

function. In Freud's words, they "play an important part in introducing sexual excitement" (*ibid.*, p. 209). Thus, the component instincts in one form or another can serve as forepleasure that stimulates the genital zone to be ready for sexual intercourse. In our society, kissing is perhaps the most popular type of forepleasure that is publicly displayed. Freud assumes that various touching and looking that involve any of the component instincts may serve as forepleasure or foreplay for the sexual act. Freud has no difficulty in conceiving of the sexual act in terms of his theory of drive discharge. Here, we should again look at his words before our analysis of his underlying assumptions. He tells us that

The part played in this by the erotogenic zones, however, is clear. What is true of one of them is true of all. They are all used to provide a certain amount of pleasure by being stimulated in the way appropriate to them. This pleasure then leads to an increase in tension which in its turn is responsible for producing the necessary motor energy for the conclusion of the sexual act. The penultimate stage of that act is once again the appropriate stimulation of an erotogenic zone (the genital zone itself, the penis) by the appropriate object (the mucous membrane of the vagina); and from the pleasure yielded by this excitation the motor energy is obtained, this time by a reflex path, which brings about the discharge of the sexual substances. This last pleasure is the highest in intensity, and its mechanism differs from that of the earlier pleasure. It is brought about entirely by discharge: it is wholly a pleasure of satisfaction and with it the tension of the libido is for the time being extinguished. [*ibid.*, p. 210]

Freud, here, admits to a difficulty in his theorizing, which will be with him for his entire career. Freud maintains that, despite other opinions, he "must insist that a feeling of tension necessarily involves unpleasure" (*ibid.*, p. 208). This, despite the fact that he also admits that "we are at once brought up against the fact that it is also undoubtedly felt as pleasurable". Clearly, the fact that people report rises in tension as pleasurable is direct evidence against Freud's assumptions about discharge being necessary for pleasure. His answer to this conundrum is to say that everything relating to the problem of pleasure and unpleasure is unanswered and that he will endeavour to "learn as much as possible" about this issue. He does not, however, withdraw his fundamental hypothesis that pleasure is inevitably associated with discharge and unpleasure with a rise in tension. In a footnote to the three essays, Freud says that he has made an attempt at solving this problem "in the first part of my paper on 'The Economic Problem of Masochism'" (*ibid.*, p. 209, fn.). We shall see, in the fourth chapter, our view of Freud's answer, but, at this point in his career, we see him holding on to a theoretical postulate regardless of the evidence that he is confronting and acknowledging.

This theoretical difficulty is not necessarily involved with Freud's central ideas about the relationship of childhood and adult sexuality. It is Freud's view that it is possible to get stuck, or to become fixated, in one of the pregenital zones. This can

happen if the pleasure derived from this zone is too great or too small. Thus, Freud has a concept of optimal stimulation, but, in his discussion, he most frequently refers to the possibility of over stimulation leading to a fixation. A fixation with a given zone takes away some of the motivation for proceeding further in sexual development. Thus, the "preparatory act takes the place of the of the normal sexual aim" (*ibid.*, p. 211). This may take the form of sexual preferences (e.g., preferring oral to genital sex), or may result in a perversion. Freud's theoretical ideas about pleasure would, in fact, make the idea of a fixation an impossibility, since one cannot obtain discharge with a component instinct. Freud attempts to deal with this difficulty (*ibid.*, p. 212), but he does not do away with the logical difficulties inherent in his theoretical ideas. The concept of fixation is central to Freudian thought, and yet Freud has not provided the theoretical underpinnings for this concept or how one explains the progression from zone to zone. At this time in his theorizing, he is undoubtedly more focused on his revolutionary ideas about sexuality than the theoretical structure that holds some of these ideas.

Differences between the sexes

Freud states as a matter of fact that "it is not until puberty that the sharp distinction is established between the masculine and feminine characters" (*ibid.*, p. 219). He does say that, while it is true that one can recognize differences in boys and girls in terms of the development of inhibitions, "the auto-erotic activity of the erotogenic zones is, however, the same in both sexes" (*ibid.*) before puberty arises. Girls, in this formulation, tend to develop affects like shame, disgust, and pity earlier than is the case with boys. They also develop stronger tendencies towards repression (i.e., defence), and tend more often to prefer the passive form of the drives. However, "So far as the auto-erotic and masturbatory manifestations of sexuality are concerned, we might lay it down that the sexuality of little girls is of a wholly masculine character" (*ibid.*). Interestingly, even anatomically girls act as little boys, since "the leading erotogenic zone in female children is located at the clitoris, and is thus homologous to the masculine genital zone of the glans penis" (*ibid.*, p. 220). After puberty, the woman transfers her erotogenic zone from the clitoris to the vaginal orifice. The man does not transfer his leading zone, since it remains the penis.

