American Beauty
A Freudian Analysis

Let’s get it on

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Sigmund Freud’s Life

1856-1939

Austrian-Jewish physician who founded the psychoanalytic school of psychology. Freud introduced the phenomenon unconscious mind and defined defense mechanism. He formed clinical practice of psychoanalysis for treating psychopathology through a one on one session between a patient and a psychoanalyst.

Provided foundation from which modern Phycologists could expand, and contrast with.

Freud was a compulsive cigar smoker, and a cocaine addict.
Freudian Terms:

- **Free Association** - used by the psychodynamic theory as the road to the unconscious, by saying a word or phrase and having the subject say what comes to mind first. It is a very subjective test that is hard to measure.

- **Psychoanalysis** - a study of psychology developed by Sigmund Freud, it is meant to investigate the mind, diagnose mental illness, and as a theory to describe behavior. It revolves around psychosexual stages and self-defense mechanisms. The unconscious is the most important aspect of the brain, and it dominates our conscious mind without us being aware of it. The brain is also broken down into three parts, the Ego, Superego, and Id.

- **Unconscious** - In the freudian view the unconscious makes up the largest part of us, we are only consciously aware of a small part of what goes on, and of why we act the way we do. Unconscious memories and feelings is what determines how we act and why we react as we do.

- **Id** - Our unconscious wants and desires, we are born controlled entirely by the id, which is why babies cry when they don't get what they want. It drives us with urges for self-gratification, it is the basis for our actions.

- **Ego** - seeks to appease the Id in realistic ways that will satisfy in the long term rather than in the immediate future. Most of the ego is in the conscious mind unlike the Id which lies more in the unconscious then the conscious.

- **Superego** - Aims to become the ideal individual based on what society dictates as such. It is what makes us feel guilty after doing something wrong, and it restrains the Id the best it can. We are not born with it but develop it as we mature.
Personality Development - According to Freud is entirely in childhood and mother-son relationships or vice versa. He brakes this development into Psychosexual phases, that without satisfying that stage result in fixation.

Psychosexual Phases - The childhood developmental phases according to Freud, in which everyone must pass through or else face a fixation which leads to personality disorder.

Oral - lasts from birth to about fifteen months. Gratification is entirely based in the mouth, putting things in kids mouths gives them pleasure as Freud said. Fixation is developed due to weaning, If weaning is done at the wrong time the ego can misinform, and it leads to either gullibility, (if its not soon enough) or manipulativeness, (weaning was too early). Fixation in this phase leads to substance abuse or over eating.

Anal - Lasts from fifteen months to about three years of age. The erogenous zone in this phase is the anus, and the significant event in this phase is potty training. Depending on the way parents treat the child, they may become Anal retentive, (they are scolded for not being clean enough and the superego dominates the Id), or if the Id takes control they may become messy and self-indulgent.

Phallic - From three to five years of age, this is where girls feel ‘penis envy’ and boys become obsessed with their penis. Gratification is in the genitals and this is where the Oedipus complex or Elektra complex occurs. Repression occurs to force these thoughts down as the child matures

Latency - Solidifying stage. Energy is redirected to activities instead of immediate pleasure. The drives of the Id are repressed and therefore latent and sub-conscious. If Oedipus complex not properly repressed then issues can occur.
Freudian Terms:

- **Oedipus complex** - occurs during the phallic stage where children want to have sex with their mother and kill their rival in love their father. These feelings are repressed as the child matures.

- **Fixation** – the tendency to be stuck in a psychosexual stage that can lead to mental disorders.

- **Defense mechanisms** – Things we do unconsciously that help us cope with anxiety and reality

- **Repression** – force conscious memories into the unconscious in order to forget about traumatic events.

- **Regression** - resort to a psychosexual stage that we have already ‘graduated’ from, (ex. drinking excessively)

- **Projection** – We see our own failings in others as a way to convince ourselves we are not the only one with these failings

- **Rationalization** – we think through and logically justify our actions regardless of whether our actions were appropriate or not.

- **Displacement** – we redirect our anger or aggression towards something other than what angers us.

- **Projective tests** – were used as a road to the unconscious. They were a way to see what goes on in a persons brain that not even they know about.

- **Rorschach inkblot test** – the idea is that this inkblot is so ambiguous that when asked what it looks like the answer the patient gives can be anything. This object that the patient chooses, represents his unconscious, therefore giving insight into his mind.
Personality

• Freud believed that a healthy personality was caused by a person progressing through all the stages of Psychosexual Development without anxiety in any particular stage.

• According to Freud, Psychological illness is caused when a person has anxiety related to the goals of a certain stage.

• This would lead to the person fixating on those themes in later life.
At the beginning of the film, Lester Burnham is controlled by his superego. He described himself as being "sedated," which is his way of expressing the egos repression of the id. With this, he is forced to conform to societal norms. From Lester's vivid narration we understand his true feelings and desires, but during this first phase of the movie, he doesn't allow them to surface.

* Carolyn Burnham represents Lester’s superego because she voices all the things he should be and do.
Shortly into the film, Lester smokes weed with Ricky, and witnesses his rebellious act of quitting his job. This triggers a transformation within Lester, it inspires him to radically change his lifestyle. He begins to oppose these societal norms that once bound him. His id comes to dominate his personality. Ultimately all his actions are to fulfill his pleasure principle and satisfy the id.
Examples of transformations from superego to id:

* At the beginning Lester masturbates in the bathroom, where he is secluded. He is later caught doing it in bed next to his wife.

* Lester repressed his lust for Angela, keeping it to merely a fantasy. Later he pursues it as a reality.

* At the party he pretends his marriage is working. Now, he admits that its a failing.

* He works a boring job, but is forced to "mask his contempt." He then not only quits but blackmails...
Defense mechanisms:

- **Regression** – When he is caught smoking (oral fixation), he acts as though his wife is his mother. He also plays with a toy car.

- **Reaction formation** – At the beginning of the novel, Lester narrates his true feelings. However, at work he acts as though everything is alright, as with his marriage.

- **Rationalization** – He justifies having sex with Angela because she does it a lot. When she admits she is a virgin, his ego kicks in.

- **Displacement** – Lester takes out his frustrations on the plate of asparagus at dinner.

- **Projection** – He justifies his black mailing at work saying, "I'm just an ordinary guy with nothing to lose." He has convinced himself what he is doing is typical.
At the beginning of the movie, Lester is restrained by his superego. After undergoing some sort of change, he is dominated by the id. When he is about to sleep with Angela, both the superego and the id clash. Ultimately the ego chooses what's moral, and correct. The superego kicks back in. He begins acting like a father again... Making a sandwich for Angela, and asking her how Jane...
WORK CITED:

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