



# On the Phenomenological Investigations into the Psychology of Dreaming

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## Abstract

In 1900 the publication of the book, Interpretation of Dreams by Sigmund Freud raised very seminal and fascinating questions in the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud's intellectual contributions and the discovery of unconscious had given a big jolt to all the classical approaches, shook the disciplinary foundations of psychology and placed 'psychoanalysis' as an alternative model for understanding mental world. Psychologists across the world showed keen interest in uncovering the mysteries of dreams and dreaming. But the institutional dominance of Behaviorism and its standards of research didn't allow them to cross the boundaries of conventional psychology. Behavioristic psychologists raised important questions on the methodology adopted by Sigmund Freud and leveled criticism against his unverifiable explanations. Behaviorism branded his theories as absolute subjectivist and unscientific. Hence, most of the psychologists were silent and systematically marginalized dream research and banished the discourses on dreams in the institutions of higher learning and research. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of the first dream studies, which were primarily concerned with dream phenomenology. Nevertheless, the pace of methodical dream research was held considerably by the emergence of distinct psychological movements at the start of the 20th century: behaviorism, classical psychoanalysis, and gestalt psychology, placed greater stress on the significance and meaning of dreams, as well as what they symbolized in the lives of individuals. Also a few of them questioned the reality of dreams and other similar mental experiences. Consequently, every movement undermined the greater sample sizes and more methodical research on dreams in its own unique manner. While presenting the views of Sigmund Freud, John Watson, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, and Fritz Perls this paper makes an attempt to show how classical schools of psychology slowed down the flow of systematic dream studies with large samples.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology; Dream Analysis; Psychoanalysis; Symbolic Representations; Interpretation of Dreams

## Introduction

The dominant 19th-century modern intellectual models, positivist and behaviorist schools of psychology, totally rejected the study of dreams, claiming that dreams are not observable and measurable phenomena. Psychoanalysis, which emerged as an alternative approach, opposed such

predisposed closure of dream studies and considered dreams central to understanding the human psyche. In 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and psychologists have recognized the importance of dreams in human life. Most of them believed that dreams function as a basis of self-knowledge and embody material from the unconscious. Since Sigmund Freud's discovery of unconscious and his iconoclastic

work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, psychologists and non-psychologists have proposed a number of theories on dreams and dreaming. In psychotherapy dreams have been recognized as having therapeutic function and as the source of knowledge to understand self and others. In what follows, the basic ideas and concepts of a few important theoretical perspectives that are discussed.

### Classical Psychoanalysis and Dream Interpretation

Until Sigmund Freud, dreams were regarded to be meaningless hallucinations. Freud's studies on his own dreams and the publication of his research work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, totally changed the way people thought about dreams. Modern medicine started recognizing his work and the importance of dreams in one's wellbeing [1].

Sigmund Freud is credited as being the first to develop a scientific method for dream interpretation, despite the fact that, before him, there had been publications on dreams for centuries. Freud was the first to give evidence of the unconscious's being and to demonstrate the practical benefits of studying the meaning of dreams and the unconscious material that makes them up. By and large, all dream theories originated from Freud's interpretation of dreams. Freud believed that dreams are disguised and hidden wishes of infantile sexual needs. For him, dreams are symbolic representations of repressed desires, fears and conflicts. They appear and surface only in the disguised form during sleep.

Freud distinguished two aspects of dream: the manifest dream and the latent dream. The discernible manifest dream refers to the actual events and occurrences in the dream. One can recall part of such manifest dream. Since this manifest dream is disguised, its substance would not surprise the dreamer during awakening. The other part i.e., latent dream is the concealed symbolic meaning of the dream events. It is concealed, but the processes of disguising are different from manifest dreams. Sigmund Freud identified the following processes:

- **Condensation:** Numerous latent dream concepts are consolidated into one idea (an image, memory, or thinking) or dream object that represents multiple relationships and ideas. In other words, many dream thoughts are frequently integrated and fused into a single manifest dream element (symbol) in dreams.
- **Displacement:** The effect associated with one thing is moved to a new location in displacement to divert the notice and attentiveness of the dreamer away from the true source of emotions.
- **Secondary elaboration:** It is the unconscious reworking

of the dream when it is remembered, which serves to obscure the core desire once more.

