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Playing in Psychotherapy: A Textual Analysis of Classical Psychotherapeutic Theories

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Abstract

The present study examines how the concept of playing has been understood in clinical psychology and explores the historical background to the limited attention given to playing in psychotherapy sessions. Playing can be observed in various playful interactions, such as jokes and casual conversations between therapists and clients. However, such interactions have scarcely been conceptualized within a systematic theoretical framework. We analyze the theoretical perspectives of S. Freud and C.G. Jung, two major figures in the development of psychoanalysis and theories of psychotherapy. The method involved collecting the major works of S. Freud and C.G. Jung, identifying passages referring to playing, and conducting close textual analyses of these passages. Both theorists primarily discussed playing within the context of childhood, while adult playing was generally considered in relation to phantasy and creative activity. Although S. Freud and C.G. Jung differed in their understanding of this relationship, they shared the view that playing was primarily related to the emergence and development of phantasy rather than being recognized as a distinct theoretical concept. Furthermore, the central role of phantasy as a creative function in both Freud's and Jung's theories may have contributed to the limited recognition of playing as an independent topic of theoretical inquiry in psychotherapy. These findings provide a historical perspective on why playing in psychotherapy sessions has remained a relatively unexplored topic.

Keywords: phantasy; playing; psychoanalysis; psychotherapy; textual analysis