Effects of Experiential Focusing-Oriented Dream Interpretation
Kuei-An Kan, Janice Miner Holden and Andre Marquis
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What is This?
EFFECTS OF EXPERIENTIAL FOCUSING–ORIENTED DREAM INTERPRETATION

KUEI-AN KAN received her Ph.D. in counselor education in 1998 at the University of North Texas. Her article in this journal is a result of her commitment to the study of a nonviolent approach to self-understanding and healing. Her areas of interest include essence and personality, holistic and harmonious human development, and consciousness studies.

JANICE MINER HOLDEN, Ed.D., professor, has been on faculty in the counselor education program at the University of North Texas for the past 12 years. She loves to teach (especially courses like Transpersonal Perspective in Counseling and Dreamwork in Counseling), enjoys what little power she has to influence her program in her role as program coordinator, and is most interested in researching and writing on phenomena related to transpersonal psychology. She also holds licensure in Texas as a counselor and a marriage and family therapist and holds certification as a sex therapist. She maintains a small private practice in the counseling of individuals and couples.

ANDRE MARQUIS is currently working toward completion of a Ph.D. in counselor education, at the University of North Texas. He intends to teach in academia, counsel, research life-span development and processes of change, and write. He is an advocate of integral studies, with emphases on developmental psychology, contemplative spirituality, counseling, and education. He is currently serving as “Devil’s Advocate” in the University Student Outreach branch of the Integral Institute, founded by Ken Wilber. He and Scott Warren founded Kosmos, an interdisciplinary student organization devoted to integral studies. He is also Book Review Editor for the journal Constructivism in the Human Sciences. He currently lives with Lerxst, his dog and friend of 11 years, in an old log cabin in the woods outside of Denton, Texas. His personal interests include integral practice, music (listening, playing, writing), nature (backpacking, mountain biking, kayaking), cooking and woodworking.
Summary

This two-part study investigated the effects of a particular approach to dream interpretation. In the first part, the Dream Interpretation Effects Questionnaire (DIEQ) was developed to assess both quantitatively and qualitatively seven specific effects of Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation. In the second part, the DIEQ was used along with a structured interview in a pretest-posttest control group design to examine the effects of Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation. The results were, first, that the DIEQ proved to be highly reliable and, second, that Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation demonstrated significant results. This study offers support for Gendlin’s assertion that an Experiential Focusing approach to dream interpretation facilitates constructive psychological change for the dreamer.

The idea that a dreamer can benefit from understanding the hidden information in a dream appears in ancient texts and in numerous cultures around the world (Meier, 1987). This idea also was central to the very foundation of Western psychotherapy, psychoanalysis (Freud, 1900/1952, 1935/1963), and has been acknowledged if not emphasized in several of the other psychotherapeutic approaches developed over the past century. The study described in this article used Gendlin’s (1986) Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation. Because Gendlin’s approach to dream interpretation includes other approaches, the latter are briefly reviewed.

In psychoanalysis, Freud (1900/1952) considered a patient’s conscious memory of a dream the manifest, or obvious, content. He believed that as the patient reflected on the dream and reported any associations that came to mind, the unconscious latent content of the dream, consisting of repressed wishes or conflicts, would emerge. Thus, he achieved a primary goal of psychoanalysis: to make the unconscious conscious. Freud proposed specific interpretations, mostly sexual and aggressive, for a number of dream images.

Adler (Mosak, 1995) believed that dreams reveal a person’s future movement. According to individual psychology, the purpose of various types of dreams is to rehearse, postpone, or dissuade oneself from action. Affirming the uniqueness of both the dreamer and the dream, Adler disagreed with the idea of fixed symbolism of dream images.
Jung (Hall, 1983; Jung, 1963, 1964, 1968/1979) viewed dreams as natural, healthy, creative, progressive, and purposive psychic processes that reveal rather than disguise less developed sides of the personality crucial to individuation, the process of psychological completion and wholeness. His psychotherapeutic approach also employed free association and interpretation of symbols. Jung believed that symbols could have meanings not only uniquely individual but also universally derived from the collective unconscious, the repository of all human experience.

Perls (1969), in his Gestalt therapy, asserted that every dream element is the projection of a disowned part of the dreamer’s personality. Rather than analyzing dreams, the Gestalt therapist facilitates an experiential process for the dreamer (Fantz, 1983). The therapist directs and guides the client to recount the dream in the first person and present tense, to take on the roles of each of the various elements of the dream, and then to carry out dialogues between some of those parts. Perls believed this process enables the dreamer to reown the disowned aspects of self and thus become more whole.