- **Dramatization:** The presentation of ideas in a dramatic, exaggerated manner is known as dramatization.
- **Symbolism:** Another method of concealment is symbolization

Almost all items and behaviors in dreams, according to Sigmund Freud, are sexual symbolism. He believed that dream symbols were usually male or female genitals. Dreams, according to Freud, are the imperial way to the unconscious. For Freud, unconscious is the place where the repressed, concealed instincts that are incompatible with conscious thought are buried. By hiding the nature of the wish, dreams' camouflage characteristic allows the dreamer to fulfill forbidden wants while sleeping soundly. According to Freud, the dream acts as a sleep guardian as well as a safety valve for unwanted desires. Freud added sleep-protection and safety-valve functions to dreams almost as an afterthought, developed before scientific sleep and dream research were available. In his patients' dreams, Freud discovered recurring symbols, incidents that nearly everyone associated with the same meaning. Steps, ladders, and stairs, for example, signified sexual intercourse in dreams. Boxes, balconies, and doors represented the feminine body, whereas candles, snakes, and tree trunks represented the penis. Despite the apparent universality of symbols, Freud cautioned that several symbols are unique to the individual receiving analysis and may have a diverse meaning for someone else. Conflicts are shown in dreams in a compressed, amplified manner. Dream events are rarely the result of a single cause, and any dream event could have a variety of causes. Dreams can come from everywhere. A dream can be triggered by physical sensations such as the temperature of the bedroom or contact with a spouse. Internal stressors, such as a fever or a sour stomach, can also produce dreams.

Freud says that the unconscious desires convey aspirations, instincts and meaning in dreams, but the dreamer's conscious attitudes prevent it from doing so. Since the dream material is insulting, startling, and hurtful to the dreamer, the unconscious has a censorship competence that monitors procedures that help the ego hide the true meaning of the dream. The ego is a component of the personality structure that involves cognitive, intellectual, perceptual, defensive, and managerial and executive functions. Condensing dream thoughts, translating dream concepts into visuals, substituting meanings opposing the original unconscious thinking, and introducing gaps in how the dreamer remembers the dream are all examples of censoring processes. The difference between the latent and the manifest dream content is crucial to Freud's theory.

## Sigmund Freud, Behaviorism and Limits of Scientific Methodology

In the late 1800s, Sigmund Freud proposed the psychoanalytic theory and treatment approach for mental illness. He strongly felt that mental illness and psychological issues might be resolved by pulling them from the unconscious into consciousness. His theory also placed a strong emphasis on the psychosexual development of the individual. One of the most well-known psychologists in America, John Watson, was drawn to the insights of psychoanalysis but disagreed with Freud's central thesis about the unconscious. He thought behaviorism and the unconscious could not coexist. He did, however, make several attempts to elucidate Freudian concepts using the framework of classical conditioning. Not all Anglo-Saxon psychologists were persuaded by Watson's attempts to explain Freudian psychoanalysis on the basis of behaviorism's scientific methods.

For behaviorists dreams are difficult phenomena to examine since the data collected depends on the subject's truthfulness, genuineness, and memory. Since Freudian theories are not supported by empirical evidence it is impossible to definitively confirm the veracity of dream analysis concepts like wish fulfillment.

The reason dreams appear illogical is due to the fact that if the wish were to be expressed in its logical form it would not square with our eve~'-day habits of thought and action. We should be disinclined to admit even to ourselves that we have such dreams. Immediately upon waking only so much of the dream is remembered, that is, put into ordinary speech, as will square with our life at the time. The dream is "censored" in other words [2].

Freud's dream theory is further challenged by the fact that large portions of its data come from case studies. As a result, obtaining a representative sample of the entire population is impossible. Fascinatingly, Freud spent most of his time researching both his own and a few chosen patients' dreams. One cannot extrapolate his theories to a larger group of people with such a small sample size.

