Catharsis Encyclopedia Article

Catharsis

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Catharsis

The release of repressed psychic energy.

The term catharsis originated from the Greek word *katharsis,* meaning to purge, or purgation. In psychology, the term was first employed by Sigmund Freud's colleague Josef Breuer (1842-1925), who developed a "cathartic" treatment for persons suffering from hysterical symptoms through the use of hypnosis. While under hypnosis, Breuer's patients were able to recall traumatic experiences, and through the process of expressing the original emotions that had been repressed and forgotten, they were relieved of their symptoms. Catharsis was also central to Freud's concept of **psychoanalysis,** but he replaced hypnosis with free association.

In other schools of **psychotherapy,** catharsis refers to the therapeutic release of emotions and tensions, although not necessarily unconscious ones such as Freud emphasized. Certain types of therapy in particular, such as psychodrama and primal scream therapy, have stressed the healing potential of cathartic experiences.

For Further Study

Books

Firestone, Robert. *Psychological Defenses in Everyday Life.* New York: Human Sciences Press, 1989.

Hall, Calvin S. *A Primer of Freudian Psychology.* New York: Harper and Row, 1982.

Jenson, Jean C. *Reclaiming Your Life: A Step-by-Step Guide to Using Regression Therapy to Overcome the Effects of Childhood Abuse.* New York: Dutton, 1995.