

# An interpretative phenomenological analysis for the experience of the unconscious and conscious conflict in Greek adults: The trauma response of conscious self-rejection, projective understanding of anxiety, and the oxymoronic experience of emotion

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## Abstract

The purpose of this is to unfold the presence of anxiety in its incomprehensible form that is experienced at a collective level, with the global literature arguing that incomprehensible anxiety is a derivative of the lack of awareness of the unconscious level, causing a four-dimensional discomfort in human biology, the intelligence quotient, emotional and spiritual intelligence. Having in the central background the research of Parlapani and colleagues, which wants Greek adults to be on a spectrum of social depression and anxiety in response to the social changes of recent years and in the absence of psychodynamic and analytical approaches related to the research of the immersive experience conflict of the conscious and the unconscious in Greece, this research, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, attempted to capture the emotional variation caused by this conflict, and its potential refraction in overall health in 8 (4 women & 4 men) Greeks adults. Semi-structured interviews were used and specific questions, in order to direct participants' attention to the conflict in question, were asked. From the data analysis, three super-themes were selected for their ability to more realistically capture the experience of experiencing the conflict: "The traumatic response of repulsion of the conscious self"; "The projective understanding of the anxiety" and "The oxymoronic experience of emotions". In conclusion, the analysis reflects questions about the difficulty that individuals have in maintaining beliefs based on both awareness and their philosophical ability to be able, not necessarily to interpret, but to approach with intentions of understanding the unconscious, in order for the incomprehensible anxiety to be more understood. Overall, social factors seem to explain the incomprehensible form of anxiety.

## Keywords

Conscious; Unconscious; Conflict; Analytical Psychology; Psychodynamic Theory; Spiritual Intelligence

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Holding a cognitive perception with the theory of unconscious cognition, unconscious will be conceptualized as the non-awareness processing of perception, memory, learning, cognition, language, and decision making [1]. With other words, this theory contains the function of implicit memory, which contains information to process routine actions like teeth brushing or being lost in thoughts. However, this theory results to monopolize the nature of unconscious by seeing only the cognitive dimension of it. Delving into Jung's deep/analytical approach [2], unconscious' understanding is going beyond what is immediately apparent. Thus, it is seen as to contain archetypes -a mental imagery form that every individual is born with, a form shared to every human being in a neuropsychological level-. It has been showed that this abstract form is passed to new generations in the form of genetic memories from parents and further ancestors in an unconscious effort to shield them by fearful, diseased, and traumatic experiences [3]. However, this collective knowledge it does not only grow positive traits in individuals. Instead of, the connection of unconscious with conscious is may be better explained as a conflict, rather as a smooth transformation. Unfolding the cognitive conflict hypothesis [4] this conflict is defined as the cognitive dissonance phenomenon that one's experiences when attempted to perceive and see the world, but forces such as impulsion, aggressive tendencies, egoistic desire, cognitive errors, and defense mechanisms are alternate his/her perceptive input of outer information.

Far beyond this cognitive hypothesis, and in accordance with the theory of symbolic thought [5], Jung exploited the universal need of humanity to explain and resonate and he unfolded the model of psyche [6] to personify the existence into archetypes. Therefore, he perceived self as the point where unconscious and conscious are they clash. Deeper to that, he used the archetype of the persona to explain individuals' conscious effort to stand and be function into the outer world. With regards to the manipulation of the inner world, Jung theorized the existence of the archetype of shadow, that causes the self to resist persona's manifestation by projecting the shadow in conscious life instead of the persona. Essentially, the shadow is the projected emotional blind spot of the individual (personified within the collective unconscious as archetypes or metaphorical sense-image complexes). However, this Jungian theory received criticism from very early, since there is no laboratory or biologically based markers to signify the existence of archetypes [7]. Yet again, since global research is quantitative-based oriented, and that numbers cannot measure abstract ideas, by invoking Ladas [8] belief to utilize qualitative methods when abstract ideas are explored, this study will adopt a philosophical point-view to assist global literature to be open towards concepts beyond the limitations of understanding. Therefore, Spiritual Intelligence (SI) will be considered as the mental tool that will bridge the gap between the infinite size of the unconscious and the infinite dimension of the inner world of individuals.