Hill and Ullman are two contemporary practitioners who have developed approaches to dream interpretation. Hill (1996) believed that humans engage in an ongoing process of encoding experiences into cognitive schemata, that is, “clusters of related thoughts, feelings, sensations, memories, and actions” (p. 49). Remembered dreams reflect waking experiences that cannot be assimilated into existing schemata but need to be accommodated by the restructuring of existing schemata. The goal of her three-stage model of dream interpretation—exploration, insight, and action—is to facilitate that accommodation and any resulting impetus for action.

Ullman (1996) developed a four-stage group approach to dream interpretation. In Stage 1, the dreamer shares the dream, and group members ask clarifying questions. In Stage 2, group members work with the dream as if it were their own—projecting feelings and meanings onto the dream. In Stage 3, further dialogue develops between the dreamer and group members to facilitate the dreamer’s exploration, felt connections, and understanding of the dream. The dreamer is free to respond or not respond to any of the projected connections offered by the group members. In the final
stage, the dreamer is invited to take a second look at the dream and to share further insights.

Moustakas (1994) presented an existential-phenomenological approach to dream interpretation in which the dreamer is encouraged to trust his or her own intuition of the dream’s meaning and to take responsibility for the direction of his or her life. Dreams are seen as projecting the dreamer into the future. This critical viewpoint implies that personal meanings and goals exist and can be actualized: The dreamer can live differently, more in touch with his or her Being. Moustakas’s approach involves five steps: incubating (upon falling asleep, requesting help in understanding a pressing concern) and recording the dream immediately upon awakening; determining the horizons (what stands out to the dreamer as most significant); clustering the horizons and deriving core themes; determining the Existential A Priori (the central theme that requires elucidation and exploration and strongly influences the direction the dreamer will take in life); and the course of action (moving toward or away from the Existential A Priori).

Gendlin (1986) asserted that all approaches to dream interpretation can be used when anchored in the experiential felt sense of the individual. He developed Experiential Focusing-oriented dream interpretation in which the dreamer uses his or her bodily felt sense to discover and affirm the meaning of the dream and possibly to discover new insight or new direction for development.

Experiential Focusing

Gendlin (1981) originally termed his approach Focusing. Others later referred to it as Experiential Focusing. In this article, Focusing and Experiential Focusing will be used interchangeably.

Focusing (Gendlin, 1974) evolved from Rogers’s client-centered therapy. In his efforts to experimentally study human change, Rogers’s conceptualization shifted from a static view of personality to a process view of human nature (Rogers, 1958). At the same time, psychologist Gendlin was developing his theory of experiencing. He reformulated Rogers’s approach in experiential terms by emphasizing the essence of client-centered therapy—accurate listening—that facilitates clients’ contacting and staying in touch with their experiences (Gendlin, 1974). Research (Walker, Rablen,
Rogers, 1960) suggested that clients who were high in experiencing level, that is, in awareness of inner experience—particularly of bodily feelings—tended to have more successful outcomes in therapy. Consequently, Gendlin developed a procedure to facilitate and use that awareness. He called the procedure Focusing.

The basic principle of Experiential Focusing is that the experiencer directly senses what is concretely felt in the body. Change occurs when the process of experiencing becomes fuller and moves beyond blockages. An inner checking with the directly felt experience allows the experiential approach to be used in conjunction with all theories, concepts, and techniques.

According to Gendlin (1981), Focusing is a process through which an individual attends quietly to the bodily felt sense of a concern and waits for the meaning to emerge from that felt sense. Focusing is not merely feeling without thinking. Rather, it is the kind of thinking that is in touch with what the unsplit body-mind already knows and lives. This is what makes Focusing more powerful than thinking or feeling alone. Gendlin argued that Focusing is analogous to a scientific approach. When one’s felt sense is used as the touchstone, one can test out different concepts, assumptions, or theories against one’s concretely felt experience to understand, to create, and to live further the meaning of one’s existence.

