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Dream Interpretation Sessions for College Students in Taiwan: Who Benefits and  
What Volunteer Clients View as Most and Least Helpful

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess the reliability and validity of the Chinese version of the Attitudes toward Dream measure (ATD, Hill et al., 2001) and examine the outcome of dream interpretation for college students in Taiwan. On a sample of 574 college students, factor analysis revealed a single factor for the ATD-Chinese. In the second stage, 60 volunteer clients were randomly assigned to an experimental or control condition. Significant differences were found between an experimental and control condition for post-session ATD-Chinese scores. Initial attitudes toward dreams did not influence perceived gains from dream sessions.

**Key Words:** Asian clients, attitude toward dream, dream interpretation

## Dream Interpretation Sessions for College Students in Taiwan: Who Benefits and What Volunteer Clients View as Most and Least Helpful

Dreams are invaluable sources for us to understand the unconscious, reveal waking life issues, and solve problems (Van de Castle, 1994). There are varieties of theories developed for how to interpret dreams, but little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of dream interpretation, especially in Taiwan. The current study was intended to explore the effectiveness of dream interpretation for Taiwanese college students in terms of their attitudes toward dream and gains from dream sessions.

A motivation for the current study was that dream interpretation is often used during the counseling process. Keller et al. (1995) indicated that 83% of surveyed clinicians in Germany worked with dreams in therapy at least occasionally. Crook and Hill (2003) found that 92% of surveyed therapists in the United States had spent at least 8% of therapy time on clients' dreams. In Taiwan, we do not have similar data, but recent dream workshops based on a Gestalt approach, Hill's (1996, 2004) cognitive-experiential model, and Ullman's (1996) group model have been popular. Hence, we thought it would be important to examine the effects of dream interpretation in Taiwan. To examine the effects of dream interpretation, we do need an instrument to assess the effects of dream work. Therefore, we translated the Attitude toward Dream scale (ATD, Hill et al., 2001) and Gains from Dream Interpretation (GDI; Heaton, Hill, Petersen, Rochlen, & Zack, 1998) into Chinese and tested their applicability in Taiwan.

In our study, we applied Hill's (1996, 2004) three-stage cognitive-experiential dream interpretation model. We chose this model because it has received the most empirical attention (see review in Hill & Goates, 2004). Many of the studies have found evidence that using the Hill

method of dream interpretation leads to insight and self-understanding (Cogar & Hill, 1992; Diemer, Lobell, Vivino, & Hill, 1996; Falk & Hill, 1995; Hill, Diemer, Hess, Hillyer, & Seeman, 1993). Other studies also suggest that there are positive outcomes for dream work, at least in laboratory-based studies with volunteer clients. For example, Hill and Goates (2004) indicated that dream work has been shown to be effective in helping clients gain insight, strengthen the working alliance, and increase the depth of sessions. In three studies (Hill, Diemer, & Heaton, 1997; Hill, Zack, Wonnell, Hoffman, Rochlen, & Goldberg, 2000; Hill, Rochlen, Zack, McCready, & Dematatis, 2003), they also asked clients to indicate the most and least helpful aspects of the dream sessions and found that gaining awareness and insight, understanding, meaning, explanation, linking to waking life were all included as the most helpful components.

We wondered if people with positive attitudes toward dream interpretation would benefit more from working with their dreams. Hill, Diemer, & Heaton (1997) found that individuals with more positive attitudes toward dreams were more likely to volunteer to participate in dream sessions than were individuals with negative attitudes toward dreams. However, positive attitudes toward dreams were not related to client-rated or therapist-rated session outcome. Rationally, we can realize that clients with poor attitudes about dreams did not seem to benefit from dream work. Hill & Goates (2004) also indicated that attitudes toward dream seem like to be a possible predictor for dream work. However, literature regarding the relationship between dream attitude and therapeutic outcome seemed to be inconsistent. Given the previous mixed findings, we did not provide hypothesis but tried to explore the relationship between attitudes toward dream and participants' perceived gains from dream interpretation.

