
Commentary

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Although Freud's theory of dreaming has been alluded to in most of the papers, perhaps in greatest detail in Ellman's paper (Chapter 2), generally only one or another aspect of the theory has been cited, depending on its relevance to the particular point at issue. At the risk of being too schematic I would like first to give a quick overview of the theory, which I will use as a point of reference for my comments on the various papers.

In a masterful review chapter, Freud (1900) started by rejecting theories of dreaming that treated dreams as the mind's effluvium or waste product, a position revived by Crick and Mitchison (1983) most recently, and thus Freud rejected the position that dreams were without intrinsic meaning or significance, a position taken by Hobson (1988). Freud also rejected theories that treated dreams as having generic meanings such as might be interpreted by using a dream book, which I might add, are still in circulation, and similarly he rejected theories that interpreted dreams as oracular messages which had some one meaning that had to be divined.

In place of these explanations he proposed a complex set of propositions, which for the first time explained dreams as the immediate product of certain complex mental processes that in turn were related to other mental processes embedded in individual life experiences and the history of the dreamer. A dream could not be fully understood without knowing both the nature of the mental processes producing it and the relevant particulars of the dreamer's current and past life. Thus his theory required both stipulating the nature of those mental processes producing the dream and obtaining the dreamer's associations to the dream; only in this way could one arrive at some understanding of the dream.

There are two basic presuppositions underlying all of Freud's theorizing which apply equally to dreams as to any other mental product: The assumption of a psychological unconscious and the assumption that this psychological unconscious causes changes in conscious experience and action. Once we understand how these causes operate we can then infer the nature of what is going on unconsciously. Otherwise put, the unconscious is seldom ever transparent, and even when it appears to be transparent, as described in Gillman's instructive paper (chapter 7) about dreams in which the analyst appears undisguised, we are still dealing with transformations of unconscious influences.

I would like to stress the importance of these two presuppositions in Freud's theorizing, because it is the basis for his distinction between the latent and manifest dream. If you discard this distinction, then you are also discarding his first basic assumption that consciousness cannot be understood without postulating the existence of unconscious processes. He further postulated that the unconscious processes at work causing the conscious dreams were of a different nature from those generally at work in the waking state. They followed primary process rules in which the principle of identity was violated so that one dream element could be two different things (or people) at the same time, or two different places at the same time, and in which the asymmetric directionality of time could be violated so that chronology could be reversed or two events occurring at different times be made to happen at the same time. In addition to condensation and timelessness he further identified displacement, representability, symbolization, and secondary elaboration or revision as the other unconscious mechanisms which produced the conscious or manifest dream. Language also

suffered a sea change. Words, for example, in his terminology were treated as “things” and could lose their referential function as counters in meaning. By “thing” one can read that they are treated purely phonetically or graphemically, so that words totally different in meaning could be run together either in speech or as written. The sum result of all these mental operations resulted in a conscious dream that to the waking mind would appear bizarre, irrational, and a collage of seemingly unrelated and impossible combinations but whose underlying meaning could only become clear through understanding the operation of these unconscious causes and obtaining the dreamer’s associations.

He further theorized that these unconscious primary process mechanisms, constituting what he called the dream work, operated upon thoughts, feelings, memories and desires, much as defenses such as repression, reaction formation, and projection operated upon unconscious thoughts, feelings, memories and desires during the waking state. The person was the same person whether asleep or awake, but because of what he considered to be the regression in mental functioning brought about by sleep, the nature of these defensive operations changed. This regression, marked by a weakening of repression, allowed otherwise repressed desires and wishes potentially greater access to consciousness.

