Research Article

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20160477

Personality and dream content: are dreams, dreamer's footprints?

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Received: 31 January 2016 **Revised:** 01 February 2016 **Accepted:** 10 February 2016

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ABSTRACT

Background: A series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep is known as a dream. Relationship of dreams and dreamer has been studied in different perspectives quite extensively. The present study is focused on dream content and personality type.

Methods: A sample of 370 randomly selected participants by nonprobability convenience sampling from Karachi, Pakistan. Questionnaire with close ended and open ended questions had two sections: 1) Personality analysis; 2) Dream analysis. Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) which is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the extraversion-introversion with 5-point Likert scale was utilized. The data from the questionnaire was cleaned, coded and entered in Excel (Microsoft, Redmond, WA, USA), exported to SPSS version 21 for windows (SPSS Inc, Chicago, Illinois, USA), for analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data.

Results: Among the 370 subjects, 54% were males and 46% were females. Median age of the study sample was 16 years. The educational level of half (50%) of the sample was masters. The data was organized in nine themes included trepidation, daze, contentment, dejection, flashbacks/past life events, symbolic, problem solving/precognition dreams, reflective dreams, and creative dreams. The frequency of almost all types of dreams was high among extroverts as compared to introverts except introverts reported a statistically high frequency of past events in their dreams. One distinguishing dream found exclusively among extroverts was about being somebody else e.g., an actor. Feeling of climbing or jump from a height was only perceived by the extroverts, surprisingly not at all by any of the introvert. The frequency of creative dreams (an innovative idea) and dreams of fight or quarrel, writing some type of information in open spaces, flight and falling were found to be same in both types of dreamers.

Conclusions: Even-though the difference in all dream content of extroverts and introverts was not significant but my study does not support the idea of no impact of personality on dreaming. The present study was an attempt to demonstrate relationship between difference in dream content and personality type. Future studies are needed to do an advance research in this dimension of dreaming.

Keywords: Dream content, Personality, Footprints

INTRODUCTION

If dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two foremen in charge of the dream-work, and we may put the shaping of our dreams down mainly to their activity, as claimed by Sigmund Freud in "the interpretation of dreams", then the dreaming is certainly a personality dependent trait.

A series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep is known as a dream. Condensation is one of the methods by which the repressed returns in hidden ways. For example, in dreams multiple dream-thoughts are often combined and amalgamated into a single element of the manifest dream (e.g. symbols). The other method whereby the repressed hides itself is displacement. For example, in dreams the

affect (emotions) associated with threatening impulses are often transferred elsewhere (displaced), so that, for example, apparently trivial elements in the manifest dream seem to cause extraordinary distress while "what was the essence of the dream-thoughts finds only passing and indistinct representation in the dream".²

Personality is a dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine a unique adjustment to its environment.³ Personality traits are conceptualized as stable characteristics different for each person explaining individual predispositions to certain patterns of behavior, cognitions and emotions.^{4,5} In 1921 Jung's classical description of the dimension of introversion-extroversion has recently been given experimental support by Eysenck and his coworkers who have devised both inventory and objective criteria.⁶⁻⁸

The terms introversion and extraversion were popularized through the work of Carl Jung. Introverts tend to be more quiet, reserved and introspective. Unlike extraverts who gain energy from social interaction, introverts have to expend energy in social situations. After attending a party or spending time in a large group of people, introverts often feel a need to "recharge" by spending a period of time alone. According to estimates, extraverts outnumber introverts by about three to one. Introversion is one of the major personality traits identified in many theories of personality. People who are introverted tend to be inward turning, or focused more on internal thoughts, feelings and moods rather than seeking out external stimulation.

Many investigators, beginning with Freud have provided evidence of individual differences in dream recall. 10-13 But the influence of Freud and the psychoanalytic tradition led to a concentration on the stereotyped symbolic interpretation of dreams, rather than examination of the literal content of dreams as a reflection of present state or trait differences in personality. Lang and O'Connor studied the relationship between personality, dream content and dream-coping style.¹⁴ Hartmann demonstrated some intriguing relationships between individual differences in dreaming and dimension of personality, which relates to the degree of separateness or compartmentalization (thickness) versus fluidity or merging (thinness) in all mental functions. 15 The present study is an attempt to demonstrate relationship between difference in dream content and personality type. It was hypothesized that the dream content of introverts is entirely different from the extroverts, because wake time experience of these personalities is quite different from each other.

METHODS

Research procedure

A quantitative comparison between different moods of dreams was done among introverts and extroverts.

