

Dreams as a resource in psychosocial counseling

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Summary. The aim of the present study was to identify how advisors ($n = 43$) are generally positioned to dreaming and working with dreams, and how a possible application could look like in practice. It should also be examined whether female consultants are more likely to involve dreams in the counseling than their male colleagues. For that purpose, consultants from psychosocial contact and counseling centers of the Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege in Germany/Hessen were consulted by post. The study has a quantitative research focus. As a result, it has become clear that consultants think that dreams can have a high impact on their work and they can easily imagine using dreams in counselling. But the reality is, that dreamwork hardly applies. A qualitative part was also integrated into the study. It turned out that advisors have developed useful ideas ($n = 37$), which are closely linked to evaluated dream theories, but only 18 consultants have shown a concrete example for this. There were also discrepancies between the generally positive attitude towards dream-work to and their actual application.

Keywords: Dream; counseling; advisor

1. Introduction

It is not only since Freud that people experience dreams as meaningful. From people in ancient Egypt to the Greeks and Romans, up to the modern times, dreams were interpreted dependent to the correspondent culture and worldview (Restak, 2014). The fact that dreams also have value in therapeutic contexts is owed to the pioneers of dream research. Meanwhile many studies about dream work can be found also for the analysis of therapeutic orientation. For example Schredl (2010) showed, that therapists - regardless which therapeutic orientation - are highly engaged in dream work when clients bring dreams into therapy. These clients estimate the benefit for the therapy success as high. Hill (2010) could also prove the effectiveness of dream work and that for example advanced training for therapists on this topic led to increased practice of dream work.

However, the questions how consultants in psychosocial counseling centers in Germany/Hessen are positioned to dreaming and in particular how it is used as a resource has not yet been explored. This work wants to close this gap by expanding the research area here, in order to get a better understanding of the dream work also in advisory contexts. In principle, counselors have more possibilities to approach and solve the problems of their clients in their work. For this purpose, they may have a larger repertoire of possibilities for intervention than in the case of classical policy psychotherapy. For example, relatives or the entire family can be invited to attend the consultation or consultants have the opportunity to visit their clients at home. This diversity could also lead to the fact that there is simply no time for dream

work for example because the superficial need of the client urges for a different intervention.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The average age of the counselors was 49.4 ± 9.6 years, of which $n = 34$ were female and $n = 9$ were male. The average professional experience was 16.2 ± 9.51 years. Almost all consultants were social pedagogues ($n = 36$), others were psychologists ($n = 3$), systemic therapists ($n = 3$) and diploma pedagogues ($n = 1$). In addition, the consultants had at least one additional qualification ($n = 30$), of which $n = 12$ had one more and $n = 8$ had a third. Here were mostly named systemic-consulting-training ($n = 17$), trauma-counselor ($n = 5$), client-centered therapy ($n = 4$) and Gestalt Therapy ($n = 4$).

2.2. Questionnaire

Firstly, the socio-demographic data of the consultants were elicited, to capture the basic attitude of the consultants to dreams. For doing so, they could answer these questions on a five-stage Likert scale (0 = I do not agree, 4 = I agree): dreams are generally relevant, dreams say nothing about the dreaming person, dreams can be a resource in the consultation, dreams of clients do not provide any approaches to solving problems. To determine the approaches of the counselors and clients in practice, another five level Likert-scale has been introduced (0 = not at all, 4 = always). The questions were related to the frequency of questions by the counselor about the dreams of the clients, the introduction of dreams by clients on their own, and the helpful integration of dreams in counseling.

2.3. Survey data and implementation

The questionnaires were sent by post to 75 advisory centers of the Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege in Germany/Hessen in October 2016. The centers operating areas are

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counselling on addiction, relationship and family counselling and general life crisis situations. Of these 75 requests, n = 43 sheets were returned. This corresponds to a return rate of 57.3%. However it should be pointed out that although 37 advisors answered the question of the use of dreams in counseling, only 18 described a concrete case.

3. Results

3.1. General attitude towards dreams and application of dream-work

In Table 1, the results are presented of the general attitude of the male and female consultants to dreams and their advisory work. It shows that the consultants give dreams a resource in consultancy and at the same time they see the chance that dreams do not help solving problems is low.

Significant differences between female and male counselors were only recorded on the question of the general relevance of dreams. In Table 2 the application of dream-work in practice is depicted. Obviously, there are discrepancies between the general attitudes to dreaming, dream-work and the actual application: the average value for the 'dreams as a resource' item (dependent t-test: $t = 7.1, p < .0001$) was considerably higher compared to the 'integration of dreams into the counseling' item.

However there was a significant difference for the integration of dreams into the counseling between female and male counselors.

