Dreams and Mistaken Beliefs

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Abstract

It is generally understood that dreams can be instrumental in the therapeutic process, and most therapists use dream content when presented in the therapeutic relationship. The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on the use of dreams to affect change within the therapeutic setting. Specifically, this project includes a brief overview of dreamwork, from ancient times to current theory, and a recommendation for an Adlerian therapeutic approach to dreamwork.

Adlerian techniques such as early recollections, lifestyle, and life tasks, are used in a proposed integrated approach to dreamwork.

*Keywords:* early recollections, dreams, lifestyle
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“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”

--John Dewey

After a lifetime of learning, studying, and reading, I find that the relationships I formed with teachers, family, and classmates, are the substance of what my life has been about. Any help I have offered, or improvements made to the general conditions of the world, are the result of encouragement and the close attention from those around me. The more I know, the less I know and this seems to become clearer with every passing season. Even when the memories of the past grow dim, I can see the chalk covered hands of so many teachers and mentors who enlightened my life and allowed me to see things just a little different from my peers. In a world where it is easy to become invisible within the crowd there was always a teacher to throw back the curtain and let in the light. Imperfect I am, and imperfect I will remain.
Dedication

To my father, who taught me that a generous heart will always win in the end, no matter what life brings. To my mother, who taught me how to read around my crooked eye and see the precision in a world filled with chaos. May they have happiness wherever they are and hopefully, we will meet once again at the end of this book of tales.
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Dreams and Mistaken Beliefs

Historically dreams, and the study of dreams, influenced civilizations and affected how individuals and groups of humans viewed the world. Kovacevic (2013) noted techniques used to capture dreams, and the exploration of the meaning of those dreams, has progressed with the ability of modern psychology to interpret not only the purpose of dreams, but also how dream content is generated.

According to Neil (2016), in the field of Psychology, dreams, and the interpretation of dreams, have been used as long as written language. Although the interpretation of dreams can be subjective, using dreams to help individuals gain insight regarding life experience has become a significant tool for the mental health profession.

Del Corso, Rehfuss and Galvin (2011) noted Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology allowed for growth and provided an avenue to balance general areas of life. Through the lens of Individual Psychology, a person develops an understanding of past circumstances and how those circumstances facilitated reactions and defense mechanisms to protect childhood beliefs. Also Del Corso et al. suggested that through the use of early recollections, the individual’s behavior and view of the world (or lifestyle) is defined. Within this lifestyle, an individual can move from a negative to a positive behavior and a new view of life.

Dreams could be a powerful, although often neglected, tool to view the individual’s protected, mistaken beliefs. With the help of the proposed therapeutic dream group approach, consistent dreamwork could generate growth and potentiate positive changes.

**Dreams**

According to Hoffman (2004), the earliest written record of a dream, was in Mesopotamia in the late 3rd millennium B.C. Dumuzi’s dream, written on several cylinder seals,
included an interpretation by his sister, who read the dream for him. (Hoffman noted that Mesopotamia was the first civilization to develop writing.) According to Neil (2016), dreams had a personal, social, and cultural meaning. When Neil referred to dreams, he used three key terms: dreams, visions, and prophecy. Neil stated dreams could be interpreted as inspiration from demonic forces or as divine intervention.

Burkeley, Adams and Davis (2009) stressed the interpretation of dreams could be viewed as divine revelation to human agents. Sometimes these dreams would lead an individual to follow a religious or even violent path. For example, a dream interpreted as a calling from the Prophet to join the struggle against the enemies of Islam, might encourage the dreamer to join Al-Qaeda. Additionally, this dream interpretation would not be limited to Islam. Examples of this form of dream interpretation can be found throughout Christianity and Judaic literature.

In early Medieval Europe, Keskiaho (2005) noted that the dreams, or visions, of the monks might be laid at the feet of the Abbot or other religious superiors for interpretation. On the other hand, the dreams of lay people might lead to fear as the church authorities did not provide tools to interpret dreams in an effort to control the meaning of those dreams. For example, Keskiaho suggested Theologians worried about the ability of the devil to appear as an angel and many believed the sign of the cross could be used to dispense illusions of a diabolical nature. Keskiaho further noted the church was worried common people would be defenseless against the tricks of the devil without the guidance of the clergy.