By unfolding a cognitive psychological belief, SI will be perceived as a mental device used to define an invisible entity underpinned to intelligence quotient and emotional quotient, commonly named cognitions (thoughts) and emotions of all individuals. This capacity is a common trait of humanity, based and shared on the biological form -semantic genes- of collective unconscious. However, also this non-material dimension of reality cannot be measured as a single biological marker and thus, it can't be quantified and observed directly, and so, a lot of criticisms, for the existence or the ability to self-manipulate SI exists [9]. A general explanatory point-view of psychology for SI is the high levels of quality of life of individuals, reflected in a variety of societal contexts [10; 11]. High levels of quality of life are characterized by the adaptation of higher meanings, values, abiding purposes, and unconscious aspects of the self and the ability to embed these meanings, values, and purposes in living richer and more creative lives. Furthermore, cognitive abilities such as visualization and defense mechanism of higher cognitive levels such as Modern correlative studies and metanalytic research yielded that higher levels of spiritual intelligence reflect high levels of the professional identity of individuals [12, 13]. However, since cognitive approaches of psychology define quality of life and thus, SI, as the behavioral result of the connection of thought and emotion so to assist personality to develop, and as the key to succeeded professional life instead of the achievements of inner happiness and reduced incomprehensible distress, it may be considered as impossible to conceptualize SI intelligence on its purest form.

If the Jungian beliefs [2] for what SI is will be adopted, a better explanation may be attributed. Jung seen SI in a multi-dimensional way, far beyond from what modern psychology can perceive. Firstly, he assumed that SI is a higher form of emotional intelligence. Therefore, Jung have idealized emotion from thought and behavior. On the fore of that, the belief that the emotional dimension of individuals is the key to conceptualize, or to manipulate both SI and collective unconscious, may be emerged. Secondly, Jung have perceived the openness to control dreams, to denaturation, and to shift between and within interpersonal states of consciousness as metacognitive abilities that flow directly from SI. Hence, emotional dimension emerges again as a key factor, since dreams or state-shift cannot be thought-captured or behaviorally controlled yet, they may only be sensed, as when happen left individuals with an understandable emotional variety. Lastly, Jung perceived SI and unconscious in its collective form as an intertwined entity to all, and Hunt [9] used the term of archetypal imagination to define the spacetime of this aforementioned intertwine. Thus, this may means that, at least phenomenologically, individuals share same collective and abstract devices to visualize or to imagine within their inner worlds. Delving deeper with a quantitative eye into the three-ways-Jungian perception of SI, a retrograde factor towards SI will emerge. Hess, Schredl and Goritz [14], grounded on a moderate effect size when investigated Big Five Personality Factors theory, highlighted neuroticism as the prevailed and explanatory trait that leads

to block towards control dreams, denaturation, and to shift between and within interpersonal states of consciousness. Hence, it arises that these three capacities may be essential markers of individuals' SI function.

Unfolding the last-mentioned theory, personality will be reflected/perceived through five traits: extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. With regards to neuroticism, this trait, is a prevailed trait among humanity. This can be understood through the metanalytic evidence of Marciano, Camerini and Schulz [15]. By investigating personality traits of individuals, they yielded that neuroticism prevails indeed, by turning individuals to disconnect from their opportunity to calmly turn into their self, and connect to outer stress-devices of society, for them to seek individuality and identity. Moreover, under neuroticism a very specific neuropsychological structure is activated. This neuropsychological structure, when activated, increases the risk of developing Axis I psychopathology (anxiety & mood disorders, somatoform and substance use disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder [16]. It is therefore clearly understood that neuroticism captures the body, thoughts, and emotions, by blocking nor only the development of SI, but also its natural flow, under the influence of societal devices as it has been mentioned.

## Greek Society

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A recent study among 3.700 adults in Greece revealed the presence of high levels of social anxiety and depression, whereby this percent is proportionally high of the peak of compliance to laws and social, non-formal, adaptations [e.g., for covid-19, 17]. Fear is the characteristic that leads to this compliance and therefore, with a few leaps of thought, it can be considered that this capture of fear works against the reduction of negative conflict experience and thus, incomprehensible distress is not accessible to individuals to manage. As a result of that, incomprehensible distress prevails within individuals yet, in an unconscious and uncontrollable form, translated and/or manifested to Axis-I psychopathology, making individuals to struggle (Marciano, Camerini and Schulz, 2020).

