

# FEELINGS READINGS

NWRPA, 12.3.21

**Feelings, Insight and Logic:  
Two Popular Dogmas of Psychotherapy and an Alternative**

**The Sponge and Bucket Theory of Emotion for One Person**



## The Sponge and Bucket Theory of Emotion for a Therapist and Patient



Early Freud, 1893, with a vague version of the Sponge and Bucket theory:

**3. *The fading of a memory or the losing of its affect depends [most importantly] on whether there has been an energetic reaction [catharsis] to the event that provokes an affect . . . If the reaction is suppressed, the affect remains attached to the memory . . . The injured person's reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely 'cathartic' effect if it is an adequate reaction — as, for instance, [in] revenge.***

S Freud, On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication, *SE 2*, [1893], 1976, p8.

Heimann with her 1950 and 1960 version of the Sponge and Bucket theory:

**4. *The aim of the analyst's own analysis is not to turn him into a mechanical brain which can produce interpretations on the basis of a purely intellectual procedure, but to enable him to sustain his feelings as opposed to discharging them like the patient.***

Heimann P, Counter-transference, *Br J Med Psych*, 1960, 33: p9-15

**5. *My thesis is that the analyst's emotional response to his patient within the analytic situation represents one of the most important tools for his work. The analyst's counter***

*transference is an instrument of research into the patient's unconscious.*

Heimann P, On, Counter-transference, *Int J Psychoanalysis*, 1950, Vol 31: p 81-84

Scharff's version of the Sponge and Bucket theory:

6. *In therapy, Mr and Mrs D joined forces to pour their anger and sorrow into me, taking turns at **pumping me full**, then accusing me of failing to **contain** themselves and each other.*

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*I was able to respond to his blame, [I imagined that I was] now in his place as a young boy who wished to defend himself. He and I both felt **vented** and relieved. **In defending myself, I spoke for him.***

Scharff, D. *Refinding the Object and Reclaiming the Self*, Jason Aronson Inc, London, 1992

Middle Freud, 1915, against the Sponge and Bucket theory:

7. *It may happen that an affective or emotional impulse is perceived but misconstrued [**through a false connection**]. Owing to the repression of its proper representative [that is the signifier] it has been forced to become connected with another idea, and is now regarded by consciousness as the manifestation of that idea. If we restore the true connection, we call the original affective*

*impulse an 'unconscious one'. Yet its affect was never unconscious; all that had happened was that its idea had undergone repression. In general, the use of the terms 'unconscious affect' and 'unconscious emotion' has reference to the vicissitudes undergone, in consequence of repression, by the quantitative factor in the drive impulse. We know that **three such vicissitudes are possible**: either the affect remains, wholly or in part, as it is; or it is transformed into a qualitatively different quota of affect, above all **into anxiety**; or it is suppressed, i.e. it is prevented from developing at all. . . . [B]ut in comparison with unconscious ideas there is the important difference that unconscious ideas continue to exist after repression as actual structures in the system of the unconscious, whereas all that corresponds in that system to unconscious affects is a potential beginning which is prevented from developing. Strictly speaking . . . there are no unconscious affects as there are unconscious ideas . . . The whole difference arises from the fact that ideas are investments —basically of memory traces— whilst affects and emotions correspond to processes of discharge [catharsis], the final manifestations of which are perceived as feelings. . . . It is possible for the development of affect to proceed directly from the unconscious system; in that case the affect always has the character of anxiety, for which all 'repressed' affects are exchanged. Often however the drive impulse has to wait until it has found a substitutive idea in the system consciousness. The development of affect can then proceed from this conscious substitute, and the nature of that substitute determines the qualitative character of the affect . . . in repression a*

*severance takes place between the affect and the idea to which it belongs . . . the affect does not as a rule arise till the break through to a new representation in the system of consciousness has been successfully achieved.*

Freud S, *SE 14*, The Unconscious, [1915], 1976, p177.

