

A Case of Borderline Personality Disorder: An Explanatory Study of Unconscious Conflicts through Dream-Analysis

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Abstract : Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is an invasive presence of affect instability, disturbance in self-concept and attachment in relationships. The profound indicator is the dichotomous approach of the world in which the ego categorizes individuals, especially their significant others, into secure or threatful beings, leaving little room for a complex combination of characteristics in one person. This defense mechanism of splitting their world has been described through the explanatory model of unconscious conflict theorized by Sigmund Freud's Electra Complex in the Phallic Stage. The central role is of the father with whom the daughter experiences penis envy, thus identifying with the mother's characteristics to receive the father's attention. However, Margret Mahler, an object relation theorist, elucidates the central role of the mother and that the split occurs during the pre-Electra complex stage. Amid the 14 and 24 months of the infant, it acknowledges the world away from the mother as they have developed milestones such as crawling. In such novelty, the infant crawls away from the mother creating a sense of independence (individuation). On the other hand, being distant causes anxiety, making them return to their original object of security (separation). In BPD, the separation-individuation stage is disrupted, due to contradictory actions of the caregiver, which results in splitting the object into negative and positive aspects, repressing the former and adhering to the latter for survival. Thus, with time, the ego distorts the reality into dichotomous categories, using the splitting defenses, and the mental representation of the self is distorted due to the internalization of the negative objects. The explanatory model was recognized in the case study of Fizza, at 21-year-old Pakistani female, residing in Karachi. Her marital status is single with an occupation being a dental student. Fizza lives in a nuclear family but is surrounded by her extended family as they all are in close vicinity. She came with the complaints of depressive symptoms for two-years along with self-harm due to severe family conflicts. Through the intervention of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), the self-harming actions were reduced, however, this libidinal energy transformed into claustrophobic symptoms and, along with this, Fizza has always experienced vivid dreams. A retrospective method of Jungian dream-analysis was applied to locate the origins of the splitting in the unconscious. The result was the revelation of a sexual harassment trauma at the age of six-years which was displaced in the form of self-harm. In addition to this, the presence of a conflict at the separation-individuation stage was detected during the dream-analysis, and it was the underlying explanation of the claustrophobic symptoms. This qualitative case study implicates the use of a patient's subjective experiences, such as dreams, to journey through the spiral of the unconscious in order to not only detect repressed memories but to use them in psychotherapy as a means of healing the patient.

Keywords : borderline personality disorder, dream-analysis, Electra complex, separation-individuation, splitting, unconscious

Conference Title : ICAP 2019 : International Conference on Abnormal Psychology

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : July 22-23, 2019