

## REVIEW ARTICLE

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# Dreams About Food and Eating: A Literature Review

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This article examines the published work related to dreams of food and eating. The history and theory of food dreams, how food dreams are affected by culture, and the incidence of food dreams in special populations such as concentration camp survivors, anorexics, and the blind are reviewed. Food dreams at times may have a straightforward relationship to the dreamer's waking life and in other instances may provide material that helps elucidate unconscious concerns related to sexual and dependency issues. **(Sleep and Hypnosis 2005;7(1):1-21)**

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### INTRODUCTION

**W**hy does one dream about food and eating? Is it because one is hungry and the dream attempts to fulfill this desire or wish? Or is it because one has unresolved issues relating to love or sex that are too threatening to the psyche to dream about directly?

Dreams about food and eating are referenced in the earliest historical writings on dreams (1) and in the accounts of dreams by classic psychological theorists such as Freud and Jung (2-4). Food dreams take on different meanings in different cultures (5-9) and may be differentially experienced by different populations such as concentration camp survivors (10), the blind (11), and the anorexic

(12). Food dreams have also been used as a basis to study patients in analysis (4,13). This essay is a literature review of the disparate theories on and approaches to dreams of food and eating.

Before looking at food dreams historically, it might be useful to provide some examples of food dreams.

The author dreamed the following while visiting Montreal in July of 2002:

*I dreamed about chicken curry. I had prepared a basic curry but was concerned about the ingredients. I needed to expand the dish and make more. I surveyed people about what they thought the key spice in chicken curry should be. In part of the dream, I was eating the first making with several others (cannot identify). I was worried that there was not enough to go around. One woman had eaten five pieces! Actually the curry had at least one soft-shell crab in it.*

In my notes reacting to the dream I recorded that the evening before I had wanted

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to eat at an Indian restaurant, but did not. Instead, I dined on a large portion of barbecued chicken breast that I could not finish. Also, before going to sleep, I had watched a CNN program, "Fat Chance," about losing weight and keeping it off. Without fully analyzing the dream, one can see potential influences from the day's activities and perhaps some deeper emotional issues such as insecurities (unsure of recipe) or inadequacies (not enough to go around).

The following is reported from a bushman of South-West Africa (7). It was offered as an example of food dreams representing "the hopes of a hungry dreamer" (p. 31).

*In his dream, J.A. went with two friends to meet people in a nearby hut who had shot an antelope and were treating their guests to meat. J.A. and his friends then went on to another village where they were given a sweet drink made of wild honey; they then returned to their own huts. (p. 31)*

The following is offered by Hamburger (13) to illustrate the movement away from the genital, regressing toward the oral, by one of his female patients in analysis.

*Dream 696: In another city—sharing a hotel room with X (a married man). Patient had arranged this—in bed with him—wanted intercourse but feared it—suddenly many people in the room. Then back in Rochester at a cafeteria with a tray of food—seemed to be looking for her mother. There were children present choosing chicken, ice cream, and red Jello. (p. 3)*

Hamburger interprets this for this patient as the "asexual pleasure of eating . . . is safer than the conflicts associated with adult genital satisfaction" (p. 3).

Food dreams have the potential for myriad interpretations. The historical and theoretical attempts to deal with dreams of food and eating will be explored first.

## HISTORY AND THEORY

### Early Writers

Although many think of Sigmund Freud when thinking about the history of dream interpretation, how dreams are explained and understood was dealt with in the Bible, the philosophy of Aristotle, and the *Oneirocriticon* of Artemidorus (14). Artemidorus (1) made specific references to food and eating in dreams. Artemidorus of Daldis was a Greek, professional dream interpreter who lived in and wrote in the 2nd century. His *Oneirocritica* consisted of five books. He reportedly drew on every book written on dreams to that point and cites many of them. He evidently came from a long line of dream interpreters and classification systems of dreams were already in place. He looked at the dreamer's occupation, personal habits, and attitudes to interpret dreams. He did not address the question of the source of dreams, whether from the gods or from within the dreamer. He did consider that dreams could be the continuation of the day's activities (1).

He classified dreams on the future states of affairs, oneiros, and dreams on the present state, enhypnion. The following is an example of an enhypnion dream, giving an early allusion in his writing to eating and drinking in dreams.

*. . . it is natural for a lover to seem to be with his beloved in a dream and for a frightened man to see what he fears, or for a hungry man to eat and a thirsty man to drink and, again, for a man who has stuffed himself with food to vomit or choke. (1, p. 14)*

He also felt that some dreams were theomatic or direct and others were allegorical or symbolic.

His five books have enumerated sections and much of his treatment of food is in Book 1, numbers 65 to 73. He first says the dry must be separated from the liquid or wet to clearly

understand what is occurring. As the focus of this paper is on food, his interpretations concerning liquids are omitted here.

Dry nourishment is addressed in some detail in each of the following categories: vegetables, pulse (peas, beans, etc.), bread, meats, flat cakes, cheese, and fruits. Various vegetables signify various outcomes. Eating vegetables such as radishes that give off a smell after eaten “indicate that secrets will be revealed and signal hatred for one’s associates” (p. 51). One will have success if one dreams of carrots or other nutritious vegetables. Dreaming of most pulse signifies bad luck. Dreaming of beans is a sign of discord “because they cause indecent flatulence” (p. 51). If one dreams of bread, it is good to dream of what one is accustomed to eating and bad luck otherwise. For example, a rich man dreaming of black bread would signify want (because he is eating the bread of the poor). He considers various meats as indicating good or bad luck, considering pork the most auspicious, because a pig only has use when dead. Eating birds and fish are generally good luck.

In the section on eating meat in dreams, he addresses the eating of human flesh. He says “the best and most auspicious dream by far is the one in which a person eats human flesh” (p. 52). He qualifies this in saying it is not good if it is the flesh of a relative because it means that relative will soon die and the dreamer will die soon thereafter. It is particularly bad to dream of eating one’s own child. It is good luck to eat the flesh of other men because it signifies their assistance and it is better that it be of men versus women and of children rather than old people.

Of the various fruits, eating sweet apples is good because they are related to the pleasures of love, whereas sour apples are related to quarrels or discord. Various nuts that are cracked (almonds, walnuts) “predict troubles because of the noise and pain because they are bitter” (p. 54). Dreaming about a bunch of grapes is good “since it generally signifies

benefits received through or from women” (p. 54).

There are occasional references to eating in the rest of Artemidorus’ treatise. In Book 2, number 45 he addresses dreaming about books and offers the following observation.

*Eating books signifies benefits for teachers, sophists, and for all who earn a living from words or books. But for other men, it portends sudden death. (p. 125)*

In Book 3, number 23, he addresses eating one’s own flesh, giving many examples and qualifications. It is good luck for the poor but bad luck for the rich. For the poor it signifies obtaining the profits of their own hard work. Eating one’s own mouth or tongue means losing one’s gift of speech, and for a woman to dream of eating her own flesh signifies she will become a prostitute and thus “be fed from her own body” (p. 164). In Book 3 he also writes about eating or drinking from dishes. He says that “a dish signifies a faithful household slave or handmaid” (p. 165) and that eating or drinking from a dish means that one will fall in love with this servant and if that dish is gold or silver, that the dreamer will marry her. In Book 4, he not surprisingly writes “it is inauspicious to see or to eat the meals that are served at festivals of the dead and at funeral banquets” (p. 216).

Book 5, a compendium of various dream examples, offers two related to eating that are rather morbid.

