

# Dreaming as "A life experience": A qualitative investigation in psychosociocultural context

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**Summary.** Dreams are one of the realms of psychology and psychotherapy. In addition, people's dream experiences and interpretations are highly influenced by individual, social and cultural contexts. A qualitative study was designed to examine in detail how meaning is given to the dream experience in Turkish society. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 adult (9 female, 7 male) participants who were not mental health professionals. The data was analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis and within a critical-realistic framework. From the common narratives of the participants, three themes were developed under the overarching theme of Dreaming as "A Life Experience," namely (i) Changing Meaning: "[Dreaming] Is Unique to Each Person," (ii) "The Day After the Dream" and (iii) Dreaming as a Therapeutic or Spiritual "Guide." It was observed that the participants interpreted dreams as an experience that reflects physical or environmental conditions, the daily life and inner world of the person, the social and cultural structure, and processes of the society in which they live, and may also include a spiritual experience. In addition, the participants evaluated waking and dream life as experiences that are often directly related to and affect each other. In clinical and psychotherapy practice, dream assessment can be used as a helpful resource for examining people's life experiences. However, it is recommended that these examinations and dream studies be conducted by taking into account their social/cultural contexts. In this context, the meanings that people give to dreams in different cultures and societies should be examined.

**Keywords:** Dream, social/cultural context, dream-waking life continuity, qualitative research, reflexive thematic analysis

*'...the study of dreams is ultimately the study of human life itself'*  
Bulkeley (2008), *Dreams*

## 1. Introduction

Characterized by positive and/or negative emotions and cognitive processes, including visual, auditory, kinetic, and, less commonly, olfactory, physical contact, and taste experiences (Kahan & Claudatos, 2016), the dream experience is a phenomenon that is "very real," and the experienter is "right there" (Hartmann, 2010). Nevertheless, it is mysterious in many ways (Merced, 2012). In this context, the self is always in a place, moment, perception and feeling, and always oriented towards an object in dreams, just like in waking life (Kara & Özcan, 2019). The cultural and religious experiences of this common self in waking and dreaming, which are influenced by the person's social way of life, will affect both awake and dream life and the meaning given to the dream.

Cultures varying in terms of history, geography, religious belief, and scientific sophistication have different definitions (Eudell-Simmons & Hilsenroth, 2007), beliefs and rituals regarding the dream phenomenon and the meaningfulness of

dreams (Schubert & Punamäki, 2016). Moreover, although the brain mechanisms of a sleeping human being are universal, the content of dreams, the importance one attributes to dreams, and one's tendency to talk about one's dreams are highly variable due to the social lifestyle and subjectivity of past experiences (Lahire, 2022).

While how dreams are evaluated and interpreted contains many clues about cultural tradition, the contents of dreams are also shaped within the framework of cultural structures (Kafadar, 1994). Written literary works are one of the sources reflecting social lifestyle and cultural structure. Many examples can be given of written literary sources that are influenced by the understanding of dreams in Turkish society and have an impact on this understanding. One example is *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Duralı, 2007), the oldest written literary work in history, including many dreams and interpretations. Another is *Asiye Hatun's Dream Letters* (Kafadar, 1994), one of the oldest unearthed works regarding dream diaries in Turkish literary history, consisting of letters written by an Ottoman woman who lived in the 17th century to her sheikh. Then, there are masnavis such as *Iskendername*, *Husrev u Shirin* and *Garipname*, which include the importance, functions, types of dreams, and as the physical conditions affecting dreams and their interpretations (Akçay, 2018). Dreams also have an important place in the Islamic religious tradition to which most Turkish society belongs (Haque & Keshavarzi, 2014). Prophets' dreams, teachings (Salem, 2010) and written religious works are also sources that constitute the understanding of dreams in Turkish society. In Islamic literature, there are many sources written by thinkers such as Ibn Sirin (654-728), Kindi (801-870), Farabi (870-950), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), and Ibn Arabi (1164-1240) on sleep, dreams, dream psychology and the interpretation of dreams (Haque, 2004; Awaad et al., 2019; Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). The dream interpretation books of thinkers such as Ibn Sirin (2017) and

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Ibn Arabi (2011) are still among the sources used to obtain information about the meanings of dreams. In addition, internet-based dream interpretation and analysis applications that can be integrated into daily life and used in psychotherapy are becoming widespread in psychology (Domhoff & Schneider, 2008; Bulkeley, 2014; Holzinger et al., 2021).

In addition to the fact that cultural contexts shape dream experiences and beliefs about dreams, dreams are, more subjectively, highly related to people's inner lives. According to Hartmann (2010), dreams, as part of mental functioning, lie at one end of the continuum from focused-waking-thought to looser thought, to fantasy, daydreaming, reverie, and finally dreaming, with a kind of gradual transition rather than absolute distinctions between the ends. This continuum is not event-driven continuum but rather a continuum of personal concerns that are in mind during waking life and expressed during dreams (Domhoff, 2020). Moreover, it includes not only the reflection of waking experiences on dreams but also the reflection of dreams on waking experiences (Schredl, 2010). Therefore, it can be said that dreams, like thoughts, fantasies, and daydreams are also meaningful, and if they are not examined, a potentially important aspect of human beings will be deprived (Hartmann, 2010). Studies show that dreams are influenced by concerns that persist in waking life (Cartwright et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2015) that there is a central interpersonal relationship pattern common to dreams and waking narratives (Popp et al., 1996), and that psychological symptoms are reflected in dream themes (Roesler, 2018; Mariani et al., 2021). These findings support that waking experiences influence the thematic and emotional content of dreams and that there is a common pattern between them. In addition, dreams are one of the inner-session experiences of clients (Stewart & Schröder, 2015) and come up in psychotherapy in different contexts. Working with dreams in psychotherapy offers a valuable contribution to the treatment process and the psychological development of clients (Pesant & Zadra, 2004; Merced, 2012). Although psychotherapeutic schools have different terminology and techniques for dream approaches, the function and purpose of their use in psychotherapy have a similar pattern. Many models search for meaning in the explicit content of dreams and suggest that interventions similar to waking life are appropriate for this explicit content and that dreaming has an integrative function in some way (Eudell-Simmons & Hilsenroth, 2007).

In qualitative studies on dreams, it is seen that the continuity relationship between waking and dream life, its influence on the psychotherapeutic process and the transformation in dreams with the change in the therapy process are examined. In studies examining waking life experiences and dream life, it is seen that there is an experiential, emotional and representational continuity between dream and waking experiences (Malinowski et al., 2014). In studies examining the effect of dream work on psychotherapy, it is concluded that dream work encourages participation in psychotherapy in clients who have recently lost a loved one and have distressing dreams (Hill et al., 2000). Also, working with dreams helps access emotions and underlying concerns, provides insight into the therapeutic relationship, and strengthens the therapist-client relationship (Hill et al., 2013). The data obtained from these studies support the view that dreams affect waking life just as waking life affects dreams, thus supporting the continuity of dreams and waking life.

## Current Study

The dream is described as a universal phenomenon, in the sense that everyone experiences it, and individual/ "involuntary," in the sense that everyone experiences very different things (Lahire, 2022). As in the waking experience, sleep and/or dream life is a multidimensional experience influenced by individual, social, cultural, and religious contexts (Bulkeley, 2008). Although psychology schools and/or psychotherapeutic approaches have put forward many different theories (e.g., Freud, 2020; Jung, 2020; Hill, 1996, 2004), studies investigating the subjective experience of the meaning given to dream life, which is strongly underpinned by religion, culture, and society, are limited. Qualitative research approaches are preferred when exploring a complex topic or bringing a deep, "detailed understanding" of the topic (Creswell, 2020; Morrow, 2007). Moreover, one of the most fundamental features of qualitative approaches is that the researcher tries to understand "how" people make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Consequently, a qualitative study was designed to examine in detail how the multidimensional, rich and, in a sense, "mysterious" dream experience is given meaning in Turkish society.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Although dream life is a subjective experience, like waking life, it is a phenomenon every human experiences. Therefore, it can be said that every living person is included in the universe of the study. In this context, the inclusion criteria were kept broad as being an adult and the exclusion criteria as not a mental health professional (to examine the social perspective rather than the professional perspective). Also, it was aimed to create a sample group consisting of 10 - 15 volunteer participants. In order to reach eligible volunteers, for recruitment, a call for participation in the study was made through social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) of the psychotherapy and research center of the university where the researchers work.

Recruitment was carried out through a call for participation poster shared on social media accounts and through individual referrals of those who were informed. As a result of the first call for volunteers, 35 people (thirty-one female, four male) applied. Volunteers were contacted according to the order in which they filled out the application form. Two applicants were excluded because they were from the field of mental health. Regardless of the application order, all male applicants were invited to the interview. Consequently, interviews were conducted with three males and nine females. In order to ensure homogeneous participation in terms of gender, a second call was made for male volunteers. Thus, 13 (three female, ten male) filled out the application form. Interviews were conducted with the first four men who filled out the form in order of application. Their interviews were completed, allowing the researchers to conclude that the appropriate number of interviews had been conducted to tell a "rich, complex and multifaceted story" about the dream experience (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). Of the 16 interviewed, nine were female and seven were male. The age range of the participants was 18 - 43 (M = 29.8). Pseudonyms were given to the participants to facilitate ease of comprehension of the study.