Generally speaking, therapists who have been trained and feel competent in dream work may want to consider doing dream interpretation at the counseling sessions. If clients know that

therapists appreciate and value dreams, they may be more likely to bring dreams in and then work hard to make meaning out of their dreams. This assumption also applied for Chinese people, especially for those who feel uncomfortable to seek for help and tell personal problems to the professional helpers, whom they think are strangers. Telling a dream seems easier than telling the personal issues at the earlier session of the counseling process. We therefore believe that therapeutic effect of dream interpretation is valuable for Chinese college students.

#### *The purpose of the current study*

For the current study, we tested the reliability and validity of the Chinese version of the Attitude toward Dream (ATD-Chinese) in the first stage. In the second stage, the purpose was to test the effectiveness of dream work on clients' attitude toward dream. We hypothesized that the college students' attitude toward dream will be more positive after they participate in dream sessions, and that students who participate in dream sessions will become more positive in their attitude toward dreams than students who do not participate in dream sessions. In addition, we hypothesized that dream attitude would predict the outcome of dream sessions, such that participants with a more positive attitudes toward dreams would perceive higher gains than those who with less positive attitudes toward dream.

### Method

#### *Participants*

Participants in the first stage of the study were 574 college students (206 men, 366 women, 2 unreported) enrolled in seven different universities in Taiwan. The average age was 21.67 years old ( $SD = 2.06$ ). In the second stage, a subset of 60 participants (9 men, 51 women, age  $M=21.67$ ,  $SD=2.33$ ) from the larger sample participated in at least one session of dream interpretation. To examine the test-retest reliability, we administered the Attitude toward

Dream-Chinese to another sample of another 64 college students (13 males and 51 females, age  $M=20.97$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ).

Therapists for the second stage of the study were 3 women ranging in age from 29 to 42 years. Two of them were doctoral students in counseling program and another one was a college professor in counseling psychology. They were all trained for this study to use the Hill (1996, 2004) dream interpretation model. Amount of counseling experience of the three counselors prior to this study ranged from 5 to 17 years ( $M = 10.33$ ,  $SD = 6.11$ ).

### *Measures*

*Attitudes toward Dreams -Chinese version* (ATD-Chinese) assesses an individual's attitudes toward dreams. The English version of the Attitude toward Dream (Hill et al., 2001) is a 9-item self-report measure of a person's attitudes about dreams. Participants respond to all items on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). In a factor analysis, Hill et al. (2001) found a single factor (eigenvalue = 4.6) that accounted for 51% of the total variance. The ATD had an internal consistency alpha of .91 and a 2-week test-retest reliability of .92. In our study, we applied back translation procedure to develop the Chinese version of the ATD. The translation involved the following procedure: First, the third author of the present study translated the ATD from the English language into Chinese. Second, the second author then translated the Chinese items back into English. Third, the first author examined the Chinese version and both English versions (original version and back-translated version) to check the exact conveyance of each item. Fourth, a pilot study was conducted with several college students to indicate any problems in understanding the instructions and the items in the scale. Since the translation of the scale may raise some problems regarding its validity and reliability (Liakos & Yannitsi, 1984), we believe that the back translation procedure applied in our study can reduce

the conceptual differences existing between the languages. Another inventory applied in this study, the Gains from Dream Interpretation (GDI), was also translated in the same manner.

*Gains from Dream Interpretation-Chinese version* (GDI; Heaton et al., 1998) assesses the specific gains that clients report from dream sessions. The GDI includes 14 items rated on 9-point Likert scales (9 = agree strongly) arranged in 3 subscales (Exploration-Insight Gains, Action Gains, and Experiential Gains. Example items are: "I was able to explore my dream thoroughly during the session," "I will use things that I learned in this dream work in my life," and "During the session, I was able to re-experience the feelings I had in the dream"). The internal consistency estimate for the total score in the Hill et al. (in press) study was .89. The internal consistency for another study with an 88 Asian Americans sample was .92 (Hill et al, in submission). The internal consistency alpha for the Chinese version with the 30-student sample in experimental group of the current study was .81.

