

Lord of the Flies Study Guide: Connections

The Connections section of the Study Guide provides intertextual and interdisciplinary resources to help deepen and broaden your experience with the novel.

Freudian Psychology — **Political Organization** — **Christian Mythology**

Freudian Psychology, Psychoanalytic Theory, and Social Psychology

An introduction to some basic psychological terms (with definitions), including an introduction to Freud's theory of personality (id, ego, superego), and some basic social psychology (including the theory of deindividuation).

Psychological Terms

The following explanations come from the textbook *Introduction to Psychology, Ninth Edition*, so when citing these definitions, you should use the bibliographic entry:

Atkinson, et al. *Introduction to Psychology, Ninth Edition*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1987.

These excerpts provide only the barest outline of some of Sigmund Freud's theories.

Psychoanalytic theories explore the private personality—the unconscious motives that direct behavior. Psychoanalytic theory is also concerned with the way in which personality develops.

Freud compared the human mind to an iceberg. The small part that shows above the surface of the water represents conscious experience; the much larger mass below water level represents the unconscious, a storehouse of impulses, passions, and inaccessible memories that affect our thoughts and behavior.

Freud believed that personality is composed of three major systems: the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego*. Each system has its own functions, but the three interact to govern behavior.

Id

The part of the personality reflecting unorganized, instinctual impulses. If unbridled, it seeks immediate gratification of primitive needs.

Ego

The part of the personality corresponding most nearly to the perceived self, the controlling self that holds back the impulsiveness of the id in the effort to delay gratification until it can be found in socially approved ways.

Superego

The part of the personality corresponding most nearly to conscience, controlling through moral scruples rather than by way of social expediency. The superego is said to be an uncompromising and punishing conscience.

Anxiety

The desires of the id are powerful forces that must be expressed in some way; prohibiting their expression does not abolish them. Individuals with an urge to do something for which they will be punished become anxious. Methods of anxiety reduction are called *defense mechanisms*.

Displacement

One way of reducing anxiety is to express the impulse in disguised form, thereby avoiding punishment by society and condemnation by the superego. Aggressive impulses, for example, may be displaced to racing sports cars or to championing political causes.

Repression

A defense mechanism in which an impulse or memory that is distressing or might provoke feelings of guilt is excluded from conscious awareness, by being pushed out of awareness into the unconscious.

Suppression

A process of self-control in which impulses, tendencies to action, and wishes to perform disapproved acts are in awareness but not overtly revealed.

Projection

A defense mechanism by which people protect themselves from awareness of their own undesirable traits by attributing those traits excessively to others.

Unconscious

Memories, impulses and desires that are not available to consciousness. According to the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, painful memories and wishes are sometimes repressed – that

is, diverted to the unconscious where they continue to influence our actions even though we are not aware of them.

More about the Id, Ego, and Superego

The Id

The *id* is the most primitive part of the personality, from which the ego and the superego later develop. It is present in the newborn infant and consists of the basic biological impulses (or drives): the need to eat, to drink, to eliminate wastes, to avoid pain, and to gain sexual pleasure. Freud believed that aggression is also a basic biological drive. The id seeks immediate gratification of these impulses. Like a young child, the id operates on the *pleasure principle*: it endeavors to avoid pain and to obtain pleasure, regardless of the external circumstances.

The Ego

Children soon learn that their impulses cannot always be gratified immediately. Hunger must wait until someone provides food. The satisfaction of relieving bladder or bowel pressure must be delayed until the bathroom is reached. Certain impulses—hitting someone or playing with the genitals—may elicit punishment from a parent. A new part of the personality, the *ego*, develops as the young child learns to consider the demands of reality. The ego obeys the *reality principle*: the gratification of impulses must be delayed until the appropriate environmental conditions are found. It is essentially the "executive" of the personality: it decides what actions are appropriate and which id impulses will be satisfied and in what manner. The ego mediates among the demands of the id, the realities of the world, and the demands of the superego.