## 2.2. Procedure

In the study, semi-structured questions about one's dream experience, created by the first researcher, were used as data collection tools. The questions used in the study were developed to cover the prioritized areas of dream experience in the context of the research question and were prepared in an open-ended, non-leading manner, avoiding technical terms and assumptions (Çelik et al., 2020). Two pilot interviews were conducted to evaluate the semi-structured questions (Maxwell, 2018), one with a mental health professional who was a doctor candidate and the other with a volunteer expertise other than mental health. These two interviews were conducted only to evaluate the questions and were not included in the data analysis process. As a result of the pilot interviews, only minor changes were made such as changes in the question flow.

Online individual interviews were conducted with volunteer participants via the Zoom application using semi-structured questions between October 19, 2021, and November 20, 2021. In this way, the participation of people living in different regions of Turkey was possible, and the flexibility to choose the appropriate time was established (Gray et al., 2020; Braun et al., 2021). The first researcher conducted interviews with the participants. Repeating the information given in the call for participation, each participant was informed at the beginning of the interview that the purpose of the research was to examine in detail how Turkish society gives meaning to the dream experience. The participants were assured their responses would be kept confidential and evaluated only by the researchers, and that they could withdraw from the study if they did not want to continue. Also, they were assured that the data obtained would be used anonymously only in academic studies and deleted when the study was completed. During the interviews, before starting the semi-structured questions, the participants were informed of the interview process, and any questions or curiosities they had were discussed. Thereafter, the semi-structured questions started with topics related to the participants' dream experiences, the general content of their dreams, their beliefs about dreams, the meaning they attributed to dreams, and the meaning they attributed to the interpretation of dreams. Further questions addressed the meaning and interpretation they gave to their dream experiences and ended with more general factors that were thought to be involved in dreams (see Table 1). At the end of each interview, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to share and their impressions of how the interview had gone for them. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. The duration range of the interviews was 0:47:09 – 1:21:09, and the average interview duration was 1:05:52.

## 2.3. Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Reflexive TA) method (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a) within a critical-realist framework, which is a combination of realist ontology and constructivist epistemology (Archer et al., 1998). This philosophical view focuses on the subjectivity of meaning and experience and assumes that meaning is produced within social and cultural contexts (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). In the context of the study, this assumption means that the participants' narratives of their dream experiences were accepted as is and interpreted as describing

Table 1. Semi-structured Interview Questions.

Semi-structured Interview Questions
(a) How often do you dream/remember dreams?
(b) What are your general thoughts about dreams (general beliefs about dreams, foretelling about the future, divine/demonic, etc.)?
(c) What do you usually see in your dreams (daily events, seeing evil, emotional state during the day, plans, problem-solving, etc.)? (What do you associate this with?)
(d) What emotions usually dominate your dreams (what do you associate this with?)
(e) How do you attach meaning to your dreams?
(f) (If you attribute meaning) Who/what sources do you consult for the meanings of your dreams?
(g) Do you care about dream interpretations or does a dream and its meaning shape your life and decisions?
(h) What do you think influences the content of dreams in general (daily events, individual issues, cultural, religious, social discourses, universal or culture-specific, etc.)?

the reality of the participants' experiences but not separating from the religious, cultural, and social contexts in which meanings were constructed.

The Reflexive TA approach comprises six iterative stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019a). However, the analysis process is not carried out by following these stages in a strict and sequential manner, but by going through the steps repeatedly in a way that establishes integration with each other stage (Braun & Clarke, 2020b). These stages consist of data familiarization and noting initial ideas, systematic data coding, creating initial themes from coded and compiled data, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. While conducting the study through these stages, the processes such as developing the survey questions, preparing the call for participation in the study, contacting the volunteers, organizing the interview schedule, and conducting the online interviews were carried out by the first researcher, and the opportunity to get to know the data from the beginning of the study was obtained. While conducting the interviews, the researchers had the opportunity to meet the participants, build rapport, and hear the way they expressed their experiences.

All recorded interviews were transcribed as separate Word files, and the files were transferred to the MAXQDA and studied. There are no strict guidelines for thematic analysis during transcription, but all verbal expressions in the interview records should be transcribed verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While analyzing the data, firstly, open coding was used in an inductive way to identify all possible experiences and interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2020b). Initially, by reading the entire transcripts imported into the MAXQDA and paying equal attention to each part of the text, codes were applied to each meaningful item in the context of the research question. These codes were initially broad (e.g., 'interpretation'), but became more detailed through repeated readings (e.g., 'interpretation is not something that can be learned'). The coding process was therefore iterated many times, reading all the data repeatedly. While coding, notes were taken about some codes and the whole study. These notes included explanations about the codes, some patterns noticed, and draft ideas about the themes. After



the initial coding, the codes obtained were classified and temporary categories and themes were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Developing themes involved a long process of coding, making tentative classifications, creating potential and/or draft themes, coding in more detail and repeatedly, and finalizing the themes.

### 2.4. Quality of the Analysis and Reflexivity

In this study, where the cyclical stages of Reflexive TA and where subjective interpretation is important and even inevitable, more positivist measures to increase reliability and accuracy (e.g., participant verification, inter-coder reliability) were not used, as this would be inconsistent with the philosophical basis of the method (Braun & Clarke, 2020b). In addition, Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2000b) fifteen-item criteria for good thematic analysis and the twenty questions to guide the evaluation of a qualified Reflexive TA study were considered. These criteria mainly included the researcher's deep engagement with the data, coding rigorously and systematically, reflexivity, i.e., the role of the researcher, stating theoretical assumptions, and presenting the thematic patterns of shared meaning rather than summarizing the data issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019a, 2020b). Themes are therefore conceptualized as common patterns of meaning that are 'developed' rather than 'emerged' or 'discovered' (Braun & Clarke, 2020b). In this context, themes are not categories formed directly from semi-structured questions or simply a summary of these questions, but shared patterns of meaning developed by the researchers.

Reflexivity refers to returning to oneself to pay attention to how one participated in developing a particular understanding or taking an action (Fischer, 2009). Specifically, during a qualitative study, the researcher "positions oneself," sharing one's experiences and views and articulating how one interprets the information (Creswell, 2020). The first researcher, probably like any psychotherapist, listened to clients' dreams from time to time during the session. She first learned about phenomenological dream studies in psychotherapy at a scientific meeting 2017. In the same year, she started to attend periodic meetings where the use of dreams in psychotherapy through the phenomenological approach was discussed. Although she had some

ideas about the phenomenological approach and dreams, and this information was evoked in the back of her mind while listening to the participants, it should be said that she could not deny the cultural, sociological and, at the same time, being a Muslim psychologist and religious dimensions shaped her dream views. However, in the Reflexive TA approach, these retreats are natural and inevitable in terms of the role of the researcher conducting a qualitative study and the researcher's contribution to developing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019b). On the other hand, it is thought that the importance that phenomenological psychotherapy and thus the phenomenological attitude attaches to subjective experience (Zahavi, 2019) and the fact that researchers have often practiced this attitude in the execution of dream studies have contributed to a greater awareness concerning her role as a researcher.

## 3. Results and Discussion

For many participants, dreams were mysterious, unknown, and difficult to understand. In addition, dreams were mainly mentioned as an "interesting" and "liked" experience. However, a few participants who stated that they "did not like" dreaming. To understand such varying narratives, this section includes the analysis of the interviews regarding the dream experience. An overarching theme is presented that entails different dimensions of the dream experience. Three corresponding themes are also identified: the meaning and interpretation of the dream experience, the effect of the dream on waking life and the transformative role of this effect (see Table 2).

### 3.1. Overarching Theme: Dreaming as "A Life Experience"

The common pattern in this overarching theme was that participants often regarded waking and dreaming as directly related and mutually influencing experiences. In other words, just as waking life affects dream life, dream life could also affect waking life (Schredl & Reinhard, 2010). It can be said that this holistic context and all the data obtained from the interviews support the acceptance that dreams are an

Table 2. Overarching Theme and Themes.

Overarching Theme and Themes	
<p><b>Overarching Theme: Dreaming as "A Life Experience"</b></p> <p><b>Theme 1:</b> Changing Meaning: "[Dreaming] Is Unique to Each Person"</p> <p><b>Theme 2:</b> "The Day After the Dream"</p> <p><b>Theme 3:</b> Dreaming as a Therapeutic or Spiritual "Guide"</p>	<p><b>Dimension 1:</b> Sleeping in an "Awkward Time" or Being "Tired Even in a Dream"</p> <p><b>Dimension 2:</b> Dreaming: "Journey to the Inner World"</p> <p><b>Dimension 3:</b> "How many mosques do Germans see in their dreams, or how many synagogues do we see in our dreams?"</p> <p><b>Dimension 4:</b> Dreaming as a "Religious Experience": "The Door to Another Realm"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "[The Dream] is a Personal Matter"</li> <li>• "I Can't Stop Wondering [What It Means]"</li> <li>• Dreams Are Attached to The Foot of a Bird Until They Are Interpreted</li> <li>• "The Mood [in the Dream] is Imprinted on Me"</li> <li>• "[Dreaming] Affects the Way I Think"</li> <li>• "I Took a Stand Regarding That [Situation]"</li> <li>• "A Kind of Free Psychological Counseling"</li> <li>• "A Message but Not a Command": Metaphysical Functions</li> </ul>

experience of the self, just like waking life (Kara & Özcan, 2019):

*That is also a part of life, actually... I mean, just as we experience things while we are awake, we experience things while we are asleep, in our dreams. I can say that I see it as a life experience. (Hüma)*

There was a common pattern of describing dreams as "a life experience" and as related to waking life. Thus, the themes that fell under this overarching theme were often intertwined and interconnected. In addition, all participants saw dreams as reflecting experiences of the self, influenced by physical, psychological, religious, cultural, and social experiences, and having different dimensions.

