

Both psychoanalysis
and surrealism
unconscious mind
psychology essay



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The relationship between Surrealism and psychoanalysis cannot be debated because they share similarities that are evident. The following literature review will show that both psychoanalysis and Surrealism are based on the unconscious mind. While psychoanalysis attempts to explain that the human behavior is influenced by the feelings from the past that have been stored in the unconscious mind, Surrealism attempts to influence the thinking of the human mind by evoking the feelings of the unconscious mind by the use of visual arts. It was also found out that the psychoanalytical theory by Sigmund Freud comes in handy in explaining the relationship between the works of a surrealist with psychoanalysis. In addition to that, some of the surrealists' works of art will be used to show how they influence the unconscious mind.

Surrealism

Sigmund Freud is known to be the father of psychoanalysis and through his work, the relationship between psychoanalysis and surrealism can be seen. “ Surrealism is a style of art and literature developed principally in the 20th century, stressing the subconscious or non-rational significance of imagery arrived at by automatism or unexpected juxtapositions” (Cherry par. 1). People who engage in surrealism are referred to as surrealists and the main activity that they are engaged in is art work, such as painting and writing of literature.

The movement of Surrealists which involved writings and visual art was most prevalent in Europe and later on spread to other regions such as New York eventually having an effect on music, literature, visual arts, political thought, social theory and philosophy. “ Surrealism grew principally out of the earlier
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Dada movement...which produced works of anti-art that deliberately defied reason" (Cherry par. 2). In her book, Bradley states that " Dada predated Surrealism, and Surrealism survived Dada, but for a while, the two movements co-existed in a continuum of shared energy and excitement" (12). The Dada movement shared a lot of similarities with Surrealism. For example, just like Surrealism, it ridiculed the way in which the way the complexities that existed in modern life were made to look secure through categorization and division. " Dada artists declared everything to be in a constant and creative state of flux. They were interested more in a mental attitude than an artistic movement" (Bradley 12). In other words, the followers of the Dada movement dwelled mostly on activity believing that it would eventually give rise to creativity.

A closer look at the Dada art and creativity shows that they had the intention of provoking and arousing anger in the audience. However, Surrealism was associated with positive expressions in contrast to Dada movement which was mostly negative towards art. The members of the Surrealism movement were reacting against the destruction that was caused by a rational way of thinking especially in the European politics and culture. The spokesman of the movement, Andre Breton, stated that Surrealism was meant to be used to reunite the unconscious and conscious experiences completely so that the dream and fantasy world would unite.

Through this unity, the rational world would be presented in the minds of people in such a way that there would exist not only " an absolute reality - but also- surrealism" (Bradley 14). Andre Breton first joined the Dada

movement and engaged in the experimentation of automatic writing. This <https://assignbuster.com/both-psychoanalysis-and-surrealism-unconscious-mind-psychology-essay/>

kind of literature involved spontaneous writing without the censoring of one's thoughts. As Breton continued writing, he managed to influence other writers to join him and with time they managed to make a team. It then dawned on them that automatic writing seemed to be an effective way of changing the society rather than the Dada way of attacking values, which seemed to be negative.

Breton kept on referring to the works of Freud and saw that the source of imagination was the unconscious mind. " He defined genius in terms of accessibility to this normally untapped realm, which, he believed, could be attained by poets and painters alike" (Lusty 4). In that regard, great works of art and paintings have been produced today due to continuous thought processes and insights of the mind. In addition to that, Breton adds that the aim of Surrealism is " to unite the internal reality and the external reality... and refusing to allow the preeminence of one over the other" (par. 5). In order to achieve this, both realities need to be treated in a manner that is systematic in order for their reciprocal effects to be felt by individuals in an effective way.

The coming together of different automatic writers formed a group that had the desire to revolutionize the experiences of humans including its political, social, personal and cultural aspects. They intended to do this by influencing people to be free from what they perceived as restrictive customs, false rationality and structures. Breton also added that the Surrealism is " long live social revolution, and it alone!" (Breton par. 6) A few years later, the group of writers, led by Breton formed the Surrealist Manifesto. In this manifesto, Breton defined Surrealism as " Pure psychic automatism, by which it is <https://assignbuster.com/both-psychoanalysis-and-surrealism-unconscious-mind-psychology-essay/>

intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought" (par. 13).

