

A Comparative Study of Nightmares, Lucid Dreams and Archetypal Dreams as Significant to the Dreamer's Life

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This study explores when and how people perceive their dreams as significant and creative in their lives by focusing on a comparison of nightmares, lucid dreams and archetypal dreams. The selection of these three types of dream experiences was based on Hunt's theory of intensified dream forms, which is detailed in his *Multiplicity Of Dreams* (1988). He proposed that cognitive theories of how dreams are formed, specifically the linguistic-mnemonic models as proposed by Freud (1900/1955) and more recently Foulkes (1985), do not take into account the evidence of creative-imaginative elements in the formation of dreams (Globus, 1987). Hunt's (1989) research indicated that while the mnemonic model adequately accounts for "ordinary dreams", it does not sufficiently explain the formation of bizarre imagery which is remote from the memories of everyday experience. These bizarre images are particularly found in nightmares, lucid dreams and archetypal dreams. He sees these types of dreams as being formed from a more imaginative-creative capacity of the dreaming mind, and as being characterized by a heightened visual, kinesthetic and emotional experience which cannot be explained in terms of nearby memory sources.

Hunt and Spadafora's studied (cited in Hunt, 1988) were the first to compare these three types of dreams: nightmare, lucid and archetypal. They proposed that people who dream frequently in these unusual styles are more likely to be creative and imaginative, thus supporting the concept of greater creativity in these types of dreams. They compared dreamers who were selected and grouped according to predominance of dream style into nightmare, lucid, archetypal, mixed and control groups. Overall imagination was measured by imaginative absorption, thinness of mental boundaries, creative pursuits, and physiognomic cues. The findings of this study were that only the frequency of archetypal dreams, not lucid dreams or nightmares, were positively correlated with imagination.

The research presented in this paper also compares these three types of dreams in terms of their significance to waking life as perceived by the dreamer. Based on Hunt's findings which indicate greater imaginativeness in persons who tend to dream in an archetypal mode, it is hypothesized that the occasional archetypal dreams of "ordinary dreamers" (those who dream primarily in a mnemonic mode) indicate points of greater creativity and thus significance in that dreamer's life.

Method

This study involved 13 ordinary dreamers who had varying degrees of experience

with three forms of uncommon dreams: nightmares, lucid dreams, and archetypal dreams. Nine persons were recruited from a March, 1989 dream class, submitting their material after attending the eight week class. An additional four dreamers attended a similar dream class in March of 1988 and have been attending weekly meetings as an ongoing dream group since that time. Each of these subjects have attended eight weekly, two hour class sessions which are half didactic and half dream work, based on Ullman's and Zimmerman's (1979) description of group dream work. The didactic portion of the classes included descriptions of the three types of dreams, how to identify them, guidelines for interpreting them (Faraday, 1974), and suggestions on how to incubate dreams according to Delaney's (1979) method. In this sample there were three men and ten women with ages ranging from twenty to forty-nine.

Each participant was asked to fill out a six-page questionnaire concerning dream types and frequency and familiarity with meditation. They were also asked to record a recent or memorable example of each type of dream; nightmare, lucid and archetypal, and comment on the relative significance of each of these to the dreamer. In addition, they participated individually in a one-hour taped interview during which they answered the following questions for each of the three types of dreams: 1. When did the dream occur? 2. What was significant in your waking life at that time? 3. How did the dream reflect your core issues? and 4. What significance did the dream have for you? The interview was concluded with the question, "Which of these dreams is most significant and why?"

Results

There were 34 dreams reported; 12 nightmares, 11 lucid dreams and 11 archetypal dreams. There were more archetypal dream examples than I hypothesized. However, in general, subjects reported experiencing less archetypal dreams than lucid dreams or nightmares. For example, nine of the thirteen subjects reported a frequency of archetypal dreams to be less than once a year (69%). Six of the dreamers reported lucid dreams less than once a year (46%) and only four subjects reported nightmares less than once a year (30%).

