

Dreams with animals in psychotherapeutic process

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Summary. The study focuses on dreams in which images of animals occur. It contains a detailed analysis of three dreams coming from patients in long-term therapy. The platform for understanding of the dreams was formed by one of the current theories of dreaming which defines the dream as a function serving to consolidate and integrate the emotions from waking life. The analysis of dreams itself was not biased by any psychotherapeutic school but resulted from objective research data. It consisted of three steps. In the first step of the analysis, dream emotions were defined in accordance with the theory of continuity as real dreamers' emotions originating from waking life. In the second step, the animals in the dream were analysed on the basis of research evidence as the dreamers' own tendencies. In the third step, the preliminary interpretations were further verified in the psychotherapeutic interview itself. The synthesis of the obtained data showed that the animals in dreams can be interpreted as instinctive impulses of dreamers. It has also been suggested that the theory of continuity in the context of dream content and the symbolic function of dreams can merge into one and the same process.

Keywords: Dream analysis, theory of continuity, psychotherapeutic process, symbols in dreams

1. Introduction

Animals are a stable part of our dreams. In their classic work in 1966 with a sample of 100 women and 100 men, Hall and Van de Castle found that animals were present in 6% of men's dreams and 4% of women's dreams (Domhoff, 1996). Van de Castle (1983) later showed that 7.5% of our dreams contained some type of animal. Similar conclusions are also suggested by current authors. For example, by following a series of dreams of a male participant for 23 years, Schredl (2013) concluded that 6.85% of dreams involved an animal. In a later study of a similar nature with a female participant for a period of 30 years, it was 11% (Schredl, 2021). According to research, domesticated animals, especially dogs and cats, have the highest frequency of occurrence in dreams (Lewis, 2008; Schredl, 2013, 2021; Schredl & Blagrove, 2021).

Theory of continuity may offer an explanation for animals in dreams. The theory suggests that "dreams are continuous with waking life" (Hall & Nordby, 1972, p.104), and therefore the dream contains primary contents and emotions related to waking life. In the context of dreams with animals, continuity theory presents much research evidence. Lewis (2008), for example, has shown that animal rights activists report more frequent dreams with animals compared to the U.S. statistical norms established by Hall and Van de Castle (in Domhoff, 1996). It has also been found that dog owners or persons in close contact with dogs have more frequent

dreams with dogs than those who are not in close contact with dogs (Schredl et al., 2020). The analysis of a long dream series also found that the number of cat dreams decreased in the studied participant who stopped living with cats, and conversely, the number of dog dreams increased when the participant lived in the immediate vicinity of a dog (Schredl, 2013). This evidence suggests that the frequency of contact with animals in the waking life also has a significant effect on the frequency of animals in the dream life.

However, animals in dreams are likely to have a deeper meaning than continuity theory suggests. Indeed, research has consistently shown (e.g., DeCicco, 2007, Domhoff, 1996; Krippner et al., 1974; Schredl, 2021; Schredl & Blagrove, 2021; Van de Castle, 1968, 1994) that most interactions with animals have an aggressive context in our dreams (e.g. threat, fight, attack, injury, etc.). This differs significantly from waking life, in which we are exposed to aggressive interaction with an animal only exceptionally and a maximum of several times in our lifetime. This is one of many arguments that allows us to consider that "animals in dream express personal issues of the dreamer in a metaphorical way" (Schredl, 2013, p. 63). However, the symbolic function of animal dreams and the theory of continuity should not be understood as opposite starting points, but rather complementary ones. For example, Schredl (2021) described a higher frequency of lion dreams in a female participant, and it was found that this dreamer was often encouraged in her waking life to be as brave as a lion. Such examples suggest that although the image of an animal appears in a dream on the basis of interactions from waking experiences (direct experience, spoken word, etc.), there is a probable relationship to the dreamer also from a symbolic point of view. In other parts of the work we will discuss this relationship.

Interpretation of dreams at the level of object and subject

Historic dream interpretation methods include many psychotherapeutic concepts that points to the symbolic nature

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of dream images. Sigmund Freud (2010) understood animals in a dream as a substitute for other objects found in the waking life of a dreamer. Images of animals such as a fish, a cat, a mouse or a snake symbolized the genitals of a dreamer, small animals or insects could represent children, and larger animals like a lion could represent authority. This approach, which perceives dream objects (e.g. animals) as real characters from the life of a dreamer, has remained relevant until now not only in psychoanalytic approaches, such as psychodynamic psychotherapy (Cabaniss et al., 2011, Gabbard, 2017) or psychoanalytic psychotherapy (Ogden, 2004, Rothhaupt & Hau, 2014), but also in some others, including individual psychotherapy (Fábik, 2019) and integrated psychotherapy (Kusý & Knobloch, 2017).