Yu (2016) compared the main text of Chinese medicine and the interpretation of dreams. Yu believed the ideas and concepts of both Chinese medicine and dream interpretation originated before the time of Christ. At the turn of the 20th century, Yu stated Freud considered the same ideas regarding the interpretation of dreams. Yu claimed that the content of dreams moved
across time and culture, and dream similarities could be tied to physical status for diagnostic purposes.

**Freud on Dreams**

D’Amato (2010) studied Freud’s germinal theory and noted that with training, analysis was the royal road to the unconscious. D’Amato believed the barriers that prevented the conscious mind from processing desires or deepest fears weakened during sleep. The dreamer may not understand the symbols expressed by dreams because the dreamer would not know who they are in the dream. D’Amato suggested dream symbols may allow the waking dreamer to ignore the true meaning.

Hersh (1995) suggested Freud used dreams to interpret inner meaning. For instance, Freud’s cancer dream from 1923 connected the idea that Freud’s cancer dream might be a warning regarding an impending physical malady from the sub-conscious to the conscious mind. Similarly, Yu (2016) noted that dreams could be utilized to diagnose physical ailments. Freud believed that dreams could be used for diagnostics because he believed dreams were influenced by physical disorders (Hersh, 1995).

Prior to 1920, Freud had two different views regarding dreams (Gruenbaum, 1994). First, Freud hypothesized that dreams reflected internal wishes. Second, Freud stated internal wishes become the dream. Gruenbaum stated, at times, the manifest components of the dream may be hidden from the dreamer because they are too painful. By 1933, Freud stopped believing that the content of the dream revealed fulfillment of a wish. Gruenbaum stated Freud continued to believe the dream-motive is always a wish, as opposed to an emotion such as anger.

Weitz (1975) compared Jung and Freud and noted that although both were deeply committed to psychoanalytic practice, they differed in the approach to dream interpretation.
Both Jung and Freud believed the unconscious created the neuroses that plagued consciousness. Jung believed, unlike Freud, that in the dream, people see the true self. According to Weitz, Freud believed all neuroses were traumatic in nature; however, Jung did not agree with this theory. Jung spoke of the dream as a message from the unconscious that could lead to insight regarding how people interacted with present and future activities. Because of the uniqueness of every human being, Jung suggested a dream analyst must uniquely interpret every dream.

Schubert and Punamaki (2016) stated disturbing dreams and nightmares are cause for psychoanalytic and cognitive dreamwork. For example, trauma victims may prefer working with dreams because they are less intimidating than working with waking experiences.

**Jung on Dreams**

Giannoni (2003) posited that Freud was more systematic than Jung. That is, Jung’s theories were more organic in nature. Unlike Freud, Jung believed that psychoanalytic tools are not mandated in every instance and should only be used when needed. Giannoni stated Freud and Jung’s primary disagreement revolved around Freud’s intensity regarding the sexual drive theory. In contrast to Freud, a Jungian would interpret a dream as a message from the unconscious mind to the ego. The dysfunction would be that the ego (or conscious mind) would not consistently understand the hidden meaning of the dream; however, Giannoni believed that waking thoughts and dreams are connected like faces of a coin. For instance, in terms of dream interpretation, the relationship between the dreamer and the listener provided a mirror reflection for comprehensive dream interpretation. Giannoni (2003) stated Jung had two different views regarding dreams. First, the dream could be interpreted without relational empathy. That is, the dream interpretation would be merely an evaluation of the dream symbols. Second, the dream interpretation would include dream symbols and the emotion of the dreamer.
Giannoni (2003) suggested that the therapeutic relationship could provide validation of emotional discomfort as it relates to the dreamer’s current lifestyle and consequently, facilitate and support lifestyle changes. According to Manduro (1987), Jung believed the initial dream contained all required information for the entire analytical process. Manduro stated at different points in dream analysis, the important, noteworthy dream may reappear; however, psychoanalysts have not reached unanimous agreement regarding the usefulness of the initial dream.

**Adler on Dreams**

Adler and Jung appeared to have similar thoughts about dreamwork. For instance, according to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956), Adler believed that consciousness was similar to the dream. Similarly, Domino (1976) tested Jung’s theory and found that dream content was similar to consciousness. Doweiko (1982) stated Adler believed the dreamer had insight regarding the external environment, and the solitude of the dream provided a safe place to explore unique life problems. Domino (1976) stated Jung believed dreams are compensatory. That is, a balance should exist between waking life and dream life, and an individual’s beliefs may prevent the display of negative emotions (e.g., a peaceful person during the waking hours may dream of being filled with anger).