Of the eleven reported archetypal dreams, seven (64%) of the subjects considered them the most significant of their dreams. Four (33%) of the twelve dreamers reporting nightmares said these were the most significant. Two persons (18%) reporting lucid dreams (15% of the total sample) considered these the most significant. Three subjects misunderstood the question of significance and listed a fourth dream; however these dreams each fell into the category of nightmares and were treated as such. In terms of the total sample, 54% cited an archetypal dream as the most significant, 31% a nightmare, and 15% a lucid dream.

Significance of Archetypal Dreams

Archetypal dreams were viewed as most significant for seven of the eleven people who reported having such dreams. When asked what made these dreams significant they were described as; changing the dreamer's life, affecting major life decisions, prompting a questioning of moral values, providing a sense of personal validation, and facilitating the setting of a feeling goal. Some specific comments on the significance of the archetypal dreams will now be pointed out.

After a nightmarish archetypal dream of confronting a grotesque monster with a Bible and being bathed in blue light that sprang from his severed head, Janet, a housewife, severely affected by her fear of death, said, "It was a turning point in my life. After that dream the fear of death was gone, absolutely, totally gone."

After a dream of flying out of a church nude, saying, "Nudity and Christ were both pure," Jim, who had been in an abusive marriage said, "It motivated and encouraged me to get a divorce. The dream convinced me of needing to feel free. Now (nine months later) my life feels lighter and easier. My personal life is on the fly."

Following dreaming of eating a pear from the Tree of Knowledge, Sharon, who was concerned about her increasing materialism, said, "It made me stop and think about where my values are."

A beautiful mandala of numinous light and colors in the sky near the moon was Pam's dream. Pam is a childhood victim of incest who is currently involved in therapy and personal growth. She commented, "Dreams like this make me feel good, like I'm on the right track. That, whatever it is I'm doing is the right thing. It validates what I'm doing."

After dreaming of a blue land, sea and sky blending beautifully and numinously, Sharon K., who is struggling in her marital relationship said, "This dream provided a very uncommon experience of alignment and satisfaction. I can now move more easily towards that as a goal."

Vivian, who struggles with her marital relationship, dreamt of a statue of the Blessed Virgin telling her that she will know what she wants to know rather than what she needs to know. "I was happy about this information and had a feeling of trust that things would be okay," commented Vivian.

After dreaming of approaching Jesus Christ on a friend's porch in spite of a friend's expectation that he wait, Bruce, a man struggling with old and new family commitments, said he "felt reassured in following my own inner directions."

These dreams were archetypal to varying degrees according to Kluger's (1975) description of archetypal characteristics. While they all had at least three of the four criteria, that is mythological parallel, heightened affect, bizarreness and remoteness from everyday life, the degree of each of these characteristics varied. For instance, the archetypal rating was high for Janet's dream. It contained three mythological elements: intense blue light streaming from a severed head, and her husband being the only element common to her everyday reality. Sharon's, on the other hand, was very low in archetypal characteristics. It contained no mythological figure, but did include a numinous feeling around the blueness, and bizarreness in the way the earth, sea and sky blended.

These experiences do offer evidence that archetypal dreams relate to broader life patterns than personal dreams. There is also a moral content to them, though not always a conventional morality. Janet experienced the Bible as her protection against fear. Sharon was warned against an increasing focus on material possessions. But, Jim was also influenced to go through with his divorce. Each reported an increase in their balance and functioning.

Another element stands out about archetypal dreams. All four of the persons in the dream group had archetypal dreams and considered them most significant. This was in spite of the fact that for much of the year that they had worked with me, I was primarily interested in lucid dreams and had done several exercises with them to incubate such dreams.

Meditation was also an element in the dream group. Brief centering exercises were done at the beginning of each of the dream groups and were not done with the class. I was afraid that this would be a confounding factor. Lucid dreaming among dream group members was rare, however, and not considered most significant.

Another interesting element about the archetypal dreams is that from this very small sample there are examples of each of the three dream types mentioned by Hunt (1989): titanic, mythological and geometric. Jim's dream of flying out of church was titanic, as it has a vivid, powerful, kinesthetic feeling of flying. This dream was transformative in his life not only in that it signaled the end of his marriage, but that it also initiated a marked change in attitude, after which he reported experiencing more independence and an ability to stand up for himself.