The last important piece of Freud’s dream theory had to do with the role of motivation in the form of wishes derived from instinctual demands. In perhaps his most fundamental and controversial formulation of how the mind works, he postulated that these wishes were always striving to reestablish a condition of previous gratification by the shortest possible avenue which results in the hallucination of gratification. This strong push, however, runs into problems because this immediate gratification creates dangers in the form of loss of love, loss of the object, castration, and loss of self-regard. More circuitous routes are found that utilize the primary process mechanisms of the dream work so that some modicum of wish fulfillment is achieved without encountering the dangers to be avoided. There are further considerations involving psychic energy, which I would need to spend too much time to explicate fully; I will only say that the notion of cathexis central to the concept of psychic energy, which functions as the impetus, or initiating cause, setting all this complicated mental

machinery in motion, has a counterpart in cognitive psychology where it is called activation. Elsewhere I have tried to spell out the functional parallels between the concept of cathexis and activation (Shevrin, 1997). Parenthetically, I will note that the philosopher of science Quine (1957) has observed that no science can do without something like an energy concept if it wishes to explain phenomena.

This complex and imposing edifice of theory, which also undergirds Freud's theory of neurosis and development, cannot easily be picked apart, accepting this aspect and rejecting that, without the whole edifice collapsing. The theory is also very much in need of testing on a variety of levels, psychological, clinical, and neurophysiological. It is, of course, true that one need not work with this theory at all, which applies to several of the papers I will comment on later.

Two of the papers, Blechner's (chapter 1) and Ellman's (chapter 2), present interesting hypotheses concerning the ways in which several important aspects of Freud's dream theory can be tested through brain physiology and anatomy. Ellman cites his research on what many would believe is one of the more esoteric of Freud's concepts—drive strength. He has demonstrated that there is an inverse relationship between drive gratification and the need to dream. Ellman's findings not only support the important role of motivation in dreams, which has also been supported more recently by Solms's neuropsychological lesion studies (2000), but links such support to the REM sleep state. If these findings are replicated, a most important piece of Freud's dream theory receives independent support—the role of motivation and motivational strength as dream instigators.

Blechner hypothesizes that dream condensations may draw upon two different brain mechanisms, one for perceptual recognition and one for individual identity. If this hypothesis can be supported it would provide a neuroscience explanation of one primary process mechanism—condensation. I have one reservation about this explanation, based in part on clinical experience. Often condensations are simply fusions of two different people. In a recent dream, one of my patients identified a dream figure as a condensation of her dance instructor and a younger image of her father drawn from a family photograph (note how the principle of identity is violated). But I have also encountered condensations of the kind described by Blechner. Perhaps then there

are different kinds of condensation with concomitantly different neurophysiological instantiations.

“Blechner’s second hypothesis is to me of great interest. He states that the specifics of bizarre dream experiences may clarify what are the different stages of perceptual processing” (p. 39). Charles Fisher formulated a similar hypothesis on the basis of his pioneering subliminal studies in which he found that images obtained following subliminal stimulus exposures often incorporated piecemeal perceptual features of the exposed stimuli in odd combinations in addition to whole objects (Fisher, 1957; see also Shevrin, 2003). We now know that the visual system is comprised of some thirty discrete perceptual feature analyzers, which need to be “bound” together before a unified object is perceived. The dream work may draw upon these perceptual fragments and enlist them for its own needs, producing in this way various displacements and rebuslike formations.

Blechner also calls attention to a potential difficulty in Freud’s dream theory concerning the point at which sensory or perceptual information is available to dream formation, which for Freud could only occur at the time of dreaming. Again it was Fisher who pointed out, on the basis of his subliminal investigations, that primary process transformations were at work in the recovery of subliminally registered stimuli into daytime images (Shevrin, 2003). These images, along with many other preconscious registrations, were subject to the same primary process transformations as dream thoughts and thus might provide some of the dream content. In a manner of speaking, dreaming begins behind our eyes during the daytime and only becomes conscious as dreams during sleep.