**Individual Psychology**

Shifron (2010) stated the main goal of Adler’s Individual Psychology was to encourage individuals in the desire to belong and contribute to the community. Every individual uses a unique set of problem solving tools to overcome a lack of belonging. Mental distress or dysfunction could be due to the inability to establish a sense of belonging. Shifron pointed out that when people do not believe they belong, this could become the root of psychological
dysfunction. In order to explore how the individual attempts problem solving, Shifron used early recollections, defined the individual’s lifestyle, and explored life tasks. Shifron described Adler’s life tasks as individual attempts to connect with various groups. These groups could be described as friends, family, or work. In addition, Shifron believed negative aspects such as anxiety, depression, and addiction could be inventive ways to meet an individual’s needs. For example, to establish a sense of control or belonging, an anxiety attack could provide respite when an individual believes he or she must be a constant caretaker.

**Life Tasks**

Mansager (2000) suggested belonging is determined by how the individual relates to family, community, and society. In addition, failure to integrate is one of the reasons people do not meet life tasks and experience discord and psychopathological dysfunction. Mansager stated Adler suggested people must complete life tasks. Originally, Adler’s life tasks included three primary tasks: work, social, and love. Adler’s contemporaries, Dreikurs and Mosak, determined the need to expand the life tasks and included two additional tasks: the love of self and spiritual life task.

**The work task.** Del Corso et al. (2011) discussed the changing environment of work and how Adler predicted that work in the current world had become an area where the individual must constantly adjust and modify behavior. In a world where an individual must frequently change roles, Del Corso et al. estimated that people changed jobs once every five years and held an average of 10.8 jobs between ages 18 and 42. Del Corso et al. suggested job change placed significant stress on an individual due to the constant need to change. Adler’s work task refers to how the individual solves the problem of supporting the community through contribution and teamwork. The work must be important to the group and personally meaningful. The impact of
the individual’s work is visible through feedback, recognition, significance, and the lens through which others view an individual’s efforts.

**The love task.** Strauch and Erez (2009) defined Adler’s *love task* as perpetuation of human beings. Strauch and Erez stated intimacy, trust, self-revelation, collaboration and long-term commitment are essential components of the love task. Similarly, Meunier (1990) defined the love task as love betrothal, companionship, and the ability to produce offspring. Meunier stated the ability to accept that one is “good enough” supports the development of healthy offspring because it decreases the propensity toward self-doubt. Meunier noted that when parents feel insecure, this feeling is passed on to the children.

**The social task.** According to Baruth and Manning (1987), Adler believed social interest was a rudimentary task for all individuals. *Social tasks* are described as communal concerns, well-being, and encouragement of others within a group setting. Nystul (1993) developed an assessment that could rate turning points within various tasks to help individuals and counselors discover opportunities for change. For instance, Nystul’s assessment could reveal if an individual had few associations or friends within the community and suggested social interaction would reflect the person’s status within society (Baruth & Manning, 1987; Nystul, 1993). Dolev and Shifron (2016) stated Adler believed if a child had a “good” childhood, played, and interacted with others, he or she may not develop low self-esteem. This led Adler to believe that social interest contributed to an individual’s overall health.

**Early Recollections**

Dolev and Shifron (2016) used early recollections (ERs) and dreams in order to show that emotions served a purpose in the lifestyle. Manaster and Mays (2004) posited that ERs can be used to arrive at the heart of a person. For instance, Manaster and Mays found that the use of
ERs may feel more comfortable and less intimidating than a discussion about current life events because ERs exist in the past. This thought differentiates Adlerian theory from other theories because an Adlerian therapist will attend to the direction the individual is moving rather than the effect of an incident (e.g., suffering or joy). Movement refers to a felt minus or a felt fictional plus (Griffith & Powers, 2007). Adler’s felt minus refers to inferiority feelings and the felt fictional plus refers to the individual’s perception of how to move away from the inferior feelings.

Early recollections are selected and defined by the unique lens of every individual (Manaster & Mays, 2004). Dolev and Shifron (2016) stated Mosak viewed ERs as a childhood memory an individual will choose to “call up” or discuss. The chosen childhood memory during an early recollection signifies the importance of the memory in the person’s lifestyle. Manaster and Mays stated the memory does not have to be positive or negative, and the same experience may lead to different interpretations given the orientation of the lifestyle. Contextual behavior can help an individual define underlying goals of the behavior (Manaster & Mays, 2004). For example, when confronted with a problem to solve, there can be an associative effect from an earlier experience. Manaster and Mays considered this association with an earlier experience as an ER in the active state. Additionally, past experiences foster organization of current situations with the benefit from past understandings.