**Felt sense and Focusing attitude.** Focusing involves two essential elements: felt sense and Focusing attitude. Gendlin (1974) considered a felt sense to be “both psychic and bodily” (p. 241). According to Gendlin (1974, 1981), a felt sense is an implicitly complex and not yet conceptually clear bodily felt whole of a person, situation, or event that encompasses everything one feels and knows about the given subject at a given time. Implicit in that bodily knowing is the next growth step for the organism. If one allows a felt sense to open up and move forward on its own, one will experience a shift in the bodily sense of the concern. This shift signifies a movement in the direction of growth. The problem may not be solved, but the way it is carried or experienced in the body is different (Campbell & McMahon, 1985; Gendlin, 1986).

According to Gendlin (1974), the Focusing attitude necessitates a quiet, gentle, curious, nonjudgmental, accepting, letting, allowing, and friendly attitude toward what is emerging from inside one-
self. This attitude involves a different way of being with one’s “problem.” In fact, the adoption of a Focusing attitude is, in and of itself, a step toward overcoming that which contributed to the problem (Campbell & McMahon, 1985; Gendlin, 1981, 1986).

In summary, a review of the literature on Experiential Focusing seems to indicate that Focusing promotes change through facilitating a high experiencing level in individuals. It has also been demonstrated that anyone can learn Focusing (Gendlin, 1981).

The literature on Experiential Focusing indicates that Focusing can be applied to many areas of interest, including dream interpretation (Gendlin, 1986). However, a thorough review of the existing literature revealed that no research had been conducted on Focusing-oriented dream interpretation.

A few researchers using non-Focusing approaches found some support for the efficacy of dream work (Falk & Hill, 1995; Hill, Diemer, Hess, Hillyer, & Seeman, 1993). These and other researchers and clinicians have indicated the need for measures sensitive to the effects of dream work and for empirical studies using those measures to assess the effects. Kan designed the following study to fulfill both needs.

FIRST PART OF THE STUDY: DEVELOPMENT OF THE DREAM INTERPRETATION EFFECTS QUESTIONNAIRE

Kan designed the Dream Interpretation Effects Questionnaire (DIEQ) as a preliminary instrument to assess both quantitatively and qualitatively the effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. Based on the existing Experiential Focusing and dream interpretation literature, she identified seven categories of possible effects: (a) a sense of easing or release of tension associated with the dream; (b) a sense of fresh air or increase of positive energy associated with the dream; (c) increased self-understanding; (d) a sense of movement, reconciliation, or healing; (e) development of a new step or new direction with regard to a concern; (f) enhanced valuation of dreams; and (g) enhanced understanding of the meaning of the dream. DIEQ Part 1 assessed these effects quantitatively, whereas the cover page, Part 2, and Part 3 assessed them primarily qualitatively. Kan established content validity for the DIEQ through the support of the existing professional literature.
Development of DIEQ Part 1

The DIEQ Part 1 constituted a quantitative assessment of the effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. For each of the seven categories of possible effects, Kan developed six to eight one-sentence items of which no fewer than one third were stated in “negative” syntax. After reading each statement, the participant would circle one response on a 7-point Likert-type scale from not at all like me to very much like me. Sample items include the following: I experience a sense of positive energy flowing when I think of the meaning of the dream, I experience a sense of uneasiness associated with the meaning of the dream, I did not see new ways to make things in my life different, I have a new understanding of myself as a result of the process, I feel I got no new ideas for ways of dealing with people or problems, dreams are insignificant, dreams are meaningful, the process helped facilitate some movement toward resolution of a concern, the process resulted in no personal change or transformation, I have a better understanding of the meaning of the dream because of the process, the process was not beneficial to my understanding of the dream, dreams are valuable, and my understanding of the meaning of the dream stayed the same.

To establish the reliability of the DIEQ Part 1, Kan recruited 52 volunteer participants from graduate counselor education courses at a moderately sized Midwestern university. Volunteers paired up as speaker and listener. The speaker told a dream in the first person, present tense, and in as much detail as possible then freely associated the perceived meaning of the dream. Meanwhile, the listener used nonverbal skills and verbal reflective responses to listen to the speaker without making any interpretation. After the speaker completed the DIEQ Part 1, the pair reversed roles and went through the same process.

Development of the DIEQ Cover Page, Part 2, and Part 3

The DIEQ cover page addressed information on preexisting factors that may have influenced research participants’ experience with this study: demographic data, information concerning participants’ dream life and dream recall frequency, participants’ attitudes toward dreams, previous experience with dream interpreta-
tion, and expectations for participation in the study. Another item assessed the length of the dream that each participant chose to use in the study, included to examine any possible relationship between the length of a dream and the effects of dream interpretation.