*A man who had three sons dreamt that two of his sons cut him into pieces and ate him. The youngest son discovered what had happened and was angry with the others and distressed. Overcome with disgust, he said, “I shall not eat of my father.” Subsequently, the youngest son died. For he alone would not eat the flesh but rather the property of his father, since he died before him and did not receive his share of the inheritance. The others who had eaten became successors in the property of the father. (pp. 234-235)*

Finally, also in Book 5, a man dreamed of being carried in a trough full of blood and eating the congealed blood. Then, also in the dream, his mother told him that he had disgraced her. After the dream he became a gladiator, earning his living on the blood of others; his mother had foretold his disgraceful way of life.

These selected examples hopefully give a feeling for the kind of detail, logic, and style that characterize Artemidorus' approach to dream interpretation. His extensive cataloguing of the various foods is interesting and generally not seen in the writings of later dream theorists. Another, but more recent, dream interpreter who also used an intuitive, analytic approach to dreams was Gustavus Hindman Miller. His *10,000 Dreams Interpreted* (15) was first published in 1901, predating the work of Freud and Jung. He thought that the content of dreams was symbolic and gave information about the past, present, and future. His work includes sections on many topics including food and drink. In the food and drink section he covers general aspects such as "eating," "starving," "hunger," and "dinner" and then gives interpretations of what dreaming about specific foods mean. One example is given here to contrast with the style and interpretation of Artemidorus above.

*To dream of seeing a bed of radishes growing, is an omen of good luck. Such a dream foretells that your friends will be unusually kind, and your business will prosper*

*If you eat them, you will suffer slightly through the thoughtlessness of someone near to you.*

*To see radishes, or plant them, denotes that your anticipations will be happily realized. (p. 137)*

### **Freud and His Followers**

Psychoanalytically oriented theorists have occasionally touched on the meaning and symbolism of dreaming about food. Like Artemidorus, Freud (2) in his *The*

*Interpretation of Dreams* views the content of dreams as possible motives or wishes that dreamers hold, or wish fulfillment. He mentions that wish fulfillment is often quite obvious in dreams and questions whether all dreams are wish fulfillment. He describes what he calls the dream of convenience, where the dream satisfies the desires of the dreamer. He gives an example from his own life where he ate salty food before going to sleep, becomes thirsty and wakes up. Before waking he has a dream "that I am drinking. I am drinking long draughts of water; it tastes delicious as only a cool drink can taste when the throat is parched; and then I wake, and find that I have an actual desire to drink" (p. 34). He says that if the dream could convince the mind that the thirst had been quenched, then the dreamer would not need to wake up. Related to this, he notes the following quotation from the Bible;

*As when a hungry man dreams he is eating and awakes with his hunger not satisfied,*

*Or as when a thirsty man dreams he is drinking and awakes faint, with his thirst not quenched,*

*So shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion.*

*(Isaiah 29:8)*

Freud concludes that dreams may often be understood only as wish fulfillments, with no hidden content. This type of dream is usually short and simple. Children tend to have the simplest dreams as they have less complicated psychic lives. He gives examples of his own children's simple dreams as evidence for wish fulfillment. In one, his eight-year-old daughter dreamed of bars of chocolate, colorfully wrapped and thrown under her bed. Earlier that day, her mother had denied her similar chocolates. Another example is related to food deprivation leading to a wish fulfillment dream.

*My youngest daughter, at the time nineteen months old, vomited one morning, and was therefore kept without food all day. During the night*

*she was heard to call excitedly in her sleep: "Anna Freud, strawberry, wild strawberry, omelette, pap!" She used her name in this way in order to express the act of appropriation; the menu presumably included everything that would seem to her a desirable meal; . . . (pp. 40-41)*

Her nurse also recounted that her gastric problem was from eating too many strawberries.

In a footnote related to the above incident he tells of the child's grandmother who was then in her 70s.

*After she had been forced to go hungry for a day on account of the restlessness of her floating kidney, she dreamed, apparently translated into the happy years of her girlhood, that she had been "asked out," invited to a lunch and dinner, and had at each meal been served with the most delicious titbits. (p. 41)*

Also in another footnote, Freud (2) cites others who had written of wish fulfillment dreams, some of which were food related. He says that in unfamiliar conditions, adults often have simple wish fulfillment dreams. One person writing of a group wintering in the Antarctic said that most of their dreams were about eating and drinking. One group member who especially enjoyed dinner parties reported dreaming of a three-course dinner.

In summary, Freud considers such occurrences of food in dreams as largely examples of simple wish fulfillment. He does not address the more complex symbolism that food might signify in dreams as others have done.

Coriat (16) in elaborating on the connectedness of the hunger and sex drives, which Freud himself had noted, does remark on the symbolism of food dreams. He says that "dreams of eating, as symbolic sexual expressions of the unconscious, are very frequent in the neuroses" (p. 378). This is particularly the case when there is a conflict between what the individual unconsciously desires and what society allows. Food dreamers

are using another erotogenic zone that is more socially acceptable "as a means of harmlessly securing sexual gratification" (p. 378). He gives an example of a young woman who has a dream that he interprets as having phallic symbolic significance; she dreams of putting raw chicken entrails in her mouth. She at first rejects the interpretation but later admits that it was related to her repulsion about sexuality. She also dreamed about being given a cream puff by a man, which she did not want to eat, but did and eventually spit it out. This also symbolically "expressed the horror of the grossly sexual act" (p. 378). Coriat says as she improved during psychoanalytic treatment, such food and eating dreams no longer occurred.

Interestingly, Coriat comments on the antarctic explorers' food dreams that Freud mentioned in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as examples of wish fulfillment. Coriat proposes that they "may be just as much symbolizations of the sexual craving due to enforced abstinence from normal sexual relations" (p. 379) and an example of regression under harsh conditions.

Emil Gutheil, another psychoanalytically oriented theorist, in his *The Handbook of Dream Analysis* (17), also pursues possible deeper or hidden meanings to dreams related to food and eating. He gives dream items which express contact with others that he says are "only occasionally" (p. 154) symbols of sexual thoughts. Included in that list is "eating a meal with, traveling or walking with a member of the opposite sex" (p. 153). He also gives the following example:

*A woman complained that her husband never spoke a word while being intimate dreamed . . . "My husband kept handing me pitchers of food without speaking." Her drawing of the pitcher . . . indicates a distinct phallic symbol. (p. 139)*

In pointing out that one must look at the individual symbols of each dreamer in order to interpret a dream, Gutheil states that the

meaning of an orthodox Jew dreaming of eating pork would have to be interpreted differently than that of a non-orthodox Jew or a Gentile. For the orthodox Jew, such a dream could be interpreted as taking part in forbidden pleasure. As a clinical example, he reports that a 22 year-old man suffering from impotence had the following dream.

[171] *"I have a quarrel with my father. Then I meet a girl and we eat something. I think it was meat and butter."* (p. 207)

He was an orthodox Jew who was brought up strictly but had recently given up his orthodox ways. His unconscious religiosity remained and manifested itself in his dream and his impotence. He had promised his father that he would not have sex until he was married. His impotence was a way of keeping that promise. The dream has the element of a quarrel with his father and his intended disobedience of going out with girls. Eating meat and butter together is forbidden to orthodox Jews and thus signifies his intended sin with the girl.