Surrealists have come to believe that cultures from the non-Western regions of the world are a source of continuous inspiration for the activities of surrealists since they strike a balance between imagination and instrumental reason than the culture of the west. In addition, Surrealism has also had an impact on revolutionary and radical politics both indirectly and directly. The direct influence can be explained in the sense that surrealists may join or form allies with political groups, parties or movements. On the other hand, an indirect effect occurs when surrealist put an emphasis on " the intimate link between freeing imagination of the mind, and liberation from repressive and archaic social structures" (Lusty 3).

Surrealists work, as stated earlier, was mostly about automatic writing which later on dwelled on visual arts. In fact, it seemed as if the Surrealism movement was all about a visual movement due to the many visual styles that were created by various artists in the movement. However, the movement came to find out that it can associate their visual images with one's individuality and at the same time use the images to bring out psychological truth. The artists did this by, for example, painting original objects that seemed to have a completely a function that is completely different from their intended use. This was done in order to evoke empathy from people that viewed it. An example of this process of a Surrealist's work is " the image of watches that sag as if they are melting" (Bond 5). Such a work of art intends to reach deeply into the psychology of individuals and is " made whole with one's individuality" (Bond 5)

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Psychoanalysis explores the interconnection between the conscious and the unconscious mind. “ The psychoanalysis view holds that there are inner forces outside of your awareness that are directing your behavior” (Cherry par. 3) Sometimes individuals might act in ways that they may not be in a position to explain why they act that way and yet their actions may be explained based on unresolved feelings about the past caused by specific experiences or significant people in their lives. Such feelings can be explored or triggered with the help of psychologists and help the individual gain insight into his or her behavior or problems.

In the field of psychoanalysis, it is widely known that Sigmund Freud was the person who first discovered psychoanalysis and he then came up with psychoanalytical theory. Most of his theories were considered to be shocking since he dwelt on the sexual desires of human beings and attempted to explain the human behavior based on these desires, which is why his theories raised a lot of controversies and debates. Actually, his work had a major influence on many disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, art, literature and most of all, psychology. “ Psychoanalysis is used to refer to many aspects of Freud’s work and research; including Freudian therapy and the research methodology he used to develop his theories” (Cherry par. 4) Most of the theories that Freud formulated were mainly based on observations he made on his patients. Cherry agrees with this observation when she states that “ Freud relied heavily upon his observations and case studies of his patients when he formed his theory of personality development” (par. 5)

When people are faced with thoughts that are immoral they engage in self reproach or some people may have paranoia towards certain images or certain people due to past experiences that are still engraved in the subconscious mind. " The purpose of paranoia is thus to fend off an idea that is incompatible with the ego, by projecting its substance to the external world" (Bell 13) Many of the behaviors of human beings can be linked to their past experiences and as Bell puts it, many people face a " difficulty in managing intolerable ideas that eventuate in self-reproach" (14). Some people manage to delete these ideas through the process of repression but for others, " self-reproach becomes self-distrust and so the obsession person continues to check and recheck his own actions" (Bell 14).

In addition to that, the idea will always remain in the mind of the paranoia but the judgment that concerns the idea is transformed as reproach towards the individual that bears the idea. In this way, the individual will live thinking that people are judging him because of the bad ideas that are in his mind, yet in the real sense, he has become paranoid. When an individual projects such internal objects to the environment that surrounds him or her, then it psychologists refer to it as projection and one is said to be suffering from paranoia.

This example is given so that the strong effect of the unconscious mind is demonstrated clearly. According to psychology, many people are unaware that the unconscious mind is very alive and the thoughts that are inscribed in this part of the brain play a significant role in shaping the general behavior of individuals. In order to clearly illustrate psychoanalysis, it is important to be in a position to differentiate the meaning of the conscious mind and the <https://assignbuster.com/both-psychoanalysis-and-surrealism-unconscious-mind-psychology-essay/>

unconscious mind. These two are sections of the brain that store memory at long term or short term depending on the section.

