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Point of View

Freud's Family

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Sigmund Freud's family background holds extraordinary fascination, not just because he is an historic figure but because his very ideas centred around the influence of formative family relationships. In addition, Freud used his own experiences as one means of research, from which he concluded that some personal details only may be available in disguised form. This has proved an irresistible challenge to those interested in the evolution of Freud's theories.

Historians have sought information from archives (e.g. Masson, 1985), from autobiographical material, including Freud's accounts of his dreams (e.g. Freud, 1900, 1925; Schur, 1972; Balmary, 1982; Anzieu, 1986; Krüll, 1987), from personal recollections (e.g. Bernays Heller, 1956; M. Freud, 1957), from biographies (e.g. Jones, 1964; Roazen, 1975; Clark, 1980; Peters, 1985) and from letters (e.g. Bonaparte *et al*, 1954). However, they found that many dates and events were not accurately recorded* or remain unavailable, and the researchers were left to piece together the puzzle as best they could. They tried to breathe extra life into the known data by suggesting connections between pieces of evidence, proposing hypotheses to explain discrepancies or motives, and offering reinterpretations of Freud's reported self-analysis. I am indebted to these authors, whose work I have drawn upon.

My primary purpose is to bring together into a succinct form the many previous chronicles (see also McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985) and attempt to trace through the patterns of inter-generational and inter-personal relationships. This is not intended to be an account of Freud's academic life, but inevitably our curiosity is aroused about personal influences upon his intellectual and other achievements. While it is very tempting to speculate on the nature of any links, we must remain aware that this is only conjecture.

The history

The year is 1815. Bismarck is born at Schönhausen in Brandenburg, and the battle of Waterloo is fought outside Brussels. Our story will begin nearly 1000 miles

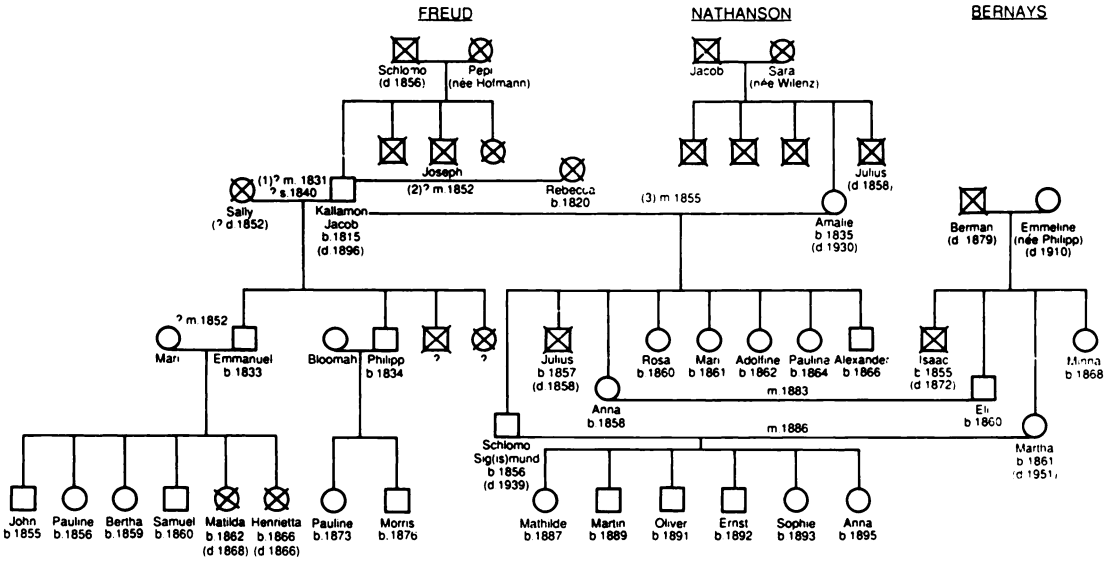


FIG. 1 The Freud family, as it was in 1895. Not all historians agree on dates.*

*Dates given in this paper are after Krüll (1987).

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further east, in the town of Tysmenitz, Galicia, which was then part of the Austrian empire. Until 1772 it had been within the borders of Poland, and today it lies in the USSR.

In 1815 the Jews of Tysmenitz welcomed the birth of Kallamon Jacob, who was to be the first of four children to Schlomo and Pepi Freud (see Fig. 1). The family was a pious one and Schlomo worked as a cloth merchant.

