

Teaching Freud: A Lesson

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This article addresses the objectives of teaching undergraduates about psychoanalysis and offers some evidence for how those objectives are addressed in contemporary textbooks and achieved in the students. Arguing that there is a poor match between goals, strategies, and achievement, we make some specific suggestions about how to proceed.

Try an experiment: Ask college seniors, as we did, to name “famous psychologists.” In class after class, Sigmund Freud’s name will be mentioned five or six times more frequently than any other. In this sense, none of the many theories of personality that undergraduate students study is better known than the psychoanalytic approach founded by Sigmund Freud. Students’ familiarity with Freud’s name and with some psychoanalytic jargon is widespread. This seems to confirm Gay’s (1989) view that “Freud is inescapable” (p. xiii) in our culture, with his influence touching literature and the theater and punctuating academic and popular vocabularies.

However, it is less clear exactly what students learn, understand, and appreciate about psychoanalytic theories of personality development. This article addresses three questions: First, how is psychoanalytic theory represented in contemporary psychology textbooks? Second, what do we think students should learn from and about psychoanalytic theory? Third, what do students, or at least our students, think about the theory and its relevance to them and to their lives? The article concludes with some comments about how to approach the task of teaching undergraduates about psychoanalysis.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE TAUGHT

Fifteen popular general psychology textbooks were selected for review of their presentation of psychoanalytic theory (see Appendix). Our first general observation

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is that there is a strong tendency to reduce the psychoanalytic perspective to something that Freud, or Freud and a few followers, said and to not do justice to the reality that Freud's own views changed over time and that no one person—not even Freud—speaks for psychoanalysis. A school of thought or a social movement is a sociointellectual construct; it has no single voice or elected representative. Even if it changes, it is not necessarily evolving in the sense of becoming more perfect.

A second general observation is that the material tended to focus on concrete details of specific aspects of the theory, again without much regard for contemporary developments or general implications. The psychosexual stages were the most commonly discussed issues, followed by the mental agencies of ego, id, and superego and defense mechanisms. The psychosexual stages, especially the Oedipal conflict, tended to be viewed critically, with a much more favorable view of defense mechanisms, dreams, and slips.

This selection of topics provides a wonderful opportunity for detail retention that can easily be assessed in multiple-choice exam format. However, it does little to place psychoanalytic theory in the context of current intellectual concerns about humans as meaning makers or to evaluate the clinical and intellectual challenges that have contributed to the shifts and changes (one hesitates to use the word *evolution*) that characterize psychoanalytic theory.

A third observation is that the criticisms of psychoanalytic theory focused on the private and possibly unreliable nature of evidence gathered in confidential therapeutic sessions, and the “reluctance” to experimentally test psychoanalytic notions. There were no references to Grinstein's (1956) four-volume tabulation of psychoanalytic research. There was no evaluation of the epistemological significance of Freud's coupling the clinical observations in *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer & Freud, 1893–1895) with the everyday observations in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900).

Although all texts referred to Freud's Oedipal conflict and the five psychosexual stages, in-depth descriptions were found in Gleitman's (1992) chapter on Freudian theory and in the discussion by Wortman and Loftus (1992). For example, whereas most texts provided a table listing the five stages and their respective “erogenous zones,” Gleitman's text and Wortman's and Loftus's text expanded the consideration of these issues to encompass contemporary interests. Similarly, their concise explanations of fixation were grounded in everyday occurrences.

In the 15 textbooks, post-Freudian theorists (or so-called neo-Freudians), were reviewed in varying detail. Referenced in most of the texts were Adler, Erikson, Fromm, Horney, Jung, and Sullivan. In some texts, Anna Freud was credited as having a role in expanding the boundaries of psychoanalytic theories, specifically ego psychology. A modern extension and variation on Freud's theory—the object relations theory—was introduced by Bernstein, Roy, Wickens, and Srull (1988) and also by Wortman and Loftus (1992). Although what Freud said and when are of some historical interest, the more important issue for introductory psychology

students is whether, and in what ways, contemporary psychoanalytic perspectives on human nature as described above are valuable or different, a question that is simply not seriously addressed in these books.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD LEARN