Freud's views on the development of the girl are perhaps his most controversial and most unsatisfactory from a variety of viewpoints. His equation of passive and feminine, he feels, is a cultural assertion. Most commentators feel that Freud's views are clearly manifestations of the prejudices of the culture of that era. He offers little evidence for this assertion and does not realize the extent to which he is codifying society's prejudices. One could continue the recent and past criticisms of Freud's views on women, but we will be content to follow his views since they change to some extent during the course of his career. His most famous quote (made several

decades later), that he does not know what women want, may be an admission of the inadequacy of his theory concerning aspects of feminine development. Let us end this chapter with a reminder by Freud that all human beings are a combination of masculine and feminine traits and that these traits are often determined by the culture in which one abides.

Commentary

In various ways, both the revolutionary aspects of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and the tentative nature of these essays have been neglected. In these essays, Freud is beginning to look at development in a continuous, integrated manner. He is positing that childhood experiences have an important effect on adult sexuality and on adult character formation. In the next several years, he will give some examples (Freud, 1907b, 1908b) of how early experience is decisive in character development. Since Freud is looking at the continuity of sexual life, he tries to illustrate how early development is formative in determining later sexual tendencies and will strongly influence a person's choice of a love object. In fact, these essays presage Freud's major concern for the next 10–12 years: the development of the capacity for object love. In the three essays, he is concentrating on sexuality and how heterosexuals are able to productively procreate. However, lurking behind this concern is how the species can survive, and Freud is convinced that survival is based on the triumph of object love. We will see that, at times, he is pessimistic about the prospects of the survival of our species. In the next chapter, Freud's views on the development of object love are detailed.

In the three essays, he implicitly gives us the concept of fixation. Thus, pregenital interests and zones are potentially points of fixation or developmental areas that arrest full developmental potential. For Freud, full developmental potential involves genital primacy. It is important to state that, for Freud, genital primacy does not occur until puberty, and so, when we talk about pregenital interests, Freud, in this period, does not have a modern conceptualization of the term pregenital. The contemporary analyst would see pregenital as almost synonymous with the term pre-Oedipal. (There is a period in the genital or phallic stage of development where the Oedipal complex is not yet implicated in the child's development. This is, for example, Brenner's (1976, 1982) view; however, there are clearly other views about the Oedipal stage of development, as we will see in the chapter on Melanie Klein.) During this period, Freud has a literal meaning of the term pregenital: that is, before secondary sexual characteristics have developed. Thus, everything before adolescence is pregenital. Clearly, latency is not here conceived of as a point of fixation, since the zones are relatively quiescent during latency. As we stated in the chapter, Freud does not yet have an idea of stages of development organized in terms of zones. Rather, the zones are points where, during pregenital development,

the child is able to have autoerotic pleasures. These pleasures, while momentarily exciting, are, over a period of time, ultimately frustrating, hence the movement from pregenital to genital interest. The genital zone during adolescence (and beyond) is the only one where there can be true satisfaction in terms of tension reduction through orgasm. For Freud, optimal sexual development involves genital primacy, with pregenital zones exciting the way towards genital satisfaction. Thus, in a single sexual encounter, an individual can relive their early sexual life and end the sexual encounter with adult satisfaction through mutual genital orgasm. Implied in this discussion is the definition of Freud's views of psycho-sexual stages at this point in time. He conceptualizes two stages of development: autoerotism and object love. Autoerotism involves all pleasures that occur before the capacity for genital orgasm. Freud assumes genital orgasm occurs for both sexes at puberty. Thus, Freud does not label stages with respect to zone, but, rather, in terms of the child's libidinal relationship to the other (object). What is not well understood in this prior sentence is the term libidinal relationship, or libidinal cathexis. Freud, at this point, is virtually equating the occurrence of a lasting libidinal cathexis as being coincident with the capacity for object love. The capacity of object love is, in turn, related to the development of secondary sexual characteristics necessary for the survival of the species. Even though Freud, at this time, is defining stages in relationship to the development of object love, this view is strongly tied to his view of the biological development of the child and relatively devoid of psychological developmental statements as compared to the statements he will make in the next several years.

Before we look at the logical difficulties of Freud's theory in this era, we must remember that Freud sees ideal development in terms of heterosexual development. However, he spends a good deal of time in the three essays on the question of homosexuality. Freud is writing these essays shortly after Oscar Wilde was on trial (Ellmann, 1987). Freud goes out of his way to maintain that homosexuality is not a form of degeneracy in any sense of the term. It is important to emphasize what has been previously stated: that, while Freud maintains that there are no certain conclusions that one can reach about the aetiology of homosexuality, he is certain about one aspect of how "inverts" have been characterized. Homosexuality has been characterized both as a type of nervous degeneracy and as a disorder that leads to moral degeneracy. Here, Freud is clear that "inversion is found in people who exhibit no other serious deviations from the normal... and in people whose efficiency is unimpaired, and who are indeed distinguished by specially high intellectual development and ethical culture" (1905d, pp. 138–139). He also refers to the fact that homosexuality flourished in societies that were of the highest order in cultural and intellectual accomplishments. This revolutionary view is part of his concept that all "perversions" are part of normal development. Moreover, it is also his view that adult perversions are much more common than society would like to admit.

