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English 4H
28 March 2016

To dream or not to dream

“The dream is the liberation of the spirit from the pressure of external nature, a detachment of the soul from the fetters of matter” (Freud 2). I have always had an attachment to dreaming, the idea of dreaming, my dreams and their significance. Ever since I was very young I have found myself to be in touch with my dreams as they continue to leave imprints on my mind, sometimes popping up randomly throughout my day, sparking constant curiosity and feeling. In this paper I will explore the various lenses of dream interpretation to assert the idea that dreams have the potential to bring significance and connection to our lives, and although dreams are often viewed as random chemical reactions in the brain, they act as an outlet of expression for emotions and thoughts.

Much of modern Western belief dismisses the idea that dreams could mean anything. In fact, they are viewed simply as a process in the brain which occurs during sleep. The act of dreaming has been determined to occur when one enters a deep state of sleeping known as rapid eye movement, or REM. Most sleeps experience REM every 90 minutes. During REM, “sleepers' eyes dart back and forth beneath their eyelids... and these episodes coincide with surges of brain activity” (Drabelle). Bruce state's, “First, brain stem activity surges and sets off responses in emotional and visual parts of the brain. Second, brain regions that handle sensations from the outside world, control movement, and carry out logical analysis shut down. Third, brain

stem cells pump out acetylcholine, a chemical messenger that jacks up activity in emotional centers” (Bruce). Each region of the brain provides a different function that plays a different role in the creation of a dream. The brain stem, specifically the pontine region, acts as a relay to the cerebellum region that pulls connections between movements and matter. Following this, the release of acetylcholine from the stem triggers the hypothalamus region that is in touch with emotions, sensory functions, and internal processes. Each individual brain process serves as a variable in a large equation occurring in the brain. The result, in Bruce’s view: “a vivid hallucination, informed by strong emotions, that takes bizarre twists and turns. REM sleep's biological makeup fosters the mistaken belief that one is awake while dreaming, saps the ability to reflect on the weirdness of dreams as they occur, and makes it difficult to recall dreams after waking up” (Bruce). From this lens, dreams are scientifically meaningful in the sense that they connect back to processes in the brain, and that is all. Even their odd and absurd aspects can be scientifically explained: “The properties of dreams--their bizarreness, visual vividness, frequent depictions of movement--all follow unavoidably from the neurophysiology and neurochemistry of REM sleep” (Stickgold). REM sleep was originally thought to be the only state of sleeping where dreaming occurs, however it is now known that dreaming also happens in and out of REM, just not as vividly.

The study of REM sleep led eventually to the discovery of the activation synthesis theory of Hobson and McCarley in 1977. This theory was almost an attack against Freud and his psychological ideas about dreams. The activation synthesis theory is a scientific interpretation of dreaming that formally established the brain process behind dreams. Cherry describes this as,

“Areas of the limbic system involved in emotions, sensations, and memories, including the amygdala and hippocampus, become active. The brain synthesizes and interprets this internal activity and attempts to create meaning from these signals, which results in dreaming” (Cherry). The activation synthesis theory solidified the scientific approach to understanding dreams, although interpretative theories continue to be put forward. Compared to Freud and Jung’s theories, Hobson and McCarley offered a much more logical, scientific and simple explanation to dreaming from the brain functions to the specific dream-like elements. Cherry writes, “Hobson also suggested that there are five key characteristics of dreams, which are illogical content, intense emotions, acceptance of strange content, strange sensory experiences, and difficulty remembering dream content” (Cherry).

Not everybody accepts these scientific explanations, starting with Freud over a century ago in his work *On Dreams*, a shortened and more concise version of his famous book *Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud dismisses the idea that dreams are not significant: “I perceive that it is wrong to regard the dream as psychically unimportant, a purely physical process which has arisen from the activity of isolated cortical elements awakened out of sleep” (Freud 7). More so, Freud theorized that dreams do in fact carry significance in that they provide an outlet for constrained desires. In his medical practice, he helped patients understand their internal conflicts through analyzing their dreams. In his theory of wish-fulfillment, he showed how a dream could actually represent a wish to kill another human: “One of Freud’s patients was extremely resentful of his sister-in-law and used to refer to her as a dog, and dreamed of strangling a small white dog. Freud interpreted this as representing his wish to kill his sister-in-law. If the patient would