### 3.1.1 Dimension 1: Sleeping in an "Awkward Time" or Being "Tired Even in a Dream"

Most of the participants' experiences and beliefs were that the "time of dreaming," during night or morning/day-time sleep, influenced the dream and that dreams seen at different times would lead to different experiences. These participants' narratives were consistent with understanding the dream depending on the time of dreaming, one of the basic principles of dream interpretation in Islamic literature (Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). For example, some participants shared their beliefs and experiences that sleeping during the "time of *kerahheeh*," the forty-five-minute interval before sunrise and sunset, was a "wrong time" for sleep and can lead to "absurd," "frightening," "satanic" or "mixed" dreams such as those about "death" or "accidents."

Many participants also talked about the reflection of bodily sensations on dream content. Ömer shared that when he sleeps and is very tired, he experiences this in his dreams: "I can't move. I can't do the things I can [normally] do. I feel tired even in the dreams." In addition, a few participants mentioned that "physical needs" such as feeling cold or "thirsty" could also be reflected in dreams. Consistent with these experiences of the participants, a study conducted with people from different cultures showed that physical states such as hunger and thirst affect dream quality (O'Neil, 1965). Different studies conducted in the laboratory environment have shown that different external stimuli, such as the vibration of hands and feet, flashing lights (Paul et al., 2014), traffic sounds (Rahimi et al., 2015), and mild pain stimuli (Nielsen et al., 1993) are complexly processed and included in the dream content (Schredl, 2018; Carr et al., 2020). Moreover, the expression of these experiences was influenced by cultural contexts at times. Many participants reported that going to bed on a full stomach, "especially at dinner," or eating "stomach-taxing foods" could lead to dreams of "what is colloquially called nightmares" or "demonic dreams." In addition to bodily sensations, some participants talked about the reflection of environmental conditions, such as the cleanliness of the environment on the dream content. Some participants stated that "sleeping in a dirty place" or "sleeping on [bread] crumbs can cause horrible dreams" and that this fear is culturally "ingrained."

The boundaries for the interpretation or meaning of these narratives of dream life, which were mostly based on religious and cultural references, were more obvious, and the participants did not seek alternative meanings in these dreams, which they attributed to environmental or physical conditions or bodily sensations:

*...when I have a very scary dream [...] I say I slept at a very wrong time. I say that I slept at a time of *kerahheeh*. (Defne)*

*...in the religious knowledge, I was told it is not good to sleep during the time of *kerahheeh*. So, if it is not good to sleep, I think there is not much good from the dream, which is the fruit of sleep. (Hamza)*

### 3.1.2 Dimension 2: Dreaming: "Journey to the Inner World"

The common narrative under this dream dimension was that daily life experiences, inner experiences, concerns or simply objects or events encountered during the day, i.e., all the inner experiences of the self, were reflected in dream life. Some participants described dreams as an experience that reflects their "inner world" and contains information about the self, implying that the nature of dream life is more authentic than waking life.

*Right now, as I am living, I think there are a lot of obstacles for my ideas to come out, but let me say that the dream state is the time when we are most comfortable and there is the least interference. Therefore, the less intervention, the more easily the idea can express itself. Again, an idea that I actually had... (Dila)*

Many participants believed that waking and dreaming experiences have similar psychological patterns that were common, interrelated, compatible, and influenced by each other. These views and experiences of the participants were quite consistent with studies supporting the continuity relationship between dream and waking life (Domhoff & Schneider, 2008; Hartmann, 2010; Schredl, 2010; Domhoff, 2020; Nöltner & Schredl, 2022; Schredl et al., 2023). In addition, some participants expressed that the experience of the dream self has a common orientation with the wakeful self. Meva expressed her experience of the common self in dreams and waking life by saying, "If I were alive with such a dream: if I encountered such a situation in real life as in that dream, I would react almost the same as in that dream." Amine also expressed this experience with an example:

*[Previously] when I was more introverted, there was a period when I questioned a lot why I was introverted, for example... I was having dreams about it. I mean I was seeing myself. I was seeing myself as the introverted Amine, in whatever way I thought of myself. For example, there were times when I saw [myself] from the outside. [...] There was such a feeling there.*

Many participants mentioned that whatever "one obsesses about," "is involved with" in daily life, "wants a lot" or "does not want at all," whatever "a person thinks about" and "turns over in one's mind" before going to sleep is reflected in dreams. Consistent with the participants' statements, focusing on positive thoughts before sleep increased the likelihood of dreaming about these thoughts (Wang et al., 2022a). Similarly, suppressing or focusing on an intrusive thought increases the likelihood of dreaming about the thought (Wang et al., 2022b). In the Islamic understanding of dreams, dreams that arise from one's worries, preoccupations, inner experiences, and self-talk are classified as psychological dreams (Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). In this context, it can be said that the participants' views were shaped

by their individual dream experiences, which were also supported by psychological, religious, and cultural contexts.

Regarding the continuity of waking and dreaming, many participants gave examples of the effects on dream content of witnessing the illness, old age and death of family elders living in one's home, an exam being prepared for, or issues that haunt the mind about one's children. A few participants also mentioned the reflection of daily life preoccupations, whether positive or negative, on dream content. Sometimes, this reflection involved the continuation of a hectic event or situation in the dream life, and sometimes, it was just a "mood" similar to the waking experience. Elif, who teaches Spanish, also talked about her experience of her day's busyness being reflected in her dreams:

*If there is something I am very busy with during the day, it usually enters my mind [dream]. Like I said, lately it's Spanish. For example, I teach Spanish all the time, or words, like that. That is, for example, if I have prepared something all day, etc. if it has been very busy... When I go to bed at night, I see it as a continuation of it, as a continuation of that busyness, if it has been a subject that has exhausted me a lot...*

Participants' experiences and opinions were inconsistent with the results of another study in which a discontinuity was found between waking experiences and dream affect (Conte et al., 2020). For example, people who frequently engaged in their hobbies had more frequent hobby-related dreams, and the emotional tone of these dreams was positive. These results support the view that there is a thematic and emotional continuity between waking and dreaming experiences (Schredl et al., 2023). In addition, a qualitative study examining the continuity between participants' waking life experiences and their dreams, observed that dream elements were not always continuous or discontinuous, but usually somewhere in between. The researchers stated that these ratings are related to the physical elements of dreams, such as the people performing the actions in the dream content and the place/location where the dream is set. However, continuity was found in the experiential and emotional context (Malinowski et al., 2014). In this context, in the relationship between waking experiences and dream experiences, there is a continuity related to a person's inner experiences rather than events and people.

Many participants mentioned that issues, people, or values they care about were included in the dream experience. People with whom one felt a strong connection, things that gave meaning to life over a short or long period, issues that were of concern and became an "internal matter," a value that one wanted to "acquire" or a situation that one wanted to "get rid of" because of a value could be included in the dream experience. By saying, "it has to mean something to us so that we dream about it," Ömer implied that all dream experiences are somehow meaningful in the context of the self. These narratives of the participants supported the findings showing that waking experiences included in dream content are more emotional and meaningful and have more impact on one's life compared to experiences not included in dream content (Wang et al., 2021).

There are findings that social networks in dreams have the same characteristics as those in waking life (Domhoff & Schneider, 2008). However, in addition to differences such as the community structure being more dispersed in dreams, it has been observed that central individuals who

are important in waking life tend to be important in the social network in dreams (Han & Schweickert, 2023). There is a central interpersonal relationship pattern common to the narratives of both. In particular, it has been found that recurrent relationship components can be easily compared to relationship themes in waking narratives (Popp et al., 1996). For example, interactions with family members overlap substantially in waking and dream experiences (Nöltner & Schredl, 2022). Many participants expressed that their thoughts and experiences about their interpersonal experiences with their family, spouse, and social/school/work friends were reflected in their dreams. These experiences included feelings towards spousal/romantic relationships, the divorce process, family problems, friendships, and lost loved ones. Participants who felt emotions such as "anger," "resentment," "regret," "sadness," and "longing," along with problems experienced in interpersonal relationships in waking life, talked about dream experiences involving these emotions. In a study with fully divorced depressed individuals, it was observed that dream content was influenced by ongoing concerns in waking life and was related to ongoing emotions (Cartwright et al., 2006). In addition, in women exposed to addictive behavior by at least one parent and in their current romantic relationship, it was observed that addiction and difficulty in relationships affect the dream lives of these women (Parker, 2015). A few participants shared their dreams about close losses for which they felt longing. Hüma said she missed her grandmother very much and that dreams "relieve[d] her longing" after losing her. Similarly, Fatma described many dream experiences related to the baby she lost during pregnancy. Fatma's experience supports the finding that most women who experience loss during pregnancy dream about their lost baby at least once (Black et al., 2021). Also, it has been observed that many people in the grieving process have dream experiences that reflect this process. Some common dream themes that they tend to have include "pleasant memories or experiences, the deceased being disease-free, memories of the deceased's illness or time of death, the deceased appearing comfortable and peaceful in the afterlife, and the deceased delivering a message" (Wright et al., 2014). Moreover, some participants mentioned that life changes also changed their dream experiences. Defne stated that after university life, as her lifestyle changed and the uncertainty about the future increased (especially in areas such as work and marriage), her dreams also changed. Some participants explained that as their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes about their experiences in daily life changed, their experiences about the same subject in their dream life also changed.