As further evidence for the relationship of primary process mechanisms to dreaming, I would like to cite briefly a sleep–dream subliminal study I conducted with Fisher (Shevrin and Fisher, 1967). Borrowing directly from Freud’s theory that dreams were constructed on the same principles as a rebus, I had devised a rebus stimulus—a picture of a pen and a knee forming the word *penny*. The subliminal effects of this stimulus could be measured in several different ways relating to Freud’s conception of primary and secondary process mentation. On a primary process basis, one could look for penny and its associates, like nickel, dime, money. On a secondary process basis, one could look for associates of pen such as ink and paper, and for

associates of knee, such as leg and bent. One could also look for clang associates of pen such as *pennant* and *open*, and clang associates of knee such as *neither* and *any*. Note how the rebus and clang associations treat words, not as referential counters in meaning, but as concrete sounds that can be combined to form a new entity, much in the way in which a condensation forms. Words, in Freud's terminology, were being treated as "things."

The rebus stimulus was presented subliminally before subjects retired to sleep. They were awakened following REM periods and stage 2 NREM periods. Our hypothesis was that the primary process transformations would be present following REM awakenings, and the secondary process transformations following NREM awakenings. This is exactly what we found. What I would like to stress is that the subliminal stimulus was operationally unconscious and remained so, only appearing later in transformed ways. Fiss, Klein and Bokert (1966) found similarly that TAT stories obtained right after REM awakenings were characterized by more bizarre, primary process stories than after NREM awakenings. These studies provide evidence that the mind simply works differently during dreaming sleep than during nondreaming sleep. Moreover, the nature of the difference appears to accord with Freud's conception of primary and secondary process mentation.

The evidence from the Ellman, Solms, Shevrin and Fisher, and Fiss, Klein and Bokert studies supports Freud's dream theory in two particularly important ways: (1) the importance of motivation and drive strength as dream instigators, (2) the importance of primary process transformations of unconscious latent contents. Any clinical use of dreams should keep this evidence in mind.

When we now turn to a consideration of the largely clinical papers, we encounter a diversity of approaches and theories, each presented ably and claiming to have arrived at a valid understanding of the dream in question. As I read the papers I wondered how to make theoretical sense of these different approaches and how to decide which might in fact be correct. I would like to use two criteria for evaluating this diversity of approaches: (1) In what way is the approach in accord with or departs from Freud's theory and with what consequences? (2) To what extent is the approach in accord with whatever

evidence we have about the nature of dreaming drawn from other sources, such as the kind of sleep-dream research previously cited.

Two authors, Fosshage (chapter 3) and Bromberg (chapter 9) and to a lesser extent, Blechner (chapter 1), wish to emphasize the importance of the dream as a manifestly coherent if difficult to understand representation of important internal states. For Fosshage, the dream is a metaphor that is capable of being "read off." He explicitly discards the distinction between latent and manifest content and along with them the need for dreamwork, primary and secondary process mechanisms, and motivational or drive strength. In short, he rejects the essentials of Freud's dream theory. He appears to gain a relatively easy entrée into what seem to be important state representations, which in Freudian theory would be accounted for by the work of secondary revision and would thus not be at the heart of the dream's meaning. Here we have a potentially testable hypothesis.

But I believe Fosshage also loses a great deal theoretically, which he may not in fact be ready to accept. As I tried to show in my brief account of Freud's dream theory, the distinction between latent and manifest is the dream form of a basic presupposition concerning the relationship between conscious and unconscious processes. Get rid of the distinction between latent and manifest and you also get rid of that distinction. There is thus no role for unconscious processes. The dream metaphor arises directly into consciousness. The "elusiveness" of the dream metaphor is caused by such factors as poor dream recall and lack of clarity in the dreaming process itself. But he also identifies as factors, difficulty in understanding the meaning of images from a waking perspective, and difficulty in making sense when juxtaposing two different states, waking and sleeping. With these two factors in mind, he appears to be saying that something different happens in dreams from waking life. Perhaps Fosshage has dealt with this elsewhere, but, in order to have a viable theory, he would need to specify what those differences between waking and sleeping states were, and how they are different from Freud's ideas. He would also have to deal with the evidence previously cited that motivation and drive strength are intimately involved with dreaming, and that one difference between waking and sleep mentation appears to follow the primary process rules which do not produce a coherent dream narrative.

