

# Sigmund Freud- “Interpretation of Dreams”

## Short Question

### SQ 1: Define Psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is defined as a set of psychological theories and therapeutic methods which have their origin in the work and theories of Sigmund Freud. The primary assumption of psychoanalysis is the belief that all people possess **unconscious thoughts, feelings, desires, and memories**. The aim of psychoanalysis therapy is to release **repressed emotions and experiences**, i.e., **make the unconscious conscious**. It is only having a **cathartic** (i.e., healing) experience can the person be helped and "cured." Freud was of the view that,

***“Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways”.***

Freud is considered to be the father of psychodynamic approach to psychology, which relies on the unconscious drive to explain the human behavior.

According to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, personality develops through a series of stages, each characterized by a certain **internal psychological conflict**. He argues that human behavior is the result of the interactions among three component parts of the mind: the **id, ego, and superego**. **The id, the most primitive of the three structures**, is concerned with instant gratification of basic physical needs and urges. It operates entirely unconsciously (outside of conscious thought). **The superego is concerned with social rules and morals**—similar to what many people call their “conscience” or their “moral compass.” It develops as a child learns what their culture considers right and wrong. In contrast to the instinctual id and the moral superego, the **ego is the rational, pragmatic part of our personality**. It is less primitive than the id and is partly conscious and partly unconscious. It’s what Freud considered to be the “self,” and its job is to balance the demands of the id and superego in the practical context of reality.

Freud used the method of psychoanalysis for **dream interpretations**. He believed that the **dream represent a disguised fulfillment of a repressed wish**.

***“What is common in all these dreams is obvious. They completely satisfy wishes excited during the day which remain unrealized. They are simply and undisguisedly realizations of wishes.”***

He believed that studying dreams provided the easiest road to understanding of the unconscious activities of the mind. He believed that, ***“The dream is the liberation of the spirit from the pressure of external nature, a detachment of the soul from the fetters of matter”***. His theories state that dreams have two parts: a **manifested content**, which is the remembered dream after we wake, and a **latent content**, or the dream that we do not remember which is considered part of the unconscious. He proposed that the latent, or unremembered, dream content is composed of three elements: the sensory impressions during the night of the dream, the residues left from the day before, and the id's drives that are already part of the dreamer. Freud believed that the repression by the super-ego is

weakened during sleep due to the absence of voluntary motor activity. Dreams allow a gratification of certain drives through a visual fantasy, or the manifest content.

At the beginning of the psychoanalytic movement, Freud and his followers considered dreams to be the main tool of self-analysis, as well as a prominent part of the treatment. Dream understanding and interpretation during that time was influenced heavily by Freud's drive-conflict theory. The therapy was designed to reveal the latent content of the patient's repressed sexuality and unconscious mind. To understand the dream, the therapist had to explore the latent content of the dream via the process of free association.

### **SQ 2: What is the role of Multiple-determinations?**

The second of the dream-work processes that Freud takes up is "**displacement**"—the method by which **dreams disguise their "latent" content** by foregrounding apparently unrelated "**manifest" content** instead. ***"Multiple determination decides what shall be included in the dream".***

Multiple determination is the number of ideas that are being associated with the single effect. The one effect which is caused by any action or response from the outside world to the patient. Freud gives a lot of importance to multiple determination. Because he believes that **a dream is difficult to interpret** and a number of **expenditures and human effort is spent on interpreting the dream**, still the dream material is unassisted and still the dreamer is not helping us a lot. So, he gives importance to multiple determination. He interprets a single dream or the object of the dream into multiple ways.

Displacement is actually the replacement of the colorless and abstract content of the thought underline the dream with the more concrete expression. This displacement is quite deep in our mind. Freud also notes that dreams will sometimes omit elements that are "**highly stressed**" (that have a substantial amount of value attached to them), while instead emphasizing other elements that are "**reinforced from many directions**".

The very images of this world that we perceive are **displaced into other elements**. Our brain doesn't show us things that happen in this world as it is into our dreams. Rather our mind changes or replaces those images. So, it might be possible that we see in our dreams **are not the real manifestations of our emotions or hidden desires**. Freud adds another crucial point to his argument here, as he notes that dream-analyses often reveal dream-contents that seem **far removed from the "kernel"** (the core meaning) of the dream.

Our mind goes through a lot of censorship and displacement and it deletes and censors a lot of extra images and dreams are just a tiny part of those images or memories. So, this is how Displacement occurs. **Displacement is the reason why there is no accurate or real thing in the dream and Condensation is the reason why manifest content is much more compact than the latent content.** These mechanisms operate outside of the dream. So, we can say that a dream may be about one thing and the dream thought is about something else. That's why this displacement is of relative importance or these multiple determinations are of relative importance because **the dream element under goes displacement of a number of relative images.**

We can also say that the displacement is the **transference of meaning from one important element to less important element**. This is also termed as **distortion**. Freud describes this process as "**a transference and displacement of psychical intensities**," and says that it is "**the essential portion of the dream-work**". This is how distortion works in a dream and the main purpose of the distortion is **to avoid censorship or displacement and to allow the desires to penetrate into consciousness**. Our desires are being suppressed a lot by our mind. They undergo a lot of censorship. That's why certain images are displaced and occur in different ways in our dreams. So, to interpret every single thought or idea, the psychiatrist has to reverse the whole process.