A different approach was represented by Carl Jung (2017) who claimed that contents of unconscious mind are constantly projected into one's surroundings. Jung therefore often understood the characters in the dream as personality traits of the dreamer, with animals specifically being the animal component of the dreamer. A related view was also held by the representative of gestalt therapy Fritz Perls (1996), who stated that all objects in a dream and all its elements are projections, in other words, they are part of the dreamer's personality. He explained that we ourselves are the creators of the dream, and whatever we put into it must be something that is inside of us. Daseinsanalysis is one of the approaches that assume that the dream image of an animal reflects a certain specificity of the dreamer's experience. Its leading representative, Medard Boss (1977), argued that the dream image must be considered only as the image which the dreamer perceives. For example, a dog in a dream is just a dog. Its appearance lets us know that the dreaming person was touched by something, was close to it, from the dog's way of life.

We could also describe other psychotherapeutic approaches, but each of them would be more or less inclined to one of the two approaches mentioned above: dream animals as a symbolic of other objects in the life of the dreamer (interpretation of dreams at the level of the object), or animals as part of the dreamer's own experience, (interpretation of dreams at the level of the subject). In practice, it is possible to meet many authors who use both approaches in the analysis (e.g. Fromm, 2013, Yalom, 2017), but the theory of a particular psychotherapeutic approach is usually based on the preference of one of these concepts.

Animals as symbols of intrapsychic dynamics

During the decades of their existence, both approaches have proven their validity with many case studies and examples of dream analysis. However, when we take into account the strict scientific evidence based on objective research criteria, it can be said that the interpretation of dreams at the subjective level prevails. Roesler's (2020, 2018a, 2018b) studies have shown that symbols in dreams, including animals, can be interpreted "as symbolic images for parts of the psyche (e.g. unmet needs or aggressive impulses), that are not yet integrated into the whole of personality" (Roesler, 2018a, p. 316). In one study (Roesler, 2018a), the dreams of 15 patients who underwent analytical psychotherapy were analysed. After the end of psychotherapy, independent assessors received a series of 10 - 20 dreams covering the entire course of psychotherapy, with no additional information about the client. Dream analysis found that at the beginning

of psychotherapy, patients in their dreams were often threatened by various characters or animals. During treatment, as the power of the ego in waking life grew, dreamers became increasingly able to cope with conflict and threat even in a dream. For example, in one dream series (Roesler, 2018b), a patient was repeatedly threatened by dogs at the beginning of psychotherapy. In later stages, this threat turned into disgust, until eventually the dog symbol disappeared. Roesler explains that during psychotherapy, the patient recognized, accepted and constructively resolved his (aggressive) impulses and stopped experiencing their threatening power with the image of dogs.

The interpretation of dreams at the level of subject was also confirmed by other authors. For example, when referring to patients with dissociative identity disorder (formerly multiple personality disorder) Barrett (1994) described dream characters which appeared as their individual personalities (alters). Barrett (p. 174) also assumes that "people without dissociative disorders can have similar dreams about various aspects of themselves that could be represented this way."

Also in our study (Fábik, 2020) where we compared the current knowledge in the theory of dreaming, we supported the interpretation of dreams at the level of the subject. Strong parallels have been shown between the current dream theory defined by the integration and consolidation of emotional stimuli from waking life (e.g. Cartwright, 2010, Hartmann, 2010, Hill, 1996) and Jung's (2017) theory of compensation, which argues that with a one-sided conscious attitude life dreams occur with strongly contrasting content, which reflects the psychological self-regulation of the individual. We also outlined the common ground in Hartmann's (2010) statement that the integration of emotions helps create our emotional existence, or our perception of ourselves, and Perls' (1996) statement on the nature of dreaming as the integration of personality.

Evidence of animals as symbols of intrapsychic dynamics can also be found in research focused on the frequency of dream contents. Nejad et al. (2005) showed that frightening animals are more frequent in the dreams of depressed people. As we know from psychotherapeutic practice, depression is often associated with the suppression of negative emotions (e.g. Langner et al., 2012), which allows us to assume that frightening animals express suppressed impulses. The research by Miller and colleagues (2015) examined the effect of meditation treatment in anxiety and depressed patients was also similar. It found that after the meditation period, a significant decrease in the number of animals in the dreams and a level of anxiety and depression in waking life were observed. It can be suggested that meditation alleviated some internal conflicts, which also led to a decline in animal dreams.