The DIEQ Part 2 consisted of 24 items, including Likert-type scales, multiple choice items, and open-ended questions, to gather in-depth information concerning the same phenomena as assessed in Part 1. Kan included these items to examine more closely (a) theoretical assumptions of various dream interpretation theories, (b) existing research findings of dream interpretation, and (c) results specific to Experiential Focusing.

The DIEQ Part 3 consisted of 7 items, including Likert-type scales, yes/no items, and open-ended questions. Kan designed this part to assess in greater depth participants’ views of the meaning of their dreams before and after dream interpretation as well as their reactions to the process. She developed three versions of Part 3 to match for the participants’ status at the time of administration: the first for pretest, the second for the control group’s first posttest, and the third for the experimental group’s posttest and the control group’s second posttest.

SECOND PART OF THE STUDY: EFFECTS OF FOCUSING-ORIENTED DREAM INTERPRETATION

Hypotheses and Research Question

In the second part of the study, Kan employed a pretest-posttest control group design to examine four hypotheses and one research question with regard to the effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation:

_Hypothesis 1:_ The experimental group’s mean posttest score on the DIEQ Part 1 will be significantly higher than their mean pretest score, reflecting a reported benefit from Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation.

_Hypothesis 2:_ The control group’s mean first posttest score on the DIEQ Part 1 will not be significantly different from their mean pretest score, reflecting no change after a waiting period.
Hypothesis 3: The mean difference between the experimental group’s posttest and pretest scores on the DIEQ Part 1 will be significantly greater than the mean difference between the control group’s first posttest and pretest scores, reflecting a reported benefit from Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation.

Hypothesis 4: The control group’s second posttest mean score on the DIEQ Part 1 (after the intervention) will be significantly higher than its first posttest mean score (after the 45-minute waiting period), reflecting a reported benefit from Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation.

Research Question: What patterns can be discerned from data from the DIEQ cover page, Part 2, and Part 3 and from the structured interview?

Selection of Participants

Kan contacted the local Focusing center for a list of potential participants: people who had participated in the Experiential Focusing training offered by the Focusing center and had expressed interest in Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. The potential participants’ involvement in the Focusing center did not constitute a counseling relationship and consequently was not subject to the limits of confidentiality.

Kan selected participants on the basis of their ability to recall one or more dreams per week. The first 20 potential participants who met the criterion and who consented to participate became the participants of the study. No exclusion was made on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, or disability.

Intervention

The intervention consisted of a 45-minute Focusing-oriented dream interpretation session guided by Kan. A guided Focusing session refers to a Focusing session with a partner who can listen with accurate empathy and can make Focusing process suggestions. Examples of Focusing process suggestions are as follows: “You might want to ask yourself, how does this whole thing feel in your body?”; “You might want to ask yourself, what in my life feels like this?”; and “You might want to ask yourself, what does this whole thing need?” A Focusing session is considered successful when a “felt shift” occurs, which involves a distinct physical shift—perhaps a sense of easing, release, or fresh air—in the bodily sense.
related to a concern. Although a shift can happen with or without a
Focusing guide, the authors and other expert Focusers (Hinter-
kopf, 1998) had observed that it occurred more frequently with a
guide.

Kan acted as Focusing guide for all research participants. At the
time, she had a master’s degree in counselor education and was
working toward completion of a doctoral degree in counselor edu-
cation. She had formal training in Focusing and Focusing-oriented
dream interpretation and 11 years of experience as a Focuser. She
also had cofacilitated Focusing training and workshops with a cer-
tified Focusing trainer.

Instrumentation and Procedures

Kan used two instruments in this study: the DIEQ and a struc-
tured interview. She designed the structured interview to obtain
further information (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992). It
consisted of four open-ended questions that gave participants the
opportunity to clarify, elaborate on, and make comments on their
previous responses. For a complete copy of these instruments along
with a thorough review of relevant literature, see Kan (1998).

After matching the 20 participants for whether they had experi-
ence with dream work, Kan randomly assigned each member of the
pair to either the experimental or control group. She carried out
the Focusing-oriented dream interpretation intervention in indi-
vidual sessions with each participant and gathered data using the
DIEQ and a structured interview.

