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The Value of Subjectivity in the Study of Dreams: An Alternative Methodology in a Quantitative Field

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ABSTRACT

This article presents original research on the dreams of adults during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Mexico. Subjects went through a series of in-depth clinical interviews where they were asked to share their most recent dream and then explored the dream imagery in conversation with the interviewer to find meaning through an analytic, dialogical process. After gathering the data through the interviews, the authors proceeded to use the narrative method and grounded theory to process the findings. The fundamental objective of the article is to explore the advantages that a qualitative exploration of dreams offers over other methodologies of dream analysis. The article proposes that a qualitative approach has the benefit of validating the dreamer's experience without generalizing it. This shifts the focus of dream research from the description of categories to the co-creation of meanings with the participants. Additionally, it constitutes an initial attempt to explore and understand the affective and/or cognitive conflicts that underly dream imagery rather than simply mentioning repeating elements within the dream content.

KEYWORDS: dreams, COVID-19, research on dreams, analytical psychology, subjectivity, qualitative research.

Psychological phenomena are often elusive in nature. Since their exploration often involves the intersection of at least two subjectivities—the observer and the observed—they pose a particular challenge for the researcher. This is true for the study of issues like motivation, affect, and identity. It is especially true, however, for the inquiry into dreams for, with dreams, there is an additional obstacle: when observing, exploring, and describing dreams, the researcher faces contents and processes which are foreign to habitual consciousness and, in many ways, remain inaccessible to it. They are, in psychoanalytic parlance, a product of the unconscious. In waking from a dream, the dreamer is often left with a collection of loose and disorganized images. Waking consciousness, when confronted with such a collection of images, will commonly attempt to translate it into linear narratives and meanings to make it easier to process. This implies that in the telling of a dream, the dreamer will adjust the oneiric content and structure to make it understandable to others and to him or herself. To this must be added the subjectivity of the listener, which is entirely out of the conscious control of the dreamer who narrates the dream. Sharing a

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dream, and listening to a dream, involves a very complex process. This makes the study of dreams a slippery and intricate discipline. The question then arises: how does our method for the study of dreams influence our understanding of dreams? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies? How does one make justice to the dream and the dreamer's experience, particularly considering the involvement of the researcher's subjectivity in the process of inquiry?

Dreams are a very useful tool to explore and understand affective dynamics and internal processes. In dreams, the psychological reality is expressed without the intervention of waking consciousness; repression and rationality are weakened, allowing for the psyche to manifest itself without the burden of conscious interpretation. This results in the articulation of emotional states and conflicts, which are often unknown even to the dreamer. As Civitarese (2021) states: "Dreams are the most precise sensors we have to help us intuit what is happening. They are like powerful microscopes designed to process our most subtle emotions into images" (p.134). In the complex and unprecedented context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is fundamental to find these "most precise sensors" and how this will facilitate the exploration of people's experiences with as little interpretation and bias as possible.

The question then becomes: how can dreams be used as a research tool in the exploration of the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic? How can dreams provide access to people's inner experiences during the lockdown? The objective of this article is to discuss some aspects of contemporary dream research methodologies and to propose a different methodological approach based on the combination of constructivist epistemological paradigms and depth psychological frameworks.

Context of Dream Research

Contemporary dream research offers mainly two possibilities: Hall and van de Castle's coding system, and Hartman's central image perspective. Hall and van de Castle's coding system is "the most standard human-scored scales for dream content" (Barret, 2020, pp. 217). It is a form of content analysis, which transforms narratives into numbers by determining the frequency of appearance of specific predetermined categories (Domhoff & Schneider, 2015). This scale includes ten general categories (e.g., characters, activities, emotions, settings, etc.) and uses a binary measuring level (Domhoff & Schneider, 2015; Rimsh & Pietrowsky, 2021). Data obtained through this scale usually tells the researcher which types of images are predominant in a specific population. The focus is on the literal aspects of the imagery. For example, a study by MacKay and DeCicco (2020) found that dreams during the COVID-19 pandemic showed a higher frequency of images of animals and changes in geographical location when compared with a control group. These studies certainly contribute important descriptions of the most common dreams in specific populations. However, their results provide scant information if the researcher wishes to delve deeper into the emotional patterns or conflicts experienced by said populations. The above-mentioned study does not clarify, for instance, if the appearance of animals (or of a specific animal) has the same meaning for different dreamers.