*Feedback Questionnaire (FQ)* was developed for this study. There are mainly two questions in the FQ to gather data about volunteer clients' experiences with dream interpretation: (a) "What was the most helpful part of the dream interpretation?" and (b) "What was the least helpful part of the dream interpretation?" Similar questions were asked by Hill et al. (1997, 2000, and 2003).

### *Procedure*

*Participant recruitment.* In the first stage, ATD-Chinese was administered to college students from 7 universities in the northern and central part of Taiwan. Those students were taking courses either in guidance and counseling, career guidance, job placement or in introduction to psychology. Most of them completed the inventory in class in 7 to 10 minutes. After completion of the ATD-Chinese, they were asked if they would be willing to attend a dream interpretation session. Of the 574 participants, 177 (30.8%) expressed a willingness to

participate in the dream session.

The participant recruitment for the second stage involved several steps. A research team member invited each person who had indicated a willingness to participate either by e-mail or by phone. When we had 60 volunteer clients after about 75 calls, we stopped recruiting.

The 60 volunteer clients were randomly assigned to either the dream session or to no dream session. For clients in dream session condition, we provided 1 to 3 sessions of dream interpretation. For the clients in control group (no dream session), we told them that they were on the waiting list and would have to wait. About a week after all the participants in experimental group received dream sessions and filled out the post measures, we sent the ATD-Chinese to the volunteer participants in control group for them to fill out and also scheduled them for dream sessions.

*Therapist training.* Prior to the dream session, two of the therapists attended a 3-hour training conducted by the first author. Since all the therapists had previous experience using the Hill cognitive-experiential model, we reviewed the Hill (2004) dream model before the training and did one group practice session using the model during the three-hour training workshop.

*Dream session.* Each client brought one dream that they wanted to work on. Before the first session, the volunteer client completed a consent form. During the session, therapist worked with clients using the three-stage dream model (Hill, 1996, 2004). After the dream session, the client completed the ATD-Chinese and GDI-Chinese. Two weeks later after the dream session, the dreamers were invited to fill out a follow-up open-ended feedback questionnaire either by email or air mail.

#### *Data analysis*

Factor analysis with varimax rotation method was applied in describing the validity of the



ATD-Chinese version in the first stage. In the second stage, the method ANCOVA was applied to test the treatment effect of the dream work. The pre-treatment score on the ATD-Chinese was treated as the covariate variable. We also applied ANOVA to test the differences of gains from dream interpretation between high and low dream attitude groups. To further understand the content of gains from dream interpretation, we also applied content analysis procedure (Abrahamson, 1983; Berg, 2007; Holsti, 1968; Silverman, 1993) to classify the most and least helpful components of dream sessions perceived by volunteer clients. In the process of content analysis, the three authors discussed together to get consensus about the categories for classifying most and least helpful components. We basically applied the category system proposed by Hill, Diemer, and Heaton (1997).

## Results

### *Psychometric Tests on the ATD-Chinese*

A principal axis component factor analysis, with varimax rotation, was performed on the 9 items on the Chinese version of the Attitude toward Dream Scale (ATD-Chinese). One factor with an eigenvalue  $> 1$  (4.20) was found; it accounted for 46.64% of the total item variance. Means, standard deviations, factor loadings, and communalities of each item of the ATD-Chinese are reported in Table 1. According to Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988), the most important aspect leading to factor stability are component saturation (i.e., the absolute magnitude of the loadings) and absolute sample size. In our study, the sample size is big enough and factor loading for each of the 9 items on the ATD-Chinese is greater than .50. In addition, those participants who were willing to have a dream session scored significantly higher on the ATD-Chinese ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) than those who were not willing to have a dream session ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = .69$ ),  $F(1,572) = 43.57$ ,  $p < .001$ .