On the other hand, many studies have criticized the interpretation of dreams at the level of the object (e.g., Domhoff, 2000, Cheniaux, 2006, Zhang & Guo, 2018), repeatedly stating that there is no empirical data confirming animal images as symbols for real characters from waking life. For the sake of completeness, let us add that there is an effort among psychotherapists to support the interpretation of dreams at the object level with their own demonstrations, but objective research evidence is absent. This is one of the reasons the view that animals in a dream represent the dreamer's own impulses seems to be a more reliable starting point.

Animals in a dream and instinctive impulses

The findings of some authors allow us to think about the specific nature of impulses, which are visualized in the form of animals. Jung (2017) suggested that the animals in a dream signify a purely animalistic and carnal life. His views are shared by many of his followers. Hannah (1954, p. 55), for example, assumes that “each animal represents a different instinct”, and Platek (2008, p. 108) speaks of animals in dreams as the “deepest layers of instinctual wisdom”. Gestalt therapists, led by Perls (1994) consider the occurrence of animals in our dreams as a projection of personal impulses. For example, predatory animals such as dogs or crocodiles, are seen as a projection of our aggression. Boss (1977), in turn, hypothesized that the image of the animal suggested that the dreamer was attracted by something of the animal’s behaviour. All these authors share the idea that the animal in a dream expresses impulses which are typical exclusively for animals; they are animalistic, instinctive. In our study (Fábik, 2020), we also stated that animals as organisms relying exclusively on their instincts can signify our instinctive impulses in dreams. Different interpretations cannot be dismissed of course, however, this idea reasonably explains why the appearance of animals in people’s dreams is so common – instinctive behaviour is inherent to animal existence.

If we accept these assumptions, we can then consider why most dreams with animals involve an aggressive interaction (e.g., DeCicco, 2007, Domhoff, 1996; Krippner et al., 1974; Schredl, 2021; Schredl & Blagrove, 2021; Van de Castle, 1968, 1994). In waking life we humans are exposed to many moral dilemmas, complicated thoughts, or conflict situations that can lead to some instinctive impulses being perceived as unacceptable or threatening. With these impulses, the probability of their suppression or repression increases. Since the dream contains mainly unprocessed (non-integrated) impulses and emotions (e.g. Hartmann, 2010), we can deduce from this that an unacceptable, threatening impulse in waking life will have a threatening, aggressive context in a dream, and this can be depicted in the form of an animal.

The instinctive impulses represented by the images of the animals allow us to explain another research conclusion, that children have more animal dreams than adults (e.g. Domhoff, 1996; Schredl & Blagrove, 2021; Strauch & Lederbogen, 1999). We can assume that children are close to their animal nature and are influenced by many instinctive impulses, which are generally less urgent in adulthood (e.g. playfulness, curiosity, etc.), which probably results in more animal dreams. According to many researchers, the increased frequency of animal dreams in children can also be caused by animated programs with animal characters or children’s animal toys, but this theory has not been supported by any research yet.

Current study

Our study presents three dreams containing animals. Every dream comes from a different patient. The aim is to analyse selected dreams in accordance with current research findings and, based on these, consider the symbolic nature of animal dreams. Work with dreams does not privilege a specific psychotherapeutic system, but uses a system which bases the analysis on current and empirically verified start-

ing points. We suggest the reliability of the interpretation of dreams is improved if it does not result primarily from the worldview of the psychotherapist, but rather, stems from objective research view. Specific procedures are given in the *Analytical Procedure for Dream Interpretation* section.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The patients are three women who have undergone long-term therapy. The first suffers from anxiety-depressive disorder, the second from depressive disorder and the third from panic disorder. Their dreams were selected for publication primarily because of the good memorability by the patients. The second factor was the openness of all three patients to the method of dream interpretation, which increased their engagement and motivation while working with the dream. More information about individual patients is given at the beginning of each dream.