What undergraduate students should learn from a discussion of psychoanalytic theory is an important but not an easy question. In today's colleges, most undergraduate curricula focus on either preparation for a vocation or, sometimes, on the acquisition of facts that should be known to an educated person—historical facts like “The French Revolution began July 14, 1789,” or psychological facts like “Learning can be described as an asymptotic function.” Both the vocational and the fact-centered views of undergraduate education overlook the older and more profound sense of education as a civilizing effort, one in which reflecting on human nature is central. From that point of view, undergraduate psychology studies, including the study of psychoanalytic theory, should aim at contributing to an understanding of human nature. When psychology, rather than being a separate discipline, was included in philosophy, the goal of understanding human nature was more clearly in focus. The study of human nature, in liberal terms, has been ill served by the differentiation of the two fields. Philosophy developed specialized interests, in ethics for example, and academic psychology shifted toward qualifying as a natural science by focusing on the acquisition of facts. The result is that the human condition became minimally addressed in too many undergraduate curricula. We believe that reflecting on human nature should be a central focus in liberal studies, and we believe that psychology's huge undergraduate enrollments indicate students' hunger for that kind of teaching.

Another complication in defining the role of psychoanalytic theory in undergraduate education is that of cultural context. What psychoanalysis had to offer the optimistic enlightenment thinkers of the turn of the century is not central in a postmodern era. Based on 30 years of clinical and pedagogical experience, we believe that the provocative and highly consequential contributions that psychoanalytic theory makes to a contemporary understanding of human nature and to which undergraduates should be exposed can be summarized in the following eight points:

1. Self-reflection persuades us of the immediacy of mind. (*Cogito, ergo sum*, or perhaps more properly, *cogito, ergo mens est*.) This point is important because the force of this assertion is an irreducible fracture line in psychology. Psychologists committed to a natural sciences model for psychology, in which the observer is looking outward to the world of subjects, have argued that the concept of mind is anathema to a “truly scientific” psychology. In contrast, those whose interest in

psychology stems from an interest in self-awareness see mind as the central focus of any meaningful psychology.

It is a historical paradox that experimental (that is, scientific) psychology was born in Wundtian laboratories using introspection as their procedure. When scientific introspection was unable to resolve problems of imageless thoughts, the behavioral reaction was to eliminate introspection root and branch as a scientifically valid approach. Nevertheless, for almost everybody except some scientific psychologists, the central feature of human experience is self-awareness. Descartes's *cogito* assumes a self-aware reasoner, and almost all of Western thought takes as given the anchoring certainty of this phenomenon. That the assumption was problematic for a systematic psychology was made clear from the difficulties encountered by the introspective method of Wundt's followers and by the retreat of American academic psychology, by and large, into a behaviorism that, in Skinner's words, regards the three main obstacles to a scientific psychology to be "humanistic psychology, cognitive psychology, and psychotherapy" (Skinner, 1987, pp. 782--783). That this retreat was self-defeating is clear from American psychology's rediscovery of cognitive psychology and from the emergence and popularity of cognitive behavioral therapy. It is to the credit of Freud and psychoanalysis that rather than ignoring self-awareness or the difficulties involved in its exploration, they undertook the daunting task of exploring just those difficulties and insisting that the difficulties be taken, not as spooks, but as meaningful phenomena.

2. Self as illusory: Fundamental observations made by Freud early in his career, and dismissed or trivialized by his followers at the cost of closing their eyes to a striking and universal aspect of the human condition, were those of the frailty of will and the discontinuity of experience. Freud noted the first observation in those patients who were unable to carry out fervent intentions. He might well have added a section to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) detailing the fragility of good intentions in all of us. We all procrastinate, abort our efforts at self-improvement, and so forth. Freud described the second observation in his early clinical descriptions of "hysterical" patients whose conscious experience contained discontinuities (hypnotic states) that are dramatically illustrated in posthypnotic suggestion and even more dramatically in cases of multiple personality and some fugue states. Here, too, there are everyday "psychopathological" analogues: mood swings and dreaming. We are speaking here of what has been described as horizontal and vertical splitting. But beyond terminology, at stake in Freud's insistence that these phenomena are nontrivial and demand a theoretical accounting is a breathtaking deconstruction of the self, an almost vertiginous realization that we are not who we think we are, that, in Gerard Manley Hopkins's (1962) words, "the mind has mountains, cliffs of fall, sheer, no man fathomed" (p. 1552).

