**The Psychoanalytic Perspective**

This approach to the study of personality comes from **Sigmund Freud's** psychoanalytic theory that proposes that childhood sexuality and unconscious motivations influence personality. It is important to understand the following terms:

1. **Psychoanalysis**- Technique of treating psychological disorders by seeking to expose and interpret unconscious tensions Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality sought to explain what he observed during psychoanalysis.
2. **Free Association** -Method of exploring the unconscious. The patient relaxes and says whatever comes to mind, no matter how trivial or embarrassing.
3. **The Unconscious**-To Freud it is a reservoir of mostly unacceptable thoughts, wishes, feelings and memories. In contemporary terms, it is the place for information processing of which we are unaware.
4. **Preconscious**- information that is not conscious but is retrievable into conscious awareness.

***Freudian Personality Structure***  
  
Freud believed that personality arose from the conflicts between three interacting and conflicting systems: the id, ego, and superego.

1. **ID**- Described as the pool of psychological drives that arise from physiological needs for such things as food, water, warmth, sexual gratification, etc. It operates on the **"pleasure principle"** in that it seeks only its own pleasure with no regard for logic or reason. According to Freud, the id is like a selfish, demanding and impulsive child.
2. **SUPEREGO**- The part of personality that represents the moral standards of society; it is the **voice of conscience**. A strong superego may impose guilt and it demands restraint. A weak superego may be self-indulgent and remorseless.
3. **EGO**- Defined as the conscious, **"executive"** part of one's personality in that it mediates among the demands of the id, superego and reality. The ego operates on the reality principle and strives to satisfy the id's desires without causing feeling of guilt or remorse.

***Defense Mechanisms***  
According to the psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanisms are mental strategies used by the ego to protect itself from anxiety.   
  
**Repression** is considered the most basic defense mechanism that pushes anxiety-arousing thoughts, feelings and memories into the unconscious; the ultimate aim of all defense mechanisms. A so-called "Freudian slip" is considered an incomplete repression, an anxiety-arousing thought that has "slipped" out. (How many Freudian's does it take to change a light bulb?  Two.  One to screw in the bulb and the other to hold the penis... oops, I mean the ladder.)

Other defense mechanisms include:

1. **Regression**- occurs when a person faced with anxiety behaves in a way characteristic of an earlier more infantile stage of life.  For example, a person gets dumped by a boyfriend or girlfriend and starts turning to comfort foods to make themselves feel better.  This is an example of regressing to the oral stage.
2. **Reaction Formation**- occurs when the ego unconsciously replaces an anxiety-producing impulse with its opposite. People may express feelings that are the opposite of their anxiety-arousing unconscious feelings. For example, a person strongly attracted to pornography may vehemently protest against the distribution of it. ("Methinks the lady doth protest too much")
3. **Projection**- this occurs when people unknowingly attribute their own objectionable impulses to others. For example, a cheating husband may be suspicious of his wife and accuse her of being unfaithful. ("The thief thinks everyone else is a thief.")
4. **Displacement**- this is a defense mechanism that occurs when a person "transfers" unacceptable feeling from the appropriate target to a "safer" one. For example, a person belittled by his boss or his peers may return home and vent his anger on his wife and children.
5. **Sublimation**- forbidden impulses are redirected toward a more socially acceptable goal like painting a picture or exercising.
6. **Rationalization**- this occurs when one attempts to justify the reasons for one's actions in an attempt to avoid facing the real, less acceptable reason.

