Dream Interpretation and Understanding the Unconscious

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Abstract

Dreams can be defined as a succession of images, ideas, emotions and sensations which usually occur involuntarily, while sleeping. Many Psychologist such as Freud and Jung believe that dreams are a road to unconscious. I have here analysed the dreams of a patient of paranoid schizophrenia, a patient of dissociative identity disorder and a patient of postpartum depression so that we can better understand their unconscious and hence apply that knowledge to psychotherapy, so that it can go on more effectively.

I have also tried to analyse the dream of a mentally healthy person, who is in a distressful situation presently.

Objective:
To analyse the dreams of following people to understand their unconscious better:

- A patient of Paranoid Schizophrenia
- A patient of Post-partum depression
- A patient of Dissociative Identity Disorder
- A mentally fit person (presently in a distressful situation)
INTRODUCTION

People today have become very selective about interpreting the meaning of their dreams, they are more likely to believe and assign meaningful symbols to dreams, which are in line with their daily lives. This phenomenon is called motivated reasoning. Motivated reasoning is an emotion based decision making phenomenon.

The earliest recorded attempt at dream interpretation, comes from the Babylonian epic, "Epic of Gilgamesh", where mother of Gilgamesh helps him in interpreting his dreams.

Following this, Akkadim, tabulated a list of omens and called them Iškar Zaqīqu, (Zaqīqu is the dream god).

Asclepieions (temples) were constructed by ancient greeks to cure sick people, here dreams were considered omens from the devine.

Aristotle, was the first thinker, to believe that dreams are already a constituting part of psychology, he believed that a dream is not just a divine 'god-sent' phenomenon but is a manifestation of law of human nature.

In Psychology, over the time a lot of work has been done on dreams and their interpretation, but the most significant is Sigmund Freud's Dream Interpretation.

Freud's Dream Interpretation

Sigmund Freud, in his book, "The Interpretation of Dreams", first argued that all dream content happen because of motivation of wish fulfilment, and while a professional tries to interpret the different factors of a dream, she or he should pay attention to the activities, that happened, in the preceding day. This, he called, "Day Residue".

He further stated that special attention, should be paid on the dreams of working adults, as their dreams are subjected to distortion, which leads to the dream content being heavily hidden by the thoughts present in the unconscious. (This factor becomes all the more important today to professionals, as now days media heavily influences thought patterns and distortion increases, hence the real significance, remains concealed.)

Freud, believed dreams to be compromises, which according to him are, "A disguised, fulfilment of repressed wishes."

Freud also states that, "Individuals entirely disregards the apparant connections between the elements in the manifest dreams and collect the ideas that occur to you in connection with each separate elements of the dreams by 'free association' according to psychoanalytic rule of procedure. From this material you arrive at the latent dream thoughts, just as you arrived at the patient's hidden complexes from his associations to his symptoms are memories. The true meaning of the dream, which has now replaced
the manifest content is always clearly intelligible."

Freud, also talked extensively about nightmares, he believed, nightmares were the result of failure of "dream work", rather than contradicting the "wish-fulfilment" theory, such phenomenon showed the reaction of "ego" (level of consciousness) to awareness of repressed wishes. (Traumatic dreams were eventually admitted as exception to the theory.)

Freud famously described psychoanalytical dream interpretation as the, "royal road to the knowledge of unconscious activities of the mind."

Jung's Dream Interpretation

Carl Jung, believed Freud's dream interpretation was rather narrow in scope and limited.

Jung believed that dream interpretation had a much wider scope and can represent the whole of unconscious both personal and collective unconscious. (Collective unconscious term coined by Jung, refers to the unconscious mind of the same specie.)

According to Jung, dream material can be analysed in two ways, subjective and objective:

- **Objective Approach:** Every person in the dream refers to the person they are.
- **Subjective Approach:** Each person is a representation of an aspect of a dreamer.

Gestalt therapist support the subjective approach and say that inanimate objects in a dream can represent aspects of the dreamer.