3. Humankind cannot be understood as pleasure-seeking, problem-solving machines. American behaviorism has attempted to account for human behavior,

and the behavior of other animals, by pleasure seeking and pain avoidance. Where those principles prove obviously inadequate, the tendency is to invoke instincts genetically hardwired by Darwinian selection to provide for survival of the species. Where this combination proves inadequate to account for the human proclivity to flirt with self-destruction, for the extinction of species, or for the failure of Darwinian selection to produce a clear winner, these theorists fall back on environmental unpredictability or some other variant of theodicy.

Psychoanalysis, including that of Freud, must struggle with these complexities as well, and it has resorted to some of the same devices. Perhaps the most startling result was Freud's grim conclusion that humans have within them an elemental need to decay and die, which is part of the dual instinct theory discussed hereafter. But Freud and other serious observers of human nature have noted another perversity: the human tendency to live in repetitive patterns. When we review our lives or the lives of others, we note these recurring themes, and we also note that they are not consciously planned or intended, or stamped in by the law of effect, in Thorndike's (1932) pragmatic view that successful behaviors are retained by the organism. In fact, many of these patterns seem not only unconscious but self-defeating.

We must therefore face the question of the meaning of these unintended, and often unrewarding, repetitions. As we look at our own lives, the question arises as to whether these patterns exist objectively or whether they are subjectively imposed meanings; whether we are meaning seekers or meaning makers, a question that can and has been raised about both historiography and autobiography. Here the psychoanalyst has an advantage denied the autobiographer and the historian. The intersubjective editing of perceived historical patterns provides a means of ensuring a degree of validity; even more to the point, the clinical impact of genetic interpretations is the ultimate, if only pragmatic, testimony to their validity.

4. Conflict is an ineluctable, essential part of human nature. Some views of personality are idealistic and even romantic, viewing the human condition as perfect or at least perfectible. Skinner (1962) and Rogers (1967), otherwise at odds, here agree, and they would be joined by at least some existentialists and by Marxists and other utopians. Freud, in contrast, took a grimmer and more pessimistic stand. He saw conflict as inescapable on two levels.

First, dual instinct theory posits that all motives consist of varying mixtures of the warring elements Eros and Thanatos, which consigns humankind to inescapable tension. As the Inkspots sang, "You always hurt the one you love." Not only are our object relations thus always ambivalent, but our personal careers are constructed of an ironic blend of growth and decay, potential and finitude.

Second, Freud emphasized the unavoidable and humanizing trauma of the oedipal struggle. We believe this struggle to be one of the most misunderstood elements of his theory. It is our view that the pre-oedipal period involves object relations that are either narcissistic or dyadic. In either case, the child experiences

himself or herself as an omnipresent and central element in any interpersonal transaction. This Ptolemaic self-centeredness is breached by a Copernican disillusionment. The advent of the Oedipal period's triadic object relations (impossible earlier on both social and mental grounds) involves the unavoidably humiliating realization that one is not always a central figure in the physical and interpersonal universe. The conflict inheres in the reluctance to give up the archaic view and the countervailing pressures of reality testing and the developing interest in others. Hence the experience of oedipal conflict becomes a precondition for the empathic experience of otherness and for mature love that concedes and values the otherness of the beloved.

5. Early experience has important psychological consequences. This point is a bit of common wisdom that finds folk expression ("as the twig is bent..."). It becomes controversial only in the context of the view that the experience of childhood is passionate and full of conflict. The psychoanalytic view that children have strong feelings and intense inner conflicts runs strongly counter to the popular view that children have child-sized feelings and are psychologically trivial, except perhaps in the vulnerability that accompanies their being plastic or impressionable. Literature recognizes that this may not be so, as in Golding's (1962) *Lord of the Flies*, but the trivialization of children's feelings persists strongly elsewhere. This distortion may have roots in the social circumstance of regarding children as parental property, or it may relate to a need to buffer our awareness of incestuous urges, or both. It is, however, a strongly held belief directly opposed by psychoanalytic theory. Much has been made of Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory in 1897, an about-face seen by some as a concession to the political correctness of the times or as a conscious or unconscious extenuation of parental (and medical) wrongdoing. Both seem unlikely. The rigor and relatively public nature of Freud's self-analysis demonstrate an admirable level of personal and professional integrity, one that makes implausible easy self-serving. Would an opportunist (or intellectual gigolo) have armed his critics with the dream of Irma's injection? Furthermore, few would have denied, even in Victorian times, that incest and other forms of sexual exploitation of children existed. The more shocking and upsetting point that Freud made, and adhered to, is that children are—or can be—victims, but not innocent victims.