The early behaviorists rejected Freud's theories on the grounds that they were too subjective and untestable. They claim that Freud extensively drew inspiration from Greek mythology to develop his own beliefs, rather than following a scientific process to observe human behavior, formulate ideas, and test them. Dream interpretation and free association interpretation are aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis in which the therapist's personal views are reflected in the interpretations made of the patient. The behaviorists believed that all variables had to be objective and testable in order to establish psychology as a legitimate

science. They also believed that psychoanalysis could not be subjected to the scientific method.

## Analytical Psychology, Collective Unconscious and Dreams

Carl Jung, like Sigmund Freud, thought dreams were the "royal path" into the unconscious. However, Jung's approach to dream interpretation differs significantly from that of Sigmund Freud. He was more interested in learning about the origins of dreams [3]. Dreams, according to Jung, were more than just unconscious wishes. Dreams, he believes, are prospective. Dreams can help you predict future events, incidents, and experiences. He also believed that dreams serve as a form of compensation. Dreams, he believes, help to bring opposing thoughts in one's mind into equilibrium.

Unlike Freud, Jung investigated patients' dreams over time. Jung believed that by doing so, he would be able to uncover information that the patient's unconscious was constantly bringing up. He wasn't a fan of Freud's way of reading dreams independently. Jung also used amplification to understand dreams. Jung advised the patient to keep making connections and reacting to the first section of the dream until he recognized a pattern. He did not make the distinction between manifest and latent dream content.

Dream material is not considered latent in Jungian theory. Dreams, on the other hand, are said to reveal the true circumstances in the dreamer's unconscious. Dreams, according to Jung, do not try to hide their worth. He thought that dreams convey the most terrible and damaging things regardless of the dreamer's mood. According to him beautiful and reassuring sights can also convey meaning in dreams. For Jung whatever imagery the unconscious decides to relay, dreams are a source of creativity, regeneration, strength, and understanding.

According to Jung, the difficulty in grasping the content of dreams arises mostly from the metaphorical and symbolic presentation of dreams, rather than the concealed visuals. Because ideas and feelings have been converted into images, it is difficult to understand sights in dreams [4]. The objective of the dream is to convey knowledge that was previously unavailable to consciousness. Only a small portion of the mind, according to Jung, is conscious, whereas the majority is unconscious. Dreams aid a person's conscious knowledge expansion by pointing out what is "ripe for consciousness," and learning occurs when previously unknown material is revealed.

The ego is the conscious aspect of the mind, according to Jungian psychology. Change is generally met with resistance from the conscious ego. This adds to the first inability of

a person to understand the meaning of a dream. Dreams remodel the ego's vision and worldview, according to Jungian philosophy. Dreams show the ego that it is not all-powerful and help people build their ideas about life's possibilities..

Dreams, according to Freud, indicate abnormal mental activity. Freud tried to figure out the remedies to neurotic patients' issues by analyzing such disturbed mental states. Jung, on the other hand, saw dreams as natural and creative expressions of the unconscious. Emphasizing the functions of dreams, Jung says "to restore our psychological balance by producing dream material that re-establishes, in a subtle way, the total psychic equilibrium" [5].

Lillie Weiss says, " Jung viewed the dream as having a compensatory function, presenting some inner truth not yet known or not yet adequately trusted by consciousness [6]. Jung rejected Freud's disguise theory completely, instead concentrating on the manifest content of the dream to find out what it might reveal rather than what it may be concealing. He also did not feel that all dreams were forms of infantile sexual wish-fulfillment needs; instead, he emphasized the present situation in the life of the dreamer rather than some past infantile fantasy."

Carl Jung criticized Sigmund Freud's condensation theory and the process of reducing all symbols to a single thought. Such an understanding, according to Jung, obscures the uniqueness of individual symbols. He offered a new paradigm to understand how dreams function. Jung says, "No dream symbol can be separated from the individual who dreams it, and there is no definite or straightforward interpretation of any dream". He believes that all symbols come from the collective unconscious. These symbols are not distinct from one another [5]. They emanate from the communal consciousness, not from a single person. He assumed these were archetypes from the collective unconscious.