In another clinical example, Gutheil writes of another orthodox Jew also suffering from impotence whose case is partly elucidated by a food dream. At age 48, he had been married for 20 years and had an eighteen year-old daughter. He had lost sexual interest in his wife about a year earlier. This impotence came at a time when he discovered in his daughter's diary a passionate interest in a young man. He provoked a major scene with his daughter, became so excited that he cried, and forced her to end the relationship. This episode so exhausted him that he was impotent thereafter. He reported the following dream during treatment:

[377] *"I got a very young pig to eat. I cut its head off and pushed it away, lest I see that it was pork meat I was going to eat. Then I cut off a piece of that. It tasted very good. Suddenly I felt disgusted and awoke."* (p.373)

Gutheil interpreted this dream as an expression of partaking in forbidden pleasure, more specifically as an expression of the patient's sexual desire for his own daughter. He removed the head because it was a strong reminder of the forbidden object. He had admitted to Gutheil that he enjoyed looking at other girls his daughter's age which Gutheil noted was acceptable because they had another "head." But the dream also shows his moral reaction as he becomes disgusted and awakes. "The analysis here discovered a strong fixation of the patient's libido toward his daughter" (p.374). The patient had forbidden his daughter to sit on his lap because of his arousal. This fixation helped to explain his impotence and lack of interest in his wife. As part of the analysis, a "chastity complex" was discovered where the man thought he was "saving his daughter's virtue by sacrificing his own sexuality to God" (p. 374).

Gutheil (17) in his clinical practice also connects some food dreams to migraine headaches. He also says that dreaming of feces among food is also found in some patients who have somatization symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, or other digestive problems.

Thus we see in the psychoanalytic tradition, food dreams can signify more than relatively simple wish fulfillment. There may be deeper seated symbolism associated with forbidden sexual desires or somatic symptoms.

Walter Hamburger (13) provides a detailed description of the use of dreams of food and eating in the context of therapeutic analysis. He had noted in some of his earlier clinical work that some obese patients reported dreams of food and eating and then realized that many of his non-obese patients were also reporting food dreams "in the manifest content" (13, p. 1). "I then looked casually through the notes of all the patients I have seen in analytical therapy and found that all the patients, both men and women, had reported dreams of food and eating, irrespective of their clinical problems" (p.1).

Hamburger (13) reports on four female

patients selected because they had reported a high number of food dreams during their analysis. P1 and P2 (Patient 1 and Patient 2) were of normal weight and presented no eating problems. P3 was obese, had gastrointestinal complaints and food allergies. P4 was a 17-year-old girl with bulimia. He looked at the reported manifest content of the dreams and the patients' associations to that content for what these associations revealed about the latent content. He compared and contrasted this information across patients and examined the context of what else was occurring in treatment. He also looked at how the ego handled the dream wish, "studying the problem-solving function of a dream" (p.2). He found that "similar impulses were being handled differently in different phases of the analysis" (p.2).

Patient 1 was a 26-year-old, unmarried, professional with social anxieties, a dominant mother, and "an oral character disorder with hysterical features" (p. 2). Of her 900 dreams reported in analysis, 115 or 12.6% were about food and eating.

*In her earlier dreams, this patient is typically being offered food, buying, ordering or looking at food, and many times is actively eating. The food items vary but are predominantly sweets, pastries, candy apples, colored Jello, and other favored foods of childhood. Repetitively she dreamed that these delicacies were gone, cold, or in some way disappointing. (p.2)*

Hamburger interpreted these early dreams as that she wanted the good things in life—love, marriage—but felt she would not obtain them. The food and eating may be a substitute for love and succor; the ego finds being fed and eating acceptable. Therefore, "the manifest content is a relatively undistorted dream wish" (p. 2).

Her eating behavior in dreams became more active in later dreams:

*Dream 314: She was "gulping food down";*

*Dream 68: She gorged herself on cakes and sweets. (p. 3)*

These intense attempts at incorporating things were not acceptable to her. Unacceptable dream wishes were being held back by her dreaming ego as in the following:

*Dream 748: She was carrying a box of candy which she dropped or threw to the ground but then she picked it up again. (p. 3)*

She interpreted this as trying to leave her childish satisfactions behind and move on but she is unsure of her ability to obtain more adult satisfaction.

Midway into her analysis she began having repetitive dreams "which would start with a sexual temptation with a man and end with eating" (p. 3). The example given in the introduction to this paper is one of these dreams. The interpretation was that she could not permit herself to have sexual pleasure, something frightening. Food and eating were safer and represented home and mother. Hamburger remarks: "The oral retreat from genital sexuality seems obvious" (p. 3).

As her analysis progressed, the eating dreams diminished. This was interpreted as reflecting her acceptance of her feminine role and reduced genital conflict. However, every time a genital conflict surfaced, the oral-regressive dreams recurred.

Patient 2 was a 30-year-old in her second marriage with the following symptoms: anxiety, headaches, crying spells, and fear of being alone. Of her 571 dreams, 57 or 9.9% were about food and eating. The manifest content of her dreams differed from P1 in that many of her dreams were of cooking, preparing, and serving meals to others as well as actively eating. P2 interpreted these as questioning her own adequacy in the roles of wife and mother. P2 had "primarily hysterical, phallic, and oedipal problems" (p. 5) which were reflected in her dreams. Feeling superior to her mother brought

on oedipal guilt which was first played out in her “dreams of cooking and serving food to her father” (p. 5). Many of her dreams took place in places that she would associate with her childhood experiences: a kitchen, restaurant, or dining room. Hamburger (13) felt that these “scenes simply symbolize the patient’s childhood which was mostly marked by her longing for more recognition and love, from different and better parents than she felt she had” (p. 6). He also found that like P1, some of P2’s dreams dealt with “a regressive retreat from frightening adult sexuality” (p. 6).

Patient 3 was an unmarried, obese, 27-year-old dietitian who resented her father, had a dominating mother, and feared contact with males. She also suffered from gastrointestinal symptoms. Thirty-six or 10.6% of her reported 341 dreams were of food and eating. Hamburger was surprised that the percentage was not higher considering her symptoms. However on reflection he concluded that it was because of her symptoms that she had fewer food dreams. The symptoms and the dreams are both expressions of the same underlying wishes or latent material. In her case, the “repressed sexual wishes are displaced to oral cravings which are expressed by the symptoms of hyperphagia (the displaced wish), by nausea and vomiting (the defense against the wish), as well as by dreams of food and eating” (p. 7). “Her dreams disclosed murderous rage and strong feelings of envy and competition directed primarily toward her father and younger sister” (p. 7). As these issues started to come out in analysis they led to guilt and then depression that she could not handle and she terminated treatment.

Hamburger felt she may have sublimated some of her oral drives in her work as a waitress, dietitian, and cook. Only one of her food dreams was of her actively eating. The typical manifest backgrounds of her dreams were kitchens to which she had various childhood associations in relation to her parents and sisters. Her maternal strivings were

evidenced in nine of her dreams relating to her preparing food for others. She was allergic to poached eggs and had repetitive dreams of poached or raw eggs. She would wake from these dreams with nausea, vomiting, or cramps which Hamburger concluded were dream induced allergic reactions. Upon analysis, it was concluded that the egg allergy and its related symptoms may have been related to her childhood belief in oral impregnation.

