

FREUD'S DREAM THEORY

It is generally unrecognized that Sigmund Freud's contribution to the scientific understand-

ing of dreams derived from a radical reorientation to the dream experience. During the nineteenth century, before publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the presence of dreaming was considered by the scientific community as a manifestation of mental activity during sleep. The state of sleep was given prominence as a factor accounting for the seeming lack of organization and meaning to the dream experience. Thus, the assumed relatively nonpsychological sleep state set the scientific stage for viewing the nature of the dream. Freud radically shifted the context. He recognized—as myth, folklore, and common sense had long understood—that dreams were also linked with the psychology of waking life. This shift in orientation has proved essential for our modern view of dreams and dreaming. Dreams are no longer dismissed as senseless notes hit at random on a piano keyboard by an untrained player. Dreams are now recognized as psychologically significant and meaningful expressions of the life of the dreamer, albeit expressed in disguised and concealed forms. (For a contrasting view, see ACTIVATION-SYNTHESIS HYPOTHESIS.)

Contemporary Dream Research

During the past quarter-century, there has been increasing scientific interest in the process of dreaming. A regular sleep-wakefulness cycle has been discovered, and if experimental subjects are awakened during periods of rapid eye movements (REM periods), they will frequently report dreams. In a typical night, four or five dreams occur during REM periods, accompanied by other signs of physiological activation, such as increased respiratory rate, heart rate, and penile and clitoral erection. Dreams usually last for the duration of the eye movements, from about 10 to 25 minutes. Although dreaming usually occurs in such regular cycles, dreaming may occur at other times during sleep, as well as during hypnagogic (falling asleep) or hypnopompic (waking up) states, when REMs are not present.

The above findings are discoveries made since the monumental work of Freud reported in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and although of great interest to the study of the mind-body problem, these findings as yet bear only a peripheral relationship to the central concerns of the psychology of dream formation, the meaning of dream

content, the dream as an approach to a deeper understanding of emotional life; and the use of the dream in psychoanalytic treatment.

Rudiments of the Dream

In his initial psychological work, Freud was led to the dream via his interest in neurotic symptoms. In his attempt to understand the meaning of symptoms, he asked his patients to associate freely, and in doing so they began to report dreams. He then treated the dream much like a symptom, amenable to the formation of associational links and susceptible to interpretation. Freud asked patients to report freely what came to mind in response to specific elements of the dream. The method of free association required the curtailment of the mind's tendency to judge, evaluate, and criticize, and thus block the natural flow of association.

This method, which is also the method used by the patient in revealing his thoughts and feelings in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, led Freud to clarify the meaning of the dream. The dream as reported is called the *manifest dream* and is the dream as consciously perceived and subsequently remembered. Freud discovered that behind the manifest dream could be uncovered a number of *latent* thoughts, and these thoughts were transformed by a process of dream work into the manifest dream. When the manifest dream was analyzed by the method of free association, the dream representation could be understood as an attempt at the fulfillment of wishes of which the dreamer was not consciously aware.

On the surface, such a proposition seemed even more radical than the view that the seemingly senseless and chaotic dream is an understandable part of psychological life; however, Freud presented evidence to support such a proposition. To support the *wish-fulfillment* theory, for example, one can point to the small number of dreams that are clearly wish-fulfilling even in their manifest content. Explorers deprived of food and drink dream of huge banquets and luscious, clear, thirst-quenching mountain streams. Also, some children's dreams are manifestly wish-fulfilling. A medical student who must report to the hospital early in the morning to make rounds dreams of lying in a hospital bed, and continues to sleep, comforted in the thought that she is al-

ready in the hospital. Such a dream is called a *dream of convenience*. The wish fulfilled is the universal desire to continue to sleep.

Such easily decipherable dreams are the exception, however; most dreams do not readily present wishes as fulfilled in the manifest content. Instead, the manifest dream is the end product of a process of disguise and distortion. To account for the masking of the wish, it is necessary to understand that the difficulty the dreamer experiences in recognizing his or her wishes is explained by the fact that the wishes that underlie the dream are unacceptable to the dreamer's ego. The wishes are objectionable on moral grounds or unacceptable because they lower self-esteem or produce anxiety, guilt, shame, disgust, or embarrassment. Thus, the wishes are unconscious, and the thoughts and feelings connected with such wishes are subjected to a *censorship* that interferes with ready access to conscious awareness. Many dreams that occur during a night's sleep are forgotten and fade away with awakening. The dream censorship also affects the retention of dream content: Thus, one may forget a dream because of the presence of a repressive force. Other similar defensive forces use a variety of psychological techniques to distort the representations of clear wish fulfillment. As an example of distortion, an unconscious hostile wish directed toward a loved one on the previous day may be presented in a dream by the dreamer's attempt to rescue the loved one from a dangerous and painful situation invented by the dream representation.