Jung believed many archetypes appeared in the dreams as symbols or figures. Each of these represent an unconscious attitude which is hidden.

Jung specially warned professionals to first understand the client's personal situation, then attempt dream interpretation.

Hall's Dream Interpretation

In 1953 Calvin S. Hall developed a theory according to which dreaming is a cognitive process. He said that dreams were simply a collection of thoughts that an individual thinks while sleeping and that these are visual representations of personal conception.

He said while analysing dreams, one should keep in mind the cultural backgrounds and thoughts.

Frarday, Clift et al Dream Interpretation

In 1970s, Ann Frarday published books on 'do it yourself' dream interpretation.

A very important finding that has emerged from Frarday's writing, is that she notes, one finding has emerged pretty firmly from modern research namely, that majority of
the dreams is some way a reflection of things that have pre-occupied our minds.

In 2009, research scholars, Carey Morewedge and Michee Norton, in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that most people, think that, "their dreams reveal meaningful hidden truths."

In a cross cultural study conducted where people from the United States, South Korea and India participated it was found that 74% of Indians, 65% of South Korean and 56% Americans believed their dream content provided them with meaningful insights.

**CASES**

**CASE: 1**

Name: Raunak Awasthi (Name changed)

Age: 18 years

Occupation: Student (Preparing for JEE)

Father's occupation: Business Man

Mother's occupation: Housewife

Sibling: 1 Sister

Family type: Joint

Disorder Diagnosed: Paranoid Schizophrenia

Raunak Awasthi is a 18 year old boy, who has taken a drop year to prepare for engineering entrance exam. He is from Bhopal and has been living in Kota for two years now, this was his third year. He lives in a hostel owned by Bhalla family. He has a sister and lives in a joint family, he is not very attached to his parents but is very close to his paternal uncle.

He started by complaining of recurring dreams, which involved him walking in crowded lane, people would look at him and laugh at him, sometimes they would poke fun at him, sometimes they would suggest him alterations to his routine, sometimes they would mock him. He further said he dreams that two people are following him, one a male and one a female, he says they are probably brother and sister and they specially mock him a lot.

He further added that initially, in all these dreams, the public and the brother sister duo first seem very impressed by him but then something or the other happens and they start mocking him. These dreams started recurring to a level that he started avoiding sleeping. He started taking medicines and drugs to avoid sleeping and developed a "self-induced insomnia".
He came to the hospital, when, he started hearing these voices even when he was awake. These voices had become directional in nature, they kept giving him instructions of different sorts, and were mostly offering constructive criticism about his routine, his attendance to the classes etc. These voices had become so dominant that at times he started answering back to them. He stopped going to classes and started becoming weaker.

When he came to the hospital for treatment, he was visibly distressed and started shaking while talking and giving us his case history. The doctor then prescribed him medicines to stabilise him and started giving him psychoanalytic therapy. He asked him to maintain a journal, where he was to write his thoughts, feelings, actions, dreams, and what the voices say.

On later analysis of the case, it was found that, he did not share a healthy relationship with his sister, and there was too much competition within his family i.e. there was a lot of social comparison prevalent in his family. Moreover we also found that his sister was the preferred child amongst the both of them, hence there was a factor of jealousy involved.

Following the approach of Gestalt psychologist and Jung, we understood, that the people mocking him in his dream are all representing his friends and family, who mock him or comment on him, while he is awake.

Further the brother-sister duo are actually representative of his sister and himself, where he tries to mirror the routine of his sister to become the preferred child.

Once we completed our interpretation of his dream, his irrational beliefs and thought patterns could be identified and therapy could then be coupled with the medication, for overall wellbeing of the patient.

**CASE 2**

Name: Heba Ali (Name Changed)

Age: 32

Occupation: House wife

Husband's occupation: Service

Disorder diagnosed: Post partum Depression

Family type: Nuclear

Heba is a 32 year old housewife, she lives with her husband and a daughter, she has recently given birth to a daughter. She says she doesn't want to touch her and feels like crying after looking at her. She has given up all desires of nurturing the new born.
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She further complains of loss of appetite, sleeplessness and restlessness. She also dreams of repetitive nightmares, where she sees her, younger daughter using some spells or magic potions to gain the affection of the entire family. In some dreams, she complains that she has become invisible and her family forgets her. She also complains of losing her voice in her dreams and her new born baby laughing at her.