The mythological-type archetypal dreams, characterized by contact with symbols of the divine, were represented primarily by conventional Christian symbols. Of the eleven archetypal images, seven were Christian archetypal images of Christ (2), the Tree of Knowledge (2), the Bible (1), the Blessed Mother (1), and the Devil (1). The other four archetypal images were, light and color (2), Loch Ness Monster (1) and a mandala (1). These were all reported with numinous feelings of contact with the divine.

The third category described by Hunt is the geometric, and Pam's dream of the mandala in the sky made of lights and colors fits this description. She experienced this dream as a validation that her conscious attempts at personal and spiritual growth were in the right direction.

Shamanic Parallels

Shamanism is described by Achterberg (1985) as having three qualities: the ability to move in and out of a special state of consciousness, a notion of a guardian spirit complex and the purpose of helping others. The dreams of this study lend themselves to a comparison with shamanism. Six out of seven people who considered their archetypal dream the most important had been involved in both meditation and imagery-centered therapy for at least one year. Both of these techniques are altered states of consciousness which are moved in and out of at will.

The guardian spirit complex is expressed in dreams with a sense of connection with Christian archetypes. There is a sense of getting knowledge and power from a guardian spirit source, when the Blessed Virgin tells Vivian she will know what she wants to know. The Bible protects Janet from a monster. Bruce finds Christ approachable as a friend. Jim identifies with Christ and freedom.

The third element in ancient and modern shamanism, the purpose of helping others, is also present in these dreamers. Six people expressed interest in helping others in the physical level of healing and regeneration. Four of these people were interested in spiritual healing with imagery.¹ The emotional healing or positive attitude change is evident in the comments of the archetypal dreamers about the changes in their lives as a result of the experience of these dreams such as, "after that dream, the fear of death was gone," "my life feels lighter and easier," "I had a feeling of trust that things would be okay," and "made me stop and think what my values are." Thus, there is a strong indication of personal meaning and growth associated with these dreams.

The Significance Of Nightmares

Nightmares were the next most significant type of dream. Four of the thirteen dreamers rated them the most significant. These dreams definitely affected the dreamers even when they were not rated as most important. The dreams motivated change, prepared for the inevitable, intensified attachments, resolved emotional issues, and increased independence.

Following are some comments about nightmare significance. The first four are the comments of those that considered them most significant while the next four are comments from people who considered other types of dreams most significant.

Bonnie had a recurring nightmare "with sexual connotations that someone was going

to hurt me or my sister." These nightmares began during the stress of her pre-adolescent transition and ended the first year of her marriage. She saw these as her "most significant dreams because they motivated me to go to a seminar on dreams, where I began to learn more about dreams, spirituality and growth as a human being. Without the nightmare I never would have gone."

Sharon M. says, "My most significant dreams, which have recurred since adolescence, are the nightmares of my grandparents' deaths. I see these dreams as my mind's way of easing along the process of accepting my grandparent's mortality."

Sharon's second reported nightmare was of an intruder who came at her with a gun. She killed him by stabbing him with a kitchen knife. She felt very contaminated by the blood but Sharon saw him walk out of a pond as though he were never dead. This dream occurred as she was struggling with the pros and cons of her present relationship. She says of the dream, "It shows how I feel like a victim even if nothing's happened."

Brian's nightmare occurred during his pre-adolescent period. He dreamed of his father being attacked by a big black bear and Brian's attempts to rescue him. This dream happened about one year before the breakup of the family due to his father's alcoholism. Brian reports, "After that dream, I didn't want my father to leave me. I was the only one to stay with him after Mom divorced him."

Karen's nightmare included the drowning and body fragmentation of a peace activist and the firing of red missiles which contaminated the environment. As a psychiatric nurse she was also struggling with the difficult personality of her young son. Her comments were that it was an indication of "my love of peace and my fear of my anger."