Another popular method is Hartman's central image (Bulkeley & Hartman, 2011). This method proposed identifying the central image in each dream or dream scene: that is, a striking, arresting, or compelling image (Bilsborrow et al., 2009; Davidson et al., 2005). The central image (or CI), after undergoing processes of condensation, displacement, and transformation of thoughts into visual images, represented the emotion at the center of the dream and the emotional state of the dreamer (Barcaro, 2022). This methodology requires trained judges to identify the CI and assess

its intensity using a seven-point scale. Additionally, the judges found the emotions contextualized in the image, using as a reference a list of positive and negative emotions (Bilsborrow et al., 2009). Davidson et al. (2005) used, as additional data, a scale scored by the dreamer to determine the existence and intensity of the CI. Using this method, Davidson and colleagues (2005) asserted that there is a significant correlation between dreamer-experienced emotion and CI intensity, " when emotion intensity was rated by the participant" (p. 43). This supported their hypothesis regarding the relationship between emotional responses in waking life and in dreams. This idea is that, if dreamers had to confront the same circumstances in waking life as in their dreams, they would have a similar emotional response. On the other hand, Davidson et al. (2005) found "substantially lower correlation for participant-rated emotions than judge-rated emotions with CI intensity" (p. 43). This raises the question of whether or not a scale of dream emotions can be responded to reliably by either the dreamer, when awake, or by the judges (the experts) by using a written dream report.

Finding a correlation between dream images and the emotions experienced in relation to them is a useful point of departure, but it can also have problematic consequences when we attempt to examine more closely both the images and the emotions. One problem is the assumption that the dreamer responds in the same way to similar images. To begin with, there are dream images that have no equivalent in waking life. If a person, for example, dreams that he or she is flying next to a winged horse, there is no referent in waking life with which we can compare this image. One of the fundamental features of dreaming is precisely that it often presents images that are impossible to face in daily life. Eliminating this distinction greatly limits the explicative and interpretive possibilities of dream research.

Additionally, when we find a central image and emotion for the dream, we run the risk of imposing upon the dream imagery a logic that does not correspond to it. In any case, such methodology tells us more about the emotions of the dreamer while awake than about the dream itself and its possible role or function in the dreamer's affective life. If this is the case, the dreamer (or worse yet, the researcher) would be adjusting the dream images and the dreamer's experience of such images to their interpretative logic. That is why Berry (1982) spoke about the importance of having interpretative self-awareness when working with dreams.

Another important point is that the entire interpretative process, in Hartman's methodology, occurs without the dreamer's presence. It has certainly proven to be reliable, having consistency and an adequate level of agreement among judges. However, as mentioned above, there is no such consistency between judge-rated and participant-rated emotions (Davidson et al., 2005).

When using such a method, everything that the judges interpret regarding the dream images and emotions is based on the assumption that the response in dreams is equivalent to the response in waking life, not to mention an equivalency between the responses of different dreamers. In other words, Hartman's methodology introduces an expectation about how a dreamer ought to respond to certain images. Interpretations based on such equivalences are not prudent. Furthermore, without the presence of the dreamer during the interpretation process, the researcher loses signifiers and associations that only the dreamer could contribute. Images that might seem to lack intensity or emotional charge in the text of a dream could prove to have a very high affective charge when the analysis is performed jointly with the dreamer. To study a dream without the presence of the dreamer nullifies the specificity of the oneiric imagery of each subject, substituting it with a generalization of dream language that loses sight of the subjective experience and the psychological importance of the dream. In summarizing, these two methods, although very different, have two elements in common:

1. The idea that there is a continuity between the dreamer's oneiric and waking life.
2. The idea that objectivity in the construction of information (or, from the judge's perspective, data retrieval) can be guaranteed by the use of dream texts as recorded in dream journals, written without any prior knowledge on the part of the dreamer that they would be used for research.

In connection to this second point, it might merit remembering one of the most revolutionary ideas contributed by psychoanalysis, mainly, that there is no such thing as an individual. Freud (1955/1992), one of the founders of depth psychology, posited the important notion of a body, which is also "an-other". This body makes evident that individuals are not indivisible. Instead of an individual, it poses a split subject in which, as Peusner (2011) suggested, the unconscious presents itself, at the very least, between two subjects. Thus, our speech will always address the symbolic (unconscious) other. This other is necessary for the unconscious to emerge. Thus, only in the presence of this other can the unconscious emerge so that the dream can be worked with less interpretation and bias. This implies that working with dreams becomes unavoidably relational, requiring a transferential relationship between dreamer and researcher.