Jacob learned his father's trade, and, as was the custom, married young – before his seventeenth birthday – in 1831. His bride was Sally (née Kanner), and she quickly bore him two sons, Emmanuel and Philipp. It is likely that two further children followed, only to die in early childhood.

Traditionally, Jewish families maintained a close bond with the mother's side, and during his early twenties Jacob partnered his maternal grandfather, Siskind Hofmann, travelling to Freiberg in north-east Moravia (now part of Czechoslovakia) as a wool and textile trader. The journey was over 300 miles and Jacob therefore spent many months at a time away from his wife and sons. It took him into a world of different customs and ways of life, and in 1848, when new laws lifted travel and domicile restrictions on Jews, Jacob chose to reside permanently in Freiberg. It would appear that he had not only broken away from his family, but also its cultural traditions.

Mystery shrouds the next few years. Nothing is known about Sally's fate, but there is good evidence that by 1852 Jacob was remarried, to Rebecca, who had come with Emmanuel and Philipp to join him in Freiberg: he was aged 37 and she 32. Surprisingly, early biographies and autobiographies contain no reference to Rebecca, and we are left to speculate that her existence was a long-standing family secret. There have been many attempts to explain the registration of a Rebecca as Jacob's wife in 1852, if indeed they were not married. One possible hypothesis is that Rebecca was the wife of Jacob's brother Joseph, and was travelling to Freiberg with Emmanuel and Philipp on some clandestine business; for, seven years later, Joseph, Emmanuel, and Philipp were to be implicated in a counterfeiting conspiracy, which Jacob surely would have wanted to keep secret from the rest of his family.

We know from our own therapeutic work how secrets can stir the imagination of other family members, and many biographers note the later conflict between openness and guarding of personal information by both Jacob's son Sigmund and granddaughter Anna.

Jacob's son Emmanuel probably married Mari in 1852, and it cannot be common that a father and son marry within a few months of each other. Could this be an example of competition between the two men? At least we can begin to see the potential for inter-generational confusion in this family.

By late 1852, Jacob, Emmanuel, Mari, Philipp, and Rebecca were living in Freiberg, but Rebecca's departure from the story is as mysterious as her arrival. She may have died, the couple may have divorced, or the marriage may have been annulled. In an intriguing analysis, Balmary (1982) wonders whether Rebecca committed suicide when Jacob had an affair with another woman, making her pregnant, for Jacob married for a third time in July 1855, to Amalie (née Nathanson) from Vienna. There was certainly something unusual about this marriage, as Jacob was then aged 40 and his bride aged only 20, and it was inconsistent with the traditions of Jacob's earlier life for a man to marry a woman so much younger than himself. We should also note that Jacob's new wife was virtually the same age as his unmarried younger son, Philipp.

John was born to Emmanuel and Mari one month after Jacob and Amalie's wedding; and so, by 1856, Jacob was living with his third wife in Freiberg, his younger son was living in the house opposite, and his elder son was living with his wife and son a few streets away.

The following few years were to be turbulent for this extended family. In February 1856, and just seven months after Jacob and Amalie's marriage, Jacob's father, Schlomo, died in Tysmenitz. This must have been a major life crisis for Jacob; he had broken away from his father's religious and cultural traditions, had married twice in a 'foreign' town, had maintained the secret of his second marriage, and was now probably unable to maintain the old custom of saying prayers at his father's graveside. Apart from the expectable period of mourning, we can only imagine how Jacob reacted to this crisis.

Amalie was heavily pregnant when Jacob's father died; three months later, on 6 May 1856, their son was born. He was given the name Schlomo after his recently deceased grandfather (as was Jewish custom), and a German name Sigismund (as was the law).

Schlomo Sigismund was held in very high regard by his parents: he was the first-born son to Jewish parents, and named after a grandfather concerning whom his father probably felt a mixture of admiration and guilt. Throughout his life, Sigismund's mother – said to be self-centred, authoritarian, and somewhat 'masculine' in character – showed a much stronger preference for him than for her daughters, and it must be significant that Sigismund was the only one of Jacob's eight children whose name Jacob entered

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into the family Bible, and that he himself makes no mention of his siblings in his autobiography (Freud, 1925).

In November 1856, Emmanuel and Mari's second child, Pauline, was born. Little Sigismund now had playmates nine months older and six months younger than he, who were, in fact, his (half-) nephew and (half-) niece. Sigismund and John were especially close.

