

**The Interpretation of Dreams**

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### **I.Introduction**

#### **The definition of Dreams**

Throughout history and across cultures, the definition of dreams has been debated. According to Oppenheim (1956), dreams were considered messages from the gods in ancient Mesopotamia and were frequently interpreted by priests. Dreams, according to Freud (as cited in Parsons, 1974), are a way for the unconscious mind to express repressed desires and conflicts, whereas Adler (as cited in Lombardi & Elcock, 1997) believes they are a reflection of the individual's personality and current life situation. Dreams, according to Hodes (1989), are the brain's attempt to process information and experiences, whereas Slavik (1994) sees dreams as a way for individuals to gain insight into their own thoughts and feelings. Despite these different perspectives, one common thread is that dreams are seen as a way for the mind to process and integrate information.

#### **The importance of dream interpretation**

Throughout history, scholars and clinicians have been interested in dream interpretation. The study of dreams is important because it can reveal unconscious desires, fears, and conflicts and provide insight into the inner workings of the psyche. Dreams were important to ancient cultures such as the Assyrians, who created dream books to help interpret them. One of the field's most influential thinkers, Sigmund Freud, proposed that dreams were the "royal road to the

unconscious" and developed a dream interpretation theory centered on revealing repressed thoughts and desires.

### **The History of dream interpretation**

For thousands of years, people have been fascinated by and interpreted their dreams. Dreams were thought to be messages from the gods or spirits in ancient times, and people sought guidance and advice from them. The earliest recorded dream interpretation comes from an Assyrian dream book from around 1300 BCE. Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of the unconscious mind in the late nineteenth century, arguing that dreams are a reflection of a person's deepest desires and anxieties. Freud's theories transformed the study of dreams, and many psychologists and psychoanalysts have built on his work since then. Some scholars, however, have criticized Freud's emphasis on sexual and aggressive themes in dreams and have proposed alternative theories about their meaning. Regardless of ongoing debates, the history of dream interpretation demonstrates the pervasiveness of dreams as a source of insight and understanding into the human psyche.

## **II. Theories of Dream Interpretation**

### **Freud's theory of dream interpretation**

The role of the unconscious mind in shaping our dreams is central to Sigmund Freud's dream interpretation theory. Dreams, according to Freud, are the "royal road to the unconscious," where repressed thoughts, desires, and memories can emerge in symbolic form. He believed that dreams resulted from an ongoing conflict between our conscious desires and unconscious impulses and that the true meaning of a dream could only be revealed through interpretation.

This interpretation entails revealing the hidden symbolic meanings hidden beneath the manifest content of the dream. While Freud's dream interpretation theory has been criticized for being overly subjective and lacking empirical support, it has had a significant impact on the field of psychology and remains an important part of dream research history (Parsons, 1974; Rand & Torok, 1993; Lombardi & Elcock, 1997).

### **Adlerian's theory of dream interpretation**

Although Adlerian psychology recognizes the role of dreams in the unconscious, it differs from Freudian theory in several important ways. Dreams, according to Adler, were a reflection of a person's striving for superiority and could be used to understand the individual's distinct way of life (Lombardi & Elcock, 1997). The collective unconscious and archetypes, or universal symbols shared across cultures, are also important in Adlerian theory (Slavik, 1994). Adler believes that dreams are an expression of the individual's unique perspective and interaction with the collective unconscious. In Adlerian theory, dream interpretation entails identifying themes and symbols unique to the individual and their culture, as well as exploring the individual's beliefs and goals (Lombardi & Elcock, 1997). Adlerian therapy seeks to help individuals overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve their full potential by understanding the individual's unique perspective and goals.

### **Other**

According to cognitive theory, dreams are a reflection of a person's current cognitive state, which includes their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. Dreams, according to this theory, are the brain's attempt to make sense of and consolidate memories, emotions, and experiences. According to Hobson and McCarley's (1977) activation-synthesis theory, dreams are the result of random neural activity in the brainstem that is interpreted by the brain's higher centers. The

biological theory of dream interpretation, on the other hand, contends that dreams serve an evolutionary purpose by assisting individuals in processing and coping with threats and challenges in their environment. Some researchers believe that dreams can help people simulate threatening situations and practice potential responses. Finally, spiritual dream interpretation theories contend that dreams have a deeper, symbolic meaning that can reveal truths about a person's inner self or spiritual journey. These theories contend that dreams can give people insight into their unconscious minds and connect them to a larger, spiritual reality that exists outside of their waking lives.