The idea of accessing the dream directly is, from the outset, impossible. From the moment of waking, the subject reconstructs the images produced during the night, giving them meaning, linearity and coherence. Everything that cannot be remembered, thought, or spoken is filtered out. The first filter is unconscious, and it will determine what can be remembered from the dream. The second filter could be described as conscious. It is what Freud (1953/1991) called secondary elaboration, which occurs when the dreamer puts the dream into words, organizing it into a unified, coherent, and understandable totality. Something is always lost in the transition from the dream itself, to the remembrance of the dream, to the narration of the dream. This returns us to the elusiveness of dreams as an object of study.

Theoretical and Methodological Proposition

The objective of this study is to understand the effects of confinement during the COVID-19 lockdown among adults and emerging adults in Mexico. Hartman and Basile (2003) have already shown some of the effects of traumatic events on dreams, such as increased intensity in the imagery, as well as the presentation, through the image, of the main emotion experienced by the dreamer. Previous studies were published about dreams in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the results reported a considerable increase in remembered dreams and in dreams with negative content (Barrett, 2020; Giovanardi et al., 2022; Iorio et al., 2020; MacKay & DeCicco, 2020; Margherita et al., 2021; Mota et al., 2020; Schredl & Bulkeley, 2020;), as well as an increase in content related to the pandemic and social distancing measures in most participants (Barret, 2020; MacKay & DeCicco, 2020; Schredl & Bulkeley, 2020). Research has also found an increase in images of moving from place to place, animals, heads, and food, which demonstrates a link with previous studies about images in dreams of individuals who experience anxiety (MacKay & DeCicco, 2020). Anxiety and other negative emotions were present in the majority of the dreams that were studied (Barrett, 2020; Giovanardi et al., 2022; Mota et al., 2020).

Most of these studies used quantitative methodologies, such as scales and content analysis, sometimes combined with other methods (Barret, 2020; Giovanardi et al., 2022; Iorio et al., 2020; MacKay & DeCicco, 2020; Margherita, et al., 2021; Mota et al., 2020). Iorio et al. (2020) combined Hall and Van de Castle's system with a qualitative analysis based on grounded theory. The results of their qualitative analysis showed that the dreams were set mostly in open spaces and that, in

addition to everyday characters, there were many appearances of people from the past with whom the dreamer had had no current contact.

Dreams

In this study, dreams are understood from an archetypal perspective; which means that the dream is considered, fundamentally, an image, specifically an autonomous image, which is complete in itself (Berry, 1982; Bosnak, 1988; Giegerich, 2021; Hillman, 1979; Watkins, 1977). The epistemological ground shared by these authors is well expressed in a principle from the Hebraic tradition, where it is posited that the dream is its interpretation. The dream needs nothing from without, implying that it needs neither the dreamer's waking life nor the researcher's elucidations of its meaning. Berry (1982) described the dream as something that is "sensate though not perceptual" (p. 57) and characterized it as an interweaving of images that interact with each other. The dream, according to her view, is emotionally charged, and this charge brings embodiment and voluptuosity. In this sense, an apparently similar affective response can have different nuances within the dream when compared to waking life. Essential to the study of dreams are experience and particularity.

This approach to the dream is therefore not explicative, but rather phenomenological. The challenge faced by researchers who use this model is to remain as close and faithful to the images as possible, without necessarily translating them into the affective experience of waking life, at least not immediately. The greatest potential in working with dreams rests in the establishment of an intimate relationship with the particularities and complexities of the imagery, as well as with the emotions that emerge within the dream. More than finding meaning, this model seeks to establish a bridge between the dream and the dreamer. The content of the dream itself will remain foreign and largely unexplainable for the dreamer; the value is found, rather, in the way in which the dreamer is affected when relating to the images in the dream. Whatever emerges from this interaction, when the dreamer is exploring the dream imagery meticulously and with close attention, is the core of dreamwork in archetypal psychology's terms.

To situate our study within the constructivist paradigm implies an understanding of realities as socially constructed and therefore lacks any *a priori* existence. Reality cannot be separated from the subject or the social agent. In terms of the study, this means that the researcher and the subject are intertwined. The research is constructed in a dialogical relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon. Thus, results are not something to be found but rather something to be constructed using hermeneutic tools (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Translated to depth and archetypal psychology, this means that the process of inquiry is not literal but evocative and relational. When researching dreams, the researcher and the dreamer establish a dialogue where they experience the effects of the dream as they investigate it.