Flood, Lawther and Montandon (2015) studied the early recollections of 429 college students regarding childhood participation in sports. One interpretation of the ERs was that the memory had an influence on the development of lifestyle and an impact on later life choices. For example, when college students received recognition for childhood participation in sports, they made healthier choices as adults. Dolev and Shifron (2016) stated Adlerians believe ERs are
subjective reconstructions of past events and can be used to determine lifestyle and private logic. Both Manaster and Mays (2004) came to the conclusion that an ER may transform into a socially integrated or positive framework at the conclusion of therapy. This positive outlook could increase motivation and as Nowack (2017) stated, the level of an individual’s motivation could predict the success and maintenance of goal achievement. Nowack suggested therapists could use the 3-E technique, that is, enlighten, encourage, and enable clients to create changes in behavior. Early recollections could provide an opportunity to enlighten, encourage, and enable clients. In addition to ERs, dreams may have the potential to be an expression of an individual’s lifestyle. The client and therapist could engage in an enlightening discussion about the dream that could lead to personal insight and change.

**Mistaken Beliefs**

Nash and Nash (2010) stated humans can maintain illogical or harmful behaviors because they intellectually sustain beliefs that may not be true. Mistaken beliefs are maintained because there is an assumed protection of a final reward related to the behavior. During a lifestyle analysis, Nash and Nash stated mistaken beliefs could be revealed through physical changes such as blood pressure or heart rate. Dinkmeyer, Lingg and Kottman (1991) suggested mistaken beliefs (i.e., behavior, a view of the world, current self-image, and lifestyle) can be found within early recollections. Early recollections can be used to reflect intentions and attitudes that may allow for the modification of negative beliefs. Dinkmeyer et al. suggested children are skilled observers and come to a childhood understanding of what they observe. As adults, awareness of false, or mistaken, beliefs can lead to a change in private logic.
Lifestyle (Lebensstil)

According to Ansbacher (1982), Adler believed the total individual is reflected by the lifestyle. Ansbacher noted the lifestyle was created by the child prior to adult language and adult perceptions. As a result, the lifestyle is the individual’s unique template used to define and solve problems, to interact with others, and complete life tasks. Essentially, an individual’s lifestyle is a lens used to filter that which does not support the goals of the individual. Adler suggested the conscious and unconscious worked together in an individual’s attempt to understand lifestyle and the self. In addition, Adler believed that during the dream state, people remain in contact with the real world and suggested people attempt to solve issues of importance through the process of dreaming (Ansbacher, 1982).

Duba, Graham, Britzman and Minatrea (2009) defined genograms as a way to demonstrate emotive configurations within family generations. That is, a genogram could be considered an embellished family tree. When diagramed correctly, a genogram can offer insight into the family of origin. Duba et al. suggested the genogram could be used to reveal patterns of behavior (e.g., communication styles). Similarly, Androutsopoulou (2011) suggested dream content frequently relates to past family members and like the use of a genogram, the attempt to create a self-narrative from a dream could be an attempt to make sense of family relationships.

Contemporary Views on Dreamwork

Gabel (1985) connected research on dreams with rapid eye movement (REM) periods. Since 1953, Gabel stated REM and non-rapid eye movement (NREM) revealed that dreams occurred during REM sleep and had a connection with memory and learning functions. There may also be a correlation between REM sleep events and the ability to solve problems. In addition, Gabel found REM sleep could help move short term memories to long term memory
used in future problem solving. Gabel stated NREM sleep was associated with the storing of memories and REM was related to current emotions and problems causing stress for the dreamer. Similarly, older memories related to the current stressor can become part of the dream. Gabel posited REM deprivation had a negative impact on the ability to recall in both animal and human participants. Gabel found that during the dream, individuals engaged in different processes to assist with problem solving, and dreams can be a mix of emotions, experiences from the past, and pre-verbal symbolic thoughts formed in early childhood.

Hobson (2004) stated in the beginning, Freud and Jung did not consider neurobiology and the brain as a basis for understanding conditions of mental illness. Hobson noted that advances in technology like PET (positron emission tomography) scans allowed researchers to study the exact physiology of sleep and the deactivation of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex during REM sleep. This same deactivation has been observed in study participants suffering from schizophrenia. The deactivation of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is related to memory, force of will, and direct thought processes (Hobson, 2004).