In the first phase of this part of the study, each experimental and
control group participant began by completing the informed con-
sent for the study and the DIEQ cover page. The participant then
described a dream in the first person, present tense, and in as much
detail as possible and completed the DIEQ Parts 1, 2, and 3 (pre-
test). Kan then guided each experimental group participant in a
45-minute Focusing-oriented dream interpretation session with
the dream the participant had described. By contrast, each control
group participant engaged in personal activities irrelevant to
dream work during a 45-minute no-intervention waiting period.
Each participant then again completed the DIEQ Parts 1, 2, and 3.
This posttest was referred to as posttest for experimental group participants and first posttest for control group participants.

In the second phase of this part of the study, immediately following each control group participant’s completion of the first posttest, Kan guided the participant in a 45-minute Focusing-oriented dream interpretation session. Each control group participant again completed the DIEQ Parts 1, 2, and 3 (second posttest).

Participants in the experimental group participated in the structured interview after the posttest. Participants in the control group participated in the structured interview after the second posttest.

LIMITATIONS

The quantitative portion of the first part of the study was limited in at least two ways. Participants were graduate students and were volunteers (Heppner et al., 1992).

The second part of the study was limited in the following ways. Participants in both the experimental group and control group were a small number of volunteers and were not matched for age, gender, race, or socioeconomic or educational status. The DIEQ is not a well-established but rather a preliminary instrument that relies on self-report (Heppner et al., 1992). Because Kan conducted all the research reported herein, the results could be biased; however, the adoption of an experimental-control group design, the use of standardized research procedures, and the use of objective measures are strategies she used to minimize bias (Heppner et al., 1992).

The final limitation involves the use of experienced Focusers as participants. Although research (Gendlin, 1981) has suggested that anyone can learn Focusing, the authors and others (Hinterkopf, 1998) have observed that most people require a few Focusing sessions to become familiar enough with the process to benefit maximally from it. For this reason, Kan involved only experienced Focusers in this study. Because participants were experienced in Focusing, the results may not be generalizable to the population at large. Such participants may have been predisposed to benefit from and report positively on the Focusing method used.
First Part of the Study

Kan established reliability for the DIEQ Part 1 through the examination of its internal consistency by Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for each of the seven categories and for Part One as a whole. For the purpose of this study, a Cronbach’s alpha of .80 or higher was considered reliable, .65 to .79 marginally reliable, and .64 or lower unreliable.

Results revealed that the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the seven categories were, respectively, .91, .80, .92, .90, .86, .91, and .93. The coefficient for Part 1 as a whole was .96. Each of these results met or exceeded the criterion of .80, and follow-up analysis revealed that elimination of any item or items did not increase the coefficient. Consequently, Kan retained all 52 items in the final instrument.

Kan did not assess reliability of the DIEQ cover page, Part 2, and Part 3. The purpose of these parts was to gather qualitative, in-depth information.

Second Part of the Study

Quantitative

To minimize the Type I error rate in analysis of quantitative data from the DIEQ Part 1, Kan established a significance level of .01 as the criterion for either retaining or rejecting the hypotheses. She performed a t test for dependent samples on Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 and a t test for independent samples on Hypothesis 3. The Type I error rate for this study was .04.

Hypothesis 1. The experimental group’s mean posttest score on the DIEQ Part 1 will be significantly higher than their mean pretest score. The experimental group’s pretest and posttest mean scores were 96.90 and 306.60, $SD = 66.86$ and 14.01, respectively; $t = 9.93$, $df = 9$, $p < .001$. Kan retained this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. The control group’s mean first posttest score on the DIEQ Part 1 will not be significantly different from their mean pretest score. The control group’s pretest and first posttest mean
scores were 99.70 and 99.80, $SD = 42.79$ and 42.64, respectively; $t = .095, df = 9$. Kan retained this hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 3.** The mean difference between the experimental group’s posttest and pretest scores on the DIEQ Part 1 will be significantly greater than the mean difference between the control group’s first posttest and pretest scores. The mean difference between the experimental group’s posttest and pretest scores and the mean difference between the control group’s first posttest and pretest scores were 209.70 and .10, $SD = 66.80$ and 3.31, respectively; $t = 9.91, df = 18, p < .001$. Kan retained this hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 4.** The control group’s second posttest mean score on the DIEQ Part 1 (after the intervention) will be significantly higher than its first posttest mean score (after the 45-minute waiting period). The first and second posttest mean scores for the control group were 99.80 and 282.20, $SD = 42.64$ and 39.62, respectively; $t = 9.18, df = 9, p < .001$. Kan retained this hypothesis.