A precise definition states that “ the conscious mind includes everything we are aware of” (Cherry par. 1) When one can easily talk and think about the mental processing in his or her mind, then it is said that the individual is operating in the conscious mind. Physicians normally test the memory of their patients, especially those that have suffered a brain injury, by asking them if they can remember their names or if they can recall what happened shortly before the accident. If these patients are in a position to recall the incidents, then their memory is still intact since a section of the conscious mind includes the memory. “ Freud called this memory ordinary memory the preconscious” (Bell 12).

On the other hand, “ the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness” (Bell13) generally, psychologists say that the contents of this part of the mind are unpleasant or unacceptable, for instance, feelings of conflict, pain or anxiety. In addition to that, the unconscious mind will always influence our experience and behavior “ even though we are unaware of these underlying influences” (Bradley 4) Psychoanalysis of the human mind will therefore help individuals understand why they behave in a particular way and they will also find out whether the unconscious mind is influencing their behavior.

Breton was always corresponding with Freud in his works and in leading the movement of Surrealism. He especially showed a deep interest and a continuous reference on the theories that were presented by Freud. A closer

look at surrealists' paintings will reveal that there is an interconnection between Surrealism and psychoanalysis. As discussed previously, it can be noted that Surrealism was an artistic movement which " was concerned with the nature of the unconscious and its connection with creation" (Bond par. 1) As the surrealists aimed to break the way of thinking that was conventional, their works attempted to highlight the " the role of the unconscious in creativity in order to break new ground" (Bond par. 1)

In addition to that, since the surrealists had an interest in the expressions and the functioning of the unconscious, and where the position of desire was in psychoanalytical theory, it was obvious that there would be attempts to associate a surrealists' work with a theme that spelled out desire. In that regard, desire is treated in psychoanalytical terms. In support of this view, Bond states that " The connection between surrealism and psychoanalysis cannot be understated" (par. 20) since psychoanalysis was seen as the means to the freedom of the mind of human beings. Since the unconscious mind is correlated with conflict, pain or anxiety, the work of surrealists, especially visual arts, attempts to evoke feelings that are associated with these three emotions. In fact, most of the work of surrealists aims to make its audience emotional and instill feelings of empathy.

The main themes of Surrealism are psychoanalytic as depicted in the work of a surrealist. Lusty supports this view when she says that " a series of psychoanalytic Surrealist themes, including narcissism, fantasy, masquerade, perversion..." (1) From these themes, it can be said that many surrealists' work depict perversion especially those that show the nudity of females. In the same light, psychoanalysis, which mainly dwells on the <https://assignbuster.com/both-psychoanalysis-and-surrealism-unconscious-mind-psychology-essay/>

unconscious mind, demonstrates that this part of the brain stores up unpleasant memories some of which, according to Freud, are sexual in nature. Therefore, the way a surrealist work uses the unconscious mind for creativity in order to illustrate perversion by the use of nude paintings, may evoke associated feelings of the unconscious mind. This way, the surrealists succeeded in influencing the human mind by use of creative visual arts. Also the use of fantasy can be explained in the same way.

In addition to that, the theater of Surrealists “ depicts the subconscious experience, moody tone and disjointed structure, sometimes imposing a unifying idea” (Lusty 6) These surrealists wish to create a theatrical form that is direct and immediate, by “ linking the unconscious minds of performers and spectators” (Bell 12) which seems to be ritualistic. In some of these theaters, feelings, emotions and metaphysical were expressed physically thus creating a vision that seems to share similarities with the realm of dreams. Thus it can be deduced that psychoanalysis has a deep interconnection with surrealists’ work since Surrealism depended mostly on imagination and linked it to psychoanalysis in order to produce great and creative pieces of art.

Conclusion

It can therefore be noted that the relationship between psychoanalysis and surrealism is real and it affects human beings since they both deal with the subconscious mind. The literature review has shown that Breton depended on the work of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, as he led the followers of Surrealism. In addition to that, Breton showed that he fully depended on psychoanalysis as he was doing automatic writing and painting.