As far as the reliability evidence, the internal consistency alpha based on the 574 college sample was .86. The alpha based on the 60 students in the second stage pre-treatment was .81 and .84 after the treatment. The 2-week test-retest reliability based on another sample of 64 college students (13 males and 51 females) was .80. The internal consistency based on the 64 college student sample was .86 on pre-test and .90 on the two-week post-test.

### *The Outcome of Dream Sessions*

Table 2 provides the means, standard deviations. An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with post-session ATD-Chinese as the dependent variable, treatment condition (dream session versus wait list control) as the independent variable, and initial level of attitudes toward dreams as the covariate was significant,  $F(1, 57) = 10.94, p < .01$ . These results suggest that participating in a dream session led to more positive attitudes toward dreams.

To test the influence of dream attitude on perceived gains from dream interpretation, we divided the experiment group into high and low dream attitude groups and did an ANOVA test with GDI as dependent variable. The result indicated no significant difference between high ( $M=7.55, SD=.71$ ) and low ( $M=7.48, SD=.67$ ) attitude groups in their perception of gains from dream interpretation,  $F(1, 28)=.08, p>.05$ . For college students, gains from dream interpretation won't depend on their attitude toward dream. For the 30 participants receiving dream sessions, the zero-order correlations also indicated no significant relationship between pre-session ATD-Chinese and GDI ( $r= -.06, p=.76$ ). The correlation between post-session ATD-Chinese and GDI ( $r=.20, p=.30$ ) was not significant either. The second hypothesis, dream attitude would influence the perceived gains from dream session, was not supported. Together with the test result of the first hypothesis, we can then draw the conclusion that participants in experimental group became more positive in their dream attitude. However, the perceived gains from dream

interpretation were not related to or dependent on their attitude toward dream. For college students who might not be as positive toward dream work as their counterpart, they can still perceive gains from the dream work.

Table 3 shows the most and least helpful components of the dream sessions perceived by the volunteer clients. All of the volunteer clients mentioned at least one most helpful component. New meaning gained from the dream interpretation was the most frequently mentioned helpful component (59%). Waking-life links (36%), understanding (41%), insight gains (27%), and ideas for change in waking life (27%) were also helpful components. In addition, 32% of clients indicated other category of helpful components such as feeling assured about self and perceiving therapist being very competent. As far as the least helpful component, 68% of volunteer clients indicated nothing unhelpful. Only few of them mentioned some points unhelpful such as too much exploration, too much explanation, not enough explanation, or getting stuck to ideas of making change.

### Discussion

The purpose of our study was to examine the outcome of dream interpretation for college students in Taiwan. The results indicated that college students' attitude toward dream became more positive after the dream session. In addition, the perceived gains from dream interpretation would not dependent on their initial attitudes toward dream.

#### *Attitude toward dream*

Dream interpretation is not so popularly applied in the process of counseling and psychotherapy in Taiwan. One reason, we believe, is that therapists in Taiwan are not well trained to use dream as a method for counseling and psychotherapy. However, the idea of dream interpretation was appealing enough to nearly one third (30.8%) of the initial sample of college

students in our study to receive dream interpretation. The figure is higher than the 19% found in Hill, Diemer, and Heaton's (1997) study using a US college sample. For Chinese college students, the idea of dream interpretation is even more appealing for them to volunteer a dream work in counseling sessions. We guess it is because dream work sounds like a kind of directive approach although it actually is not. Theorists have suggested that clients with high levels of Asian cultural values would prefer directive counseling (Kim & Atkinson, 2002; Kim et al., 2003).

