

The Oedipus Complex

Definition

- The attachment of the child to the parent of the opposite sex, accompanied by envious and aggressive feelings toward the parent of the same sex.
- These feelings are largely repressed (ie. made unconscious) because of the fear of displeasure or punishment by the parent of the same sex.
- In its original use, the term applied only to the boy or man.

The idea of the Oedipus Complex is derived from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, during which Oedipus learned that he was cursed to kill his father and sleep with his mother.

The Picture

- Oedipus is contemplating the Sphinx's riddle in this image.

The history of the prophecy that doomed Oedipus

- Laius, who ruled Thebes at the time, was told the prophecy that his son would kill him and sleep with his wife.

- He and his wife gave their baby son to one of their slaves, who was to bring the baby to Mt. Cithaeron, which was haunted by wild beasts.



- However, the slave felt pity for the baby, so he gave him to another shepherd from the city of Corinth located on the other side of the mountain.
- King Polybus of Corinth was presented with the baby and decided to bring him up on his own.
- When Oedipus was older, someone calls him a bastard.
- He decided to leave Corinth for Delphi, so he could learn of his parentage at the oracle of Apollo.
- There he was given the news that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother.

- To prevent the oracle from coming true, Oedipus went to Thebes.
- On the way he ran into an old man driving a wagon at a place where three roads cross. The man ordered Oedipus to move off the road, but he refused.
- He became aggressive and killed the man and what he thought to be all the guards.
- Before Oedipus could enter Thebes, he had to solve the riddle the Sphinx, who guarded the entrance to the city, asked him. No one had ever solved the riddle before and as a consequence, they were killed by the Sphinx.
- The riddle is, "Which animal has one voice, but two, three, or four feet being slowest on three?" Oedipus answered correctly with the answer, "Man."
- The city welcomed Oedipus and offered him the vacant job of king and the marriage to Laius' widow, Jocasta.
- Years passed while Oedipus was king of Thebes. He had four children by Jocasta.
- Eventually the city was infected by a plague. Oedipus promised to save his city, so he ordered his brother-in-law Creon to consult the oracle at Delphi.

- He returned with news that the plague was caused by the unpunished murderer who killed Laius. Oedipus cursed the killer, but Tiresias said that Oedipus was the killer.
- Oedipus was furious and blamed Tiresias and Creon for creating such a story to dethrone him so that they could have power.
- Jocasta explained to Oedipus that robbers killed Laius at a place where three roads crossed. Oedipus remembered that he killed a man at such a place.
- He contemplated the possibility of him being the killer, but Jocasta reassured him that a witness saw several robbers kill Laius.
- Oedipus sent for the witness, so the issue could be resolved.
- While he waited, a Corinthian messenger arrived with news that Polybus had died, so Oedipus would be King of Corinth.
- Oedipus told the messenger that he could not go back while his mother was alive.
- Surprise overwhelmed Oedipus, for the messenger told him that she was not his mother. He explained that he was given the baby many years ago by a Theban shepherd.
- Jocasta then realized that Oedipus was her son.

- The witness finally arrived and revealed that he was given the baby by Jocasta and passed it to the messenger because he did not want to kill him.
- Oedipus realizes the truth and went to tell Jocasta, but she had already killed herself.
- He blinds himself and was ordered to leave Thebes by Creon, the new king.