The next four comments come from people who did not consider their nightmares to be the most significant. April's nightmare was of three men threatening bodily harm. She became lucid in this nightmare and changed the men into a handsome soap opera star, but could not keep the attacking men from returning. This dream occurs as April, a young mother, felt out of control because she got hurt when a household repair hadn't been made. She said, "It made me realize that I shouldn't wait for things to be done but I should go and do them the best I can."

Sharon K.'s nightmare, which occurred as she questioned her marriage, was an escape dream. At first she was trying to get out of her locked room, then realized that unlocking her space let scary people in, and finally she tried to escape by running in front of a raging fire. She said, "This was the most dramatic in a series of dreams dealing with anger. It was part of the work towards its recognition and resolution."

Jim's nightmare was of being accused rather than comforted when he had hurt himself. This dream occurred at the time of a work transition. His relationship with his

work partner was being recognized as a drain that was hurting more than helping him. "This dream showed me I can look to myself to take care of me, not depend on someone else to rescue me."

Clare's nightmare was of trying to help her family escape from an exploding house. This dream occurred during pre-adolescence and just before the family moved from England to America. She said, "I didn't realize how much my family meant to me."

The nightmares, in general, were consistently related to stressful transition periods in the dreamer's life. Three of these were recurring nightmares that started at the stressful transition of pre-adolescence. Each of these concerned the family's conflicting messages about sexuality, alcoholism and death. They served to reinforce certain bonds, perhaps in a thinly bounded, enmeshed way. Bonnie bonded to her sister, Sharon to her grandparents and Brian to his father. Clare's dream was not recurring but it happened at the same period, pre-adolescence, and reinforced the bond with her whole family. The other five were adult transitions. April and Karen experienced transitions in motherhood. Sharon K. and Janet had transitions in marriage while Jim was in a work transition.

Bodily harm to the self or others was threatened or implied in each of the nightmares. The pre-adolescent nightmares tended to contain threats to others while reinforcing the bonds to the person threatened in the dreams. Adult nightmares in relationship to the transitions of marriage, motherhood and work, tended to depict threats to the self and most often encouraged independence. This is in contrast to the pre-adolescents' which encouraged increased dependence.

It is also interesting that symbols of anger were relatively frequent in these nightmares. Clare dreamed an explosion injured her family. Sharon was chased by fire and Karen was attacked by red missiles. I would suspect from these images that their own emotions were the primary sources of their stress in these dreams.²

Coincidentally, even though these women didn't know each other, they responded similarly. They had both experienced schizophrenia in their family, were currently working as nurses, offered a fourth dream as most significant and had images of bodily fragmentation and contamination in the dream they reported as a nightmare. These fourth dreams fit into the nightmare category because the dreamers woke with the intense emotion of sadness. The dreams each of them shared as a nightmare, (not as most significant) contained images of bodily fragmentation (body parts torn or cut) and transformation (from dead to live). They also expressed concern about contamination (from missiles or blood) in these dreams. These elements were not present in the other nightmares. This corresponds to the hypothesis that nightmares may be related to schizophrenia (Hartmann, 1984). However, both of these people were also nurses, and

functioning well in a healing profession. Thus it also appears that these signal the initial states of growth for healing themselves and others.

Unlike Hartmann's study (1984), none of these dreamers had nightmares more than four times a year. The occasional adult nightmare appears, from these reports, to move the person towards greater independence and individuation.

To return to the shamanic theme, those individuals who showed the characteristics of the shaman were familiar with their images, active in a healing profession and concerned with the world (i. e. political contamination -red missiles and AIDS contamination- blood).

The Significance of Lucid Dreams

Only two of the eleven subjects who had lucid dreams considered them most significant. The values cited as significant were power, control, personal growth and self-reflection. Although adventure was present in these accounts, it was not mentioned as significant. Here are some participants' comments on the significance of these types of dreams.

Clare described an experience of "waking in my head while my body remained asleep. I felt that all of my energy was in my head and I was almost detached from my body." This experience occurred at a time when Clare was struggling for a sense of control in her life as she worked a physically demanding job, was a full time student and was having a reaction to birth control pills. She was using meditation before sleep to help her deal with insomnia. She described this as her most significant dream because, "it showed me the power of my mind or my spirit."

