

**PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH OF SIGMUND FREUD CONCEPT OF *ID, EGO AND SUPEREGO* LEADING TOWARDS THE PATH OF SELF DISCOVERY IN THE LENSE OF A SHORT STORY THE SECRET SHARER BY JOSEPH CONRAD**

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**Abstract:**

*The purpose of this research article is to explore and imply the psychoanalytical thematic study of an Austrian Neurologist and Founder of Psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud's concept of ID, EGO AND SUPEREGO to a short story of Joseph Conrad "The Secret Sharer." The research paper further explores that how Freud's theory helps us to understand the path leading towards the struggle in self-discovery.*

**Keywords:**

ID, EGO AND SUPEREGO, Psychoanalytical Themes, The Secret Sharer by Joseph Conrad.

**Introduction:**

**Sigmund Freud (1856—1939)**

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, was a physiologist, medical doctor, psychologist and influential thinker of the early twentieth century. Working initially in close collaboration with Joseph Breuer, Freud elaborated the theory that the mind is a complex energy-system, the structural investigation of which is the proper province of psychology. He articulated and refined the concepts of the unconscious, infantile sexuality and repression, and he proposed a tripartite account of the mind's structure—all as part of a radically new conceptual and therapeutic frame of reference for the understanding of human psychological development and the treatment of abnormal mental conditions. Notwithstanding the multiple manifestations of psychoanalysis as it exists today, it can in almost all fundamental respects be traced directly back to Freud's original work.

Freud's innovative treatment of human actions, dreams, and indeed of cultural artifacts as invariably possessing implicit symbolic significance has proven to be extraordinarily fruitful, and has had massive implications for a wide variety of fields including psychology, anthropology, semiotics, and artistic creativity and appreciation. However, Freud's most important and frequently re-iterated claim, that with psychoanalysis he had invented a successful science of the mind, remains the subject of much critical debate and controversy.

**Concept of ID, EGO AND SUPEREGO:**

**Origins**

Freud's work wasn't based on empirical research, but on his observations and case studies of his patients and others, so his ideas are often viewed with skepticism. Nonetheless, Freud was an enormously prolific thinker and his theories are still considered important. In fact, his concepts and theories are the foundation of psychoanalysis, an approach to psychology that is still studied today.

Freud's personality theory was influenced by earlier ideas about the mind working at conscious and unconscious levels. Freud believed that early childhood experiences are filtered through the id, ego, and superego, and the way an individual handles these experiences, consciously and unconsciously, shapes personality in adulthood.

### **Id**

According to Freud, the id is the earliest part of the personality to emerge. The id is present at birth and runs on pure instinct, desire, and need. It is entirely unconscious and encompasses the most primitive part of the personality, including basic biological drives and reflexes.

The id is motivated by the pleasure principle, which wants to gratify all impulses immediately. If the id's needs aren't met, it creates tension. However, because all desires cannot be fulfilled right away, those needs may be satisfied, at least temporarily, through primary process thinking in which the individual fantasizes about what they desire.

Newborns' behavior is driven by the id—they are concerned only with having their needs met. The id never grows up. Throughout life, it remains infantile because, as an unconscious entity, it never considers reality. As a result, the id remains illogical and selfish. The ego and the superego develop to keep the id in check.

### **Ego**

The second part of the personality, the ego, arises from the id. Its job is to acknowledge and deal with reality, ensuring that the id's impulses are reigned in and expressed in socially acceptable ways.

The ego operates from the reality principle, which works to satisfy the id's desires in the most reasonable and realistic ways. The ego may do this by delaying gratification, compromising, or acting in ways that will avoid the negative consequences of going against society's norms and rules.

Such rational thinking is referred to as secondary process thinking. It is geared towards problemsolving and reality-testing, enabling the person to maintain self-control. Like the id, the ego is interested in seeking pleasure, however, it wants to do so in a realistic way. The ego is not concerned with right and wrong, but with how to maximize pleasure and minimize pain without getting into trouble.

The ego operates at conscious, preconscious, and unconscious levels. The ego's consideration of reality is conscious. However, it may also keep forbidden desires hidden by unconsciously repressing them. Much of the ego's functioning is also preconscious, meaning it happens below awareness but takes little effort to bring those thoughts into consciousness.

Freud initially used the term ego to reference one's sense of self. Often, when we use the term in everyday conversation—such as when we say someone has a “big ego”—we are using it in this sense. Yet, the term ego in Freud's theory of personality no longer refers to the self-concept but to functions like judgment, regulation, and control.

### **Superego**

The superego is the final part of the personality, emerging between the ages of 3 and 5, the phallic stage in Freud's stages of psychosexual development. Freud says that the superego is the moral

compass of the personality, upholding a sense of right and wrong, values that are initially learned from one's parents. However, the superego continues to grow over time, enabling children to adopt moral standards from other people they admire, such as teachers.

The superego consists of two components: the conscious and the ego ideal. The conscious is the part of the superego that forbids unacceptable behaviors and punishes with feelings of guilt when a person does something they should not. The ego ideal, or ideal self, includes the rules and standards of good behavior one should adhere to. If one is successful in adhering to these behavioral standards, it leads to feelings of pride. However, if the standards of the ego ideal are too high, the person might feel like a failure and experience guilt.

The superego not only controls the id and its impulses towards societal taboos, like sex and aggression, but it also attempts to get the ego to go beyond realistic standards and aspire to moralistic ones. The superego works at conscious and unconscious levels. People are often aware of their ideas of right and wrong but sometimes these ideals impact us unconsciously.

### **The Mediating Ego**

The id, ego, and superego interact constantly. Ultimately, though, it's the ego that serves as the mediator between the id, the superego, and reality. The ego must determine how to meet the needs of the id, while upholding social reality and the moral standards of the superego.

