Literature, unlike many aspects of life, still possess the ability to remain applicable to Sigmond Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. It possesses the ability to represent the repression and projection that occurs when the Ego ignores the desires of the Id. Ernest Hemingway’s short story *Hills Like White Elephants* proves to be no different. *Hills Like White Elephants* shows the repressed desires that the female character feels, and how she projects her feeling of oppression onto the scenery around her. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory supports this repression and projection along with supports symbolism as a whole.

Hemingway has a history with creating depth in his stories, and *Hills Like White Elephants* proves to conform to this norm. His stories, much like Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, contain a deeper message than what a surface read suggests since “Hemingway, one suspects, was driven by an inner necessity to develop the oblique narrative” (Johnston 70). His stories, despite being short like *Hills Like White Elephants*, have a meaning within them that must be explored “or there are "hidden" depths, dimensions, to the surface story which are not given direct or full statement” (Johnston 69). Much like the iceberg analogy, these stories have a “deceptively simple surface … rested upon a broader, more complex, hidden base” (Johnston 69). Freud’s psychoanalytic theory offers a window with which to examine these stories. It gives the reader another set of knowledge with which the reader can use to create a deeper and better
understanding of the deeper meaning Hemingway creates since “Hemingway's is the art of indirection, suggestion, and implication, rather than that of outright omission” (Johnston 69).

As aforementioned, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory is one lens that can be used to examine literature. Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis involves the division of the mind into the Ego, Superego, and Id, and it is these parts that are deeply involved in the repression and projection of desires. In Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, he focuses on the mind and how the conscious and unconscious work together. Within the unconscious mind Freud illustrates three parts: the Id, Superego, and Ego. These three parts are each unique, and they work together to create a balanced unconscious. First, there is the Id “which contains the instinct” (Farrell 12). The Id acts as the connection to a person’s primal instincts that are not appropriate in society. An example would be if someone wanted ice cream but there was a long line, so said person made the choice to shove everyone out of line to reach the front faster. That action is one that the Id would insist upon so as to receive instant gratification. The second part of the unconscious is the superego. The superego acts as what is commonly referred to as “[the] conscience” (Farrell 14). It acts to “control [the] … activity” of the individual in question, and is easily viewed as the polar opposite of the Id (Farrell 13). In the scenario where the individual’s Id desires to push those in front of him or her out of line to receive a faster gratification, the superego realizes and remembers that doing so would be considered rude, and would be unfair to those pushed. These two parts are at odds within the unconscious, and it is the Ego that “does the job of mediating between the demands of the Id and the demands of the real world” or the superego. (Farrell 12). The Ego is responsible for balancing the desires of both the Id and the Superego. It works to prevent improper behavior, much like shoving people out of the way to purchase ice cream, but it
also allows one to subconsciously acknowledge those desires. If one were to ignore his or her desires, they would then experience repression and projection.

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory also includes the idea of repressing and projecting an unacknowledged desire. The idea of repression is, as the name suggests, when a particular desire is ignored and left unsatisfied and so it becomes inhibited. These desires, be unconscious or conscious, become repressed when the “Ego also withdraws sufficient energy from all such associations, derivatives” and forces them to be ignored (Farrell 16). The problem with repression is that it hurts the individual. Ignore desires and creating repressed wants “involve[s] the constant expenditure of energy by the Ego” (Farrell 16). Since repressing a desire needs a lot of energy, the Ego cannot keep repressing something forever. When something can no longer be repressed, “the repressed material … emerge[s] into consciousness” and “it does so in a heavily disguised form” (Farrell 19-20). When this scenario occurs, the repressed desire projects onto something else. Projection means when a repressed desire begins to appear and relate to something else in the individual’s life. For example, when someone represses the desire to eat McDonald’s, they may smell it when they walk down the street. This action of repressing desires is exactly what happens in Ernest Hemingway’s *Hills Like White Elephants*.

