

# The Relevance of Freud in the Modern World

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## ABSTRACT

Sigmund Freud has affected generations not only in the field of psychology but also in social scenarios, home life and popular culture. His views and theories have shaped our current concepts ranging from development to therapy. His beliefs, in his time, not only inspired his contemporaries with theirs' but they also sparked controversies with other intellectuals. Despite being subject to criticism, his ideas have been and are still relevant. The terms introduced by him like the 'Freudian slip' and 'denial', have been incorporated into the present dictionaries and everyday life. Massively influential, his ideas, theories and his school of thought, psychoanalysis, continue to have a strong impact on psychology as well as psychotherapy even today.

**Keywords:** Freud's theory, Pleasure principle, Psychology

## INTRODUCTION

A person's 'fate' is a consequence that has been arranged by the same person [1]. A fascinating thought that emerged from the brilliant mind of Freud. A mind that caused others' to warp themselves with unending queries of what is, was and could be. Sigmund Freud is almost synonymous with the term psychology itself in today's world. Wildly popular was he for his thought-provoking and rather antithetical views that wouldn't collectively apply to the generation of today. It is under debate if those views even applied in the yesteryears since they were actively opposed by his successor's themselves [1]. But despite all of that, sticking to his guns, Freud trusted himself to be right. He had a staunch personality and was incredibly enigmatic. His grand daughter, Sophie, said that he knew that he was bright and was going to change the world. He was right. He did change the world [2].

Born to a merchant family, Freud was a rather shy youngster. Beginning his career formerly as a neurologist, he was influenced by Jean-Martin Charcot into exploring the 'mind' for solutions to psychological disorders rather than the 'brain' [3]. This led to the birth of his school of thought-Psychoanalysis, where, he emphasised the importance of the unconscious. Psychoanalysis was his brain child. The psychoanalytic approach has held clout over the years but the approach was not without criticism and has been called unscientific, implausible, inconclusive and absurd among other things. His theories were also accused of being unoriginal. According to Menand L., other historians claimed that Freud's theory of the unconscious was derived from Lamarckism [4]. But these claims were unfounded quite like some of Freud's theories.

## SOME OF FREUD'S THEORIES

Among some of his 'absurd' albeit whacky theories were the famous Oedipus and Electra Complexes. These were part of his Psychosexual Stages of Development. The Oedipal or Oedipus complex was inspired by the Greek story of Oedipus who was cursed to murder his father and sleep with his mother. Dolloff L explained this as the attachment of a child to the parent of the opposite sex along with feelings of envy and aggression towards the parent of the same sex [5]. The Oedipus complex, also explained by Bloom P in simpler terms is when a boy, roughly 3-4 years of age (in the phallic stage of the psychosexual development) realises they are interested in their penis and also

that he loves his mother but with the father in the way of the kid's approach, he would try to eliminate the threat (the father) [6]. But the father has a distinct advantage of a penis and threatens back with castration, which is why the kid backs off and moves on into the next stage-the latency stage. When asked about the state for girls in the same age, Freud came up with the Electra complex. It is the female analog of the Oedipus complex [5]. It is essentially the same but the reason for the hate for their mother would be 'penis envy'. He believed girls were envious of the penis of the father and resented that they were more like the mother's penis and hated them for the same reason. These ideas seemed far-fetched and couldn't be verified. Nevertheless, Freud remained their firm advocate of his theories.

While his earlier work and theories were presented as facts that moulded most of the treatment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his later theories were more of speculations than facts by his own admission. This wasn't the case with most of his earlier pieces of work like the interpretation of dreams. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle published in 1920, nearly 20 years later, it can be observed that his thoughts had taken a rather different approach than before [7]. In the essay-Beyond the Pleasure Principle, he mentions the pleasure principle. The core that drives a human being is pleasures that are often hidden in the unconscious. Instinctual wishes promoted by the 'Id' of the psyche, are strong and look for a pleasurable discharge and simultaneously strive to decrease the unpleasurable tension [8]. This basically means everything we do is to increase pleasure.

With the inclusion of reality, DeRose T and Ruers J (Episode 1) described the pleasure principle as follows- we don't necessarily look to satisfy the needs of our senses [9]. Rather, our psychical apparatus (the mind) regulates to get rid of the unpleasurable tension by introducing the reality principle. The reality principle works with the 'Ego' of the psyche that weighs in on the cravings of the 'Id' and either delays or changes the terms of gratification. Now, these were the claims of instincts made by Freud in the start of the essay. Towards the end though, there was an added part that Freud inserted after the publication of the essay. It was reckoning that contradicted the afore mentioned pleasure principle. In that added part, he defined two more instincts that boggle the mind and showcase how unique and out of the world his approaches were. In the part, he stated that we possess a 'death instinct' that is inherent and is present in all organic life.