A healthy personality is the result of a balance between the id, ego, and superego. A lack of balance leads to difficulties. If a person's id dominates their personality, they may act on their impulses without considering the rules of society. This can cause them to spin out of control and even lead to legal troubles. If the superego dominates, the person can become rigidly moralistic, negatively judging anyone who doesn't meet their standards. Finally if the ego becomes dominant, it can lead to an individual who is so tied to the rules and norms of society that they become inflexible, unable to deal with change, and incapable of coming to a personal concept of right and wrong.

### **Critique**

Many critiques have been leveled at Freud's theory of personality. For example, the idea that the id is the dominant component of personality is considered problematic, especially Freud's emphasis on unconscious drives and reflexes, like the sexual drive. This perspective minimizes and oversimplifies the intricacies of human nature.

In addition, Freud believed that the superego emerges in childhood because children fear harm and punishment. However, research has shown that children whose greatest fear is punishment only appear to develop morals—their real motivation is to avoid getting caught and prevent harm. A sense of morality actually develops when child experiences love and wants to keep it. To do so, they engage in behavior that exemplifies their parents' morals and, therefore, will gain their approval.

Despite these criticisms, Freud's ideas about the id, the ego, and the superego have been, and continue to be, highly influential in the field of psychology.

### **"The Secret Sharer" and Freud's Concepts:**

"The Secret Sharer" tells the story of a young sea captain who shelters Leggatt, a fugitive who has killed a man on another ship. We can analyze the characters and their actions using Freud's model

#### **Leggatt as the Id:**

Leggatt embodies the Id. He acts on impulse, killing a man in a moment of perceived necessity. His primary concern is survival and avoiding the consequences of his actions.

His presence represents the captain's own repressed, instinctual desires. The captain is drawn to Leggatt's boldness and the raw expression of his impulses.

Leggatt shows little to no remorse, and is focused on his own preservation. This is a very Id driven action.

#### **The Captain as the Ego:**

The captain's struggle is the central conflict in the story. He is constantly trying to balance his sympathy for Leggatt (his Id) with his responsibilities as a captain (his Superego).

He engages in complex calculations, weighing the risks and benefits of hiding Leggatt. He is the mediator, attempting to find a solution that satisfies both his moral and instinctual needs. His internal conflict is the Ego at work. He must deal with the reality of the situation, while also dealing with his inner self.

The captain's growing identification with Leggatt also shows the power of the Id, and how it can influence the Ego.

#### **The Societal Expectations and the Captain's Superego:**

The expectations of the maritime code, the potential consequences of being caught harboring a fugitive, and the internalized sense of duty all represent the Superego.

The captain's anxiety and fear of discovery stem from the Superego's pressure. He is constantly worried about being judged and punished for his actions.

The crew, and the other captain, also represent this superego, as they are the embodiment of the societal rules that the captain is breaking.

The captain's choice to sail so close to shore in order to let Leggatt escape, is the Ego overriding the superego, in order to satisfy the Id.

#### **Thematic Implications**

**The Shadow Self:** Leggatt serves as the captain's "shadow self," representing the repressed aspects of his personality. By sheltering Leggatt, the captain confronts and integrates these aspects.

**Identity and Doubling:** The story explores the theme of identity and doubling. The captain sees a reflection of himself in Leggatt, blurring the lines between their personalities. This reflects the internal struggle between the different parts of the psyche.

**Moral Ambiguity:** Conrad challenges traditional notions of morality by presenting a situation where the "right" course of action is unclear. The captain's decision to help Leggatt highlights the complexities of human nature and the conflict between individual desires and societal expectations.

Growth and Self-Discovery: The captain's experience leads to a deeper understanding of himself and his own capabilities. He emerges from the ordeal more confident and self-assured, suggesting the transformative power of confronting one's inner conflicts.

In essence, "The Secret Sharer" provides a rich psychological landscape for exploring Freud's concepts. The story's enduring appeal lies in its exploration of the universal human struggle to reconcile our instinctual desires with our moral obligations.

### **Freud's theory leading towards the struggle in self-discovery**

Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides a lens through which the arduous path of self-discovery can be understood, highlighting the internal conflicts that shape this journey.

Central to this understanding is Freud's tripartite model of the psyche: the id, ego, and superego. The inherent tension between the id's instinctual drives and the superego's moral imperatives creates an internal battlefield that individuals must navigate (Freud, 1923). The ego's role as mediator in this conflict necessitates a constant process of negotiation, forcing individuals to confront their desires and values, thereby prompting introspection. Furthermore, Freud's emphasis on the unconscious mind underscores the significance of bringing hidden motivations and repressed experiences to conscious awareness, a crucial element in self-discovery. This process of uncovering and resolving internal conflicts, often involving the confrontation of one's "shadow self," is fundamental to achieving a deeper understanding of one's identity. In essence, Freud's theoretical framework illuminates the psychological struggles inherent in self-discovery, demonstrating that it is a process of reconciling internal forces and gaining insight into the unconscious.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Freud's psychoanalytic theory, with its emphasis on the interplay between the id, ego, and superego, offers a powerful framework for understanding the often turbulent journey of self-discovery. By illuminating the internal conflicts that arise from the clash between instinctual desires and moral constraints, Freud's model reveals the psychological undercurrents that drive individuals to seek deeper self-understanding. The process of navigating these internal struggles, confronting the shadow self, and bringing unconscious motivations to light ultimately leads to a more integrated and authentic sense of identity. Thus, Freud's work underscores that self-discovery is not a passive endeavor, but an active and often challenging process of reconciling the multifaceted aspects of the human psyche.

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