have really dreamed of killing his sister-in-law, he would have felt guilty. The unconscious mind transformed her into a dog to protect him” (McLeod). Freud developed many theories around dreams all based on analyzing the unconscious mind. McLeod writes, “The purpose of dream work is to transform the forbidden wish into a non-threatening form, thus reducing anxiety and allowing us to continue sleeping. Dream work involves the process of condensation, displacement, and secondary elaboration” (McLeod). Sometimes Freud based his theories on his own dream experiences that he frequently introduces in his book *On Dreams*. In a dream that he had while eating spinach at dinner where a Mrs. E. L put her hand on his knee at a company table, he dissected each aspect of the dream, connecting it back to his memories or small events that had happened recently in his past. Freud analyses the first aspect of the dream: “Company; at a table or table d’hote. The recollection of the slight event with which the evening of yesterday ended is at once called up. I left a small party in the company of a friend, who offered to drive me home in his cab.... The taxis always reminds me of the table d’hote” (Freud 5). As readers we see that the meaning of the dream and the significance that it may have carried is gained after it occurs, in the analysis and breakdown of the different events. “The matter yielded by an analysis of the dream stands in intimate relationship with the dream content, but this relationship is so special that I should never have been able to have inferred the new discoveries directly from the dream itself. The dream was passionless, disconnected, and unintelligible. During the time that I am unfolding the thoughts at the back of the dream I feel intense and well-grounded emotions” (Freud 6). Freud believed that dreams are a release of constrained desires - often emotional, physical, and sexual - that are repressed in human society. Through thoughtful reflection on our dreams, we can understand our internal wishes and conflicts, and come to terms

with our deepest feelings.

Carl S. Jung was a friend of Freud's who shared many of his beliefs in psychoanalysis but also developed his own theories that differed from Freud's. His ideas mainly stemmed from a simple thought: "The basic idea behind Jungian dream theory is that dreams reveal more than they conceal" (Hurd). He put less emphasis on childhood experiences and rather focused more on future aspirations. Jung did believe that dreams had a significance and that they represented activities of the unconscious, but he did not recommend intense analysis of dreams. Hurd again writes, "Jung did not believe that dreams need to be interpreted for them to perform their function. Instead, he suggested that dreams are doing the work of integrating our conscious and unconscious lives; he called this the process of *individuation*. It's easiest to think of individuation as the mind's quest for wholeness" (Hurd). Jung's approach to understanding the mind and subconscious was more spiritual rather than analytical or scientific.

A modern day interpreter following in the Jungian tradition is Dr. Steven Fox, author of *Dreams: Guide To The Soul*, 2013. Fox credits his own understanding of dreams with helping him to heal from multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks the insulation (the myelin) coating the fibers of the nervous system. This leads to nervous system problems including issues with vision, walking, balance, strength, incontinence, and vertigo. Fox's condition continued to worsen even though he took regular injections of cytoxan, a strong immune system suppressor. He became increasingly incapable and started to develop a severe infection in his left leg, leading to his hospitalization. While in the hospital he experienced an extremely vivid and real dream, almost a vision: "I dreamt that Native American medicine men were dancing around me, shaking percussion instruments that sounded like hundreds of beads

rhythmically hitting seashells all at once. They were nearly running as they danced around me with high kicks (I was a long distance runner in high school and was in karate shortly before the MC was diagnosed)” (Fox 10). After he left the hospital and his infection was treated, his vivid dream kept reappearing in his thoughts and was not something he could easily shake. In fact, he took the dream as a lesson from his subconscious. “I took the dream vision to mean that I needed to do physical activity. Specifically, the medicine men running and kicking in this very archetypal dream meant that I was supposed to engage in vigorous physical activity like I did in my long distance running and karate days” (Fox 11). He followed this interpretation and started to engage in intense physical therapy, as running felt impossible to achieve with his current health. However, he “decided to ask my dreams and subconscious to send a sign to me in a dream when it was time for me to start running. The answer came about two months later” (Fox 12). Fox experienced a similar dream to his first, where he performed an advanced flying full roundhouse Taekwondo kick. This was the sign he was waiting for. The next morning he ran for the first time in years, starting with a slow trot, expecting his legs to break from under him. However, nothing of the sort happened; he remained steady and able to place one foot after another.

Fox describes his intense vision-like dreams as “personal power archetypal images” that served as recommendations from his subconscious that were projected in his dreams. His dreams saved him from his condition and gave him strength and normal human abilities again. Fox’s ideology follows Jung’s ideas, in that dreams hold significance to our future aspirations, and Fox’s interpretation of his dreams and the tasks they told him to seek out turned his life around.

