

Totem and Taboo: Freud was Right!

Lecture One: The Universal Oedipus complex

Parts 4 and 5

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Part 4:

Oedipus Rediscovered in Anthropology and Effaced in Contemporary Psychoanalysis

Introduction

We've seen so far that for much of the 20th century Bronislaw Malinowski's anthropological critique, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) remained the most influential argument against the universal Oedipus complex. Its impact was felt profoundly within psychoanalysis and across the social sciences. On the basis of his field study in the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski claimed to have discovered a distinct 'matrilineal complex' and to have proved that the Oedipus complex was only one type of *nuclear family complex*. He further argued that Freud's theory was an example of ethnocentrism and that oedipal conflicts reflected a pathology of Western patriarchy. So far from being universal the Oedipus complex was a symptom of paternal authority out of harmony with human biology. By contrast the 'matrilineal complex' was far closer to an ideal state of human nature according to Malinowski.

In this final part of Lecture One on the Universal Oedipus complex we'll look more closely at how Malinowski's critique of oedipal theory (and those that have followed his argument) eventually failed to hold up under much delayed scrutiny within its own discipline, only to be revived in ever new forms within psychoanalysis right up to the present. This odd twist in the history of the controversy is only one of the many ironies that have characterized it, as I have

tried to show. Still another example was the fact that Malinowski himself – to the credit of his brilliance as a pioneering ethnographer - provided sufficiently descriptive ethnographic detail to enable others like Jones (1924) and Roheim (1950) to refute his own thesis. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the authority of Malinowski's critique was the thirty years that would have to pass before another anthropologist would attempt a follow-up study in the Trobriands to test Malinowski's data and his interpretations of them.

The 1957 Powell ethnography

Unsurprisingly, the follow-up ethnography conducted by H.A. Powell in 1957 confirmed much of Malinowski's basic ethnographic data. *What it did not confirm were Malinowski's interpretations of his data and the critique of oedipal theory that he based on them.* The realities of Trobriand kinship simply did not refute Freud's universal claim for the Oedipus complex as Malinowski had asserted. It was an empirical fact, confirmed by Malinowski himself, that the Trobriand child's early caregiving relationships were

...essentially no different to those of upbringing in any elementary family, whether under a patrilineal or a matrilineal kinship system. The overt pattern of interpersonal relationship in the Trobriand elementary family presents much the same picture as that found in many other societies. A man and woman united by the marriage contract are responsible for one or more dependent children whom they bring up as members of a single household. (Powell, 1957 pp. 137-138)

Anthropologist Marvin Harris (1968) would later underscore the problem entailed in Malinowski's thesis of a matrilineal nuclear family complex, in which the core "system of sentiments" flowed not from the familiar nuclear triangle of mother-child-father, but instead from the triad of sister-brother-maternal uncle. Harris reemphasized that Malinowski himself admitted that "the Trobriand child is brought up largely under the influence of the usual nuclear pairs. Mother's brother enters the picture only when the child is seven or eight years old, an age by which the Oedipal constellation is firmly entrenched..." (p. 428) The Powell reanalysis in

1957 also confirmed the Trobriand father's role as an early authority figure and disciplinarian, which Malinowski had denied in spite of his own evidence to the contrary. Once again, it was an empirical fact that "during the critical years of personality development, until the age of about six or seven, it is the father, not the mother's brother, who personally represents authority, instils such discipline and obedience as is required, and generally trains the boys during their time of residence with him." (Powell, 1957, pp. 140-41)

Powell's correction regarding the father's role correlated also with a more accurate interpretation of the maternal uncle's influence over his nephew.

The mother's brother is prevented by the respect relationships between himself and his sister from interacting personally with her children until after they reach an age by which the bases of the personality are already laid. To this extent therefore there is little reason to suppose that he rather than the father should become the "authority figure" in relation to the child; rather it seems that the psychological relation between father and child is essentially the same under the Trobriand matrilineal as under a patrilineal system of formal kinship.... (pp. 140-44)

Converging Reconsiderations

These observations exposed the logical problem at the heart of Malinowski's critique and affirmed the positions taken by Jones and Roheim in the early debates. Remarkably, however, the extraordinarily significant follow-up study by Powell, conducted four decades after Malinowski's own fieldwork, would go largely unnoticed or ignored within anthropology *for another twenty-five years!* (Spiro, 1982, p. 2) In spite of this baffling fact, however, individual voices within anthropology were converging toward similar conclusions; and by the late 1970's, advances in *object-relations* theory and new information on the role of parents in socialization, led British anthropologist, Meyer Fortes (1977) to anticipate some kind of 'reconciliation' of the views taken in the Malinowski-Jones/Roheim debate. Fortes rendered his own verdict in favor of the Freudian position, calling attention to matrilineal societies that, against

Malinowski's thesis, "argue plausibly for a 'normal' (if well disguised) Oedipus complex, centered on the parents, in early infancy..." (p. 131) He concluded that "[Anthropological findings] for the past 30 years or so of the social and personal relations of parental and filial generations in matrilineal family systems in many parts of the world *tend to support a Jonesian rather than a Malinowskian interpretation of the situation.*" (ibid; italics added)

Fortes and Kluckhohn

Fortes' endorsement of the Freudian position carried a great deal of weight within anthropology. Not only had he been trained as an anthropologist under both Malinowski and the latter's own teacher and mentor, CG Seligman, but Fortes had also earned a Ph.D. in research psychology before turning to anthropology. His ethnographic studies on African kinship, kingship, ancestor worship and divination – the very stuff of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* – had become a standard in studies on African social organization and comparative ethnology. (EB) Coming from someone of his standing within British social anthropology, the testimonial was analogous to the famous so-called 'confession' in 1951 from Clyde Kluckhohn, one of the most reputable theorists in American culture and personality studies. Kluckhohn's confession is always worth repeating at length:

... the facts uncovered in my own field work and that of my collaborators have forced me to the conclusion that Freud and other psychoanalysts have depicted with astonishing correctness many central themes in motivational life which are universal. ... the underlying psychologic drama transcends cultural difference. This should not be too surprising except to an anthropologist over-indoctrinated with the theory of cultural relativism for many of the inescapable givens of human life are also universal. Human anatomy and human physiology are, in the large, about the same the world over. There are two sexes with palpably visible differences in external genitalia and secondary sexual characteristics. All human infants, regardless of culture, know the psychological experience of helplessness and dependency. Situations making for competition for the affection of one or both parents, for sibling rivalry, can be to some extent channeled this

way or that way by a culture but they cannot be eliminated, given the universality of family life. The trouble has been because of a series of accidents of intellectual and political history that the anthropologist for two generations has been obsessed with the differences between peoples, neglecting the equally real similarities upon which the "universal culture pattern" as well as the psychological uniformities are clearly built. (quoted in Singer, 1961, pp. 19-20)

