

# Freud And Jung's Theories On The Role Of Sexuality

Posted on October 16, 2018

## Introduction

Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung were central figures in the development of depth psychology, but the original discussion misidentifies them and exaggerates several differences. Freud did not claim that every psychological problem was caused by sex, and Jung did not argue that sexuality was irrelevant to personality. Their disagreement concerned the meaning and scope of libido, the structure of the unconscious, the interpretation of symbols, and the place of religion and culture in psychic life. Jung initially worked within the psychoanalytic movement and regarded Freud as an intellectual mentor, but their relationship ended as Jung developed analytical psychology. Comparing them accurately requires attention to both shared foundations and major theoretical departures (Makari; Shamdasani).

## Their Early Intellectual Relationship

Freud and Jung began corresponding in 1906 and met the following year. Freud saw the younger Swiss psychiatrist as an important ally who could help psychoanalysis expand beyond its Viennese and Jewish origins, while Jung valued Freud's method of taking dreams, symptoms, and unconscious conflict seriously. Jung became the first president of the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1910. Their collaboration was intellectually productive but also unequal, because Freud expected loyalty to central psychoanalytic claims and Jung increasingly sought independence. Disagreements over sexuality, mythology, religion, and the nature of psychic energy became personal and institutional. Their final break around 1913 separated classical psychoanalysis from Jung's emerging analytical psychology (Makari; Shamdasani).

## Freud's Concept of Sexuality

Freud used sexuality in a broader sense than adult intercourse. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he argued that bodily pleasure, attachment, fantasy, and desire develop from childhood and become organized through changing psychosexual patterns. His concept challenged the Victorian assumption that childhood was entirely asexual. Freud believed that repression and conflict involving desire could contribute to symptoms, dreams, and character formation, but he did not reduce all motivation to one simple sexual act. Aggression, self-preservation, love, loss, and later the death drive also entered his theory. The strongest criticism is not that Freud noticed sexuality, but that he

sometimes generalized speculative developmental claims beyond the evidence available (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*).

## Jung's Broader Concept of Libido

Jung initially accepted the importance of sexuality but gradually redefined libido as general psychic energy that could appear in sexual, creative, religious, intellectual, and power-seeking forms. In *Symbols of Transformation*, he argued that myths and fantasies could not always be explained as disguised sexual wishes. A symbol might organize development, express cultural memory, or point toward a future psychological task. This broader view allowed Jung to examine art, religion, alchemy, and myth, but it also made his concepts harder to test. The difference between the two men was therefore not sexuality versus no sexuality. It was a narrower drive-centered account of libido compared with a wider symbolic and developmental account of psychic energy (Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*).

## The Unconscious in Freud

Freud's theory of the unconscious developed through several models. His topographical model distinguished conscious, preconscious, and unconscious processes, while the later structural model described id, ego, and superego. These are not simply three parts of the unconscious: aspects of the ego and superego can also operate unconsciously. The id contains instinctual pressures, the ego negotiates reality and defense, and the superego represents internalized authority and ideals. Symptoms arise through conflict, compromise, repression, and defense rather than because the unconscious is merely a storage place for mental illness. Freud's lasting contribution was to argue that motives and meanings can influence behavior without being fully available to conscious awareness (Freud, *The Ego and the Id*).

## The Personal and Collective Unconscious in Jung

Jung retained a personal unconscious containing forgotten, repressed, or subliminal material but added the collective unconscious. He proposed that human beings inherit predispositions to organize experience through recurring patterns he called archetypes. Archetypes are not detailed ancestral memories or fixed images; they are theoretical forms that become expressed through culturally specific symbols, stories, dreams, and behavior. The persona, shadow, anima, animus, self, and hero are familiar examples in Jungian writing. Critics question whether these concepts can be distinguished from cultural transmission or broad human similarities. Supporters value them as interpretive tools for recurring symbolic patterns. The collective unconscious remains influential in humanities and psychotherapy but controversial as an empirical scientific claim (Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*).

## Dream Interpretation

Both theorists treated dreams as meaningful, but they interpreted them differently. Freud described dreams as disguised fulfillments or expressions of wishes shaped by condensation, displacement, symbolism, and secondary revision. The remembered dream was the manifest content, while analysis sought latent thoughts and conflicts. Jung rejected the assumption that every dream concealed a forbidden wish. He often viewed dreams as compensatory communications that balanced the conscious attitude and assisted psychological development. Jung interpreted symbols through personal associations, cultural parallels, and the dream's place in a series. Modern sleep science does not validate either theory as a universal explanation, yet both approaches encouraged careful attention to emotion, imagery, memory, and personal meaning (Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*; Makari; Shamdasani).

## Religion and Psychological Meaning

The original essay incorrectly attributes the phrase “opium of the masses” to Freud; it is associated with Karl Marx. Freud described religion as an illusion arising from wishes for protection, order, and a powerful father figure. He regarded religious belief skeptically, although he recognized its psychological and cultural force (Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*). Jung took religious experience more positively as an expression of the psyche's symbolic life and a possible resource for integration. He did not require a therapist to prove theological claims. Instead, he examined the psychological reality of religious images for believers. Their disagreement concerned whether religion primarily defended against helplessness or could support individuation and psychic wholeness (Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*).