2.2. Analytical procedure in the interpretation of dreams

In the analysis of dreams, we used a current theory of dreaming, which defines dream function as consolidation and integration of our emotions from waking life (e.g., Cartwright, 2010; Hartmann, 2010; Hill, 1996). This theory created a consistent platform in the context of which we interpreted the data obtained from patients. The work with the dream itself used three steps. In the first and second phases, we analysed dream emotions and dream contents as the two most important aspects of a dream for its interpretation (e.g. Boss, 1977). By analysing these components, we developed the preliminary interpretations, which we verified in the third step via the ongoing psychotherapeutic interview. A more detailed description of all the steps follows:

2.2.1 Analysis of dream emotions

We considered the dream emotions (emotions which the person experiences during a dream) as the patient’s own emotions coming from his or her waking life, which are consolidated and integrated via dreaming. This definition of dream emotions follows from the theory of continuity, which has reliably demonstrated that dream emotions are a continuum of waking emotions (e.g. Hartmann, 2010; Komasi et al., 2018; Mikulinger et al., 2011; Selterman et al., 2014; Serpe & DeCicco, 2020; Schredl & Reinhard, 2010; Sikka et al., 2018). For this reason, many authors recommend searching for the same emotional dynamics in dream analysis - the one that takes place in both the dream and waking life (e.g. Totlis, 2011). This can lead to significant new patient insights in a very short period of time (Hartmann, 2010). For example, if a patient feels satisfied or relaxed in a dream and then begins to experience sadness under the influence of a certain situation, it means that the patient has likely experienced the same emotions (emotional dynamics) in his waking life. We also applied this knowledge in our analyses. First, we let the dreamers thoroughly describe the emotions experienced in the dream, and as part of the creation of the interpretation, we considered that these were the dreamer’s own emotions coming from waking life.

2.2.2 Analysis of dream contents

In accordance with several studies (Barrett, 1994; Fábik, 2020, 2021, Roesler, 2020, 2018a, 2018b), we defined the dream contents (dream-occurring animals) as impulses of intrapsychic dynamics of patients themselves. To specify these impulses in more detail, we invited patients to use their imagination to empathize with and personify the animals in the dream. For example, if the dreamer feels that the bear in the dream is furious or aggressive, we view the presence of this dream bear as a symbol of the dreamer's impulse of fury or aggression. Subsequently, we assign a specific emotional experience analysed in the previous step to the given impulse.

2.2.3 Determination of interpretation

By analyzing dream emotions and dream contents, we obtained a preliminary interpretation, formed by an impulse (symbolized by a certain animal) and the associated emotion. We subsequently verified our preliminary interpretation in the same psychotherapeutic interview. For this purpose, we used some specific psychotherapeutic questions (e.g. "What would your life look like if you had the characteristics of a given animal in a dream" or "Can you think of something in that respect?"). These questions helped us clarify the impulse in a dream from a psychodynamic point of view. The fact that we were able to clarify the occurrence of impulse and emotion in a dream in accordance with the personality structure of the patient and his or her basic psychodynamic conflict serves as an additional verification of the reliability of our interpretation. In addition, each patient has accepted and acknowledged the interpretation.

3. Case studies

The following case studies present a detailed procedure for the analysis and interpretation of dreams. Given the reasonable scope of the present publication, the first part of the dream analysis, dealing with dream emotions, is paraphrased. The second part of the work with the dream, which analyses dream images of animals, is a transcript of the interview and presents the complete and accurate structure of the conversation. We can notice that some aspects of the dream were left without specific analysis, such as the dream environment or other details, reflecting the notion that it is more beneficial to know the core of the dream than each of its elements (e.g. Fromm, 1998; Hartman, 2010; Yalom, 2017).

3.1. Patient 1

The first patient is a 25-year-old woman suffering from anxiety-depressive disorder. The dream in which the dreamer confronted the fox comes from the initial meetings of therapy. Therapy was successfully completed after 46 sessions.

"I walked through the forest until I got to a forest clearing. I saw several animals there. Owls, kitten, piglet, even an alligator. At first glance, my attention was drawn to a huge trunk of a tree that lay on the ground and was overgrown with moss. I decided to go near it. On the way, a fox jumped on me and tried to bite me in the throat. I felt the alligator going petrified for a moment, and the owls were looking at me. I tried to figure out how to get rid of the fox and how to defend myself. At that moment, it was

as if my mind had entered the body of an alligator, who was heading towards us, and the fox ran away into the forest. I was in my body again and in my mind I was trying to thank every animal I met here."

In accordance with the above analytical procedures, in the first step of the analysis we focused on describing the emotions in the dream. The patient stated that the beginning of the dream was carefree and pleasant. When she saw the animals in the forest clearing, she was surprised and fascinated by this extraordinary experience. However, after the fox attack, the experienced emotions suddenly changed. Feelings were replaced by intense anxiety and fear for one's life. Anxious emotions persisted until the fox ran away. Then there was relief.