We understand that the statement just made will generate howls of protest from those who take it to be a blackguardly blaming of victims. We have no such intention, nor was that Freud's point in abandoning the seduction theory. The point is that children are not living Beaver Cleavers or Betty Boops, cosmetized and prettified to the point of two-dimensionality. Rather they are people passionately engaged (and not always in admirable ways) with the people around them. There is more truth in *The Lord of the Flies* than in the Bobbsey Twins. It is hard to overestimate the degree of our resistance to acknowledging the reality and force of childhood sexuality, a resistance to which the psychological and psychoanalytic

communities are not immune. Rage, terror, passion, and jealousy are not the prerogatives of adulthood, although we are motivated to cultivate the fantasy that children do not experience such feelings. The irrationalities and resistance that can characterize students' sexual attitudes were illustrated in a recent undergraduate abnormal psychology class. Almost all the students were in favor of early sexual education and the availability of condoms. However, the same students also strongly opposed the notion of making children's dolls anatomically correct. A properly conducted psychoanalysis must deal with memories and conflicts about early sexual excitement and rageful impulses—in short, intense passions.

Specifically, of course, the erotic component of our attachment to our mothers must be taken into account, and that leads to yet another misunderstanding of the oedipal period. We have in mind the misunderstood origins of penis envy and the gender differences in the role of homoeroticism. Both boys and girls enter the Oedipal stage with an intense erotized attachment to their mothers. Penis envy, seen by some feminists as a sexist fantasy because of Freud's apparent belief that it implies an inherent superiority of male genitalia, does exist, but it owes its origin to the circumstance of the erotic component of the child's early maternal attachment. Penis envy arises not out of the young girl's view of male genitalia as inherently more desirable but out of her growing appreciation that the mother she so ardently desires has a primary attachment to father. This attachment has an erotic component in which father's penis is central. She becomes increasingly curious about father's penis, and that curiosity initiates an involvement with him that has been unhappily called a reverse Oedipus complex. It is not reversed; it is more complicated. It has the same crucial element of a humiliating Copernican disillusionment, but it differs because of the presence of a penis envy rooted in the belief that she would have been more interesting to her mother had she been thus equipped. What is at stake is not an argument for male superiority but a recognition of the powerful erotic component of our first attachments to our mothers, and the young girl's attempt to deal with her version of oedipal humiliation: realizing that the parental ties to each other are primary and sexual. Another consequence of the circumstance that the first erotic attachment for women is same sexed and for men is cross-sexed is that homosexual derivatives tend to be more egosyntonic and less conflictful for women than for men, and thus men are more likely to be homophobic than are women.

6. Reminiscence, or the fictional nature of memory: Despite the popular belief of the evidential weight to be accorded to eyewitness testimony, a belief endorsed by pop cultural sources as diverse as Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason and Edward R. Murrow's "You Are There," the overwhelming weight of experimental psychology evidence is on the side of the unreliability of eyewitness evidence. That same point has been made by Freud. It has been made in another way by Lacan (1966) and by a series of narratologists from Aristotle (1964) to Ricoeur (1984–1988). Although all agree that memory is not an accurate register of events,

there are differences as to the basis on which memories are constituted. Lacar focuses on the constraints of representation, whereas many narratologists emphasize the capacity for (or need to) emplot or thematize.

Freud noted the selectivity and unreliability of memories, especially childhood memories. With his typical refusal to take anything for granted, he insisted on taking into account not just what is retained but also the gaps and inaccuracies. Combining personal retrospection and clinical observation, Freud concluded that memory (including forgetting and distortion), rather than being a passive register, is a motivated, meaning-filled act. One might take his construal of dreaming as a paradigm.

