

Freud – analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy – little hans

People



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Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy - Little Hans Chronological

Summary of Events 1903 Hans born. (April) 1906 3 to 3 ? First reports. 3 ? to 3 ? First visit to Gmunden. (Summer) 3 ? Castration threat. 3 ? Hanna born. (October) 1907 3 ? First dream. 4 Removal to new flat. 4 ? to 4 ? Second visit to Gmunden. Episode of biting horse. (Summer) 1908 4 ? Episode of falling horse. Outbreak of phobia. (January) 5 End of analysis. (May) Background Little Hans (Herbert Graf) was born in April 1903 to Olga Graf (mother) and Max Graf (father).

He undertook four months of treatment, which was conducted by Hans' father himself, and supervised by Freud, who took somewhat of a backseat. Freud wanted to explore what factors led to the phobia and what factors led to its remission. He believed children face subconscious emotional conflicts just as adults do, and their future adjustment depends on how well the conflicts are solved. It was the first ever psychoanalytic treatment on a child. Freud believed that the sexual impulses in a child would be fresh and naive, unlike when conducting the analysis on an adult, where the impulses have to be 'dug out'.

Freud hypothesised that the analysis would correspond with his previous work in the 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality'. Overview First observations were taken at three years, where Hans' spirit of enquiry towards 'widdlers' became apparent with his initial observation that the presence or absence of a widdler differentiated between inanimate and animate objects [p. 9]. He also assumed that all animate objects were like himself and possessed this important bodily organ - thus allowing him to arrive at a genuine abstract knowledge: 'A dog and horse have widdlers; a
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table and chair haven't. He was not deterred from this notion despite noting the lack of a 'widdler' on his sister Hanna [p. 11]. Hans had begun to practise the commonest - and most normal - form of auto-erotic sexual activity; Giving himself pleasure by touching his member. The castration complex was first planted in to Hans' head at three and a half years when his mother told him the doctor would come and chop his widdler off if he didn't stop playing with it. [p. 7-8]. At the present time he was unfazed, and suggested he could wee out of his bottom.

His mothers threat made Hans believe it was possible to lose your genital organs, which he would later subconsciously believe would happen for repressing oedipal desires. This concern for the loss of his widdler was initially dismissed from his thoughts but made its effects apparent at a later period. Taking pleasure in his own sexual organ soon turned in to scopophilia, in active and passive forms with his main fantasies and dreams being aimed around widdlers, widdling and wishing that the girls in Gmunden would help him widdle [p. 19]. At age 3 he asked his father 'Daddy, have you got a widdlers too?' When he asked his mother if she had a widdler, she replied with 'why of course'. He also repeatedly expressed the desire to see his mother and fathers widdlers in order to draw comparison. Hans had observed that larger animals had correspondingly larger widdlers and formulated the hypothesis that this was the case with his parents. For example; his mother he thought must have a widdlers 'like a horse'. This reflection could be interpreted that a child's wish to be 'bigger' had been concentrated on his genitals.

The sexual aim in which he pursued his girl playmates had 'found its way into object love' in the usual manner from the care he had received as an infant. It's suggested that this sudden erotic urge originated from the pleasure derived from the cutaneous (skin) contact of sleeping next to his mother (Hans would crawl into bed most mornings). This caused sexual arousal or 'Satisfaction of the instinct of concentration [Moll (1898). Cf &SE;, 7, 169 n. 2.]. This facilitated his increased interest in other girls (wanting to sleep with Mariedl Etc. and ultimately wanting to see their widdlers. Little Hans showed affection towards both genders of children indiscriminately and once described Fritzl as 'the girl he was fondest of' [p. 16]. This contributed to Freud's idea of 'object-choice' and 'homosexuality in children' suggesting that most children have homosexual tendencies as they are only acquainted with one kind of genital organ. Freud intimates that because little Hans had a widdler, and gave so much importance to it, he chose to have this 'familiar feature' as his sexual object.