Study participants

Participants were chosen by nonprobability convenience sampling. Participation into the study was solely on a voluntary basis and whoever volunteered was reassured that all information obtained will be kept confidential and secure.

Sample size is 370 randomly selected from Karachi, Pakistan, out of which 140 were introverts, 200 were extroverts while 30 were found to be on the borderline. The ages of the sample range from 18 to 45.

Research instrument

It was a questionnaire included close ended and open ended questions in it.

Broadly, the questionnaire had two sections: 1) Personality analysis; 2) Dream analysis.

Data collection for section one was accomplished by using Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) which is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the extraversion-introversion. Hans Eysenck described extraversion-introversion as the degree to which a person is outgoing and interactive with other people. These behavioral differences are presumed to be the result of underlying differences in brain physiology. ¹⁶

It consisted of 10 items that measure over the previous month with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from in-accurate (=1), moderately inaccurate (=2), neither inaccurate nor accurate (=3), moderately accurate (=4), and very accurate (=5). The EPQ has a possible range of scores from 10 to 50.

The second section of the questionnaire was covered by the questions regarding creative dream and events happen in dreams.

Participants answered the questionnaire in direct supervision of the author. Test-retest technique was adopted to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interview. They were fully informed of the nature of the study and the use of the data. They were free to withdraw from the interview at any time or refuse to answer any particular question. Participants were also ensured of confidentiality.

Data analysis

The data from the questionnaire was cleaned, coded and entered in Excel (Microsoft, Redmond, WA, USA), exported to SPSS version 21 for windows (SPSS Inc.,

Chicago, Illinois, USA), for analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

A minor modification of the study questionnaire that did not deviate much from the original Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) was found expedient for the main study.

Data was collected on dreams reported by 370 participants, out of whom 140 were introverts, 200 were extroverts while 30 were found to be on the borderline. The data was organized in nine themes included trepidation, daze, contentment, dejection, flashbacks/past life events, symbolic, problem solving/ precognition dreams, reflective dreams and creative dreams.

The gender distribution in the sample participants was 54% males and 46% females. Age distribution (median 16 years) in the study sample was disproportionate between the three age groups, and was in the following: 15-20 (15%), 21-45 (70%), 46 onwards (15%). The educational levels of the sample was: Intermediate level (15%), bachelors level (35%) and masters level (50%) (Table 1).

Table 2 shows that the dreams of running, failing some type of examination, seeing the broken teeth, running short of time, being naked in an inappropriate place,

puzzlement, unsolved problem, worries, paralysis in sleep, helplessness and speechlessness, were aggregated under trepidation theme. The frequency of dreams with trepidation was almost same among both types of dreamers. Statistically, no significant difference between percentages of the frequency was found.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants (n=370).

Variable	Category	n=370	%
Gender	Male	200	54
	Female	170	46
Age (years)	15-20	55	15
	21-45	260	70
	>45	55	15
Marital Status	Married	270	73
	Unmarried	100	27
Education level	Intermediate	55	15
	Graduate	130	35
	Post-graduate	185	50
Religion	Muslims	370	100
	Christian	0	0
	Others	0	0

Figure 1 depicts the significant findings of this study. There was a significant difference in frequency of dejected dreams like someone who is close to you dies (36%:13%); sadness, tearfulness or crying (41%:20%) among extroverts and introverts (Figure 1).

Table 2: Trepidation.

	Extrovert's response	Percentage %	Introvert's response	Percentage %
Running	80	36	40	27
Failing some type of examination	100	45	40	27
Seeing the broken teeth	10	5	10	7
Running short of time	80	36	70	47
Being naked in an inappropriate place	10	5	10	7
Puzzlement: unsolved problem, worries	80	36	70	47
Paralysis in sleep, helplessness	40	18	20	13
Speechlessness	90	41	60	40

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. The frequency of symbolic dreams like a journey through road or rail (23%:7%) and crossing the bridge (14%:0%) was very high among extroverts as compared to introverts (Figure 1).

Dreams of the participants who were more extraverted have significantly more dreams of discussing something with people (32%:7%), observing and standing in the crowded place (18%:27%) and wise man advising

something to them regarding a problem of their waking life (27%:0%) and have problem solving dreams or precognition dreams about future events. One distinguishing dream found exclusively among extroverts was about being somebody else e.g., an actor (Figure 1). Introverts reported a statistically high frequency of past events in their dreams (36%:53%) i.e., retrieval from some kind of "memory store" (Figure 1). Feeling of climbing or jump from a height was only perceived by the extroverts (14%:0%), surprisingly not at all by any of the introvert (Figure 1). Contentment or wishfulment in

dreams by the extroverts and introvert personalities had no difference (45%:40%).