Patient 4 had similar beliefs about oral impregnation. Hamburger makes the point that one has to examine and understand the symbolic meaning that specific foods have for each person. Patient 4 “was the sickest of the four patients” (p. 8). She entered analysis at 17, diagnosed with compulsive bulimia and schizoid personality. She had been anorexic and then began eating binges. She had relatively few reported dreams, only 116 in her 500 hours of therapy. Twenty-one (18.1%) of these dreams were about food and eating. Hamburger felt that her relatively few dreams were because her “persistent eating symptom . . . ‘drained off’ unconscious emotional tensions which might otherwise have been discharged in dreams” (p. 10). He felt she had strong oral fixations as evidenced in her higher percentage of dreams of active eating.

She had an interesting dream related to cannibalism:

*Dream 51: (Selected fragments only). Patient entered a room with people in big pots being cooked. Patient got in a pot with vegetables. (p. 10)*

In her associations the cannibals were not human and she was doubting that she were human, based on her bulimic eating episodes. Hamburger interprets her bulimia as running from or avoiding close interpersonal contacts; “she feels unconsciously that if she gets too close to people either she or they will be devoured” (p. 10). Thus she gorges on food rather than having normal relationships.

Hamburger reports an interesting transference dream of P4 playing on his surname.



*Dream 74: Sitting with a boy on stools at a lunch counter—ordered a hamburger—a person in the next seat said, “You can’t eat that, it has to do with sex.” Patient replied she hadn’t known that, thought sex only had to do with hot dogs. She ordered a dish of macaroni instead, ate only a few mouthfuls and awakened. (p. 10)*

In her associations she reported she had always liked hamburgers and did not associate them with the therapist. But she had been feeling exhilaration on coming to the sessions and maybe it meant that he was more than just a doctor to her. For Hamburger, this did indicate “an eating transference symbol” (p. 10). It demonstrates her typical way of relating to people, i.e. “to like someone is to devour him” (p. 10). This patient did not successfully complete analysis with Hamburger, but moved to a woman therapist and then to another male psychiatrist.

In his discussion, Hamburger (13) addresses the concept of the “typical dream.” He points out that Freud early on “implied an ‘almost’ universal dream with a single latent meaning;” and then later “a similar manifest content but multiple latent meanings” (p. 12). Hamburger used two different latent meanings in his interpretation of food dreams: “(1) the need for anaclitic love, support, and succor, and (2) disguised erotic wishes” (p. 12). Both of these are “‘oral needs’ which in turn are a fusion of nutritional, dependent, and erotic needs” (p. 12). Since these are from basic biological and psychological needs, Hamburger considers these dreams as “typical.”

Hamburger (13) raises the issue that a lay person might ask, “aren’t these dreams simply an expression of hunger occurring during sleep?” (p. 12). He says that some may be, but in this study none of his patients “correlated their dreams with being hungry during the day or evening preceding the dream” (p. 13) and they did not awake hungry. Their associations “always led into nonnutritional areas: their wish for love, succor, approval or reward, their fear

of sex, etc.” (p. 13).

The surface meaning is often a distortion of the true meaning in adult dreaming. An underlying drive or unacceptable wish has been repressed. So dreams of food and eating should make us look for the underlying meaning. He concludes: “I have gained the distinct impression, from studying these dreams of food and eating, that such dreams often represent by displacement and symbolic substitution, the sexual drive” (p. 13). “...the eating drive is substituted for the sexual drive” (p. 13) and it is also regressive. His interpretation of the dream work then is: “My adult sexual urges are too threatening. Give me instead the (assumed) asexual gratification of my childhood” (p. 13). Another set of dreams still involve drive substitution, but in these “the manifest dream content of eating appears to be a substitute for pregenital, infantile wishes for love, support, and succor” (p. 13). His restatement of this is: “My infantile longings to be cared for by my loving mother are no longer possible. Instead, I must gratify myself with the recollection of the food which (symbolically) signifies my mother’s love” (p. 13).

He states that Freud established the concepts of drive displacement and substitution and that his own work with dreams of food and eating support these concepts. “The aim of satisfaction remains unchanged, but the object by which the aim is achieved is substituted: namely, eating for (genital) sexual gratification, or eating for gratification of dependent longings” (p. 13). The first represents a regression or pulling back from a mature genital level of development, and the second represents a fixation at an early point in development, of early oral dependency on the relationship between mother and child. Hamburger feels that studying the meaning of dreams of food and eating in a therapeutic context would have application to various clinical eating disorders such as obesity, bulimia, and anorexia, as well as other general disorders.

## Jung and His Followers

Carl Jung rejected Freud's idea that dreams intentionally hide their meaning and thus rejects the manifest content, latent content distinction (14). For Jung, dreams give a direct, honest portrayal of the psychic state of the individual. If dreams appear strange it is because our conscious minds often cannot understand "the special symbolic language of the unconscious" (14, p. 30). One of the basic functions of dreams is compensation, to bring elements of the unconscious into the conscious where they can be dealt with and thus achieve some balance. Like Freud, Jung felt dreams could provide information about one's past but he also felt they could serve a prospective function; that is, give some information as to what might happen (14, 3). In interpreting dreams he tried to relate the dream to the dreamer's waking context and have the dreamer focus on the elements of the dream, amplifying details and exploring feelings and emotions. While most symbols were explored within the life context of the dreamer, Jung also believed that there were many archetypal symbols that were universal, coming from the collective unconscious (14).

Jung (3) gives the following example of a young man's dream that has an element of food in it.

*I was standing in a strange garden and picked an apple from a tree. I looked about cautiously, to make sure that no one saw me. (p. 27)*

The material that this young man associated with this dream included having similarly stolen pears as a boy, a situation the day before the dream in which he was embarrassed when seen talking to a young woman acquaintance, and the Garden of Eden story of which he had always thought that God's punishment was too harsh. He also associated it with having been punished by his father when he was young for secretly watching girls bathing. He confessed

about being involved in an affair (not sexually consummated) with a housemaid with whom he had been with the night before the dream. Jung points out that guilt underlies all of these associations and that his getting together with the maid was represented in plucking the apple. "The associative material shows that the apple episode is obviously intended as an erotic scene" (3, p. 28). The young man in his dream was showing his guilt over his erotic experiences. Jung interprets this as a compensation for the fact that in his conscious, waking life he has not been concerned about the moral questions that his behavior might raise.

Eve Jackson (4), a Jungian analyst, also provides examples of food dreams and interpretations.

Jackson discusses the mother or Great Mother archetype as the provider of food, the sustainer of life. Generally the concept of "mother" includes associations to a personal mother and the archetypal mother. "In the metaphorical language of dreams images of food frequently cluster about this figure," (p. 14) (the Great Mother).

To demonstrate the connection of food imagery and mother, Jackson introduces Jennifer, in her late thirties, in analysis and dealing with "a negative mother complex." Jennifer reported a dream which gave evidence of her unconscious identification with her mother. In the dream she went to a cake shop with her mother and her mother bought her a birthday cake. However, Jennifer was upset because the cake had her mother's name on it rather than her own. Jackson interprets this as showing both sides of a mother, the nurturing and the negative or devouring, "for in offering this supposed treat the mother complex proposes to assimilate the daughter" (p. 15). For Jennifer, the cost of the cake is giving up her identity. The mother was very controlling, could not maintain relationships with men, and had become an alcoholic. Thus Jennifer did not wish to see her mother as a role model.

Jennifer had been a picky eater as a child, was very concerned about diet as an adult, and was trying hard not to resemble her mother physically. Jackson says that difficulties with body image and at times their associated eating problems tend to be associated with problems with mother.