Based on the continuity hypothesis, we will operate on the assumption that all emotions in a dream are a continuum from the waking life. This means that all the emotions mentioned, including joy, surprise, anxiety and relief, are emotions that the patient has already experienced in wakeful life are current and salient. We therefore paraphrased her words and the described emotions in the dream and then asked about their occurrence in her waking life. The patient stated that she felt similarly very often. She often experiences feelings of contentment, freedom from worries. These are sometimes suddenly replaced by intense anxiety, until finally relief occurs. However, she had no idea why she had dreamed of animals or why she had been attacked by the fox. The only association was her interest in embroidery, in which she often encounters the fox pattern. The analysis of this image was carried out with the following interview:

D. F. Please tell me. Could you empathize with the fox? How was she, how did she feel?

P. The fox felt threatened. She was threatened by me, so she attacked..

D. F. So she felt threatened. She was scared. Can you think of anything else? What was she like?

P: She was so unpredictable.

D. F. On the one hand, she attacked, on the other hand, she was startled because she felt threatened. So, overall, you perceived her as unpredictable. Can you sense any other characteristics of her?

P. Unpredictable, crazy (laughs) ... so unforeseeable ... Probably this.

D. F. Unpredictable, almost crazy. Are these her basic characteristics or can you think of any others?

P. No, especially that she was crazy ... unpredictable.

D. F. All right, now try to imagine that you are the fox. That you would have all those characteristics. You would be like her, unpredictable, crazy in a certain context. What would it look like?

P. I can't imagine that. I am the exact opposite of this. I always think about everything, I analyse what is best (laughs). I also analyse each person and then choose what I will do, how I will react.

D. F. You're right, it's hard to imagine. Still, try to imagine that you are have all of the characteristics and feelings of the fox. What would be different in your life?

P. *Hmm ... I would be like an unguided missile ... irresponsible. I couldn't be stopped. I would do what I want.*

D. F. *Unguided missile?*

P. *Yeah, I probably wouldn't care what anyone else thinks ...*

The patient's last responses indicated that the fox symbolized, in accordance with the above studies, her own impulse. It is an impulse leading to fierce ("I would be like an unguided missile") and assertive ("I couldn't be stopped") action, which could result in living life according to one's own intention and according to the patient's own needs ("I would do, what I want"). In a dream, however, the image of a fox is accompanied by anxiety, which in accordance with the theory of continuity means that in waking life, the impulse of assertion and satisfaction of one's own needs must also be experienced with anxiety. Just as in a dream the fox attacks the dreamer and causes her anxiety, so in the waking life the impulse of assertion and fierceness "attacks" and causes the patient anxiety. An escape from a conflict experience is living life according to the expectations of others, overlooking one's own needs and trying to satisfy others. Not surprisingly, the patient developed depression.

The reliability of the presented analysis is evidenced by several aspects. The first is the respect for the current theory of dreaming. Many examples by various authors perceive dream emotions as a fulfilled wish of the dreamer, escape or anticipation. In these cases, the interpretations come into conflict with the theory of continuity, which understands dream emotions as the real emotions of the dreamer coming from waking life. In our case, however, the harmony between dream and waking experience is maintained. The second aspect which increases the reliability of the interpretation is the work with the dream, which results exclusively from the information from the patient. This largely prevents the influence of the therapist's own projections. And the last, extremely important fact remains the acceptance of the interpretation by the patient herself, who quickly became aware of specific areas of life, where the tendency for fierceness and assertion appears. The family background in relation to the mother and her partner were mentioned.

From a long-term perspective, the psychotherapeutic process also confirmed our interpretation. During this process, the patient gradually recognized and accepted her inner impulses until she mentioned the following dream at the penultimate meeting of the therapy:

"Every morning, when I went to work, I was accompanied by a strange dog. But always only to the end of a certain sidewalk, from there he never went further, not by a bit. After a few days of building trust, I tried to pull him by the paws so he could walk a little more with me, but he refused. Over time, the dog began to look forward to me, wagging his tail when he saw me. I felt that we had built a relationship, and he went further beyond his original boundary."

The patient herself intuitively understood this dream, which was reflected in her affection when she talked about it. She knew that from now on she would be friends with her inside, with her impulses. She knew something had changed. When I said she had become a friend of herself, tears streamed down her cheeks.

3.2. Patient 2

The patient is a 27-year-old woman suffering from depressive disorder. Her dream with the bison was analyzed at the 18th session. The therapy is still ongoing.

"I was on Devínska Kobyla (a mountain in Slovakia) and suddenly a bison appeared from the forest. I tried to run from him. Whenever I thought I managed to run away from him, he reappeared behind me."