### **III. Techniques of Dream Interpretation**

#### **Keeping a dream journal**

Keeping a dream journal is a dream interpretation technique that involves immediately writing down the details of one's dreams upon awakening. This method is based on the idea that dreams are fleeting and easily forgotten and that documenting them as soon as possible can help to preserve their content. Dream journals can be used to identify recurring themes or symbols in dreams and to track changes in dream content over time. Additionally, dream journaling can serve as a form of self-reflection and introspection, allowing people to explore their subconscious thoughts and feelings. According to research, keeping a dream journal can improve dream recall and provide greater insight into one's inner world (Schredl, 2011).

#### **Free association**

Free association is another technique used in dream interpretation. Freud developed this technique, which involves associating various elements of a dream to the individual's life experiences and unconscious thoughts. The goal is to discover the hidden emotional content that may be repressed in the conscious mind by delving into the underlying meanings of the dream

symbols and images. Allowing the mind to freely associate with the dream content may provide insight into the individual's unconscious beliefs, desires, and fears. Free association, which can be done alone or with the assistance of a therapist, is a powerful tool for self-discovery and personal growth.

### **Interpretation of symbols**

One of the most important techniques in dream interpretation is symbol interpretation. Symbols are objects or images that represent something else, and the unconscious mind frequently employs them to communicate complex emotions and ideas. The interpretation of symbols in dreams, according to Oppenheim (1956), was practiced in the ancient Near East, where people believed that dreams had divine or supernatural origins. According to Freud (as cited in Parsons, 1974), symbols in dreams were representations of unconscious desires or fears. Symbols, on the other hand, were seen by Adler as reflections of an individual's unique life experiences as well as the collective experiences of their culture (Lombardi & Elcock, 1997).

The importance of interpreting symbols in the context of the individual's personal associations and cultural background is also emphasized in modern psychoanalytic approaches to dream interpretation (Hodes, 1989; Rand & Torok, 1993). The dreamer may need to engage in free association and explore the personal meaning of the symbols in the context of their life experiences in order to interpret the symbols in a dream (Slavik, 1994).

### **Lucid dreaming**

The experience of becoming aware that one is dreaming while still in a dream state is referred to as lucid dreaming. This phenomenon has received a lot of attention in the scientific and popular literature. Lucid dreaming occurs when the prefrontal cortex, a region of the brain responsible for decision-making and self-awareness, becomes active during the dream state,

according to LaBerge and DeGracia (2000). This allows the person to be aware that they are dreaming and even control aspects of the dream. Various techniques, such as reality testing, intention setting, and wake-induced lucid dreaming, have been shown to induce lucid dreaming (LaBerge, Nagel, Taylor, & Dement, 1981; LaBerge, Levitan, & Dement, 1986). While lucid dreaming has been linked to benefits such as increased self-awareness and emotional regulation, it also has some risks, including the possibility of becoming confused between the dream world and reality (Gackenbach & Bosveld, 1989). As a result, more research is required to fully comprehend the potential benefits and risks of lucid dreaming.

#### **IV. Applications of Dream Interpretation**

##### **Psychotherapy**

Dream interpretation has been used in psychotherapy for more than a century and is still a useful tool for therapists today. Dreams, according to Sigmund Freud, were a window into the unconscious mind, and dream analysis was a primary method of psychoanalytic therapy (Parsons, 1974). The Adlerian theory also employs dream interpretation to investigate a patient's subjective experiences and comprehend their distinct worldview (Slavik, 1994). Today, many therapists use dream analysis to uncover hidden thoughts and emotions, as well as to explore the patient's deeper experiences and conflicts (Hodes, 1989). Dream interpretation has been found to be especially effective in the treatment of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder because it can assist patients in processing and working through the intense emotions associated with these experiences (de la Sierra y. Escobar, 2015).

##### **Spiritual practice**

Dreams have long been a part of spiritual practice in many cultures. Oppenheim (1956) discusses the use of dreams in the ancient Near East, where they were interpreted as divine

messages. Similarly, Hodes (1989) observes that many indigenous cultures regard dreams as a means of communicating with spiritual forces. Dreams are used by some people in modern times to connect with their spirituality. Slavik (1994), for example, describes using dreams to access unconscious beliefs and values that may be impeding personal growth. Furthermore, according to de la Sierra y. Escobar (2015), children's dreams can provide insight into their spiritual development and understanding of the world. The interpretation of dreams in a spiritual context may involve exploring symbolism and archetypes, as well as considering the individual's personal beliefs and experiences.