Another finding in our study was that college students' attitude toward dream became more positive after dream sessions. We guess the positive attitude toward dream might lead to their tendency engaging in further dream work. We are wondering if a trial in counseling session can also increase their attitude toward professional psychological services. Empirical studies regarding Asian's or Asian American's help seeking attitude were inconsistent. Yeh (2002) found that Taiwanese adolescent and young adults who have high levels of collective self-esteem reported less positive attitudes toward help-seeking among Taiwanese. Atkinson and Gim (1989), Tata and Leong (1994), and Zhang and Dixon (2004) found that high acculturation was related to favorable attitudes toward seeking professional psychological services. However, Gim, Atkinson, and Whiteley (1990) found that low acculturation was related to an increased willingness to see a counselor. We believe that there are even more factors related to college student dream attitude and help seeking behavior. We also need to further examine which part of the dream session works for college students and facilitate their attitude toward dream.

#### *Gains from dream session*

A major finding of this study is that the perceived gains from dream interpretation do not depend on their initial attitude toward dream. Volunteer clients can generally gains benefits from

the dream interpretation no matter whether their attitudes toward dreams are positive or not at the beginning of the dream session. According to varieties of empirical studies (Hill, Diemer, and Heaton, 1997; Hill et al., 2001; Zack & Hill, 1998), it seems reasonable to expect that clients with higher positive attitude toward dream will perceive more gains than those with less positive attitude toward dream. However, in our study, we found that participants' perceived gains from dream work won't depend on their attitude toward dream. For college students in Taiwan, they can still gain from dream session although their attitudes toward dream are not as positive as their counterpart before the dream session. It seems that dream work would be a good idea to benefit client in counseling and psychotherapy. For Asian people, who inclined not to seek for professional help because of feeling shamed to tell personal problems in front of strangers, dream work can provide psychological benefits out of their expectation.

#### *Most and least components of dream session*

To further understand the student perceptions of gains from dream interpretation, we did a qualitative analysis for the answers on the feedback questionnaires filled by the 30 participants in experimental group. Similar to Hill, Diemer, and Heaton's (1997) study, all participants perceived at least one helpful component from the dream session. Over half of the volunteer clients (59%) indicated gaining new meaning from the dream sessions (e.g., "It's good to have the chance to think the meaning of the dream in a more systemic way", "The dream is a kind of self-reflection at the certain particular point", "The dream let me think about my life goal" and "The questions given by the therapist let me think more about the meaning of the dream").

In addition, 36% of the volunteer clients mentioned helpful component related to waking life linking (e.g., "The dream let me think more about the waking life events that troubled me", and "The content of the dream reflected my family relationship"). Helpful component related to

action stage is also important in the study (27%, e.g., “I can figure out the problem solving strategies related to my current trouble” and “The therapist helped me analyzing the pros and cons in making a career decision”). Some of the clients indicated that “The dream annoyed me a lot and now I understand what it means and feel more comfortable with it”. Others mentioned that “Comparing to the regular counseling, I prefer the dream work”. This finding is consistent with past research suggesting higher outcome indices with dream work as compared with general therapy (Hill & Goates, 2004).

With regard to the least helpful component, over two thirds (68%) participants listed nothing unhelpful. This result is similar to Hill, Diemer, and Heaton’s (1997) study and also suggested that dream interpretation was generally viewed as helpful. However, there were still a few clients mentioned that events happened during the dream session were least helpful for them such as “The therapist mentioned the point (i.e. interpersonal relationship problem) that I think was not my concern” and “The joke played regarding to the relationship between my mother and me was not fun at all”. These feedbacks from the client viewpoint remind us that therapists need to be sensitive enough about the client’s concerns. Also, inappropriate humor related to metaphors in the dream should not be applied in the process of dream interpretation.

In summary, the most helpful components of dream work perceived by volunteer clients included all stage activities provided by the therapist. Similarly, Hill and Goates (2003) reported results from several qualitative and experimental studies suggesting that clients found all components of the Hill (1996, 2003) model to be effective. Therefore, therapists can use varieties of activities to help clients work with dreams. However, the effect of different components of stage activities/skills for college students needs further exam.