**Further analyses.** From the most statistically conservative point of view, the ordinal data obtained through the use of Likert-type scales in this study could be considered most appropriately analyzed with nonparametric tests. Therefore, Kan reanalyzed the data using the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-rank test on Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4 and the Mann-Whitney $U$ test on Hypothesis 3. For Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4, results showed differences in the expected directions at the .01 level of significance. For Hypothesis 2, results showed no significant difference. Consequently, Kan retained all hypotheses. Thus, parametric and nonparametric analysis yielded equivalent results.

To examine further the effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation, Kan performed a category-by-category analysis of the seven major effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. The posttest mean of the experimental group and the second posttest mean of the control group were combined to compare with the combined pretest means of both the experimental and control groups (see Table 1).

The results revealed that the DIEQ Part 1 combined mean score on after-intervention posttest was significantly higher than the DIEQ Part 1 combined mean score on pretest for all seven categories, indicating significant beneficial effects from Experiential
Focusing–oriented dream interpretation on all seven dimensions. For six of the categories, the pretest and posttest means were different enough to yield \( p < .001 \). Only the sixth category, enhanced valuation of dreams, yielded a \( p < .01 \).

Qualitative

Kan tallied control group and experimental group participants’ gender, age, marital status, educational level, ethnicity, previous experience with dream interpretation, and length of the dream. Because of small numbers in each category, statistical analysis was not viable. However, Kan made several observations. First, with regard to demographics, participants represented a broad spectrum of socioeconomic categories (lower class to upper class), as well as a range in age, educational level, and marital status. Moreover, both genders and three ethnic groups (Asian American, European American, and biracial [Asian American and European American]) were represented. Results did not appear to differ based on these characteristics. In addition, neither the amount of previous experience with dream interpretation nor length of the dream appeared to contribute to differences. Finally, participants’ experience in Focusing ranged from 9 participants who had

### TABLE 1: Seven Major Effects of Focusing-Oriented Dream Interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Pretest Mean</th>
<th>Pretest SD</th>
<th>Posttest Mean</th>
<th>Posttest SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easing or release of tension</td>
<td>7.35</td>
<td>33.10</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>6.34</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh air or increase in energy</td>
<td>10.15</td>
<td>44.70</td>
<td>10.79</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased self-understanding</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>39.75</td>
<td>9.35</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement, reconciliation, or healing</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>45.00</td>
<td>10.85</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>13.78</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of a new step/direction</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>38.10</td>
<td>8.55</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced valuation of dreams</td>
<td>50.15</td>
<td>53.45</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced understanding of dream's meaning</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>40.30</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
experienced only one weekend of training in Focusing to 3 participants who had practiced Focusing for 2 or more years. The effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation appeared to be equivalent for these participants. In summary, Kan could discern no pattern of relationship between the cover sheet data and the quantitative results.

Using participants’ responses to the DIEQ Parts 2 and 3 and to the structured interview, as well as from observations and comments from field notes, Kan found that the data corroborated the quantitative results. In addition, she discerned the following patterns that had not emerged from the quantitative data:

1. Each dream in this study appeared to reflect either a current concern of the participant or an unresolved issue from the participant’s past.
2. Focusing-oriented dream interpretation helped each of the participants in this study reconfirm the meaning of their dream and deepen their insight.
3. All participants in this study reported having experienced insight and/or movement with regard to an individual need as a result of the Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. Some participants reported experiences of healing or movement beyond where they felt stuck in addressing a psychological issue, whereas others reported gaining awareness of a need to work on a certain psychological issue. All reported receiving something from the process that they needed, whether it was healing, movement, or a new insight into an unresolved issue.
4. In every case in which the participant used a dream involving distressing emotions, after Focusing-oriented dream interpretation the participant reported an abatement of distress and an experience of positive insight from the dream.
5. The largest difference in pretest-posttest data appeared to occur with dreams or nightmares that the participants initially described as frightening or strange. Of the 20 participants, the 5 who described on the pretest that their dreams were scary or strange reported having the most profound experiences of transformation after the intervention. This dramatic shift occurred despite participants at pretest reporting little or no association to, or mainly distressing associations to, the meaning of the dream. All 5 participants reported on posttest that their experiences of the meaning of the dream turned into something very positive and even, in their views, spiritual.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the first part of this study, the DIEQ Part 1 can be preliminarily regarded as a reliable instrument that
assesses seven effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. Because of the relatively high Cronbach’s alpha coefficients and also on the basis of the consulting statistician’s suggestion that more items tend to generate higher statistical power, Kan retained all 52 items of the DIEQ Part 1. However, several research participants commented on the redundancy of several items and reported fatigue associated with responding to a long questionnaire. This suggests a need for revision of the instrument, eliminating items that can be deleted without greatly reducing the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for each category and for the instrument as a whole. This study also suggests that the DIEQ cover page, Part 2, and Part 3 can be used to gather more in-depth information with regard to the effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation.

