

So, tell me  
about your  
childhood.

A brief introduction to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis

# Sigmund Freud



- 1856 - 1939.
- The conscious and unconscious mind.
- Instincts and sexuality.
- A huge influence.

# WHAT'S ON A MAN'S MIND





*Haka Peep Show, The Octagon*

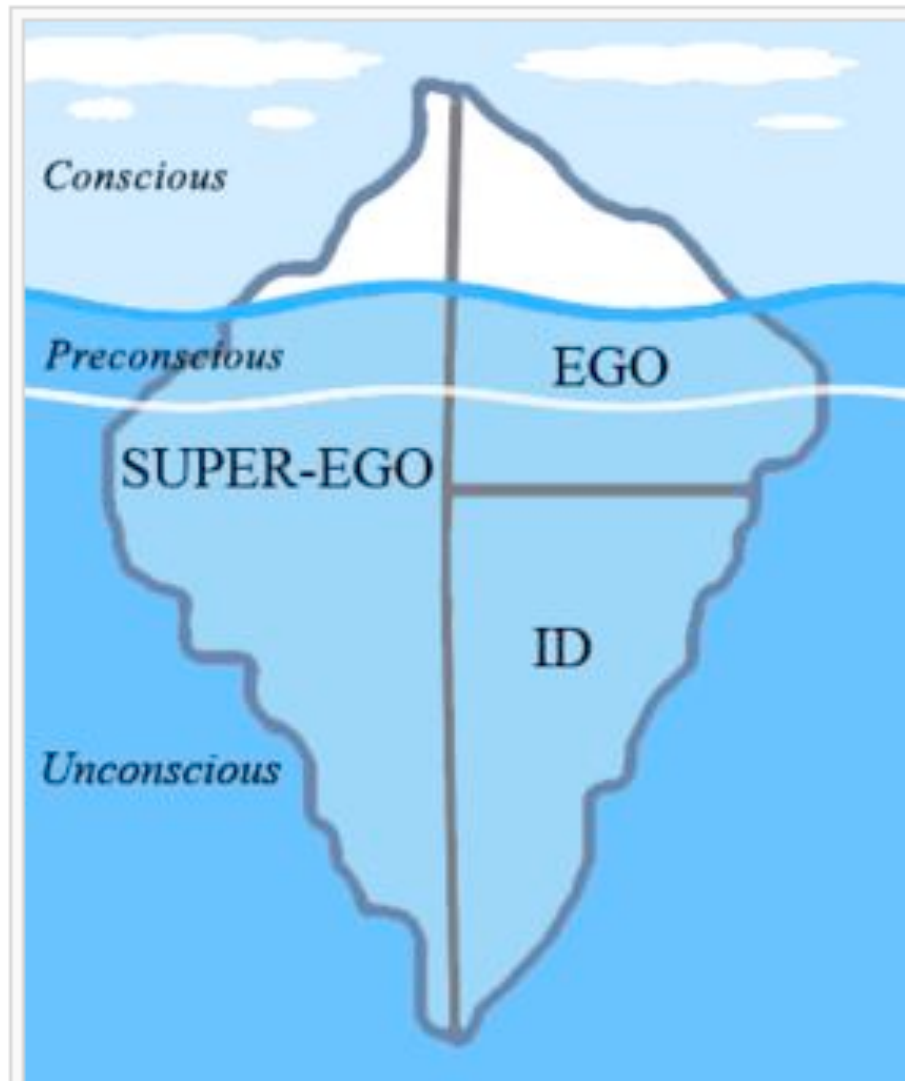






# Some key Freudian terms

- Unconscious
- Repression
- Sublimation
- Ego - consciousness - physiological
- Super-ego - conscience - controlling impulses
- Id - unconscious - “the obscure, inaccessible part of our personality”



