British Journal of Psychiatry (1990), **157**, 940–943

Reading About . . .

Psychoanalysis

The reading I suggest first is concerned with the Oedipus complex, a major explanatory theory of psychoanalysis based upon a set of observations and crucial to the understanding of the personality and its relationships. It refers to an organised configuration of loving and hostile feelings which the child experiences towards its parents. It is the desire for the total possession of mother and the death of father as a rival, but is also love of the father and rivalry with the mother. Siblings, babies and genital and pregenital versions of sexual intercourse and masturbation enter into it as well. My brief description draws upon the discussion in Laplanche & Pontalis' (1973) invaluable dictionary of psychoanalytic terms and concepts.

For many reasons it is difficult to fully appreciate the power and scope of the Oedipus-complex theory. For instance, in the first half of life individuals can have the unnoticed belief that their oedipal phantasies can be realised. It is only with realisations of a different sort – of limitations, the inevitable loss of parents and the fact of personal mortality – that oedipal elements force themselves upon the personality in a way which demands the re-working of adjustments previously achieved in adolescence and childhood; more explicit recognition and insight requires a personal analysis.

Freud first put forward the theory of the Oedipus complex in 1897 during one of the most productive phases of his life. He was suffering at the same time from his own psychoneurosis with mood changes and states of intense anxiety. At the end of October 1896 his father had died. The period is described in the two main biographies of Freud, the classic by Jones (1953) and the more recent work by Gay (1988). Ellenberger (1970), in *The Discovery of the Unconscious,* mentions this period as part of what he terms Freud's creative neurosis. Ellenberger's work is a means of orientation in a difficult terrain. He describes the history of pre-Freudian notions of the dynamic unconscious, and of psychodynamic therapies, and shows where Freud's theories are situated in the history of ideas. As a general introduction to Freud's own ideas it is hard to better Jones' (1953) biography and Wollheim's (1971) concise account of Freud in the Fontana Modern Masters series. All Freud's biographers draw heavily upon the correspondence between Freud (1887–1902) and Wilhelm Fliess which reveals Freud's life, state of mind and way of working in the 1890s when some of his most important theories and methods of investigation were born.

One of Freud's means of discovery in this period was his self-analysis, a method which itself was a major achievement: many have entered into periods of intense self-examination and reorganisation with major results, but Freud managed to systematise something of the means of this process. His self-analytic procedure was modelled upon his therapeutic method with his patients but it, in its turn, contributed to the development of Freud's technique – psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the self-analysis was intimately linked both with his writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), and with his bereavement (". . . my reaction to my father's death – that is to say the most poignant loss of a man's life"), out of which the discovery of the Oedipus-complex theory came.

Freud's self-analysis was only sometimes a detached and intellectual self-scrutiny. Often, it was a powerful process such as develops in good analyses. This process is not contrived or willed but arises from powerful, non-voluntary sources deep within, and from this derives the conviction which attends these discoveries. Freud wrote of the turbulence and non-deniability of the analytic processes in a letter to Fliess (27 October, 1897): ". . . I am living only for "inner" work. It gets hold of me and hauls me through the past in rapid association of ideas; and my mood changes like the landscape seen by a traveller from a train". He goes on to quote Goethe: "And the shades of loved ones appear, and with them like an old, half-forgotten myth, first love and friendship". To this, Freud adds, somewhat ruefully, "as well as first terror and strife" (letter 72).

The insights gained in his self-analysis provided Freud with an understanding of the nature of family relationships and their internal representation, which enabled him to build a theory based upon motives and meaning. Freud was making a psychological theory

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.157.6.940 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in which the physiological principles that marked his earliest theories remained only as parallel and increasingly metaphorical structures.

The major conclusion of this period arose from Freud's growing disbelief of the memories of florid seduction by their parents revealed by many of his patients. He reasoned that, while the seduction of children occurred to a much greater extent than had been previously acknowledged, the memories of many of his patients were based on their wishful fantasies rather than on fact. In a letter to Fliess (15 October, 1897) he announced one factor which changed his view: "Only one idea of general value has occurred to me. I have found love of the mother and jealously of the father in my own case too, and now believe it to be a general phenomenon of early childhood even if it does not always occur so early as in children who have been made hysterics. The tragedy of Oedipus Rex endures . . . because it seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognises because he has felt traces of it in himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy, and this dream fulfilment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror, with the full measure of repression which separates his infantile from his present state".