## Rationale

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Since the beginning of human existence, spiritual intelligence of individuals can be thought of as being, not merely within, but encased in human bodies [2, 1]. Under this entrapment, it is considered both in research and philosophically that the intense clash of the conscious and unconscious parts within individuals, is the front line of the barrier to spiritual intelligence's flow and development [4]. Deeper to this barrier, metanalytic evidence yielded that Greek society, using very specific societal devices, raises neuroticism within the inner world of individuals, instead of other positive traits, making the essence of this aforementioned inner conflict to be sensed in intensity, and also, reducing further spiritual intelligence

[14,15]. Specifically, Hunt [9] by attempting to bridge the conceptualization of this struggle concerning the collective form both of unconscious and spiritual intelligence, contributed to the global scientific literature the term archetypal imagination, where in essence he implied for inner higher defenses such as visualization and denaturation as the key to capture incomprehensible distress. Therefore, this qualitative study will first attempt to penetrate the spiritual capacity of adults in Greece. Furthermore, this study will attempt to force unconscious beliefs of how individuals experience this inner conflict of self, by holding a philosophical language [8]. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis has been chosen as the appropriate methodology to capture the emotional variety of individuals with regards to the experience of the conflict that conscious and unconscious produces and reflects variations in mental health of individuals. Furthermore, the questions chosen to be given to the participants are weighted and modified and target to activate and mobilize their spiritual intelligence, so to investigate both its block and its potentiality. To that core, universal and shared archetypes, as they are, will be forced to emerge within individuals so, an abstract map of archetypes can be discussed. Hence, this study considers that spiritual intelligence is to have of high priority in the line of individuals' internal dimensions and will attempt to produce evidence for how to manipulate and cultivate it, by leaving the experiences of participants to guide this research effort.

## Methodology

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### Data collection

The semi-structured interviews used in this qualitative study were chosen to investigate the experience-sense-making-meaning attributed to the incomprehensible stress caused by the conscious-unconscious clash and the flow of spiritual intelligence. Semi-structured interviews are recommended because they are open-ended and flexible, allowing for a more complete expression of personal diverse experiences. As a result, they enable in-depth investigation by collecting extensive data about a phenomenon while also ensuring on-topic responses because the use of specific questions increases the possibility of unraveling a phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews are a good way to investigate how abstract variables like conflict and SI are experienced [18].

### Participants

Three to six participants are commonly suggested as a necessary sample for penetrating into phenomena but eight participants have been recruited to reinforce the interpretative effect [19]. Since conscious-unconscious conflict experience is investigated, opportunistic sample collection was chosen, to reinforce the potentiality of randomly-synchronously collect necessary information about the possible phenomena that will be reflected. Inclusion criteria invite individuals from the Greek population of all ages (18>), so to investigate the created phenomena within a chronosystemic perspective.

Criteria that exclude individuals from the present research, concern having a diagnosis of a speech and language disorder. Furthermore, Individuals that will report negative effects, both physical and mental, of a period of 1 month> will be also excluded. This will satisfy the reduction of the risk that the external mobility of one's spiritual intelligence can double or activate physical and mental negativity.

### *Analytic approach*

The philosophy of IPA was established to unfold the analysis of the data. Within this philosophy, the intellect and interpretation of participants' interpretation, meaning- and sense- making are of utmost importance. Of course, and therefore, double hermeneutics will also guide the analysis. As mentioned in the design report, language and words are of maximum relevance, as they act as indicators of internal dimensions, and will also reflect the writing of analysis. IPA is founded on phenomenological epistemology. Phenomenology is related with the study of phenomena with an emphasis on experience as lived and communicated by an individual. As a result, it is distinguished by an idiographic approach to occurrence of phenomena. For succeeding an analysis at its best dynamic, the six core steps of IPA will be applied. First, the data will be re-read while keeping notes until a tolerance for the words is acquired, and the transparency of the phenomena begins. Thereafter, phenomena will be divided into sub-phenomena. Eventually, the emergent phenomena will be reassessed, and overlaps between and within them will be identified, for each interview individually and systemically. Finally, the final structure of phenomena and sub-phenomena will be renegotiated and defined.