Dreams are interesting cognitive events for two reasons. First, they reveal the arbitrary and unreal nature of the terms we use to describe experience or to account for behavior. Does the term *dream* refer to the physiological activity that accompanies the mental events of night? Does it refer to the conscious or unconscious mental events of the night, or to what one relates to oneself or to another subsequently? Freud (1965) is helpful in recognizing the complexities and in providing at least the outlines of an appropriate analytical terminology: latent dream, manifest dream, secondary revision of the dream. These distinctions provide the basis for acknowledging the second reason for the special interest of dreams as cognitions. They are experienced as perceptions but in the absence of an external reality impressing itself more or less directly on our perceptual and cognitive apparatus. Some people go to great lengths to emphasize the component of "day residue" in dreams or to reduce dreaming to an epiphenomenal experiential correlate of random physiological off-gassing. The everyday experience of dreaming is that of a remembered (or forgotten) event almost certainly distorted in the remembering (we feel it change in the process of the struggle to bring it to mind), often vivid in the moment but paradoxically vulnerable to being whisked out of consciousness by forces over which we lack control. In short, dreams suggest a paradigm for remembering, not as a passive but fallible register, but as an intensely personal and effortful activity. Moreover, analysis of this activity reveals reality, not as a text that exists independently of the act of interpretation but as one that is created or at least modified by the act of being read. More prosaically, and less epigrammatically, we cannot see reality without seeing ourselves; there is an irreducible element of personally motivated distortion in any perception.

7. Demedicalizing human nature and human ills: Conflict is intrinsic in the human condition. Optimists who believe in the perfectibility of humankind have difficulty with the assumption made by classical psychoanalysis that conflict is inescapable. This assumption is sometimes trivialized into a statement that Freud thought that everybody (except analysts) is neurotic. That mistake overlooks the deeper meaning of Freud's use of his own dreams and slips in his early writings, a practice that eliminates the sick-well polarity and casts psychoanalysis not as a medical treatment but as a humbling exercise in self-exploration. This crucial

development has been lost, especially because of the grip of American medicine on psychoanalytic practice and because of the frantic pursuit by too many psychotherapists of reimbursement by health insurance plans.

The health–illness model is inappropriate to the world of moral relationships, aspirations, and the pursuit of self-esteem. As noted, psychoanalytic theory is, in a central way, *nonmedical*. It runs counter to the practice of medicalizing almost everything, a trend that reached its most extravagant expression in the World Health Organization’s definition of *health* as “complete physical, mental and social well-being.” (1993). This expansive statement has the effect of medicalizing every untoward situation (ugliness, job dissatisfaction, marital discontent, etc.), with predictable effects on “health” care costs, medical incomes, and personal responsibility.

8. The canonical nature of psychoanalytic theory: Among the misconceptions about psychoanalytic theory, one of the most persistent is that it is a dogmatic canon protected by its zealots from intellectual challenge. In point of fact, both Freud’s views, as reflected in his writings, and the general body of psychoanalytic writings have undergone repeated and radical alteration. These changes have been grounded in the root sources of psychoanalytic theory—clinical experience, self-observation, and reflections on art—rather than on the findings of psychological laboratories studying highly fragmented behaviors in rigidly ritualized ways. The psychological community has been unforgiving of such evidence.

Broadly speaking, one can identify three categories of effective psychoanalytic critiques. The first challenges the nature of human motivation; the second challenges the source or origin of human motives; and the last, and most radical, calls into question the paradigm of motivation and suggests meaning as an alternative.

Included in the first group are those who decry Freud’s emphasis on sexuality and call for substitutions or additions, such as a will to power. Here we would include the Adlerians, Jungians, and American ego psychologists committed to functional autonomy. Also included in this group are those who decry Freud’s later pessimistic insistence on a death instinct.

Some of the objections to Freud’s views in this area have to do with terminological ambiguities: lack of sufficiently clear distinctions among the concepts of instinct, drive, motive, intention, wish, and so forth. Freud’s dual instinct theory, positing a death instinct, was a response to his observation that human nature included perverse, non-self or non-species enhancing behaviors. His cynicism was founded not only on his observations of patient behaviors, but also on the staggering failure to avoid a second World War and the failure of history to define a direction that plausibly promises to preclude viciousness and cruelty. It was also grounded in the rational recognition that the brute fact of mortality demands sanction as a biological and human goal. For these reasons, he posited not an unambivalent wish to die, but Thanatos. This is a theoretical element, in the physical sense, that never exists in isolation but combines with Eros in variable ways to produce the variety

of human motivations, some fraction of which find expression as conscious intentions. But even taking this clarification into account, some are unhappy with the emphasis placed by classical psychoanalysis on sexual motivations. Adler (1956) argued, for example, for the importance of basic, elemental needs to dominate, and Jung (1964) for forces that transcend the personal, and indeed the natural, and link humanity to spiritual agents. Although Freud was open to the possibility of nonmaterial forces, and certainly recognized the presence of interpersonal conflict, he gave privilege to sexual motives. He did so partly on Darwinian grounds and partly on empirical grounds: Sexual motivations are powerful. He also recognized that many critics, including the ego psychologists, rather than enlarging the class of motives, in fact avoided recognizing the role played by sexual motives, a myopia that any observer of a political scene that includes Edward Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, and Bill Clinton can recognize. Finally, though he considered the possibility of nonmaterial forces and agencies, he argued for a psychology that was consistent with, if irreducible to, biology and history.