Cognitive Development

Sandor, Szakadat and Bodizs (2016) studied the intimate relationship between cognitive function and dreaming. In addition, Sandor et al. attempted to reveal the relationship between cognitive development and dreaming with children. Sandor et al. noted REM sleep appears during fetal development and suggested a possible connection between dreams and neurological growth. Sandor et al. conducted the first to study regarding the relationship between children, cognitive growth, and dreams. Although the study was small, Sandor et al. established a positive correlation between dream content and intellectual functioning.
Catalano (1984) believed a child’s dreams are worthwhile in clinical practice and provide a path for the exploration of nonverbalized struggles. Catalano disagreed with Freud and noted a child’s dreams should not be discounted. Catalano suggested that although dreams have long captivated interest, dreams have only been scientifically studied over the last few decades. For example, Sharon and Woolley (2004) demonstrated children could differentiate between fantasy and reality in their dreams. This belief contradicted Piaget’s common belief that a rigid boundary exists between reality and make-believe. Sharon and Woolley found children may have an understanding of real versus imaginary, even when they might not correctly categorize as such. In contrast to previous understanding, Sharon and Woolley stated children develop and use a more refined sorting method than researchers originally thought they did.

Counter-Transference and Dreams

Falchi and Nawal (2009) stated Freud first reported transference in 1905. Freud noted transference was a client’s unconscious projection onto the therapist from an earlier time and situation. In 1910, Freud stated countertransference was a therapist’s weakness and required further analysis for the therapist; however, current beliefs indicate countertransference does not block effective therapy, rather, it is viewed as a useful therapeutic tool.

Abromovitch and Lange (1994) posited it is customary to consider a therapist’s dreams about a client as unacceptable and symptomatic of countertransference; however, the initial dream could be used to gain previously unrevealed understanding within the therapeutic relationship. The traditional view was that an appropriate, professional therapist would not dream about the client and embarrassment promoted a lack of disclosure (Abromovitch & Lange, 1994). Abromovitch and Lange believed there is little mention of dreams because of this embarrassment; however, disclosure may lead to a different view regarding the helpfulness of
dreams that could be used to promote the therapeutic relationship. For example, Tate-Angel (1999) believed a countertransference dream could help the counselor identify issues within the therapeutic process. The dream may help the therapist foster the development of empathy and prevent disruption of the fragile relationship between the therapist and the patient.

**Contemporary Dreamwork Techniques**

Schubert and Punamaki (2016) successfully used dreamwork to treat two women with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from different cultural backgrounds: West Africa and the Middle East. Schubert and Punamaki found that successful PTSD treatment did not eliminate nightmares associated with the trauma, and dreamwork was an essential component of the therapeutic process. Cultural perspectives influence and inform an individual’s understanding of dreams. For example, in African culture, dreams may be messages from God(s) or predecessors. In the Middle East, individuals may use dreams to make significant life decisions (Schubert & Punamaki, 2016). Schubert and Punamaki stated within variant cultural perspectives, dreams may be a means to overcome cultural dissonance within therapy. To date, several beliefs and dreamwork approaches are included in the therapeutic environment.

**Dream Journaling**

Stone (1998) stated journaling augments therapy. Stone believed the *process* of journaling was important, not the content, although journaling can potentiate a deeper level of insight and reflection. Stone suggested journaling is a form of storytelling that allows the individual to share and explore and used the journal writing process to promote useful and thoughtful behavior to aid in understanding lifestyle. As an example, Dale and DeCicco (2011) utilized the storytelling method of dream interpretation (TSM) to examine the relationship
between dream content and waking life and found males had more aggression content than females. Additionally, the dream content had a relationship with waking desires.

**Computer-based journaling.** Shepherd and Aagard (2011) found that journal writing can assist individuals in aptitude improvement and increase the understanding of an individual’s abilities. Shepherd and Aagard stated journal writing fostered imagination, facilitated problem-solving, and increased proficiencies. Journal writing would be useful in a dream group to assist with the interpretive component of dream exploration. Shepherd and Aagard suggested journal writing is useful for self-disclosure although some may fear too much disclosure.

Hiemstra (2001) believed journal writing could lead to significant benefits such as personal growth, innovations, internal contemplation, and personal maturity. Also, electronic journals, or computer journaling, could allow for easily accessible information and insights that could be shared with a broader group.

