Dream Interpretation Essay, Research Paper

Dream Interpretation

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Dream Interpretation

Introduction – What are dreams and why are they important?

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A. Coping with daily stress

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Dream Interpretation

What can fix Jack Nicklaus’s golf swing? Inspire Julius Caesar to invade Rome(Kramer

59)? Calculate the structure of a benzene molecule(Horgan 50)? Skin two pounds of potatoes a

minute for just four easy payments of only $29.95? The answer to those questions (well, not the

one about potatoes) is a dream. Dreams have always had a huge influence on our lives, as well

as the destiny of mankind.

A dream is defined as “a series of thoughts, images or emotions occuring during sleep”

(Webster’s 344). Sound exciting, don’t they. Dreams are, in fact, much more than that. It is

dreams, not eyes, that are the true windows to the soul. Now that we have established what

dreams are, why do we have them? First of all, there is a reason. They are not mere

hallucinations caused by neurons and chemicals in the brain, but neither are they mystical or

supernatural visions meant to guide our lives(Kramer 56).

Dreams are caused by the area of the mind called the subconscious (Freud). It’s

responsible for collecting nearly every detail of your life you think you forgot and analyzing it

until all of your mental and social obstacles make sense. It is usually productive and helpful, as

far as mental health is concerned, but it can harbor unhealthy desires, such as the fear of success,

clowns, water, and all the other wierd stuff you irrationally avoid. The subconscious is almost

completely separate from the conscious mind (the mind you think with when you’re awake).

There are some links that are disputed as to their validity, such as hypnosis and slips of the

tounge (Freud), but dreams are the most recognized link between these two important parts of

the mind. Generally speaking, if you are in good mental health, your dreams will provide a

means of coping with your daily problems through a metaphorical backdrop. They usually don’t

exactly tell you how to solve your problems, they sort of soothe your mind, basically calming it

down. That’s why you don’t have to remember them the next day for them to have an effect. The

reason you don’t usually remember them, and almost never remember them well, is that they are

only run through your short-term memory (Lawrence 1-8). The long-term memory is asleep like

everything else.

However, not all of your dreams are intended to cope with daily problems. For one thing,

sometimes you might somehow, through some freak of circumstance, actually have a good day.

In such rare cases as this, your subconscious sets to work on more long-term tasks. Kind of like

when all the normal housework is done, and you decide to work on cleaning out the basement.

These tasks are things like social anxieties, anger problems, issues with your mother, and all that

other mental clutter. Now, the subconsious mind, despite all of its wisdom, cannot simply fix all

of your problems. Unfortunately, the best it can do is try it’s hardest to bring them to your

attention. This is no easy task, and because of that memory thing I mentioned earlier, it rarely

works. It can be very successful in rare instances called lucid dreams, which will be discussed

later.

There are two main reasons for studying dreams. One is so therapists can better

understand their patients. The other is to learn more about dreams in general, so that therapists

can better understand their patients. (Okay, so in a way, there’s only one reason, but who’s

writing this paper, you or me?)

Therapist Gayle Delaney says it best: “Doing (psychological) therapy without dream

interpretation is like doing orthopedics without X rays” (Colt 41). Therapists analyze their

patients’ dreams based on generally accepted research and on what they know about the

individual. This is often a daunting task, since the patient rarely remembers anything more than

small fragments of information from a dream. Because of the unreliability of dream memory,

dreams are normally discussed only when the dream itself is the problem. Such problems are

recurring nightmares or just simple curiosity about a dream’s meaning. That meaning is usually

determined by examining the patient’s emotional state during the dream and by looking for

common dream symbols. Dream symbols are objects or places that are present in a dream and

carry a deeper and more enigmatic meaning than what is obvious (Freud). Therapists also try to

determine who or what the characters in a dream might represent. There are also common

dream themes that have certain established meanings, such as dreaming of flying, being chased

by animals or evil forces, being paralyzed, etc.

In order for therapists to have any idea what to look for, there must be some accepted

ideas about dream interpretation and the science of dreams in general. These ideas are generated

by dream research. There are many types of dream research, most of which revolve around what

conditions cause what types of dreams. They test with conditions like music played during

sleep, food eaten shortly before sleep, ambient sound present, stress levels, mental state,

temperature, lighting; the list goes on and on. Other research is conducted to measure the effect

that dreams have on us. Generally speaking, the effect is to help us manage stress (Kramer 56).

Still more research is conducted on dreams in different stages of sleep (the most vivid and

important dreams occur during the period known as REM sleep) and on the ability to recall

dreams under various conditions.

Through all of this research we have, among other things, discovered and identified many

different types of dreams. Following are the most important types.

Anxiety Dreams

Typically called nightmares, anxiety dreams dwell on those facors of our lives which we

find most problematic and frustraing, and twist the into the most hideous and fightening visions

of our inner psyche.