In stating Freud's view, I am not maintaining that homosexuality is a perversion. Rather, I am stating that Freud's view of what has been called perverse behaviour (including thoughts and fantasies) is revolutionary in that he is maintaining that what

has been called perverse is experienced by all human beings. Thus, Freud sees intense reactions to homosexuals as indicative of homosexual conflicts. In a similar manner, oral or anal sex viewed in terms of disgust is also seen by Freud as a manifestation of conflict. What society views as perversions, Freud posits is infantile sexuality that is represented in the unconscious, in everyone's unconscious. Affects such as disgust and shame are examples of conflicts that have not been completely defended against or adequately sublimated. (Here, I am being somewhat anachronistic, since Freud has not stated this formulation as clearly as it is being stated above. Nevertheless, Freud has implied such a formulation in the dream book [1900a].) Thus, in adult life, a person is anxious, disgusted, or ashamed because of an earlier fixation caused by conflict at a given point of development. In many ways, this bourgeois Viennese doctor is pointing out that Victorian Europe is hypocritical in many senses of the term.

However, Freud returns to middle-class values when he posits an optimal resolution of sexual preferences. The optimal resolution (or, more accurately, result) of infantile or childhood sexuality is for the male to be active and penetrating and the female to be passive and receptive. This occurs during the period of genital primacy, and both female and male participants should appreciate and be desirous of someone who is different than they are in terms of bodily (genital) development. Thus, homosexuality, while no longer perverse, is now either a genetic disorder, a fixation, and/or, as we shall see later, an element of narcissism. The revolution returns to middle-class values with males asserting and females receiving, while homosexuality is indicative of incomplete development. The theoretical rationale that is provided conceives of human motivation being powered by two drives. Freud imagines that he has derived these two instincts from Darwin, but we shall see in his subsequent publications that these instincts are based at least in part on his conceptualizations of the clinical phenomena he is encountering. They are also based on Freud's misunderstanding of Darwin's revolutionary concepts. Freud's drive, or instinct, theory will be more fully discussed in the next chapter, but here we can at least briefly sketch out some aspects of this aspect of Freudian theory.

Freud's two drives can be roughly translated into survival of the self and survival of the species. In the three essays, Freud is writing about sexuality, and sexuality is in the service of survival of the species. From Freud's point of view, to be in love means, to some extent, to be able and willing to give up self-interest. Freud begins to conceive of the idea of survival of the self as a drive when he begins to think in more detail about the obstacles to developing a love relationship. This leads him to his theory of narcissism, which we shall encounter in the next chapter. Freud will posit that the two drives can potentially be in conflict in early development as well as in adult life. Freud's next bout of theorizing is greatly concerned with the conflicts that he is witnessing clinically and that he is conceptualizing partly in terms of these two drives. It is easy to see that one important way of looking at the three essays is that Freud is attempting or beginning to understand the pathway to true love. In the next

decade, he will expand how he views the pathway and point to many obstacles to the development of the capacity for object love.

Earlier in the commentary I mention Freud's logical difficulties in his new theory. For the time being, we will look at two of these difficulties, one which has been the subject of a great deal of literature and the other which is implied by a great deal of this literature. Freud's view of pleasure being restricted to discharge or lowering of tension is questionable at best. His view was based on some of the neurophysiologists of his time, and the idea of the orgasm as the model for pleasurable experiences. It is hard to quarrel with the idea that tension reduction is pleasurable in a variety of circumstances. It seems equally difficult to imagine that this is the only type of experience that provides pleasure to humans (or other species). Numerous studies have shown that a variety of mammalian species (including humans) seek stimulation that raises levels of excitation. This is clearly an argument against the view that pleasure is involved only with lowering levels of excitation. We will encounter some of this research in several chapters of this volume, but, for the present, we will content ourselves with the assertion that the hydraulic model (in Freud's use of this model, he posited that lowering or pumping out excitation down to quiescent levels is the ultimate source of pleasure) as the sole explanation of pleasure is incorrect or not supported by various types of evidence and experience.