Concepts like *human nature* and the Oedipus complex, so closely tied to evolutionary theory, were casualties of the more extreme versions of cultural relativism that Kluckhohn was referring to. Malinowski's original critique had been reinforced by others', like Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and Benedict's *Patterns in Culture* (1934), far and away the two most popular implementations of Boas' charter for cultural determinism in American anthropology. Mead had characterized the mandate from her mentor as "merely the documentation over and over of the fact that human nature is not rigid and unyielding." (quoted in Singer, 1961, p. 16) Singer summed up the ever-more relativist versions of this charge in a phrase, "It's not human nature, but only our culture." (ibid)

By mid-century, however, a role for cross-cultural universals and biological determinants in theories of human adaptation was becoming more acceptable again within anthropology. Singer (1961, p. 20) pointed out that Kluckhohn only grew more insistent in the last decade of his life that the Oedipus complex was among the many identifiable cross-cultural universals. Lest the significance of this shift be underestimated, we can recall Mead's (1947) more extreme cultural relativist statement on the supposed 'incommensurability' between different societies; this was made only four years before Kluckhohn's confession in 1951: "It will be necessary for psychology to assimilated and reduce to useful form the more recent findings of ethnologists which stress that a fully acculturated member of a living culture *differs in every respect and systematically* from members of any other culture." (quoted in Roheim, 1950, p. 447; italics added)

This idea that culture renders its members different “in every respect and systematically from members of any other culture” is precisely what Kluckhohn had in mind regarding anthropologists’ obsession with differences. Kluckhohn ascribed the more radicalized expressions of Boasian cultural determinism to “a series of accidents of intellectual and political history”, underscoring their ideological bases. Roheim (1950), speaking from within both anthropology and psychoanalysis, pointed out that even on purely logical grounds Mead’s incommensurability argument against *human nature* and the universal Oedipus complex made no sense:

Mead’s statement is absolutely incorrect on *a priori* grounds. For if a Samoan differs in every respect from an American, how can Mead’s findings about the Samoan be valid? No empathy is possible under such circumstances. Indeed, we might then give up writing about anthropology altogether – except about our own group. (p. 447)

Arguably, Roheim was seeing in Mead’s claim the same logical *performative contradiction* (see Havens, 1997; Whitebook, 1993) that I have said undercut Malinowski’s thesis. Again, Malinowski had rejected, on theoretical grounds, the universal Oedipus complex because of cross-cultural differences, while also arguing for a common matrilineal complex across widely differing matrilineal societies. But the theoretical tide was changing and only four years after Kluckhohn’s confession Mead would emphasize just how commensurable all human experience really is:

In the study of personality and culture we start with the recognition of the biologically given, of what all human beings have in common... Because of these recurrent biological similarities of growth, of parent-child relationships, of needs and fears, and reassurances it is possible to compare childhood in one society with childhood in another. (Mead and Wolfenstein, 1955, pp. 6-7)

Oedipus in the Trobriands

Mead's affirmation of the concept of human nature came just before Powell's support for a Trobriand Oedipus complex, an indication of the changing theoretical landscape in anthropology by mid-century. Nevertheless, it took another two decades before Freud's *Totem and Taboo* would itself be revived for scholarly attention in American anthropology by Paul's (1976) reanalysis, "Did the Primal Crime Take Place?". The conclusion there was that "something like the primal crime must have occurred." (p.341) Two years later, one of anthropology's leading kinship theorist, Robin Fox, wrote *The Red Lamp of Incest* (1980), contributing to the rehabilitation of *Totem and Taboo* and Freud's primal horde theory. Although not intended to be an explicit polemic against Malinowski, nonetheless the *Red Lamp* has been described by some within evolutionary anthropology as a "point-by-point refutation" of Malinowski's critique of Freud. (quote in Fox,1994, pp. 5-6)

But it wasn't until Spiro's *Oedipus In the Trobriands* (1982) - more than half a century after Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* - that an authoritative and explicitly polemical refutation of Malinowski's thesis would emerge from within mainstream anthropology. (As we'll see, Roheim was a unique exception, but he was in no way accepted as "mainstream" within anthropology.) Spiro's formidable analysis spelled out the theoretical and empirical problems inherent in Malinowski's matrilineal thesis along with their full cross-cultural implications. It affirmed the Powell reassessment in far greater detail, demonstrating that neither "the Trobriand household nor the social relationships that obtain within the nuclear family display the characteristics that might expectably produce [a 'matrilineal'] variant of the classical Oedipus triangle." (Spiro, 1982, p. 163) Malinowski's argument was assessed to be "seriously flawed" on several accounts. Spiro's analysis and rigorous documentation extended to the larger cross-cultural problem as well, concluding that for "exactly the same reason neither this nor any other structural variant of the classical Oedipus triangle has been reported at the total societal level for any other society..." (ibid)

Jordan and Swartz (2010) from within contemporary American psychological anthropology, analyzed the blow to Malinowski's argument in the following manner:

The fact that the mother is the first love object of the male child, the inference that a boy's sexual rivalry with the father seems indicated on a repressed, unconscious level, and the fact that the authority of the mother's brother becomes salient only after the normal Oedipal period is passed – all conspire to demolish Malinowski's thesis... Trobriand specialists and others may dispute evidential details, their use, and inferences made from them, but such critics will have a difficult time dismissing Spiro's intricately constructed case. Only new or previously uncited primary data directly bearing on the issues raised would be sufficient to invalidate Spiro's conclusions. (pp. 162-3)

It's arguable that in the thirty years since *Oedipus in the Trobriands*, no "new or previously uncited primary data" have yet to emerge to convincingly refute Spiro's conclusions. It remains one of the most fascinating anomalies of 20th century social science that Malinowski's matrilineal thesis could have been accepted within anthropology "with almost no skepticism or critical inquiry for fifty years." (Spiro, 1982, p. 175)

Brief Recap

What we've just considered can be summarized in the following way. By mid-century the most powerful 20th century argument against the universal Oedipus complex - Malinowski's *matrilineal complex* - was beginning to crack under much-delayed scrutiny within its own discipline. By the final quarter of the century it was crumbling. Spiro's analysis alone presented devastating evidence that the Oedipus complex was not only universal but was *even more intense and unresolved* in the very society that was supposed to have refuted the Freudian case. To this day it is still likely that no decisive refutation of Spiro's defense of the Freudian Oedipus complex has been offered in the very discipline from which the preeminent critique of Freud had been constructed. *At the very least*, then, it clearly is not legitimate to assume that the Freudian Oedipus complex has been disproved, despite many claims to the contrary. Moreover,

it appears highly likely that the preponderance of findings from anthropology *alone* support the existence of a cross-culturally universal Oedipus complex.