When we try to interpret all these dreams we see a common pattern, i.e. within all her dreams, she seems to become a victim of neglect from chiefly her husband.

On later sessions with her it was found that her husband is a very busy man and she stays at home alone usually, but when she was pregnant the second time, her husband paid extra attention to her, he even took leaves to take care of her.

She unconsciously harboured the belief that, for her husband their second daughter had become more precious and she would lose her importance when the child would be born and would hence face a lot of neglect. This irrational belief was leading to her disorder.

As Freud said, "Dreams are a royal road to unconscious." through Heba's dreams we could understand her unconscious and hence also catch the irrational belief, and we could administer CBT properly and efficiently.

CASE 3

Name: Vineet Jain (Name Changed)
Age: 28
Occupation: Unemployed
Education: Diploma in polytechnic
Marital status: Married
Family type: Joint.

Vineet Jain is a 28 year old man, he lives in a joint family, he recently lost his job, so his family decided to take him to an astrologer. The astrologer told him he was meant for a different devine purpose, and will be doing great deeds. He further told Vineet to start worshipping Lord Hanuman, twice a day, and told him to establish a relationship with him.

Vineet followed the instructions of the astrologer very strictly, he didn't miss even a day. Things went on smoothly in the beginning, but later problems started. He started having convulsions and started behaving like God Hanuman himself. He said Hanuman has chosen him to work for him. He started applying "sindoor" on himself and wore various string and beads. Scared of all this development his wife brought him to the hospital. When we questioned him he said, he becomes Hanuman and has
future visions. He said Hanuman comes here on earth to rescue mankind through him. We then asked him, when did all of this start, he answered saying a few months after they had met the astrologer. We further asked him how did all of this start, he answered that one day after offering prayers to lord Hanuman, he went to sleep, and dreamt of the astrologer taking him to Lord Hanuman, and when he bowed down to him in order to show respect, the Lord hugged him and entered him. He woke up feeling stronger.

These dreams continued for a long time and slowly he started believing he was Hanuman and changed his behaviour pattern completely. He now has phases when he is Hanuman there are phases when he is Vineet.

Through Vineet's Dream, we understand archetypes of Jung and the effect of culture on the unconscious of a personal. Within Indian culture we take astrology very seriously and hence we see, the effect of the astrologer's prophecy on Vineet.

**CASE 4**

Name: Shravan Kumar (Name changed)

Age: 43

Occupation: Unemployed

Disorder diagnosed: None, he is mentally fit

Shravan Kumar is a 43 year old healthy man, who has just lost his job and is in distress, he doesn't suffer from any mental disorder. He says he has repeated dreams of his college days, where he would, try to catch up on his pending work and his friends decide to not help him, he keeps struggling to complete his work and while struggling he falls in a pit, and from the pit he calls his parents, but no one shows up and then his mother comes but she is not able to help him and he stays in that pit. He wakes up at this point.

If we analyse each element of this dream, we find that his seeing his college is basically his missing his old carefree days, then we move on to the next element where he sees, he is trying to complete his pending work and his friends refusing to help him show that how he is trying to find opportunities but is failing to do so, and then finally him falling into a pit shows, his fear of falling in a desperate situation and not able to come out of it, then his mother not being able to pull him out, shows his fear that no one can help him in this situation.
CONCLUSION

Through my interpretation of people's dreams, I have found that dreams can help a professional to better understand a person's unconscious and hence provide better therapy and the client also becomes more receptive to therapies. Dream interpretation also help in strengthening therapeutic alliance, and helps a professional provide more client centric and goal oriented therapies. Dream interpretation when done with full involvement of the client, helps the client to better understand themselves.

REFERENCES