The present study uses grounded theory to perform its analysis. This implies a specific way of working with data, where theorizing is based on the data itself rather than on pre-established hypotheses. Grounded theory analysis does not aim at validating or refuting a previously defined theoretical model (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). By using this frame, researchers seek to validate the particularities of the observed phenomena, allowing for an in-depth understanding. This is particularly important in exploratory studies.

The purpose of the analysis in this study is to observe psychological themes and conflicts that appear in dreams. Additionally, the intention is to seek types of images that might recur, seem to carry importance, or particularly affect the dreamer. To validate the interpretation, the

interpretations of three different experts were compared, a method known as research triangulation (Stake, 2007).

The units of analysis in this study are the dreams as presented by the dreamer. The units of observation, however, are the interview transcripts, where one finds already an initial work and analysis of the dream taking place between interviewer and interviewee. Consequently, the interviewer and interviewee built a relationship based on transference, and this specific relationship allows the emergence of unconscious material. This method for analyzing and constructing information allows for a deep understanding of the participants' experience rather than describing the contents of the images.

Procedure

The data used in this study was obtained and constructed in one-hour clinical interviews held online due to confinement and social distancing. The ethics committee of Universidad de las Américas Puebla approved the research. Participation was voluntary and all participants signed an informed consent form before the interview. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. To maintain participants privacy, all names and personal aspects on the interviews were changed. The intention was to work on one dream per interview; however, there were interviews where more than one dream was addressed.

The interviews followed a clinical model, and the work was based on the method proposed by Berry (1982). Berry (1982) described certain aspects of images that are to be explored: their sensuousness (their relationship with the body), their textuality, their emotional charge, the interrelation between different elements of the dream, and the dream's structure. Berry's (1982) approach is fundamentally a metaphorical one, it one. It aims at generating a sensibility towards the images presented by the dream to produce or detect affective responses in whoever is working on the dream. Berry (1982) also listed specific tools in the work with dreams: analysis of narrative structures, image amplification, search for similarities and repetitions, elaboration of imagery, differentiation between images, and even recognition of shifts in inflection, tone, or accentuation in the dreamer's voice when narrating the dream. This is not only an attempt at considering the content of the dreams in terms of images but also a method in which the image is thought to be the method *par excellence* for the work with dreams.

Two Examples of Dream Interpretation

To illustrate our method, we will present two dreams, dreamt by different subjects, together with a fragment of the analytic process of a particular conflict. Specifically, in college students between the ages of 17 and 25, a particular theme was found in many cases regarding losing "power" or "control" over their own lives.

Dream 1. Alfredo: In this dream of witchcraft and future I was at a party with friends, only friends from college and it all happened in a house, it was nighttime, and everything was calm. Suddenly a girl comes in, I really like her… she arrives and we begin to talk. Everything was very calm – normal, more like. After this, hmm… well… what always happens in those types of situations happened, you must imagine… well… then we start to have an encounter… Hmmm… all this is happening still at the party. Then I say I don´t want anything serious, and that this was just a one-time thing. Ok? She gives me some figures made of paper and she tells me… she just tells me something like: "Ok. I understand. But just take this, this present". And I say: "Ok, no problem." It turns out that this present… well I realize that this is actually witchcraft, that these…

figures made of paper are like symbols that… that bring bad energies to your life. And that… hmm… they bring bad luck, that they make you see like… well… ghosts… typical, let's put it like that. Then, the dream ends with… with… with me burning these paper figures. After this, the dream ends.

The thing is that actually the dream was: from the party, she gives me the present and then it kind of cuts and I am in my house and everything starts happening. Objects moved by themselves, doors opened and closed by themselves, I started to hear noises. my mood kind of changed a bit, hmmm… and things like that.