Hemingway’s *Hills Like White Elephants* shows the hidden desires of the female character, and show the repression and projection that occurs when one’s desires are ignored. The short story, *Hills Like White Elephants*, is about a young woman whose partner is trying to convince her to have an “operation” (Hemingway 213). It is implied that this “operation” is an abortion, and at the end of the story it is unsure whether she has decided to get the abortion or not. The story shows that the “girl” feels reluctant about getting the abortion, looking away or down when the “man” brings it up (Hemingway 213). Since she is only a “girl” and her partner...
is a “man,” she does not have the ability to make her own choices, and so what she wants, not
have the operation, is overshadowed by what he wants. She is not satisfied with having an
abortion because she wants to have the baby. Her desire is to have the child, and when the man
tries to convince her otherwise, her desire becomes repressed. She would have the operation
“because [she does not] care about [herself]” and would rather make the man happy by satisfying
her desires (Hemingway 214). This decision causes her to repress those desires, and her
repression causes her to project her feelings of oppression onto the hillside. When she looks out
toward the hills, she thinks “they look like white elephants” (Hemingway 212). When the girl
gazes out toward the hills, she sees something that is not there, and that her partner cannot see
(Hemingway 212). This disconnect is because she feels the weight of her repressed desires and
he does not since she is more likely to submit to his will of having the operation. The girl thinks
the hills look like white elephants, or at least says she does, because the hills “were white in the
sun” (Hemingway 212). Those white elephants would blend in with the background of the hill
because of the “coloring of their skin” (Hemingway 213). They would not be seen; they would
be overshadowed by a bigger, more powerful entity much like the girl feels overshadowed by her
partner. She projects her feelings of repression and her desires onto the hills before her to help
her better deal with her feelings of oppression.

Though the story *Hills Like White Elephants* is short, it contains a deeper meaning that is
relatable to almost everyone since most people have found themselves choosing the desires of
others over their own desires. Hemingway is known for his deeper meanings and themes, and
often times using a specific lens is helpful for better understanding a story. Freud’s
psychoanalytic theory is one of those lenses, and it helps the reader understand that the female
protagonist in *Hills Like White Elephants* is experiencing repressed desires and is projecting her
feelings of oppression onto the hills around her. It helps the reader understand that this story is more about abortion; it is a story about a woman feeling oppressed and overshadowed.

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Works Cited


Dr. Breuer found that her symptoms abated when he helped her recover memories of traumatic experiences that she had repressed, or hidden from her conscious mind. This case sparked Freud’s interest in the unconscious mind and spurred the development of some of his most influential ideas. Models of the Mind. Later, Freud posited a more structured model of the mind, one that can coexist with his original ideas about consciousness and unconsciousness. Freud Model of the Mind. It frequently occurs in treatment in the form of transference onto the therapist, in which the client applies their feelings and expectations toward another person onto the therapist. There are many different types of transference, but the most common include Critics of psychoanalytic theory claim that it grossly exaggerates and generalizes human behavior. One of the strengths of psychoanalytic theory is that it gives patients the opportunity to talk about problems with a professional, which could help relieve symptoms of psychological illness, according to About.com. Despite this, most psychoanalytic theories are difficult to measure and often overemphasize the unconscious mind, sex, aggression and childhood. Psychoanalytic theory, or psychoanalysis, was developed by Sigmund Freud as a means of developing an understanding of the inner workings of Sigmund Freud developed psychodynamic theories on personality. He believed that there are three elements to our personality. The first is the ID, the. Ultimately she faulted her mother for this and focused her attention and love onto her father. Freud referred to this concept as “penis envy”. There was concern if a person did not overcome the Oedipus Complex. As the evidence shows, Freud did not have a good handle on females and how they developed. He assumed that if a female did get fixated in the Oedipus Complex stage it was because she was deeply ashamed and rather than face her father she gravitated towards the female sex. (Phalen, 2005). The next stage in the psychosexual stages is the latency stage, occurring between the ages of about 6 to puberty.