Jung’s Psychology of the Complexes

Course Introduction:

According to Jung, a complex “is the image of a certain psychic situation which is strongly accentuated emotionally and is, moreover, incompatible with the habitual attitude of consciousness” (CW 8, par. 201). Put another way, the complex can be regarded as an organizing structure of the psyche that gathers similar feeling-toned elements together around an archetypal core of meaning and functions to supply an affective thematic enrichment to our perceptions and experiences. Yet, while complexes need not be thought of as necessarily pathological, the origin of the term was very much tied up in an attempt to understand psychopathology – in particular hysteria.

It was Josef Breuer who was the first to use the term “complex.” Breuer wrote a chapter entitled “Theoretical” in *Studies on Hysteria*, an 1893 work he had co-authored with Sigmund Freud, in which he stated: “Sense-impressions that are not apperceived and the ideas that are aroused but do not enter consciousness…sometimes accumulate and form complexes – mental strata withdrawn from consciousness; they form a subconsciousness.” Here, Breuer was drawing from Janet’s notion of “fixed ideas” – a term Janet used to formulate his understanding of hysteria as a state in which ideas or images that carried highly charged emotion became split-off from the habitual personality and impervious to adaptation.

Breuer and Freud’s understanding, of course, was brilliant but was derived anecdotally. It was left to Jung, in his experiments with word association, to provide quantifiable data that demonstrated the existence of the psychic complex. Such data were measurements in response time, increase in skin conductivity, and mistakes in recall that could be tied together thematically based on the subject’s responses to a list of stimulus words. This was so striking an empirical demonstration that it drew international attention. Being thus celebrated, of course, Jung’s work got Freud’s attention and became the occasion for their historic first meeting in 1907.

But Jung’s experiments did not simply give backing to an existing hypothesis. He came increasingly to the conviction that complexes were not simply sources of pathology but intrinsic to the structure of the healthy psyche. At a 1942 conference, for example, Jung stated that “The possession of complexes does not in itself signify neurosis.... A complex becomes pathological only when we think we have not got it” (CW 16, par. 179).

Complexes are vessels of archetypal meaning that at times can bring drama and dysfunction but also enrichment into life. They are pathological to the extent that they function autonomously and are disruptive to the executive function of the ego. Their effects can go so far as flooding the personality and taking possession of it. When this happens, one is no longer oneself. As the ego heals and matures, however, it expands its ability to tolerate and admit the previously threatening archetypal material into consciousness in symbolic form. This expansion of consciousness activates the unlived potentials buried in the psyche opening-up the process of individuation. In the Jungian approach, this is often accomplished in working with dreams, but increasingly also in relational terms by working with the transference-countertransference dynamics both of which are driven by the activation of complexes.

Course Objectives:

This program will help practitioners to develop:

1. An understanding of Jungian theory regarding the structure of complexes, including historical developments as well as more recent commentary.
2. An understanding of the relationships among personal complexes and the architecture of Jung’s model of the psyche (ego, persona, shadow, etc.).
3. An ability to recognize the activation of complexes in the context of a therapeutic relationship.
4. Insight into working with complexes the in context of dream interpretation.
5. Insight into working with complexes in the context of relational therapeutic dynamics.

Class Reading & Discussion Schedule:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Dates | Jacobi | | Shalit | |
| 1 | Sept. 13 | Forward  *Part I: Complex, Archetype, Symbol*  Introduction  Complex | ix – xi  3 – 5  6 - 30 | Preface  The Complex in the History of Psychoanalysis  Complex Psychology | 7 – 9  10 – 21  22 - 41 |
| 2 | Sept. 27 | Archetype | 31 - 73 | Oedipus and the Archetypal Complex | 42 - 67 |
| 3 | Oct. 11 | Symbol | 74 - 99 | The Complex in the Shadow | 68 - 80 |
| 4 | Oct. 25 | Symbol | 99 - 124 | The Complex in the Shadow | 81 - 118 |
| 5 | Nov. 8 | *Part II: Archetype and Dream*  Introduction  The Dream of the Bad Animal | 127 – 138  139 - 155 | Mahr, G., & Sweigart, J. (2020). Psychedelic drugs and Jungian therapy. *Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies,* 15(1), pp. 86-98.  Class discussion of related myth and fantasy material as manifested in dreams and transference-countertransference dynamics. | |
| 6 | Nov. 22 | The Dream of the Bad Animal | 156 - 189 |
| 7 | Dec. 6 | Conclusion | 190 - 198 |

Books you will need to purchase:

Jacobi, J. (1959). *Complex, Archetype, Symbol in the Psychology of C. G. Jung.* Bollingen: Princeton University Press.

Shalit, E. (2002). *The Complex: Path of Transformation from Archetype to Ego.* Toronto: Inner City Books.

A copy of this article will be provided:

Mahr, G., & Sweigart, J. (2020). Psychedelic drugs and Jungian therapy. *Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies,* 15(1), pp. 86-98.

Presenter Bio.:

James A. Fidelibus, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist in the State of Ohio and holds a diploma as a Jungian Analyst from the C. G. Jung Institute of Chicago. In addition to Jungian analysis, he specializes in Gottman Method Couples Therapy and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) with training in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy from the Cleveland Center for Cognitive Therapy. Special interests include psychedelic assisted psychotherapy and the integration of analytical psychology with process-relational philosophy and theology.