

Freud on oedipus



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Freud and Oedipus Sigmund Freud is today recognized for his brilliant breakthroughs in the science of the mind. Even though some of his ideas are criticized today as being too focused on the sexual, they still managed to give us great insight as to the working of the brain. One such insight is today referred to as the Oedipal complex. In this theory, Freud uses the play Oedipus Rex by the ancient Greek Sophocles to illustrate a natural human tendency that can develop into a neurosis. After reading through Freud's theory and reading through the play, it seems clear that Freud is right in suggesting Oedipus suffers from the complex Freud named after him.

The Oedipal complex as described by Freud indicates men wished to possess their mothers in much the same way that their fathers did. "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (Freud, 2006). According to Freud's theory, in identifying with the male gender, boys begin to see their fathers as competition and begin wishing they could replace their fathers and marry their mothers. Freud's theory held that children suffering the guilt and frustration of the oedipal complex, in which the child unconsciously desires an intimate relationship with the parent of the opposite sex and the removal of the parent of the same sex, who are incapable of solving this conflict on their own eventually grow up to become criminals as they seek alleviation from this guilt through punishment. To illustrate his point, he continuously goes back to the story of Oedipus to illustrate these ideas.

In the play, Oedipus is fated at birth to grow up to kill his father and marry his mother, so his natural father orders that he be abandoned to the wilderness expecting that he will die of exposure to the elements. However,

the crying baby was rescued by a shepherd and taken to the neighboring monarchs, who were sadly childless, to be raised as their son. All of this history was unknown to Oedipus when he took leave of his parents at an appropriate age to go question the Oracle about his future. As he is leaving the Oracle, Laius, seeking a solution to a Sphinx problem back in Thebes, is approaching. The two come together at a place where three roads meet and they argue over who has the right of way. Their argument turns into a fight and Oedipus kills Laius never knowing who he really is, thus fulfilling the first part of the prophecy without even knowing it. Because he is fighting for right-of-way with his father, he is also fulfilling Freud's requirements of the Oedipal complex.

Because he is afraid to go home or he might fulfill his prophecy, Oedipus heads in the opposite direction, towards Thebes. When he answers the riddle of the Sphinx and sends it away, he becomes a hero, is made king and marries the widowed queen, Jocasta. At this point, Oedipus is confident that he has outwitted fate because he and Jocasta have several children together and the kingdom prospers. However, at the opening of his play, Oedipus is faced with a new plague. As ruler, Oedipus swears he will root out the poison in spite of warnings. While the audience begins to realize the truth of the situation long before Oedipus, eventually, the main character must also realize that his fate has been realized. However, whether he realized it or not, the fact remained that he desired his mother, or a mother figure, in a sexual way, again fulfilling Freud's ideas.

Thus, Freud's assertion that King Oedipus suffered from the Oedipal complex are confirmed. Defined as hatred toward the father with an aim toward taking his place and loving the mother with a deep sexual desire, Oedipus

demonstrates all of these elements of the complex. He fights with a father figure over the question of right of way and he marries a mother figure with whom he has children. This is evidence enough even if the biological elements of the story were left out.

Works Cited

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