But a double tragedy soon followed. A brother had been born when Sigismund was 17 months old and had been named Julius, presumably after his mother's youngest brother: but, just five months later, uncle Julius died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Then, at the age of six months, baby Julius died of gastro-enteritis. By the time Sigismund was 17 months old, then, his parents had lost in quick succession Jacob's father, Amalie's favourite younger brother, and now their second son. His parents' mourning and melancholia must have been experienced by Sigismund during his formative years, and Julius' death might well have exaggerated the bond between Sigismund and his mother and father. Sigismund later claimed he could recall his jealousy when baby Julius replaced him for their mother's attention, and how distraught he felt when Julius died.

Family conflict pursued these tragedies. Young Sigismund had a nursemaid while his mother was pregnant with Anna, and some authors (e.g. Krüll, 1987) believe that she sexually abused him by masturbation. We may assume that this was at a time when Amalie and Jacob were emotionally unavailable to Sigismund. In 1859, when Sigismund was aged three, the family split up and went its separate ways, in a manner that caused him considerable distress. Various explanations have been offered for this event. Some suggest that Jacob's business was failing, and others that anti-Semitism resurfaced locally or that Philipp was about to be drafted into the army. Krüll (1987) re-assesses Freud's dream material to propose that he may have witnessed his mother committing adultery with Philipp.

What might have been the effects on young Sigismund of the secrecy surrounding his father's earlier life, of finding his parents emotionally unavailable to him during his early years, of (possibly) experiencing sexual abuse from his nursemaid, of (perhaps) witnessing adultery between his mother and half-brother (whom he regarded as his uncle), of the traumatic break-up of his close extended family, and of the loss of his play companions (from a younger generation)?

Jacob brought his wife and two young children to Leipzig and then to Vienna, where Amalie's family lived, while Emmanuel and his wife and three children, together with Philipp, emigrated to Manchester, England. Emmanuel became a respected member of the community, but Philipp's life seems to have been somewhat less successful. However, while his sons were settling in their new home, Jacob's business and personal life deteriorated in Vienna. He turned into a poor, unhappy and withdrawn man, a disappointment to his family and probably to himself, since he was forced to rely on Amalie's family for financial support. Amalie herself became impatient, impulsive, and demanding, and we might speculate that Sigismund, as the elder child revered by both parents, was for a time triangulated in their complementary relationship (as described by Minuchin, 1974).

During this period of decline, the family had many changes of address, while four more daughters were born. The last child of the household, Alexander, was born in 1866, and during Amalie's pregnancy with him, her father died. Sigismund was to be attached in a parental way to Alexander, and (apart from brotherly closeness) one wonders whether Sigismund was especially sensitive to their father's and mother's unhappiness during Alexander's early years and tried to compensate. Sigismund also developed a positive relationship with Rosa and Adolfine, but Anna and he sparked off anger and competition in each other, possibly influenced by Jacob's extra closeness to Anna.

At the age of nine, Sigismund passed his entrance exam to the Sperl Gymnasium, where he excelled. In his mid-teens he first visited the town of his birth, and also modified his name to Sigmund. He followed his father's wishes for him to be a dedicated scholar, and when he left the Gymnasium with distinction in 1873, he first contemplated a career in law, but then chose to study medicine at Vienna University, graduating in 1881.

When he was 19, his father and half-brother Emmanuel had planned that Sigmund should marry Emmanuel's daughter Pauline. But in 1882, aged 26, Sigmund became engaged to Martha Bernays. She was the third of four children in a devoutly Jewish family: her eldest brother had died in 1872, at the age of 17, and then her father in 1879, since when the remaining brother, Eli, had supported the family.

In 1882 Martha was aged 22 and still emotionally attached to her mother. We have already noted the closely competitive relationship between Sigmund and his sister Anna during their childhood: we now find that Anna and Eli became engaged six months after Sigmund and Martha, and married the following year. Sigmund came to feel strong rivalry and hostility to Eli – he chose not to attend Anna and Eli's wedding – which was only mitigated when Eli

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and Anna emigrated to the United States ten years later. Neither Martha's brother nor her mother approved of her choice of partner.

Sigmund was concerned to further his studies and become established professionally and financially before marrying, but over the next few years the couple saw little of each other. Martha agreed to go with her mother to live in Wandsbek, near Hamburg, while Sigmund undertook research and then worked as a resident in the Vienna General Hospital. With the help of a travelling grant, he then visited the Salpêtrière in Paris for 19 weeks to study with Charcot, an experience which changed his interests from neurology to neurosis and hypnosis. Of great significance is Masson's discovery (1985) that while in Paris in 1885–1886, Sigmund was exposed to considerable clinical and written evidence of the physical and sexual abuse of children.