There are dreams in which a physical need or intrusion from outer world such as alarm clock sets up similar conditions in our dreams to mirror the outer conditions. A person who goes to bed thirsty will often dream of satisfying that thirst during their dreams. An alarm clock ringing in the bedroom may translate into a telephone or some other kind of bell, ringing in the person's dream. A physical urge to go to the bathroom will manifest itself in exactly the same way in the dream state. These dreams are called reflective dreams and in this category, most frequently reported dream was about a feeling of quenching thirst which was equally reported by both types of personalities (18%:13%).

The frequency of fight or quarrel in dreams of both types of dreamers was almost same. Seeing the water pond or sea-shore was same in both types (32%:27%). Writing some type of information in open spaces (14%:7%) was equally reported by both introverts and extroverts. The frequency of flight (14%:20%) and falling (41%:33%) in dreams was very similar in both type of personalities.

The frequency of creative dream (an innovative idea) was found to be almost same among both types i.e., 60%: 71% in extroverts and introverts respectively, but the percentage of response "No not at all" was very high in extroverts (90%) as compared to introverts (40%).

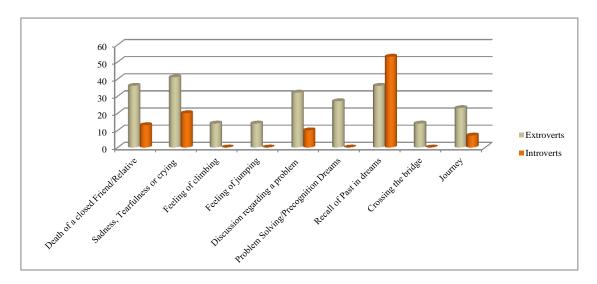


Figure 1: Significant findings.

DISCUSSION

The study findings reject the hypothesis that the dream content of introverts is entirely different from the extroverts, because wake time experience of these personalities is quite different from each other but still, the study supports the notion that there is some content which is entirely different between two types.

Even though the study was intended to evaluate the differences in dream content of the dreamers of different personality but it unfolded a very interesting fact. It is concluded that the content remains same but it's the frequency of dreaming content which is found to be different among introverts and extroverts.

The results of this study signify that the frequency of dream content is dreamer's personality dependent to some extent if not completely. The exploratory analysis regarding the effect of personality on dream content showed promising findings e.g., extroverts outnumbered introverts in most of the content related to feelings and experiences with only except of past events in dreams. The study reveals that extroverts have more vivid and rich dream experiences as compared to introverts. This finding is incompatible with the study done by Howarth. There was no evidence in that study for the view that extroverts do not have extrovert dreams, nor did extroverts reveals less (or more) dream content. The reason behind this dissimilarity may be the gulf of decades between two studies. There is no single study available on this topic which is recent and covers this aspect of dreaming. There is a need of new research on this topic.

The significant personality differences regarding the frequency of symbolic dreams like a journey through road or rail and crossing the bridge are also in disagreement with above mentioned study, in which assessment of dream samples by rating failed to reveal an

association between either extroversion or neuroticism and symbolic content of the dreams. ¹⁷

Limitations

As in other studies of this kind, convenience sampling was a limitation as the ideas gathered through this study may not represent views of the general population.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion study infer that most of the dream content of extroverts and introverts is same but there are difference in frequency of dream content and the compelling finding is there are some of the content which is exclusively found in dreams of extroverts. Hartmann in 1991 demonstrated some intriguing relationships between individual differences in dreaming and dimension of personality, which relates to the degree of separateness or compartmentalization (thickness) versus fluidity or merging (thinness) in all mental functions. The present study was an attempt to demonstrate relationship between difference in dream content and personality type. The findings of the present study cannot be generalized due to the limited sample but does not support the idea that personality does not have any impact on dreaming. Future studies are needed to do an advance research in this dimension of dreaming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Author acknowledges the immense help received from the scholars whose articles are cited and included in references of this manuscript. The authors are also grateful to authors/editors/publishers of all those articles, journals and books from where the literature for this article has been reviewed and discussed.

Funding: No funding sources Conflict of interest: None declared

Ethical approval: The study was approved by the

Institutional Ethics Committee

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Cite this article as: Khalil R. Personality and dream content: are dreams, dreamer's footprints? Int J Community Med Public Health 2016;3:598-602.