*Before, when I did not know how to drive, for example, sometimes I would always be searching for something while behind the wheel... but on the other hand, I did not know how to drive either. I would see myself in various, very anxious situations like: "God, what am I going to do now?", "How am I going to stop?" "How am I going to step on the gas?" and "How am I going to break?" For example, this thing disappeared after I got used to driving and over the traffic phase. (Elif)*

Almost every participant mentioned the concept of the "subconscious" many times when discussing the relationship between dreams and the self. Although references to the subconscious sometimes included only encountered and recorded experiences, it was often mentioned as a



source of unrecognized but essential and unbiased information about the self. Dreams were described as an "expression," "reflection" or "place of release" of the subconscious. Many participants claimed that "established" fears, worries, or doubts that "never come to mind in daily life or are ignored even if they come to mind occasionally," and that were "unspoken," "suppressed" or "avoided" enter dreams. Although these statements seem to be very compatible with the conceptual language of the psychodynamic dream approach (Freud, 2020), it can be said that the dreams that the participants described as an expression of the subconscious, containing emotions such as fear and doubt, are in a sense very related to waking life. This relationship can be seen from the manifest content of the dream, and the participants can easily see this relationship. For example, Defne talked about the process of taking the driver's license exam, saying, "I dream about the things I worry about in daily life." She explained that she had experiences with a similar pattern in her dreams, with fear, anxiety, and thoughts of "I wonder if I will not be able to do it" and that in her dreams, she "could not find the gas pedal while driving a car." She explained this experience as "what I call the subconscious." Many participants shared similar experiences. While some participants distinguished between dreams that originate in the subconscious and dreams that are like an event experienced, they described dreaming as a "discharge" of things that happened during the day that could not be addressed or completed. Many participants identified the subconscious as a "place" that contains all the experiences of the self, "whether one is aware of them or not." In psychoanalytic dream theory, it has been argued that the complex images of dreams that evoke a sense of inconsistency and incomprehensibility constitute the "manifest content" of dreams, which is the visible face of dreams, and that the real thought behind this visible face, "latent content," should be sought (Jung, 2020). The findings of a recent study with an analytical approach show that, contrary to Freud's views, the psychological state of the person can be clearly seen from the manifest content of the dream. Furthermore, the findings support that dreams more holistically encompass the entire reality of the inner world, including aspects inaccessible to one's waking consciousness (Roesler, 2020). These findings and discussions seem consistent with participants' beliefs about dreams that they associate with the subconscious.

*I generally think of dreams as the reflection of things that we have put into our subconscious in daily life. I usually see such things. For example, an event I experienced that day at work... (Ömer)*

A few participants said that individual, religious, cultural, and social values or norms influence dreams because they are "embedded in the subconscious" or "introduced into the subconscious." Esma thought that any dream influenced by a situation valued in her community would not be dreamed by a person living in another community that did not show similar importance to such a situation. She gave the example that a religious practice that her family cared about and inculcated in her might have entered her dreams by influencing her subconscious mind:

*For example, when I was little, I dreamed about hell, heaven, and so on. My mother interpreted me as being warned to pay attention to my prayers. But since she always warned me about this, such a dream could have come from my subconscious.*

On the other hand, some participants' attitudes towards dreams that they thought came from the subconscious mind were as follows: "These fears have no basis" or "These worries are not real," "a game of the subconscious mind," "just a reflection of an experience encountered" or the effect of a thought passing through the mind while falling asleep. Additionally, many participants stated that objects, people, situations, or events encountered during the day can somehow be involved in dream life. These participants referred to such dreams as "unqualified," "empty," "foggy," and "mixed" dreams.

### 3.1.3 Dimension 3: "How many mosques do Germans see in their dreams, or how many synagogues do we see in our dreams?"

Under the overarching theme that dreaming is "a life experience," the dimension of "journey to the inner world" certainly includes religious, cultural, and social experiences in particular. This can be based on the assumption that these contexts somehow influence every individual experience and not vice versa. However, due to their role in constructing subjective experiences related to the "inner world," they were also seen to have a special place in the narratives. While narratives about subjective experiences constructed with these contexts were also seen in other dimensions, in this dimension, the views expressed by almost all the participants about the place of religious, cultural, and social processes in dream life were also prominent. Many participants repeatedly stated that "living conditions," values, "opportunities," socio-economic conditions, and "the environment in which [the person] lives" have an impact on dreams.

A few participants talked about the reflection of their lives and the issues and discourses they attach importance to in the context of their religious beliefs on their dream lives. Some participants thought that things that could not be experienced or expressed in waking life due to religious, cultural, and social pressure were realized in dreams. Fatma stated that "restricting oneself" for religious reasons "inevitably reflects" into one's dreams. Amine also mentioned that every time she did something she thought was a "sin" in waking life, it was reflected in her dreams:

*When I do something wrong, in a religious sense... When I do something wrong in my life, I see this. For example, I see it in a bad way, but I cannot reveal this. It is a very special thing... Let's say when I commit a particular sin or I do not pay attention -The symbol of it has been the same for years. - I see that thing. I see myself that way.*

In addition to religious values and sensitivities, some participants felt that cultural or social experiences also constituted the content of dreams. In their narratives, participants mentioned that "whatever is culturally important" was included in their dream experiences and referred to "social norms," "social structure," and "social consciousness." The lifestyle, environment, and conditions that by the context of religion and culture also shaped the dream. Asaf supported his view by saying, "how many mosques do Germans see in their dreams, or how many synagogues do we see in our dreams?" When the dream experiences of different cultures are compared, it has been observed that there are significant differences in self-constructs, dream length and structural patterns in dreams (Konakawa et al., 2023). In addition, this reality is becoming apparent partly via the

"dream bank" (dreambank.net) founded by Adam Schneider and G. William Domhoff, which contains over twenty thousand dream stories reported by people aged between seven and seventy-four. The data obtained from this database has made it visible that common images, themes, and words were shared in the dreams of people belonging to the same group, community, population category or living the social experiences of the same period (Lahire, 2022).

Many participants were of the view that social phases such as economic and political ones, opportunities, "living conditions" or the country's "atmosphere" or "agenda" influenced their dream experiences. For example, there have been many studies that support that COVID-19, a global pandemic that has affected individual and social life for several years, is reflected in dream content (Margherita et al., 2021; Barrett, 2020; Civitarese, 2021). In a qualitative study examining dream content during the COVID-19 phase, it is seen that the themes developed were corona, chaos, death and loss, illness, fear, threat, and anxiety, and crowding and loneliness. Thus, it can be said that a mass disease such as a pandemic, which negatively affects people's lives and causes traumatic stress, leads to common themes in many people's dreams (Avci, 2022). In addition, there are findings that it [COVID-19] is included in dream content but rarely experienced (Koppehele-Gossel et al., 2023) or that being more affected or anxious during the pandemic had greater effects on dream experiences (Scarpelli et al., 2022; Schredl & Bulkeley, 2020; Sikka et al., 2023; Raffaelli et al., 2023). Similarly, Asaf, who is closely interested in the economy, talked about the repercussions of negative changes in the country's economy on his dreams:

*Yesterday, I had a dream. The emotional equivalent of this is that recently, this - I am following the economy very closely - economy is a bit troubled in the country right now. Obviously, I saw some troubling things about the economic situation in my dream. This situation triggered me.*

### 3.1.4 Dimension 4: Dreaming as a "Religious Experience": "The Door to Another Realm"

Almost all participants mentioned "divine," "spiritual," "religious," or "demonic" dreams, which they considered as a separate category. These were "a completely different field" from "other," "normal" dreams in which the human being was "just seeing," that is, in the "receptive position." In addition, it was described as a phenomenon in which "a divine being reveals itself to us through our dreams" or that Satan manifests himself in order to cause "fitnah [incitement]" and "waswasa [delusion]." This includes some special experiences such as "istikhara [prayer performed to ask for guidance in a matter from Allah]" and "karabasan [something like a nightmare]," and this generally occurs "rarely." A database of over 22,000 dream contents (dreambank.net) shows that religious or spiritual elements in dreams are rare (Domhoff & Schneider, 2008). One participant described this type of dream scenario as follows:

*Sometimes, a person feels very empty spiritually and does not know what to do. At those times, I pray a lot. I ask God for help and I sleep. Maybe I sleep sadly, or rather I sleep helplessly, not knowing what to do... Then, when I have slept, I have a few dreams. I can interpret them spiritually, that is, recognize their orientation. (Hüma)*

Some participants expressed that they were not sure whether the dreams they categorized as "divine" or "spiritual" were "truly a spiritual experience," "a divine message," or "sourced from the subconscious." Meryem thought that a dream she had during her divorce was perhaps because she had thought about it too much, but perhaps it was a divine message. Some participants talked about the characteristics that distinguish spiritual dreams from other dreams and emphasized the emotions that "this kind" of dream evokes:

*In this kind of dream, I feel - how should I describe it - as if I am in a conversation or enveloped in something and all sounds stop. And I feel as if there is only that event. In these divine dreams, there is a different feeling, a different atmosphere. But other dreams are noisier, as if we are more alive, that's how I feel. (Amine)*

Many participants also talked about dreams they referred to as "demonic." At times, they used the terms "bad," "scary," or "unpleasant" interchangeably with "demonic dreams." Esma emphasized the distinction between bad or frightening dreams and demonic dreams, saying that although demonic dreams are bad, "not all bad dreams are demonic." This approach seems to align with Islamic literature, which states that the source of confused, fuzzy, or frightening dreams may be psychological or demonic (Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). Participants stated that these dreams, as with dreams revealed by God, are "shown" by Satan as "a method of waswasa" to "upset," "confuse," "make people feel guilty," and "cause discord" between them and others.