Oedipus Waning and Effacing in Psychoanalysis

What was happening in psychoanalysis as anthropology was finding its way back to Freud's anthropological theory? This question brings us to a second striking irony in the history of this controversy. For just as anthropology was rediscovering the value of *Totem and Taboo* and oedipal theory, the theoretical momentum in psychoanalysis was building in precisely the opposite direction. By the mid-sixties, Nagera (1966) described the increasing "lack of precision", "displacement", "overshadowing", "obscuring" and "disappearance" of the Oedipus complex (in relation to its corollary, the infantile neurosis) in psychoanalysis. A decade later, Loewald (1979) published his observations on "The Waning of the Oedipus complex" among psychoanalysts, an indication of the continuing trend.

This momentum away from oedipal theory in psychoanalysis has continued apace into the present. As recently as 2005, Nagera repeated his concern from forty years earlier, writing that oedipal theory continues to be "ignored, overlooked or more specifically actively denied" (2005 p. 2) What Loewald called a "waning" has become a complete "effacing" in psychoanalytic *intersubjectivity* theory, according to a recent appraisal made by Adler (2010) at a conference for contemporary perspectives on the Oedipus complex. In his paper "The Effacing of the Oedipus Complex", Adler described his surprise at realizing that his own inter-subjectivist text from 1998, *Working in Depth: Framework and Flexibility in the Analytic Relationship*, had failed to include a single indexed reference to the Oedipus complex.

Oedipus uncoupled from infantile sexuality

Adler emphasized one particular aspect of this effacing, namely the elimination of the role of infantile sexuality in child development:

That these [inter-subjectivist] perspectives marginalize, ignore, or outright reject the role of infantile sexuality in development, further tends to dilute and obscure the place of the Oedipus complex in our contemporary discourse. The Oedipal romance may still be widely acknowledged, yet it is frequently uncoupled from the psychosexual dynamism that gives it its crucial significance as a developmental event that organizes gender identity and superego structure. (2010, p. 545)

Other authors (e.g., Green, 1995) also have drawn attention to this shift away from childhood sexuality and this decoupling of psychosexual dynamism from oedipal theory. In truth, however, this trend is one with a long history in psychoanalysis. It began with the original opposition to Freud's views on infantile sexuality. It was the object of Freud's objections in 1914 to the "view of life reflected in the Adlerian system [which] is founded exclusively on the aggressive instinct" (1914, p. 58) and to Jung's "pushing into the background of the sexual factor in psychoanalytic theory." (ibid)

This earlier resistance to infantile sexuality was only reinforced by Malinowski's critique. The neo-Freudians Fromm, Horney and Kardiner were swayed by the claim that the Trobriand oedipal child had no oedipal attachment to the mother, repressed or otherwise, to rival the father (or anyone) about. Kroeber (1939) redoubled this argument with his call for a redefined oedipal "kernel" without the *superego*, which he viewed as one of Freud's "gratuitous and really irrelevant assumptions". (pp. 545-47) Fromm (1944) answered the call and argued that it was not sexuality but the child's "defeat in the fight against authority which constitutes the kernel of the neurosis". (quoted in Kluckhohn and Murray, 1959, p. 519) It was quickly becoming difficult to recognize anything oedipal in this redefined kernel.

It is this old fractional adoption and redefinition of oedipal concepts that continues to recur within psychoanalysis and contemporary inter-subjectivity theory. As in the earlier debates, it also goes hand-in-hand with a rejection of Freud's cultural evolutionary theory in *Totem and Taboo*. Here is a contemporary example: "[Freud's] mythological reconstructions of the origins

of the Oedipus complex (in a quaint piece called “Totem and Taboo” [1913]) are interesting in that they show us how far away 19th century biology is from the historical present. *Concepts like the Oedipus complex have disappeared completely.* (Strenger, 2006, p. 420; italics added)

The second half of this rejection should be repeated. The author claims that “Concepts like the Oedipus complex have disappeared completely.” This claim is flatly refuted by many contemporary psychoanalytic publications, such as Greenberg’s (1991) *Oedipus and Beyond*, and those already mentioned. (see also Hartke 2016) We’ve seen also that this is refuted by the last fifty years of developments within anthropology that have been steadily undoing the most powerful 20th century critique of oedipal theory.

The incompatibility of such claims with the actual research literature is no small problem for the field of psychoanalysis. Yet this kind of unsupportable dismissal, so sweeping in nature, is remarkably common. Here’s another typical example: “Examination of the nature and origins of the Oedipus complex presented by psychoanalysts and critics suggests that there is little evidence to support its existence. (Kupfersmid, 1995, pp. 535-47)

Here the critique is not limited to the narrower debate over *universality*, but extends to the very *existence* of the Oedipus complex altogether. We are asked to believe that a fair examination of the “nature and the origins” of the Oedipus complex would suggest that no one anywhere has *ever* had an oedipus complex! Even Malinowski’s thesis - the most important and ethnographically-grounded critique of the Twentieth century - never went this far. On closer scrutiny broad dismissals like this frequently rely on the omission of essential sources of evidence. The last critique failed to mention any of Spiro’s writings, including *Oedipus in the Trobriands*, arguably the most important defense in the last few decades of oedipal theory from an interdisciplinary perspective. The author also seems unaware of the significant Powell reassessment from 1957 and makes no reference to Fox’s *Red Lamp of Incest* or to any of Paul’s analyses from within both anthropology and psychoanalysis. In other words, the examination simply excluded some of the most important sources in the scientific literature.

Misrepresentations

Apart from the exclusion of evidence, contemporary rejections of oedipal theory often rely on parodies of Freud's basic concepts. Nowhere is this problem more likely to occur than in critiques of Freud's concept of *infantile sexuality*. The last critique portrays Freud as believing that infants are born with knowledge of both sexes' genitals and that oedipal-aged children have sexual fantasies of adult intercourse, as if they can understand what this entails. Since the author provides no context for this claim, other than a general reference to Freud's entire *Introductory Lectures*, it remains difficult to understand on what basis he arrives at it. He simply writes, without any clarification, that Freud "contended that anatomical knowledge of the opposite sex, as well as a desire for sexual intercourse with the opposite sex parent, is genetically inherited." (Kupfersmid, 1995, p. 536) Many of Freud's observations on childhood sexuality would suffice to demonstrate how misleading this kind of characterization is. With regard to anatomical knowledge Freud was clear on his view that young girls and boys originally make the ego-centric assumption that all genitals are *like their own*; that boys, for example, "attribute the same male genital to both sexes." (1917, p. 317) In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud refers to a boy's pre-oedipal identifications with the father and then clarifies that perhaps "it would be safer to say [identification] 'with the parent'; for before a child has arrived at a definite knowledge of the difference between the sexes, the lack of a penis, it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother." (p. 31)

Freud's formulations on the castration complex, castration anxiety, and penis envy presuppose the potential anxieties children can have when first confronted with anatomical facts so at odds with their original misconceptions based on concrete thinking and ego-centrism. The following passage from Freud's (1910) *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* demonstrates the complexity of Freud's actual views on infantile sexual knowledge and experience:

...during the time when the child is dominated by the still unrepressed nuclear complex, an important part of his intellectual activity is brought into the service of his sexual

interests... Under the influence of the component instincts that are active in himself, he arrives at a number of ‘infantile sexual theories’ – such as attributing a male genital organ to both sexes alike, or supposing that babies are conceived by eating and born through the end of the bowel, or regarding sexual intercourse as a hostile act, a kind of violent subjugation. But as a result precisely of the incompleteness of his sexual constitution, and of the gap in his knowledge due to the hidden nature of the female sexual channel, the young investigator is obliged to abandon his work as a failure.” (pp. 47-48)

Condensed into this passage are a number of essential concepts and empirical observations that remain as useful today as they were when Freud formulated them over century ago. Childhood sexuality and infantile sexual theories are all understood in relation to stage-typical aggressive trends and Freud’s concept of the libidinal *component instincts*. The latter concept pertains to the building blocks of psychosexual development and is not limited to the leading oral, anal, and genital zones. It comprises all the bodily sources of sensory excitation, all of which are associated with functions basic to human survival.

The gain achieved with this synthesis was that it operationalized the question of how libidinal components emerge, compete for dominance, and eventually become more or less successfully coordinated in the service of mature object-relations, conscience formation, and reproductive genital primacy. The advantage of the *libido* concept was that it applied to the entire sensory field, and did so in the context of a model that accounted for the vicissitudes of the drive components over the entire life course. Critics of Freud often overlook the fact that oedipal sexuality must not be “reduced to the genital, precisely because of the importance [Freud] accords to infantile sexuality and the partial drives.” (Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger, 1986, p. 136) Freud’s *epigenetic* view of the gradual differentiation and integration of drive components in the course of development is a reminder that the concept of *infantile genital* makes no sense apart from the systematic interrelation of all the component drive contributions, including the preoedipal ones. Otherwise, the Oedipus complex is misunderstood and reduced to intensifying genital sensations and fantasies. But this over-simplifies Freud’s view of the

Oedipus complex, as demonstrated in the extraordinary passage just quoted. The typical sexual theories of the oedipal child are no less oedipal because of their conspicuous oral and anal components. Rather, these components, along with the child's maturing ego functions, are now enlisted on behalf of emerging *oedipal trends*; in Freud's words they are "*brought into the service*" of the child's infantile genital aims.

Conversely, the meanings associated with oedipal or infantile genital concepts are easily confounded with those of adult *genital primacy*. But there is a world of difference between the genital experiences at these different levels of maturation and development. It must be held in mind that oedipal sexuality remains fully *infantile* in every Freudian sense of this term:

- consolidation of masculine and feminine identifications remains incomplete
- representations of sexual anatomy are not yet integrated into a mature self-concept that is consistent with *genital primacy* and sexual reproductive capacity
- the full implications of sexual intercourse and reproduction are not yet *comprehensible* to the oedipal child, nor do their real consequences yet apply
- pre-oedipal oral and anal trends still vie for dominance over genital ones
- boundaries defining self/object representations are still fluid and easily fragmented
- thinking is still largely ego-centric, concrete, and dominated by impulse, magical thinking and fantasy rather than the *reality principle*;
- full physical maturation, along with emotional independence from caregivers, could still be as much as two decades away

For all these reasons, vaguely defined critiques of Freud's views on infantile sexuality using phrases with highly-charged adult connotations, like "the desire for sexual intercourse with the opposite sex parent", will always be misleading unless they specify the meaning of these concepts in their proper theoretical contexts.

The explanatory power of Freud's actual theory becomes even clearer when we expand our considerations beyond individual ontogeny to the larger anthropological and evolutionary questions that Freud took up in *Totem and Taboo*. To do so is to bring the concept of the *component drives* into the service of our comprehension of how individual psychology (and psychopathology) manifests in specifically collective forms. After all, *Totem and Taboo* was Freud's "first attempt" to explain the causal relations between these two levels. Holding in mind the climactic 'deed' in *Totem and Taboo* (i.e., the murder of the primal father) Freud's synthesis accounts for how collective actions that would appear to be an expression of drive activity in its most regressed or primitive state - oral and anal-sadistic cannibalism - can be more comprehensively understood in terms of these pre-oedipal components being mobilized in the service of infantile genital and adult genital aims. *And, indeed, this is how we are to understand the "primal deed" and the evolutionary transformation from proto-human to human society according to Freud's schematic reconstruction in Totem and Taboo.* The primal father is killed and ingested in the service of possessing his phallic power over the horde and his genital monopoly over the females. This represents an oral incorporative form of identification brought into the service of phallic-oedipal aims at the shared level of the group. This deed (real or imagined) is *quintessentially oedipal* precisely to the extent that it stands without resolution and is driven by fantasies of omnipotence and idealized sexual satisfaction; such hopes remain as futile as the oedipal child's wish to replace the parent. No sooner is the primal deed accomplished than its victor becomes the next victim. In Freud's account, the collective solution to this dilemma over the course of human evolution was a compromise in the form of culturally defined exogamous boundaries and the ritualized regulation of aggression (i.e., the structures of totemic society). The psychological corollary of this is the *resolution* of the Oedipus complex - the relinquishing of oedipal objects by means of an introjection into one's own ego of the oedipal rivals' social values. This *identification* results in conscience formation (i.e., the *superego*) and it represents a triumph of the reality principle. Conversely, just as with the murder of the primal father, no sooner are *oedipal victories* experienced by the child - which can occur for many reasons (ex., death of a parent, divorce) - then difficulties arise for the child's ability to resolve the oedipal conflicts and move beyond them.

Part 5:
Pathological Patriarchy vs. Prolonged Infant
Dependency and the Complementary Series

Malinowski's curious prophesy

The analogous relationship between oedipal victories and the primal deed brings us to our next subject. Earlier in this series I quoted Malinowski's curious prediction that the Oedipus complex would become extinct in proportion to the emasculation of the patriarchal father. As he put it, "Psychoanalysis cannot hope I think, to preserve its 'Oedipus complex' for future generations, who will only know a weak and henpecked father. For him the children will feel indulgent pity rather than hatred and fear!" (1927, p. 27)

Originally, my reason for quoting this abysmal forecast for the Western father was to clarify that Malinowski had never viewed the Trobriand *matrilineal complex* as a mere subtype within oedipal theory, some kind of "different Oedipus complex." Malinowski's actual view on this is important to understand because a misrepresentation of his thesis, precisely to this effect, arose in anthropology and psychoanalysis and continues to be a source of confusion. A consequence of this confusion is that it obscured the critical difference in Freudian theory between what *causes* the Oedipus complex, on the one hand, and what *complicates its resolution*, on the other. For this reason, a brief look at the confusion over Malinowski's thesis is necessary before we address the more important question of what actually causes the Oedipus complex.