Dreams can be significant and have been very powerful to many. Chucky Leddy, a

Harvard correspondent for the Harvard Gazette, describes a similar experience of a woman, Trisha Coburn, who had an intense dream, vision like, that prompted her to ask her doctor about her health: “After Trisha Coburn’s doctor told her she was in good health, Coburn said she had a dream in which a disembodied voice told her to “look deeper.” Fearful, the 46-year-old Coburn returned to her doctor and asked him to look into the deepest part of her body: her colon. She said the skeptical doctor’s examination detected colon cancer, treatable only because it had been detected early” (Leddy). Trisha’s dream essentially changed her life. Her subconscious sparked her to take action on her health, something she would have never questioned without experiencing the dream. This powerful experience echoes back to Jung’s ideas about dreams, and what they can reflect or say about our futures. “Dreams were potentially divinely sent messages, fraught with meaning about the future, and having the potential to heal or offer solutions to life’s biggest problems” (Leddy). More than just a scientific reaction occurring in the brains, dreams carry significance and connection to ourselves and our lives, and can be so powerful that they can prompt actions that perhaps we cannot learn from the clarity of the conscious mind.

Perhaps this power and significance of dreams can be explained through another perspective that is less scientific and more spiritual. Looking through a Buddhist lens, there is a different state of “being” that the mind and body experiences when in deep meditation or a dream state that is unlike usual consciousness. It is described as a different level, a “sixth sense.” Tarab Tulku XI writes, “In the dream state, as well as in the deep meditation state, perception and cognition are united. The sense-impressions are not functionally distinct. They are not dependent on the physical sense organs, but operate directly from within the sixth-sense consciousness. That is to say, the five sense consciousnesses and the sixth-sense consciousness

operate naturally in union in the dream/meditation states of being—implying a natural basis for uniting body/mind and subject/object” (Tulku). There is a relationship between the mind and body that allows dreams to occur and this level of being to be reached. Without the balance between the two and the presence of the “sixth-sense consciousness,” dreams of such vividness and often times lucidity would not be sparked.

The absurdity and unique elements of a dream can also be explained and understood through these ideas by viewing the human body as something not so concrete. Tulku describes this as an energy body: “In the dream state and deep meditation state, we also have/are a body. However, the dream body and the body in the deep meditation state, often named the subtle body, are not of course physical nature, but are energy bodies, and have therefore the ability to go beyond the ordinary limitations and bondage of the physical body, i.e. beyond space and time fixations” (Tulku). Extending past the frames of reality opens us up to areas of the mind that we are not always in touch with when in a clear and awake state, often resulting in dreams that can contain deeper messages and meanings about ourselves, who we are, what we should do, our futures.

Generically speaking, dreams occur when the body is asleep and the mind is awake during REM sleep. However, when both the body and the mind are awake in unison, a different kind of dreaming occurs, specifically called lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming is a state of being that follows very closely Buddhist beliefs and the sixth-sense consciousness. When in a state of lucid dreaming, one has the ability to take control of a dream because of the fact that one is aware that one is dreaming. In order for lucid dreaming to occur, the awareness that a dream is taking place must come first. Following that, the dreamer has the ability to take control of the

dreaming, opening up endless possibilities within the dream. Beverly D'Urso describes a lucid dream she experienced:

...I decided to fly to the sun. I started to fly sort of superman style—faster and faster and faster, almost exponentially faster. As I got closer and closer to the sun I couldn't really see anything. I couldn't really feel my body either. But I noticed a sense of vibration and sound and light. Obviously, there was a lot of light coming from the sun, and I kind of stayed in this state which I can't really describe. So the phenomenology of lucid dreaming really is very different from the phenomenology of regular experiences. (D'Urso)

Lucid dreaming opens up a whole new realm of possibility. With different levels of being and consciousness, a dreamer can explore and experience a whole world, just within the mind. Lucid dreaming sparks a new conversation about whether dreams are meaningful and if benefits can be gained from dreams. D'Urso points out, “you learn to be in the present moment and to notice your surroundings and take in things without being sidetracked by random thoughts or the past or the future.... The importance of being in the present moment. That's what lucid dreamers have been doing all along. They are aware of the present moment with more than just their physical body, because their agency is expanded to include a higher self” (D'Urso).