The following anxiety dream was related to me by someone who wishes to remain

anonymous:

“I was in my living room and I was on the couch, looking out the

window. When I turned around, I realized I couldn’t stand or sit on

the floor because the entire room was absolutely filled with

snakes.”

This childhood nightmare could easily be dismissed as being caused by a fear of snakes.

On closer examination, however, the major symbols of the dream,(the window=opportunity; the

couch=permanence; the snakes=change) indicate that this dream actually has a much deeper

meaning. In this case it indicates that the dreamer was facing an upcoming opportunity, but out

of a fear of change, wanted to cling to the safety of stability and permanence.

Traumatic Anxiety Dreams

Despite the name they have been given, traumatic anxiety dreams are actully a protective

mechanism for the mind. They help to desensitize the dreamer to a particular trauma they have

experienced. They are very similar in content to anxiety dreams with one key difference; the

dreamer experiences little or even no fear in what would normally be a terrifying situation.

The following excerpt is of a traumatic anxiety dream that was dreamt by the comedian

Soupy Sales:

“I’m in a plane. . . .I’m flying. . . . It’s not an easy flight. There is

some turbulence and the plane is doing a few loops. I am nervous

because I think the plane will crash.”

The event that triggered this dream was the traumatic rememberance of when he

wittnessed a B-42 crash, killing the crew, outside an Air Force base in San Diego. The dream

enabled him to experience the trauma without feeling the intense fear of a plane crash.

Self -Affirmation Dreams

At the beginning of a self-affirmation dream, it is dominated by an underlying problem

that must be solved by the dream’s end in order to produce a sense of control and self-worth. The

problems in a self-affirmation dream are very much like those in an anxiety dream, only a

solution is possible, whereas in an anxiety dream the problem is accompanied by a feeling of

hopelessness.

The following self-affirmation dream was dreamt by Star Wars’ Mark Hammill:

“I woke up late to get to the theater. I call in to say that I’ll be

there a half hour later. Time is of the essence. I run down to

Columbus Avenue, but there are no cabs. Somehow I am able to

leap into the air in slow motion to the height of a second story

building. Then I touch down. Finally, I get to the theater where

everyone is waiting for me, saying ‘Thank God you’ve arrived!’

I’m hustled onto the stage. I know the lines I have to say, but I’m

not sure what play we’re doing.”

Mark’s dream occurred when he had gone home to rest during a break he had between

performances of a previewing musical. Calling in to say he’d be there indicated that Mark was

dependable and would not let them down. Mark shows personal strength by “leaping” to the

theater. When everyone says “Thank God you’ve arrived!” that indicates importance among his

peers. The fact that he knows his lines even though he does not know what play is going on

indicates that he is confident of success, even though he does not know what his life will bring.

Wish-Fulfillment Dreams

Wish- fulfillment dreams allow us to break free of the restraints of the waking world and

do whatever our heart desires. We can do things that would be considered socially unacceptable,

physically impossible, situationally unlikely, or finnancially unattainable.

The following is a wish-fulfillment dream that was dreamt by Vivica A. Fox, of

Independence Day.

“I am sitting in my seat at the Oscars. I am wearing a pink dress.

Suddenly, I hear them call my name. I have won an Oscar. I get

up from my seat and walk down the aisle. Everyone is

applauding.”

The reference to “sitting in my seat” denotes being just one among many, no one special.

In contrast, getting up represents her wish to rise above obscurity and be recognized, hence

hearing them “call my name.” Also, the applause is a definite symbol of acceptance and

approval.

Libidinous Dreams

The pinacle of Freudian psychology, the libidinous dream, also called the Oedipal

dream, is symbolic of all dark and hidden sexual desires. Although these dreams are rarely

sexual in content, they are very sexual in meaning. The Oedipus Complex has an enormous

influence on these dreams. Many of the symbols in these dreams involve the primary object of

desire in the subconscious of males- the mother. The reverse is true with females. Incidentaly, in

females it is known as the Electra Complex.

This next libidinous dream was dreamt by G. Gordon Liddy, radio host.

“I discover myself to be in a very large house with multiple rooms.

I am in the company of a young woman for whose safety and well

being I have somehow become responsible. It’s never made clear

how or why. There is a romantic andr sexual relationship there.

There are bad or antagonistic people outside of the house that are

a threat. As I go through the house I am trying to figure out how I

am going to protect this female and accomplish some mission

which involves leaving the house and going somewhere else. The

house turns out to be floating on a body of water; sometimes it is a

mere river, and sometimes it is a very large body of water, but

there is always land in the prospect, and I am trying to get to the

land with the female. when I get to land, the hostile forces are in

hot pursuit, and there’s an edifice, like a light house. I have

somehow become armed with a firearm. I get to the top of the

stairs with the female. People come up the stairs, and there’s a

gun battle where I kill people left and right.”

