality and life experiences. Not surprisingly, Freud's relationship with his parents is of particular interest. Although his father had several children from an earlier marriage, Sigmund was his mother's first child and the apple of her eye. His mother was only 21 when he was born and almost as close in age to her son as she was to her husband. Biographers agree that an especially close relationship was formed. Freud's mother sometimes referred to him as her "Golden Sigi." In contrast, Freud's relationship with his father appears to have been cold, if not occasionally hostile. Freud arrived late to his father's funeral, something he later identified as clearly unconsciously motivated. Freud struggled with guilt feelings over his relationship with his father many years after his father's death.

It is not difficult to see how Freud's description of the Oedipus complex—sexual attraction for the mother and competitive hostility toward the father—may have been a kind of projection of his own feelings toward his parents. Freud hints at this insight at many places in his writings. Indeed, he often relied on his own introspection to test the accuracy of his clinical intuition. He is reported to have reserved a half hour each night for this self-analysis.

Freud's marriage was a long and relatively happy one, producing six children. The youngest child, Anna, held a special place in her father's heart. She followed in his professional footsteps, eventually taking over a leadership role in the psychoanalytic movement and becoming a respected psychoanalytic theorist in her own right. Freud created a situation filled with interesting Oedipal possibilities when he conducted Anna's psychoanalysis himself.

Freud and his family fled from their home and from Nazi persecution when Germany invaded Austria in 1938. They escaped to London, where Freud died of cancer the following year.

Gradually, Freud's ideas gained acceptance within the growing field of psychology. In 1909, Freud was invited to the United States to present a series of lectures on psychoanalysis at Clark University. For Freud, the occasion marked the beginning of international recognition of his work. However, resistance to psychoanalysis by academic psychologists kept Freud's theory out of American textbooks for another quarter of a century (Fancher, 2000). Freud continued to develop his theory and write about psychoanalysis until his death in 1939. Many consider Freud the most influential psychologist in the history of the field. A *Time* magazine cover story at the end of the 20th century featured a picture of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, identifying the two as "The Century's Greatest Minds."

We begin our examination of this influential perspective by looking at classic Freudian theory. Contemporary advocates of the psychoanalytic approach vary in the degree to which they agree with Freud's initial descriptions of personality (Westen, 1998). Most accept key psychoanalytic concepts, such as the importance of unconscious thoughts. But modern psychoanalytic psychologists typically back away from other aspects of Freudian theory, such as his description of infantile sexuality. Nonetheless, you need to understand what Freud said before deciding which parts make sense to you and which parts to jettison. More than a century after introducing psychoanalysis to the world, the Viennese neurologist still casts a large shadow across the field of personality.

The Freudian Theory of Personality

The Topographic Model

The starting point for understanding the Freudian approach is the division of the human personality into three parts. Freud originally divided personality into the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. This division is known as the **topographic model.** The **conscious** contains the thoughts you are currently aware of. This material changes constantly as new thoughts enter your mind and others pass out of awareness. When you say something is "on your mind," you probably mean the conscious part of your mind. However, the conscious can deal with only a tiny percentage of all the information stored in your mind. You could bring an uncountable number of thoughts into consciousness fairly easily if you wanted to. For example, what did you have for breakfast? Who was your third-grade teacher? What did you do last Saturday night? This large body of retrievable information makes up the **preconscious.**

Although many people consider the material in the conscious and preconscious to be fairly exhaustive of the thoughts in their minds, Freud described these as merely the tip of the iceberg. The vast majority of thoughts, and the most important from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, are found in the **unconscious.** This is material to which you have no immediate access. According to Freud, you cannot bring unconscious thoughts into consciousness except under certain extreme situations. Nonetheless, this unconscious material is responsible for much of your everyday behavior. Understanding the influence of the unconscious is the key to appreciating the psychoanalytic perspective.

The Structural Model

"In its relation to the id, [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse, [but] is obliged to guide it where it wants to go."

Sigmund Freud*

*Excerpts from *Collected Papers*, Vol. III by Sigmund Freud. Authorized translation under the supervision of Alix and James Strachey. Published by Basic Books, Inc. by arrangement with the Hogarth Press Ltd. and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London.

Freud soon discovered that the topographic model provided a limited description of human personality. He therefore added the **structural model,** which divides personality into the id, the ego, and the superego. Just as you often say, "One part of me wants to do one thing, and another part wants to do something else," so did Freud conceive of the personality as made up of parts often not at peace with one another.

Freud maintained that at birth there is but one personality structure, the **id.** This is the selfish part of you, concerned only with satisfying your personal desires. Actions taken by the id are based on the *pleasure principle*. In other words, the id is concerned only with what brings immediate personal satisfaction regardless of physical or social limitations. When babies see something they want, they reach for it. It doesn't matter whether the object belongs to someone else or that it may be harmful. And this reflexive action doesn't disappear when we become adults. Rather, Freud maintained, our id impulses are ever present, held in check by the other parts of a healthy adult personality.