Jung says "a dream can contain some message other than sexual allegory" and that these hidden messages are more important than most people realize [5]. Jung was not a fan of Freud's free association method. According to him, such an approach never allows us to comprehend the dream text and instead leads us away from the genuine dream text. Jung recommended various ways for focusing on a single dream and uncovering its unconscious elements in order to better grasp and attain the dream text.

Jung hinted that Freud's concept of dreams was too simplistic and his concept of the unconscious was too negative. While Freud felt that dreams were delusions of the human mind that revealed early signs of psychosis, Jung believed that dreams revealed truths that may help us overcome a variety

of concerns, whether religious, emotional, or psychological. The "personal" and "collective," according to Jung, make up the unconscious. Jung assumed that archetypes, abstract symbols from the "collective unconscious," and direct the human psyche toward "wholeness" through dreams. Under the influence of a force known as "the Self," we emerge as individuals from the collective unconscious through cycles of transformation.

Dreams, according to Jung, help the individual by acting on an inherent inclination toward balance or wholeness [7]. Jung offered the objective and subjective systems as two main techniques to analyze dream material. Inherent in the neurological brain is a subjective system that creates dream visions that aren't evident reflections of reality. Despite the fact that the subjective system is more problematic for a dreamer to comprehend, most dream analyses reveal that the dream characters can represent an unrecognized component of the dreamer. Every person in the dream relates to a reality element in an objective system, a concept rejected by Freud, who believed that dreams are individual-based.

### Individual Psychology and the Art of Dream Interpretation

Alfred Adler founded his idea of dreams on the premise that increasing self-awareness can lead to changes in behavior, and that paying attention to dreams is one method to do so. An individual can modify the value and importance given to life by having a deeper understanding of the goal of their action, which allows them to change that behavior. According to Adlerian philosophy, the purpose of dreams is to provide solutions to life's problems and to shape the dreamer's unconscious attitude toward facing and resolving problems. Through dreams people get to know about themselves and address their day-to-day problems.

Dreams, according to Adlerian psychology, reflect waking lives and convey the same desires that people have while they are awake. The emotions necessary for action would be provided by dreams. By studying one's dreams, one can make positive changes and take productive measures to improve one's life. Reflecting on the Adlerian perceptive, Dushman and Sutherland state, "If we carry the message of the dream with us, we can give new meaning to it based on what is going on in our lives at the moment. Dreams hold the potential to understanding ourselves and the conflicts we create in waking life" [8].

Adler and Freud agreed on the importance of dreams in understanding personality, but they disagreed on how dreams should be understood. Dreams, according to Adler, did not fulfill wants or expose latent tensions. Rather,



## Gestalt Psychology and Dreams as Existential Messages

dreams are about how we feel about a present issue and what we plan to do about it. This point is shown through one of Adler's nightmares. Adler was nervous and apprehensive about how he and his idea of personality would be accepted in the United States before his first visit. He had a dream that the ship he was on capsized and sank the night before he was supposed to cross the Atlantic Ocean. The roaring seas ruined Adler's whole worldly belongings. Adler was thrown into the ocean and forced to swim to safety. He battled through the choppy waters by himself. He made it to land safely because to his strength of will and perseverance. This dream reveals Adler's fear of what he might encounter in the United States and his desire to arrive safely. To put it another way, he wanted to be successful both for himself and for his individual psychology theory. We believe we can overcome the most difficult obstacle or simplify the most complex problem in our dreams (both night and daydreams). Therefore Adler argues that dreams are always oriented toward future and present, but not concerned about previous conflicts and disputes.

