

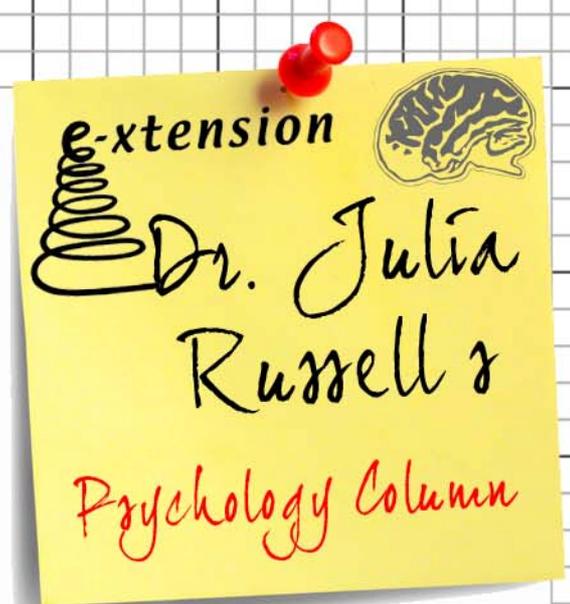
FREUD (1909) then and now

Freud (1909) is perhaps the most famous case study in psychology. 'Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy' is an extensive work (running to 140 pages in my copy), describing and interpreting the experiences, dreams and fantasies of a young boy who was studied by Freud and treated for his fears and anxieties. The case is summarised in the box opposite.

Figure 1 Sigmund Freud



Freud was interested in the role of infant sexuality in child development. He recognised that this approach may have appeared strange to people unfamiliar with his ideas but observed that it was inevitable for a psychoanalyst to see this as important. The case therefore focused on little Hans's psychosexual development and it played a key role in the formulation of Freud's ideas within the Oedipus Conflict, such as the castration complex.



Case aims:

- To describe an example of the illness and recovery of a young boy presenting with a phobia of horses using psychoanalytic interpretation.
- To offer advice on the treatment of the child.

Background:

- 'Little Hans' was nearly five when he was seen by Freud (on 30th March 1908) but letters from his father to Freud provide the bulk of the evidence for the case. These refer retrospectively to when Hans was less than three years old and were supplied to Freud through the period January to May 1908 (by which time little Hans was five years old).
- The boy was a lively, good-natured and cheerful child in general, although Freud was aware that he was atypical of other children in relation to his phobia.
- The father and mother were followers of Freud's theoretical views. Freud himself was aware of this potential source of bias.

Case history:

- From around three years of age, little Hans showed an interest in 'widdlers', both his own penis and those of other males, including animals. His mother threatens to cut off his widdler unless he stops playing with it.
- His father objected to Hans getting into bed with them.
- Hans's fear of horses worsened and he was reluctant to go out in case he met a horse. Freud linked this fear to the horse's large penis. The phobia improved, relating only to horses with black harnesses over their noses. Hans's father suggested this symbolised his moustache.
- The end of the phobia coincided with two fantasies. In one, Hans had children and when asked who their mother was, said 'mummy, and you're their Granddaddy'. In the second, a plumber fitted him with a bigger penis.

Conclusion:

- Freud's interpretation linked Hans's fear to the Oedipus complex, the horses (with black harnesses and big penises) unconsciously representing his fear of his father. The conflict arose as Hans was denied access to his parents' bed and therefore his mother's love (whereas his father did have) making his father a rival).
- Freud suggested Hans resolved this conflict as he fantasised himself with a big penis and married to his mother. This allowed Hans to overcome his castration anxiety and identify with his father.

Release of the Freud Archives

Oedipus in Greek Mythology

Oedipus, a legendary Greek King, fulfilled a prophecy foretelling that he would kill his father and marry his mother.

When the prediction is made, his father tries to abandon him to die but he is rescued and raised unaware of his parentage. After hearing the prophecy himself, he leaves his (adoptive) parents to avoid the fate but on his travels he kills the driver of a chariot in self-defence. The driver is his birth father, so Oedipus has accidentally fulfilled the first part of the prophecy. He later encounters a sphinx which stops all travellers into Thebes and tests them with a riddle: *What walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon and three at night?* The answer Oedipus gives "Man: as an infant, he crawls on all fours; as an adult, he walks on two legs and; in old age, he uses a walking stick" is correct and the sphinx throws itself into the sea. This frees the city from its harsh rule and the grateful people make Oedipus their king, so he marries the (now bereaved) queen, his mother.