**Lucid Dreaming**

Smith and Blagrove (2015) stated the term *lucid dream* implies the dreamer is aware of the dream state and REM sleep is associated with lucid dreaming. Smith and Blagrove believed half the population had at least one lucid dream and 20% of the population experienced frequent lucid dreams. Although many methods exist to increase the frequency of lucid dreams, Smith and Blagrove stated no method exists that is completely effective. Smith and Blagrove studied the wake-back-to-bed (WBTB) method in which the sleeper sets an alarm an hour ahead of normal waking, and when that alarm wakes the sleeper, he or she will focus on lucid dreaming and go back asleep. This small study was positively correlated with the ability to experience lucid dreams.


Positive Ideation

Hori (2005) proposed the creation of positive dreams could foster an increase in health and wellness. For example, in the history of Japanese culture, Chinese Baku amulets and charms are used to obtain good dreams, and over time, became the Japanese concept of a nightmare eater. Another example Hori used in the creation of good dreams was the impact of humorous movies on the immune system. Hori reported that the immune system improved after watching movies filled with humor and decreased after watching sad movies. Hori suggested further study into the ability to create positive dreams and posited that positive dreaming could foster an increase in health and overall well-being.

Hori (2005) created a technique for learning to control the lucid dream. In this method, the individual would learn to become aware of a dream (i.e., lucid dreaming) and then remember key elements of the lucid dream. Once an individual is aware he or she is dreaming again, the key elements of the dream would allow the individual to control the dream. Hori stated dream components, such as flying, would alert the person that he or she is dreaming. Typically, the key elements used for lucid dreaming would be those things the person could not do outside the dream state (e.g., flying). Hori credited LaBerge for the technique used to promote lucid dreaming and referred to it as a mnemonic induction of a lucid dream (MILD). Hori noted that LaBerge used electromyography (EMG) and showed his colleagues that he could send messages while in REM sleep (e.g., he sent them his own initial).

Dream Model: Exploration, Insight, Action

Wonnel and Hill (2005) used a three-stage dream model consisting of exploration, insight, and action. Wonnel and Hill pointed out that even though dreams can, and should, be used in therapy, the component that should be utilized is the action stage of a three-part process.
First, the therapist and client work to explore the meaning of recurring dreams. Then, the client and therapist work together to create an action plan to facilitate change and address the stress generated by dreams. Wonnell and Hill found if participants did not engage in the action phase of the dreamwork, they did not achieve higher levels of problem solving even after increased awareness and insight. Wonnell and Hill’s dream therapy could benefit parents after the loss of a child or soldiers when they suffer from PTSD. In contrast, Rothbaum and Mellman (2001) questioned the effectiveness of dreamwork after a traumatic event; however, Rothbaum and Mellman found that dreamwork with a trained therapist from any discipline could lead to some level of client insight and understanding that could foster personal change.

In addition to dreamwork, the miracle question technique (Santa Rita, 1998) could help an individual look at problems in a different way. For example, a person could imagine a future without the problem. Santa Rita suggested therapists ask clients about the smallest component of the current problem to help the individual manage smaller therapeutic goals. Ultimately, smaller goals could lead to larger changes. As a result, clients would have greater success with the focused goals and the flexibility to accomplish goals at a comfortable pace.

**Discussion**

Dreams, and the interpretation of images and meaning, have historically changed and shaped human behavior. In the past, humankind developed institutions such as religion and made attempts to control the meaning and portents’ of dreams (Huffmon, 2007). Throughout history, the church attempted to control the meaning of dreams and made great efforts to protect the common individual from the temptations that may arise from the influence of the devil (Keskiaho, 2005).
Freud was instrumental in connecting dreams to the analytic therapeutic process, and through his efforts, brought about new views regarding the role and function of dreams (D’Amato, 2010; Hersh, 1995). As new contemporary thoughts about dreams developed, others such as Jung, viewed dreams, and the meaning of dreams, as complementary to waking thought (Weitz, 1975). Differing views regarding dreams continue to promote further research within the mental health profession (e.g., why dreams exist, how dreams might be used to diagnosis dysfunction, and how dreams inform waking life).

Through analysis of Adler’s life tasks (i.e., work, love, and social) the lifestyle could be assessed, and mistaken beliefs could be explored (Ansbacher, 1982; Baruth & Manning, 1987). Dreams and early recollections could be used to inform lifestyle and assist an individual in resolving mistaken beliefs and life problems. Through a proposed group process (see Appendix), couples could supplement therapy and participate in a six-session dream group.