Psychoanalysis is interested in the varied sources involved in the formation of a dream. If we simply examine the dream on a manifest level, the dream is made of a large number of elements. The images of the dream may consist of previously experienced real events, waking thoughts, feelings, and ideas. Body sensations, memories from the previous day, or memories of experiences from the distant and even infantile past may find a place in the manifest dream. The immediate source for the dream is some psychological remnant, such as a longing, worry, or concern—some incomplete task from the previous day that has not been resolved and put to rest. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud offers several examples of such *day residues* that serve as precipitants to the imagery of the dream. Freud had a dream of turning over a colored picture of a plant in a monograph he had written. The imme-

mediate source of this dream was the sight of a new book about the plant, which he had seen the previous day. The dream was also instigated by a conversation Freud had on the previous day with a man on a topic related to the book he saw. The second instigator, the conversation, was much more emotionally meaningful to Freud than the sight of the book in the window. It is common for dreams to use indifferent recent memories to conceal other situations that stir emotion and conflict. It is also common for the thoughts about the current life of the dreams to evoke related memories from the past with which the immediate experiences resonate.

The Dream Work

The latent dream thoughts, stirred by the day residues, seek some form of expression. The vehicle for this expression, the means by which the latent dream thoughts are transformed into manifest dream content, is known as the *dream work*. Before embarking on a description of dream work, one should point out that the latent dream thoughts, when they are revealed through dream interpretation, follow the ordinary laws of logic and everyday speech. Latent dream thoughts are understandable as forms of expression in the optative mood; that is, "if only it were true that . . .," "given such and such a condition, I would wish that . . .," and other such ordinary means of expressing a desire.

The dream work is the vehicle and language available to the dreamer for expressing thought. The language resembles a rebus or pictographic puzzle more than a written language, in which words bear a clear symbolic relation to a referent. The mechanisms of dream work: *condensation*, *displacement*, *plastic representation*, and *secondary revision* (also known in older psychoanalytic literature as secondary elaboration). The first three mechanisms are archaic, prelogical modes of thinking. The last, secondary revision, is a component of rational, logical thought.

Condensation refers to the tendency to combine a number of latent dream thoughts into a more succinct element. Thus, in Freud's well-known dream of Irma's injection, which he discussed at length in the second chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the figure of Irma in the manifest content stands for at least seven

women including herself. Thus, a number of latent thoughts about women are condensed into a single manifest element. Displacement is a mechanism that allows the dreamer to shift the emotional intensity from one dream thought to another. Freud maintained that there is never any doubt about the psychological value of the latent dream thoughts. We know their value on the basis of our direct judgment, our shared humanity, empathy, and introspection. In the formation of the dream, however, the accent is shifted, the psychologically important is treated casually, and the seemingly innocuous in the manifest content may stand for the emotionally intense. Displacement is facilitated by the dream censorship, resistance, and defensive needs to conceal conflicted thoughts from the dreamer's ego. Freud was fond of illustrating the concept of dream displacement by the tale of a town in which a tailor had committed a crime punishable by execution. As the town had only one tailor but had three butchers, it was decided to execute a butcher instead.

The contents of the latent dream thoughts are also revealed through the processes used in constructing the dream. As primary process mechanisms are inadequate to express relations between dream thoughts, they may be expressed in the formal means available to the dreamer. Thus, a close connection between two events or people may be expressed by their occurrence simultaneously in time or by juxtaposing figures side-by-side in the manifest dream. Furthermore, causal relation in latent thought may be represented by a short dream sequence that introduces another dream. A contradiction may be expressed by a reversal. Various qualities about the dreamer's perception of the dream may represent components of the latent dream thoughts. Thus, the sensory quality of the dream may stand for ideas about clarity or vagueness, which are components of the latent dream thoughts. For example, a patient has a "vague" dream that expresses his view of the psychotherapist's interpretation of the previous day; it, too, was vague.

The dream work may also make use of a universal tendency to depict a psychologically important person, body part, or experience by a repertoire of common *symbols*. A father or the analyst may be represented by a king or president, a penis by a knife, a vagina by a cave, birth by water. These symbols, however, are traps for the unwary. In the absence of confirming associa-

tions, the psychotherapist will not be taken in by the facile glibness such symbols offer, but will explore their meaning via associations from the patient.

The third mechanism of the dream work is the capacity to form plastic representations of the dream thoughts. The dreamer tends to form visual images rather than to express formal relations among thoughts in conceptual terms. Occasionally, the images are in other sensory modalities besides the visual; auditory, kinesthetic, and olfactory are also used. Some dreams may lack all sensory qualities and be present only as thoughts, isolated ideas, feeling states, or single words.

The fourth factor responsible for the work of constructing a dream is secondary revision. This mechanism strives to make the confusion and seeming chaos of dream images and thoughts coherent and intelligible. The organized narrative and storylike quality of the dream is attributable to this factor. Occasionally, the dreamer will fit the dream contents to an available daydream from waking life, much as a Renaissance painter may choose to express personal infantile wishes for maternal care by making use of conventional Nativity iconography.

The dream work is the manner by which a dream is created; dream analysis and interpretation are the techniques by which the meaning is revealed.

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