Indeed, Freud's act itself has been the subject of psychodynamic interpretation. **Billig (1999)** observed that Freud considered horses to be symbols of sexual intercourse and furthermore that climbing the stairs, the exertion associated with which produces heavy, rhythmical, breathing extends this symbolism perhaps expressing Freud's sexual interest in Max Graf's beautiful wife.

In 2004, the Freud Archives released a number of key documents which helped to complete the context of the case of little Hans (whose real name was Herbert Graf). The released works included the transcript of an interview conducted by Kurt Eissler in 1952 with Max Graf (little Hans's father) as well as notes from brief interviews with Herbert Graf and his wife.

Such documents have provided some key details that may alter the way information from the original case is interpreted. For example, Hans's mother had been a patient of Freud herself. Another noteworthy detail was that Freud gave little Hans a rocking horse for his third birthday and was sufficiently well acquainted with the family to carry it up the stairs himself. It is interesting to question why, in the light of Hans's horse phobia, details of the presence of the gift were not mentioned in the case study (since it would have been possible to do so without breaking confidentiality for either the family or Freud himself).



Figure 2 Freud gave little Hans a rocking horse, introducing a sexual symbol into the household but did not mention Hans's attitude to the toy.



Hans's sexual knowledge

It is worth remembering that the case was set in an era when the availability of sexual knowledge for children was very limited and constraints on their behaviour much greater than we now expect. **Beirman (2007)** tells us that in January 1908 Max Graf wrote to Freud saying that his son had developed a fear that a horse would bite him in the street. Freud first suggested that the father provided sexual knowledge, eg that his mother and other females have no "widdlers" but this increased Hans's anxiety, prompting Freud to meet with Hans and his father and interpret the fear of the horse as fear of the father. While Max Graf helped Hans to understand some dreams and fantasies, he punished Hans for masturbation (and this was reinforced by Freud's attitude). Max Graf did not assist Hans's development by withholding knowledge of how babies are born, neither did Freud when he withheld any contrary suggestions.

Conflict within the Graf family

Information from the archived documents reveal much conflict within the Graf family. **Blum (2007)** concludes that "Trauma, child abuse [of Hans's little sister], parental strife, and the preoedipal mother-child relationship emerge as important issues that intensified Hans's pathogenic oedipal conflicts and trauma. With limited, yet remarkable help from his father and Freud, Little Hans nevertheless had the ego strength and resilience to resolve his phobia, resume progressive development, and forge a successful creative career."

On the other hand, **Ross (2007)** reports that the interviews with Max and Herbert Graf provide evidence of the psychological problems experienced by Little Hans's mother and her mistreatment of her husband and her daughter (who committed suicide as an adult). Ross suggests that "Reread in this context, the text of "A Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy" provides ample evidence of Frau Graf's sexual seduction and emotional manipulation of her son, which exacerbated his age-expectable castration and separation anxiety, and her beating of her infant daughter. The boy's phobic symptoms can therefore be deconstructed not only as the expression of oedipal fantasy, but as a communication of the traumatic abuse occurring in the home."



Figure 3 The three-way dynamic between mother, father and the child is, according to Freud, important for the child's development. However, this relationship had many additional problems.



Giraffes reconsidered

Wakefield (2007) reconsiders Little Hans's giraffe fantasy, which Freud interpreted as Hans's unconscious sexual desires for mother. Bowlby argued that attachment-related factors might alternatively explain such situations (though he did not explore this one in particular). A reconsideration of the giraffe fantasy suggests Bowlby's hypothesis is right - it is about the sibling rivalry triangle involved in caregiver attachment access, rather than (or as well as) the Oedipal triangle.



Figure 4 Freud's explanation of Hans's giraffe dream is only one possible interpretation.