Included in the second group of critics are those who see human motivations as social products, culturally, not biologically, conditioned. Here we would include both the British object relations thoughts and the self psychologists who believe that cultural shifts produce new pathologies and new personalities.

Of course, one must acknowledge at the outset that Freud was clear about the importance of experience in modifying behavior. His vocation as a psychotherapist would require that. What is at stake is not the issue of whether our experience helps to shape our motives and our behaviors (though not our instincts), but the question of human and social perfectibility. The core of the classical position is that our instinctive natures make conflict an unavoidable part of human nature. At the heart of the object relations view is the optimistic belief that good-enough parenting can preclude conflict. At the level of psychotherapeutic technique, this optimism leads to an overvaluation of the mutative impact of the relationship aspects of the psychoanalytic experience (as opposed to the interpretive element) and to an avoidance of recognizing negative transference. At a theoretical level, it leads to a failure to recognize the dark side of human nature and the ironies of mortality.

Included in the third group of critics are those who take the distinctively human attribute to be language or intention, the construction of experience. These Lacanian views have the allure of modernity and the merit of arguing for a note of modesty in asserting the merits of any theoretical system. They also have the considerable merit of defamiliarizing important aspects of psychoanalytic theory, permitting us to see them more clearly and with more appreciation of their meaning. There is something compelling, if frustrating, in acknowledging the imperfectability of human nature and of human knowing. But for psychoanalysis to make a claim as a science and as a therapeutic endeavor, it must adopt rules at least not inconsistent with the former, and it must accept responsibility for the consequences of psychoanalytic relationships. Although one must recognize the importance of language in

reforming human nature, one must not lose sight of the persistence of the animal—and the perverse—in us.

To recapitulate, the eight psychoanalytic points we think important to call to the attention of undergraduates are (a) the primacy of mind, (b) the illusory component of self-experience, (c) the failure at simple pleasure and seeking models, (d) the ineluctable nature of conflict, (e) the passionate nature of early experience, (f) the fictional nature of memory, (g) the desirability of demedicalizing human nature, and (h) the psychoanalytic challenges to psychoanalytic canons.

WHAT STUDENTS THINK

The third important issue is what students come to think. The day after a lecture on the psychoanalytic theory of personality development, a student remarked to one of the authors that her friend, a graduate student in psychology, told her that one of his psychology professors had said that “teaching Freud” is a waste of time and is usually not done anymore. “For one thing,” the student explained, “this professor said that everyone knows by now that Freud’s work was published late in life when he was ‘mad’ from cancer pain, and therefore should not be taken too seriously, especially his psychosexual stages.” This incident accentuates the ambivalence surrounding psychoanalytic theory and highlights the larger question: “What is our goal in teaching psychoanalytic theory to undergraduates, and what do they come away having learned?”

To provide a view of our students’ understanding of psychoanalytic theory, we asked a class of students to write anonymous accounts of their experience reading about psychoanalytic theory of personality development in an introductory psychology course using the text by Dworetzky (1991), which was chosen by a department for all students of this course. A total of 41 students (about two thirds of the class) responded. Obviously, the students’ reading was in a context of other “texts”: the lecture material, assigned or unassigned material in the media, and other courses. Participation in this project earned additional course credit for all respondents, who were encouraged to provide specific comments without concern about remarks being judged as right or wrong. The completed responses ranged in length from one to three pages.

Evaluations of Psychoanalytic Theory by Respondents

In the students’ writings, some prominent themes emerged. Opposition was greatest for the psychosexual stages, and particularly the oedipal conflict. Students responded most favorably to defense mechanisms and, to a lesser degree, the tripartite psychic structures, id, ego, and superego.

The stages were too strange to be believable. How do we know children have these feelings? [How do] children receive pleasure from eating and going to the bathroom? This may be true, but I don't think the pleasure they receive is sexual ... it's pretty much improbable for anyone to have sex drives until they are 13 or 14 years old.

