

Interpreting Dreams: A Case Study

BACKGROUND

Debbie, a high school senior, is 17 years old. She comes from a suburb of Boston and lives with her mother and two brothers, ages 13 and 15. She is popular in school and often likes to be the center of attention in her classes. She is considered friendly by most people, but all of her friends are girls—she has no friends who are boys.

Although, she is a good student, her grades have been falling lately. Debbie has been having some very disturbing dreams over the last few weeks. She says that it is hard to concentrate in class when all she can think about is how upsetting her dreams are.

YOUR JOB

You have been hired as her psychologist and your job is to do your best to interpret her dreams. That is, what do they mean?

Read the following four dreams. Then answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What **theme(s)** do you notice in the dreams (a theme is the basic idea of the dream; sometimes the same theme may show up in different dreams)? What is/are the theme(s)? What do you think the theme(s) might be related to in Debbie's life?
2. What examples of **dream work** are there in the dreams (e.g., *displacement*, *condensation*)?
3. Can you explain why Debbie would be having these dreams? Don't be afraid to take a guess. Try to base as much as you can on what we have learned about interpreting dreams.

NOTE: Use your notes and your Freud dream play handout to help you.

Dream #1—The Mall

Debbie's first dream is a recurring one for her. In the dream, she is walking in the mall with two of her friends. They are very happy in the dream and she can remember everyone laughing. The dream ends with Debbie sitting alone in the middle of the mall and crying; she cannot find her friends.

Dream #2—The Prom

It is prom night. Debbie waits for her mother to come help her with her new dress. Her mother never comes. Debbie's dress looks 'funny,' like there's something not quite right with it. She goes to the prom alone and all the students laugh at her as she arrives in her new dress. She runs into the ladies room and hides. Her mother is in there. Debbie asks her mother why she didn't help her with her dress. Her mother looks away and walks out of the bathroom, not saying a word. Debbie is falling into a bottomless pit and lands in the arms of a strange man. She strikes him in the mouth and continues to fall.

Dream #3—The Teacher

It is the beginning of the school year and Debbie is upset because she will not be able to take the one course that she had been looking to all summer. The problem is that her favorite teacher, Mr. Stevens, has decided to leave the teaching profession. When she hears about this at a school assembly, Debbie suddenly finds her self in the middle of the ocean, many miles to the nearest sign of land. Mr. Stevens is on a row boat several feet away, but does not hear Debbie call him as he rows away.

Dream #4—The Man

Debbie is walking to the corner store and sees a man walking. He looks like someone she knows. She gets close to him and notices that his face has changed into something quite frightening: it is her own face, but she looks about 40 years older, and has an evil look on her face. The person then runs away. Debbie sees a Coke can and crushes it under her shoe.