Sigmund and Martha married in Wandsbeck in September 1886 – he was aged 30 and she 25 – with Sigmund announcing to Martha that she must now expect to belong to his family and no longer to her own. Over the next eight years they had six children: the last, Anna, was born in 1895, when Sigmund was aged 39, and it was she who was to become the closest to Sigmund, and the one to take up the torch of his work.

Adolfine was the only one of Sigmund's siblings not to marry, for the family designated that she would remain single in order to look after Amalie. This she did, and for the rest of her life she was dominated by her demanding mother.

Professionally, Sigmund was on the threshold of describing psycho-analysis. He had been corresponding since 1887 with Fliess and collaborating with Breuer on hypnotic techniques. *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer & Freud) was published in 1895, and in May 1896 Sigmund courageously presented his paper 'The aetiology of hysteria' (Freud, 1896) to the Vienna Society of Pyschiatry and Neurology, in which he proposed that sexual seductions in childhood underlay adult neuroses. A significant element in the icy reception from Krafft-Ebing, the Society's Chairman, must have been that *he* suffered from hysterical symptoms and clung resolutely to a belief in their organic origins.

Sigmund was also much preoccupied with death and loss, and he had superstitiously predicted that he would die at the age of 40 – incidentally, the age Jacob had been when his father Schlomo had died. Sigmund's prediction of a personal crisis in 1896 was realised; however, not as he had anticipated. For in June his father fell terminally ill and he died in October, aged 81.

During that year, Martha's younger sister Minna moved in to live permanently with the family, and it is widely reported that thereafter Sigmund sustained a closer relationship with Minna (who, like his mother, may have shown 'masculine' character traits) than with Martha. Martha chose the role of obliging housewife who organised domestic life around her husband's professional work.

Within a few month's of his father's death, Sigmund's recurrent psychosomatic symptoms worsened and were accompanied by severe anxiety, depression, and morbid fears of dying; and he embarked on his self-analysis. It quickly led Sigmund to renounce his theory that childhood seduction underlay adult neuroses, although not without considerable conflict. It is worth noting that in his famous letter to Fliess (dated 21 September 1897) announcing his retraction of the seduction theory, Sigmund found himself unable to accept that ". . . in every case the father, not excluding my own, had to be blamed as a pervert" (Freud, 1897). We are left to wonder whether actual experiences or exposure during his childhood were now unacknowledgeable to Sigmund. He concluded that children *imagine* sexual experiences: modern clinical experience teaches us differently (e.g. Baker & Duncan, 1985).

The first of Sigmund and Martha's children to marry was Mathilde, at the age of 21, in 1909 (on the same day that Sigmund's brother Alexander married), followed in 1913 by Sophie when aged 20; Martin married in 1919 at the age of 30, Ernst in 1920 aged 28 and Oliver in 1923 when aged 32. Anna remained unmarried. Eight grandchildren were born between 1914 and 1924.

However, these same years were also marked by significant losses, which seemed to have a greater impact on Sigmund. Martha's mother died in 1910 – which indirectly must have affected him – and then his half-brother Philipp died in 1911. Emmanuel, of whom he had always remained fond, was killed in a railway accident in 1914. His favourite sister Rosa's son was killed in action in 1917, and Count Anton von Freund, a friend, benefactor and strong supporter of psycho-analysis, died of cancer in 1920. Only five days later, Sigmund heard of the death from influenzal pneumonia of his then favourite daughter Sophie: he first used the term "death instinct" in a letter to Eitington just three weeks later. In 1922 his 23-year-old niece Caecilie – Rosa's remaining child – committed suicide, and the following year Sigmund was numbed by the death from tuberculosis of his favourite grandchild Heinz, son of Sophie, when aged only four.