It is also important to note that in his future development he demonstrated 'an energetic masculinity with traits of polygamy; he knew how to vary his behaviour, too, with his varying feminine objects—audaciously aggressive in one case, languishing and bashful in another. His affection had moved from his mother on to other objects of love, but at a time when there was a scarcity of these it returned to her.' Hans demonstrates elements of the sexual relations of a child to his parents discussed in Interpretation of Dreams [1900a, in Section D (?) of Chapter V; Standard Ed. , 4, 248 ff.] and in Three Essays [1905d, Standard Ed. 7, 222 ff.] with regard to being a little Oedipus who who wanted to have his father 'out of the way', to get rid of

him, so that he might be alone with his beautiful mother and sleep with her. This wish had originated during his summer holidays at Gmunden and had developed with the alternating presence and absence of his father (due to work commitments). Hans identified that his fathers' absenteeism gave him the opportunity of increased intimacy with his mother; which he longed for. This desire for his father to 'go away' then later developed into a desire for him to permanently go away - to die.

This caused great conflict within Hans as it contradicted the deep love he also felt towards his father. For example; hitting his father then immediately kissing the place he had hit [p. 42]. Freud goes on to comment that 'the emotional life of man is made up of pairs of contraries such as these.' And that '...they usually go on suppressing each other until one of them succeeds in keeping the other altogether out of site.' Children offer the exception to this in that they can exist peaceably side-by-side for some time. Baby Hanna and the Stalk The most important influence upon the course of Hans' psychosexual development. Hans watched how Hanna was cared for and this stimulated memories of his own early experiences of pleasure. His fever a few days after Hanna's birth was an indication of how little he liked the addition to the family [p. 11]. Although affection came later his first thoughts were hostility and fear that yet more brothers and sisters might arrive - further eroding the time and affection mother would devote to him. Freud states that it is clear within Hans' unconscious he treated his sister and father in the same way - wanting them permanently out of the way.

Interestingly Hans did not associate the same guilt towards his sister's death wish as that of his father. He subconsciously wanted mummy to drop Hanna

in the bath so she would be gone, which consequently caused Hans great anxiety when having a bath himself, fearing it would happen to him as a punishment for thinking such things. Again, this wish would mean he could have his mummy all to himself. This hostility is represented by a fear of the bath [p. 66]. The use of a Stork to explain the origin of Hanna was in conflict with the childish sexual theories he had begun to apply to the material in front of him.

There is a clear progression from his initial acceptance of his father's explanation; ' he declared with conviction: " The stork's coming to-day. ' to a growing awareness that ' Everything he says shows that he connects what is strange in the situation with the arrival of the stork. He meets everything he sees with a very suspicious and intent look, and there can be no question that his first doubts about the stork have taken root. [p. 10] Causes of anxiety and the beginning of the phobia Little Hans suffered an anxiety-dream shortly before the start of the phobia, in which mummy had gone and he had ' no mummy to coax with'.

This, combined with his separation from his mother at the time of Hanna's birth [p. 96] led to a sudden surge of wanting mummy. Initially he would show signs of distress when away from her but it soon became evident that he was still afraid even when his mother went with him. Freud suggested Little Hans had now concentrated his libido on her. His want to be with her constantly now changed into anxiety producing the phobia. He was initially scared of a big white horse biting him in the street, and his father worried this was connected to the fear of big widdlers, which he had once taken great pleasure in examining.

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His fear was so strong that he struggled to leave the house, even more so without his mother. Whereas Little Hans once loved the fact that big animals had big widdlers, he now repressed it and was scared. This was thought to be due to him being so dissatisfied with his own. Anxiety was caused by mixing his 'former pleasure' of big widdlers with his 'current un-pleasure' of them. Little Hans admitted to placing his hands on his widdler every night which resulted in some kind of sexual pleasure or satisfaction (something which Freud later distinguished as a normal form of auto-erotic sexual activity).

Yet at this early stage of the illness when his anxiety was heightened he expressed a fear that 'the horse will come into the room' [p. 24]. His father worried that this masturbation was not helping the phobia. Freud suggested that it was his affection for his mother that he was trying to replace with his fear of horses [p. 28]. His libido was attached to seeing his mother's widdler and masturbation was giving him gratification. Attempts were made to stop this act, and daddy told Hans that mummy did in fact not have a widdlers [p. 31], which calmed the phobia for a short while.