I'd like to say that Freud's psychosexual stages seem plausible to me. I guess that might label me as crazy right away, but oh well. Many people feel that Freud was a dirty old man, but I don't. Sex really is the essence of existence, since without it, the race would disappear.

I cannot believe that children develop sexual attachment at such early stages. It is even more outlandish to think that these attachments are towards the child's parents.

I've never had an attraction to my mother ... or any other feelings toward her at that age. But an attraction could develop toward an older woman, such as a sixth-grade teacher, but never my mother.

I have caught myself doing things (defense mechanisms) that I now know are considered to be denial, rationalization, and projection.

I have heard of the id, ego, and superego in the past, but I never realized that they are all part of Freud's theory. I can relate best to the superego ... it causes you to review your values and ... decide what is right or wrong according to the situation you are in.

Freud is able to blame all our social faux pas, secret desires, and other unacceptable behavior on the failure of the ego to control the id.

I think that these concepts exist but there is no way for us to know whether or not an actual id, ego, and superego exist up there in our heads or if it is something else controlling these processes.

Clearly, the aspects of psychoanalytic theory that we have described as most important are not presented in the textbooks and are not understood by the students. Rather, it seems that many students think of *psychoanalysis* and *Freud* as synonymous terms and regard Freud as a problematic and possibly dangerous person.

THOUGHTS ON TEACHING PSYCHOANALYSIS

Perhaps the most important issue to keep in mind when teaching psychoanalysis to undergraduates is that the teachers are not impressing their thoughts on a *tabula rasa*. Freud has permeated our society, and the instructor's words are decoded in the context of the student's current understandings and feelings about psychoanaly-

sis and Freud. That means, among other things, that a crucial first step in the teaching process is to determine what the students know or think they know and what they are curious about. A device we have found useful is asking students—at the outset of a unit dealing with psychoanalysis—to submit written questions that they would like to have answered. One of the findings is very likely to be that, for the majority of students, when the instructor says “psychoanalysis,” the student is likely to hear “Freud.” The implication is that early attention must be given to clarifying the nature of a school of thought and putting psychoanalysis into a historical and cultural perspective.

When asked to articulate their thoughts on the relation between psychoanalysis and sex, some students claim that Freud was simply a “perverted, dirty old man” who thought that “little kids want to have sex with their parents.” In protest against psychosexual stages, one student exclaimed, “Everyone knows that we don’t become sexual until puberty!” Such passionate objections are often based on adult conflicts and resultant misunderstandings. One of the problems of the term *sexuality* is that its connotations are limited by the student’s difficulty in recapturing childhood modes of thought and experience. In classroom discussions about toddlers’ curiosity, exploration, and investigation of most everything in sight, including putting these things into their mouths, the students agreed that this behavior is normal and expected. Similarly, they agreed that exploring mom or dad’s face, mouth, eyes, and nose with little fingers is typical of infants, as is the seemingly pleasurable use of a pacifier. Touching one’s own toes, an ear, or a nose is acceptable behavior; but the infant’s discovery of his or her genitalia, the pleasure associated with stimulating them, and the wish to explore parts of the adult’s body that are normally covered is not acceptable because it makes adults feel uncomfortable. Students can come to see that adults’ differential treatment of these exploratory behaviors, like the provision of sexually ambiguous dolls, conveys a message. Psychoanalysis posits a childhood *sexual instinct* as part of a continuum culminating in the total sexual development of humans. The child’s exploration of the physical body as a whole, whether it be touching a big toe or touching genitalia, might be viewed in the same manner as Piaget’s (1973) description of children’s active examination of the environment.

Equally important, students can be helped to reflect on the assumption that children’s feelings are pale or trivial as opposed to passionate and violent. We ask them to consider raging tantrums and night terrors as examples of childhood feelings and to speculate on the subjective emotional concomitants of marasmus. The point of psychoanalysis is that we are complex creatures, only partly known to ourselves, profoundly affected by the meaning we assign to our early experiences, and living in a moral climate full of conflict.