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In that regard, the definition of surrealism is connected with art and the subconscious mind as they work hand in hand with the aim of expressing inner thoughts and influence the way of thinking of other human beings. Therefore, it is sufficient to state that surrealists are the people who are paint and do automatic writing, also referred to as literature. Moreover, the surrealists were known to be influential and they were very aggressive with their work of art since it was a way of expressing anger and ridicule to the people's way of thinking.

In other words, surrealism does not use the voice for expression but passes so many messages by the use of visual arts that seems so unique and creative. This kind of art helps surrealists to express emotions such as desire, love, hatred, despair, dissatisfaction and many more. It was also seen that they use abstract images in their work of art; images that one cannot expect can be used in a particular manner. An example of this was the use of a sliding wall clock on top of a table. Such are the kind of creative art that were used but with the intention of influencing the subconscious, just as psychoanalysis attempts to understand the feelings that are stored up in the subconscious.

In addition, it was learnt that Surrealism grew from the Dada movement and the two movements shared some similarities. The only problem that Dada movement had is that it used its literature to attack the individuals of the society. This is what displeased Breton, who was then a member of the Dada movement and he would later turn out to be the spokesman of the

Surrealism movement. Thus, the literature review has shown that Breton, together with a team of other automatic writers rebelled from the Dada
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movement since they were not pleased with the concept of leadership and they formed a Surrealist network that would be positive in its activities and movements instead of negative like Dada. In other words, Breton and his team chose art, a more subtle way of passing messages, as the theme of movement. This movement would later move from Paris to other parts of the world like New York.

The relationship between Surrealism and Psychoanalysis was brought out clearly in the paper by showing that they both use the subconscious mind. First and foremost, the conscious mind is that part of the brain where one can easily talk about when asked what they are thinking about. On the other hand, the unconscious mind is the part of the brain that stores up feelings and emotions associated with it and this is the part of the mind that influences behavior. Moreover, psychoanalysts who try to understand why an individual is behaving in a particular manner will always explore the mind of a patient with the aim of uncovering the stored feelings in the unconscious. Psychoanalytical theory that was invented by Sigmund Freud dwells upon the unconscious mind.

Sigmund Freud has stated that the feelings that result from the experiences all people go through are sometimes stored in the subconscious mind. Such feelings may, in many occasions, influence the way people interpret other situations that they go through in life without being aware that the subconscious mind is the one leading them to act and think in such a manner. The kinds of feelings that are stored in this part of the mind are normally unpleasant and Freud states that most of the time, the feelings are sexual. Freud further states that some individuals engage in self-reproach <https://assignbuster.com/both-psychoanalysis-and-surrealism-unconscious-mind-psychology-essay/>

whenever they experience such feelings because they believe that they are unacceptable and wrong. This is what results in paranoia where an individual is self-obsessed with fear over issues and experiences due the influence of the feelings in the unconscious mind.

The paintings of Surrealists had a connection with the unconscious. This is where the relationship between Surrealism and Psychoanalysis begins. The works of surrealist was painted in such a way that they would influence the way of thinking of human beings, which was thought to be conventional.

Thus their work intended to bring out the role the unconscious mind played in creativity and thinking so that this way of expression by art, would break new ground. Moreover, it was seen that Breton kept referring to the psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud in his work so that he would use the theme in the paintings. Thus this also was an indication that there exists a relationship between Surrealism and Psychoanalysis.

Furthermore, it was shown that the main themes of the Surrealists work are psychoanalytic. The kinds of themes that seemed prevalent and shared a close relationship with psychoanalysis are narcissism, perversion, fantasy and masquerade. It is especially true to note that perversion seemed to be the central theme of their work especially when they did the paintings of women, this kind of paintings has raised a lot of controversy in the world today as the Surrealists were accused of being feminists. Moreover, the use of perversion may evoke associated feelings with the unconscious mind that people see as unpleasant, such as paintings of nudity. In addition, theaters that displayed surrealists work intend to make a connection with the mind of the audience and this is also a concept of psychoanalysis. This is how the <https://assignbuster.com/both-psychoanalysis-and-surrealism-unconscious-mind-psychology-essay/>

surrealists used visual art to influence the human mind. In fact, it was not only the theme of perversion that was used to influence their way of thinking, but also themes that would ridicule politicians and other leaders in society to change their way of leadership and lead the society and its members in the right path.