

Lecture Notes on Sigmund Freud

Unconscious: the focus of Freud's depth psychology -- a level of psychic functioning deeper than the conscious or preconscious. The unconscious is inaccessible to introspection, not attached to language, revealed only symbolically in dreams, fantasy, myth, Freudian slips, and free association.

Early studies of hysteria: Freud argued that hysteria was caused neither by a physiological disorder of the female sexual organs nor mere play-acting; hysteria was not uniquely female. Hysteria was caused by painful, emotion-charged memories, repressed from consciousness, leading to physical symptoms. Repressed memories were typically of childhood sexual seduction. Freud originally believed these were memories of actual events (trauma theory), but later concluded that they usually recalled forbidden wishes (wish theory).

Theory of the instincts: Freud uses the term **libido** for the energy that drives the sexual instincts. Freud conceives of psychic functioning as the flow of this energy along paths shaped by **cathexis** (attachment) and **anti-cathexis** (aversion). Libido seeks release through pleasure; when blocked this leads to neurotic symptoms. Initially Freud distinguished between sexual and self-preservation instincts, but soon came to view these as merely two expressions of a single libidinal energy. Late in life he speculated on the existence of a **death instinct** -- the drive of all living things to return to an inorganic state.

Model of the psyche

Id: biological substratum; completely unconscious; consists of wishes seeking gratification; operates according to the **pleasure principle** (seeks immediate satisfaction).

Ego: the more rational part of psyche (perception, learning, memory, reasoning); arises at interface of id and external world; aims at preservation of the organism; operates according to the **reality principle** (postpones or redefines gratification until safe or appropriate).

Super-ego: conscience; represents social norms and taboos; internalized from parental commands; produces guilt feelings (as well as self-esteem).

Ego defense mechanisms: the ego conflicts with both the blind drives of the id and the punishing, guilt-inducing commands of the super-ego as it tries to maintain some balance; it uses various ego defense mechanisms in this process:

Repression: unacceptable desire is denied and rendered unconscious.

Sublimation: transfers the energy of an unacceptable desire to a substitute activity or object; especially the transfer of sexual drives into "higher" cultural pursuits.

Projection: subject of unacceptable desire is transformed into object (e.g., "I hate you" becomes "You hate me").

Reaction formation: unacceptable desire is turned into its opposite (e.g., "I hate you" becomes "I love you").

Childhood sexuality: his insistence on the sexual nature of children made Freud highly controversial in a society that pretended otherwise. Compared with adult sexuality, Freud argued that childhood sexuality tends to be more **auto-erotic** (self-focused rather than directed toward external sexual objects), **polymorphously perverse** (the entire body is eroticized rather than focusing mainly on genital pleasure), and **bisexual** (rather than desiring only male or female sexual objects).

Stages of childhood sexuality

Oral Stage: focus on the mouth; pleasure in nursing; trauma at separation from mother/breast.

Anal-erotic stage: focus on excretory organs; pleasure in emptying bowels/bladder; fascination with products of own body; trauma at toilet training and learning societal norms of cleanliness and disgust toward bodily functions.

Genital (phallic or Oedipal) stage: focus on genital sexuality; desire for sex with parent of opposite sex; trauma when confronted with incest taboo (**Oedipus complex**); leads to repression of sexual attraction toward parent, latency period, and super-ego formation.

Male oedipus complex: original attachment to mother; intensified with emergence of genital sexuality; fear of competition from more powerful father (**castration anxiety**); boy represses sexual desire for mother, identifies with father as idealized authority figure (resulting in a strong super-ego), and waits for mother substitute.

Female oedipus complex: original attachment to mother; emergence of genital sexuality leads to feelings of inferiority (**penis envy**); mother blamed for inadequacy and rejected as an inappropriate sexual object; redirection of sexual desire toward father; this is repressed by incest taboo; having experienced desire for both parents the girl retains a stronger bisexual orientation.

Origins of adult personality traits in childhood stages

Narcissism: appears as self-centeredness and self-love but actually reflects a lack of self-esteem, an inner loneliness and insecurity, dependence upon attention of others. Rooted in failures and inconsistencies of maternal empathy in the oral stage. Might

be intensified by anything that interferes with the mother's ability to respond consistently to the child's needs or to facilitate the child's development toward autonomy. Latent predispositions may also be reinforced by adult institutions like the therapy industry and consumerism that encourage anxious self-scrutiny.

Anal-erotic character: a syndrome characterized by extreme possessiveness, miserliness, greed, hoarding, stubbornness. Rooted in a particularly traumatic anal stage. Might be intensified by anything that imposes stricter norms of toilet training (e.g., urban living imposes greater need for cleanliness; organization of daily life around the clock intensifies norms of punctuality).

Authoritarianism: exaggerated devotion to authority and authority figures, paralysis of skeptical or rebellious impulses, sadistic desire for punishment of any who defy authority. Rooted in a particularly traumatic Oedipal crisis leading to the overdevelopment of the super-ego. Might be intensified by anything that intensifies the Oedipal conflict (e.g., isolation of the nuclear family) or that increases the patriarchal authority of the father over wife and children.

Character structure: each society tends to reinforce a distinctive set of compulsive personality traits (e.g. narcissism, anality, or authoritarianism). Being widespread, these traits are seen as normal and adaptive, although they are rooted in the same kind of childhood traumas that produce idiosyncratic neurotic symptoms. Followers of Freud have characterized early capitalism as a society marked by the prevalence of anal character traits, while late capitalism has more often been described as a culture of narcissism. Authoritarian personality traits have figured prominently in Freudian inspired analyses of fascism and other repressive right-wing movements.

Group psychology: close-knit social groups (e.g., sports teams, religious orders, military units) are held together by libidinal ties (aim-inhibited sexual desire); strong identification with the leader (=father) is based on the Oedipal complex.

Theory of religion: religious beliefs build upon unconscious memories of early childhood. The modeling of gods on parental figures reflects the child's extreme helplessness and dependency upon parental care; the ritual pursuit of transcendence of self reflects the desire to return to the blissful state of unity between self and world, child and mother (**oceanic feeling**) that existed before the emergence of the ego.

Civilization and its Discontents: civilization depends upon the renunciation of sexual instinct through a combination of repression and sublimation, leading to malaise. Each new generation is forced to repeat this process of repression -- i.e., the life of the individual repeats the history of the species (**ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis**). Social reform and the overcoming of material scarcity cannot change this situation, since human sexual appetites remain unsatisfied. Discontent, bred by excessive sexual repression, can attach itself to the death instinct, resulting in outbursts of anti-social aggression (**return of the repressed**). The best that can be hoped for is that the masses can learn the art of sublimation, which at least allows the partial satisfaction of sexual desires through substitute outlets, rather than relying exclusively on repression.