### **Personal growth and self-awareness**

Dream interpretation has been used to aid in personal development and self-awareness. According to Oppenheim (1956), in the ancient Near East, dream interpretation was viewed as a way to communicate with the divine, gain insight, and seek guidance. Similarly, Hodes (1989) believes that dreams can be used as a tool for personal development and to resolve psychological conflicts. According to Slavik (1994), dream interpretation can help people uncover unconscious patterns, gain insight into their emotional lives, and promote personal growth. According to Rand and Torok (1993), while dream interpretation can provide valuable insights, it can also lead to incorrect conclusions and reinforce biases. Regardless of these opposing viewpoints, there is evidence that dream interpretation can be a useful tool for promoting personal growth and self-awareness.

## **V. Criticisms and Limitations of Dream Interpretation**

### **Scientific validity**

While dream interpretation has been used for personal growth and self-awareness, it has also faced scientific validity criticisms and limitations. According to Oppenheim (1956), dream

interpretation lacks objectivity and frequently relies on the interpreter's personal beliefs and values. Parsons (1974) criticized Freud's dream interpretation theory for a lack of empirical evidence and the possibility of falsification. Hodes (1989) also questioned the scientific validity of dream interpretation, claiming that the subjective nature of dreams makes determining the accuracy of interpretations difficult. Similarly, Rand and Torok (1993) expressed reservations about the reliability of dream interpretation because it is dependent on the individual's memory and subjective experience. According to Lombardi and Elcock (1997), the lack of scientific validation of dream interpretation undermines its credibility as a therapeutic tool. Despite these criticisms, Slavik (1994) argued that dream interpretation can still be useful in therapy if viewed as a complementary technique rather than a stand-alone approach. Overall, the scientific validity of dream interpretation continues to be a source of contention in the field of psychology.

### **Reliability**

The reliability of dream interpretation has been criticized and limited. Because dream analysis is subjective, different people can interpret the same dream in different ways, resulting in inconsistency in interpretation. Oppenheim (1956), for example, observed that dream interpretation in the ancient Near East was heavily reliant on the interpreter's personal experiences, beliefs, and associations. Similarly, Parsons (1974) observed that Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic dream interpretation was based on the analyst's subjective interpretation of the patient's free associations. Freud's dream interpretation was criticized by Rand and Torok (1993) for being subjective and lacking empirical evidence. These limitations indicate that the reliability of dream interpretation is dependent on the interpreter's skills and objectivity, which can vary greatly. Therefore, dream interpretation's reliability is subject to debate and requires more empirical research to support its validity.

### **Cultural differences**

The potential impact of cultural differences on the interpretation process is a major criticism of dream interpretation. According to Oppenheim (1956), dream interpretation practices varied across cultures in the ancient Near East, with some cultures believing that dreams held prophetic or divine meaning while others saw them as mere reflections of daily experiences. Similarly, Hodes (1989) contends that dream interpretations are culturally constructed and can vary greatly depending on the cultural context in which the dreamer finds himself. This means that interpretations based on a Western cultural framework, such as those developed by Freud and Jung, may not be applicable to people from other cultures. As a result, when interpreting dreams, it is critical to consider cultural differences and the possibility of cultural bias.

### **VI. Conclusion**

Finally, this literature review paper looked at the concept of dream interpretation, its historical roots, and the major theoretical approaches that have influenced its development. We looked at some of the most common criticisms and limitations of dream interpretation, such as issues of reliability and cultural differences. We also emphasized the importance of considering the dreamer's subjective experience, as well as the potential therapeutic benefits of dream analysis. While the scientific validity of dream interpretation is being debated, it remains a popular and widely used tool in psychotherapy and personal growth. Overall, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of current knowledge on dream interpretation and highlights some key areas for future research in this field.

### **Implications for Understanding the Role of Dreams in our lives**

The critical review of dream interpretation literature revealed both the potential benefits and limitations of this practice. While some theories propose that dreams serve as a portal to the

unconscious mind, providing insights into our deepest desires and motivations, others have expressed reservations about the validity of dream analysis and the cultural differences that may impact its effectiveness. Despite these limitations, it is clear that dreams play an important role in our lives and comprehending their significance can provide us with valuable insights into our emotions, relationships, and personal development. It is critical to approach dream interpretation critically, considering the cultural context, personal biases, and other factors that may influence its interpretation.

### **Future directions for research on dream interpretation.**

Future dream interpretation research should aim to address the limitations and criticisms raised in this literature review. To better understand the role of the cultural context in dream symbolism, one direction could be to investigate more diverse cultural interpretations of dreams. Furthermore, future research could look into the dependability and validity of various dream interpretation methods, such as psychoanalytic and cognitive approaches. Another area of investigation could be the therapeutic applications of dream interpretation, particularly in the treatment of mental health disorders. Finally, as technology advances, future research could investigate the use of neuroimaging techniques to gain a better understanding of the neural correlates of dream content and how they relate to waking life experiences.

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