

Encircling the Neck of the Unborn Child with the Navel-String and the Fear of Snakes

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Abstract: Two clinical observations are reported. The author discusses a role of the navel-string encircling the child's neck in combination with other factors in the snakefeargenesis.

Zusammenfassung: *Die Nabelschnurumschlingung am Nacken und die Schlangenphobie.* In diesem Beitrag werden zwei klinische Beobachtungen angeführt. Der Autor bespricht die Rolle der Nabelschnurverwicklung rings um den Hals des Kindes im Zusammenhang mit anderen Ursachen bei der Entstehung der Schlangenphobie.

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Introduction

Human phobias were classified at the beginning of the 20th century (Hall 1914) nevertheless even nowadays there is no satisfactory explanation of their genesis. So, S. Freud (1976), analyzing phobias as a sign of neurosis, singled out the form of fear which was associated with some definite objects and situations. He supposed that the phobia of snakes is a common state of many people. Freud cited Darwin who had not been able to overcome his fear at the sight of an approaching snake, though Darwin had known that he had been protected by a thick glass. But one thing is the fear at the sight of a real object and this object can attack you and quite the other thing is the fear of an imaginary object. Genesis of the fear of snakes in people who never have met them during their life could hardly be rationally explained. However, we believe that our observations to some extent could bring us nearer to the understanding of this phenomenon.

Case 1. Marina, 30 years old, an accountant, with some gynaecological problems had the problems of adaptation in a working group. Now she is working at the fourth company but her interrelationships with people always undergo just the

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same transformations they underwent during her work in the previous companies, namely, during the first months or a year she had good interrelationships with her colleagues, but little by little they became worse, she noticed that someone started to steal her ideas, she was slandered and as a result of slander her chief changed his attitude to her, insulted her, then he apologized, but during the next 2 or 3 years after beginning her work she was forced to change her job for another place of work where she was invited to as an experienced specialist. She was the first child in the family, but her parents' attitude to her, as she says, was indifferent even hostile, in comparison with their attitude to her younger brother. She usually had conflicts with her parents, their relations were strained and she was glad to get married, because it released her from the strain, which she had suffered from in her parents' home, and as she thought, they were glad to part too.

She grew healthy, did well at school and at a lot of different courses, she liked to study. Having a good memory she easily learned a lot of details of the work of an accountant that allow her, inspite of her young age, to cope with the work of a chief accountant and at present time to carry out the work of an accountant, consulting firms on very complicated problems.

We asked her to draw her problem. She drew a house, a tree to the left of it. On the trunk of the tree, winding it, a snake was rising.

“Why a snake?”

“In the periods of spoiling off the interrelationships with my colleagues in the companies in my dreams I see snakes around me, and I feel fear and experience some heaviness in my chest.”

“Have you ever seen crawling snakes, have they ever bitten you?”

“No, I have never seen real snakes and that is why they never have been able to bite me.”

Deepening in her anamnesis till the period of her birth, I asked her to tell what she knew about her birth. She answered, that her mother had been given oxygen during delivery. I was interested in more details and asked if her mother had been ill, if she had had heart diseases, if her lungs had been well. She answered that her mother was alive and she was well.

Then I supposed that the necessity of using oxygen had been connected with fetus's intrauterine hypoxia during labor because the umbilical cord tightly encircled the child's neck. I asked her to give me a chance to speak to her mother.

From the conversation with her mother I learned out that her attitude to pregnancy and to her future child was more negative because of the family problems. The delivery was delayed, labor-stimulation and oxygen inhalations were used, since the doctor had found out cardiac rhythm disorders in the unborn child. The girl was born with the navel-string tightly encircling her neck and the signs of asphyxia. Resuscitation measures were needed. The girl grew capricious, she was a hard controlled child, she had never met snakes.

This observation made me think about the importance of encircling the child's neck with the navel-string in the developing of the fear of the snake, it served as the reason for the next researches.

Case 2. Yulia, 25 years old, a secretary of the insurance company. The only child in the family, she seldom fell ill, she learned well, spoke foreign languages fluently, it enabled her to work as a guide with foreign tourist groups and at the same time to study at the two faculties of the university: the faculty of Economy, and the faculty of Philology. Her interrelationships with parents were not easy and she used the slightest possibility to avoid their guardianship. After the first pregnancy (desirable but unsuccessful due to spontaneous abortion at 7-week gestation) she consulted the doctor in connection with her miscarriage, simultaneously she had another problem, namely, her unbearable anguish for her unborn child, followed by depression.

While talking I asked:

D: Are you afraid of snakes?

P: I am afraid of snakes very much, though I have never seen them at large.

D: Do you sleep well?

P: It is a problem too.

D: Why?

P: I have nightmares in my dreams and I often wake up.

D: What is the essence of your horrors?

P: Snakes . . . I have seen snakes in my dreams since I was 23 years old when I parted with my mother and left for another town.

She saw such a dream in the periods preceding strong emotional stress (presentiment?) as the consequence of a conflict situation psychologically significant for her. Then such dreams occurred on the background of strong emotional stress.