### *Materials*

All necessary forms of the study are included as materials. The interviews will be recorded using a mobile phone. Personal computers and audio-visual communication means at the participant's easiness will be used to process the distance methods. A list of 9-11 questions that target the rationale of the study will be used (e.g., "How Greek society affects the way we perceive what the eyes see and what the eyes do not see?", Recall a dream that caused you negative feelings or thoughts.")

### *Procedure*

Upon the opportunity to meet in person with the potential participants, they were asked to participate in this research and therefore, when willing prevailed, the space-time of the interview was defined. In person or on-line methods were chosen according to the needs of potential participants. At the designated meeting, and through the briefing form, participants were notified of their rights and instructions for creating a personal code. They were initially be given the information and consent form to complete. Before the interview process begun, which lasted approximately 35 minutes, they were asked if there is any question related to the process and the research, they were given the option to participate under a pseudonym and the option to withdraw from the process at

any time, and they were thanked for their participation. Penultimately, they were asked to consent to the recording process. Finally, after completing the interview, participants were asked to save the debriefing form, were asked to communicate any question, if any, and were thanked again.

### *Ethics*

The whole process of the research falls under the Guidelines for Good Practice in Research of the BPS (British Psychology Society). This study included adult participants from non-vulnerable groups. Both the nature of the study and their reflected rights by the BPS will be shared prior to its execution. They have the chance to withdraw at any time during the interview process but they had 14 days to withdraw after the completion of the interview. Unique codes and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Every piece of data they generate will be digital (in a password-protected computer) and will be manipulated solely by the current researcher for the purposes of the dissertation project.

### *Reflexivity*

I feel the presence of incomprehensible stress within me, and I desire to balance my conscious and unconscious connection, and I believe that my spiritual intelligence has just begun to be activated. However, I realize that by following the philosophy of IPA and assimilating the epistemological approach reflected by it, I will succeed in capturing the interpretation of individuals in relation to the relevant questions, that is, how they experience, feel, and explain these variables without projecting myself on their hermeneutics.

### *Analytic Strategy*

In order to generate data relevant to the literature review, initially the analysis was carried out strictly following the principles of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. Thus, specific questions in the form of factor analysis will be used to reveal the experience of the explored conflict, the disconnection from the self, but also not understanding it at a conscious level. For this, answers were also attempted to emerge through the imagination and the dream world (as indicators of the unconscious state) of the participants.

### *Analysis*

From the analysis emerged 6 super themes that specifically capture 6 different phenomena in relation to social influence in shaping the collective unconscious, the anxiety archetype, the archetypal sense of self-actualization, inner disconnection, projection psychic defense, and dual dream understanding. These six factors emerged as subsequent indicators of the traumatic experience of the clash of the conscious and the unconscious. In this study, three subthemes of these will be superficially discussed: the trauma response of repulsion and self-displacement, the projective understanding of anxiety, and the oxymoronic understanding of emotions.

### *“The trauma response of repulsion and self-displacement”*

To create this data was drawn from questions such as “what is what the eyes see and what the eyes do not see?”, and “do you use your imagination to interpret what the eyes do not see”. Individuals’ attempts to interpret these two levels of consciousness were dominated by the identification of the unconscious with “something dark”, “monopolic” or with fear:

*“It’s like a dark place, hard to seen”*

*“The outer world is full of emotions yet, unconscious is only one emotion”*

*“It provokes me fear to think about happens in my mind”*

So, this is also how the sense of inner self is experienced. The presence of fear is highlighting Parlapani and colleagues [17] evidence for the presence of fear towards the promotion of anxiety in a social level, and this is had nothing to do with what participants have been declare, but how their bodies, autonomic reactions and the voice tone was alternated. Also, the phenomenon that these two are separated and cannot communicate emerged, since the interpretation prevailed that a wall separates them:

*“I imagine two huge waves like crushing, but there is a wall between them”*

Phenomenologically, the lack of internal as well as external communication can be supported here, if one remembers the presence of the inability to self-discuss inner conflict, leading to delusional understanding [20]. Furthermore, it emerged that if the usefulness of what one consciously understands is consistent with one’s self-concept, then one tends to establish it within oneself, as a belief. This was reflected by the experience of individuals not to process more their discussed beliefs. In the downside of this axis, the factor of selective perception, and therefore memory and “vision” emerged, explaining the fact that beliefs that cost lower emotional pain but shallower self-awareness, will be adopted [21]. The conscious seems to be considered more real than the unconscious, which tends to resemble the cognitive error of minimization and maximization since individuals pay little attention to their unconscious navigators, as phenomenologically the anxious efflux seems to swing toward a lack of visualization, understanding, and communication of the unconscious side.