Jennifer often followed raw food diets and would dream of salads and fruits. Jackson reports that some of Jennifer's dreams might be connected to transference to her, the analyst. Jackson says in the first reported salad dream, Jackson had offered Jennifer salad and they ate together. She also reports the following dream.

*I am on my way to see Eve, walking to the underground station. I pick fruit from the trees laden with huge William pears and avocados. Then I get home and start to prepare them. X is there too, preparing food, and asks where I got them from. I say, "round the corner," and she says they are expensive. I see X has bacon on her plate and I feel guilty. I say, "but there are nuts if you prefer." X tells me it's okay to eat meat occasionally, then turns to me looking stern and says, "when I was a child we only had meat on special occasions." (p. 16)*

In interpreting this as a transference dream, Jackson compares herself to "the good mother whose fruits hung ripe and ready for plucking" (p. 16). Jennifer associated avocados with good nutrition and saw pears as "juicy but messy" (p. 16). Thus to work on her psychic problems, Jennifer had to do some work and get messy in the process. In taking the fruit to her home in her dream, Jennifer was taking it to her core, attempting to take it all in. X was an older woman who reminded Jennifer of her grandmother, a person who had cared for Jennifer and whom Jennifer loved. X had been able, through a dietary therapy, to cure herself of a serious illness. Thus X was a symbol of a successful cure. X in the dream points to the cost of the fruit, meaning that Jennifer would need to work hard to take advantage of

Jackson's therapy. The bacon, contrasting with the raw vegetarian food, is seen at one level as X saying one need not be so rigid about diet. At another level Jackson sees this as having curative symbolic value because it brings into consciousness "the mother complex of pig, that is at the level of instinct, of animal dependency" (p. 17). Jackson explains that the pig was a symbol of fertility and abundance and "considered sacred to mother goddesses" (p. 17). This is but another reference to a form of mother, another reminder that Jennifer has much to take in during the therapeutic process. Commenting further on this, Jackson says "The motif of being fed by and of feeding the analyst is a common one in dreams, often with maternal implications" (p. 18). Both people need to be engaged in the process and it is particularly encouraging if the analysand dreams of providing food to the analyst. This is because it signifies the analysand's feeling of having something to give.

Another food related dream of another client shows a different outcome.

*On the other hand, one client dreamt early in the therapeutic relationship that he brought his own packed lunch to eat at my house. He did not stay long in therapy as he did not want to risk the diet I might have had to offer. He wanted to take in only what he had come prepared with and for, so there was no way for the new to enter. (pp. 18-19)*

Jackson considers the symbolism of fruit, noting that Jung associated the individuation process with a tree. Fruit is symbolic of a goal achievement, the end of a growth process. "The roundness of the apple indicates the completeness of the beginning and the completeness of the end, the perfect sphere of the One. A round fruit in dreams may represent what Jung calls the Self in all its nourishing naturalness, an image of our wholeness" (pp. 44-45).

Jackson also considers the object of meat in dreams, and considers the "theme of meat as

the original goal of masculine search and its connection with liberation from the mother” (p. 54). She writes of a male patient who frequently dreamed about meat and often the inability of obtaining it. She relates this to the male role of hunter and interprets it as his continuing search and desire to gain independence from his family, particularly his mother. In another dream this same man did obtain meat but it “turned into a thick, sloppy liquid, like brown custard” (p. 55). This was interpreted as symbolizing his devaluing of his recent accomplishment of finishing an important piece of writing.

Jackson (4) reports the dream of another patient, a woman in her late thirties, who was having relationship problems and panicky feelings. She had been starved for attention and support as a child and had low self-esteem. Part of her dream took place on a street where she and some other women were talking with an older woman she did not know.

*She had baked a big doll/statue out of Rice Krispies and she was encouraging us to sample it. I also noticed that she had Rice Krispies all over her, and she may have been made of the cereal herself. I took a little piece out of the doll as I like baked Rice Krispies. When I looked up again, about to reach for another piece, she had gone. (p. 70)*

In her analysis, Jackson says, “This mysterious figure is nothing less than a twentieth-century version of the great Grain Mother” (p. 72). Jackson then discusses this archetype as a common one in various cultures and that some cultures actually form dolls of grain related to good harvests and fertility. Eating from such a doll could be expected to bring good things to the diner. This patient had had other dreams of plain white rice which she did not find particularly palatable. She found Rice Krispies more interesting. Jackson related this to the ongoing therapy. The patient was perhaps finding the therapeutic content more interesting now and was left wanting more. The

analyst was in the role of the Grain Mother providing nourishment in a way that the analysand could incorporate.

Later, Jackson talks about assimilation and the idea that feeding in dreams may indicate psychic elements that have been neglected and need attention. “When the dreamer does manage to eat it is an indication that something is nearing consciousness” (p. 111).

In summary, food dreams have been under discussion for a long time and have found their way into various theoretical approaches to treatment. Most therapeutic approaches go beyond Freud’s wish fulfillment theory and the waking context of the dreamer’s life to consider the symbolic value of the elements of the food dreams as related to the dreamer’s unconscious.

### **A Quantitative Approach**

Building on an empirical coding system that was developed by Calvin S. Hall and Robert Van de Castle (18), G. William Domhoff (19) presents a quantitative, content analysis approach to dreams. This approach does not concern itself with underlying symbolism but classifies the content of what is given in dream reports into a number of categories. In this system, “food and eating” is one of ten major categories along with others such as “characters,” “social interactions,” “activities,” “emotions,” and “physical surroundings: settings and objects.” The focus of this work is on how the content of dreams is related to the dreamers’ lives, their conceptions and ongoing concerns. The assumption is that “the frequency with which a dream element appears reveals the concerns and interests of the dreamer” (pp. 2-3). This is obviously related to Freud’s concept of a wish being fulfilled in the manifest content, only the term “wish” is not used. Domhoff uses the term “continuity” to express this relationship of what happens in dreams and what is occurring in the dreamer’s waking life. For Domhoff, “the concerns people express in their dreams are the concerns they

have in waking life” (p. 153).

Domhoff (19) reports the normative data of Hall and Van de Castle that is based on about 1000 dream reports from a couple of hundred American college students. Relevant to the discussion here, 16% of the men’s dream reports contained at least one reference to food and eating and 17% of the women’s dream reports contained such references. Domhoff proposes this normative data to be a baseline for comparison. One focus of the book is on how the content of dreams is related to other variables such as gender, age, nationality, and individual differences.

Unfortunately, the “food and eating” category gets very little attention in Domhoff’s work. He basically relegates this category along with temporal references, modifiers, and negatives to an appendix, saying “the findings are worthy of only the briefest mention here” (p. 63). One reason he gives for this is the lack of gender differences on these variables. He does leave it somewhat open by saying that “these findings await further exploration and creative development” (p. 63). It is unfortunate because he makes use of the other categories to relate to aspects of individuals’ lives and personalities. He also speculates that certain extreme deviations from the norms, such as having relatively few friends in dreams or having a high rate of aggression, might be indicative of psychopathology. Dreams of food and eating, although appearing in about one in six of the average person’s dreams, have been largely ignored in his analyses.

### **FOOD DREAMS AS AFFECTED BY CULTURE**

Several studies (5-8) have looked at food dreams in the context of other cultures, and shared some interesting insights into the phenomenon.