From the conversation with her mother I learned out that in the first part of her pregnancy (she was pregnant with Yulia) her psychological attitude toward it was negative. In the first trimester she had severe early gestosis, in the second part her psychological attitude to the pregnancy was ambivalent, there were some signs of the risk of miscarriage. Delivery was difficult for her with the breech presentation, with the navel-string encircling the neck and the resuscitation of the newborn because of asphyxia. Girl's behaviour was hard controlled, she studied well, never had met snakes.

Discussion

When analysing these two cases we paid our attention to several correlated problems. First of all the problem of the unwanted children and mother's psychological state in such a situation. The researches demonstrate that the unwanted children don't differ in intellectual aspect from the wanted ones. However, they may have many difficulties in adaptation in social environment. They appear to have inclination to conflicts and to abnormal behaviour. They are known to have lack of selfconfidence. In such children one can see more frequently that psychological problems are displayed with their emotional disbalance, depressive reactions (Matejeek, Dytrych and Schuller 1980). Colter (1988) supposes that the environment in which the mother and her unborn child are constantly existing is subjected to the influence of thoughts, feelings, hidden nonverbal information, which penetrate into consciousness and remain there in the form of subconscious signals. The child, when bathing in the "water" of these stimulations will have "implanted"

programme. These primary, basic puttings, images, schemes, imprints create the character of the human being and will accompany him during his life. Any mother's thoughts, which provoke her stress and anxiety contribute to the formation of the repressed feeling of anxiety, fear and worry in the child (Verny and Weintraub 1992). We supposed those aspects to have been present in the above mentioned persons.

The next problem is connected with the behaviour of the unborn child in case of the unwanted pregnancy. It is well known, that when the mother is under stress, when she gets nervous, the child demonstrates an increased motor activity. This is confirmed by our clinical observations and this is so evident, that when we reveal child's increased motor activity we are sure to find out the presence of psychological problems in the woman, even in case when she tries to conceal them by any reason. Child's higher motor activity is one of those conditions that lead the child to the loop of the navel-string which encircles his neck.

The third aspect is connected with getting reliable facts that any unborn child has a developed and functioning nervous system and the sense organs. Before his birth the child has tactile sensibility and response to pain (Humphrey 1978; Anand and Hickey 1987), hearing (Truby and Lind 1965; Birnholz and Benecerraf 1983), vision (Smyth 1965; Liley 1972; Dubowitz et al. 1980), etc. He has active emotional life and remembers his birth (Chamberlain 1983, 1987, 1988a,b, 1992).

We can suppose that sufficient sensibility of the unborn child, allows him by his neck skin to feel the navel-string, and after that he perceives its tightness, and his memory is able to keep the feeling of asphyxia, etc. Probably, this is imprinted and fixed in his unconsciousness. Dreams are a bridge between unconsciousness and consciousness. These imprints occur like different images in a person's dreams. In the cases discussed they occur in the image of the snake provoking a sense of fear. Besides, preservation on the unconscious level of such an image (umbilical cord-snake) forms the feeling of unexplained fear even in the absence of the object filling a person with that feeling of fear and displays itself in his dreams under actual psychotraumatizing circumstances.

The described above can be regarded as follows. Unwanted pregnancy forms in the mother negative emotions which periodically become acute and are accompanied with the unborn's increased motor activity. The latter is the reason of the child's finding himself in the loop of the navel-string and its encircling his neck. On the one hand, child's prolonged motor activity turns out to be unpleasant for the mother as it reminds her about her unwanted child and contributes to frequently occurring thoughts rejecting the child, on the other hand this provides the tightening of the navel-string. So we can see the formation of a "vicious circle", resulting in the newborn's hypoxia and asphyxia. The unborn child may experience the feeling of his failing to pass the vagina during the delivery and he may become terror-stricken. This condition simultaneously with the accumulation of biological active substances (catecholamine, etc.), which violate labour activity, delay delivery; and obstetricians have to administer labor-stimulating remedies, to use surgical delivery and after it they are to apply measures of resuscitation of the newborn. Our clinical observations have confirmed this suggestion (Brekhman and Danilov 1995).

As a result there occurs the problem of individual's interrelationships in the family, in children's and working groups. They appear to have fears, phobias of snakes. But the problem of how the image of the navel-string which a person meets before and within the process of delivery can be transformed in the image of the snake remains vague.

It is known that the child in the prenatal period has got vision and he opens his eyes, being in the uterus. The unborn child plays with the navel-string and can feel its touching and can see its encircling his body. Therefore, the snake symbolizes the navel-string, which had already been seen and that might cause an unpleasant vague sense of danger for his life, which is the man's greatest value. In this connection the image of the object twisting and tightening the unborn to the state of asphyxia may be firmly fixed in his memory. In the postnatal period this object is likely to be associated with the image of the snake which he could see in pictures, in a zoo, etc.

If our suggestions were confirmed, they would be at variance with D. Grandgeorge's (1993) statement that only individuals who feel as if being castrated can see snakes in their dreams since the snake symbolizes the penis. Grandgeorge's opinion attracts our thinking to the problem of castration. Perhaps, his conclusion is referred to his observations over boys.

We consider our report as a preliminary one and we are to continue our investigations in this direction. We shall be very thankful to everybody who will confirm or disprove our suggestions.

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