To dream is one of the most unique, emotional, bizarre, beautiful and absurd human experiences known to exist, and in my opinion it is impossible to dismiss dreams as meaningless or purely scientific. It is also impossible to describe dreams as pure meaning that carry no scientific weight or provenance. And perhaps one's connections with dreams and their meaning depends on each individual, their own awareness of life, their mind - both the conscious and

unconscious, and their ability to interpret and experience it. “A Freudian will find one kind of meaning in a dream, while a Jungian will find another, and a Gestalt therapist will find still another meaning. But all would agree that there is meaning to be found, even if they may disagree as to exactly what that meaning might be. And many say each and every element of a dream - a given image or sensation, say - has significance” (Goleman).

In conclusion, while scientific theories of dreams as merely biological processes may make rational sense, there is too much evidence and unique experiences, from Fox and many others, that there is in fact meaning in dreams, sometimes life-changing meaning, if we can only open our minds to doing the work of interpreting it and finding it.

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Rubric for the Innovator Research Paper:

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Focus	There is little or no sense of argument, and the paper wanders as a result. Generalizations and inconsistencies disorient the reader.	Central question(s) and thesis statement are present but fairly obvious. Argumentative focus is not consistently maintained or suffers from generalizations. The purpose and relevance of the discussion are not consistently clear for the audience.	Writer establishes central question(s) about the topic and a clear thesis (although it could be more complex). Writer typically maintains this argumentative focus throughout the paper. The audience gets a sense of purpose and relevance, although the argumentative structure could be better defined.	Writer establishes compelling central question(s) about the topic and a clear, argumentative thesis; this argumentative focus is honed throughout the paper. Writer communicates a clear purpose, making the relevance of the argument distinct for the audience.

Content / Organization	<p>Introduction neither hooks the reader nor establishes appropriate context for the thesis. Body paragraphs are underdeveloped or lacking. Conclusion is missing or does not clearly bring closure to the paper. Transitions are incorrect or missing. Quotations are missing or are dropped into the text. Sentence structure and vocabulary are in need of serious improvement.</p>	<p>A hook is attempted, but ineffective. Context for the thesis is either thin or overdone. Body paragraphs might show some of the writer's original thinking about the topic, but they are underdeveloped or inconsistent. Conclusion basically restates the main argument but does not bring a meaningful sense of closure to the discussion or leave a lasting impression. Transitions are effective sometimes, but in other places they are incorrect or missing. Quotations are mostly dropped into the text or are not integrated smoothly. Sentence structure and vocabulary clearly need more development.</p>	<p>Introduction hooks the reader and establishes context for the thesis, although these elements could work more effectively. Body paragraphs develop the writer's thinking about the topic, but more varied patterns of development would improve the breadth and depth of the discussion. Conclusion makes clear how the central question(s) have been resolved, but could do more to add closure to the discussion and leave a lasting impression. Transitions are used effectively most of the time and most quotations are integrated smoothly into the text. Sentences tend to demonstrate sophistication in a couple of the following areas: variation, flow, creativity, mature vocabulary.</p>	<p>Introduction hooks the reader powerfully and efficiently establishes context for the thesis. Body paragraphs demonstrate breadth and depth of thought about the research topic through varied patterns of development. Conclusion is memorable, leaving the reader with a distinct sense of how the central question(s) have been resolved. Transitions link sentences and paragraphs smoothly and quotations are smoothly integrated into the text. Sentences are consistently sophisticated (varied, smooth, creative, mature vocabulary).</p>
Use of Sources	<p>Research sources are lacking or off-topic.</p> <p>Writer may string together quotations without taking time to paraphrase, comment, or analyze.</p>	<p>Research sources are fairly one-dimensional, focusing on a single perspective.</p> <p>Writer's own words are not consistently balanced with quoted material.</p>	<p>Research sources establish a couple of perspectives on the topic, but could be more thorough/varied.</p> <p>Writer does a good job of maintaining a balance of own words and quoted material.</p>	<p>Research sources are thorough and varied, establishing different perspectives on the topic.</p> <p>Writer balances own words (paraphrasing, commentary, analysis) and</p>

				quoted material compellingly.
Mechanics	Writing is seriously obscured by spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.	Writing contains many errors. Errors affect reader's understanding.	Writing contains some errors, but not at the expense of understanding.	Writing is polished, free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

See draft for comments

Grade: B-A