While some participants defined divine and spiritual dreams only as "revealed by Allah," others placed them in a metaphysical category, including demonic or frightening dreams. In the context of cultural and religious literature, regarding the current understanding of dreams in Turkish society, which is strongly influenced by Islamic teachings, dreams are classified into three types: divine or righteous, complex, or demonic, and psychological (Salem, 2010; Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). Contrary to the dimensions of the dream mentioned in the Islamic literature and those that are culturally adopted, most of the participants talked about the dimensions of the dream that are experienced through the reflection of contexts such as social life or the country's agenda and sensations from one's surroundings or body in the dream. However, for the most part, Islamic literature and teachings heavily influenced the participants' views on the dimensions of dreams. The passages on dreams in the Qur'an and hadiths significantly influenced on Muslims past and present and are a strong basis for the Islamic understanding of dreams (Bulkeley, 2002). Hamza drew attention to the mention of a dream in the Qur'anic story of the Prophet Joseph, and shared his ideas that "the dream is not just a healing mechanism" but "a door to another dimension." Similarly, Asaf knew that the prophets of Islam received revelation in dreams and that "for the chosen ones" such as prophets or guardians, "special, beautiful or important things are shown to them in dreams," and implied that he had heard this information from others and that it was culturally common knowledge. The Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, contains many verses about dreams. Although participants commonly gave the example of Prophet Joseph (12:4-5; 12:36), there are other verses such as Prophet Abraham's dream about the sacrifice of his son (37:102-105), and Prophet Muhammad being given the good news of the conquest of Mecca in a dream (48:27). In this context, it can



be said that the Qur'an and hadiths influence many participants' beliefs that dreams have a spiritual dimension.

### 3.2. Theme 1: Changing Meaning: "[Dreaming] Is Unique to Each Person"

#### 3.2.1 "[The Dream] is a Personal Matter"

Many participants emphasized that dreams are a "personal matter" indicating that the meaning or interpretation given to the dream will change depending on the person experiencing the dream and in the context of one's dream and waking life. While sometimes the dreamer assigned this meaning or interpretation, other times another person served as its interpreter. Many participants stated that the dream "can be interpreted differently depending on the dreamer" and that different people "having the same dream can even interpret that dream differently." The idea that what dreams correspond to can be explained by personal contexts is also consistent with the idea of the continuity of dreaming and waking. In one study, dreamers evaluated most of their dreams with their waking experiences on the same day, whereas independent evaluators identified only half of the dreams as having such a relationship. However, independent evaluators could also determine the meaningful inclusion of personally significant events and concerns in dreams (Wang et al., 2023). In line with these findings, the objects, people, or situations included in the dreams have personal contextual and explicit correspondences rather than symbolic or implicit correspondences. Similarly, Dila explained that when she listens to the dreams narrated by people from her close circle, she could see that the content of the dream was based on what they experienced or thought about. Likewise, many participants thought that uniform interpretation was wrong. Esma explained this idea with an example, stating that someone who can "interpret dreams" can interpret the fire seen in the dreams of two different people completely differently. She stated that she might have heard this information from her surroundings, along with a religious reference. In the understanding of dreams in Turkish society, which is especially influenced by Islamic literature, even though dreams are symbolic, the meaning of dreams is also influenced by personal contexts (Kafadar, 1994). Elif mentioned that blog posts about the meaning of dreams would not be valid for everyone. She gave the example of how old age, one of the themes of subjective dream experiences, could be interpreted as "fear of disease" for her, while it can mean something else for someone else. Moreover, she said that a comment written on a blog on this subject could be "a matter that has nothing to do with her" and added that dreams are "a personal matter."

Dreams have been treated as meaningful phenomena in many cultures. However, there may be some cross-cultural differences in interpretation and in views on what certain dreams correspond to (Eudell-Simmons & Hilsenroth, 2007). Similarly, many participants mentioned that there may be differences in the meanings given to their dreams by people who believe in a different religion or live in different societies. They stated that a person who believes in a different religion might give a different meaning to a similar dream and that the meaning they attribute to the dream might be related to their beliefs, values and culture, therefore, their perspective. Some participants expressed their thoughts on the different

meanings of dream content by comparing people living in different geographies.

*In the end, that person dreams about something in his/her geography or something in his/her own life. That symbol may mean one thing to him/her, and another symbol may mean another thing to me. But in order to understand this, I think it is necessary to look at the connections and logic of that dream as a whole. In other words, you need to look at what exactly the content is conveying, the feeling. (Meva)*

#### 3.2.2 "I Can't Stop Wondering [What It Means]"

Almost all participants said that after having a dream, they looked up its interpretation "especially if it was impressive" on the internet or, less commonly, in dream interpretation books. The most common emphasis on researching the interpretation of the dream was the feeling of "curiosity." Esma said that she looked up what she saw in her dream by going to websites "wondering what it could be" and was satisfying her curiosity. Defne said that she felt the need to look at dream interpretations as soon as she woke up and that she often did so.

Some participants used the word "preference" for their attitudes when looking at dream interpretations in books or on the internet and emphasized the behavior of choice. Similar to some other participants, Fatma stated that she usually looks at "no other pages than the pages that have religious content" because it seems "truer" to her. Many of the participants explained that after looking at "several different sites" out of a sense of curiosity, they chose the comments that "made the most sense or worked best for them," that were "beautiful" or "the most positive," and that "overlapped with each other" or were "common" across different sites.

The "symbols" or "icons" in the dream content were also one of the elements that aroused curiosity about the meaning or interpretation of the dream. Although almost participants did not find the general explanations in written dream interpretations consistent and logical, some participants thought that the symbols in the dream content were not a coincidence but a warning or sign. In Islamic dream understanding, although personal contexts are taken into consideration when interpreting dreams (Kafadar, 1994), there are symbolic interpretations, such as the shirt being a sign of religion, drinking milk being a sign of gaining knowledge, and a broken sword being a sign of the death of someone close (Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). While some participants like Fatma thought that these symbols could be "a sign." Amine explained that she wondered what an object or situation she saw in her dream "meant as a symbol," such as "the sea is knowledge," "bread is blessing or sustenance" and "greenery has a spiritual meaning." But she did not look for a meaning in her waking life. Ahmet thought different objects could "acquire a symbolic meaning" for people from different cultures and geographies. In addition, some participants mentioned that in "*istikhara* dreams" (Edgar & Henig, 2010), a religious practice, colors such as red, orange, and black are interpreted as bad, while white, green, and blue are interpreted as good. Like some of the participants, Ahmet also stated that despite this search, he did not see any of his dream interpretations come true and said the following about the fact that information in the internet interpretations did not match the dream content exactly:

*Let's say you are at the sea. You are fishing with a boat, for example. I look at it as fishing. But I didn't fish. I only saw myself fishing. Now one site interprets it as fishing. One interprets it as seeing yourself while fishing. One interprets it as being in a boat. One interprets it as being in the sea... Which one is it? Actually, all of them are correct, but incomplete. You know, not correct. I'm making such a selection. I'm scanning...*

However, some had experiences, such as Fatma's loss of a loved one after her "teeth fell out" in her dream, Amine's sister's getting into university after seeing the sea, or the same symbol she saw "every time she does something wrong." Amine thought that the experiences that followed symbolic dreams reinforced both the meaning of the symbols and the idea that "it means that something like this will happen." Nevertheless, almost all participants expressed a lack of trust in these interpretations when talking about the sources they consulted out of curiosity about the meaning of their dreams. Hamza said that he did not trust dream interpretations that say "seeing this means that" because the bad and good interpretations of the same dream are on the same website. However, for many participants, this disbelief did not mean that they did not consider the interpretation. Hüma stated that she looked for "religious interpretations" on websites and, after she "got a little information," interpreted her dream accordingly. The nature of dreams, which are influenced by personal contexts, and the thought that they should be interpreted in a personalized way led to this attitude among these participants.

### 3.2.3 Dreams Are Attached to The Foot of a Bird Until They Are Interpreted

Almost all participants talked about the reflections on the meaning and interpretations of the dream on the person or life. The view on the impact of the interpretation and meaning given to the dream on one's waking life, which almost all participants accepted, emphasized the criticality of not telling anyone about the dream. Participants explained this as the interpretation affecting the dreamer in a psychological or metaphysical context. Besides not telling everyone or paying attention to the person being told, some participants talked about dreams they had never told anyone. Telling anyone about the dream, which is a reflection of one's "inner world" and "subconscious", was seen as "revealing" intimate information about the self.

*If you open yourself up to someone for interpretation, you are somehow affected by the feedback they give you. Therefore, there is no point in revealing it to anyone, especially someone who doesn't even know you. [...] I find it dangerous to restrict oneself by allowing it to enter your mind. (Meva)*

With this care, many participants talked about the people they told or preferred to tell their dreams. Apart from looking for a trustworthy person to interpret their dreams, these participants stated that they mostly told their dreams to their families and close friends/circle. Beyond paying attention to the person to whom they told the dream, the participants also talked about their attitudes towards the choice of which dreams to share. These attitudes included conveying "beautiful," "funny" and "they couldn't get out of it" dreams and not verbalizing bad dreams. According to Turkish society's

understanding of dreams, interpretation is critical within the framework of cultural and Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, it is necessary to be selective in repeating and not to tell anyone about evil dreams (Kafadar, 1994). Moreover, sharing dreams has a social effect and can function as a group bond (Blagrove et al., 2021). A study conducted in a Muslim community shows that dream sharing is common and most commonly shared with relatives, such as spouses, mothers or friends, respectively. In addition, sharing positive dreams or both positive and negative dreams and not sharing dreams were associated with more positive mental health than sharing negative dreams (Askari et al., 2021). Participants attributed their preference to not repeat bad dreams to reasons such as not wanting to remember the bad dream, upset the person being told, or increase its impact by making it stick in one's mind. Although, mostly, the preference was based on the importance of avoiding negative comments made by others after the bad dream. Beyond avoiding negative interpretations, the critical importance of interpreting the dream, whether it was "good" or "bad," not in a bad or negative way but in a good, beautiful, and positive way, was widely emphasized. Familial, religious, and cultural teachings highly influenced views on the criticality of interpretation.