O’Neill (5) studied several cultural groups to find evidence for hunger and thirst motivation expressed in dreams. O’Neill assumed that the motivation would appear in the manifest

content imagery of the dreams. O’Neill gathered dream reports from a large sample of people and used Freud’s wish fulfillment theory as an approach to the collected data. O’Neill points out that Freud did not really consider the effects of social conditioning or culture on how hunger and thirst motivation appear in dream imagery. O’Neill studied 434 male students from four different cultural groups that were assumed to have a “wide variation in food and drink patterns” (p. 183). The groups were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, Fasting Nigerian Muslims, Non-Fasting Nigerians, and Americans. The first two groups have strict customs related to fasting whereas the latter two groups do not. The Ethiopians were expected to fast about 165 days of the year. The fasting Nigerians were studied during the Islamic observance of Ramadan which requires no food or drink during the day over that period. The non-fasting Nigerians were primarily Christian and did not follow a fasting regimen but there was evidence of malnutrition in the group. The American group was from a Chicago secondary school, mostly lower middle and upper middle socioeconomic status, mostly Christian, and the “fasting issue is judged to be virtually non-existent for this group” (p. 185).

O’Neill compared the relative food frustration of the groups with the measures of manifest hunger and thirst in their reported dreams (two personal dream reports written by each student). Using descriptive data, a food frustration score was derived for each group. Out of a possible score of six, the groups received the following scores: Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, 5; Fasting Nigerian Muslims, 3; Non-Fasting Nigerians, 1; and Americans, 0. The food frustration or cultural deprivation scores predicted exactly the relative percentages of each population showing manifest hunger motivation in their dreams. Those percentages were: Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, 63.8; Fasting Nigerian Muslims, 43.8; Non-Fasting Nigerians, 33.7; and Americans, 14.5. (Note that this last figure is

not that far off from Domhoff's (19) norm of 16 percent for male American college students.)

When food was mentioned in the dreams of Americans, it tended to be a rather casual mention. Food was more central when mentioned in groups with hunger motivation. The following is part of a longer dream of an Ethiopian respondent.

*. . . After I went for some miles (following a heavenly light) I reached a place where different types of foods were stored. As I was hungry I went on to eat the sweetest foods and to drink. I enjoyed doing this very much... (5, p. 190)*

O'Neil believed the study supported Freud's wish fulfillment theory and it "should lend encouragement to efforts to study the development of human motivational states through the use of reported dreams" (p. 191). It also supports the usefulness of considering culture in studying the content of dreams.

The high level of food dreams of Nigerians is interesting in light of the study reported by Ilechukwu (6). Ilechukwu, a psychotherapist practicing in Nigeria, noted that many patients attributed negative consequences to having eaten in their dreams. For example, one woman's symptoms of depression and agoraphobia became worse after eating stewed rice and meat in a dream. In questioning healthy adult Nigerians, Ilechukwu found that some were aware of this belief and many were not. Therefore Ilechukwu did a more formal survey attempting to find out how prevalent the belief was, what variations in the belief existed, whether there were ethnic differences, the origins of the belief, whether it was related to social class or education, and whether it was related to illness or seeking therapy.

About half of his sample of 60 had this belief about the negativity of eating in dreams, with the percentage of females holding the belief being slightly higher than the males. The belief was more common in the lower social classes and the less educated. The sample was mostly

Christian, but it was found that Nigerians who had a mix of Christianity and indigenous beliefs were more likely to hold this belief about food dreams. The groups were too small to make conclusions related to ethnic groups, although one group, the Edo, seemed to have a higher incidence of the belief. The belief was not related to mental health status. Not surprisingly, most had learned the belief from their parents. Most said that eating anything in dreams was harmful although some made exceptions for fresh fruits. Eating treat foods such as candies, kolanuts (which when awake would indicate goodwill), and nonfoods were listed as especially dangerous. Ilechukwu discusses the findings as they relate to psychotherapy in general and especially for the need of the therapist to be aware of possible cultural influences.

Another study of the dreams of an African group was conducted by Achté and Schakir (7). It was part of a larger study which explored the thinking and mental health of a group of bushmen in Amboland, South-West Africa. Interviews were carried out in the early 1970s by a trained interviewer, a former missionary to the bushmen. Three hundred adults, 55% men, were interviewed. They were asked to "relate a dream they recalled" (p. 27). The data are descriptive because no analysis was undertaken and the interviewees were not asked to give their associations to the dream or interpret them in any way. A total of 282 dream reports were obtained. The dreams were divided into nightmares and other dreams without a clear distinction as to how this was done except to say that it was "according to their central themes" (p. 27). The sampling is not considered representative in that the respondent was allowed to choose his or her own memorable dream. As a result, 88% of the dreams were classified as nightmares and most included some interaction with a feared animal. It is interesting that in several of the examples of nightmares, the report begins with the dreamer in the process of searching for food in the forest

when the encounter occurred.

Of the dreams not classified as nightmares, one-third were about food or eating. In a statement related again to Freud's wish fulfillment theory, the authors comment: "Dreams of eating can undoubtedly be understood to represent the hopes of a hungry dreamer" (p. 31). One of their examples was given in the introduction of this paper.

Munroe et al. (8) looked at the effects of population density on various measures of food concerns of three societies in East Africa, the Logoli, the Gusii, and the Kipsigis. All three societies relied on subsistence farming, but the Logoli had a density of 1440 persons per square mile versus 691 per square mile for the Gusii and 253 per square mile for the Kipsigis. The authors had predicted that all of their measures of food concern would correlate with these densities, that is, the higher the density the more food concern. They found this to be the case for food imagery in folk tales, for short term memory of food objects and food words recalled, and for choosing the relative importance of hunger as a theme in stories presented to the respondents. However, the predicted correlation for reported dreams of eating was reversed. For the Kipsigis, 30% of their reported dreams were of eating, compared to 20% for the Gusii, and only 12% for the Logoli.

The authors point out that this seems to contradict the results of O'Neil's (5) study cited above where people who were fasting reported more food dreams. Munroe et al. try to explain their findings by saying that even though there is more pressure on the Logoli in terms of food, there was sufficient food available at the time. They speculate that their "insecure environmental background" (p.169) related to food might act to block their "expression of imaginative goal activity, perhaps due to anxiety" (p. 169). If they had actually been deprived of food, such as a fasting group, then they might have expressed their desires in the fantasies of dreams. They also comment that it

had been assumed that the imaginative measures of folktales and dreams would be equivalent, but their study shows otherwise. Of course a major difference in the measures is that folktales reflect a cultural, non-individual measure whereas dreams are from the individual psyche.

Anthropologist Allan R. Holmberg (9) provided information on the dreams of the Siriono, an indigenous group in eastern Bolivia. One of the main factors in Holmberg's choosing this group to study was that they were "perennially hungry" (p. xviii) and he wanted to document the effect of such hunger on various cultural practices. He lived among the group in the early 1940s. The Siriono were described as technologically backward. Bows and arrows were their only weapons. They were semi-nomadic and characterized as hunter, fisher, gatherers, although they grew some crops on a limited basis. Their basic anxieties and concerns centered on food. Holmberg says "the supply of food is rarely abundant and always insecure" (p. 71).

The Siriono believed that dreams foretold the future. Men would dream about hunting a certain animal and then in their waking life often go hunting and kill such an animal. Holmberg was able to obtain data on about fifty dreams. He does not indicate how many individuals contributed to this set. About half of the dreams collected "related directly to the eating of food, the hunting of game, and the collecting of edible products from the forest" (p. 241). Holmberg states, "if dreams are an unconscious expression of desires, then those of the Siriono clearly reflect their preoccupation with the quest for food" (p. 241). Sometimes the dreams were indicative of desires to eat a certain type of food. Holmberg said he was struck by the fact, however, that the food dreams occurred about as frequently when the people were not hungry as when they were hungry. He says "it would seem that such dreams reflect considerable concern about food" (p. 242), and he speculates that this

indicates that hunger is this society's most prominent motivation. Perhaps their hunger motivation being so prevalent in their dreams indicates a higher level of food insecurity than the Logoli in the Munroe et al. (8) study.