This libidinous dream involves the father being transformed from one person into many,

thus making his identity indestinct, and, therefore, more enigmatic. The very large house and the

young woman are both symbols of the mother. Liddy reverses the protective role of the mother

onto himself, making him responsible for the young woman’s safety. This also serves to explain

why he doesn’t know how or why he came to be responsible for her. The threat is fear of

castration. The house afloat is a symbol of birth. The lighthouse and the firearm are both

phallic symbols of manliness and power. The gun battle where the dreamer kills people “left and

right” is symbolic of the infantile oedipal wish to get rid of the father.

Problem Solving Dreams

Problem solving dreams are the wise old sages of the human psyche. They are available

for you to seek their wisdom whenever you are pouring over a particular problem all day. They

can also provide a stepping ston for life, even when there is no real problem that has been

noticed consiously. The symbols used in problem solving dreams are less mystifying and more

literal.

The following problem solving dream comes from Warren Avis, ceo of Avis Enterprises,

and founder of Avis Rent-a-Car.

“I had just come out of the bomb base. I had to get somewhere.

There was no transportation. I dreamt there was a terrible need

for ground transportation. That’s how I started Avis.”

This dream lead Avis to create what would be a very successful business, and success is

the very nature of problem solving dreams. In order to solve a problem one must first be aware

of what the problem is that needs to be solved. The recognition that “I had to get somewhere ”

symbolizes the desire to get ahead in the world, to progress, to excell.

Initiation Dreams

Initiation dreams come at times of our life when we must make some change. The

change can be pleasant, like leaving for college or getting married, or unpleasant, like death.

Initiation dreams serve to smooth the transition and enable us to accept the change.

This dream was dreamt by Ludovic Autet, one year before his tragic death.

”I dreamt I was in my bedroom, when suddenly from a long hall I

saw two dogs coming towards my room, one yellow, the other

black. I shut my door, but somehow the dark dog came through my

door and got into my bedroom. It looked menacing, like a panther,

but when it climbed onto my bed I embraced it, and we lay

embracing, sleeping.”

The dark dog represents the unconscious, the mysterious dark side of the psyche. It

might also represent death. The door symbolizes the gateway into the unknown, something

always frightening. Ever the hero, Autet confronts the dark dog on his own. The yellow dog

represents the fear that is kept outside.

Lucid Dreams

Lucid dreams are radically different from other types of dreams. In fact, they aren’t a

type of dream in the sense that the previous dreams are. A lucid dream can occur in any type of

dream. It happens when the dreamer becomes aware of the fact that he or she is dreaming.

There are varying levels of consiousness one can reach within a dream, but if one is able to

revive his or her consious mind fully without waking up, it can be a truly interesting experience.

In most cases, you will reach a level of consiousness where you are able to use rational thought,

but can not readily distinguish between people and places you know. When I had a lucid dream

recently, I made a consious decision to find someone I knew from my church within the “dream

world” my mind had created. (Even though I had no idea where they lived, I knew I could pick

any building at random and “decide” that they would be inside.) It wasn’t difficult to find the

person, but upon awakening I discovered that the person I had found was in fact someone I used

to work with. Even though I felt equally “conscious” before I woke up, I had not been able to

distinguish between two people I would never confuse in real life.

There are two reasons you would want to achieve a lucid dream. For one thing, the laws

of physics are optional. You can fly, run up walls, and do all that other cool stuff they did on

The Matrix. The second reason is that you can learn a great deal about yourself. Characters in

dreams can tell you quite a bit, if you ask the right questions.

Dream types aside, there are many myths about dreams and many facts about dreams.

Many people believe they don’t dream. That is not true. Everyone has about four dreams a night;

they just don’t remember them. Many people also believe we dream in black and white. That is

far from true. Very few people don’t dream in color. I know I do. Despite what some people

believe, the amount of time you spend in a dream is equal to the amount of time you experience

in a dream. Contrary to some of us may think, everything in a dream is not about sex. Very few

things are, in fact. You can fly in any dream. The reason you don’t fly in every dream is that you

usually don’t try to fly. People believe that you can completely control a lucid dream. That is not

quite true. You can control most things that you cannot see, (in other words, you can decide

what something is before you see it, but once it is in your field of view, it stays the way it is) and

you can move things and turn things on and off with your mind. Other than that, you can only

control yourself. (You can change shape, which is pretty cool.)

The mind is a curious thing, and never is it more curious than when it is supposedly

turned off. In fact, it is never turned off. (Good thing, too, because it would probably just flash

“12:00″ over and over when it came back on, like your VCR does.) At any rate, enjoy your

nocturnal entertainment, and if you feel the need, analyze it like the Zebruder Footage or the

Sergeant Pepper album cover. Whatever you decide to learn from your dreams, enjoy them.