

The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud

Studies on Hysteria Chapter III Theoretical Section: Unconscious ideas and ideas inadmissible to consciousness - Splitting of the mind. SE, Vol 2, p. 222-239; Freud, S (1894)

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Studies on Hysteria (1893-1895).

Chapter III. Theoretical Section (Breuer): 5. Unconscious ideas and ideas inadmissible to consciousness-Splitting of the mind. Ideas that we are aware of are called conscious. A great deal of what is described as mood comes from ideas that exist and operate beneath the threshold of consciousness. The whole conduct of our life is constantly influenced by subconscious ideas. All intuitive activity is directed by ideas which are to a large extent subconscious. Only the clearest and most intense ideas are perceived by self-consciousness, while the great mass of current but weaker ideas remains unconscious. There seems to be no theoretical difficulty in recognizing unconscious ideas as causes of pathological phenomena. The existence of ideas that are inadmissible to consciousness is pathological. Janet regards a particular form of congenital mental weakness as the disposition to hysteria. Freud and Breuer say that it is not the case that the splitting of consciousness occurs because the patients are weak minded; they appear to be weakminded because their mental activity is divided and only a part of its capacity is at the disposal of their conscious thought. What underlies dissociation is an excess of efficiency, the habitual coexistence of 2 heterogeneous trains of ideas. In their initial stages, hysterics of a severe degree usually exhibit a syndrome that may be described as acute hysteria. The weakness of mind caused by a splitting of the psyche seems to be a basis of the suggestibility of some hysterical patients. The unconscious split of mind in hysteria is preeminently suggestible on account of the poverty and incompleteness of its ideational content.

The neuro-psychoses of defence. SE, Vol. 3, p 43-61; and Freud, S (1940)

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The neuro-psychoses of defence (1894).

The problems of the neuroses, which Freud investigated during the years 1893 to 1894, fell into 2 fairly distinct groups, concerned respectively with what were later to become known as the actual neuroses and the psychoneuroses. After making a detailed study of a number of nervous patients suffering from phobias and obsessions, Freud was led to attempt an explanation of these

symptoms, thus arriving successfully at the origin of the pathological ideas in new and different cases. The syndrome of hysteria justifies the assumption of a splitting of consciousness, accompanied by the formation of separate psychological groups. The characteristic factor in hysteria is not the splitting of consciousness but the capacity for conversion. If someone with a disposition to neurosis lacks the aptitude for conversion, but if, in order to fend off an incompatible idea, he sets about separating it from its affect, then that affect is obliged to remain in the psychological sphere. In all cases that Freud analyzed, it was the subject's sexual life that had given rise to a distressing affect of precisely the same quality as that attaching to his obsession. In 2 instances considered, defense against the incompatible idea was effected by separating it from its affect; the idea itself remained in consciousness, even though weakened and isolated. In another type of defense the ego rejects the incompatible idea together with its affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all. But from the moment at which this has been successfully done the subject is in a psychosis, which can only be classified as hallucinatory confusion. The content of a hallucinatory psychosis of this sort consists precisely in the accentuation of the idea which was threatened by the precipitating cause of the onset of illness. The ego has fended off the incompatible idea through escape into psychosis. In summary, a working hypothesis for the neuroses of defense is as follows: In mental functions something is to be distinguished (a quota of affect or sum of excitation) which possess all the characteristics of a quantity which is capable of increase, diminution, displacement and discharge, and which is spread over the memory traces of ideas.

Splitting of the ego in the process of defence. SE, Vol 23, p271-278.

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Splitting of the ego in the process of defence (1940).<

The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence, published posthumously, was dated January 2, 1938. The ego of a person whom we know as a patient in analysis must, dozens of years earlier, when it was young, have behaved in a remarkable manner in certain particular situations of pressure. The conditions under which this happens can be called the influence of a psychological trauma. Let us suppose that a child's ego is under the sway of a powerful instinctual demand which it is accustomed to satisfy and that it is suddenly frightened by an experience which teaches it that the continuance of this satisfaction will result in an almost intolerable real danger. It must now decide either to recognize the real danger, give way to it and renounce the instinctual

satisfaction, or to disavow reality and make itself believe that there is no reason for fear, so that it may be able to retain the satisfaction. The child replies to the conflict with two contrary reactions. On the one hand, with the help of certain mechanisms he rejects reality and refuses to accept any prohibition; on the other hand, in the same breath he recognizes the danger of reality, takes over the fear of that danger as a pathological symptom, and tries subsequently to divest himself of the fear. The two contrary reactions to the conflict persist as the center point of a splitting of the ego. An individual case history is discussed concerning this point. A small boy created a substitute (fetish) for the penis which he missed in females. So long as he was not obliged to acknowledge that females have lost their penis, there was no need for him to believe the threat of castration in punishment for his masturbation. The boy did not simply contradict his perceptions and hallucinate a penis. He effected no more than a displacement of value: he transferred the Importance of the penis to another part of the body through the assistance of regression. He had a great fear of his father.