Study Summary


Aim
To test his theory about the Oedipus complex and to report on the treatment of a five-year-old boy 'Little Hans' for his phobia of horses.

Method

- Case study method

Procedure
This was a case study of a boy named ‘Little Hans’ who had developed a phobia for horses. The data was collected from the age of 3 to 5 years by his father who was a supporter of Freud and a member of the Psychoanalytic Society. The interest in ‘Little Hans’ began when his father wrote a letter to Freud stating; “[Hans] is afraid that a horse will bite him in the street, and this fear seems somehow connected with his being frightened by its large penis”. All communication between Han’s father and Freud took place via postal correspondence where Hans’s father collected information about his son’s phobia by observing his behaviour and interviewing him about his dreams and fantasies.

Behaviour: Hans who was in the phallic stage had developed an interest in his penis which he called “widdler”. He believed that both his parents had big widdlers. He was interested in his widdler and that of others.

Dreams: Hans reported various dreams and fantasies such as his encounter with two giraffes, a big one and a “crumpled” one where “the big one called out because I took the crumpled one away from it. Then it stopped calling out and then I sat down on top of the crumpled one.”

Fantasies: He reported having a fantasy of being married to his mother and was playing with his children and had promoted father to the role of grandfather.

Interviews: His dad also conducted interviews that about his experience with the falling horse he had seen and it was concluded by Freud that the fear of horses was a symbol of the fear of
his father (Oedipus complex);
“Father: When the horse fell down, did you think of your daddy?
Hans: Perhaps. Yes. It's possible.”

Results
Freud concluded from the reports by Han's father that:

- The fear occurred because Hans was displacing his fear or rivalry of dad onto horses. Horses were symbols of Hans father especially the ones that had both black bits around the mouth and blinkers, symbolic of his father's moustache and glasses.

- The 'giraffe' dream was evidence of the Oedipus complex where the crumpled giraffe symbolised his mother and the big giraffe symbolised his father. The dream was interpreted as Hans' unconscious desire to possess his mother and take her away from her father.

- Hans fear came about because he was afraid that his father would discover his secret desire for his mother and castrate him. To overcome such fear it was symbolically transferred to horses.

Freud at the conclusion of the study was confident that Han's phobia was over when Hans had a dream that as he lay in a bath a plumber had come and removed his small widdler and replaced it with a larger one “first he took away my behind with a pair of pincers, and then he gave me another and then the same with my widdler”. Freud interprets this as Hans being given a bigger backside and widdler like his daddy.

Evaluation
- The study contains detailed and in-depth information about the life of 'Little Hans'.
- It is high in ecological validity as it conducted at his home and by his father.
- The findings and conclusion in the study are culturally biased as they are restricted to a boy from a two-parent family and with a Viennese background.
- The research is laced with researcher bias because dad is a follower of Freud and Freud cautions that Hans father “went to work instilled by my theoretical views and infected by my prejudices”
• Hans’ father also uses **leading questions** in an attempt to support Freud’s psychoanalytic theory.

• **Generalisations** are difficult to make from one subject who is mentally unstable as supported by Freud’s statement “Hans was not a normal child, but had a predisposition to neurosis” to other groups of children.

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**Freud….Must Know!!!!**

**Check original study for accurate and detailed responses**

1. Freud’s Psychodynamic approach:
   a. The psychosexual stages of development
   b. The Oedipus complex and the origins of the term
   c. Castration anxiety
   d. The unconscious mind
   e. The theory of personality
   f. Dream interpretation

2. The development of Hans’ phobia and Freud’s interpretation

3. The data collection methods used and how they were communicated to Freud

4. The practical problems such as researcher bias in the data collection

5. Why the study may be criticised as being unscientific

6. Evidence that Hans was ‘little Oedipus’ and his fantasies and dreams

7. Evidence about resolution of his phobia and criticisms of the view that he had resolved the phobia.

8. Ethnocentrism in the study

9. Why would Hans not remember this stage when he was older