> Interviewer: *Things move by themselves ((silence)), you mean that neither you nor anyone else is acting upon these things, they move by themselves, the things move by themselves, when things move by themselves ((brief silence)), I feel anger, I get angry. It feels that there is something here that has to do with control.*
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> Alfredo: *It could mean something like maybe, for instance, in real life, the fact that things started moving by themselves, it could be my own interpretation, that I do not have control over my life. Something like that, for example?*
>
> Interviewer: *That could be an interpretation, yes ((both laugh)). What's your impression? How do you feel about that?*
>
> Alfredo: *With this whole confinement thing, my parents are very strict and I don't have much freedom here in my house ((coughs)) so it could be, I don´t know, I don´t know, hmmm, but maybe it could be that, that things move by themselves because I have no control over them, but my parents do, for example.*

Dream 2: Ana: I dreamt that an aunt, my grandmother's sister, well, my grandmother's sister got married; I mean, I was there, me, my siblings and everyone. It was like a farm and all of us were on the farm, my cousins and my siblings and myself, no? But my siblings and I like, it was as if someone from the house kidnapped us I was with my siblings and other children that were there, no? And then this guy told us something like no, they are going to take you away, you won't be here any longer, and then a woman arrived and that woman kind of looked at the farm but she wanted to take us. And then, the guy who had kidnapped us told her no, you have to go get a car down there, you have to drive it out in reverse and that's when everyone is going to begin to get in the car. And she came with the car, we got into the car and I remember that the man and the woman [in the car], were my grandparents. I mean my grandparents bought us ((laughter)). [They] told us no, no one could see you.I told my grandparents, I mean, what are my parents going to think about this? Can you imagine the depression they'll fall into without their three children? And then my grandmother told me don't worry, we will be here in the front, you are going to see them from afar.

> Interviewer: *Ok. What is it, to kidnap?*
> Ana: *Well… to take someone, no? I mean a person… to take another person without her consent. And well without rights, no? I mean, even if you don´t*

want to, that person will take you, I mean it is like you don't have many
options.
Interviewer: *Yes. And what happens when your rights are taken away?*
Ana: *Well. It is as if you belonged to the other person.*
Interviewer: *You belong to the other person… somewhat like an object.*
Ana: *Yes, I mean, because everything you do, or do not do, will depend on*
the other person, I feel.

The process that was presented in the excerpts above reflect the elaboration of the dream. With Ana, deepening the definition of "kidnapping" is aimed at maintaining the connection with the dream image while increasing the details and specificities. In Alfredo's case, by repeating or emphasizing a specific fragment of the dream narrative, the dreamer could make his association. In this way, the interpretation does not come from a researcher who separates the dream from its context or the dreamer's context. The opposite happens: by remaining with the image as presented and exploring it in depth, it becomes possible for the dreamer to find his or her meanings and to be affected by the dream.

This method of dream work (and dream analysis) neutralizes the possibility of the investigator imposing his or her interpretations. Given that the exploration occurs through dialogue, the dreamer has the possibility of exploring how the dream is affecting him or her. Moreover, this will help the investigator to adjust his or her attitude toward the dream and, thus, help the researcher remain closer both to the dream imagery and to the dreamer's experience. The interviewer's interventions then help the dreamer to open, unfold, and amplify the dream images and their subjective experience.

Even in the transcript, it is possible to detect the speech's cadence, its rhythm, the moments in which the dreamers interrupt the telling of the dream (e.g., to give an explanation or to address the interviewer), or the use of interjections and euphemisms. All these elements are part of the dream: they turn the telling itself into an image, and they reveal emotional contents that are crucial for the dream's function. When Alfredo, for instance, begins his telling of the dream by anticipating that this dream is about "witchcraft and future", he is giving a very particular meaning to everything that follows. In a dream that begins in a space that is very "calm" and "normal", to use the dreamer's words, the interviewer is already anticipating witchcraft. This allows for more complexity in the study of the dream. Furthermore, it is a dream about the anticipation of such witchcraft (such lack of control) in a very "calm and normal" space.

Although the two dreams mentioned above exhibit similar themes, their imagery is very different. A content-focused analysis might fail to notice the repetition of themes or conflicts when these manifest in different "symbols". In this case, the analysis performed after the interviews aims to find these themes and meanings that emerge during the different interviews. In this way, the research results point toward what is happening to the participant or towards what is presented about what is happening instead of toward the symbol, which has unending possibilities when it comes to meaning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study coincide with those of previous research on dreams and Covid-19 in that participants reported a considerable increase in remembered dreams and dreams with negative content (Barrett, 2020; Giovanardi, et al, 2022; Iorio et al., 2020; MacKay & DeCicco, 2020; Margherita, et al, 2021; Mota, et al, 2020; Schredl & Bulkeley, 2020). We also

found anxiety and other negative emotions in the majority of dreams, which supports prior research (Barrett, 2020; Giovanardi et al., 2022; Mota et al., 2020). Additionally, participants reported an increase in the appearances of people from the past with whom the dreamer had had no current contact, which also coincides with previous research results (Iorio et al., 2020). On the other hand, even if there were several dream reports linked literally to the pandemic, they do not represent a significant proportion of our sample, as is the case in other studies (Barret, 2020; MacKay & DeCicco, 2020; Schredl & Bulkeley, 2020)[2].