Similarly to the previous case, dream emotions were first analysed. At the beginning of the dream, the patient described a huge surprise and shock at seeing a bison. Furthermore, she felt anxiety from being followed, which was interrupted by short-lived feelings of security at times when she thought she had definitely escaped the bison. Even in this case, it is clear that these are real emotions from waking life. Based on the mentioned emotional dynamics, we can assume that in the waking life the patient has impulse that causes anxiety. We further verified this assumption by analysing the dream content, specifically the bison.

D. F. *When you saw the bison in your dream, what characteristics would you attribute to the bison? It's strange to attribute characteristics to a bison, but still ... What would you say, what kind of bison is in your dream?*

P. *He was huge and he was beautiful. He was so ... so really "bison-like". If you wanted to imagine a bison, he was the perfect "bison" ... just stunning.*

D. F. *So he was immense, huge. You also used the word that he was "bison-like".*

P. *Yes, yes. He was perfect and being himself.*

D. F. *Perfect being himself... OK, and in general what is your association with a bison?*

P. *With power.*

D. F. *With power... ehm.*

P. *Maybe even with some unpredictability. The bison looks very calm and when it runs, it crushes everything.*

D. F. *Ehm...*

P. *It has such a counter-acting forces inside. Peace on one side and a huge destructive force on the other.*

D. F. *So he was immense, huge, perfect in being himself. You perceive the bison as a strong animal, in which peace is combined with destructive energy, destructive power. And does anything else occur to you in the context of that dream? Can you feel any more characteristics?*

P. *He knew he was to follow me, and he was very determined, very consistent, so deliberate. He stood watching me for a moment until I did something. And I don't really know if he wanted to crush me completely ... because he didn't catch up with me. And he could. Perhaps...*

D. F. *Perhaps? What are you thinking?*

P. *Maybe he didn't want to hurt me. Although I was afraid of him.*

D. F. *And do you have any feeling, intuition, what he might have wanted from you? Because you don't think it was the crushing ...*

P. Well, now I feel like ... maybe was supposed to tell me something. But not by talking, but ... by thought ...

D. F. Um, and let's try to develop the imagination, what would he tell you?

P. I don't know, I can think of something like "Don't give up". I don't know why I think it would be "Don't give up"

D. F. I suppose that bison is your own impulse ... to be strong, stunning, perfect in yourself. It even gives you support ... it says "Don't give up". And it is interesting for me that even though you have this amazing personality side somewhere inside of you, you are afraid of it in a dream and you run away from it. Why run from your strength?

P. Maybe because I'm afraid it can be destructive.

D. F. Ehm... ehm...

P. And maybe because it's hard to accept ... like the bison on Devínská Kobyla (No bison actually lives on the Devínska Kobyla mountain.). He does not belong there.

D. F. Ehm, interesting thought...

P. As if I felt or was worried that this was not acceptable for the society.

D. F. Um, yeah, I understand why you're running from that force. And if we bridged it into the waking life ... when you imagine that you would "take" those characteristics of the bison, if you were not to run away from them, but you would take everything that the bison has... that greatness, that power, that balance, what you feel from that bison, what would your actions look like in everyday life? What would change?

P. I probably wouldn't be afraid to speak in my full voice. That's such nonsense, but I'm fully aware that several times I wanted to ... I wanted to put something out of myself, but instead my throat closed up.

D. F. Ehm...

P. I would go forward towards my goal, which I do not yet know what exactly is, but I would know to follow it like the bison. In a sophisticated way, but also with force ...

D. F. Yes, I understand ... as you said, the bison was so focused.

P. Yes, yes, he was completely focused on the goal. He didn't notice other people at all.

D. F. Um, is there anything else you can think of? Would the power of the bison appear elsewhere? You mentioned the voice, you mentioned the goal ...

P. I would probably be more determined with respect to the work - to work as I like. Although it might not quite suit the family situation. And it occurred to me that I would defy the status I have in my family. I don't mean in my family right now ... husband, children. I mean in my original family.

D. F. The status being?

P. I'm the youngest halfwit there. What can I really know about everything ... about life and such.

D. F. And what is the risk of standing up to it in your family?

P. My father probably wouldn't talk to me for the rest of his life. Mom, I think she'd get used to it somehow... she'd cry for a while and she'd be fine. It would be quite a strong argument with the oldest brother ... so really "comprehensive". And with the middle brother, I can't imagine that the middle brother wouldn't perceive me as that little ... fool.