Domhoff (19) provides further information related to cultural differences on references to food and eating in dreams. Two studies in India (20; Bose & Pramilia, 1993, as cited in 19), both report, without giving actual numbers, that the Indian students in their studies were more likely to dream of food and eating than the American normative group. Likewise, Yamanaka, Morita, and Matsumoto (21) report that their Japanese college students "dreamed significantly more about food and drinks than those of Hall and Van de Castle" (p. 42). (They reported 22% versus the 16% or 17 % reported by Domhoff, (19).) They also report that when breaking down the category of objects mentioned in dreams, their Japanese college student subjects mentioned food and drink significantly more than the American students (6.6% versus 1.9%). Interestingly, this was the only significant difference on any of the objects analyzed which also included such items as "architecture," "household articles," "travel," "body part," and "money."

There is one mention of a study involving an ethnic or subculture group. Stephen Gornick, in an unpublished report (19), studied the dreams of African American community college students in Chicago in 1967 using the Hall/Van de Castle system. He found no differences on reported dreams of food and eating as compared to the normative group.

## FOOD DREAMS IN SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Food dreams are reported in other groups such as former concentration camp prisoners, anorexics, alcoholics, the blind, participants in sleep laboratory research, and participants in studies of hypnotically induced dreams.

Susulowska (10) reports on interviews with 55 former concentration camp prisoners

conducted in 1967 and 1973. The report is descriptive, without any attempt at statistical analysis. The report and interpretation fit Freud's emphasis on dreams as wish fulfillment.

Most of these dreams were related to the individual's urgent needs, hence the need to satisfy hunger. In these wish-fulfillment dreams, the prisoners saw food - not tables laden with a sumptuous and tasty meal, but mounds of beautiful, freshly baked bread and potatoes. (p. 149)

Two examples of dreams of a 51-year-old man are as follows:

*When I was very hungry, I always dreamed that I was in a meadow of grazing cows. I could smell the milk. (p. 149)*

*I sat on the doorstep holding a bowl of soup. There was a hole in the bowl which I tried to stop so that the soup would not leak out. I was afraid that I would die of hunger if the soup seeped out. (p. 149)*

Former prisoners also reported other, non-food related wish fulfillment dreams, such as being at home or seeing members of their family. Many saw their dreams as a respite from daily horrors.

Decades later, at the time the interviews were conducted, these former prisoners reported that their current dreams were largely anxiety dreams connected to their concentration camp experiences.

Frayn (12) compared the recalled dreams of 19 anorexic patients to those of 19 control subjects. All participants were female and ranged in age from 16 to 32. The anorexics had a higher reported frequency of felt hunger in their dreams. Also, "the anorexic patients far more frequently dreamed about food ( $p=.0001$ ) ...and often experienced their hunger dreams as unpleasant" (p. 518). Interestingly, the anorexics recalled their dreams less frequently



than the control group, which was the same as reported for Hamburger's (13) Patient 4 discussed above. The anorexics in Frayn's study also did not dream in color as frequently as the controls, had more frightening dreams, and had more body distortion in their dreams. As these patients improved during treatment, their color dreaming approached that of the normal controls and they dreamed less of body distortion. Frayn says that his study raises a question about whether these dream disturbances are due to starvation or personality traits.

Hall (22) looked at the content of dreams of differing groups of hospitalized mental patients. There were four groups: 1) schizophrenic and alcoholic, 2) schizophrenic but not alcoholic, 3) alcoholic but not schizophrenic, and 4) neither schizophrenic nor alcoholic. The "alcoholics had more dreams in which oral incorporation occurred than did the nonalcoholics" (p. 136). Hall says this would be in accordance with Freudian theory. He however does not provide the percentage figures nor does he draw comparisons with normal populations on oral incorporation content. Therefore from this we do not know if alcoholics dream more about food than nonalcoholic, non-patient populations.

Sabo and Kirtley (11) had 14 middle class, visually handicapped adults, ages 20 to 56, keep dream diaries over a two to four month period. The content of their dream reports was analyzed. "Both the male and the female blind subjects tended to dream more than the sighted norms about objects used to construct buildings (e.g., boards, brick, lumber, etc.), all forms of food or drink, land areas limited by boundaries (e.g., cities, parking lots, yards, swimming pools, etc.), and parts of the torso (e.g., shoulders, chest, hips, side, etc.)" (p. 241). The authors explain this in terms of the experiences of the blind and say that their dreams are "continuous with waking behavior and mentation" (p. 242)

Hurovitz, Dunn, Domhoff, and Fiss (23)

agree with Sabo and Kirtley that the dreams of the blind are continuous with their waking life, but they, using more rigorous data collection and analysis, did not find any differences between the blind and the sighted in reporting dreams of food and eating. All of their participants, blind men and women, and male and female norms, reported dreams of food and eating in a range of from 16 – 19 percent of their total dreams (again in line with the norms reported by Domhoff, 19). Hurovitz et al. did find that subjects who had been blind most or all of their lives and reported little if any visual imagery in their dreams did report a very large percentage of taste/smell/touch in their dreams. Sighted individuals rarely report these types of sensory experiences in their dreams.

Domhoff and Kamiya add further information related to the question of whether food dreams are more or less likely in a sleep laboratory situation (24), and whether food dreams become more or less likely as the night progresses (25). Their first study examined whether the content of dreams collected from people in a sleep lab awakened during REM sleep are different than those that people recall and report from their everyday dreams at home. They found that "references to food and drink, as well as eating, are more frequent in the laboratory" (24, p. 521). They commented that this might "be attributed to the dependency feelings aroused by the experimental situation" (p. 522).

In another study, Domhoff and Kamiya (25) attempted to find out if the content of one's dreams changed over the course of the night. They were able to study only the first three REM periods because not enough dreams were collected to be able to analyze periods four and five. They found that "food and drink elements appeared increasingly throughout the night" (p. 531) with one explanation being "the subjects may be getting hungrier as the night progresses" (p. 531). There was no difference over the periods for eating as an activity. It is interesting that the percentage of dreams with reported

food and drink elements was 16%, which is the same as the Domhoff (19) norms and in the same range as what Hurovitz et al. (23) found. However, the subjects in the Hurovitz et al. study were reporting their home dreams. Yamanaka et al. (21) also report that food and drink were more likely to appear in dreams that occurred later in the night, i.e. after 3:01 or 5:01 a.m.

There have also been food dreams reported under hypnotically induced conditions (26). The effect of dreaming on the gastric motility of people with empty stomachs was studied. This was done before the discovery of the relationship between REM and dreaming and they used themselves as subjects. They recorded gastric motility by “the balloon and ink-recording method” (p. 683). Others had concluded that in a hungry subject, dreams occurred only during a period of hunger contractions. One conclusion they made was that dreams, when they occur, inhibit this gastric motility. The following is the report of a dream that was thought to have come from a period of reduced motility.

