

Personal and collective unconscious essay



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The Personal and Collective Unconscious To many, the unconscious is a section of our minds that is inconceivable and almost nonexistent. Like many things in life, what we cannot explain, we cannot accept.

Sigmund Freud, mastermind of the field of psychology, began to theorize and explain the concept of the unconscious and its effects on our personal lives. Carl Gustav Jung was a young colleague of Sigmund Freud who made the “ exploration of this “ inner space” [the unconscious] his life’s work (Boeree 1). Jung was not only knowledgeable on the Freudian theory he was also knowledgeable in mythology, religion, philosophy and “ traditions such as Gnosticism, Alchemy, Kabala, and similar traditions in Hinduism and Buddhism” (Boeree 1). Jung began to stray away from the Freudian theory and develop his own theory on the unconscious.

The personal unconscious could be seen as the set of repressed feelings and thoughts experienced and developed during an individual person’s lifetime (Hayes 2) Freud put a lot of emphasis on the personal unconscious; Jung, however, believed there was more to our unconscious minds than just our own personal experience. He believed all humanity had a general unconscious that was the same. He named this the “ collective unconscious”. The collective unconscious could be seen as the set of inherited and typical modes of expression, feeling, thought and memory that were seemingly innate to all human beings (Hayes 2). The unconscious contributes to the ways in which we function throughout our lives, and is made up of two components: the personal and collective unconscious. To better understand the unconscious, both personal and collective, the conscious needs to be explained and understood.

One would say that the conscious is simply everything we as an individual are aware of. The conscious can be defined by four sections. The first is thinking, which is thought, cognition, and logic. The second is feeling, and this type is what allows us to make value judgments; this can be good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, etc. The third is sensation, which is what allows us to experience and perceive the world through our senses (touch, smell, taste, sight, sound).

The last section is intuition, which is what we use to perceive things through our unconscious. (Snider 2) These four points are what shape our ability to perceive things in our world, and eventually will be what makes up our unconscious. Now that the conscious is explained it can be easier to understand the personal unconscious. The personal unconscious is “made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed. (C.

G Jung 1) What this means is that what we perceive, either through our senses, emotional feelings or thinking, is sooner or later either going to be stored or repressed in our personal unconscious. The term repression is defined as meaning the unconscious exclusion of painful impulses, desires, or fears from the conscious mind (Repression 1). Not all memories, ideas or experiences are painful or repressed, so those that aren't repressed are stored in our personal unconscious and are made readily available for retrieval. It is important to know that anything stored in the personal unconscious includes anything that is not at the moment conscious to the

person, but if need to be can be retrieved and brought to consciousness again.

(Boeree 3) As Carl Jung States in his book, " The Undiscovered Self, with symbols and the interpretations of dreams", what was once conscious is not lost, only stored away, and is in fact what dictates our consciousness: " When something vanishes from consciousness it does not dissolve into thin air or cease to exist, any more than a car disappearing round a corner becomes non-existent. It is simply out of sight, and, we may meet the car again, so we may come across a thought again which was previously lost... The unconscious, therefore, consists in the first place of a multitude of temporarily eclipsed contents which, as experience shows, continue to influence the conscious processes. (Carl Gustav Jung 76, 77) Our memories are in fact like a " car" that disappears around a corner. Just because it is no longer visible it doesn't mean that the car is no longer existent. It is the same with our thoughts and memories.

Once we think or experience something it becomes stored in our minds. This is then what begins to dictate the way in which we carry out our lives. Our minds are continuously working and our personal unconscious allows us to store information and experiences that can either be retrieved or unconsciously applied. The personal unconscious, therefore, is distinguished by the fact that " the materials contained in this layer are of a personal nature in so far as they have the character partly of acquisitions derived from the individual's life and partly of psychological factors which could just as well be conscious" (494). Not only is the personal unconscious different for each individual, it can easily be recalled or conscious.

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This is what separates the personal conscious from the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is the part of the unconscious that was never conscious before. Therefore, “ the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity” (C. G Jung 1).

The collective unconscious is the area where we find the kind of knowledge we are all born with. The collective unconscious manipulates experiences and behaviors in our lives, most importantly the emotional moments. The way in which we know of this is by looking at those influences, meaning we cannot find out about it directly. (Boeree 3). This area of the unconscious is also where we find what we call “ archetypes”. An archetype can be defined as “ an unlearned tendency to experience things in a certain way” (Boeree 4) Archetypes are present in every human being and are not formed through experience.