The psychotherapeutic conversation led us to the idea that even in this dream the animal symbolizes the dreamer's own impulse. In our case, the image of a bison symbolized the impulse of strength, fighting ability or focus. However, the patient does not experience this tendency in her waking life, as she fears that she would remain unaccepted ("difficult to accept") and cause more conflicts (e.g. "father would probably not talk to me for the rest of his life", "it would be quite a strong argument with the eldest brother"). The patient thus gives up important impulses that would enable her to assert herself adequately in life and to satisfy her own needs. We see that if the patient would accept her own impulses, her behaviour and experience would change fundamentally in her waking life ("I would not be afraid to speak in my full voice", "I would pursue my own goal", "I would work the way I like to"). Our psychotherapeutic hypothesis, therefore, states that accepting these tendencies will be essential for alleviating the depressive symptoms.

We should also notice the theory of continuity, which remains valid in this dream. Anxiety and fear in the waking life from one's own impulse of strength and fighting ability are manifested in the same way in a dream, specifically by fear of a strong and destructive bison.

3.3. Patient 3

The last patient is 34 years old. She suffers from panic disorder and her dream with orangutans was analyzed at the 38th session. The therapy is still ongoing.

It was like a situation from an American teen movie. There were several young couples with the men/boys having a very wild party without their female partners. Suddenly, alien orangutans - large males - began to appear in the dream and started turning into humans. They took on the form - they disguised themselves - as young men. They were like their clones, they wanted to enjoy themselves, dominate ... I was afraid of them. One of them wanted to rape a young girl under the car, but she managed to run away. We started running to safety away from them.

From the patient's statements, we learned that the dream contained a short section at the beginning, which could be called emotionally neutral. Although it was a visually appealing image (wild party), it was not accompanied by any intense emotion. Only with the arrival of orangutans did the experience change. Significant anxiety arose, which continued to escalate as the story unfolded. From an emotional point of view, therefore, it is a similar dream as in the previous cases. Again, we are witnessing that the image of the animal evokes anxiety in the dreamer. Let's look at the structure of the interview in its analysis:

D. F. Tell me, orangutans are significant characters in the dream. Can you describe them? How were they? Or what characteristics did they have?

P. *It's like they're saying something like I'm going to conquer it here. They wanted to expand ... something like that.*

D. F. *Yes, I understand, they wanted to expand. Can you think of something else?*

P. *They wanted to satisfy their needs...*

D. F. *And would you be able to empathize with them? How were they? What were their characteristics?*

P. *Hm...hm... aggressive, self-centred?*

D. F. *Aggressive, self-centred?*

P. *I think so, yes.*

D. F. *You are little uncertain about that. Not convinced?*

P. *They were like that. They certainly were aggressive ... dominant ... and self-centred.*

D. F. *Ehm, and you can also think of some other characteristics?*

P. *Not really.*

D. F. *Well, those orangutans then disguised themselves as ordinary people, so they looked like young boys. Can you empathize with them as well? Can you name any of their characteristics?*

P. *Well, they were so "stupid." They had a blank look, like from a movie ... when someone is controlled by someone else.*

D. F. *Yes, blank look. Do you know what was that look like?*

P. *Probably cold ... no emotions, nothing, just machines.*

D. F. *Nothing, no emotions...ehm. Can you think of anything in relation to that? It seems like you have the urge to assert yourself, maybe be a little self-centred ... but on the other hand, you may be disguised ... and you're cold on the outside ...*

P. *Yes...*

Based on this interview, we can presume that orangutan signifies the patient's anxiety around experiencing her underlying impulse of aggression and egocentrism. This impulse is completely foreign to the patient when we consider her moderate behaviour in waking life ("alien orangutans"), but it is probably of great intensity ("large males"). If we develop these considerations further and suggest that animals or other characters symbolize the dreamer's impulses, we can suppose that just as orangutans disguise themselves as humans in a dream, the impulse of aggression or egocentrism disguises itself as emotional coldness or indifference in wakeful life. This idea was confirmed to us by the dreamer herself, who was fully aware of her behaviour in waking life. In an extensive interview, which we do not publish, she described a strong impulse to assert herself at work and to be extremely critical of her bosses and colleagues. Outwardly, however, the patient behaves coldly, with learned and pre-thought-out "formulas" like a machine.

Let us add that in this case there was a living memory of an orangutan in waking life. At the end of the analysis, the dreamer told how she was fascinated by a scene at the zoo a few years ago. The female orangutan guarded her young.

She didn't take her eyes off him, and whenever the baby orangutan moved away, the female pulled him back to her. A male sat a few feet above them. He was huge, he looked strong and dominant. He oversaw everything. It was clear that he could intervene quickly and aggressively in case of any emergency.

For interest, we shall add the patient's dream from the following session. In that dream,

she saw a woman carrying a large exotic frog on a tray. It was colourful, toxic to humans, but with a curious, enthusiastic, playful look, like a small child. Suddenly the frog was on me and I felt it stung me on my back. I was afraid the poison might kill me.