Obviously, if the id were to rely only on reflexive action to get what it wants, our pleasure impulses would be frustrated most of the time. Therefore, Freud proposed that the id also uses *wish fulfillment* to satisfy its needs. That is, if the desired object is not available, the id will imagine what it wants. If a baby is hungry and doesn't see food nearby, the id imagines the food and thereby at least temporarily satisfies the need. As discussed later in this chapter, Freud argued that our dreams also are a type of wish fulfillment.

As shown in Figure 3.1, Freud described the id as buried entirely in the unconscious and therefore outside of our awareness. Indeed, because many id impulses center on themes of sexuality and aggression, it is probably good that we are not aware of this unconscious material.

As children interact with their environment during the first 2 years of life, the second part of the personality structure gradually develops. The actions of the **ego** are based on the *reality principle*. That is, the primary job of the ego is to satisfy id impulses, but in a manner that takes into consideration the realities of the world. Because id impulses tend to be socially unacceptable, they are threatening to us. The ego's job is to keep these impulses in the unconscious. Unlike the id, your ego moves freely among the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious parts of your mind.

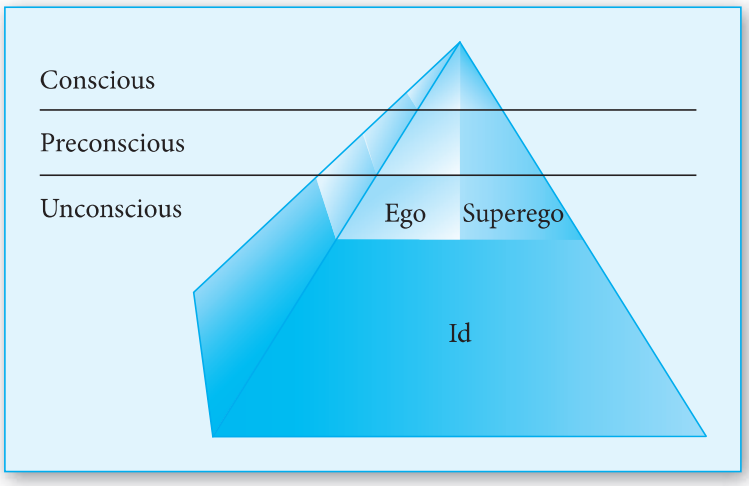

Figure 3.1
Relationship of the Id, Ego, and Superego to the Three Levels of Awareness

However, the ego's function is not simply to frustrate the aims of the id. Freud maintained that human behavior is directed toward reducing tension, such as the tension we feel when impulsive needs—even unconscious ones—are unmet. Very young children might be allowed to grab food off their parents' plates and thereby reduce tension. But as infants mature, they learn the physical and social limits on what they can and cannot do. Your id impulse may be to grab whatever food is around. But your ego understands this action is unacceptable. The ego tries to satisfy the wants of the id, and thus lessen tension, but in a way that considers the consequences of the action.

By the time a child is about 5 years old, the third part of the personality structure is formed. The **superego** represents society's—and, in particular, the parents'—values and standards. The superego places more restrictions on what we can and cannot do. If you see a $5 bill sitting on a table at a friend's house, your id impulse might be to take the money. Your ego, aware of the problems this might cause, attempts to figure out how to get the $5 without being caught. But even if there is a way to get the money without being seen, your superego will not allow the action. Stealing money is a violation of society's moral code, even if you don't get caught. The primary weapon the superego brings to the situation is guilt. If you take the money anyway, you'll probably feel bad about it later and may lose a few nights' sleep before returning the $5 to your friend. Some people have roughly translated the concept of the superego into what is called *conscience*.

But the superego does not merely punish us for moral violations after the fact. Even thinking about doing something wrong can trigger feelings of guilt, thereby keeping most of us in line with societal standards. However, some children fail to fully develop their superegos. As adults, these people have little inward restraint from stealing or lying. In other people, the superego can become too powerful and burden the ego with impossible standards of perfection. In this case, the person may suffer from relentless *moral anxiety*—an ever-present feeling of shame and guilt—for failing to reach standards no human can meet.

Like forces pulling at three corners to form a triangle, the desires of the id, ego, and superego complement and contradict one another. In the healthy individual, a strong ego does not allow the id or the superego too much control over the personality. But the battle is never ending. In each of us, somewhere below our awareness, there exists an eternal state of tension between a desire for self-indulgence, a concern for reality, and the enforcement of a strict moral code.

Libido and Thanatos

The topographic model provides the playing field; the structural model provides the characters. But what sets Freud's system in motion? Freud maintained that human behavior is motivated by strong internal forces he called *Triebe*, roughly translated as drives or instincts. Freud identified two major categories of instincts: the life or sexual instinct, generally referred to as *libido*, and the death or aggressive instinct, known as *Thanatos*. Although Freud originally maintained that these forces were in opposition, he later suggested that the two often combine, thus intertwining much of what we do with both erotic and aggressive motives.