Bromberg's view (chapter 9) that dissociated states of the self surface in dreams, which again can be read off from the manifest content, presents a more complicated position. Insofar as the states are dissociated, some mechanism must be posited that produces the dissociation. Presumably, once dissociated, the state of the self exists in some unconscious condition and there is something about the sleep state that undoes this dissociation. Thus Bromberg would need to specify these additional processes in order to make his theory work. As with Fosshage, he would also need to account in some way for the findings that motivation and motivational strength play an important role in dream formation, and that at least some of the dream mechanisms appear to follow primary process rules.

If Fosshage and Bromberg can be said to have a concept of unconscious processes, it is of a dispositional rather interactive nature. For Freud, unconscious processes are in constant interaction with conscious processes. The latent unconscious dream thoughts are driven by underlying motives to become conscious or be enacted. For Fosshage and Bromberg, at best the unconscious is a dispositional alternate state waiting to become conscious when a change in state from waking to sleep allows it to happen. Once conscious its meaning is available. Very little in additional data is necessary. There is thus no need to postulate defensive alteration of dream content, underlying conflict, and certainly no distinction between latent and manifest. In effect, the edifice of Freudian theory cannot withstand this drastic an overhaul. Their views constitute a different conception about how the mind works. Whether it is better or truer remains to be seen. As previously noted, their understanding of dreams would not find it easy to account for the role of motivation, or the nature of primary process mechanisms.

Several authors rely on a rebuslike treatment of dreams insofar as their interpretations often hinge on seemingly trivial dream features such as the raw, red noses in Lippmann's dream. Blechner takes a position intermediate between that of Fosshage (chapter 3) and Nersessian (chapter 4), Goldberger (chapter 10), and Peskin (chapter 11), on the role of manifest themes and concrete details. He maintains that the analysis of the concrete details should fill out and support the manifest theme, and that if they do not then something is wrong in the interpretive process. As it stands, this is offered as an assertion or

intuition without any support. From the standpoint of Freudian dream theory there is no reason to believe that secondary revision would need to be consistent with the associations to specific dream elements. Here we have another hypothesis that could in principle be put to the test.

As best as I could determine, Nersessian, Peskin, and Goldberger appear to base their work with dreams primarily on Freud's dream theory. Goldberger demonstrates that the same processes may be at work in daydreams, although at times I was hard put to distinguish what she meant by a daydream as opposed to larger category of fantasies. Her work with daydreams is consistent with the position taken by Fisher (Shevrin, 2003) that some waking mentation can be quite dreamlike in its mechanisms and formation. Peskin stresses deception and self-deception as motivations developed under evolutionary pressure for resorting to disguise. Nersessian suggests that too much attention to the transference implications of dreams may blind us to potentially rich material and he gives several convincing examples to illustrate his point.

Finally, I would like to say a word or two about Paul Lippmann's paper (chapter 8). He describes himself as the offspring of two very different traditions: the clinical interpersonal tradition in New York City, and the Rapaport chapter 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900) seminar tradition at Austen Riggs. How his analytic DNA must have boiled and corkscrewed with that mixture! But in a more serious vein, these are two of the traditions very much in evidence in this symposium. Lippmann takes a reflective stand with respect to each. He observes trenchantly that the "vanity of modern psychoanalysis, particularly in the increasingly dominant relational form, is seen in the belief that we have achieved significant progress and have come a long way in our theory and in our technique over the last one hundred years. I think this assumption can be argued" (p. 183). Although he grants that maybe "it could all make sense, if one had the desire and patience to apply Rapaportian learning to Freudian creation (our secular version of the relationship of Talmud to Torah, from which much of the spirit of psychoanalysis arose)" (p. 182). He offers a sentiment with which I agree, and makes a fitting close to my discussion, "I believe it important not to assume we are better at our work than were the originators."

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