Amalie died in Vienna in 1930 and surprisingly Sigmund did not attend her funeral himself (was

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TABLE I

Year	*Life event*	*Theoretical transition*
1896	A year Sigmund predicted he would die; father's death (October)	Renounces seduction theory in 1897 (eventually published as *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905)
1910	Mother-in-law's death (October)	–
1911	Half-brother Philipp's death (August)	Beginnings of break with Jung
1914	Half-brother Emmanuel's death (October)	Early ideas about masochism (in 'Instincts and their vicissitudes', 1915), written March–May 1915; drafts for 'Mourning and melancholia' (1917), written February–May 1915
1917	A year Sigmund predicted he would die; Rosa's son Herman killed (summer); first sign of pre-cancerous lesion on palate (winter)	–
1920	Deaths of friend von Freund (January), daughter Sophie (January) and sister Mari's husband (September)	Final theory of death instinct (in 'Beyond the pleasure principle', 1920), completed July 1920
1923	Cancer diagnosed (April); deaths of grandson Heinz (June), Emmanuel's wife (October), and brother-in-law Eli (November)	Writes 'The economic problem of masochism' (1924) in January 1924
1930	Mother's death (September)	First draft of 'Female sexuality' (1931), written February 1931

he ill?) but was represented by his daughter Anna. He commented to Jones (Jones, 1964) that his mother's death induced in him "an increase in personal freedom, since it was always a terrifying thought that she might come to hear of my death", and "no grief otherwise". Ambivalence?

Earlier, in 1917, Sigmund had first noticed a lesion of his palate, which was diagnosed as cancerous in 1923. The numerous subsequent operations brought Sigmund and his daugher Anna closer still; for she was virtually the only person he allowed to nurse him, a task she accepted with dedication.

There would appear to be coincidences between these personal events and developments in Sigmund's theoretical work (Table I), although, again, we should be wary in our speculations. Sigmund appears to have reacted to many actual or threatened losses with a renewed intellectual vigour, and especially in areas which were conflictual for him personally.

Only a few members of the family became involved in psycho-analysis: Martin (a lawyer) managed the movement's independent publishing company 'Verlag' and Ernst (an architect who came to London in 1933) supervised translations of Sigmund's works and edited his correspondence. Sophie's son Ernst became a psycho-analyst, and Anna (initially a teacher) was psycho-analysed by her father, who gave her one of the special rings to inaugurate her into the 'inner circle' in 1920, and she became a member of the Vienna Psycho-Analytic Society two years later. Her psycho-analytic work with children is respected world-wide.

Sigmund, Martha, Anna, Minna, Mathilde and her husband, Martin and his family, Alexander, and grandson Ernst fled to London in 1938 to escape the Nazi terror, but four of Sigmund's sisters perished in the holocaust – Adolfine in Theresiensdat, Maria and Pauline in Treblinka and Rosa in Auschwitz. Sigmund never knew of their fate: for on 23 September 1939 he died, aged 83. Martha survived him by 12 years; Anna died in 1982. Their ashes lie in Golders Green Cemetery.

Conclusions

Jacob was an adventurous and progressive man, prepared to explore beyond traditional boundaries. He encouraged his son Sigmund to explore ideas, but also gave him the conflictual communication, "don't look (into my background) too much". Sigmund was already exposed to puzzles about inter-generational relationships because of the structure of his family, and he seems to have experienced disturbing sexual events in his early life. He grew up as an idealised and parentified child, but probably also was caught up in an increasingly conflictual relationship between his parents. Sigmund admired his father when he was young, but Jacob's personal and emotional decline followed the drama of the family's break-up and exaggerated Sigmund's mixed feelings towards him – which he only became aware of when Jacob died. Perhaps the self-important son felt responsible for his family's predicament.

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As he grew up, Sigmund remained closer to his doting mother than to his more withdrawn father, and he came to show similar character traits; for example, a tendency to be self-centred and authoritarian. His wife showed many of the opposite traits.

When a young medical practitioner, Sigmund was driven by a desire to make a name for himself: this he most certainly achieved. During the growth of the psycho-analytic movement he was equally determined to lead the group in the direction of his own ideas, at the cost of bitter estrangements from a number of his followers.

There can be little doubt that most unprejudiced clinicians have found derivatives of Freud's theories valuable, but also that some of his original opinions must be modified by subsequent findings. Freud's work was dominated by postulates about unacknowledged secrets, real or imagined traumata too alarming to be admitted into everyday consciousness, sexuality, death and loss, cross-generational coalitions, and the formative relationships between infants, mothers and fathers. I have outlined significant events in the story of the Freud family which may well have sensitised Sigmund to the creative discoveries he made. It is also possible to understand how family influences could have produced blind-spots and distortions in his theorising. As it is said, *when it comes to self-analysis, beware the counter-transference!*

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