We have looked at Freud's psycho-sexual stages at this point in time, and there are only two stages that he names: autoerotism and object love. Autoerotism refers to the time before adolescence, where pleasure is essentially without a libidinal object cathexis. Freud makes it clear that there can be attachments and a type of love before adolescence, but the love, as he will more clearly specify, is based on self-interest. This self-interest pertains to issues of being protected or fed, both issues that relate to survival of the self. However, love of the object as different from the self is, for Freud, not available to the child until the sexual (survival of the species) drive is fully manifested during adolescence. This view will change in the next few years, but the problem of moving from stage to stage will remain. Freud's idea of progression from stage to stage is that while something may be exciting for a time, it is ultimately not pleasurable unless there is tension reduction. Clearly, if there is no tension reduction possible in the pregenital zones, then there can be no lasting pleasure. Passage from autoerotism is then likened to the passage from foreplay to genital sex. One can imagine this passage as happening during a sexual encounter, or even over some finite period of time. It seems quite unlikely that this will occur over a period of years. Thus, the passage from one stage to another implies a capacity to retain tension that seems impossible as a characterization of childhood experience. Let me give an example of the type of questions that can be formulated if one takes this aspect of Freudian theory seriously. How can pregenital fixations be considered pleasurable if they only increase stimulation? If fixations are pregenital and sexual pleasure is not fully possible, how is pleasure represented in the unconscious? It must be represented in terms of excitation rather than discharge,

but, for Freud, how can this be considered pleasurable? One could compound this type of question, but, for the time being, we will be content to say that to answer this type of question would require adjustments to Freud's theorizing. This type of attempt will occur in the later sections of this volume.

Commentary: dream book

Although Freud initially presented a complex model of dreaming, the emphasis of this model was on the wish. The wish, to paraphrase Freud, is the capital needed to fuel the dream, and Freud and those that followed him have focused heavily on the capital in the business of dreaming. Freud maintained that dreams are instigated by unconscious wishes. After making this assertion, Freud, in [Chapter Seven](#) of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), frequently reminds us of Socrates helping his listeners search for the meaning of the good and the beautiful. The sceptic might ask, if all dreams are instigated by a wish, what about anxiety dreams, or dreams that feel horrific and typically are called nightmares? Freud answers these queries and his answers lead him to consider a realm of experience that, up to that point in time, had been largely unexplored: the earliest and deepest recesses of human experience. He defines an unconscious wish as a pleasure (to quote Freud, a wish is "a diminution of excitation was felt as pleasure" [*ibid.*, p. 598]) that has its source in early childhood. It is a pleasure that, if activated, shows the mind in conflict, since what is pleasurable at one level (unconscious) will cause anxiety on another level (Pcs-conscious). This conflict is mediated by the censorship (which serves a defensive function), and these two levels of awareness are *primarily* governed by different modes of cognition (primary vs. secondary process).

Why does a dream occur? Here, Freud posits that sleep is both a condition for regression and during sleep the censorship is weakened. Thus, the emergence (representation) of a wish (which was activated during the previous day) can more easily occur during sleep. The censorship that is still active provides the impetus for a compromise formation. This compromise formation consists of the transformation of the wish into a sensory form (the movement from motor activity [and thought] to sensory experience is Freud's first definition of regression) that is disguised sufficiently to allow the person to dream and stay asleep. Anxiety dreams, in Freud's theory, signal the failure of the dream process and dream-work to adequately disguise and deal with the wish. In the dream book, Freud theorizes about how different systems communicate, and it is this communication that he labels as transference. Freud says specifically that

an unconscious idea is as such quite incapable of entering the preconscious and that it can only exercise any effect there by establishing a connection with an idea which already belongs to the preconscious, by transferring its intensity on to it and by getting itself "covered" by it. [*ibid.*, p. 562]

It is via the dream that Freud gives theoretical definition to this concept that will gradually change the way he conceptualizes the treatment situation. As a last point in this brief summary, Freud attempts to show the similarities between dream formation, symptom formation, and, during the same time period, a variety of other phenomena (momentary forgetting, slips of tongue, etc., [Freud, 1901b]). In short, [Chapter Seven](#) is unparalleled in psychoanalytic thought, in that Freud attempts the most general theory that has been put forth probably up to the present time. Despite this heroic attempt, Freud will find various difficulties with his theoretical structure and certainly others will find even greater difficulty.

When Freud wrote the dream book, he was just beginning (or about to begin) to develop an instinct or drive theory (I am using these terms synonymously). The first drive theory that he put forth contrasted the drive or tendency towards survival of the self with survival of the species. There were a number of contrasting tendencies that emerged from this conceptualization, ego (self) libido and object (other) libido were translated into issues that involved narcissism and object love, which are primary subject(s) of the next chapter. In the explanation of dreams, Freud posits the idea that in the unconscious there are pleasurable fantasies that would lead to anxiety in the Pcs.-Cs. system. We have just discussed this concept in