

Carl Jung: Archetypes and Analytical Psychology

Exploring the realm of Carl Jung's collective unconscious and the archetypes that live within it.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961) was interested in the way in which symbols and common myths permeate our thinking on both conscious and subconscious levels.

Jung initially worked with fellow psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, whose 1899 work *The Interpretation of Dreams* had attached significance to the recurring themes and motifs in people's dreams, and sought to understand their relevance to subjects' psyches and their mental wellbeing.¹ However, Jung and Freud later took different paths, with the former disagreeing with Freud's emphasis on the influence of biological factors on behavior and personality.

Instead, Jung looked at areas of the mind that constitute the *psyche*, and the way in which they influenced one another. He distinguished the *persona*, or the image of ourselves that we present to the world, from our *shadow*, which may be comprised of hidden anxieties and repressed thoughts. Jung also noted the relationship between our *personal unconscious*, which contains an individual's personal memories and ideas, and a *collective unconscious*, a set of memories and ideas that is shared amongst all of humanity. Shared concepts, which Jung described as *archetypes*, permeate the collective unconscious and emerge as themes and characters in our dreams and surface in our culture - in myths, books, films and paintings, for example.

Jung felt that disunity among thoughts in the personal subconscious and the conscious could create internal conflicts which could lead to particular personality traits or anxieties. Such inner conflicts could be resolved, claimed Jung, by allowing repressed ideas to emerge into the conscious and accommodating (rather than destroying) them, thus creating a state of inner harmony, through a process known as *individuation*. In this article we will look at Jung's theories on psychoanalysis and the most significant of his archetypes, and will see how his ideas influenced modern psychology.

Personal Unconscious

Jung's idea of the *personal unconscious* is comparable to the *unconscious* that Freud and other psychoanalysts referred to. To Jung, it is personal, as opposed to the *collective unconscious*, which is shared amongst all persons. The personal unconscious contains memories which are unaware we still possess, often as a result of repression. As we exist in a conscious state, we do not have direct access to our personal unconscious, but it emerges in our dreams or in a hypnotic state of regression.

Collective Unconscious

The *collective unconscious* is key to Jung's theories of the mind as it contains the *archetypes*. Rather than being born as a *tabula rasa* (a 'blank slate' in Latin) and being influenced purely by our environment, as the English philosopher John Locke believed, Jung proposed that we are each born with a collective unconscious. This contains a set of shared memories and ideas, which we can all identify with, regardless of the culture that we were born into or the time period in which we live. We cannot communicate *through* the collective unconscious, but we recognise some of the same ideas innately, including archetypes.

For example, many cultures have cultivated similar myths independently of one another, which feature similar characters and themes, such as the creation of the universe.

Archetypes

Jung noted that within the collective unconscious there exist a number of *archetypes* which we can all recognise. An archetype is the model image of a person or role and includes the mother figure, father, wise old man and clown/joker, amongst others. The mother figure, for example, has caring qualities; she is dependable and compassionate. We all hold similar ideas of the mother figure and we see her across cultures and in our language - such as the term 'mother nature'. Archetypes are often incarnated as characters in myths, novels and films - in the James Bond spy series, 'M' embodies the mother archetype, whom the spy trusts and returns to. Similar, archetypes permeate the cards of a Tarot deck: the mother archetype is seen in the qualities of the Empress card, whilst the Hermit embodies the wise old man archetype.

The Persona

Distinct from our inner self, Jung noted that we each have a *persona* - an identity which we wish to project to others. He used the Latin term, which can refer either to a person's personality the mask of an actor, intentionally, as the persona can be constructed from archetypes in the collective unconscious, or be influenced by ideas of social roles in society. For example, a father may adopt traits which he considers to be typical of a father - serious or disciplining, for example - rather than those which reflect his actual personality.

Philip Zimbardo's study of social roles in a prison situation (1971) further demonstrated the effect that our role has on our persona. Assigned a role, such as that of a prison guard, people often behave as they would expect someone in their role to act. Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment revealed how social roles can influence our behavior.

As the persona is not a true reflection of our consciousness, but rather an idealised image which people aspire to, identifying too much with a persona can lead to inner conflicts and a repression of our own individuality, which Jung claimed could be resolved through *individuation*.

Shadow archetype

"Taken in its deepest sense, the shadow is the invisible saurian tail that man still drags behind him. Carefully amputated, it becomes the healing serpent of the mysteries." *Carl Jung in The Integration of the Personality (English translation)*.³

The *shadow* archetype is composed primarily of the elements of ourselves that we consider to be negative. We do not show this side of the self to the outside world as it can be a source of anxiety or shame. The shadow may contain repressed ideas or thoughts which we do not wish to integrate into our outward *persona*, but these must be resolved in order to achieve *individuation*. However, it may also include positive traits, such as perceived weaknesses (for example, empathy) which may not fit into the 'toughness' that a person wants to present as a part of their persona.

In literature, the shadow is often presented as a villainous character - for instance, as the snake in the Garden of Eden or *The Jungle Book*. Jung also observed Hyde, whom Dr. Jekyll transforms into, as representing the character's shadow in Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Wise Old Man archetype

Through his age and frailty, the Wise Old Man represents the power of peaceful contemplation in the absence of physical prowess. The wise old man, through quiet thought, foresees the future and offers guidance in turbulent times.

The wise old man is a prophetic archetype and can often be seen in stories as a wizard, such as Gandalf in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

Great Mother

The Great Mother archetype embodies the idealised qualities of the mother figure. She is caring, compassionate, dependable and loving and, like the Wise Old Man, she may offer guidance when asked.

The stock character of the 'fairy godmother' often embodies the Great Mother in literature.

Other archetypes

The archetypes that we have looked at in this article are just a few of those which Jung believed to populate our collective unconscious.

Many more archetypes may be recognised, possessing non-exclusive qualities which may be held by multiple archetypes to different extents. Other archetypes include the magician, the child, the creator and the caregiver, among others.

Individuation

Jung believed that by acquiring the qualities of an archetype from the collective unconscious, we repress those attributes of our true self which do not conform to the archetype. To achieve individuation and realise our true self, he claimed that, rather than repressing these traits, we must 'integrate' them by allowing them to surface from the shadow and to coexist with those in the *ego*, or true self. Analytical psychologists may encourage this integration, or individuation, through therapy including free association.

Jungian psychology today

Although his theories are discussed to a lesser extent than Freud's psychodynamic approach, Carl Jung's ideas carry an influence whose effects can still be felt today.

The idea that we project in our personas not our true personality but an aspirational, idealised version of who we would like to be, and Jung's distinction between inward-looking introvert and outgoing extrovert personality types, have led to the development of numerous personality tests which are still used today, including that of Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers.

Jung's theories have also impacted on the field of analytical psychology, which is commonly referred to as *Jungian psychology*.

References

1. Freud, S. (1899). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Leipzig and Vienna: Franz Deuticke.
2. Zimbardo, P.G. (1971). The power and pathology of imprisonment. *Congressional Record*. Serial No. 15, October 25th, 1971.
3. Jung, Carl and Dell, S.M. (1939). *The Integration of the Personality* (English translation). New York: Farrar & Rinehart.