Fight between Super Ego and ID

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Sigmund Freud’s structural model of the psyche consists of three parts: The ID, ego and Superego that are meant to work together to create complex human behaviors. This structural model can be applied to the protagonist Blanche Dubois, a “southern belle” in the play “The Streetcar named Desire”. During the play, Blanche has the longing for shelter, attention and status, which results in actions that her super ego denies. The result of the fight between her Super Ego and ID erects deep psychological tensions that eventually lead to her insanity.

Blanche is a mentally fragile character, who has always had the aspiration for a save home. Because she lost her husband due to suicide, she lost the condition of being protected against physical, social, emotional and psychological and other consequences of failure. Her longing for safety and protection is her instinctual drive that has been present since birth, and therefore present during the whole play. The ID operates according to the pleasure principle that motivates immediate satisfaction to our bodily needs, wants, desires, and impulses. Blanche does anything to satisfy these instincts, even if it means self - prostitution.

Blanche also fosters the desire for attention of men. In a psychological view, Blanche is self - conscious and discontent with herself, which is why she needs acknowledgement, especially from males. Her drive for attention and the “kindness of strangers” might be understood from this period in that her sense of confidence of her own feminine attraction was shaken due to her knowledge of her husbands homosexuality. This struggle and insecurity makes her use her sexual charms to attract men over and over to eventually get the reassurance she is longing for.

Every human’s desire is fitting into society and being socially accepted. Blanche grew up in good family conditions, and has learned to believe in values and norms. When entering the Kowalski Household, Blanche wants to forget about her past and represent dignity and class, by pretending of being a person she is not. In reality however she is an insecure, dislocated individual, seen as a social pariah due to her actions. Blanche tries so hard to keep up her good image, that her sense of reality slowly fades away. She is not able to deal with her past, which is why she becomes mentally instable when Stanley exposes her. Her desire to fit in and being accepted makes her lie about herself to people she loves, that at the end of the play turn away from her.

In Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality, he describes the super ego of being a part that denies the satisfaction of all impulses. The superego judges, based on our internalized moral standards and ideals, and tells us, what is right and wrong. Therefore it stands as a contradiction to the ID, thus our desires.

Blanche is unable to deal with her mixed desires, and cannot balance these competing forces. She feels guilty for having slept with so many men, as she feels dirty and used. It does not fit into her view of morals and standards, which is why she feels ashamed of herself and entering the play, lies about her past. Because the superego exists in the conscious, preconscious and unconscious, Blanche is confronted with her mistakes every day and every moment. The fact that Blanche depends on male sexual admiration for her sense of self-esteem, also creates negative tensions in her mind, due to her super ego telling her what she is doing is wrong and socially unacceptable. Blanche is already a fallen women in societies eyes, due to her indiscrete sexual behavior and her badly covered up drinking problem. Because the superego works to suppress unacceptable behavior and generally urges of the id, it gives her every reason to feel guilty and bad about herself.

The interaction of the ID, Ego and Superego demonstrates a wide range of conflicts that may arise, due to the fight between the super ego and ID. Freud refers to “Ego strength” as the ego’s ability to function, and balance out these dueling forces. A person with a so -called “strong ego” is able to find a balance and effectively manage these pressures, whereas a person with a “weak ego” is not. Blanche is not able to find a balance between her conscience and her dark doings, due to the judgment of the super ego, and struggles to deal with them. Until the end of the play, Blanche is burdened with what she has done, and is never able to get over it.

The result of her too little ego strength leads to alcoholism, her bathing procedure and her mental insanity.

Blanche has a bad drinking problem, due to deep psychological tensions. She tries to drink away her past, and forget about everything that has happened. Blanche herself does not notice her problem, whereas her surrounding is aware. Her alcoholism underlines her internal issues with her past.

Another result of the imbalance of the super ego and ID is her bathing procedure. During the play, Blanche has some sort of bathing procedure, in which she bathes for hours. Blanche does not notice this resultant, but it is surely noticed by the other characters in the household. What Blanche unconsciously tries to do, is wash off her guilt, her mistakes and the “dirt” she has loaded on herself, when she prostituted herself. This is a sign of her super ego being more present than her ego.

The fight between the super ego and ID eventually leads to Blanches mental instability. Freud analyzed a healthy personality to be a balance between all three. Because Blanche was not able to balance these three, she is later in the play forced to go to a mental hospital. Overall it is made evident, that Blanche herself was a weak character, having to fight many issues one of them being her past. She was never able to get on with her life, instead far from reality.