*I dreamed that I was on a great ship and that it was part of a parade mounted on a motor truck. This truck was going past the main campus of the university. The decks of the ship seemed to be crowded with people all chasing me to the bow or front. When I was finally as far forward as I could go a great crowd of people many of them Negroes surged toward the front of the ship and started throwing pies. I reached over excitedly to grab some of the food for I suddenly realized that I was very hungry. After great effort and what seems to me now as failure, I thought I was cast into space and awoke. (p. 685)*

The following was a dream that occurred under hypnosis and followed closely the suggestion of the hypnotist.

*I was walking through a fruit market in which great rows of peaches were displayed on well-*

*ordered racks in upright and inverted triangular wooden supports. A sensation of extreme hunger accompanied the dream. I vainly attempted to stretch forth my arm and pick some of the fruit from the racks. (p. 688)*

The researchers could not be sure of the time of this dream but again thought it was at perhaps a time of decreased gastric motility. They felt that there was some central nervous system action that was affecting the stomach during this process but could not be sure of what it was.

### INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Individuals obviously differ in how much they dream about food and eating and the nature of the content of such dreams. The individual patients reported on earlier (13, 4) gave good evidence for that. There were also quite different types of food dreams coming from individuals from different cultures and the above special populations. There is obviously great variation in the amount of food dreams reported from one individual to another. Hamburger's (13) patients had the following percentage of dreams with food and eating reported: P1 – 12.6%; P2 - 9.9%; P3 – 10.6%; and, P4 18.1%.

Domhoff (19) reports on the analysis of large sets of dreams coming from four different individuals that were analyzed using the Hall/Van de Castle system as he looked at consistency and change over long time periods. For three of the four people analyzed, food and eating were not mentioned as a factor. However, the fourth individual, a woman he refers to as Dorothea, “dreamed most frequently about food and eating” (p. 145), not aggression, sex, or the past as some of the other people. Over 900 of her dreams were analyzed from a 53 year time span (1912-1965). She dreamed of food at a rate of three times the rate of the female norms. In her dreams she often “is eating, preparing to eat, buying or seeing food,

watching someone eat, or mentioning she is hungry” (p. 145). A recurrent theme was her not getting her fair share of food. Domhoff says they did not know enough about Dorothea to relate her dreams to her possible life stresses. She was a psychologist and teacher who had never married and never engaged in sexual intercourse. An analytic approach might be quick to point to the obvious displacement of drive into the production of her food dreams.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is interesting that food and eating play such essential roles in human survival, but so little research exists on dreams of food and eating.

Methodological problems abound in much of the literature. Much of the work is subjective, from interpretations such as those of Artemidorus (1) and Miller (15), to therapists reporting on their processes and outcomes. Many of the studies that gathered dream reports were unsystematic and perhaps biased, or used techniques which would prevent obtaining dreams that were truly representative of people’s experiences. For example, Achte and Schakir (7) asked their subjects to “relate a dream they recalled” (p. 27). This opens it up to bias, such as the most memorable dream being reported or the one thought to most impress the researcher. Thus their relative incidence data is not based on a random selection from a large set of dreams which would be more representative. Domhoff (19) reports that a better way of getting representative results when questioning a number of individuals is to ask them to report the most recent dream they can remember. He reports that results from such studies are comparable to the results of studies where a random sample is taken from large sets of dreams reported by many people. Domhoff’s quantitative approach is rigorous and has provided much information on the meaning of dreams, but as mentioned above, it unfortunately has not focused on dreams of

food and eating.

To a large extent, the work that has been done still leaves us with the question of what does it mean to dream of food and eating. Are these dreams mainly related to relatively conscious ongoing concerns of our waking life, such as Freud reported about children’s dreams and the various authors reported about groups that had high hunger motivation, or do they have meaning related to deeper relationship issues, both sexual and dependent, as reported by therapists? Perhaps one of the earliest authors, Artemidorus (1), had it right by saying that some dreams are straightforward, direct, or theorematic, whereas others are more symbolic or allegorical. But how are these to be differentiated? This question perhaps can never be answered with complete confidence, but looking at the context of the life of the individual who reports the dream may provide some answers.

Researchers addressing hunger motivation manifested in dreams make an interesting case that if food is a major concern for a society or subgroup (religious fasters, groups with food scarcity, anorexics, concentration camp inmates), it will likely be apparent in their dreams. Not enough is known about whether the dreams of people in these groups signify anything more than that. Do their food dreams at times also relate to sexual and dependency issues that Western analysts find in their patients? This question remains unanswered because therapeutic processes that could scrutinize these dreams thoroughly within the context of the dreamer’s life have generally not been applied. Hunger motivation seems to be involved as well in the findings that more food dreams seem to occur as the night progresses (21, 25). The relationship between food dreams and hunger contractions was researched in an early study (26) but remains relatively unexplored.

The analysts reporting in some detail about their patients’ dreams, including food dreams, make an interesting case about how these dreams help us understand some deep-seated

underlying unconscious problems. Symbols are found and interpretations are made that aid in elucidating the unconscious and some patients are reported to be helped with the problems that caused them to seek treatment. In some cases, the incidence of such food dreams was reported to decrease as the patient made progress (16, 13), and one analyst (13) reports the recurrence of such dreams when underlying conflict resurfaced. This would support the symbolic interpretation of these dreams. However, most of these analysts also report that a number of their patients' dreams are not of particular symbolic importance. They also assert that in every case, the individual dreamer must be considered.

Dreams seem to have multiple determinants, including physiological processes, ongoing life events, and perhaps deeper seated mental aspects. If a dream is sufficiently interpreted on the basis of the physiology or ongoing life events (the person was in state of hunger or desired particular foods) then we may be satisfied that the dream was an expression of relatively manifest wish fulfillment. If however physiological and life event causes are less evident and associations or interpretations lead to revelations elucidating psychic problems beyond food and eating such as nurturance, dependency, or sexual issues, then symbolic interpretations would be justified.

Other questions remain unanswered. We do not know what triggers food dreams, except perhaps living in a culture with high concerns about food procurement or being hungry or in a state of starvation (anorexics). In Western or more modern societies, is the incidence of food dreams related to personality variables or situational ones, such as dieting, exposure to media, or some other memorable food event in the person's waking life? To what extent are food dreams of a non-patient population

related to underlying symbolic issues? Not everyone is neurotic and perhaps non-disturbed individuals have a very low incidence of symbolic food dreams. Are there differences related to age? Freud (2) reported that dreams of wish fulfillment were particularly prevalent in children but then also gives an example of a wish fulfillment food dream for a family member in her seventies. Domhoff (19) reviews studies related to dream content and age and differences are noted for some content areas but not for food and eating. It is unclear whether this is because this content area was examined and no differences were found or because food and eating was ignored in the studies. More research would be needed to determine if the experience of food dreams is related to age. Are there any appreciable sex differences? As reported earlier, the lack of sex differences was one reason given for not analyzing food dreams in Domhoff's (19) quantitative approach. However, he does report on an unpublished dissertation (Howard, 1978, as cited in Domhoff, 19) that found that both high school and college women had more dreams with references to food than did their male peers.

To answer these questions, more research with improved methods needs to be undertaken. More work needs to be done cataloging dreams using content analysis and relating this content to the personality characteristics and ongoing life events of the dreamer. Therapists also need to be aware of the potential of using food dreams symbolically. They should then systematically report on their therapeutic experiences.

For many people, the incidence of food and eating content in their dreams seems to add to the interest and quality of their dream life. If we "are what we eat," then perhaps the unconscious psyche is in part what it dreams about eating.

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