He hypothesizes there is a "**psychical force ... operating in the dream-work**." This force "**strips the elements that have a high psychical value**," meaning high emotional intensity. It also takes "**elements of low psychical value**" and gives them a new intensity, so that they "**find their way into the dream content**."

The psychical force behind dreams is of high importance which effects the transference of meaning and the displacement of images and because of this force the difference between manifest content and latent content occurs. And also because of this force, the meaning, story and text of the dream is different from the interpretations of the dream.

Dream-displacement and dream-condensation determine the form of a dream, Freud adds. For thoughts to make their way into the dream, "**they must escape the censorship imposed by resistance**." So, Freud believes that in order to interpret a dream by studying the dream displacement, one must believe that these elements must escape censorship. The censorship which is being imposed by the superego.

### LONG QUESTIONS

#### LQ 1: What is the process of Dream work?

Freud, in his "Interpretation of Dreams", discussed the process of dream formation in a quintessential chapter "The Dream-Work". Dream work according to him, is the unconscious ciphering that transforms the latent content into the manifest content. **Latent content** are all of ones hidden desires and motives that are in dormant state and remain so for most of his life due to restriction of several sort. **Manifest content**, however, is the visual and actual representation of latent content in dreams as seen by a person. Thus, the Dream work involves processing of latent content into dreams. The dream work is the combination of finding relationship between latent content and manifest content and also to trace out the processes by which one is converted into the other. The dream-work is what allows the dream wishes to get past censorship. It is also what gives dreams their peculiar form. Freud called the dream-work "the essence of dreaming." He wrote:

***"At bottom, dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking. It is the dream-work which creates that form."***

Freud identified four aspects of the dream-work. Condensation, Displacement, secondary revision, and representation. According to Freud, thoughts, memories or latent content exists in our minds in huge abundance, it a material accumulated over years. Their manifestation on the other hand

lasts only for few minutes. It is through **condensation** that a number of dream-elements, themes, symbols, memories etc. are combined into one. Condensation is the reason why there is no neat, one-to-one correspondence between the elements of the manifest content and the latent content. It is also why the manifest content is so much more compact than the latent content. A single fragment of a dream can carry several latent dream-thoughts, even contradictory ones and it is impossible to determine the amount of condensation. Freud said,

***“Dreams are brief and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream thoughts.”***

Freud noticed that important things in the latent content were often represented by seemingly insignificant things in the manifest content, and vice versa. A dream might seem to be about one thing, but the dream-thoughts can show it was really about something else. Because of this phenomenon, Freud said that the relative importance of the dream elements could undergo **displacement**. The emotion associated with one idea or experience is detached from it and attached to another one. He called this phenomenon, **over-determination**, which means that there could be several causes behind and associated with a single thought. All these are associated with one another via a hypothetical physical force, that he call libido, and a great expenditure of this force is required for the transformation of these remote thoughts into a distorted and symbolic manifestation in a dream. This displacement is crucial since it is because of this that the dream does not matches the real cause behind it and also censors the content to be manifested. Freud concludes the step by suggesting that the displacement comes about through the influence of the censorship by endopsychic defense and any element of thought that makes it way to dream, ***“must escape the censorship imposed by resistance.”***

Since dream thoughts emerge as a complex of thoughts and memories of intricate structures, they might represent background, digressions and illustration. That’s the reason many dreams do not seem to ‘make sense’, many others appear to be quite coherent and logical. Freud says that it is the function of **secondary revision** to create this appearance of narrative coherence: it *“fills up the gaps in the dream-structure with shreds and patches.”* As the name implies, secondary revision occurs at the end of the process of dream-construction and can basically be thought of as the application of conscious thought processes to the dream material. It can be linked to a tendency of the ego to try to gloss over inconsistencies, making things appear to make sense.

Dreams work in images, so the abstract thoughts which might underlie the dream must be turned into a pictorial and concrete language before they can be used in a dream. This is one reason why Freud compared dreams to picture puzzles like rebuses. This mechanism can sometimes be observed when we describe our dreams. As we put the images back into words, we realize that the images were **representing** words in the first place. Freud says that this process is “psychologically the most interesting.” It involves a massive level of ingenuity that few of us are capable of in waking life.

These mechanisms also operate outside of dreams. They can be observed in art, music, literature, jokes, slips of the tongue, and in the formation of symptoms. Their widespread applicability is perhaps one reason why Freud regarded dreams as the *“royal road”* to the unconscious. According to Freud, the work of interpreting the dream follows the dream-work in reverse, from the manifest



content to the latent content. He said, ***“The task of dream interpretation is to unravel what the dream-work has woven.”***

## **LQ 2: What is the difference between manifest content and latent content?**

Among Freud’s earliest writings was ***“The Interpretation of Dreams” (1899)***, in which he insisted that dreams are, ***“The royal road to a knowledge of activities of the unconscious mind.”*** In other words, that dreams offer a means of understanding waking experience. The essential part of the dream, according to the theory, presented in ***“The Interpretation of Dreams”*** is the dream work. The dream-work, according to Freud, is the essence of dreaming.