Policeman, transference and supervision

Wakefield (2008) explores Hans's 'policeman fantasies', Freud's most direct evidence for specifically sexual Oedipal desire by Hans for his mother. Hans's father was a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society and was 'treating' his son's phobia. Psychoanalytic therapists are '**supervised**' ie their work is overseen by a more experienced therapist, in this case Freud. Perhaps the policeman fantasies are the first recorded **transference** fantasies about psychoanalytic supervision and the patient-therapist-supervisor triangle. This interpretation would provide an answer to the mystery which goes unaddressed by Freud's oedipal interpretation: Who is the policeman?

And in 101 years, little seems to have changed in terms of the way masculinity is defined for the individual, internally and socially. According to **Corbett (2007)** little Hanses are still emerging now.



Figure 5 Freud's explanation of Hans's policeman fantasy is only one possible interpretation.



Key terms

phallic fixation – the arresting of development as a consequence of a trauma experienced during stage of psychosexual development when the focus of the libido on the genitals (the phallic stage). This causes the expression of behaviours in the adult which are typical of childhood behaviours at this time.

projection – a defence mechanism in which the individual's own undesirable characteristics or feelings are attributed to others, so alleviating blame.

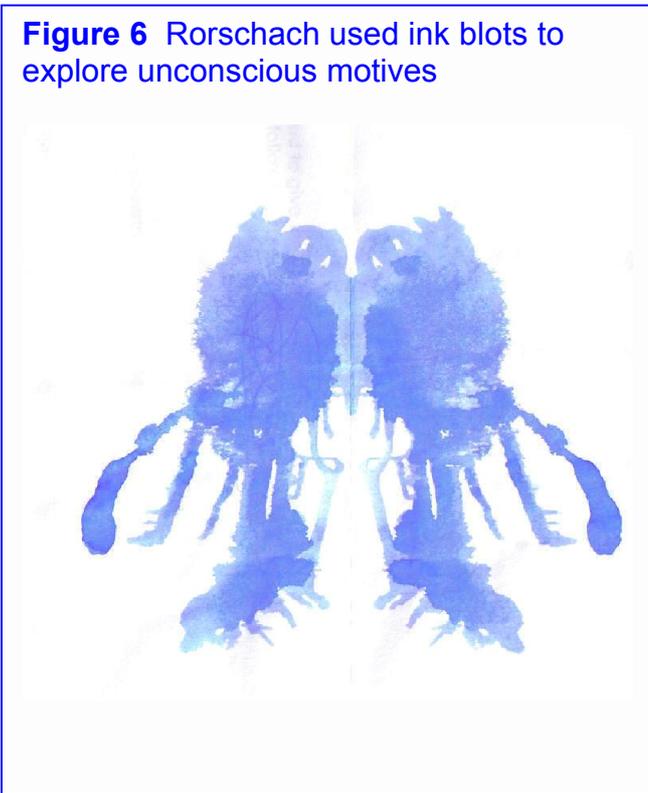
supervision – in a therapeutic setting the therapist is supported by a colleague. In the case of psychoanalytic therapy, the therapist themselves receives psychoanalysis.

transference – the redirection of emotions such as anger felt towards an individual (eg a parent) during childhood towards the therapist. This new relationship allows the client to express and work through their previously unconscious problems.

Activity

Before attempting this activity, discuss the ethical implications with your teacher.

Figure 6 Rorschach used ink blots to explore unconscious motives



Mogami (2010) explored psychosexual fixations and defence mechanisms in young Japanese women and found that **phallic fixation** was positively correlated with **projection**. This suggests that the two factors are related and provides support for the idea that phobias like Hans's can be psychosexual in nature as Freud suggested.

To test phallic fixation, Mogami used the Rorschach test. You could attempt to replicate this study using your own ink blots to measure phallic fixation. You will also need a measure of defence mechanisms. It is possible to use online quizzes (eg at: <http://quizilla.teennick.com/quizzes/981336/which-freudian-defense-mechanism-are-you>), though you should carefully consider the validity and reliability of such measures.