Around the time of the closely coinciding deaths of Freud, Malinowski and Boas (Freud in 1939, both the latter in 1942) this idea that Malinowski had argued for a *type* of Oedipus complex became more common among leading figures in the disciplines. To repeat only one of the several examples I gave before, Fenichel (1945) in his influential *Psychoanalytic Theory of the Neuroses*, attributed to Malinowski the idea that "societies with family configurations different from our own actually have *different Oedipus complexes*." (p. 97; italics added) This use of oedipal terminology to describe Malinowski's own critique of oedipal theory was an

ironic development, to say the least. The so-called “different Oedipus complex” that Fenichel and others had in mind (i.e., the matrilineal complex) represented a radical redefinition of oedipal theory. Not only was it supposed to have proven that the Oedipus complex was not universal, but it had also redefined it as a pathological symptom. According to Malinowski the Oedipus complex was not a normal developmental conflict in need of resolution but a sickness in need of a cure. Yet this same thesis, accepted as valid, was now being referred to as though it had confirmed a universal oedipal structure, *of which it was merely a type!*

Arguably, this ironic condensation of terms was just another example of the decoupling or watering-down of oedipal concepts that we’ve already seen. On the other hand, the fact that it was concurrent with the losses of Freud, Boas and Malinowski, just as their grieving followers had become wartime allies, also suggests that a wish for some mediating function in the bitter controversy may have begun to surface. In this case, the construct of a “matrilineal Oedipus complex” would also have functioned in a manner similar to the original totem object: as a compromise formation, forged out of necessity on behalf of an otherwise warring band of siblings in a time of ambivalent mourning and existential danger.

Malinowski himself may have contributed to the confusion when he claimed that his thesis had confirmed “the main tenet of Freudian psychology.” (1927, p. 82) But this had nothing to do with the Oedipus complex *per se*. It simply meant that he had “established a deep correlation between the type of society and the *nuclear* complex found there” (ibid; italics added). Given the nature of Malinowski’s critique this certainly did Freud no favors; it amounted to a rhetorical means of undoing oedipal theory with faint praise. Aside from the fact that Freud never agreed with such a watered-down definition of his “main psychological tenet”, the essential point remained that the Oedipus complex was supposed to be universal and Malinowski had found no such complex in the Trobriand Islands.

On the central question of the universality of the Freudian Oedipus complex Malinowski’s position could not have been clearer: *the Trobriand complex was not a different type of Oedipus complex; it was a different type of nuclear complex. Therefore the Oedipus complex was not*

universal. His entire argument relied explicitly on the assertion that the nuclear complex of Trobriand society was “so entirely different in its genesis and its character from the Oedipus complex...” (1927, p. 83). In fact, Malinowski’s prediction of an end to the Oedipus complex, and Western patriarchy itself, with the arrival of a “weak and henpecked father” would have made no sense otherwise.

With these considerations in mind let’s return now to Malinowski’s prediction that the Oedipus complex would become extinct with the rise of a “weak and henpecked father”. As I’ve said, this idea obscured the distinction between what causes the Oedipus complex and what interferes with its resolution. Malinowski’s prediction relied on the premise that the father’s power (or, more accurately, the pathological abuse of it) *causes* the Oedipus complex. It assumed that in the absence of oppressive patriarchal authority the son’s hostile emotions toward the father associated with sexual rivalry for the mother’s love would not arise. This premise was a reflection of Malinowski’s idiosyncratic rendering of Freudian theory and, upon closer scrutiny, the flaw in the logic of it becomes easy to recognize. It was equivalent to saying that someone competing for sexual love could feel no hostility toward a rival *so long as the rival posed no physical threat*. This allowed for no role whatsoever for narcissistic anger directed toward objects perceived as obstacles or threats to love and sexual attachment. The only relevant etiological factor in Malinowski’s formula for the Oedipus complex was oppressive paternal hostility. This was the same problem that Freud had identified in his critique of the “Adlerian view of life”, namely that it was a theory “founded exclusively on the aggressive instinct”; as Freud eloquently put it, “*there is no room in it for love.*” (1914, p. 58; italics added)

Accordingly, Malinowski’s critique relied on portrayals of the Western-type father and the Trobriand father that from a contemporary perspective appear transparently villainized and romanticized, respectively. Malinowski’s representation of the patriarchal father was so one-dimensionally hostile and aggressive, in fact so much like the tyrannical *primal father* in *Totem and Taboo*, that one can appreciate why Malinowski would have wished for his extinction as soon as possible. Ironically enough, the Viennese father of Little Hans - Freud’s exemplary case of child phobia in *Totem and Taboo*, bore a closer resemblance to the Trobriand all-loving

father depicted by Malinowski! Spiro (1982) documented the problem with these exaggerated representations and explained them in terms of Malinowski's effort to "reinforce his polemical aim of proving that the hostility of the Western son is to be explained...by the father's oppressive authority" (pp. 35-6) rather than by the son's sexual rivalry for the mother's sole affections.

Wilhelm Reich

Psychoanalysts influenced by Marxist theory such as Reich, in the *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) and *The Sexual Revolution* (1936), or, later, Guattari, in *Anti Oedipus* (1972), took up and amplified the more ideological and socio-political implications of Malinowski's thesis of pathological patriarchy. (see Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger, 1986) Perhaps the most controversial and tragic of these was Wilhelm Reich, who eventually pushed these elements to frankly psychotic extremes. In spite of the psychotic element in Reich's ideological views, however, his ultra-Malinowskian critique of patriarchy gained a great deal of followers. "Right up until the end Reich had many disciples, including medical doctors and scientists." (1986, p. 109) Reich became fascinated with Malinowski's idealized portrayal of Trobriand sexuality and his ideas on patriarchy, repression and totalitarianism. With his amalgam of Freudian and Marxist theories Reich constructed a more explicitly political version of Malinowski's prediction of an extinct Oedipus complex: "The Oedipus complex must disappear in a socialist society because its social basis – the patriarchal family – will itself disappear, having lost its *raison d'etre*." (quoted in 1986, p. 144)

Reich seized upon Freud's earlier theory that anxiety results simply from undischarged quantities of libido, and proceeded to reduce "all mental and physical illness to a single cause: sexual stasis." (1986, p. 115) The mentally ill person is simply "constrained by social prohibitions, [and] is unable to abandon himself to orgasm, to discharge sexual energy." (1986, p. 128) Reich further insisted that "the repression of genital tendencies [is what] provokes the eruption of brutality in history." (quoted in 1986, p. 134) Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger describe this overriding theme in Reich's writings: "[In all of Reich's work] we have a

universal evil – sexual stasis, which is responsible for cancer, schizophrenia and Fascism; and, its obverse in a universal panacea – orgasm.” (1986, p. 204) Probably it would be more accurate to say that *patriarchy* was the real ‘evil’ for Reich and his followers and that ‘sexual stasis’ was merely its effect. As with Malinowski, the symptom may have been a sexual one but the real problem was oppressive paternal authority. Exactly as Fromm and others would claim, Reich maintained that the Oedipus complex was only “a result of the sexual restrictions imposed on the child by society. Yet wholly unconscious of what they are doing, the parents carry out the intentions of authoritarian society.” (quoted in 1986, p. 203)