Freud believed that accepting women do not have widdlers risked destroying Hans' self-confidence and heightened the castration complex, so he resisted the information. After a short time an episode of illness caused the phobia to return. Freud finding similarity between the psychological structure of these phobias and that of hysteria termed this 'Anxiety-hysteria' concluding that such hysterias are the most common of all psychoneurotic disorders and goes on to state they are par excellence in the neuroses of childhood. Little

Hans' outbreak of anxiety-hysteria was by no means as sudden as it first appeared.

The anxiety dream he had where his mother had gone away and he was left with ' no-one to coax with' [p. 26] was preceded by two examples of attempts to seduce her [p. 19 ; 23]. Hans dreamt of ' exchanging endearments and sleeping with her; but all of the pleasure was transferred into anxiety - causing a punishment and repression. The catalyst for suddenly turning this sexual excitement into anxiety is speculated upon by Freud suggesting that mothers' rejection of his advances could be one possibility. His fear of horses was traced back to an impression he had received at Gmunden [p. 9] when his father warned him " Don't put your finger to the horse; if you do, it'll bite you. ' The words, ' don't put your finger to', which Hans used in reporting this warning, resembled the form of words in which the warning against masturbation had been framed. ' Hans attempted to communicate his feeling towards his mother, in what was still a distorted form, with the phantasy of the two giraffes. Little Hans' story of the big giraffe and the crumpled giraffe was interpreted by his father and Freud. His father was indeed the big giraffe and mummy was the crumpled giraffe.

Subconsciously, little Hans wanted to take possession of mummy, by taking her away from daddy. Hans loved getting in to bed with mummy in the morning, it gave him pleasure, but the big giraffe calling out was his father dislike of him getting in. Immediately after the giraffe fantasy Hans disclosed two others; ' forcing his way into a forbidden space at Schonbrunn, and the other of his smashing a railway-carriage window on the Stadtbahn [p. 40-41].

In each case the punishable nature of the action was emphasized, and in <https://assignbuster.com/freud-analysis-of-a-phobia-in-a-five-year-old-boy-little-hans/>

each his father appeared as an accomplice. This again links to the oedipal characteristic of taking possession of his mother.

This combined with his burgeoning childish sexual theories that 'taking possession' would involve some form of consummation which gave rise to the elusive thought of something violent and forbidden - which the dreams allude to. Freud states that the dreams were therefore 'symbolic phantasies of intercourse' and that his father plays accomplice within the dreams as Hans has very astutely deduced that 'I should like', he seems to have been saying [to his father], 'to be doing something with my mother, something forbidden; I do not know what it is, but I do know that you are doing it too. The giraffe fantasy resulted in Freud and father deciding it was the right time to inform Hans 'he was afraid of his father because he himself nourished jealous and hostile wishes against him' and thus 'partly interpreted his fear of horses for him: the horse must be his father—whom he had good internal reasons for fearing.' [p. 42] Subconsciously he was extremely fearful that his father would find out, as he feared if he did he would castrate him. When an internal situation such as this one cannot be processed, it becomes pathological, and a compromise-formation needs to happen, which becomes apparent at the very end of the analysis.

Enlightening Hans on this subject had cleared away his most powerful resistance against allowing his unconscious thoughts to be made conscious; for his father was himself acting as his physician. As a result Hans became more aware/willing/confident to describe the details of his phobia; 'He was not only afraid of horses biting him—he was soon silent upon that point—but also of carts, of furniture-vans, and of buses (their common quality being, as <https://assignbuster.com/freud-analysis-of-a-phobia-in-a-five-year-old-boy-little-hans/>

presently became clear, that they were all heavily loaded), of horses that started moving, of horses that looked big and heavy, and of horses that drove quickly.

The meaning of these specifications was explained by Hans himself: he was afraid of horses falling down, and consequently incorporated in his phobia everything that seemed likely to facilitate their falling down. ' [p. 46-7]. Hans described going for a walk with his mother and witnessing a bus-horse fall down and kick about with his feet [p. 49]. He was terrified thinking the horse was dead and that all horses will fall down. He then associated this with the wish for his father to ' go away' and wanted him ' to fall down in the same way and be dead. When confronted with this notion Hans did not dispute it and later went on to play a game of biting his father; symbolically accepting the theory that he had identified his father with the horse he was afraid of. [p. 52]. Upon questioning Hans' father uncovered an impression which lay concealed behind that of the falling bus horse of an event that occurred during their summer at Gmunden. While they were playing horses Fritzl had hit his foot against a stone and fallen down. [p. 58].