The archetype can be compared to instincts in Freud’s theory. Like Freud had pointed out, we do certain things because our body tells us. We do not know why, but we know we are required to do it. For example, a baby wants to eat something, but doesn’t know exactly what it wants.

It can be satisfied by some things, but not by others, and the baby is not knowledgeable on what will or will not satisfy this need. Through experience this instinct becomes better shaped and the baby can be more specific on what it wants when it is yearning for something to eat (Boeree 4). The same is sort of true for the Archetype. The only difference is that archetypes are

not biological tendencies, like those of Freud's instincts. (Boeree 4).

Archetypes don't apply to your yearning for food, water, sleep, etc.

Archetypes are more of a "spiritual demand" (Boeree 4). One can infer that this means the archetypes are the internal, unconscious, demands and needs that we experience and are unknown to us. It is important to understand, also, that archetypes are considered to be bipolar. This means that always possess the power to be the opposite of their central characteristic (Snider 2).

If an archetype is perceived as generally "good" or a positive force, it has the potential to be "bad" or cause negativity. There are numerous archetypes that every individual possesses. One archetype that is extremely important and present in everyone is the "shadow". The shadow is generally perceived as being a negative archetypical characteristic.

It is considered to be the "dark side" of the ego primarily because it is the archetype that contains characteristics we as an individual do not wish to acknowledge (Snider 2). The shadow is the part of ourselves that we reject and wish not to express in our lives. We begin to recognize these traits we reject in others and criticize them harshly for it (Crisp 1). An example made by Toni Crisp in the essay "The archetype of shadow" is as follows: "For instance we may deeply criticize a man for leaving his wife for another woman, only find later that we have the same urge, and had been denying it. Therefore, when we detest the shadow in another person, our dislike for them is very strong and often unreasonable in its degree.

So much so that we cannot stop mentioning them or criticizing them". The shadow is where we store all the parts of ourselves we " can't quite admit to" (Boeree 4). We can't admit to them because we aren't quite aware of it, therefore we tend to criticize others because the urge is lurking inside of us but is unable to be presented. The other two important archetypes that are present among in every collective unconscious are the " Anima and Animus".

The Anima is the " female aspect present in the collective unconscious of males, and the Animus is the male aspect present in the collective unconscious of females. " (Boeree 6). The Anima and the Animus are the " communication routes" with the collective unconscious. The Anima and the Animus are considered to be our " true selves, as opposed to the masks we wear everyday and is the source of our creativity.

" (Changing Minds 1). It is possible for the male to have an Animus archetype and a female have an Anima archetype. This is what we contribute to when a male has a " feminine side" and a female having a " masculine" side. Jung theorized the development of the anima/animus as beginning with infant projection onto the mother, then projecting onto prospective partners until a lasting relationship can be found.

(Archetypes 1). This means that, for example, a male may project his inner emotions and " female characteristics" onto his female counterparts, and will continue to do so until he finds one that can retrieve these " anima archetypes" and bring forth her " animus archetypes". When a male and a female can both return the anima and animus equally between one another, this is when they achieve " syzygy". Syzygy is defined as " wholeness and

completion". When someone uses the term "soul mate", what this is really meaning is that we have found a partner that both our anima and animus are compatible with one another. Archetypes 1).

The last main archetype that is present in all individuals is the "Self". The self is defined as "the ultimate unity of the personality". (Boeree 7) The self is the recognition of completion and is the unity of both consciousness and unconsciousness. Jung described creation of the self as a process of individuation, where all aspects are brought together as one.

(Archetypes 1). To unconsciously achieve the union of both the conscious and the unconscious and the completion of joining all aspects of your individuality can be compared to the idea of reaching nirvana or ecstatic harmony. Archetypes 1). The Personal and Collective unconscious are extremely complicated and intensely constructed. The personal and collective unconscious are present in all individuals, but the personal unconscious is different for every person.

The personal unconscious doesn't have certain categories or "sections" as the collective unconscious does. The personal unconscious is sculpted by our own individual experiences and memories, while the collective unconscious is set up the same within each individual. The collective unconscious differs in each individual when it comes to the underlying wants and urges in the self, or the way in which we demonstrate and find our counterpart in the anima and animus. Our unconscious is what dictates the ways in which we live our lives and interact with one another and ourselves. "Archetypes, Jung" Syque 2002-2007. 28 November 2007.

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