**Implications for Practice**

Therapists (preferably a male and a female) could facilitate a dream group comprised of approximately 5-7 couples meeting over a period of six months. Couples are selected from a referral base provided by clinicians. Prior to participation in the group, couples would complete an Adlerian lifestyle analysis (Nash & Nash, 2010) and agree to work on the couple relationship using dream journaling and lucid dreaming techniques to promote positive changes in the relationship. In addition, participation in the group would be determined by interest and ability.

Prior to participation in the group, couples will be interviewed for background information and assessed to determine eligibility. Groups can be structured for specific issues such as intimacy, trust, and problem-solving strategies. Couples tend to know each other well and could offer a significant contribution to dream analysis. The group facilitators would use
Smith and Blagrove’s (2015) wake-back-to-bed methodology and introduce dream journaling methods such as Dale and DeCicco’s (2011) story telling method.

**Initial session.** The initial session includes a 2-day weekend session. During this first day of the weekend session, the therapist completes introductions, addresses issues of safety, reviews confidentiality, and provides a packet of resources. The facilitators assist in the recording an earliest remembered dream (with all participants) and outline Hori’s (2005) methods of positive ideation. The group explores the connection of the dreams to difficulties in waking life, and group facilitators offer examples of positive emotional content within dream images.

During day two of the first weekend, participants review past lifestyle analysis from individual worksheets and incorporate the analysis into the dream group. Personal and couple goals are defined at this time. Group members take personal inventory and discuss this with the group. The final segment of day two includes an introduction to dream analysis and lucid dreaming. The group facilitators introduce dream journaling and techniques used to engage in the journaling process.

**Session two.** The second week of the dream group is designed to strengthen the resolve of group members and develop positive change using the techniques outlined by Wonnel and Hill (2005). The male and female therapists encourage the use of the action stage of the three-part dream model. The hope is to have an impact on the goals of every couple through insight received from their dreams. The couple records and evaluates their dreams and receive feedback from the group and the therapists. The insight becomes a part of an action goal to change behavior that may be blocking the couple’s growth. The relationship between all of the couples in the group strengthens as a result of the group process and can potentiate action and successful
change. In the form of homework, couples and individuals will be asked to outline how they want life to be using the miracle question and use this outline to find common ground and the ability to nurture positive change.

**Session three.** Several different forms of dream journals will be available to participants to accommodate individual preferences. For example, computer software or paper dream journals will be available in the group packet distributed during the initial session. Group members will be instructed on the use of various dream journaling techniques.

Johnston (2014) believed lucid dreams are nurtured by dream journaling. In addition, Johnston stated lucid dreams, or dreams a person is aware of in the dream state, do little to help the dreamer if he or she is unable to recall the dream. Recording dreams when a person wakes from a dream, and prior to returning to sleep, can improve memory of dreams upon waking. Johnston noted that when you wake at night, it is helpful to think and read about lucid dreaming. Group members will be asked to record dreams and read or think about lucid dreaming.

One technique Johnston (2014) suggested was reviewing dream journals to help an individual notice dream signs. Couples will be asked to review their journals and look for recurring signs within their dreams. It is possible couples can use these recurring signs to know when they are dreaming. Another technique Johnston utilized was reality checks. That is, group members will be directed to ask themselves if they are dreaming while performing waking activities. As a result, Johnston suggested these reality checks could continue during the dream state.

**Session four.** The purpose of session four will be for every couple to complete individual genograms. Duba et al. (2009) pointed out the importance of generational patterns of emotion. Genograms can help couples identify intergenerational strengths and differences both partners
bring to a relationship and how those differences can create some of the conflicts the couple must address. An initial self-assessment will be incorporated within the dream group to reveal overlapping areas between the assessment and the genogram. The information from the genogram and assessment will be used to identify themes or patterns in the couple relationship.

**Session five.** The focus of session five will be on individual and couple goal setting. Nowack (2017) stated goal setting and starting new behaviors is difficult for most individuals. Because of this difficulty, Nowack used the enlighten, encourage, and enable (3-E model) to foster successful behavior changes. Similarly, according to Main and Boughner (2011) encouragement is a basic principle of Adlerian practice and within the dream group, social support can also lead to success. Nowack stated when goals are tailored to fit the individual, this will promote successful completion of therapeutic goals. In this session, well-defined individual and couple goals are outlined and discussed in the group. In addition, the therapists demonstrate problem-solving and goal-setting techniques.