Seeing the bus horse fall while walking with his mother had reminded him of this although Hans initially denied this [p. 82]. Freud commented that ' It is especially interesting, however, to observe the way in which the transformation of Hans's libido into anxiety was projected on to the principal object of his phobia, on to horses. ' Hans regarded Fritzl as a substitute for his father, particularly as Fritzl competed with Hans for the attention and affection of the girl playmates at Gmunden in a similar way to the manner in which Hans competed with his father for his beloved mothers affection.

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Freud also states that ' When repression had set in and brought a revulsion of feeling along with it, horses, which had till then been associated with so much pleasure, were necessarily turned into objects of fear. ' The ' Lumf' Complex Hans became unexpectedly preoccupied with ' lumf' showing disgust at anything that reminded him of evacuating his bowels [p. 55]. Hans had been in the habit of insisting upon accompanying his mother to the W. C. [p. 63]. His friend Berta filled his mother's place, until the fact became known and he was forbidden to do so [p. 1]. His father speculated that there was a link between the symbolism of a loaded horse cart passing through some gates (which Hans had observed in the Customs House opposite their home) and the passing of faeces out of the body [p 66-68]. Hans further clarified the symbolism of lumf with an additional phantasy of the plumber; ' Daddy, I thought something: I was in the bath, and then the plumber came and unscrewed it. Then he took a big borer and stuck it into my stomach. ' [p. 65]. Freud interpreted this as ' With your big penis you " bored" me' (i. . ' gave birth to me') ' and put me in my mother's womb. ' His fantasy regarding the plumber unscrewing the bath and then struck him in the stomach with a big borer was further interpreted later on in the analysis. He was remoulding a ' fantasy of procreation', distorted by anxiety. The big bath was his mother's womb and the borer was his fathers penis; giving a connection to being born. We must also consider Hans' earlier confession that he wished that his mother might drop the child while she was being given her bath, so that she should die [p. 72].

His own anxiety attached to bathing was a fear of retribution for this evil wish and of being punished by the same thing happening to him. Hans

moved on to draw the natural conclusion that little Hanna was a lumf herself and that all babies were lumfs and were born like lumfs. We can thus deduce that all furniture-vans, drays and buses were only 'stork-box carts', and were therefore symbolic representations of pregnancy; and that when a horse fell down it can not only be seen as his dying father but also his mother in childbirth - a conflicting desire and fear.

As discussed during the stork analysis Hans had noticed his mother's pregnancy and had 'pieced the facts of the case together' without telling anyone. Which was demonstrated by his sceptical attitude towards the stork explanation given by his father and his description of Hanna joining them at Gmunden a year before her actual birth. Hans justified this phantasy, and in fact deliberately embellished it as an act of revenge upon his father, against whom he harboured a grudge for having misled him with the stork fable. Freud eloquently summarises Hans' subconscious feeling on the matter; 'If you really thought I was as stupid as all that, and expected me to believe that the stork brought Hanna, then in return I expect you to, accept my inventions as the truth.' Hans continued to seek revenge within the phantasy of teasing and beating horses [p. 79]. This phantasy, again, had two constituents. Firstly to reinforce his pleasure at the teasing he had submitted his father with the recollection of Hanna at Gmunden; and secondly, it reproduced the obscure sadistic desires directed towards his mother. Hans even confessed consciously to a desire to beat his mother [p. 81].

Hans discloses further phantasies which seem to confirm his growing confidence to communicate his conscious wish to 'get rid' of his father and

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that the reason he wished it was that his father interfered with his own intimacy with his mother. As Freud states this clearly shows Hans' ' progressive development from timid hinting to fully conscious, undistorted perspicuity. ' Overcoming his fears - Concluding phantasies Freud describes the first of these as a triumphant, wishful phantasy, and with it he overcame his fear of castration' in which the plumber gives Hans a new and, as his father guessed, a bigger widdler [p. 98].