Questions

1. To what extent might the information, and lack of information, provided by Hans's father and Freud (reported by Beirman, 2007) have contributed to Hans's sexual fantasies?
2. **Gottesmann (2010)** has reviewed recent physiological evidence relating to dreaming and psychoanalysis.
 - a. He reports that **Maquet & Franck (1997)** showed how the amygdala (a brain area involved in processing emotional information) links to the visual cortex (so could also be involved in dream images) is active during REM sleep. How would this support Freud's ideas about dreaming?
 - b. Freud suggested that only traumatic events led to neurosis (**Freud, 1920**), and caused memories to re-enter the dreamer's consciousness and reappear in dreams on successive nights. Gottesmann suggests that current neurobiological data show an association between the hippocampus for recent episodic events, the cortex for long-term memories, the amygdala, and the visual cortex. How might such associations explain the emotional components of recurrent dreams?
 - c. Gottesmann also identifies a potential problem. A decrease in hippocampal influence during REM sleep, working through neurotransmitters in the cortex, allows emotional information from the amygdala to influence the nucleus accumbens (a region associated with reward and positive feelings). Gottesmann speculates that this may contradict Freud's idea that dreaming serves to protect us from emotional trauma. Why?

Stretch & Challenge

Use one of the following websites to explore the contents of the Freud Archives:

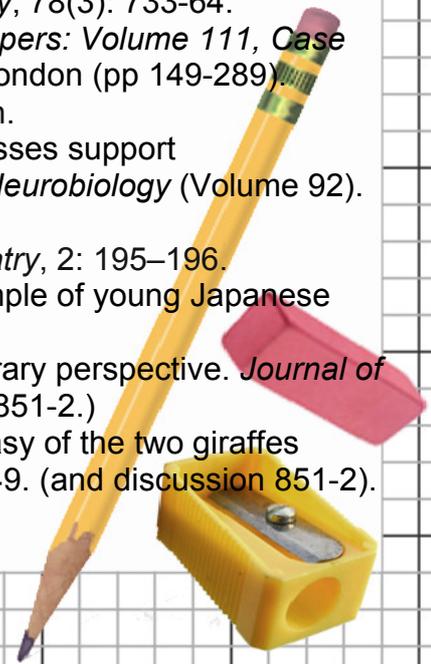
http://www.freudarchives.org/PDFS/finding_aid.pdf

<http://international.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxmlmss/eadpdfmss/2004/ms004017.pdf>

Look for some interesting facts about Herbert or Max Graf, and images of them. Make a poster to illustrate your findings.

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Answers

1. To what extent might the information and lack of information provided by Hans's father and Freud (reported by Beirman, 2007) have contributed to Hans's sexual fantasies?
Children are inquisitive about many aspects of life and ask questions. In the absence of accurate information about sexuality, and the provision of conflicting answers, may have caused Hans to be anxious about his own and other people's (or animals') sexual behaviour.
2. Gottesmann (2010) has reviewed recent physiological evidence relating to dreaming and psychoanalysis.
 - a. He reports that Maquet and Franck (1997) showed how the amygdala (a brain area involved in processing emotional information) links to the visual cortex (so could also be involved in dream images) is active during REM sleep. How would this support Freud's ideas about dreaming?
Emotional information from the amygdala could pass directly to the visual cortex during REM sleep without the need for activation of conscious visual memories thus allowing for the expression of apparently unconscious wishes.
 - b. Freud suggested that only traumatic events led to neurosis (Freud, 1920) and caused memories to re-enter the dreamer's consciousness and reappear in dreams on successive nights. Gottesmann suggests that current neurobiological data show an association between the hippocampus for recent episodic events, the cortex for long-term memories, the amygdala, and the visual cortex. How might such associations explain the emotional components of recurrent dreams?
Emotions in recurring dreams could be the result of activation of activation of emotions in the amygdala and associated emotional memories in LTM which then appear as visual episodes in dreams via the visual cortex during REM sleep.
 - c. Gottesmann also identifies a potential problem. A decrease in hippocampal influence during REM sleep, working through neurotransmitters in the cortex, allow emotional information from the amygdala to influence to the nucleus accumbens (a region associated with reward and positive feelings). Gottesmann speculates that this may contradict Freud's idea that dreaming serves to protect us from emotional trauma. Why?
As emotions in the amygdala are predominantly negative (eg anger and fear) the influence of the amygdala on the nucleus accumbens would be to reduce positive feelings. This is contrary to Freud's idea that the manifest content of dreams protects us by disguising negative emotions from the unconscious.