## Individuation and Personality Development

Jung's concept of individuation describes the gradual integration of conscious and unconscious aspects of personality. The aim is not perfection, selfish independence, or elimination of conflict, but a more differentiated relationship among the ego, shadow, social persona, and wider self. Jung associated this process especially with adulthood and midlife, when earlier ambitions may lose meaning. Freud also believed that analysis could expand self-knowledge and reduce the power of unconscious repetition, but he framed development more through conflict, defense, and adaptation to reality. Jung placed greater emphasis on symbolic transformation and future potential. Both approaches view personality as dynamic, though they describe the direction of change differently (Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*; Freud, *The Ego and the Id*).

## Parapsychology and Synchronicity

Jung was more willing than Freud to explore reports of telepathy, precognition, and meaningful coincidence. His theory of synchronicity proposed an acausal connection between inner states and external events that share meaning without an identifiable chain of physical causation. Freud was generally more cautious, although his position toward occult phenomena was not a simple lifelong rejection. Jung's interest expanded the range of experiences discussed in psychology but also intensified criticism that analytical psychology moved beyond testable explanation. A responsible account should distinguish the clinical value of discussing a patient's meaning-making from the scientific claim that paranormal mechanisms exist. Subjective significance does not by itself establish objective causation (Shamdasani).

## Gender and Cultural Limitations

Both theories reflect assumptions from European society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Freud's accounts of female development and Jung's anima-anima framework have been criticized for treating gender differences as universal, binary, and rooted in stereotypes. Their clinical samples were limited, and observations were sometimes transformed into broad developmental laws. Later psychoanalytic, feminist, queer, and cross-cultural thinkers revised these traditions by emphasizing relationships, social power, trauma, language, and diverse identities. Historical influence should not be confused with current scientific consensus. Theories can remain useful for interpretation while their unsupported biological or cultural assumptions are rejected. Critical reading preserves insight without granting founders permanent authority over evidence.

## Influence on Psychotherapy and Culture

Freud influenced free association, transference analysis, defense theory, developmental interpretation, and the idea that symptoms possess meaning. Jung influenced active imagination, symbolic work, personality typologies, dream exploration, and therapies focused on meaning and individuation. Their concepts also shaped literature, film, religious studies, art criticism, and popular culture. However, many specific claims are difficult to test, and contemporary clinical psychology relies heavily on controlled evidence, validated assessment, and treatments developed outside classical depth psychology. The historical importance of Freud and Jung lies partly in the questions they made unavoidable: how unconscious processes, childhood, relationships, fantasy, culture, and self-deception contribute to psychological life (Makari; Shamdasani).

## Points of Similarity

Despite their split, Freud and Jung shared several commitments. Both rejected the idea that conscious reason fully controls behavior, treated dreams and symptoms as psychologically meaningful, used extended dialogue to explore inner conflict, and believed that present difficulties could be connected to earlier experience. Both developed theories from clinical observation, autobiography, literature, mythology, and cultural analysis rather than modern experimental methods. They also created professional movements with loyal followers and institutional disputes. Their similarities explain why Jung emerged from psychoanalysis even though he later opposed its central assumptions. Analytical psychology is not simply a correction added to Freud; it is a related but distinct system built through agreement, reinterpretation, and rupture (Makari; Shamdasani).

## Contemporary Evaluation

A contemporary evaluation should avoid choosing one thinker as completely correct. Freud's emphasis on sexuality, repression, defense, and relational conflict can illuminate some cases but becomes reductive when treated as universal. Jung's broader symbolism and attention to meaning can support reflection but may encourage unfalsifiable explanations when every event is interpreted archetypally. Neither framework should replace medical assessment, trauma-informed care, or evidence-based treatment for serious mental illness. Their work is most useful when approached historically and critically: concepts become hypotheses for understanding rather than unquestionable diagnoses. Clinical claims should be tested against the patient's experience, cultural context, functional outcomes, and current research.

## Conclusion

Freud and Jung differed significantly, but not in the simplified form of sexuality versus complete rejection of sexuality. Freud treated libido primarily through psychosexual development and conflict, while Jung expanded it into a general form of psychic energy expressed through symbols, religion, creativity, and individuation. Freud described unconscious conflict through repression and structural relations among id, ego, and superego; Jung added the collective unconscious and archetypes. They also diverged over religion, dreams, and unusual experiences. Their theories remain historically influential because they enlarged the study of inner life, yet both require critical revision. Understanding their disagreement means preserving complexity, correcting false attributions, and distinguishing interpretive value from scientific proof (Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*; Freud, *The Ego and the Id*; Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*; Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*; Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*; Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*; Makari; Shamdasani).

## References

1. Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. 1905.
2. Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. 1923.
3. Freud, Sigmund. *The Future of an Illusion*. 1927.
4. Jung, C. G. *Symbols of Transformation*. 2nd ed., Princeton UP, 1956.
5. Jung, C. G. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. 2nd ed., Princeton UP, 1966.
6. Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 2nd ed., Princeton UP, 1969.
7. Makari, George. *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis*. Harper, 2008.
8. Shamdasani, Sonu. *Jung and the Making of Modern Psychology*. Cambridge UP, 2003.