### *“Projective understanding of anxiety”*

The cognitive dissonance hypothesis [22], where two beliefs about the same context coexist but the belief that is mentally less costly is ultimately chosen, and the psychic defense of projection [alterity in which inner content is misinterpreted as coming from the outside, 23] seem to give more meaning to this current phenomenon, since it emerged more understanding of the presence of incomprehensible anxiety in others

than in oneself. Initially in relation to projective understanding of others, participants were asked the following statement:

“Describe your experience in a very specific context: “I seem to run into thoughts automatically without much awareness of what I’m doing or feeling and having” and “Do you think all people get lost in their thoughts?”.

Most participants chose to identify in a way of denying that this might be the case:

*“This gives me freedom”*

*“No such thing happens, I try to manage my time and my thinking”*

However, when they were given the question:

### *“Do you believe that all individuals get lost in their thoughts?”*

the same freezing trend was not seen in their following statements:

*“Yes, everyone is getting into it, because they are not sure, maybe because they can’t anymore, because they want to exhaust the little bit more about what is going on in various subjects”*

*“Okay, this is in the nature of individuals. As technology has evolved, the fast pace of life, we inevitably enter into thoughts of how to deal with society and family and everyday life”*

*“There is much in the future that one is anxious about.”*

Here phenomenologically, the lack of self-understanding and denial of a difficulty, but also with a systemic eye, the inner desire to understand external stimuli in order to experience a sense of control. Macroscopically it results from a lack of self-control and self-awareness, within the complex perception that the self feels free and in control compared to others Phenomenologically it reflects the difficulty of understanding personal stress.

### *“The oxymoronic understanding of emotions”*

To capture the oxymoronic experience of the coexistence of negative and positive emotion, questions such as: “Can you recall from a dream that caused you negative and positive emotions”

For both Freud [24] and Jung [2], dreams are the royal road to the unconscious, and their lucidity demonstrates high levels of spiritual intelligence. Through the investigation of the dream world of the participants, a contradictory phenomenon was captured that arises from the non-present awareness of the emotions experienced and concerns the positive axis of dreams. Regarding the dreams that caused positive emotions,

the research has shown that they actually refer to a double psychological message [24]. Participants were asked to recall a dream that had evoked negative and positive emotions. Among the negative dreams dream falling, climbing stairs, the feeling of being chased and violated, TV pests and the death of others emerged. Among the positive dreams, erotic images such as sexual intercourse, love and kissing prevailed, but also images of childhood such as the younger self, familiarity with family and home-cooked food. In addition to research reports [25] that explain that in people who are familiar with dreams of falling and feeling violated, there are common characteristics of reduced self-control and a refusal to direct one's mental field to feelings that the person wants to avoid in order to not to experience internal conflict or loneliness, interest appears in research interpretations of the remaining stressful dreams. Climbing stairs, which for internal and analytical psychology symbolizes the elevation of the individual [2], in general, is a dream that in the present research was experienced with the emergence of the feeling of anxiety. For the death of others, opposite symbolism is attributed, such as the end of a feeling/thought/relationship. The death of others was described through the persons sense of fear. Therefore, it could be assumed that the incomprehensible fear of changes and new things in life is symbolized by the fear of losing significant others. Phenomenologically, individuals value the stability of individuals in their lives, unaware that this need for stability potentially deactivates internal motivational mechanisms. In conclusion for the bag of negative dreams, the dream memory of TV parasites, is identified with the emotional difficulty to interpret the incomprehensible anxiety for individuals.