After interpreting one of the classical world's great tragedies (Sophocles, 429–420 B.C.) he moved on to consider Shakespeare's most difficult tragedy. Shakespeare depicts Hamlet, a very modern hero, in a state of confused and guilty bereavement. "Shades of loved ones" have appeared to Hamlet too. How can Hamlet's hesitation to avenge his father by killing his uncle be explained? Freud's answer: "How better than by the torment roused in him by the obscure memory that he himself had meditated the same deed against his father because of passion for his mother, "use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape a whipping?" ".

Psychoanalytic insights can enrich our appreciation of the work of creative artists. The reverse holds with equal force. These great works, which can support so many different readings, enable us to contemplate the range of human passions which are also the raw data of psychoanalytic theories. Hamlet can help us understand what the theory of the Oedipus complex is really about.

The loss of loved ones leads to major upheavals. There is a re-working of deep and often ambivalent feelings. Every loss revives earlier losses and the powerful feelings of infancy are stirred; the Oedipus complex is the source of some of our very earliest loss. We all have to give up the exclusive possessive love for, and of, our parents. According to psychoanalysis, loss, as well as first love, is built in.

Freud's first observations about the Oedipus complex were more subtle than popular formulaic versions allow. It is well known that infantile sexuality, in the sense of infants and young children having diverse sexual excitements and phantasies, is considered to be important in personality development. However, Freud also concluded that children's observations of their parent's intercourse – the primal scene – can have a telling influence. And where there was no opportunity for observation, the child's imagination, his phantasy, would provide.

Freud further developed his ideas with observations about the internalisation of parental objects when oedipal wishes are repressed, and he considered this to be the essence of superego formation. In a very important paper, "Mourning and melancholia" (1917), he described how one part of the ego sets itself up in judgement over another, how melancholia and mourning are both linked with object loss and how the self-accusations of the melancholic are also complaints directed at an introjected object.

Klein's (1945) paper "The Oedipus complex in the light of early anxieties" gives an account of her work on the role of Oedipus situations in the development of boys and girls. Differing in many areas from Freud, Klein felt that oedipal fantasies occurred almost from the beginning of life; that the little girl had an awareness of herself as female, possessing an internal space and the vagina as a means of entry to it; that both boys and girls had an intensely possessive loving and hating relationship to the mother, first to her breasts but also, from very early, to her body and its contents, including babies; that the father, like the mother, is first experienced as a part-object; and that all these objects are felt to exist inside the child as well as outside. The feelings are at first extremely intense and the infant and very young child has periods when it veers from experiences of ideal satisfaction to those of intense persecution and distress.

Klein's description of her work with two children reveals the originality of her approach. There are sustained insights into internalisation and phantasy, two areas which she investigated in great detail. The notion of unconscious phantasy arose out of her technique with young children and was dependent upon her extraordinary capacity to appreciate the symbolic significance of play activities. Klein seeks to show how the perception and appreciation of the world and people in it is radically influenced by internalised object relations, and by the child's continuously active unconscious phantasy relationships, which also affect the state of the objects that the child unconsciously feels to be inside them.

The Oedipus Complex Today (Britton, Feldman & O'Shaughnessy, 1989), a statement of modern

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.157.6.940 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kleinian thinking, takes Klein's 1945 paper as its starting point. The three authors approach the Oedipus complex with different perspectives upon a shared point of view. The manifestations of oedipal situations can be subtle and difficult to spot, and these authors address instances where such qualities obtain. However, the clinical descriptions are also valuable because they show oedipal situations as ubiquitous, reassuringly commonplace and everyday.

Very sick patients are unable to negotiate oedipal situations in their development as this is dependent upon the internalisation of a secure good object as a central core to the ego. This process has miscarried in these patients, sometimes for environmental reasons, sometimes because of constitutional factors and always as a result of an interaction of both. O'Shaughnessy describes these patients in whom oedipal feelings are not evident because they are too intense to be faced. Of one occasion in the treatment of an 11-year-old boy she writes: "I said he felt I had mentioned his brother at the wrong time just when he was longing to have me to himself, and rage and disappointment were now pushing and pulling him about. I linked these feelings to his infancy, and how the baby that was still there in him felt that his mother, by becoming pregnant when he was four months old, filled herself with his brother at the wrong time, because he still needed to have her for himself."