*There are also statements of our Prophet that the dream depends on that interpretation. In that sense, of course, I try to pay more attention. Even if I have a bad dream, I try to get information about my own personality, but I also try to evaluate it positively. (Akif)*

While choosing the people and/or dreams they told, they also thought that dream interpretation was "not a skill that everyone could have" but "a kind of knowledge" or even a "special art." Amine heard in an environment where she was present (but of which she could not remember exactly) that "the dream is in the mouth of a bird" with a religious reference, implying that the person to whom the dream is told will influence its meaning and thus the waking life.

## 3.3. Theme 2: "The Day After the Dream"

### 3.3.1 "The Mood [in the Dream] is Imprinted on Me"

The most frequently reported effect of dreams on waking life is their impact on mood the next day (Schredl, 2000b). The participants said their dream experiences during sleep affected their waking moods, "affected their daily life," and "affected their psychology that day." Moreover, when they woke up, the mood continued throughout the day or for several days, and they remained under its influence. Hüma said that when she woke up, she was "really scared" due to the effect of the dream experience, that it affected her a lot and that she could not get over its effect for a few days. Defne described the effect of a dream she had years ago on her present-day as follows: "It was a dream 10-15 years ago. It was a very long time ago, 10-15 years, no less, but I never forgot that dream. I cannot forget it anyway..." It was evident from the participants' narratives that this period could be shorter or longer depending on the emotional impact of the content of the dreams. These statements of the participants imply that dreams have lasting effects not only daily but also over a long time. Indeed, many bereaved people have similarly reported that their dreams affected the griev-

ing process (Wright et al., 2014). Hamza talked about the good feeling a dream left on him:

*I don't remember the face. But I was at the top of a staircase, and a woman at the bottom of the staircase turned and smiled..., and I mean she liked me. She had positive feelings towards me... I felt it very vividly in that dream. And when I woke up, that sweet thing continued throughout the day as if such a thing had really happened.*

There is evidence that non-disturbing dreams and nightmares predict a decrease in negative emotions the next day. In contrast, bad dreams and nightmares experienced the same night predict an increase in negative emotions the next day (Tousignant et al., 2022). Although the participants' narratives did not specifically emphasize nightmares, their statements indicated that dreams with negative content increased their negative emotions the next day. Esma explained that she was "really affected by the dreams," such that when she woke up from sleep, the mood of the dream "washed over her." "Sometimes [she] couldn't get out of that mood for a long time." Furthermore, she said, "this situation was affecting my functionality." She stated being in a bad mood when she woke up because her "fears came true in the dream," and therefore, she had "lived" and "experienced" her fears. On the other hand, some participants talked about the positive emotional effects of dreams. For example, Fatma stated it was "peaceful" when she dreamt about her lost and "longed for" a baby. Defne talked about the effects of her dream experience, which she described as "an absurd dream," on her day:

*I dreamed that my house was bewitched and so on. I couldn't get rid of the spell, no matter what. For example, I couldn't get out of this dream. All day long, I've been looking at things related to magic: I've been thinking about magic. I couldn't get over its effect, so it didn't pass as a positive day. But I am waiting for the effect of that dream to pass for a few days so that I can return to my positivity again.*

Participants' narratives support the idea that dreams are an intervening variable between emotional concerns experienced during waking life and post-sleep mood (Cartwright, 2005). When the records of seventy-four people who kept diaries about their daytime moods, the emotional valence of daytime events, and dreams over two weeks were examined, it was seen that the intensity of the negative effects of waking life on dream content predicted the effect on waking mood in addition to the emotional intensity of the dream (Schredl & Reinhard, 2010). It was also seen from the participants' statements that dreams can be an experience that can affect one's daily life, just like waking life. Many participants stated that one dream experience can cause reluctance and lack of joy and that it is necessary to struggle to cope with this feeling. In contrast, sometimes another dream experience can make them feel positive emotions that motivate them throughout the day.

### 3.3.2 "[Dreaming] Affects the Way I Think"

Some participants described dreams as influencing, reinforcing, or developing their ideas. The dream experience, defined as the mind "thinking in another neurophysiological state," affects thought processes and creativity. Correspondingly, it was seen that an issue stuck in the mind

during waking life could be solved in a dream (Barret, 2017). Dila expressed her views that dreams, which she referred to as "a period of time when there is a little less intervention," "contribute to the dimension of thinking," and that connections that may be difficult to form in waking life are "associated through dreams." Ali also talked about the experience of a "light bulb turning on" in the mind during sleep about a topic focused on in waking life. Consistent with participants' narratives, a meta-analysis on the relationship between learning-related dreams and memory development found a strong and significant relationship between dreams involving learning tasks and memory (Hudachek & Wamsley, 2023). In addition, several participants mentioned that dreams affected their perspectives and evaluations of events. Hamza described how his perspective changed after a dream he had, despite his "very certain" opinions about "a historical state personality whom he had criticized a lot":

*I dreamed about that historical figure at a time when I was very, very critical of him. He was in a coffin. And he raised his head from the coffin and turned to me and said, "I'm on Sirat-ı Mustakim. Don't mess with me." For example, at that time, I did not know the meaning of Sirat-ı Mustakim. I said, "What does this mean?" I looked it up, and it means something like "I have reached the right path." Yes, the dream was in such a dark environment again, maybe it can't be evaluated in a religious way, but... I said to myself, Hamza, maybe that person did certain good deeds that you couldn't see. After all, you didn't receive authorization from Allah. I mean, okay, you can continue to criticize, but you can make your discourse a little more respectful.*

Similarly, some participants described making inferences that led them to change their feelings, thoughts and behaviors in their waking life after the dream. As Fatma and Elif mentioned, these inferences could sometimes provide information about their inner worlds and sometimes places where they were stuck in relation to the dream content. Some participants also thought that dreams could give them preliminary information about situations they would encounter. This idea influenced their thoughts about the situations they might encounter in the future after making sense of a dream experience with more cultural and religious references. In both Eastern and Western cultures, it is believed that dreams contain hidden truths, that dreams provide more meaningful information than waking thoughts, and dreams interpreted in line with these beliefs affect daily life (Morewedge & Norton, 2009). For example, when Fatma was three months pregnant, she dreamed that one of the stones of the five-stone ring they had bought to represent each family member had fallen out. When she woke up, she thought the dream might be a sign of losing her baby and said, "My Allah, please don't make me experience such pain." Some participants also mentioned that they made inferences based on the symbols in their dreams. However, participants sometimes made inferences about waking life after the dream experience through "*istikhara*" dreams, a practice for spiritual guidance through symbolic meanings. This practice, which is influenced by Islamic narratives and is almost universal in Muslim societies, is also highly influenced by the traditions and practices of the current culture (Edgar & Henig, 2010).



### 3.3.3 "I Took a Stand Regarding That [Situation]"

Many participants shared their thoughts and experiences about how the meaning or interpretation they gave to the dream following a dream experience led them to act, change their behavior or attitude, and sometimes make choices. A dream experience could be a factor in taking actions or making decisions by causing a change in thoughts and/or being a supportive element in emotions. Ali talked about how he had a different orientation before, but his thinking changed with a dream and the change he made in his choice due to this thought: "Three days later, I dreamed that I told him about my dream. So, this meant that I had to tell him. It was just the time for the noon prayers. I got up, I called brahim that afternoon." Hüma explained that after having a dream and interpreting it, she "started to act according to it" and "took a stand regarding it." Similarly, Amine said that after two dreams she had, she "shaped her life" and "distanced herself from those people and [that] environment." In a study conducted on the extent to which experiences related to intimate relationships in dream content predicting the waking experience, participants' two-week dream reports and interaction diaries with their partners were analyzed. It was seen that certain contents and emotions in dream reports affected the waking relationship. For example, those who experienced the theme of infidelity or jealousy in dream content had a less intimate and more conflicted relationship with their partner in the following days (Selterman et al., 2014).

Many participants talked about being more "cautious," especially after a bad dream experience. From time to time, they explained that after a bad dream, they would take some actions to guard against the evil to come. These behaviors were again based on religious and cultural teachings. In Islamic literature, many dream narratives show that dreams have some emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects on daily life. In the narratives, there are examples such as a physical effect on the dreamer's body, making important life decisions, changing his/her mind, and emotional or behavioral changes in social relationships (Mazandarani & Mahmoudi, 2023). In religious and cultural contexts, the significance of dreams during mourning particularly reinforces this theme. Dreams about the deceased person can influence the mourning process in Turkish society, influencing feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and rituals associated with waking life (Sami, 2019). A study on mourning culture in a city in Turkey shows that some actions are taken in waking life about how the deceased person appears in the dream. For example, if the deceased person was seen in need or requested in the dream, help was given to someone with a similar need in waking life (Papuşcuoğlu, 2022). Many participants also mentioned that they took some actions as precautions or preventative measures, such as giving alms or opening the faucet and telling their dream to the running water [to prevent or purify anything bad in one's dreams]. Amine stated that "when [she] had a bad dream, [she] got up and gave alms" and that this was like a responsibility: "We say that alms ward off troubles [...] These things are conveyed as prophetic advice, so that's why I do it." Fatma explained that her mother used to be very obsessed with her dreams and that while she used to obsess more, now she takes more precautions:

*My mother had some things about her: she was very obsessed with her dreams. For example, when she saw*

*something bad in her dream, she absolutely did not want to leave the house that day. She didn't want to send us anywhere, not even to school. I mean, if she could, she wouldn't want to send my father to work. I look at some things: I used to be obsessed with such things. My! My! I used to do them. Now I say, "Okay. Say "Bismillah" [In the name of Allah], be more careful when walking down the road [...] precaution is from the servant, providence is from Allah..."*

Studies, especially on psychopathology, support the effect of dream contents on post-sleep attitudes and behavior. For example, a study observed that 80% of people hospitalized in a psychiatric emergency unit with suicidal thoughts or attempts had bad dreams, nightmares or dreams with suicidal scenarios before the suicidal crisis (Geoffroy et al., 2022). Similarly, among people suffering from substance abuse, those who reported substance-related dreams were more likely to have a history of deprivation and overdose (Ellis et al., 2021). Participants' narratives and related literature support that dream experiences influence waking behaviors.