His second phantasy confessed to the wish to be married to his mother and to have many children by her [p. 96-97]. Significantly this phantasy also provided an acceptable [to Hans] resolution to the unacceptable conflict within him caused by his desire to kill his father. Instead he promoted him to marry Hans' grandmother. Thus resolving the alternating emotions of love and hate towards his father and the evil thoughts he'd harboured towards him. Hans had made up for the loss (reduced care and attention received from his mother) he experienced as a result of the birth of his sister by ' imagining he had children of his own. And so long as they were at Gmunden he could really play with his children and therefore found an acceptable [to him] outlet for his affections. The families subsequent return to Vienna refocused Hans' attention on his mother resulting in him gaining satisfaction by ' a masturbatory stimulation of his genitals. His desire to have children was twofold: He considered Hanna to be born like passing a lumf and therefore identified with his own feelings of pleasure in passing stool. Secondly the compensatory pleasure of passing his affection onto them. The conflict within Hans arose by his inability to cognise his fathers ole in Hanna's (and therefore his own) birth. Hans could understand that he and

Hanna were his mother's children - after all he now knew she had brought them into the world. But what role had his father played and what gave him the right to say they were his? As discussed Hans considered his father's presence detrimental to his relationship with his mother for example by preventing her from sleeping with him. This revelation further reinforced Hans' hostility towards his father which was compounded by the lie which Hans perceived to be a conscious decision by his father to 'keep Hans from the knowledge he was thirsting for. This, Hans concluded, was therefore putting him at a disadvantage on two fronts. Despite hating his rival he was the same father whom he had always loved and was bound to go on loving, who had been his model, had been his first playmate, and had looked after him from his earliest infancy; thus giving rise to his first conflict. Freud therefore states that the 'hostile complex against his father screened [the] lustful one about his mother.' Summary ; Conclusions Witnessing the horse falling down carried no 'traumatic force'.

It acquired significance due to Hans' former interest in them and the earlier event in Gmunden which led to the association of horses from Fritzl to his father. This was then compounded by the additional association of the horse falling with his mother in childbirth. Freud describes this 'return of the repressed' as returning in such a manner that the 'pathogenic material was remodelled and transposed on to the horse-complex, while the accompanying affects were uniformly turned into anxiety. Hans' phobia was also further distorted by the warning he had been given about masturbation and its link to the hostility he felt towards his father. Hans was later affected by a 'great wave of repression' giving up masturbation and turning away in

disgust at everything that reminded him of excrement and of the pleasure he had previously derived from observing other people performing their natural functions. This repression, considered natural by Freud [Three Essays [1905d, Standard Ed.]], was not however the ' precipitating cause of the illness. The two key conditions leading to Hans' phobia were tendencies within Hans that had already been suppressed and had therefore never been able to find uninhibited expression: i) Hostile and Jealous feelings towards his father ii) Sadistic impulses (premonitions of copulation) towards his mother. These repressed ideas forced their way into Hans' consciousness as the (distorted) content of the phobia. As Freud describe this was however a ' paltry success' as the forces of repression ' made use of the opportunity to extend their dominion over components other than those that had rebelled. The purpose of the phobia was therefore to restrict his movement: Keeping him closer to his mothers affections. Hans had always taken pleasure in movement ' I'm a young horse', he had said as he jumped about' [p. 58]. This pleasure in movement had however included the instinctive impulse to copulate with his mother and resulted in Hans causing his symbol of movement (the horse) to develop into a conscious anxiety. Alfred Adler suggested that anxiety arises from the suppression of an ' aggressive instinct' [Adler, ' Der Aggressionstrieb im Leben und in der Neurose' (1908)]. However Freud disagrees with this notion and goes on to state that this aggression is an ' indispensable attribute of all instincts. ' Or to simplify; ' each instinct [has] its own power of becoming aggressive. ' Freud identifies the two instincts which became repressed in Hans as ' familiar components of the sexual libido. ' Freud seemed to hold Hans in high regard describing

him as ' well formed physically, and was a cheerful, amiable, active-minded young fellow who might give pleasure to more people than his own father. He went on to observe that it is ' by no means such a rare thing to find object-choice and feelings of love in boys at a similarly early age. ' Significantly he also goes on to speculate that ' sexual precocity is a correlate, which is seldom absent, of intellectual precocity, and that it is therefore to be met with in gifted children more often than might be expected. ' This is demonstrated by Hans' ability to cogitate abstract reasoning; particularly towards his childish sexual theories relating to the origin of his sister Hanna.

