Chapter 8: Dream Theories

Freud

• Believed that most behavior is motivated by powerful unconscious forces, mainly sexual and aggressive impulses.
  - Some of it too disturbing to think about when awake, or socially unacceptable
  - Yet, the “pressures” from these forces need to be released, else mental illness
  - Hence these forces are expressed in dreams as “wish fulfillment.”
  - But, dreams are not direct expressions of the desire or wish, since that might be too emotionally disturbing and be remembered by or waken the sleeper.
  - Instead, the latent content (the wish that is expressed in the dream) is disguised (censored by the “censoring agent”) as something less disturbing, termed the manifest content (what you remember), drawing on less disturbing memories from daily life.

From Freud’s text:

Happily married man may unconsciously desires to have an affair with his neighbor. To think about this idea may be too disturbing, so it remains unconscious. But it continually exerts pressure for expression, which manifests in a dream as “wish fulfillment.” When the dream is remembered on awakening, however, …[it has been censored]… transforming it to disguise the unconscious desire. The unconscious content is called the “latent content.” The remembered dream is the “manifest content.” For example, the man may remember the dream as being in a business partnership with his neighbor.

Freud

• Latent content is disguised into manifest content through several mechanism. Examples:
  - Symbolism: a symbol (manifest) replaces an action, person, or idea (latent).
  - Condensation: one dream object (manifest) stands for several associations and ideas (latent).
  - Displacement: a dream object's real emotional significance (latent) is replaced by a less threatening one (manifest).
Fun with Freud’s sexual symbols

• Phallus:
  – Things that jut out: mountains, rocks, sticks, umbrella’s, poles, trees, etc.
  – Body penetration: knifes, daggers, lances, guns, cannons, etc.
  – Objects from which water runs: pipes, watering pots, fountains.
  – Aerials: balloons, airplanes, rockets

• Female genitalia:
  – Hollow objects: pipes, pits, caves, vessels, bottles, boxes, suitcases, pockets, closets, stoves, ships.
  – Houses with entrances: passages, doors, chapels, windows.
  – Fruit symbolizes breasts

• Any kind of playing = masturbation

• Any rhythmic activity = intercourse
Fun with Freud’s sexual symbols

- Baldness, hair cut, teeth falling = fear of castration

Freud

- Dream analysis:
  - Free association: While describing their dreams, patients are instructed to talk, without self judgment, about anything they want to.
  - Therapist does “symbol substitution” to infer latent content
  - Therapist uses dream analysis to understand patient and improve mental health.
  - Practiced by some today, but heavily criticized.
    - Is theory correct? Does therapist know best?
  - In any case, Freud’s great contribution was to draw attention to the unconscious.

Jung

- Initially a Freud protégé, but broke off with own theory.
- Individuation: Integration of conscious and unconscious. A built-in mechanism to become psychologically healthy (achieve “emotional balance”)
- Dreams promote individuation by serving as a communicator between conscious and unconscious, to establish harmony.
  - broken ladder rung example
- To Jung, unconscious includes repressed feeling, instincts, memories, and “collective unconscious”

- Collective unconscious contains “archetypes” that are expressed in dreams
  - “Predispositions, instincts, or elements” inherited from primitive humans
  - Culturally universal
  - Key archetypes
    - *Persona*: Image of self that we attempt to present to the world
    - *Shadow*: Parts of self poorly integrated into personality; “renounced parts of self”
    - *Anima*: Male element of female unconscious
    - *Animus*: Female element of male unconscious
    - *Ego*: Ones conscious identity; thinks it’s the “big dog” of the psyche
    - *Self*: totality of psyche
  - Dreams can serve to enlighten rather than just being a veiled expression of the unacceptable. Dream analysis should facilitate integration.
Hall (1950s)

- Drew conclusions from thousands of dreams from normal folk.
- Deemphasized censor, manifest vs. latent content, archetypes.
- However, agreed with Fred/Jung on many observed aspects of dreams, including: unconscious influences, wish fulfillment, and common themes and content (e.g., Oedipal complex).
- Dreams are about things of personal importance; reveals aspects of the true self (e.g., see world as dangerous => victim of aggression in dreams).
- Dreams can help reveal the dreamer’s conflicts and problems (so dreams interpretation may be useful).
- However, therapist not necessarily needed to interpret.

Activation-Synthesis (most modern)

- REM-on circuit deactivates the motor system. Sensory information is not being processed or is processed at only a minimal level. Hence the brain is isolated from the outside world.
- Areas of the brain that store memories of all types remain active.
- Freed from the constraints of perceiving and acting in the physical world, the brain generates essentially random activity (activation).
- However, there is a natural tendency for the brain to impose order on its perceptions and thoughts; hence synthesis of random activation into a mental model.
- But decreased activity of and influence from of the prefrontal lobe places limits on this.
- Also different parts of the brain may be generating conflicting images or movement.
- The result is non-lucid dreams that are experienced as real and mostly sensible, but can contain bizarre elements.

Activation-Synthesis

- Implications for dream interpretation
  - Dreams are not initiated by the unconscious with a preconceived purpose and there is no censor agent. We remember actual content.
  - Rather, the random activation of different brain areas, combined with the brain’s innate drive to synthesis (to make a mental model), creates the dream content and flow.
  - However, because our daily life – including its emotional component – provides the memory content that is activated, dreams may still be useful for self-insight.
    - Thoughts and feelings that may be unsettling and largely ignored or repressed while awake may manifest in dreams.
    - Dream content may appear to be symbolic, but is better described as imprecise.

Activation-Synthesis

- Hypothetical example of symbolism
Activation-Synthesis

• Danger in over-interpreting dream content

Summary

• Controversial area
  – Are dreams meaningful or purposeful?
  – Are dreams necessary?
  – How can dream theories be differentiated scientifically?
  – What do dreams imply for the nature of the mind?