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Hamlet and the oedipal complex
(approximately 1200 word essay)

The oedipal complex is a theory formed by Sigmund Freud, stating that individuals have a repressed desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex while feeling rivalry with the parent of the same sex. There is much evidence in the play that suggests Hamlet is a victim of the oedipal complex.

Hamlet is an emotionally complex character. In the beginning of the play, Hamlet is grieving over his father's death. Hamlet's mother has been remarried to Hamlet's uncle. After a visit from a ghost who tells Hamlet that his father has been murdered by his uncle, Hamlet becomes obsessed with avenging his father's death. Hamlet also is repulsed by his mother's marriage to his uncle. This act was considered immoral in Hamlet's time.

Furthermore, in the beginning of the play when Hamlet is reciting his first soliloquy, he makes many references to his disgust in his mother when she is with other men. "Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown." He says this of his deceased father. He does not want to remember how his mother hung on his father, as if to satisfy some great appetite, a need for his love. He tells that his mother married his uncle with "most wicked speed," to "incestuous sheets." He then continues, "It is not nor it cannot come to good; But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue."

Hamlet must keep quiet about his feelings and it tears him apart. Hamlet decides to fake madness to the king and queen in order to act out his revenge. Hamlet finds that what his mother has done is nearly an unforgivable sin. He is driven to proceed with his plan of murder because he sees it as the only way to lift the burden of his mother's sin and break up the incestuous marriage.

Hamlet has an Oedipus complex and there is much evidence for it. Throughout the play, there are several hints that the young prince suffers from the Oedipus complex. Claudius is quoted, (1)"The queen his mother lives almost by his looks," (Hamlet IV.vii.11-12) revealing a sense of closeness between Hamlet and his mother. This also reveals the need for Hamlet in his mother's life. Although Hamlet does love his mother, he is able to fall in love with Ophelia. Quite possibly, Hamlet saw qualities in Ophelia that resembled those of his mother, which would explain the early attraction between the two. Other more striking evidence is visible when the ghost or old Hamlet commands young Hamlet to, (1)"Let thy soul contrive against thy

mother." (Hamlet I.v.85-86) In this scene the ghost is trying to make sure that Hamlet keeps his impulses controlled, and will carefully plan a course of action upon his mother.

The most important key to understanding Hamlet's true feelings is the "Closet Scene" or Act 3 Scene 4, in which the ghost reappears in order to prevent Hamlet from enacting his childhood fantasies with his mother Gertrude. Without this scene, it would seem unlikely that Shakespeare had any intentions of suggesting an Oedipal relationship between Hamlet and his mother. Young Hamlet finally decides to confront his mother, and is extremely upset by the situation. However, instead of talking about his mother's second marriage to his uncle, or her possible involvement in the killing of his father, Hamlet decides to focus on his mother's sexuality. Hamlet is obviously disgusted with his mother. He speaks very sexually in regards to her relationship with Claudius. The significance of this scene being set in the queen's 'bedroom' is very important, as Hamlet makes many references to beds in the scene: "In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed / Stew'd" (Hamlet III.iv.93-96), meaning sweaty and semen-stained, like a prostitute's bed. This sexual language implies that Hamlet could well be talking to a future lover, when it is in fact his own mother. 'Bedrooms' are private, and conventionally places of sexual activity, so Shakespeare may well have deliberately presented the two on the bed, or in the bedroom, to suggest their sexual relationship.

This speech serves as a very effective means of unnerving his mother. Hamlet's mother is quite distraught at this point and asks him how to handle the situation. Instead of Hamlet inquiring about his father's death, he orders her to cease her incestuous relationship with Claudius. "Not this, by no means, that I bid you do: Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed" (Hamlet III.iv.183-184). This possessive instruction represents Hamlet's ideal relationship with his mother, one where there is no sexual attention given to the father figure. These scenes in particular expose Hamlet's lustful feelings for his mother.

Hamlet's feelings towards women expand beyond the specific feelings for his mother. Hamlet loses all faith in women because he feels that his mother has too quickly forgotten his father. The scene where he tells Ophelia "get thee to a nunnery!" is provoked by the betrayal he feels from his mother and then Ophelia when she lies to him about where her father is. Hamlet loves his mother very much but is simply angered by her hasty marriage to Claudius and perhaps even the incest that appears to be involved in the matter. Hamlet loved his father and may even suspect that Claudius and Gertrude had affairs before his untimely death. This provokes Hamlet to believe that all women are frail of judgment and weak of mind.

Every son loves his mother consciously and tries to please her. Subconsciously, Hamlet is motivated by an oedipal urge, to sleep with his mother for various reasons. First, Hamlet had lost the love of his life Ophelia, which sends him into anger mode that has to be exerted somehow. This happens to be desire for his mother, the next love in his life. Secondly, Freud's theory helps us realize that Hamlet's mind has a conscious level and

a subconscious level. Lastly, Freud helps us to understand Hamlet's motivations and actions towards his mother by going to her for support. Hamlet might have really been going to his mother for reasons more intricate than that. This all proves that Shakespeare figured out the human mind before the father of psychology was even born.

In conclusion, one of the most puzzling elements of William Shakespeare's Hamlet has been the personality of Hamlet himself. Although he receives supernatural assurance that his uncle Claudius has murdered his father, and although he can see with his own eyes that Claudius has hastened to marry his own sister-in-law (Hamlet's mother), Hamlet still seems incapable of deciding what to do. Should he leave Denmark and resume his studies? Should he take the place as heir apparent that Claudius offers? Should he kill Claudius? When we focus on the personality of Hamlet itself, at least part of the puzzle is solved. Even though Hamlet was written long before Freud was born, Shakespeare has given us an accurate portrait of a man paralyzed by oedipal guilt. In short, Hamlet's personality has three crucial elements -- his indecision, his hasty actions, and his oedipal complex.