The Superego

The third part of the personality, the *superego*, is the internalized representation of the values and morals of society as taught to the child by the parents and others. It is essentially the individual's conscience. The superego judges whether an action is right or wrong. The id seeks pleasure, the ego tests reality, and the superego strives for perfection. The superego develops in response to parental rewards and punishments. It incorporates all the actions for which the child is punished or reprimanded, as well as all the actions for which the child is rewarded.

Initially, parents control children's behavior directly by reward and punishment. Through the incorporation of parental standards into the superego, a child brings behavior under control. Children no longer need anyone to tell them it is wrong to steal; their superego tells them. Violation of the superego's standards, or even the impulse to do so, produces anxiety over the loss of parental love. According to Freud, this anxiety is largely unconscious; the *conscious* emotion is guilt. If the parental standards are overly rigid, the individual may be guilt-ridden and inhibit all aggressive or sexual impulses. In contrast, an individual who fails to incorporate any standards for acceptable social behavior will have few behavioral constraints and may engage in excessively self-indulgent or criminal behavior.

Question: What happens when the superego is weak (as is the case in a young child) and the external parental or social control is removed?

More about Anxiety

Anxiety and defenses against it.

Freud believed that the conflict between the id impulses (primarily sexual and aggressive instincts) and the restraining influences of the ego and superego constitutes the motivating force of much behavior.

Children eventually internalize parental restrictions on impulse satisfaction, thereby forming the superego. The more restraints a society (or its representatives, the parents) places on impulse expression, the greater the potential for conflict among the three parts of the personality.

Social Psychology

Social psychology is in part the study of how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied *presence of others*. The *presence of others* includes notions of *deindividuation* and *bystander intervention*, which both include notions of the *diffusion of responsibility* (i.e., when each individual knows that many others are present, each can think that the burden of responsibility does not fall solely on him or her).

Social Influence

There are three basic processes of social influence:

1. Compliance

The person at whom the influence is directed (the target) publicly conforms to the wishes of the influencing source but does not change his or her private beliefs or attitudes. One speaks of conformity to a majority and of obedience to authority when talking about compliance. (The child eats the spinach but continues to dislike it.)

2. Internalization

The target changes his or her beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors because of a genuine belief in the validity of the position advocated by the influencing source. (A middle-aged man gives up smoking after reading – and believing – the surgeon general's warnings that smoking causes cancer.)

3. Identification

The target changes his or her beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors in order to resemble an influencing source that is respected or admired. (A high school girl takes up smoking in order to be like a group of older girls she admires.)

In addition, we are strongly influenced by *social norms*—implicit rules and expectations that tell us what we ought to think and how we ought to behave.

Deindividuation

Deindividuation theory explains individual behavior when in a crowd. The idea is that the individual's sense of self is diminished and replaced by a social identity, and generic social norms are replaced by the norms of the crowd (some of which may also happen to coincide with the generic social norms). The psychological state of deindividuation is marked by reductions in the individual's self-restraint and inhibitions. For more details, see Chapter 18 in *Introduction to Psychology* and the Tom Postmes's essay, "Deindividuation," (partially excerpted below).

"In social psychology, deindividuation is a major theory of group behavior: it provides an explanation of collective behavior of violent crowds, mindless hooligans, and the lynch mob. In addition, deindividuation has been associated with other social phenomena such as genocide, stereotyping, and disinhibition in other settings such as computer-mediated communication. [...] Deindividuation hinders reflection about the consequences of actions, rendering social norms impotent while increasing suggestibility to random outside influences." (Postmes, Deindividuation).

Bibliography

Atkinson, et al. *Introduction to Psychology, Ninth Edition*,. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1987.

Postmes, Tom. "Deindividuation." <http://www.ex.ac.uk/~tpostmes/deindividuation.html>. Accessed 2/01/03.