8. *We cannot assert the existence of unconscious affects in the same sense as that of unconscious ideas.*

Freud S, *SE 16*, Introductory Lectures, Anxiety, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, (1915), 1976, p409.

Freud on a clinical consequence of his opposition to the Sponge and Bucket theory:

9. . . . *a transference is present in the patient from the beginning of the treatment and for a while is the most powerful motive in its advance. We see no trace of [transference] and need not bother about it so long as it operates in favour of the . . . analysis.* ’

Freud S , Transference, Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, *SE 16*, [1917], 1976, p143

10. *So long as the patient’s communications and ideas run on without any obstruction, the theme of transference should be left untouched.*

Freud, S On Beginning the Treatment, *SE 12*, [1913a],  
1976, p139

Lacan on counter / transference:

**11.** *[Freud] recognised at once that the principle of his power lay there, in the transference . . . but also that this power gave him a way out of the problem only on condition that he did not use it . . .*

J Lacan, *Ecrits*, The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power, trans Sheridan, p236

**12.** *'The counter transference' is nothing other than the function of the analyst's ego, what I have called the sum total of the analyst's prejudices.'*

J Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book One, Freud's Papers on Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1954*, ed Miller, trans Forrester, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1988, p23.

The influential paper (Schacter and Singer, 1962) below started a renaissance of the Freudian paradigm, without acknowledgement, within social psychology. There are now thousands of empirical studies within this currently dominant paradigm:

**13. COGNITIVE, SOCIAL, AND PHYSIOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF EMOTIONAL STATE,**  
Schacter and Singer 1962.

online at:

<http://www.garfield.library.upenn.edu/classics1986/A1986C497400001.pdf>

Below is the abstract of another paper in the same paradigm by different scientists:

#### 14. Abstract

Explored some of the cognitive effects of internal events. The objective was to ascertain whether the labelling of emotional stimuli would be affected by information concerning internal reactions. Subjects viewed 10 slides of seminude females while hearing sounds that were allegedly their heart beats. 1 group of Ss heard their "heart rates" increase markedly to 5 of the slides and not change to the other 5; a 2nd group of subjects heard a marked decrease in the bogus heart rate to 5 of the slides and no change to the other 5. In comparison with the slides to which subjects did not hear a change in the bogus rate, the slides to which they heard a marked change, whether increased or decreased, were (1) rated significantly more attractive during the experiment proper and during a disguised interview conducted 4-5 wk. later, and (2) chosen significantly more as remuneration for experimental participation.

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Related sponge and bucket theoretical views on  
Insight, Understanding and Reality

**15.** *'Interpretations . . . attempt to put into conscious words those ideas, emotions and relationships that are hidden, or part-hidden; in effect, to speak the unspoken [thoughts, emotions and ideas of the client].'*

Hinshelwood, R Clinical Klein, London, FAB, 1994.

**16.** *. . . a good interpretation, a complete interpretation has to take the three spheres and show the essential identity of what happens in the consulting room <sup>1</sup> with what is happening outside <sup>2</sup> and what happened in the past <sup>3</sup>. If we take only one of these areas, whichever it be, as if the other two did not exist, then we no longer operate with the transference.'*

R Etcheygoyen, *The Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, trans Pitchon, Karnac Books, London, 1991, p424

Late Freud on the underlying mechanism that explains his opposition to Sponge and Bucket theories:

**17.** *We see this . . . ego as a poor creature owing service to three masters and consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the superego . . . As a frontier creature the ego tries to mediate . . . ; it is also a submissive slave who courts his master's love. Whenever possible, it tries to remain on good terms with the id, it clothes the id's unconscious commands with its preconscious*

*rationalisations . . . ; it disguises the id's conflicts with reality and, if possible, its conflicts with the superego too . . . it . . . often yields to the temptation to become sycophantic, opportunist and lying, **like a politician who sees the truth but wants to keep his place in popular favour.***

S Freud, The Ego and the Id, *SE 19*, [1923], 1976, p56.