A major weakness of this argument for pathological patriarchy as the cause of the Oedipus complex is that it allows for no contribution whatsoever from normal maturation and development to the child’s aggression, sexual competition, and ambivalent trends in the nuclear relationships. In one form or other these all reflect a perversion of power, structured according to external forces, encoded in repressive institutions, and implemented by pathological parenting. This argument is inconsistent with the abundant examples of instinctually-driven dominance hierarchies, sexual competition, and bisexual behavior among all of our closest primate relatives. Were the instinctual sources of these behaviors simply erased with human evolution? A common thread that runs from Malinowski through Reich, to later publications like *Anti-Oedipus* and into contemporary psychoanalytic critiques, is the claim that if the Oedipus complex is simply the consequence of culture and oppressive power then the parents (and Freudian psychoanalysts) who reproduce Western society itself are the agents of that pathology. There are ever new examples within psychoanalysis of this old thesis. Here is a recent one:

There is little doubt that the Oedipal complex is culture-specific and an essentially pathological outcome of a male-dominated, class-structured society. The destructive competition with other men, produces distant uncooperative, possibly non-constructive relationships and leads to erotic compulsions that prevent stable, intimate, sexually

satisfying marriages alongside intimate, contextualized relationships with other women. (Bhugra and Bhui, 2002, p. 81)

These authors essentially paraphrase Malinowski's original conclusion and write that the Oedipus complex "is not built into the collective mind but is found only under specific historical circumstances, such as societies with patriarchal authorization structures and competition for wealth that stimulate rivalry and hostility." (p. 84) And repeating Reich's objects of blame, the authors insist that parents "as agents of such a social order, who harbour hostile and erotic feelings for their children, bring the Oedipal complex into being where it may not exist." (ibid)

Specifically missing from this thesis is the Freudian complementary series, which includes both environmental and innate contributions in the etiology of aggression and sexual competition in the nuclear triangle. For the same reason it eliminates the weighing of both endogenous and exogenous contributions to bisexual conflicts and *ambivalence* in human psychosexuality. These must all be pathological symptoms of oppressive power relations. Reich was explicit about this, maintaining that "ambivalence in the sense of coexisting reactions of love and hatred is not a biological but a socially conditioned fact..." (quoted in Chasseguet-Smirgel and Grunberger, 1986, p. 197) By definition this argument also pathologizes the *complete Oedipus complex*, with its complementary heterosexual and homosexual dimensions. All of these essential Freudian concepts are simply eliminated and replaced with the same old Malinowskian etiological equation of external patriarchal oppression.

Freud on utopia

Freud was clear about his assessment of a utopian dimension to these socio-political critiques of oedipal theory. This particular aspect of the polemic, namely the relation of individual psychology to power and political institutions, was always a part of the debates within and between both anthropology and psychoanalysis over the Oedipus complex. Within psychoanalytic circles alone the relation of theoretical to political differences was complex. On

the one hand, Fenichel, himself a Marxist, *disagreed* with Neo-Freudians like Kardiner, Fromm and Horney who insisted that oedipal theory represented a rigid biological determinism that was antithetical to the hope for a malleable human nature and perfectible society. Unlike Fenichel, the neo-Freudians insisted that “the insight into the formative power of social forces upon individual minds” required changes in Freud’s theory of instincts. (Fenichel, 1945, p. 588). On the other hand, Fenichel’s ideological perspective, while less revolutionary than Reich’s, required a level of optimism for humanity that Freud considered to be unrealistic. Fenichel believed that “wars, misery and neurosis” could one day be fully eliminated with “a more reasonable and less contradictory regulation of social relations”. (1945, p. 589) Freud was more pessimistic about the benefits of state-regulated social relations and the future of mankind, an attitude which he explained in his correspondence with Albert Einstein, published in *Why War?* (1933) The following passage is especially relevant to the present discussion because while Freud is writing explicitly about the utopian element in critiques of his anthropological theory, he is implicitly referring to Malinowski’s Trobriand matrilineal thesis:

“...there is no use in trying to get rid of men’s aggressive inclinations. We are told that in certain happy regions of the earth, where nature provides in abundance everything that man requires, there are races whose life is passed in tranquility and who know neither coercion nor aggression. I can scarcely believe it and I should be glad to hear more of these fortunate beings. The Russian Communists, too, hope to be able to cause human aggressiveness to disappear by guaranteeing the satisfaction of all material needs and by establishing equality in other respects among all the members of the community. That, in my opinion, is an illusion.” (pp. 211-12)

What really causes the Oedipus complex: infant dependency and precocious genitality

Apart from its utopian implications, perhaps the greatest weakness of the pathological patriarchy critique is that it fails to account for what is possibly one of the most significant and underappreciated features of human evolutionary biology, one which was always at the heart of Freud’s oedipal theory. The likely consequences of this feature for individual psychology and

human society go virtually unnoticed in critiques of oedipal theory in spite of their central role in the development of that theory. Specifically, Freud maintained that what sets the central oedipal conflicts in motion is neither exclusively externally motivated, nor is it primarily aggression (paternal or otherwise). Rather, it is *the prolonged duration of childhood helplessness and dependency as this gradually becomes inflected through the prism of the distinctly precocious sexual maturation that characterizes our species*. In Freud's (1924) own words, "the Oedipus complex is the psychological correlate of two fundamental biological facts: the long period of the human child's dependence, and the remarkable way in which its sexual life reaches a first climax in the third to fifth years of life." (p. 208)

Roheim's explication of Freud

To better understand this feature of Freud's anthropological thinking we can turn to Geza Roheim, the first psychoanalyst-anthropologist and arguably the most eloquent interpreter of this aspect of Freudian theory. Roheim elaborated on the congruence between Freud's formulations and the "fetalization theory" of Dutch anatomist, Luis Bolck. Roheim quotes Bolck:

There is no mammal that grows so slowly as man, and not one in which the full development is attained at such a long interval after birth... What is the essential in Man as an organism? The obvious answer is: The slow progress of his life's course... This slow tempo is the result of a retardation that has gradually come about in the course of ages. (in Roheim, 1950, p. 360)

In the course of hominin evolution individual physical development has been marked by a progressive "retardation" or slowing of its *rate*. Following Roheim's description of this, humans in particular achieve physical maturation "...far more slowly than any other mammal. Most mammals are mature at one year or less. A chimpanzee is mature at about seven years, a human being at about fifteen or more, though growth is not complete until over twenty years and the skull sutures remain open until nearly thirty so that the brain can still grow." (1950, p. 490)