As discussed earlier, the present article is a reflection on how to approach dreams as a unit of analysis in scientific research. Dreams are a very elusive research object and the majority of current dream research uses quantitative methods such as scales and content analysis. These studies generate interesting data but also present certain limitations. This study discusses and proposes a new approach to three of those limitations:

a) A focus on literal aspects of dream images, rather than the symbolic or metaphorical levels of analysis;
b) An interpretation process that occurs without the presence of the dreamer (i.e. a split between dream and dreamer);
c) The use of written dreams in the search for objectivity.

As mentioned before, when researchers interpret dream images literally, searching for repetition of words or themes, as is the case with Hall and van de Castle's system (Domhoff & Schneider, 2015), results will reveal what percentage of dreams present certain images: horses, cars, bodily parts, etc. However, such a method does not discuss what this imagery, in its specificity, means for particular dreamers. The two cases presented in this paper showed hardly any similarity in terms of the literal images; however, they had at least one emotional theme in common: the perception of losing control. The analytical approach proposed by the present study allows a deeper comprehension of the dreamers' inner state because the meaning of dream elements, words, or images is discussed and elaborated in the interview within a transference-based relationship.

One of our premises is that, when analyzing a dream without the dreamer's presence, most of the constructed meanings are imposed by the researcher. Likewise, Davidson et al. (2005) found no significant correlation between CI intensity, emotions as rated by the researcher, and emotions as rated by the dreamer. To minimize bias in the researchers' interpretation, we chose in-depth clinical interviews as a method for information construction. We found that, frequently, an image that appears to have no intensity can unfold and gain emotional charge when the interviewer asks the dreamer questions as simple as: "why does this call your attention?" or "why did you choose to tell this dream and not another?" Through these questions, important information usually emerges, allowing for a deeper understanding of the image.

Moreover, this study proposes that the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is a valuable research tool that allows for the construction of new meanings and the emergence of unconscious material (Peusner, 2011). The unavoidable aspects of bias have the potential to become useful. When we deliberately and consciously incorporate the researcher's subjectivity into the process, we strengthen the exploration of the dream. To assume that there is objectivity simply because the dreamer does not literally narrate his or her dream to another person (Davidson et al.,

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[2] As the aim of this paper is to discuss methodological aspects of dream research, we have not delved deeper into the results.

2005) increases the risk of the researcher imposing their subjectivity implicitly or even involuntarily. The sought-after "purity" of the dream image is also unattainable, for the reconstruction and even the remembrance of the dream are, in themselves, interpretive and translating processes performed by the dreamer. The dream, as an expression of the unconscious, is inaccessible in a direct or "pure" form (Freud, 1953/1991).

A difficulty faced during the analytic process was avoiding the influence exerted by the researchers' own experience of the pandemic. As Civitarese (2021) mentioned, in this unique and new situation, the context of the dreamer is very similar to the researcher as both are facing the same reality. This can make it more difficult for the dreamer or the dream analysis not to be influenced by the researchers' experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. As Civitarese (2021) said:

> *The drama touches everyone, but it brings out each person's fingerprints differently. In each session, it is important to see what is expressed unconsciously, no matter what the subject is. (…) Two elements, however, are essential: there is still some kind of setting (time, space, or cyberspace), and there is an internal "setting" of the analyst, in other words, his or her ability to rigorously deploy the usual theoretical and technical tools of psychoanalysis.* (pp. 133-134).

In facing this difficulty, we used the solution posed by Civitarese (2021), that is, to remain faithful to the method. Another solution was to keep a journal during the process of analysis, where the researchers' impressions, feelings, and thoughts were recorded. The idea is to maintain a disciplined and conscious subjectivity to be as objective as possible.

In summary, the major implications of this study regarding methodological aspects of dream research are:

- The efficacy of the use of clinical interviews as a tool for data construction instead of written dream reports.
- The importance of including the dreamer and the transferential relationship in the interpretation process.
- The focus on symbolic and unconscious aspects of the dream image instead of on the literal content or emotional reports.

Finally, it must be said that the main limitation of this study is the lack of a point of reference to make comparisons with dreams that occurred before or after the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

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