

Eros in Psychology

Authored by
mohammad looti

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Sigmund Freud

In Freudian psychology, Eros, also called libido, libidinal energy or love, is the life instinct innate in all humans. It is the desire to create life and favours productivity and construction. In early psychanalytic writings, instincts from the Eros were opposed by forces from the ego. But in later psychoanalytic theory, Eros is opposed by the destructive death instinct of Thanatos (death instinct or death drive).

In his 1925 paper "The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis", Freud explains that the psychoanalytic concept of sexual energy is more in line with the Platonic view of Eros, as expressed in the Symposium, than with the common use of the word "sex" as related primarily to genital activity. He also mentions the philosopher Schopenhauer as an influence. He then goes on to confront his adversaries for ignoring such great precursors and for tainting his whole theory of Eros with a pansexual tendency. He finally writes that his theory naturally explains this collective misunderstanding as a predictable resistance to the acknowledgement of sexual activity in childhood.

The philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse appropriated the Freudian concept of Eros for his highly influential 1955 work Eros and Civilization.

Carl Jung

In Carl Jung's analytical psychology, the counterpart to Eros is logos, a Greek term for principle of rationality. Jung considers Logos to be a masculine principle, while Eros is a feminine principle:

Woman's psychology is founded on the principle of Eros, the great binder and loosener, whereas from ancient times the ruling principle ascribed to man is Logos. The concept of Eros could be expressed in modern terms as psychic relatedness, and that of Logos as objective interest.

This gendering of Eros and Logos is a consequence of Jung's theory of the anima/animus syzygy of the human psyche. According to Jung, men and women have opposite-gendered counterparts within their unconscious: for example men have an unconscious feminine principle, the "anima", and this is a caricature of the feminine Eros. An aspect of the work of individuation for men, then, is to confront the anima and learn to accept it, by accepting Eros. This is necessary in order to see beyond the projections that initially blind the ego. To "withdraw the projections" one must learn about and assimilate the unconscious forces into the conscious mind.

In essence, Jung's concept of Eros is not dissimilar to the Platonic one. Eros is ultimately the desire for wholeness, and although it may initially take the form of passionate love, it is more truly a desire for "psychic relatedness", a desire for interconnection and interaction with other sentient beings. However, Jung was inconsistent, and he did sometimes use the word "Eros" as a

shorthand to designate sexuality.

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