The *maturation* being referred to here would include that of the *ego* of Freudian structural theory and all of what Hartmann (1939) referred to as “inborn ego apparatuses” and the structures of the “conflict-free sphere of the ego” (see Nagera 1968), such as perception, motility, memory, and the physical structures of the body on which they depend. Hartmann, Kris and Loewenstein (1951) underscored the importance of Roheim’s observations on the significance of the retarded development of these structures in humans. “[It] implies the idea not only of the unique role of the love object in human development but also the extent to which the influence of this object determines later behavior.” (p. 9) A corollary of this evolutionary slowing of somatic development, or *neoteny*, is the progressive *fetalization* of adult human features relative to our primate relatives and our hominin ancestors. According to Roheim, “human beings have conserved traits in the anatomical structure which makes them comparable to juvenile or foetal anthropoids...” (1950, p. 401) As a result, “We are much more like baby monkeys than adult ones.” (ibid) This remarkable fact can be seen in adult human features – such as flattened face, upright posture, roundness of the skull, and brain size relative to the body – all of which more closely resemble those of the *infant* chimpanzee, who will eventually outgrow them.

Roheim’s synthesis shows that Freud’s observations on the evolutionary significance of delayed development remain perfectly consistent with contemporary evolutionary biology. Stephen Jay Gould (1977) referred to this “paedomorphic theory of human origins [whereby humans] evolved by retaining the juvenile features of our ancestors.” (p. 356) He judged that this neotenous slowing down of human development - and the corollary retention of juvenile traits - “has been a (probably the) major determinant of human evolution.” (p. 9) The selective advantage of this process is evident in the fact that it allowed for the retention into later development of the rapid brain growth rates of the fetus, longer learning and socialization, greater complexity in social behaviour, and more adaptive flexibility due to less over-specialized traits.

The particular relevance of this to the Oedipus complex becomes clearer when we compare the slowed rate of ego development in humans to our separate rate of *sexual drive development*. Over the course of human evolution the rates of these two maturational or developmental lines have become ever more decoupled, divergent, and *asynchronous*. The final adult growth of the ego lags far behind its sexual drive counterparts. Whereas in general among most species sexual development is synchronous with completed physical growth, this is not the case for humans. In Roheim's description, "*the incidence of the sexual impulse is premature*, man is not only slowed down when compared to the animal world but presents a disharmony in his own rate of development." (1950, p. 412-13; italics added) The consequence of this is that "within the frame of our general retardation our sexuality is *relatively precocious*." (ibid; italics added)

Roheim observed that the "enormous discrepancy in the age of sexual maturity and full growth is striking when we compare man to other mammals." (1950, p. 400) This holds true even for our closest primate relatives, who in turn display this same asynchrony more so than all other mammals except humans. A remarkable example of this precocious genitality in another primate can be seen among the Bonobo chimpanzees, a species possibly most similar to our pre-human ancestor. Among the Bonobos, genital arousal and stimulation in a variety of modes is utilized nearly indiscriminately, including by juveniles and between the young and adults as a means of modulating aggression, dissipating conflicts, food bartering, and other social purposes. Though not as great as in humans, the asynchronous relationship between sexual development and full physical growth is still quite marked. "Wild females give birth for the first time at 13 or 14 years of age, becoming full grown by about 15." (De Waal 2006)

Roheim elaborated on Freud's view of the significance of this asynchrony for object-relations in childhood, noting that "since genital libido is present at the time when the child is still dependent ...the prima facie sex object must be the mother." (1950, pp. 412-13) Intrapsychic conflicts result from the mismatch between the child's object-related libidinal fantasies and the ability to fully satisfy them in reality. Depending on a multitude of potentially ameliorating or exacerbating internal and external factors (again, in accordance with Freud's complemental

series) these conflicts can result in nothing more than the stage-typical transient nightmares and fears of monsters under the bed; conversely, the conflicts can develop into paralyzing and unresolvable symptoms, such as chronic phobias or crippling inhibitions later in adult relationships. Along with the evolution of this asynchronous differentiation between ego and id, humans have co-evolved psychological mechanisms of defense, such as *projection*, *repression*, *sublimation* and *introjection*, in order to protect the immature ego from being overwhelmed by the precocious drives while the child is still dependent upon the mothering figure. According to Roheim, “the psyche has to evolve various mechanisms to repress or project or transform the sexual impulse.” (ibid)

Social Implications

Now I’ve followed Roheim extensively here in order to clarify Freud’s (1924) underappreciated formulation that “the Oedipus complex is the psychical correlate of two fundamental biological facts: the long period of the human child’s dependence, and the remarkable way in which its sexual life reaches a first climax in the third to fifth years of life.” (p. 208) *Oedipal theory reflects Freud’s recognition of the psychological, social and evolutionary implications of this developmental asynchrony. It is this incongruity and the developmental conflicts arising from it – and not paternal aggression - that causes the Oedipus complex and makes it universal.*

These considerations serve to further clarify the problem with Malinowski’s prediction that the Oedipus complex would become extinct with the “weak and henpecked father”. It assumed that if the average father-figure of a given society were benign or psychologically castrated, then the motivation for jealous hostility toward the father due to sexual competition for the mother’s sole affections would be eliminated. As we’ve seen, even logically this makes no sense. The arousal of such hostility requires nothing more aggressive or violent than the oedipal child’s nightly exclusion from the mother’s bedroom – to say nothing of the total extrusion of the child from the mother’s entire village at weaning and again at puberty, as in the Trobriand case! In fact, Malinowski had it exactly backwards. Whereas the weak and henpecked father-figure would have little bearing on the actual *cause* of the Oedipus complex, he would most certainly play a

role in its course, intensity, and likelihood of remaining unresolved. Of course, the same would be true in the case of a tyrannical and abusive father. Freudian theory implicates both extremes of over-stimulation or indulgence, on the one hand, and excessive frustration or trauma, on the other, in the wide range of problems that can interfere with a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. Both extremes can be associated with complications leading to oedipal and pre-oedipal fixation or regression. Likewise, both can interfere with latency and, for this reason, an adequate consolidation of sexual role identifications and conscience formation going into puberty. Spiro demonstrated this for the Trobriand boy who, so far from having no Oedipus complex, retained the unresolved libidinal attachments to the pre-oedipal and oedipal mother even more intensely than is likely for the Western boy. In Trobriand society, the total extrusions from the mother and her village at the time of weaning, and again at puberty, were necessary precisely in order to facilitate the young boy's identification with his collective fathers and the relinquishment of the still-powerful earlier attachment to the oedipal and pre-oedipal maternal objects.