## 3.4. Theme 3: Dreaming as a Therapeutic or Spiritual "Guide"

### 3.4.1 "A Kind of Free Psychological Counseling"

All participants emphasized the different psychological functions of dreams. Some participants stated that dreams give messages about the self and bring awareness. Meva preferred to use the expression "seeing oneself" when conveying her experiences and ideas about this awareness that dreams provide. Hüma stated that she "see[s her] emotions more clearly and unambiguously" in her dreams because "it is a little smoother version of what [she] feel[s] or think[s]," and that is why she attaches importance to dream life. Studies have shown that the assessment of dream content contributes identifying waking life resources and personal insight gains (Edwards et al., 2015) and that daily and recurrent dreams may be linked to experiences of psychological need (Weinstein et al., 2017). Some participants also felt that their inner experiences were revealed in their dreams, especially unexpressed issues, thus fulfilling a psychological need. Fatma explained that beautiful dreams sometimes contain experiences that one "wanted to live but could not" or longed for. She said that the dreams she had about the baby she lost during her pregnancy were "like balm." Thus, she "woke up with peace." Dream experiences can reflect emotional experiences in waking life and strategies and difficulties in emotion regulation (Wong & Yu, 2022). Elif, who lived with sick family elders for many years, explained that with her experiences of illness, old age and death, she was scared "even though she did not realize it." As such, she did not confront it. For this reason, she said that she was always "in touch" with these experiences in her dreams, which she thought were more permanent in her mind. She said these dreams might be "a sign that [she] should work on it more or that the issues that caused it should be eliminated." Many studies are showing that psychological symptoms or psychopathologies in waking life are reflected in dreams and are related to emotional and cognitive experiences or themes in dreams (Schredl, 2010; Schubert & Punamäki, 2016; Kuelz et al., 2010; Schredl & Engelhardt, 2001; Limosani et al., 2011; Roesler, 2018, 2020; Mariani et al., 2021). However, when people with psychopathologies are compared with

people without any psychopathology, there are significant differences in dream content and structure (Rimsh & Pietrowsky, 2021; Gomes et al., 2023).

One of the main qualities of dreams is that they are test drives in a safe place (Vedfelt, 2020). Hüma and Asaf thought that dreams were a mental "practice" or "pre-experience" for "things that have not yet been experienced but will be experienced." Hüma says, "we encounter something with our fears, joy, and happiness [...] No matter how afraid we are, we know how far that fear goes. In other words, we experience fear. We experience shame." She added that the emotions experienced in waking life are practiced during dream experiences. In addition, she thought that dreams sometimes provided a "confrontation" with what had been avoided or were experiences that were "an opportunity to meet again." Similar to Hamza's situation, Amine and Meva shared these sentiments, stating that dreams "say something" about what keeps coming to mind, is making one's mind busy or those things that keep wandering around and getting stuck in the mind. Many participants also shared their views and experiences that dreams "cleaned," "refreshed" or "emptied" the mind. These participants used similar concepts and words while narrating their similar experiences. They said that "certain things that one cannot suppress," "things that cannot be expressed," "feelings," or "unexperienced emotions" tend to "break out," "flow out," or "emerge" by "entering dreams." Participants' narratives supported the findings that the dreaming process is a function of integrating and processing memories (Margherita et al., 2021).

*[Sometimes in the dream] I react pretty much the same as I would if I had encountered the situation of that dream in real life. [...] But sometimes I can react differently in my dream than I would expect from myself. The reason for this is that I think [...] that I am trying to express in my dream what I cannot fully express myself. (Meva)*

Muaz described dreams as "a kind of a place to consult," while Hamza very similarly said that he used dreams as "a kind of psychological counselling." In describing his experiences, Hamza preferred to use the term "healing" to describe the function of dreams, which he said could be called "self-protection insurance." One study examining the effect of dreams on mood regulation during the night focused on participants going through a divorce and showing symptoms of depression. It found that participants were more likely to be in recovery one year later if they reported having more negative dreams at the beginning and fewer at the end of the night than if they had fewer negative dreams at the beginning and more at the end of the night. Researchers explained that this may indicate that early negative dreams reflect the process of mood regulation during sleep (Cartwright et al., 1998). Another recent study found that in good sleepers, negative affect was predominant during dream experiences, and positive affect was more prevalent in waking life. In poor sleepers, there was an equal degree of affect during waking and dreaming. Researchers stated that this result may reflect ineffective emotional processing in poor sleep (Conte et al., 2021). On the other hand, findings also show that when sleep quality is poor, there is a greater likelihood of negative affect and nightmares and less positive affect. In this context, it can be said that the continuity between waking and dreaming may be affected by individual differences, such as sleep quality and stability in emotional

processing (Sikka et al., 2023).

Although examining its functions is one of the focal points of dream research, there needs to be more consensus on this issue (Hartmann, 2010). Approaches and theories suggest that dream experience has no function or has functions such as threat simulation (Revonsuo, 2000), memory enhancement (Winson, 1990), memory clearing (Crick & Mitchison, 1983), and emotional processing (Hartmann, 2007). In addition, theories on the function of processing or regulating negative emotions, have been frequently examined in the literature (Revonsuo, 2000; Cartwright et al., 2006; Cartwright, 2013; Malinowski & Horton, 2015). However, these theories have been insufficient to explain the presence of positive emotions experienced significantly in dream experiences and the strong relationship between cognition and all emotions (Kahan & Claudatos, 2012). Furthermore, it has been proposed that dreams function, such as access to unconscious dimensions (Gennaro et al., 2020) and integrating new materials with existing memory stores (Hartmann, 2011). However, the limitation of all these approaches is that these functions are limited by the inability to distinguish whether they result from the direct effect of the dream experience on the waking life or from the effect of thinking about the dreaming during waking life (Schredl, 2010). Nevertheless, many participants' accounts of dreams' cognitive and emotional functions supported many theories and studies. Theories which dreaming have no function seemed inconsistent with the results, at least when considering these participants' practical experience.

#### 3.4.2 "A Message but Not a Command": Metaphysical Functions

Many participants described a class of dreams as "divine," meaning they contained "a message from Allah." In addition to the idea that Allah conveys a direct message through these "completely separate" dreams, which some of the participants described as "a door to another dimension," some participants considered the dream mechanism as "a blessing from Allah." Akif said these messages were meant to "increase one's faith." According to Amine, they were Allah's way of saying, "don't give up." Ömer stated that he thought "religious dreams" had a "connection with daily life" and questioned himself after these dreams. In a study, the belief that dreams could be a message sent by the creator was associated with the importance of faith in a person's daily life and a positive attitude towards dreams. In this context, the authors thought that these dreams may contribute to deepening one's faith (Schredl & Mönch, 2023). In Islamic literature, it has been stated that divine dreams have different functions, such as good news, warning, premonition, guidance and problem-solving (Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). Almost all the participants had a common attitude towards this message. Even though they interpreted it as a message, they considered it as a guide, a sign, and an issue that they should consider again. Meva said that "there is such a saying in our faith" that "one should not act on a dream." She also mentioned that dreams can show certain signs and guide the way, but directly "acting on a dream can be misleading." Amine expressed a similar thought and interpreted it as, "I had this dream. Not that I should live my whole day, week and life like this, but that there might be a message here."

Many participants shared their views and experiences on the function of the *"istikhara"* dream, one of the Islamic dream concepts and types. Giving the example of a dream interpreted by Prophet Joseph that contained information about the future of his country, Defne mentioned that she believes that dreams can be "guiding." In this context, she further mentioned that one can intend to have an *"istikhara"* dream by "asking for help from Allah" to guide one in indecision. Amine shared that she had experienced something similar to what she had seen in her dream in her waking life:

*I was going to meet someone, and I was a bit confused. In my dream, we talked, but he left. I stayed behind. And when I woke up, I interpreted it as, "This will not work. This person will leave." That's what happened.*

Some participants said they did not directly experience dreams with a divine message but witnessed them from people around them. Yet others were wondering if "we are interpreting it as something we want." There was also the view that dynamics such as religious belief, society and culture influenced interpretation of the function of a dream. Consequently, some reflected that a person of another religion could interpret a dream a message in one society as a "nonsense" dream. In addition, as a result of a study conducted with a multinational sample, it was seen that most participants reported that dreams somehow guide their spiritual lives (Robinson & Vasile, 2023).