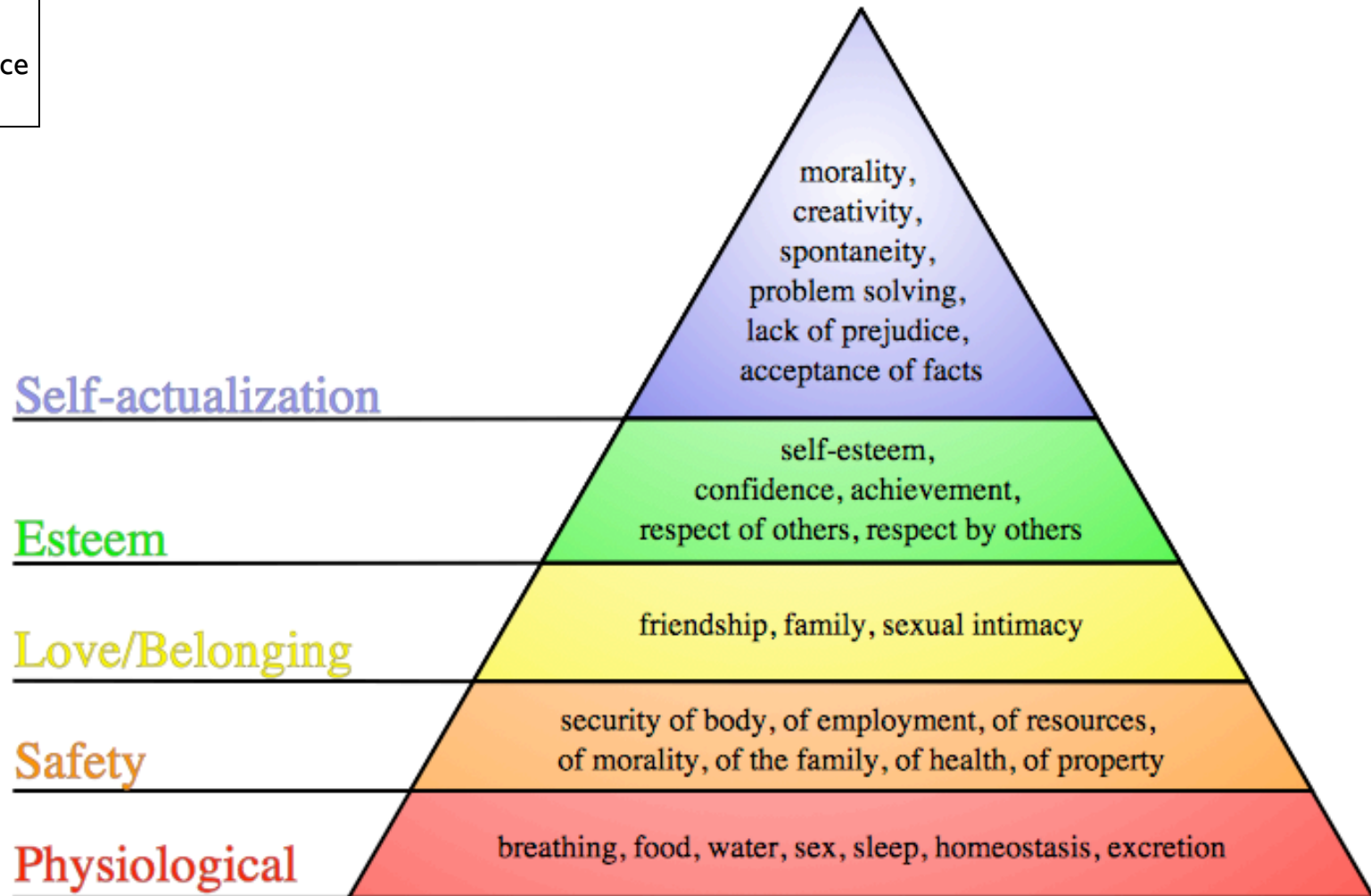
The "iceberg" metaphor is commonly used for comparing the states of consciousness with the three elements of the mind.



# Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs

## Recap

- ego - conscious
- super-ego - conscience
- id - unconscious

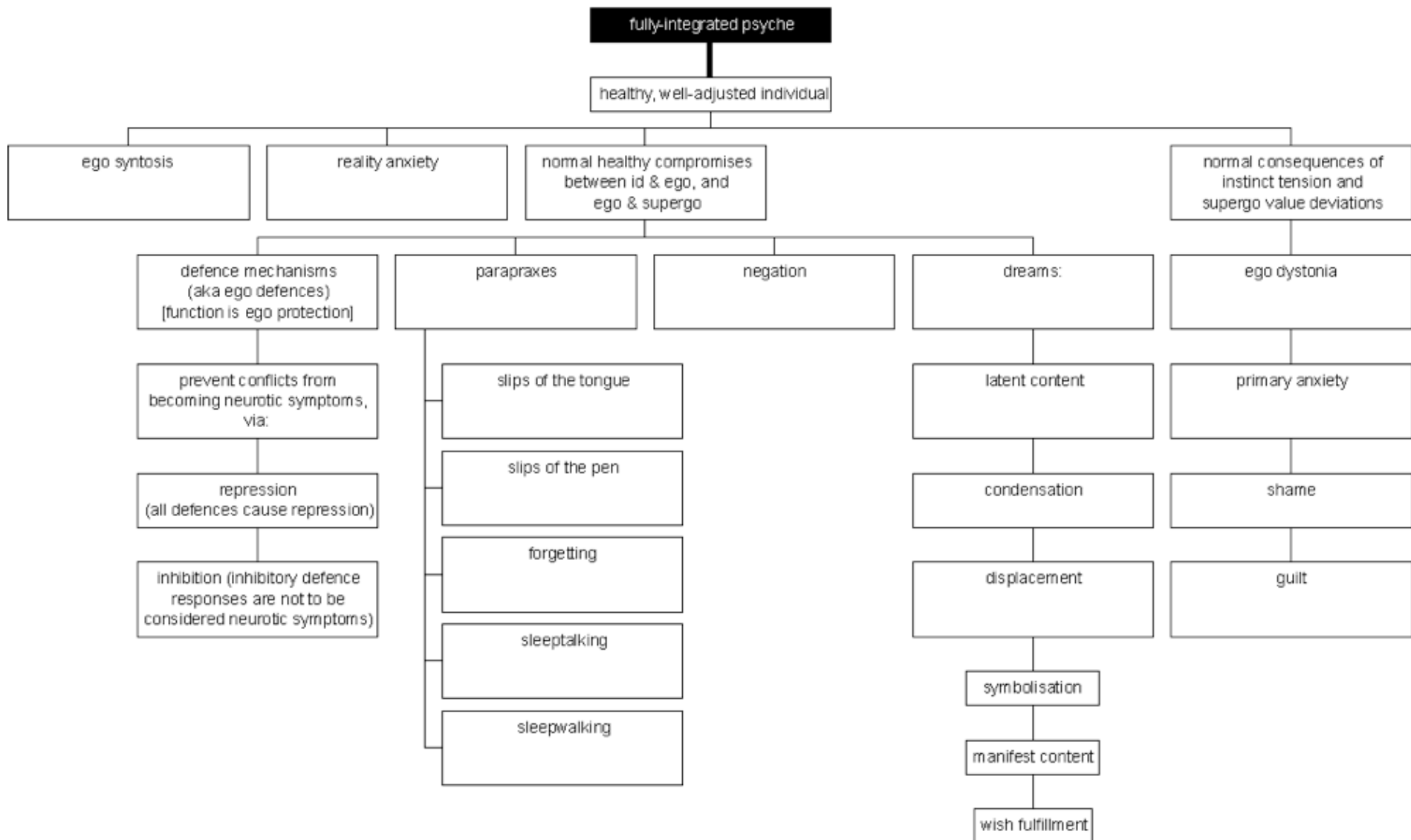




# More key terms

- Psychic processes:
  - transference
  - projection
  - screen memory
- Dream work:
  - displacement
  - condensation

Classical Psychoanalytic Theory of Normal Adjustment





# Applying psychoanalytic ideas

- In Freudian terms, Hamlet's unwillingness to face up to his problems is a form of *repression*, as is the way he has not yet resolved her grief over his father's death.



# Get on the couch, Hamlet!

(This might take some time.)

- Hamlet seems to exhibit (in part, at least) what Freud would call an *Oedipus Complex*. He subconsciously is sexually attracted to his mother. His new 'father' successfully competed with him for his mother's attention. Hamlet is jealous of Claudius.



Let's look at the evidence





# Let's look at the evidence

“...the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,  
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love  
Over the nasty sty.”

“...but go not to mine uncle's bed;  
Assume a virtue, if you have it not.”

“Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:  
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed...”



# Stay on the couch, Hamlet!

(We ain't done yet.)

- Hamlet has *transferred* his grief for his lost father into hatred of the new 'father.'
- Hamlet is *repressing* his love for Ophelia in an attempt to forget it so he can focus on revenge.





Don't get up, Hammy. We ain't done.

- Hamlet *represses* all aspects of his sexuality. (eg nunnery, 'man delights not me')
- Hamlet's antic disposition and sexual punning are examples of *parapraxis*, allowing repressed sexual thoughts to find an outlet.