Britton comments upon the shift of emphasis from the child's possessive sexual feelings to the impact of the child's awareness of the parents' sexual relationship. Some children are able to face this "challenge to the goodness of mother", and, after a period of mourning the loss of the previous exclusive, possessive relationship, re-establish a relationship with both parents on a new basis. Others cannot accomplish this, introducing some split in the ego, disintegrating or attacking the perceptual apparatus – their own minds — which registers the nature of the world.

Interestingly, the thinking process seems to be greatly affected by, for example, phantasies of controlling or taking the place of the parental couple. Feldman shows this through careful clinical descriptions. These emotional influences upon the thinking processes and upon cognitive development are more fully understood as a result of Wilfred Bion's work. Roger Money-Kyrle (1968, 1971) describes this work and the consequent far-reaching reformulation of psychoanalytic subject matter. Essentially, this can be conceived as the response of the infantile mind to certain basic facts and experiences. These include notions of the creativity of parental intercourse and of the capacity of the breast to nourish and nurture, which do not seem to be entirely dependent upon experience. Basic experiences and phantasies around issues of this sort provoke intense hostility and envy as well as love and admiration, resulting in the unconscious misrepresentations, delusions and misconceptions which are to some extent part of normal development. A corollary of Money-Kyrle's approach is that he can describe certain types of superegos as misconceptions.

Defining more precisely what psychoanalytic knowledge actually is has fascinated analysts, psychiatrists, critics and philosophers. Psychiatrists interested in analysis are often preoccupied with clarifying for themselves the epistemological issues raised by psychoanalytic ideas. What is the distinguishing quality of psychoanalytic findings? In my view it is an attempt to be objective about subjectivity while still describing what things look like and feel like from the inside.

In an essay, "Philosophy, metaphysics and psychoanalysis" the philosopher John Wisdom (1953) examines the distinction between discovery by reflection and discovery by investigation, and between knowledge about people with consciousness and knowledge about inanimate entities. He compares Freud's discovery which linked the unconscious and the repitition of the past with Newton's discovery of gravity which also connected already known phenomena.

Wisdom illustrates one type of psychoanalytic discovery with this example: "It's like someone who is trying on a hat and is studying it in a mirror. There is a pause and a friend says, "My dear, the Taj Mahal". All along she has known there was something wrong with the hat, now she sees what it is."

One reason why psychoanalytic findings are valuable is that meaning, mentality and emotionality are addressed in their own terms. This yields data about intangible entities. Anxiety has no shape or smell, yet we are in no doubt when we are in its presence. However, sometimes, it is worrying that in the last analysis there is still nothing to put a finger upon.

The direct observation of behaviour and interaction can provide more objective data which occasionally assuages some of these anxieties. If they are relied upon too much the distinctive subjective quality of analytic findings is lost. The observation of infants and children has a particular relevance for psychoanalysis with its reconstructive hypotheses about childhood and the idea that infantile factors continue to be relevant in the adult personality. One infant observation of great interest is that which Charles Darwin (1877) published in *Mind* of one of his own children.

Many analysts have devoted considerable efforts to the formal observation of development. Of course,

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.157.6.940 Published online by Cambridge University Press

while their studies were of theoretical value and empirical reassurance, they also had humanitarian effects. Rene Spitz, who in 1910 had a training analysis with Freud, in 1945 published a classic paper, "Hospitalism: an inquiry into the genesis of psychiatric conditions in early childhood", demonstrating the effects upon development of the existing pattern of care in institutions, particularly the lack of mothering and of a mother. Fraiberg, in a commentary upon Spitz's (1945) work, wrote: "The younger generation no longer knows first hand that when Spitz's studies of hospitalism and anaclitic depression appeared in the 1940s they were greeted in psychological circles with disbelief that deprivation of mothering could produce enduring effects on an infant's psychological development."

