THE PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF CONFLICTS

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CONFLICTS

• What do we mean when we say ‘conflict’?

• Psychoanalytic definition of neurotic conflict

• What type of conflict?

• Distinction between problems and conflicts
CONFLICTS

• How many parts to the conflict can be described?

• Elements involved: affects, instincts, longings etc on one side and defences on the other

• Which ‘conflicts’ are accessible to our psycho-analytic armamentarium?

• How does the magnitude of the forces in conflict affects the conflict? Describe.
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CONFLICTS

• Not all conflicts lead to illness (Ex.Dev conflicts)

• Some may promote development (Dev conflicts)

• A sudden increase in the aggressive or libidinal drives, or a decrease and enfeeblement of the ego may cause the emergence of a latent neurosis
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• In the 1890’s the scientific opinion was that neuroses resulted from “heredity and degeneration”

• Freud instead postulated that neuroses were the result of mental forces in conflict

• These conflicts were resolved by the formation of symptoms (compromise formations)
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- Hysterical symptoms as compromise formations (both tendencies represented simultaneously)

- Obsessional symptoms: one tendency comes first followed by a second one (undoing the first)

- In perversions there is no objection on the ego side. Perversions are ego syntonic
CONFLICTS

• Freud described how conflicts are to start with external authority (External Conflicts)

• During development these external conflicts become internalized (Internalized Conflicts)

• Internal conflicts are related to contradictions in human nature. Passive-active, love-hate, and bisexuality for example.
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• There are many types of conflicts observable in mental life.

• Some are found at the basis of certain neurotic, or other types of disturbances.

• In other cases they are part of normal mental processes or relate to developmental stages (Developmental Conflicts examples)
Thus conflicts can take place among the three mental agencies as well as the external world:

a) Id-Ego conflicts (self preservative instincts)

b) Id- Ego/Superego conflicts (produce guilt)

c) Ego-ego ideals conflicts (produce shame)

d) Between opposite ego ideals which is the case of the war neurosis (peace and war ideals)

e) Similar mechanisms in the traumatic neurosis
Conflıcts can be described as:

1) Inter-systemic:
   - between id, ego and superego
CONFLICTS

2) Intra-systemic:
   - due to the existence of some contradictory tendencies and instinctual pairs of opposites:

   a) Love and hate
   b) activity/passivity polarity.
   c) bisexuality (homo versus hetero-sexuality)
   d) Ambivalence

Later on, conflicts were described as between the Life and the Death instincts
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Thus, the following were indications of the aggressive or destructive instinct:

• the masochism inherent in so many people

• the negative therapeutic reaction

• the neurotic sense of guilt
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• Conflicts were formulated as well on the basis of the instinctual forces involved

• Such formulations changed with the changes in the conceptualization of the instinct theory:
  
  • First: between sexual an ego instincts*
  
  • Second: between the libidinal ego instincts and the libidinal object instincts (self-object)
  
  • Third: between the life and death instincts
Similarly when the Topographical Theory changed to the Structural Theory*:

- Contrast no longer between the conscious and unconscious
- Now between the coherent ego and the repressed split off from it
How can we influence conflicts:

1) Can conflicts be solved finally and for all time?*

2) Can we inoculate patients against conflicts in the future?

3) Can we activate sleeping conflicts and is it wise to do so?
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Conflicts looked at developmentally:

1) Developmental interferences

2) Developmental conflicts
   (Differences and similarities of 1 & 2)

3) Neurotic conflicts

4) The Infantile neurosis

5) The Adult neurosis