***Personality Development***  
  
Freud believed that a person's personality was developed very early in life. He felt that a child passes through various "psychosexual stages" of development during which the id's pleasure-seeking energies focus on distinct erogenous zones. He believed that the more significant influences on personality arise from the unconscious, which contains emotions connected to early childhood experiences. Freud's Psychosexual Stages include the following:

1. **Oral (0-18 months)**: Pleasure focuses on the mouth (sucking, biting, chewing).
2. **Anal (18-36 months)**: Pleasure involves bowel and bladder elimination. During this time toilet training is usually imposed and the child must cope with demands for control.
3. **Phallic (3-6 years)**: Pleasure involves the genitals. At this time Freud believed that a young boy develops an "Oedipus Complex" where a boy develops sexual desires towards his mother and feelings of jealousy and hatred for his father, who is a rival for his mother's affection and attention.  This is resolved when the boy concludes he cannot compete with his father who much bigger (and can cut off his penis - castration anxiety) so the only way to "possess" his mother is vicariously, by becoming like his father.  This is how a boy develops his male identity.  Freud says that girls go through similar stages called the "Electra Complex" but also have **Penis Envy**where they realize they do not have a penis like their brothers and father.  Since they want a penis, and can never have one, they always remain somewhat fixated at this stage.
4. **Latency** (ages 6 to puberty): Dormant sexual feelings and children are busy focusing on social situations and play mostly with peers of the same sex.
5. **Genital** (puberty+): Maturation of sexual interests and the development of sexual attraction towards others.

**Fixation** was a term used by Freud to describe a lingering focus of pleasure-seeking energies at an earlier psychosexual stage, where conflicts were unresolved (can occur in the oral, anal or phallic stage). For example, according to Freud, if parents are too lax or too strict with toilet training that person will never resolve the anal conflict (the conflict between the child's id impulses- wanting to use the bathroom now - and society's rules - learning to control the urge until you get to a bathroom).  An anal retentive person (too strict toilet training) may be highly controlled and compulsively neat.  An anal expulsive person (too lax toilet training) may be messy and disorganized.  
  
**Neo-Freudians**  
  
Freud's descendants continued to accept his basic ideas on personality structure and development, the unconscious mind, and the role of defense mechanisms in the reduction of stress. They however emphasized a conscious interpretation of experience criticized Freud's emphasis on sex and aggression as all-consuming motivators. Take note of the following neo-Freudians:

1. **Alfred Adler**- focused on the importance of childhood **social** tension in personality development and not sexual tension.
2. **Karen Horney**- sought to balance Freud's masculine biases and disagreed with his theory of penis envy.
3. **Carl Jung**- emphasized the idea of a **collective unconscious**the concept of a shared, inherited reservoir of memory traces from our species' history. He believed that the unconscious held more than just repressed thoughts and feelings.

***How do You Assess The "Unconscious" Mind?***  
  
To evaluate the contents of the unconscious mind, psychoanalysts are not interested in objective tests that assess conscious knowledge. Instead, they wish to reveal and to explore hidden conflicts and impulses. **Projective personality tests**attempt to assess the unconscious by providing ambiguous stimuli designed to trigger the projection of one's inner feelings. Two examples include:

1. **Thematic Apperception Test**(TAT)- a projective test in which people express their inner feelings and interests through the stories they make up about ambiguous pictures.
2. **Rorschach Inkblot Test**- designed by Hermann Rorschach, it is the most widely used projective test and uses a set of 10 inkblots to identify people's inner feelings by analyzing their interpretations of the blots.

***Evaluating the psychoanalytic perspective***  
Critics have suggested that Freud's ideas lack good scientific evidence and offer only after-the fact explanations with no predictive validity. Developmental psychologists argue that personality development is lifelong and not completed in childhood, while gender identity (the sense of being male or female) occurs much earlier in childhood than Freud has suggested and research has shown that gender identity occurs even without a same-sex parent as a role model. Lastly, although there are cases of repressed memories, more often negative and traumatic events are remembered well.

Having said that, Freud's ideas changed people's perspectives in that they drew attention to the unconscious, to the effects of anxiety and our ability to cope with it, and to our struggle with balancing biological impulses and social acceptance. His language, which included the terms ego, repression, "anal", fixation, and having a complex is the source of many expressions that we use today.