# Jacques Lacan



- 1901 - 1981
- Mirror stage
- other / Other
- Lack
- Desire



# From Freud to Lacan

- Lacan is a Freudian. Accepts Freud's ideas.
- The unconscious is the “nucleus” of our being.
- Explained *Oedipal Complex* in different way.
- Influenced by linguistics and structuralism.
  - ...and post-structuralism.



# Lacan and language

- Language is fluid in its meaning.
- Meaning is derived through contrasts.
  - Eg. hovel - house - mansion
- In dreams, metaphor can *condense* images into one symbol.
- In dreams, metonymy can *displace* one image with another



# Stages of development I

- Similar to Freud's *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*.
- We move from the *imaginary* stage...
  - once we successfully resolve our *Oedipus Complexes*
- to the *symbolic* stage.
  - Recognise self as separate from rest of the world.



# Stages of development 2

- We construct our own identity.
- We go through three stages of development:
  - *mirror stage*
  - *recognition of law* - usually paternal law
  - *discovery of language*



# Stages of development 3

- *other* (lower case) - early imaginary depiction of self.
- *Other* (upper case) - symbolic, external views of self.
- These two are often in tension with each other:
  - like Freud's *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*.
  - like the fluid nature of language.



## Get on the couch again, Hamlet

- Hamlet struggles with his progression from the *imaginary* to the *symbolic*. He *lacks* a defined sense of himself and sees himself only in relation to his father and mother.
- His *recognition of law* - in the form of his father - is taken from him before he has resolved his *Oedipal Complex*.
- He is mired in the *mirror stage* of development. This is emphasised in the Branagh film in the “To be or not to be” scene with the mirror symbolism,





## Are you a mad lad or a sane Dane?

- Hamlet has no real sense of his *Other* for much of the play. He finally understands his *Other* in III, iii.
- His “antic disposition” is a childish attempt to hide how the real world perceives the real Hamlet until he has resolved his identity and the elements that make up the *symbolic order* in adult society. His delay emphasises how much he struggles with this.



# Don't think that about Gertrude!

She's your mother, for goodness sake!

- Hamlet has not *successfully resolved* his *Oedipal Complex*.
- The death of King Hamlet left the way clear for Hamlet to fulfil the *repressed desire* he has for his mother.
- But Claudius gets in the way by taking Hamlet's father's place.



# So what about Claudius?

- In III, iii, Hamlet recognises that Claudius is his *Other*.  
A bit like his alter ego.
- Once he realises this, he cannot kill Claudius because it would be like killing himself, and God's canon has forbidden that.



## So what about V, ii?

- Hamlet finally acts against Claudius because he (Hamlet) is dying. So too is Gertrude, the object of his *desires*.
- He is dying anyway, so he might as well slay his *Other*, a symbolic suicide that resolves his *Oedipus Complex*.
- He needs a new *Other* and his *super-ego* demands that Horatio lives to tell the tale, exonerating Hamlet, who is aware of how the *symbolic* world will perceive him.



# Get on the couch, Willy!

(This might take some time.)

- Willy Loman has *repressed* many traumatic past events without resolving them (eg his conflict with Biff).
- Miller uses the “dream” sequences to help the audience see Willy’s unconscious mind.
- The original title of the play was *The Inside of his Head*.



Don't get up, Willy. We're not done.

- Sometimes, Willy uses what Freud calls *screen memory* to obliterate significant memories. Eg. he remembers how Biff used to simonize the Chevy and refuses for some time to face up to Biff's failings.
- The way Willy attacks Linda and Biff is a form of *transference* because he takes out his frustrations on the person who is trying to help him and comfort him. He also *projects* his fear of being un-liked onto Bernard and Charley, who he views as unpopular.  
(p25)



## Still a long way to go, Willy

- Willy talks to himself in a semi-subconscious attempt to resolve his inner conflicts.
- He *condenses* the success of others into memories of Ben. This is a good example of what Freud would call “dream work” and helps the audience understand Ben and why he is not depicted in a realistic manner but rather a symbol of success.



# Essay time again

*“The most memorable protagonists in plays are significantly flawed in some way.”*

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Respond to this question with close reference to one or more text(s) you have studied.





# Flaws in characters

- Relationships.
- They don't understand themselves or their surroundings.
- Self-doubt and paralysis.
- Psychoanalytic theory - applying some of Freud's ideas.
- Tragic heroes and conventions.
- Inability to change when all around them, the times, they are a-changing.