Freud continues to say that Hans ' is not the only child who has been overtaken by a phobia at some time or other in his childhood. ' In fact such phobias can be ' extraordinarily frequent. ' Typically ' Their phobias are shouted down in the nursery because they are inaccessible to treatment and are decidedly inconvenient. In the course of months or years they diminish, and the child seems to recover; but no one can tell what psychological changes are necessitated by such a recovery, or what alterations in character are involved in it. He therefore concludes that ' Hans' illness may not have been any more serious than that of many other children who are not branded as degenerates. As discussed in previous papers [For example; last section of the third of Freud's Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality(1905d), Standard Ed. , 7, 225.] psycho-analytic analysis of adult neurotics regularly identifies infantile anxiety as the ' point of departure. ' Freud goes on to discuss wider societal issues stating that we ' concentrate too much upon symptoms and concern ourselves too little with their causes.

An issue arguable still as relevant today as it was at the time of Freud's writing. Freud's concern was that ' In bringing up children we aim only at being left in peace and having no difficulties, in short, at training up a model child, and we pay very little attention to whether such a course of development is for the child's good as well. ' It can therefore be argued that the phobia was in fact an advantage for Hans as it directed his parents to ' unavoidable difficulties' in ' overcoming the innate instinctual components of the mind. With his father assistance Hans now longer carries the repressed complexes other children still have to bear. It is also fair to state (as Freud does) that such complexes (as the origins of babies) are not only repressed by children but dreaded by their parents. Freud also looked to counter potential criticism that by bringing Hans' ' wicked instincts' into his conscious he might act upon them. For example; acting out his evil wishes against his father?

In his Postscript (1922) Freud scornfully comments that some readers of the case study had foretold ' a most evil future' for little Hans who had been a ' victim of psychoanalysis' thus ' robbing him of his innocence. ' He triumphantly reports that none of these predictions had come true and that the analysis actually facilitated Hans' recovery. It had in fact helped prepare him for the emotional turbulence of his parents separation in subsequent years. A further point to consider from the postscript is teenage Hans' apparent ' infant amnesia' towards the challenges of his early years.

He also argues in favour of ' full disclosure by telling him about the ' vagina and copulation' allowing him to put an end to his ' stream of questions' without losing ' love for his mother [or] his own childish nature. ' In his <https://assignbuster.com/freud-analysis-of-a-phobia-in-a-five-year-old-boy-little-hans/>

conclusion Freud discusses a number of principles common to modern psychotherapy. For example: ' A number of individuals are constantly passing from the class of healthy people into that of neurotic patients, while a far smaller number also make the journey in the opposite direction. ' ' A child's upbringing can exercise a powerful influence for good or for evil upon the disposition' they subsequently exhibit. The origin of pathogenic complexes... deserves to be regarded by educators as an invaluable guide in their conduct towards children. And subsequently ' At what cost has the suppression of inconvenient instincts been achieved? ' He also passes comment on the psychoanalytic process itself. Specifically relating to this analysis he states: ' Previously, his father [the therapist] had been able to tell him [Hans] in advance what was coming, while Hans had merely followed his lead and come trotting after; but now it was Hans who was forging ahead, so rapidly and steadily that his father [the therapist] found it difficult to keep up with him. This alludes to the significant challenge the therapist faces in containing and interpreting the information and emotions the patient transfers onto them. In the case of Hans this is compounded by the conflict produced within the father-son/therapist-patient diad. Something Freud refers to when discussing the considerable barrier in bringing Hans' hostility towards his father into the little boys conscious. This is summarised beautifully by Freud in the following paragraph: ' The physician is a step in front of him in knowledge; and the patient follows along his own road, until the two meet at the appointed goal. ' Beginners in psycho-analysis are apt to assimilate these two events, and to suppose that the moment at which one of the patient's unconscious complexes has become known to them is also

the moment at which the patient himself recognises it. They are expecting too much when they think that they will cure the patient by informing him of this piece of knowledge; for he can do no more with the information than make use of it to help himself in discovering the unconscious complex where it is anchored in his unconscious. '