Although the dream appears to be different in content, after analyzing the animal in the dream, we came to a similar conclusion as in the case of the transforming orangutan. The frog looks enthusiastic and playful on the outside, but in reality it threatens the dreamer with an aggressive poison. The dreamer behaves similarly - on the outside it looks harmless, but it carries the impulse of "aggressive poison". The dream therefore showed us a similar hiding of personal impulses as in the case of the image of an orangutan.

4. Discussion

The presented work with dreams and the resulting interpretations respect current research findings in the theory of dreaming. In each analysis, we perceived dream emotions as real emotions coming from waking life that are consolidated and integrated through the dream process (e.g., Cartwright, 2010; Hartmann, 2010; Hill, 1996). We were also able to observe the same emotional dynamics in each dream in waking life, thus remaining in line with another paradigm in the issue of dreaming - the theory of continuity (e.g. Hartmann, 2010; Komasi et al., 2018; Mikulinger et al., 2011; Selterman et al., 2014; Serpe & DeCicco, 2020; Schredl & Reinhard, 2010; Sikka et al., 2018). We also applied the research findings in dream content, which we analysed as dreamers' tendencies (e.g. Barrett, 1994; Fábik, 2020, 2021, Roesler, 2020, 2018a, 2018b). The result of these principles came in the form of interpretations of dreams that were accepted and acknowledged by the patients themselves. Let us therefore consider that the analysis has resulted in reliable interpretations that allow us to make some assumptions and conclusions.

First of all, we can think about the nature of the animals in our dreams. In example number 1, the fox symbolized rapid and violent tendencies (or the dog certain companionship), the bison in example number 2 represented strength and fighting ability and in example number 3 orangutans symbolized aggression, dominance, egocentrism (similar to the frog). When considering the nature of these impulses, which reflect certain animal innate urges to ensure survival, they can be described as instinctive. In this we identify with other authors (e.g. Boss, 1977, Fábik, 2020, Hannah, 1954, Jung, 2017, Perls et al., 1994, Platek, 2008), who also perceive animals in a dream as animal or instinctive components of a personality. The reason animals in dreams represent our instinctive impulses may be our perception. Everyone, on a conscious and unconscious level, associates animals with instinctiveness, with the fact that they act automatically. They are not exposed to complicated considerations or moral dilemmas. They react on the basis of their instinc-

tive activity, which creates many impulses (e.g. the need for mating, the need to defend their territory, etc.) requiring their immediate fulfillment. Animals in dreams therefore represent impulses which result from the deeper sphere of human existence, i.e. from instinct. The specific animal and its action in the dream then represents a specific form of that tendency. In order to understand this tendency, it is necessary to thoroughly analyze the animal.

The analysis of dreams also indicated that although the image of the animal has a symbolic nature, its specific form reflects the experiences of the dreamer from waking life. We could observe this phenomenon in patient 1, who said that she often encounters the fox pattern during embroidery. Patient 3 had a relatively strong memory of the orangutan, where she perceived its dominance and strength. These examples suggest that the dream uses objects with which the dreamer came into close contact as symbols. By perceiving these objects and their properties, an associative relationship was created between the object and its property, which is then applied in the dream. It is therefore likely that the dream of a patient who is in frequent contact with a fox will use the image of a fox as a symbol of a certain instinctive impulse. The dream of a dog lover could probably use the dog. Of course, these considerations require further research. If these assumptions were to be confirmed, it would result in a fusion of the theory of continuity and the symbolic nature of images in a dream.

5. Conclusion

The paper suggests that dreaming animals can symbolize our instinctive impulses. Although it is necessary to further investigate and verify this conclusion, we would like to emphasize several benefits for psychotherapeutic practice based on our conclusions.

In the first place, the analysis of dreams with animal images can lead to the recognition of important instinctive impulses or tendencies that would otherwise remain hidden and unknown to the patient. Therefore, by knowing, realizing, and accepting these impulses, a psychotherapist can support the integrity of the personality and help to realize the patient's needs. Furthermore, the examples in the article inspire a non-directive way of working with dreams, where the meaning of the dream is derived exclusively from the statements of patients and the therapist himself does not insert any new information into the interpretations. And third, the article presents a unique combination of concepts of current dream theory (eg dreams such as the consolidation of emotions, continuity theory, etc.) with psychotherapeutic practice. We assume that the implementation of new knowledge resulting from the current theory of dreaming could be a stimulus for many psychotherapeutic approaches.

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