***“At bottom dreams are nothing more than a particular form of thinking made possible by the conditions by the state of sleep. It is the dream work which creates that form and it alone is the essence of dreaming”.***

***“Dream-work”***—by which he means all of the mechanisms and **psychical** processes that contribute to the formation of a dream. This theory proposes that dreams are a byproduct of the dreamer's physical and mental state during sleep, distinguishes between ***manifest and latent dream***, and points out that the dream-work proposed by Freud is actually a result of information processing and self-organization in the sleeping brain.

Freud's theory of dreams occupies a nodal position in his **Psychology**, constituting as it does a point of conjunction for his various conclusions on normal and abnormal mental life. From it, as a starting point, he has developed an outlook that calls for the earnest consideration of psychologists, for it is extensively conceded that if his conclusions are true they carry with them a revolutionary change in the knowledge of the structure and functions of the mind. Freud believed that the **content** of dreams is related to wish fulfillment and suggested that dreams have *two* types of content: ***manifest content and latent content***. The manifest content is ***the actual literal subject matter of the dream*** while the latent content is ***the underlying meaning of these symbols***.

The ***manifest content*** of a dream is the *actual literal content and storyline of the dream*. This is usually contrasted with what is referred to as the latent content or hidden meaning of the dream. According to **Sigmund Freud**, the **manifest content** of a dream includes the *actual images, thoughts, and content contained within the dream*. The manifest content is the **elements of the dream** that a person remembers upon awakening. In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud suggested that the content of dreams is related to *wish fulfillment*. Freud believed that the manifest content of a dream, or the actual imagery and events of the dream, served to **disguise** the latent content or the unconscious wishes of the dreamer. For **example**, if a person dreamed that he was being chased by an ominous creature through the dark streets of a strange city that would be the manifest content of the dream. What that dream **might actually mean**, or the interpretation of its symbolic meaning, would be considered the latent content. In this case, a **dream analyst** might suggest that the manifest content of that person’s dream suggests that he is running from something in his life or worried about an upcoming change in his life.

Freud believed that the **unconscious mind** contained *desires, urges, and thoughts* that are *unacceptable* to the **conscious mind**. These might involve traumatic memories, secret desires, or socially objectionable urges that might cause distress if they were brought into awareness. Also, Freud believed that dreams served as a form of wish fulfillment. Since a person cannot act on his **unconscious desires** in his **waking life**, he can explore these feelings in **dreams**. However, he tends to do this in hidden, symbolic forms. According to Freud, the *mind uses a number of different strategies to censor the latent content of a dream*. By censoring the unconscious wishes and disguising them in the manifest content, one can explore one's hidden thoughts and memories in a way that protects the *ego* from anxiety. According to **Friedman & Schustack**: *"As the hallmark of psychoanalytic theory suggested, what is observed on the surface is only a partial representation of the vastness that lies beneath. Although images may initially appear bizarre and nonsensical, individual analysis of the dream can reveal its underlying meaning."*

He further suggests that the **latent content** of the dream illustrates the hidden meaning of one's unconscious thoughts, drives, and desires. The unconscious mind actively suppresses what can be revealed from the **latent content** in order to protect the individual from primitive feelings that are particularly difficult to cope with. Freud believed that by uncovering the meaning of one's hidden motivations and deeper ideas, an individual could successfully understand his or her internal struggles through eventually resolving issues that create tension in their lives. In contrast to the information easily recognizable, latent content makes up everything underneath the surface.

To further elaborate on this idea, Freud proposed **four mechanisms** by which the **latent dream** can be obscured. He submitted that one aspect of manifest content could come to represent a number of latent elements (and vice versa) through a process called **condensation**. Further **displacement** of emotional attitudes toward one object or person theoretically could be displaced in dreaming to another object or person or not appear in the dream at all. Freud further observed a process called **secondary elaboration**, which occurs when people wake and try to remember dreams. They may recall inaccurately in a process of elaboration and rationalization and provide *"the dream, a smooth facade, (or by omission) display rents and cracks."* This waking activity he called **"secondary revision."**

In seeking the latent meaning of a dream, Freud advised the individual to associate freely about it. **Dreams** thus represented another source of free association in **psychoanalysis**. From listening to the associations, the analyst was supposed to determine what the dream represented, in part through an understanding of the personal needs of the dreamer. Using this information, the analyst could help the patient overcome inhibitions that were identified through dream work.

Thus, Freud believed that **dreams** could be a form of **wish fulfillment**. In dreams, one can explore all the unconscious desires in one's mind. A person can explore feelings in dreams that he cannot explore in his daily life. It is one of many strategies one's brain uses to explore one's desires, hopes, and fears in a way that protects his mind from anxiety. And **manifest and latent content** or meaning of a dream help people to explore all the feelings which they could want to enjoy in reality.