Adler thought that dreams should never be understood without first learning about the individual and their circumstances. Because the dream is an expression of a person's way of life, it is unique to that person. However, Adler did discover some typical dream interpretations. Many people say they've had nightmares about falling or flying. Freud interpreted such dreams sexually. A dream of falling, according to Adler, denotes an emotional state of demotion or loss, such as the dread of losing self-esteem or prestige. A flying dream indicates that the person wishes to rise above or be better than others, indicating an ambitious lifestyle. Flying and falling dreams are associated with a worry of being overly ambitious and consequently failing. A dream of being pursued shows a sense of vulnerability in regard to others. Dreaming of being naked implies a dread of being exposed.

For Adler, dreams represent the wholeness of an individual's personality. Dreams, he believed, are forward-looking, problem-solving experiences. Adler believed that dreams are purposeful, focused on the dreamer's goals, desires, and anxieties for the future rather than just unconscious conflicts. Dreams, according to Adler, reflect the dreamer's personality and lifestyle. Like in Jungian theory, Adler opposed the idea of universal symbols in dreams. According to him, the content of a dream represents the dreamer's own logic, rationality, and language. Dream interpretation, for Adler, is an art that requires aptitude, skill, thoughtfulness, warmth, and vision while remaining within the client's reasoning and language. He didn't want to set rules for dream interpretation because he thought it was mostly an art.

Fritz Perls one of the founders of Gestalt psychology says, "If you are working on your own dreams you need to create the drama yourself. You are the maker of the dream ...whatever you put into the dream must be what is in you." Dreams symbolize every facet of the dreamer's personality and what the dreamer wants to avoid in Gestalt therapy. Since the dreamer has significantly better access to the meaning of the dreams, the Gestalt therapist avoids dream interpretation. The therapist, on the other hand, tries to lead the client to what they're avoiding, and may even propose dream elements that might be addressed. Using this strategy, clients can proceed at their own pace and seek significance in their own lives. The clients will reconcile competing or conflicting components of their personalities by exposing the dream, which will show the dreamer's relationship to the physical environment and other aspects of themselves [9,10]. Rather than seeking reason or cause, the purpose of Gestalt dream work is to internalize self-information.

Dreams, according to Gestalt theorists, contain existential messages that must be understood. Dreams are fragmented in the same manner that our personalities are, and many aspects of our personalities aren't related or coordinated. They exist, but they must be brought together to form functional wholes and a full Gestalt in order for an individual to function effectively. The therapist may be tempted to interpret dreams when dealing with them, but Gestalt therapy is an integrative practice, not an analytical one. If the dreamer does not participate actively, every interpretation by the therapist becomes a cognitive-intellectual game. Freud's analysis of Dora's dreams is an outstanding example of how the therapist's interpretation might interfere with the dreamer's free contemplation on the dream. The lack of emotional substance in these case reports is another issue with Freud's conclusions, which often reflect his associations. As previously stated, the dreamer knows a great deal more about himself than the psychotherapist and must be vigorously involved in the personal search for meaning. It is a matter of self-discovery and learning. Gestalt therapy advocates acting out and replaying dreams in order to grasp their essence [11].

Every detail of our dreams is a part of who we are. The dream is similar to a book we writing, in which the meaning is written down and waiting to be discovered in the present moment of a dialogue with your dream. The key is to adhere to the three most important phenomenological inquiry guidelines, which allow us to begin from a position of creative difference and cultivated ignorance. These guidelines are: i) Avoid interpreting ii) Equalization: in the dream, everything

is of equal importance iii) Use a descriptive language and detailed tone

## Conclusion

In conclusion, as rightly pointed out by Soudabeh Givrad, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of the first dream studies, which were primarily concerned with dream phenomenology [12-16]. Nevertheless, the pace of methodical dream research was held considerably by the emergence of distinct psychological movements at the start of the 20th century: behaviorism, classical psychoanalysis, gestalt psychology, and cognitive developmental psychology placed greater stress on the significance and meaning of dreams, as well as what they symbolized in the lives of individuals. Also a few of them questioned the reality of dreams and other similar mental experiences. Consequently, every movement undermined the greater sample sizes and more methodical research on dreams in its own unique manner.

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