

Summary of Freud's (1918) study: a study of the Wolfman

Background

- Freud developed a theory, the main focus of which was how the unconscious is, by far, the largest part of the mind and has great influence on the individual.
- Freud used case studies to gather in-depth, detailed data about an individual. He used methods such as free association, dream analysis and slips of the tongue to try to uncover an individual's unconscious wishes, desires, thoughts and fears.
- This study only looks at the Wolfman's key dream and Freud's initial analyses of the dream, it does not cover the complete history of the patient's illness, treatment and recovery.
- Freud believed in the power of therapy and was interested in the origins of mental illness. Freud's type of therapy was called psychoanalysis. This led him to develop his theory of dreams & dream analysis.

Aim

Freud wanted to try to explain and treat Wolfman's psychological problems through dream analysis.

Sample

Sergei Pankejeff was a Russian aristocrat born in 1886 in Odessa. Freud gave him the pseudonym 'Wolfman' to protect his identity.

Method

(i) Research method/design

- This was a **longitudinal case study** which gathered in-depth, detailed information about the infantile neurosis of Sergei Pankejeff – the Wolfman. Freud carried out a series of interviews from 1910-1914 – so it was a longitudinal study.

(ii) Outline of the study

- Freud reported that:

(i) Sergei's initial relationship with his father was excellent and that he aspired to be a 'gentleman' like him.

(ii) In 1906, the Wolfman's older sister, Anna, committed suicide by poisoning herself and he began experiencing symptoms of depression. In 1907 his father overdosed on sleeping pills, so also committed suicide. Soon after, the Wolfman began seeking treatment for his own depression and, in 1910, his physician took him to Vienna to have treatment with Freud.

(iii) The Wolfman's early years had been dominated by a serious neurotic disorder which began shortly before his fourth birthday as anxiety hysteria (animal phobia) and then turned into an obsessive-compulsive neurosis, religious in content, the effects of which persisted into his tenth year.

- Much of Freud's analysis of the Wolfman's infantile neurosis centred on a dream that he had as a young child – shortly before his fourth birthday. *The dream: 'I dreamt that it is night and that I am lying in my bed (the foot of my bed was under the window, and outside the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter in my dream, and night-time). Suddenly the window opens of its own accord, and terrified, I see that there are a number of white wolves sitting in the big walnut tree outside the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were white all over and looked more like foxes or sheepdogs because they had big tails like foxes and their ears were pricked up like dogs watching something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. Obviously fearful that the wolves were going to gobble me up I screamed and woke up. My nurse hurried to my bedside, to see what had happened. It was some time before I could be convinced that it had only been a dream, because the image of the window opening and the wolves sitting in the tree were so clear and lifelike. Eventually I calmed down, feeling as if I had been liberated from danger, and went back to sleep.'*

The dream was described by the Wolfman in slightly different ways on different occasions.

Results

Manifest Content	Latent Content
× The wolves watching Sergei as a boy	× The dream was a result of Pankejeff witnessing at a very young age a 'primal scene' of his parents having sex. The wolf symbolised his father.
× The tree in the dream	× A Christmas tree as the dream occurred at Christmas time, where there would have been Christmas present there were wolves. × Represented the white bed linen and underclothes of his parents.
× White wolves	× Pankejeff had an unconscious desire to be seduced by his father (like the pleasure of receiving Christmas gifts). Gifts = wolves = his father. Freud believed he wanted to experience the pleasure he had seen in his mother's face but believed his mother must have been castrated (no penis) by his father during the sex act.
× Wolves in the tree	× He feared his father's power and developed castration anxiety (fear of losing his penis).
× Feared the wolves would eat him	× Symbolised large penises which were a threat to the boy.
× Wolves having big tails	



Overall: Pankejeff repressed his unconscious fear of his father but displaced it onto wolves.

Conclusions

- **The unconscious mind can have significant influences on human behaviour.**
- Traumatic events can be repressed into the unconscious and repressed memories can be projected to the conscious mind.
- Phobias may be caused by childhood experiences which have been repressed into the unconscious mind.