

Sigmund Freud and “The Oedipus Complex”

Sigmund Freud (May 6, 1856–September 23, 1939) was an Austrian neurologist and the co-founder of the psychoanalytic school of psychology. Freud is best known for his theories of the unconscious mind. He is commonly referred to as “the father of psychoanalysis” and his work has been tremendously influential.

For Freud, the “Oedipus Complex” is the childhood desire to sleep with the mother and to kill the father. Freud describes the source of this complex in his *Introductory Lectures*: “You all know the Greek legend of King Oedipus, who was destined by fate to kill his father and take his mother to wife, who did everything possible to escape the oracle’s decree and punished himself by blinding when he learned that he had none the less unwittingly committed both these crimes.”

According to Freud, Sophocles’ play, *Oedipus*, illustrates a stage in each individual the child desires the mother because of its intimate connection through birth and infancy and resents (even secretly desires the murder) of the father. Such primal desires are, of course, quickly repressed but, even among the mentally sane, they will arise again in dreams or in literature.

Sigmund Freud’s theory as related to the Oedipal complex is basically saying that we humans are ruled “deep down” by animalistic sexual drives. The key here is to understand that he was saying that these drives are derived from our primitive ancestry and are hidden deep within our subconscious. He believed that we all have an **Id**, which is where our uninhibited instincts and desires are dominant; then as we evolved, we developed a conscience, or a **Superego**, and we all have an **Ego** which acts as a regulator or compromiser between the Id and the Superego.

One critic debates that Oedipus *does* represent an example of the Oedipal Complex: Oedipus demonstrated use of the Id by not being able to remember killing his father and then unknowingly hunting for a reconnection with his mother. He demonstrates the Ego when he starts to believe that he really is the murderer, and when Jocasta is trying to explain to him the death of her previous husband. Superego was demonstrated by the blinding of himself. He felt he needed to punish himself for the killing of his father and of incest.

Another critic claims that Freud’s Oedipal Complex *doesn’t* apply to Oedipus: I certainly do not see how it could apply to Oedipus at all. He did not forget or suppress the memory of killing his father because he had not killed his “father.” He killed a group of strangers on the road that made him angry. One of those strangers happened to be his birth father. Oedipus would have had to have killed the King of Corinth, his adopted father, for Freud’s theory to apply. Oedipus

obviously loved the parents that had raised him or he never would have been so appalled at the prophecy that he left his home to ensure it did not come to pass.

Freud's theory would not have applied to his marriage to Jocasta either. He married a complete stranger, not the woman who raised him. Again Freud's theory would only have worked if he had married the mother who had raised him. King Laius and Queen Jocasta were the real villains in this story. Had they kept their infant son and raised him, the dire prediction would most likely not have come true.

A **Freudian slip**, or **parapraxia**, is an error in speech or memory that is believed to be caused by the unconscious mind. Some errors, such as a woman accidentally calling her husband by the name of the other man with whom she is having an affair, seem to represent relatively clear cases of Freudian slips. In other cases, the error might appear to be trivial or bizarre, but may show some deeper meaning on analysis.