Many serious students read psychoanalysis (or Freud) in the context of contemporary feminism. Concepts like penis envy and castration anxiety, along with Freud’s placement in a Victorian milieu, are taken as expressions of a sexist

program essential to the psychoanalytic movement. This concern should be faced and can be evaluated on two levels. First, although Freud, like his contemporary readers, was affected by his sociological and cultural context, the issue of what young children make of anatomical differences in our culture, patriarchal or not, is an empirical question. Certainly psychoanalysis, probably more than most theories, includes a program for social change. The political evaluation of whether that program is particularly sexist is an open question, as is the question of whether psychoanalysis as a movement or an organization is more or less sexist (or patriarchal) than the general society or the medical profession. Second, a psychoanalytic proposition that systematic, biologically based differences exist between men and women (anatomy is destiny) can be regarded not only as subject to evaluation but also as a precocious expression of some contemporary feminist views (e.g., Gilligan, 1982), as well as consistent with the writings of social critics like Illich (1983).

A generally useful point of contact for many students between their lives and psychoanalytic theory is dreaming. Psychoanalytic theories about dreams are frequently presented in general psychology textbooks under the heading of "disguised" representations of repressed desires. This is known as the dream's *latent* content, as opposed to the *manifest* content that is known to the dreamer. We believe that this labeling procedure is more pedagogically useful if attention is focused on two somewhat different issues: the fragility of dreams and their amenability to useful interpretation. Almost all students are familiar with the phenomenon of forgetting a dream that moments before had been clearly and vividly in mind. The difficulty of accounting for this familiar experience without a model of repression and unconscious motivation is a very useful and persuasive point of departure. In addition, foregrounding that common experience serves as an opportunity to examine the complexity of memory as a function and to open a discussion of the reliability of memory. This discussion can connect with Loftus's work (Loftus, Feldman, & Dashell, 1995), contemporary questions about abuse memories, and the basis on which Freud abandoned the seduction theory. Here again, the bottom line is the psychoanalytic view that dreams, like early memories, are constructed, or in the language of postmoderns, are representations that contain meaning (or are motivated) and that differ from accurate registrations of objective reality. The use of dream journals can help students explore dreams and their meaning. Teaching techniques like Cartwright's (1977), in which she encourages patients to interpret their dreams, can introduce students to the activity of discerning meanings that are not immediately apparent and to the notion of mental and personal complexity. Our daily experiences with human frailty in all its forms, infantile passions, dreams, infatuation, love, and illness, provide connections with psychoanalytic theory.

Recently one of the authors had the experience of seeing many of the issues just discussed beautifully illustrated in a classroom discussion of sexuality and love, particularly in relation to the AIDS crisis. Through poignant discourse, the human

condition and its intrinsic vulnerability surfaced, bringing to center stage the very personal anxieties and intense discomfort associated with AIDS and sexual behavior. Also important, however, was the students' discovery of those provocative notions inherent in contemporary psychoanalytic theory, namely, self-awareness; indirectly experienced mental activities such as denial, self-defeating behavior, and early childhood passions; and the nonmedical consideration of moral relationships, aspirations, and self-esteem. Acknowledgment of our human urgency to engage in sexual behavior was the focus for those students. Being aware of denial as a defense mechanism and being educated about condom use were figural issues. For others, however, the focus related to "immoral sexual behaviors," the importance of abstinence-based sex education, and the inhibition of students' subjective experience of any form of sexual pleasure. This emotional debate sidestepped another very uncomfortable fact, which is that the virus being discussed tends to cause horrendous physical and emotional pain, and to be fatal for most, but not all, of its hosts. That sexual passion can have such profound consequences was not as figural as the debate about anatomically correct dolls or the use of condoms!

Finally, if we have the courage, it might be well to dispense with the laundry list of Freudian terms and stages to be memorized for a multiple-choice exam. We have underestimated the relevance of Freud's ideas to contemporary lifestyles and experiences and reinforced the popular opinions among undergraduates that Freud is a synonym for sex.

A psychoanalytic view of human nature can help students understand childhood as a passionate time in which our basic natures are forged and illustrated. It may help them accept a human condition characterized by inescapable conflict; conflict made inescapable by the elemental stuff out of which motivation is built, and doubly inescapable because of the cataclysmic collapse of the egocentric paradigm during the Oedipal period. And may help them cultivate a self-awareness, the fragmentary and inconsistent nature of which is required by the conflicts that we cannot avoid and can only partially formulate. Helping students achieve such an understanding is civilizing in a way consistent with the best aspects of liberal education and is, sadly, inconsistent with how psychology is often taught.

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APPENDIX: SELECTED GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

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