Prolonged Dependency and Social Structures

Freud's recognition of the consequences of prolonged human maturation and dependency provided him with a conceptual link between individual and social psychology and phylogenetic (evolutionary) processes. Freud (1926) realized that it was because of this feature in the mother/infant relationship that "the influence of the real external world upon [the developing infant] is intensified..." (p. 154); it was this factor that "establishes the earliest situations of danger and creates the need to be loved which will accompany the child through the rest of its life." (p.155) The implications of this for the evolution of social structures was not lost on Freud. "In the prolonged symbiosis of the child with his parents we have the reason why human beings live in families and in this prolonged co-existence of two generations we have the biological basis of social life." (Freud, 1924, p. 208) It was on this conceptual foundation that Freud formulated his theory of human culture as a compromise solution to the dynamic conflicts forever arising between the ego and the drives:

And here, the discovery was made that a third and extremely serious part of human intellectual activity, the part which has created the great institutions of religion, law, ethics, and all forms of civic life, has as its fundamental aim of the *enabling of the individual to master his Oedipus complex and to divert his libido from its infantile attachments into the social ones that are ultimately desired*. (ibid; italics added)

A Final irony and Freud's complementary series

The genius of Freud's theoretical integration of individual psychology, social psychology and phylogenetic (evolutionary) processes brings us to a final irony. It was because of Freud's grounding in evolutionary biology that critics ever since Malinowski have continued to accuse him of postulating a rigid biological determinism or reductionism. Yet nowhere is Freud's insistence on the reciprocal interaction of biological inheritance and developmental experience in human adaptation more elegantly on display than when Freud defined the Oedipus complex in relation to the biological fact of prolonged infant dependency. As we have seen, Freud (1926) recognized that it was precisely for this reason that an "early differentiation between the ego and the id is promoted". (pp. 154-5) A major consequence of this differentiation is the fact that anywhere between twelve and twenty-plus years of enculturation (depending on the given society) will be required of the human ego before it can master the simultaneous demands made upon it from *both* the external environment and the internal drives sufficiently to achieve "adult" status. It is this distinctive feature of our shared evolutionary heritage and developmental biology that ensures, from the beginning to the end of life, the role of learning, culture and adaptation in all human motivation. And it is this differentiation between the ego and the id - and the normal developmental conflicts arising from it - that causes the Oedipus complex and makes it universal.

Summary and Conclusion

We can summarize these considerations by saying that prolonged childhood helplessness and dependency is a cross-culturally universal fact among humans. This fact is a function of our shared evolutionary heritage as a species. Equally cross-cultural is the fact that roughly between

two to five years of age, long before physical maturity and independence is attained, libidinal attachment to the primary caregiver will become inflected through the prism of genitally-dominated object-related impulses, perceptions and fantasies. The dawning recognition at this unique moment in development, “that the young baby and its mother are not alone in the world [and] that the object has its own object, which is not the baby” (Green, 1995, p. 882) triggers an inevitable and more or less painful narcissistic crisis. The normal developmental conflict (or set of conflicts) that flow from this crisis is what Freud called the Oedipus complex.

The achievement among our proto-human ancestors of a means of resolving this Oedipus complex was, in Freud’s estimation, as monumental an event for human evolution as it is for each person’s individual’s development. It is only too easy to forget that Freud’s most controversial conclusion in *Totem and Taboo* was not that all children experience destructive and incestuous wishes in the oedipal triangle or even that the primal deed (either fantasied or real) had occurred. Rather it was Freud’s assertion that the distinctly human means of *resolving the Oedipus complex* in both its intrapsychic and cultural dimensions recapitulates primal adaptations made and preserved by some as yet incompletely understood mechanisms of “inheritance”. A central theme of these lectures is that Freud’s explanation of this human innovation can only be appreciated in the context of his *etiological formula* of the reciprocal interaction of innate and acquired factors operating in human ontogeny and phylogeny – otherwise known as the *complemental series*.

Finally, as oedipal conflicts must be accounted for regardless of society or culture they must also be accounted for regardless of sex. Much has been written and debated concerning the profound and important differences between the female and male Oedipus complexes. I would argue that these differences were always the more important and fruitful subject for psychoanalysis to grapple with – far more than the question of a non-oedipal nuclear complex. It certainly was for Freud. He grappled a great deal with this question and altered his theory over time to account for it. He also acknowledged his limitations with regard to this subject and recognized the necessary role of women psychoanalysts in answering it. For better or worse,

however, the historic controversy that emerged between anthropology and psychoanalysis was not about these differences, nor was it about their profound effects in the adult lives of women and men. The crux of the controversy, rather, was the question of whether or not the Oedipus complex *existed*; specifically, whether it existed in non-Western matrilineal societies.

Malinowski's answer was "no", even though he agreed that Freud's oedipal theory was an accurate analysis of the European or Western-type nuclear complex. To this extent, Malinowski's own thesis remains at odds with the more radical rejections of oedipal theory in contemporary psychoanalysis and the "postmodern" rejection of nomothetic or generalizable models altogether. It is in large part these latter trends in psychoanalysis and their historical connections with Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* that the present lecture has attempted to address.

The guiding assumption here is that an understanding of the evolutionary bases for oedipal conflicts serves the question of their different manifestations according to sex and a multitude of other variables. Radical versions of cultural determinism would preempt this *complemental* approach with the claim that sexual differences are *purely* cultural constructions. Equally extreme versions of biological determinism would also preempt it and the possibility of a psychoanalytically informed critical theory, one which takes into account the role of environmental forces in structuring apperception. (see Whitebook, 1993) By definition, both effectively eliminate Freud's etiological formula of the *complemental series*. For the same reason, both extremes preempt a balanced understanding of the cross-culturally variable, but universally recognized, boundaries that differentiate the generations (adult from child) and the sexes (male from female). The social structuring of these boundaries, along with those defining exogamous groups, is the collective equivalent of the resolution of the Oedipus complex. Paradoxically, while it was Freud (1940) who insisted on the "biological fact of the duality of the sexes" (p.188) it was also Freud who confronted our simplistic assumptions about these boundaries, asserting that "no individual is limited to the modes of reaction of a single sex" (ibid) and that "psychological bisexuality, too, embarrasses all our enquiries into the subject and makes them harder to describe." (ibid) And while it took Freud to elucidate the nature of the

unconscious forces that drive our creative capacity to transcend boundaries, it was also Freud who described the power of those same forces to undo the boundaries upon which our creativity and culture thrive. While variously drawn, these universal boundaries are the very ones to which every human being must become reconciled in the course of resolving the Oedipus complex and mastering the challenges of life and adult love. Unfortunately, this comes as a painful blow to human narcissism and our childhood fantasies of omnipotence. For this reason the fragile ego is always ready with new resistances to the recognition and acceptance of these universal boundaries. It is a tribute to the power of such resistances that Kluckhohn's affirmation of the *universal culture pattern* had to be considered a "confession" within anthropology, as though he had told an embarrassing secret. It is no small irony that seventy years later, and a century after Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, this universal cultural pattern is still being treated like an embarrassing secret within psychoanalysis.

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