As a result of this work as well as that of Robertson and Bowlby in this country, attitudes to children, admission to hospital and adoption procedures have changed enormously. Moreover, these observations and the analytic work which preceded them have led to a harvest in the field of developmental psychology. Patterns of emotional reciprocity between mother and infant have been recognised as an essential part of the developmental process. Brazelton *et al* (1975) describe the mutual cycling of attention and affectivity which can be observed between young infants (2–20 weeks) and their mothers. They suggest that the goal of this is to achieve affective synchrony, and among its many powerful effects may be the modulation of excitement, mood and the taking in of the maternal environment. When mothers were asked to keep a frozen face for a few minutes their infants were very upset, looking hopeless and depressed. In infant–mother pairs who failed to thrive, Brazelton *et al* (1975) observed a "chaotic non-synchrony" and suggest that this embodied a basic distortion of "complex, expected and necessary rules for interaction". There are psychoanalytic contributions on the nature of mother–infant interaction. Winnicott's "holding" and Bion's "containing" are two important theories about emotional and mental operations and attitudes. In this area there is an opportunity for the integration of domains.

Psychoanalysis is a large subject with many avenues of approach and the reading recommended here is highly selective. Before leaving you to these highways and byways I recommend a paper by Riviere (1936), "A contribution to the analysis of the negative therapeutic reaction", which deals with those patients who are difficult to treat by any means, who respond to progress with deterioration, and who are narcissistically inaccessible. Riviere cautions against analysts using the negative therapeutic reaction in a self-exonerating way and shows why these patients are so threatened by change. Her description of the depressive anxieties to be faced in periods of psychic change is unsurpassed.

References

BRAZELTON, T. B., TRONICK, E., ADAMSON, L., *et al* (1975) Early mother-infant reciprocity. In *Parent Infant Interaction: Ciba Foundation Symposium 33*, pp. 137–154. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

BRITTON, R., FELDMAN, M. & O'SHAUGHNESSY, E. (1989) *The Oedipus Complex Today, Clinical Implications*. London: Karnac Books.

DARWIN, C. (1877) A biographical sketch of an infant. *Mind*, 7, 285–294.

ELLENBERGER, H. F. (1970) *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press.

FREUD, S. (1887–1902) *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis, Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes* (eds M. Bonaparte, A. Freud & E. Kris) (1954). London: Imago.

—— (1900) *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Vol. IV of the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press & Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

—— (1917) Mourning and melancholia. In Vol XIV of the *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, pp. 237–258. London: Hogarth Press & Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

GAY, P. (1988) *Freud – A Life for Our Time*. London: Dent & Sons.

JONES, E. (1953) *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*. London: Hogarth Press.

KLEIN, M. (1945) The Oedipus complex in the light of early anxieties. In *Love, Guilt and Reparation*. Vol. 1 of *Writings of Melanie Klein* (1975) pp. 370–419. London: Hogarth Press.

LAPLANCHE, J. & PONTALIS, J.-B. (1973) *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Hogarth Press.

MONEY-KYRLE, R. (1968) Cognitive development In *Collected Papers of Roger Money-Kyrle* (1978). Strath Tay: Clunie Press.

—— (1971) The aim of psychoanalysis. In *Collected Papers of Roger Money-Kyrle* (1978). Strath Tay: Clunie Press.

RIVIERE, J. (1936) A contribution to the analysis of the negative therapeutic reaction. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 17, 304–320.

SHAKESPEARE, W. (1596–1601) Hamlet. *The Arden Shakespeare* (ed. H. Jenkins). London: Routledge.

SOPHOCLES (429–420 B.C.) *King Oedipus. The Theban Plays*. (Trans. by E. F. Watling) (1974). London: Penguin.

SPITZ, R. (1945) Hospitalism: an inquiry into the genesis of psychiatric conditions in early childhood. In *Rene Spitz: Dialogues from Infancy Selected Papers* (ed R. N. Emde). (1983). New York: IUP.

WOLLHEIM, R. (1971) *Freud*. London: Fontana/Collins.

WISDOM, J. (1953) Philosophy, metaphysics and psychoanalysis. In *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis*, pp. 248–282. Oxford: Blackwell.

Additional reading on psychotherapy

The Royal College of Psychiatrist's reading list on psychotherapy may also be of interest to readers.

David Taylor, *Consultant Psychotherapist, The Tavistock Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA*

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.157.6.940 Published online by Cambridge University Press