#### *Limitation and Implications*

The findings in the current study have limitations that are typical of survey research with university students. The focus on college students in northern and central part of Taiwan in the current study limits the generalizability of findings to this population in Taiwan or in China. Similarly, at this time it is unclear to what extent the results from this study utilizing college students from Taiwan could be generalized to adults in Taiwan as well as to other Asian countries (e.g., Korea, Japan, and mainland China). Because of the wide diversity among Asian cultures, people from different Asian cultures might respond differently to dream work. Future studies can be conducted with samples from different Asian cultures.

In addition, the results of gains from dream interpretation was based on small sample size. The results may not apply to all Chinese groups not represented in the current sample. However, the present findings still have a number of implications for Chinese college students and the researchers and clinicians who serve them. Dream research participation helps the college student becoming aware of their attitude toward dream. Attending at least one session of dream interpretation can increase their attitude toward dream. Learning from the dream session/therapist about how to interpret their dreams can even encourage them to deal with their dream on their own. Future research regarding dream interpretation self-efficacy could be conducted. We as therapists can also encourage the clients to tell their dreams in the regular therapy session.

In terms of future research, the finding of this study is quite encouraging for the future use of the Attitude toward Dream Scale for Chinese population. It would also be interesting to further examine the relationship between cultural-related variables (such as Asian value, collectivism/westernization/individualism, and preference counseling style) and dream session outcome. A future study regarding directive versus nondirective approach of dream interpretation

for Asian college students could also be conducted. In addition, it would be interesting to know which therapists are likely to encourage dream work in their practice. Also, researchers could investigate when and how therapists encourage dream work in the therapeutic process. Finally, we would suggest further examination about therapeutic factors during the process of dream interpretation that lead to client perceived gains from dream interpretation.



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*Table 1*

*Items, Component loadings, Communality Estimates, and Means and Standard Deviations for the Chinese Version of the Attitude toward Dream Scale*

Item	Factor loading	$h^2$	Mean	SD
1. I believe that dreams are one of the most important ways to understand myself.	.70	.49	3.03	1.11
2. I do not pay any attention to my own dreams.	.73	.53	3.55	1.13
3. Dreams have meaning.	.70	.49	3.57	0.98
4. Dreams are too confused to have any meaning to me.	.76	.58	3.42	1.09
5. I dislike speculations about the meaning of dreams.	.50	.25	3.26	1.01
6. I value my dreams.	.77	.59	2.96	1.03
7. Practical everyday life is too important to me to pay attention to my dreams.	.71	.50	3.31	1.12
8. How often have you speculated about the possible meaning of one of your dreams?	.56	.31	2.93	1.30
9. Do you have any beliefs of theories about the meaning of dreams?	.59	.34	2.78	1.07

*Note.* N = 574.  $h^2$  = communality estimates.

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*Table 2*

*Means, Standard deviations, and ANCOVA Summary Table*

	Pre-ATD		Post-ATD		F(1, 57)	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental group	3.82	.50	4.15	.46	10.94**	.002
Control group	3.49	.67	3.57	.63		



*Table 3*

*Client Reports of the Most and Least Helpful Components of Dream Interpretation*

Category	%
Most helpful	
Component of the Exploration Stage	
Links to waking life	36
Association	18
Experiencing feelings or Catharsis	18
Component of the Insight Stage	
New meanings	59
Gaining awareness	14
Gaining insight	27
Understanding	41
Explanation	9
Components of the Action Stage	
Ideas for change in waking life	27
Courage to make change	5
Other (Feeling reassured, competent therapist)	32
Least helpful	
Component of the Exploration Stage (Too much exploration about unimportant issues)	4
Component of the Insight Stage (Too much or not enough explanation)	9
Components of the Action Stage (Hard or no way to make change)	9
Other (Not ready to tell the dream, too much repetition, Joking)	14
Nothing unhelpful	68

*Note.* The open-ended responses about most and least helpful components of the session were categorized by a team of judges. Volunteer clients could list more than one component that they feel most or least helpful, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

### Authors Note

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