It is what propels the organism to go back to an earlier state of things. He surmised that if inanimate objects lived before the living ones, then the aim of all life is death i.e., to go back to the way the things were (inanimate). For this reason he said that living organisms engage willfully in suffering or activities as such because they lead to death, the ultimate goal. "Instinctual life, as a whole, serves to bring about death" [10]. Like the death instinct-Thanatos, Freud also coined the paradoxical, 'Eros'-the life instinct. "The efforts of eros provide a substitute for this instinct towards perfection, whose existence we cannot admit." This self preservation instinct contrasts the death instinct but exists to make certain that the organism dies of its own choosing. This essentially means that we live to die in the way we want to. It is an extremely convoluted notion and at the same time provides fodder for thought [11].

Similar to that revision, was the revision to his essay-The Theory of Dreams. While formerly he claimed that dreams were but an expression of fulfillment of desire, Freud tried to figure out why traumatic dreams tended to reoccur as they weren't fulfilling any desires. He then concluded that there is a more archaic function of the dreams than only catering to the pleasure principle. "An exception to the proposition that dreams are the fulfillment of wishes. Anxiety dreams... offer no such exception. Nor do punishment dreams... they arise, rather in obedience to the compulsion to repeat" [10]. This could be interpreted as follows-traumatic dreams recur because the anxiety they cause has not been appeased. Thus, according to Freud, the original purpose of dreams is to 'bind excitations' or to deal with the anxiety. Only after these excitations are bound, can the dreams move on to fulfill desires. Again, this notion was but a conjecture. "What follows is speculation which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further, an attempt to follow an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead" [10]. DeRose T and Ruers J poetically likened the idea of speculation that brewed in Freud's mind to a siren song that seduced him to abandon scientific evidence and leap into the unknown [11]. Hence, over the course of his writing, it was noticed that his hypothesis were ideas that needed exploration and that did not seem to please a man even as willful as Freud. He was almost regretful when he penned his letter to Lou Andreas-Solome, where he described himself as a mole tunneling the dark recesses of science to find the bright light of speculation at the end [11]. This disharmony with speculation-the tension can be observed across his writing of the 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' says DeRose T and Ruers J [9]. So he wasn't always right, he didn't like that he could be wrong and his theories were suspicious suppositions that lack scientific backing. Why then do we still credit and give merit to his teachings? Why do people still accept his theories? Freudians stoutly believe that the Freudian theory proves itself by the course of psychoanalysis. As in, they believe that every single claim of the patient can be attributed to an unconscious motive be it hate for the mother or anger at the same hatred. They would also cite clinical experience as a base for their assumptions [11]. There is absolutely no scientific attestation. Psychoanalysis has also been said to cure mental illnesses but this also lacks validation since other treatment methods have proven far more useful for treating mental illnesses like anxiety or depression.

According to Bloom P, these theories lack scientific evidence, that they cannot truly be proven right; the reason they stay is because they cannot truly be proven wrong i.e., theories are simply unfalsifiable [6]. He quotes the philosopher Karl Popper on falsification. Popper said that scientific data could be proven wrong and if it couldn't be proven wrong, they aren't interesting

enough to be science. Empirical evidence, thus, serves only to 'test' a scientific hypothesis not 'confirm' it [7]. Despite all of that, the main proposition of Freud that does have certain certifiable merit is the very power of the unconscious mind. Unconscious motivations, according to Freudians, have the monopoly and power to reject the idea that a person knows anything. It is rather similar to being compared to Jon Snow of the Game of Thrones where everyone keeps telling him 'You know nothing'. Thus, the idea is to reduce oneself to Lord Snow and believe that every single action is caused by something nobody knows, not even Jon. It is caused by something no one is aware of or conscious about because these are desires that are so deep rooted in the unconscious mind that the person is simply unaware. It is dependent on the Id, the Ego and the Superego-the heroes of Freud's theory of the unconscious mind. The Id is almost animalistic and as afore-mentioned functions on the pleasure principle. Freud termed Id to have 'polymorphous perversity'. The Ego functions on the reality principle and for Freud, this recognises the origin of consciousness. And lastly, the Superego plays by the morality principle that is basically governed by the internalised rules that are in sense formed by parents and the society. And like the Id, the Superego is also in the unconscious [6].

These unconscious needs and drives are what make our everyday decisions. These are the reasons that Jon could love or hate someone, kill someone he loves or save his enemy, forget certain things and remember other things when he isn't supposed to and ultimately simply not know why he feels that way. When asked why, he would be stumped. Why Jon, it happens to everyone. And this happens because the motives or drives are so deeply embedded in the unconscious mind that only deep digging and will get us to the bottom. And that precisely is what forms the basis of psychoanalysis. Freud's insight about the unconscious mind and its dynamic power over our likes and dislikes has empirical support from social psychology [12]. Gerson MJ says, psychoanalysis aids in discovering the phenomenology of the person and offer a comprehensive understanding of the mind [13].

## CONCLUSION(S)

In view of the above discussed literature, psychoanalysis, Psychoanalysis, thus, does deserve value. Despite the fact that a Nobel Prize winning biologist called the psychoanalytical theory, "the most stupendous intellectual confidential trick"-A mere trick, well, it is the trick that seemed to and still seems to work for some. Most psychologists today would use Freud and his theories more as a reference rather than a therapy modality but they wouldn't deny the importance of exploration of the psyche of the patient or client. Ergo, Freud's uncanny presence is not that easy to get rid of. He is here to stay.

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