In the context of cultural and religious literature, the current understanding of dreams in Turkish society, which is strongly influenced by Islamic teachings, asserts that dreams "bring news from the afterlife if interpreted correctly" (Kafadar, 1994). Some participants shared their own experiences and talked about their belief that dreams can foretell the future. Fatma thought the symbols seen in dreams could contain information about the future, stating that she had heard about them from her social circle and family. She had also witnessed her sister experiencing this many times. "My sister has been saying since I was little [...] 'if my tooth falls out, someone will die. Or if I eat chocolate, someone will die...' and I really don't know. She has experienced it a lot," she said, explaining that she was very afraid of teeth falling out in her dreams. She shared that she experienced a tooth falling out in her dream once, and after waiting anxiously, her grandmother passed away. In this context, it can be said that symbols, which are one of the motivations for the participants to wonder about the meaning of dreams, can be influenced by the individual experiences of the participants as well as the symbolic interpretation approach in Islamic dream understanding (Elzamzamy & Salem, 2020). Defne stated that she has experienced this situation many times and said, "When I have a dream, if I have a very clear dream, I expect that I will definitely experience it in my daily life. Because after it is very clear, it comes to my life one day, even if time passes." Many participants stated that it is possible to have dreams that contain information about the future, referring to the fact that this is seen in the chapters about Prophet Joseph "in the book [they] believe in." Some participants, on the other hand, stated that they had no such dream experience themselves, that "seeing the future" is not possible for "ordinary people", and that "people who have attained virtuousness," "perhaps at the level of saints," could have such dreams.

When dream narratives are examined in Islamic literature, it is seen that dreams are considered as a form of communication and messaging, a means of confirmation and verification, a source of feedback, and a premonition of one's fate or a means of prophecy (Mazandarani & Mahmoudi, 2023). For example, in Turkey, dreams can be seen as a way for the mourner to communicate with his or her relative in the other world. For this reason, it can be interpreted as an experience in which the deceased person is consoled or guided (Sami, 2019). In addition to Islamic teachings, many symbolic interpretations in Turkish mythology and epics provide examples of the function of dreams. It is seen that these dreams have different functions, such as carrying the idea of expanding the lands, revealing the secret of the birth and sanctity of the ruler, foretelling the future, guiding, containing a command or request, or healing. In addition, Turkish folk tales and fairy tales also include love dreams, heralding, guiding, warning, or prophetic dreams (Çelepi, 2017). Similarly, people in different cultures think dreams have functions such as accessing spiritual knowledge, receiving spiritual messages through encounters with other beings, and receiving information about upcoming events (Robinson & Vasile, 2023).

#### 4. Limitations and Strengths of the Study

There are several issues that researchers can consider to improve the findings of this study in future studies. First, it is seen that the participants in this study are mostly religious people. Although the common belief in Turkish society is Islam, the level of religiosity varies in different sociocultural environments. In this context, the findings of the study mostly reflect the dream understanding of religious people and that studies involving people with different sociocultural characteristics can provide broader findings. In addition, the fact that the call for participation in the study was made through social media and the interviews were conducted via an online application increased the likelihood of participation of relatively young people with access to the internet. Although the fact that the interviews were conducted online enabled participation from different regions of Turkey, research conducted by adding different call and interview methods may provide richer data. In addition, although many participants said that they had not thought about the questions asked during the interview process and that they had the opportunity to think about their beliefs about dreams at the end of the interview, their interest in the subject of dreams may have been effected in their volunteering to participate in the study.

Despite these limitations, this study, which examines the meaning attributed to the dream experience in Turkish society, contains valuable information about the subjective understanding of dreams in Turkish society and results that draw attention to the importance of the social contexts that shape this understanding. While the participants shared their individual experiences, they expressed many times that these experiences were influenced by their society. In this context, the study supports the critical importance of considering the individual understanding of dreams influenced by social factors and agreeing on a shared understanding when addressing dreams in therapy. Furthermore, one of the study's most important findings is the view that dreams are a life experience, the overarching theme developed within the scope of the participants' common story. In other words, the common story of the participants supports



the view that dreams are experiences like waking life experiences in terms of being an experience of the self (Kara & Özcan, 2019). At the same time, as another finding, the ability of dream experiences to affect emotional, cognitive, and behavioral experiences in waking life may be valuable information about addressing dreams in a clinical context by supporting previous findings (Selterman et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2014; Schredl, 2000b; Geoffroy et al., 2022).

## 5. Methodological Discussion

Thematic analysis approaches are a family of theoretically flexible but non-theoretical methods. This flexibility makes it possible to work with any preferred paradigm in line with the study (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). Through its theoretical freedom, in this study, in which the meaning given to the dream experience in Turkish society was examined in depth, reflexive TA was preferred, considering that it would provide a rich, detailed, and complex data account.

Braun and Clarke (2020a) suggested reflexive TA as a method of analysis rather than interpretive phenomenological analysis if the research question focuses on something beyond personal experience and interpretation, such as the aim of making social inferences; the sample is relatively large (larger than  $N=10$ ); the research has the aim of making practical inferences or obtaining "actionable results"; and the researcher's interest includes how personal experiences are situated within broader socio-cultural contexts. In this study, reflexive TA was preferred because of the focus on the religious, cultural, and social processes that accompany the interpretation of the dream experience in line with the interviews with the participants and because the data obtained as a result of the research have the aim of expanding a dream model. Also, since it was aimed to reach themes and common stories rather than the content of the data obtained from the participants, reflexive TA was preferred instead of the qualitative content analysis method. Additionally, the use of methods such as discourse analysis, which is a useful tool in examining how social language affects meaning, can enrich the findings of this study when examining the given meaning to the dream experience by a society highly influenced by religious and cultural contexts. Considering the critical effect of the meaning attributed to dreams on waking life, such research may provide useful data, especially for clinical studies.

In the study, although the semi-structured questions prepared for the interviews examined subjective experiences, the fact that they did not directly focus on recent dreams may have limited access to some information about the dream-waking life experiences. For this reason, planning a second interview with each participant at a particular time, selecting impressive or meaningful dreams from the participants' dream diaries during this period and analyzing them more subjectively may enrich the study's data.

## 6. Conclusion

In the study examining the meaning given to the dream experience in Turkish society, three themes were developed from the common story of the participants under the overarching theme of *Dreaming as "A Life Experience."* These three themes are: *Changing Meaning: "[Dreaming] Is Unique to Each Person," "The Day After the Dream" and Dreaming as a Therapeutic or Spiritual "Guide."*

It was observed that the participants interpreted dreams as "a life experience" that reflects physical or environmental conditions, the daily life and inner world of the person, the social and cultural structure and processes of the society in which they live, and may also include a religious experience. In addition, many participants stated that the dream experience is "unique to each person." Specifically, to what the content of the dream corresponds or the meaning given to it will vary depending on the dreamer, and the interpretation/meaning given will vary according to the interpreter and how it is interpreted, especially concerning the written sources used for its interpretation or meaning. This variability corresponds to an interpretation that dreams and the meaning given to the dreams have a nature that is affected by contexts. In other words, the evaluation and interpretation of the dream should be made in the context of the person's dream and waking life. Almost all participants stated many times that waking life affects dream life, and dream life affects waking life (emotions, thoughts, and behaviors). This corresponds to an interpretation that dreams have an influencing nature. This influence is understandable, inevitable, and consistent with the view that dreams are experiences like waking life. Finally, many participants stated that dreams have therapeutic functions such as expressing and externalizing "inner world" experiences, raising awareness of the self, and processing a subject over which the person is perplexed. However, they can also have metaphysical functions, such as a divine message or foretelling the future. The participants stated that after the dream experience, directly, sometimes through interpretation, the dream makes the person spiritually "better" and/or changes them. From the participants' narratives and expressions, it is strongly visible that their beliefs and experiences about dreams are shaped within the framework of their individual experiences and the family, environment, society, religion, and culture in which they live, especially in the context of interpretation.

The common story in the narratives of the participants supports the view that dreams are an experience of the self, and the self is also in a moment, a place, a perception, and a feeling in dreams (Kara & Özcan, 2019; Kara & Selvi, 2017). In addition, dream content is in continuity with the waking experiences of the self, encompassing all individual, familial, social, religious, cultural, and societal experiences. Considering dreams in clinical and psychotherapy practices can facilitate access to clients' emotions and other inner experiences (Hill et al., 2013). Indeed, it has been suggested that dreams, like all other assessment tools, can provide valuable support to traditional diagnostic processes when used in conjunction with history, differential diagnosis, consultation and necessary measurements (Siegel, 2010). Different cultures' subjective theories, beliefs, and rituals about dreams do not preclude using dreams in psychotherapy (Schubert & Punamäki, 2016). However, it is important to approach dream work in psychotherapy from a social and cultural practice framework (Leonard & Dawson, 2022) and to develop a certain degree of alliance between the psychotherapist and the client. According to Bonime (1962), who developed a culturalist approach, this collaborative alliance between therapist and client is essential for dream work because the client, as the owner of the dream experience, is the only person who can evaluate the meaning attributed to the dream (Pesant & Zadra, 2004). Even in approaches where it is argued that dreams have a hidden or implicit content and this implicit meaning is sought during dream

work in psychotherapy (especially in symbolic interpretation) (Jung, 2020), it can be said that it would be important to consider personal contexts and culture. One of the participants, who live in a residential area close to the sea, gave an example from his community and pointed out that rain, wind, and anchovies are important where he lives, and that dreams involving them may correspond to other symbolic meanings different from those living in another part of the world. In this context, by examining how sense is made of the dream experience in Turkish society, this study may encourage that in the use of dreams in psychotherapy, the valuable components of social/cultural contexts in dreams be considered and examined in different societies. Thus, the findings from this study and future studies may provide the therapist with a broader perspective on how the client interprets and is influenced by the dream. It may also be a helpful resource in facilitating alliance-building with the client during dream work in psychotherapy or in incorporating sociocultural contexts in newly developed models.

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