3.2. Qualitative Analyses of counsellors' dream theories

In order to get an overview of the concrete practical work, and to get a connection between this and common dream theories, the consultants were able to answer a question in their own words: In what way would you consider the topic dreams useful in your consultation? In addition, they were able to respond to the call: Please describe briefly - if available - a specific case in which you could use the dream of a client in counseling (e.g. nightmare, recurring dream, being able to fly etc.)! There was also the possibility to give comments on the questionnaire or the topic in general. For the evaluation, the method of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2015) was used. After viewing the texts, the following dream theories could be read out by means of classic examples and determined by coding rules:

1. Continuity-hypothesis according to Hall & Nordby (1972): What people bothers during the day will also be reflected in their dreams. Classic example: "that dreams have much to do with the experiences..." Coding rule: Text must indicate the interaction between the waking life and the dream.
2. Mastery-hypothesis according to Wright & Koulack (1987): Problem solutions or approaches to this can occur in dreams and be taken over into the awake state of mind: carry-over effect. Classic example: "Dreams show problem solving." Coding rule: Words such as "solution", "problem solving", "resource" or text passages that point to solutions or further steps in this direction must occur.
3. Theories of C.G. Jung (2011) and F. Perls (2007): With regard to persons, animals or objects that come up in the dream. These can be aspects of one's own ego. Classic example: "Because they can show the unconscious aspects of the client". Coding rule: Words like "unconscious aspects", "differentiated personality parts" are present in the text.

The evaluation of the texts showed that most counselors (68 text passages) are oriented at the continuity-hypothesis, and see it useful for their work. 13 text passages were determined for the mastery-hypothesis with a possible problem solution in the dream. Jung's view of dream objects as subjects is also used by Perls in the Gestalt-Therapy and could be documented at nine text passages. Within the part of a general comment, it was quite often named that the survey has evoked an interest in dream work or is at least a stimulus for paying bigger attention to the dreams of the clients in the future. In addition, the topic of nightmares was named and it was asked whether there are "tricks" to avoid dreams. Several texts have also pointed out that the lead interpretation of dreams should lie with the client, that the subject of dreams belongs more to the therapeutic context, and that when coping with nightmares caused by a traumatic incident, the clients should be send to a therapist who has an appropriate training.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Consultants seem to have an interest in the work with dreams, because they give dreams a high value as a resource. The restraint in the application certainly has various reasons, which also can be explained with time deficit or the special task of the adviser. However, only four consultants

Table 1. General attitude to dreams (total sample and gender differences)

Questions about the general attitude to dreams ¹	Total sample (n=43) M ± SD	Women (n=34) M ± SD	Men (n=9) M ± SD	t-value ²	p-value
Dreams are generally relevant	2.77 ± 1.04	2.91 ± 0.97	2.22 ± 1.20	1.811	.038
Dreams say nothing about the dreaming person	0.56 ± 0.83	0.47 ± 0.75	0.89 ± 1.05	-1.366	.089
Dreams can be a resource in the consultation	2.86 ± 1.01	2.91 ± 1.03	2.67 ± 1.00	0.640	.262
Dreams of clients do not provide any approaches to solving problems	1.05 ± 0.95	1.06 ± 1.04	1.33 ± 1.22	-0.677	.251

M ± SD = arithmetic mean ± standard deviation, ¹Likert-scales ranging from 0 = I do not agree to 4 = I agree, ²statistical test for gender differences.

Table 2. Application in practice (total sample and gender differences)

Questions concerning the application in practice ¹	Total sample (n=43) M ± SD	Women (n=34) M ± SD	Men (n=9) M ± SD	t-value ²	p-value
I ask my clients about their dreams in the consultation	1.05 ± 0.95	1.12 ± 0.98	0.78 ± 0.83	-0.572	.285
My clients come up with their dreams in the consultation on their own	1.58 ± 0.93	1.65 ± 0.88	1.33 ± 1.12	0.896	.188
I'm integrating dreams of my clients in the consultation and it's helpful	1.86 ± 1.26	2.03 ± 1.17	1.22 ± 1.48	1.744	.0444

M ± SD = arithmetic mean ± standard deviation, ¹Likert-scales ranging from 0 = not at all to 4 = always, ²statistical test for gender differences, .

did have a sufficient qualification or additional education, which covers dream-work. And even if nightmares of clients are addressed, there seems to be a great lack of knowledge how to deal with them. Also tried-and-tested methods, such as the cognitive-experiential dream model from Hill or manuals, as favored by Eschenröder (2003) or Schredl (2012), were not mentioned in the written answers. Therefore, a well-founded training program for consultants on dream-work and sleep-hygiene could be an additional area in resource-oriented work with people in particular problem situations. Further research on a larger random sample could be build up on this study, as well as the questioning of clients about the feeling of the effectiveness of dream-work.

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