Regarding the dreams that caused positive emotions, research has shown that they actually have a double message. Specifically with sex dreams and their identification as a dream that evoked positive emotions, research has shown that high sexual energy appears to occur in response to high levels of stress, as an anti-stressor. Therefore, it can be considered that high sexual interaction occupies a part of the incomprehensible form of anxiety, if and when it actually comes or is dreamily experienced as a positive correlate of the reduction of anxiety, and not of its unfolding. Analytical psychology points out that a dream sexual image more explains the failure of individuals to connect with desired behaviors and aspects of themselves than physically with others. After all, the application of this theory is consistent with reality, if one considers the psychological risks of intense sexual contact, as hyper-sexuality combined with other characteristics of individuals, can create space to manifest the so-called human sexual promiscuity. The latter is accompanied by the risk of development or parallelism with disorders of the psychopathological axis II [6]. In addition, dream experiences related to childhood were recorded in a positive way such as a childhood self that was specifically captured with the feeling of nostalgia. This, an essential requirement for Carl Jung [6], as such contact reflects the playful, creative side of the self that has learned walking, language, and other skills. The traumatized child archetype in dreams is a reminder of abuse, neglect, and other traumas the dreamer may have experienced during childhood. How-

ever, since nostalgia was the emotion that accompanied the particular stimulus, it will be quite important to enter into the discussion or research of Newman and colleagues [26] who conclusively demonstrated the negative side of the feeling of nostalgia, let alone in relation to the possible abused childhood. Nostalgia did not reduce, but rather increased, the negative effects of loneliness on emotional well-being. These findings support a theoretical account that suggests that the effect of nostalgia on well-being depends on the physical context in which nostalgia is induced. In its pathological form, the mood contains only the pleasant aspects without the acceptance of the loss, or what could be described as a bittersweet feeling. The pathological form mainly serves denial and functions as a screen influence.

## Discussion

The purpose of this research was to unfold the presence of anxiety in its incomprehensible form that is experienced at a collective level under the relentless influence of the imposition of the unconscious on the conscious. Regarding how individuals experience this specific conflict, this research adds for the first time to the Greek literature three issues that emerged as phenomenological realities around this conflict. First, in the spectrum of neuroticism and traumatic repulsion of the conscious self, the presence of fear that translates into social anxiety and depression according to Parlapani, you explain through the individuals' stay in the incomprehensible form of anxiety with their difficulty to approach the unconscious side and thus interpret the conscious one in a more correct way, get in touch with their intrapersonal ethics and thus improve the heteropersonal one, and finally, with the conclusion that they adopt convenient beliefs and not ones that require a personal process. Second, on the spectrum of projective existential understanding, people in a latent way use others, significant or not, to understand the existential part of anxiety through others so that the negative emotional aporia is not personified in the first place. of such a belief. Macroscopically this can lead to a society made up of plastic relationships. Third, in the context of oxymoronic emotional understanding through the dream spectrum, the archetype of intercourse emerged as a positive aporia, with global research taking a contrary view of this particular positivity. When this, intercourse, comes as an anti-stress response, in addition to minimizing sexuality, it can become an addictive bridge potentially paving the way to human sexual promiscuity and axis II psychopathology. However, as much as was said today, of course, they cannot be generalized to the population, nor can they be directly compared in the absence of Greek literature on the subject. For this, the present research issues a call to psychodynamic and analytical psychologists to rally around the question raised here, with both quantitative and qualitative eyes. Further, both the capacity of morality in the intrapersonal and interpersonal axis of individuals, must be studied and observed with other characteristics, such as openness/closedness and neuroticism but mainly with social-emotional

reciprocity. Projective understanding of individuals must be isolated in the laboratory to observe the complex structure and emotion that leads to this impersonal understanding. Regarding the sexual interaction archetype that emerged at the collective level from the participants, it will be particularly useful to investigate their sexual health in relation to the dark triad of personality to further explore the transformation of sexuality in human sexual promiscuity.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, what the research overall reflects is that perhaps individuals lack the philosophical capacity to approach invisible issues such as the collective unconscious, something that all mental health professionals should consider. Perhaps by cultivating their spiritual intelligence, we can make them more capable of facing the discomfort and anxiety, in its incomprehensible form, caused by the conflict of the conscious with the unconscious.

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