**Session six.** In the final session of the dream group, couples will learn to increase communication skills. A positive relationship is established by using listening skills and listening is a fundamental skill in interpersonal relationships (Cihangir-Cankaya, 2012). Developing listening skills and demonstrating those skills within the dream group will foster increased understanding as the couples explore dreams and achieve their goals.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Dream research has a historical footprint, and as noted by Kovacevic (2013), research efforts contributed a number of significant tools for mental health professionals as they help individuals and couples gain insight regarding relationships. Del Corso et al., (2011) pointed out that Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology allowed for growth and balance within an individual’s
lifestyle, and according to D’Amato (2010), Freud stated dreams were the royal road to the unconscious. The combination of dreamwork and Adler’s ERs could create a deeper sense of awareness in the therapeutic process because they exist outside current life events (Dolev & Shifron, 2016). Techniques that help individuals move toward goals can be advanced by the use of dream techniques in individual and group therapy settings.

Researchers could study dream techniques to advance the knowledge base of current therapeutic interventions. Older dream techniques could be researched and could contribute to the re-establishment of previous techniques that have been replaced or lost in therapeutic practice. For example, researchers could explore the effectiveness of a couple’s dream group (such as the proposed dream group) used in conjunction with couples therapy. In addition, research on effectiveness and therapeutic outcomes of dream journaling (Stone, 1998), computer-based journaling (Shepherd & Aagard, 2011), and Smith and Blagrove’s (2015) exploration of lucid dreams could become an integral component for dreamwork. Dreams will continue to push and pull an individual’s psyche, and therapists must consider this powerful tool to facilitate personal growth and insight.

Conclusion

Dreams capture the imagination and can be a safe place to address behavior or ideas that might be too painful to address in the waking world. Adlerian concepts such as lifestyle, mistaken beliefs, and life tasks could become therapeutic tools used by a dream therapist to establish goals and affect change in couple relationships. Future research and clinical studies could contribute to the integration of Individual Psychology and dreamwork as an effective therapeutic approach used to foster growth and heal couple relationships.
References


Appendix A

Dreams and Mistaken Beliefs

Intake Session

1. Introduction to couples counseling

Two-Day Weekend Session: Day One

1. Introductions
2. Icebreaker
3. Guidelines of group
   a. Safety
   b. Contact between sessions
   c. Confidentiality
   d. Session resources
   e. Hand out packets
4. Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)
5. Client Expectations: Goals of the dream group
6. Check-out: Individuals share a word, thought, or feeling. Therapist may begin with “I feel encouraged…”

Two-Day Weekend Session: Day Two

1. Lifestyle Analysis
   a. Review past lifestyle analysis from individual worksheet
   b. Incorporation of lifestyle analysis within the dream group
   c. Personal and couple goals derived from group exercise
2. Individual and couple expectations
   a. Personal inventory
   b. Correlation of inventories
   c. Group discussion
3. Introduction to dream analysis and lucid dreaming
   a. Dream journaling
   b. Lucid dreaming
   c. Techniques for journaling
   d. Techniques to potentiate lucid dreaming

Session Two: Miracle Question

1. Miracle question writing: If you fell asleep tonight and woke up in the morning where everything was the way you wanted it to be, what would that look like? (Individual and couple worksheet)
2. Review dream journals in group.
3. Guided imagery exercise using miracle question worksheet
4. Checkout

Session Three: Dream Journaling

1. Techniques of dream journaling
   a. Computer-based journaling
   b. Electronic dream journaling
   c. Handwritten journals
   d. Barriers to journaling (as personal feelings and thoughts change)

Session Four: Genogram

1. Genogram and family constellation
   a. Interrelatedness and close ties affect dreams

2. Homework: Complete the genogram worksheet

Session Five: Goal Setting

1. Select one personal and one couple goal
2. Discuss with therapist to identify steps to achieve goals
   a. Check-in: Concerns from previous sessions
   b. Word or feeling that defines present moment for individual
3. Couples work on well-defined, specific, and achievable goal
4. Group members help with practical steps for goal achievement
5. Group review of goal worksheet
6. Checkout

Session six: Communication

1. Check-in: Present feelings and thoughts
2. Therapist presents listening and speaking skills handout
3. Review progress since last session
4. Role-playing techniques
   a. Therapists present a role-play using the speaking and listening skills
   b. Couples practice techniques with one another
   c. Couples practice techniques with the group
5. Homework
6. Checkout: One positive word or feeling from the session