According to the findings of the second part of this study, participants greatly benefited from Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. All four quantitative hypotheses were retained. The after-intervention posttest for all research participants revealed a significant increase in each of the seven effects of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation. These quantitative results were corroborated by qualitative results.

Fourteen of the 20 participants were available for a follow-up telephone interview approximately 1 week after the research. Each of these participants reported one or more of the following applications of the insight gained from participation in the study: (a) The participant was able to make further connections, based on the insight gained from the dream work, to understand the underlying factors influencing his or her emotions, thoughts, or behaviors; (b) the participant gained an immediate awareness during acting out of an undesired pattern of behavior and was able to respond differently based on the insight gained from the dream work; (c) the participant continued to experience at a bodily felt level a different way to be or to handle a concern; (d) the participant began working, or continued to work, on the issue reflected by the dream work; (e) the participant took actual behavioral steps to carry out the insight gained from the dream work; (f) the participant realized the value of adopting and applying the Focusing attitude to life in general; (g) the participant gained deeper appreciation of dreams and no longer believed in a merely intellectual approach to dream interpretation; and (h) the participants who worked with distressing dreams in this study no longer viewed such dreams as something to be avoided.
Kan observed a wide range of characteristics of participants in the second part of the study. These observations suggest possibly greater generalizability than some of the previously stated limitations would indicate. Although based on preliminary observation rather than statistical analysis, these indications suggest that Focusing-oriented dream interpretation is equally effective and useful for individuals representing a wide range of characteristics.

Gendlin (1981) asserted that anyone can learn and benefit from Focusing. Although this may be true, the current study involved only those participants who had some experience with Focusing. The results of this study strongly suggest that people with some Focusing experience, who can remember a dream, and who are guided by someone well trained in the Experiential Focusing method are highly likely to benefit from Focusing-oriented dream interpretation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presents several opportunities for further investigation. These include the following:

1. Confirm the reliability findings of the DIEQ Part 1.
2. Examine the applicability of the DIEQ to other approaches to dream interpretation.
3. Use the DIEQ to compare the relative effectiveness of Focusing–oriented dream interpretation with other approaches to dream interpretation.
4. Use the DIEQ to explore the effects of long-term interventions, consisting of 8 to 10 sessions of Focusing-oriented dream interpretation, with both general populations and populations with specific presenting problems, such as depression, eating disorders, or survival of any form of trauma.
5. Use the DIEQ to explore the effects of short-term or long-term Focusing–oriented dream interpretation on specific types of dreams, such as pleasant dreams, nightmares, recurrent dreams, or mystical dreams.
6. Use the DIEQ to examine the effects of Focusing–oriented dream interpretation with people who are not experienced in Focusing, perhaps compared to effects with those who are experienced.
7. Use the DIEQ to examine the effects of Focusing–oriented dream interpretation with people who, on learning about Focusing, are not attracted to it, perhaps compared to effects with those who are.
CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the effects of Experiential Focusing–oriented dream interpretation can be examined through the use of the DIEQ. In this study, individuals trained in the use of Focusing and guided by a well-trained and experienced Focusing guide were very open to examining psychological material reflected by their own dreams. This study strongly suggests that dreams reflect a person’s current psychospiritual issues and that Focusing helps the person experience new insight or movement concerning these issues. This finding offers support to Gendlin’s (1996) proposition that Focusing helps individuals make use of the “clues to and energy for the steps to a solution” that are implied in dreams (p. 200).

REFERENCES


Reprint requests: Janice Miner Holden, Ed.D., Counseling Program, University of North Texas, P.O. Box 311337, Denton, TX 76203-1337; e-mail: holden@unt.edu.