April considered her lucid dream the most important because, "In the dream I was in control and I can be in control in waking life, also." In this dream she flew, taking off from her parent's driveway, flapped her arms to maintain her altitude and finally landed gently on her feet. This dream occurred as her infant daughter was put on a schedule. Thus April felt her ability to plan and control her own life.

Now to turn to the comments of those who did not consider their lucid dreams to be most significant. Kathy's lucid dream started as she looked down a deep abyss populated by amusing creatures. She realized she was lucid, began to fly or float over the abyss and finally skidded into her bed, knocking over her pen. She interpreted knocking over the pen as her dream encouraging her to write down her dreams. Kathy is a professional weaver and is just beginning to study her dreams. Her comments on the significance of this dream is, "It's possible to be aware and change things and do what I want to do. But I can do what I want to do anyway. What was most interesting about this dream was that it indicated the need to write it down."

In Bonnie's lucid dream she is chased by a shadow in the financial district of New York City. As she turns and faces it, the shadow becomes a friendly, helpful group of oriental men. In this bizarre transformation, she recognizes a lucid dream, and her excitement woke her up. At the time of this dream, he was in an unsatisfying job and felt pursued by money fears. She felt this dream helped her to face her fears and see her choices. She said, "It was the first time I had a lucid dream. I felt it was a positive step in personal growth to confront and take control."

Karen, a psychiatric nurse, had a lucid dream in which she was having a hard time getting observation checks done on patients. She was concerned about patient safety and then realized that it was "just a dream." This dream occurred as she began a new job and a busier shift. Her comment was, "It is an attempt to detach from worry."

Sharon M. had a lucid dream where she found herself floating down a store aisle. She then recognized she was dreaming and knew she could buy anything she wanted. Her excitement woke her up. This dream occurred as she was changing her spending habits and establishing a budget. She said, "It made me want to have more lucid dreams because it didn't influence my spending but had a nice feeling. It's an incredible feeling of power and you don't have to worry about the money. Money to me means freedom."

Jim's lucid dream was of a sexual encounter in which a faceless man interfered. Jim recognized it was a dream and said to the intruder, "This is my dream. This woman is mine. You may leave." Of this lucid dream he said, "This is the first dream I stood up for myself. It didn't make a difference that day but has over time."

Pam dreamed she was in a hallway, recognized she was in a dream, but thinks it is someone else's dream. She seeks the real dreamer, only to find it is her companion who has lied to her. This realization transforms him into something dangerous and evil. This dream occurred at a time of questioning her incest memories and relationship with her current partner. About this dream Pam says, "It's questioning what's real and what's a dream. 'Am I valid in feeling this anger and frustration in what's going on around me? Or is it all just stupid shit in my head?' It's more a matter of self reflection than control."

All of these dreams were pre-lucid in the using of the definition for lucidity of dream awareness and control because while the dream state was recognized, control was not exerted and they were awakened by the realization that the dreams were lucid (Bonnie, Karen, Sharon, Vivian).

There were seven ordinary lucid dreams. In each, some change or control was initiated by the dreamer without interrupting the dream (Brian, Clare, April, Kathy, Janet, Jim, Pam). Six of the eleven had some negative emotions and no one described any

numinous emotion in these lucid dreams, although several of these same dreamers described numinous feelings in their archetypal dreams.

Most of the comments on the significance of the lucid dreams dealt with control and power. This echoes Castenada's (1972) statement in *Journey to Ixtlan*, "In dreaming, you can control whatever you want." Eight people's comments made some reference to control (Brian, Clare, April, Kathy, Bonnie, Sharon, Janet, Jim). I suspect the emphasis on control and power is related to individual questioning of personal power. It could be a need to manage and control something in the dreamer's life at a time of change. The two persons who listed lucid dreams as the most significant considered control very important.

Lucid dreaming could also occur in response to the growth toward a more flexible attitude and willingness to try new choices in response to recurring problems. The change seems to entail a movement from the helplessness of seeing oneself as a victim of circumstance to the sense of being in control and capable of self direction. Seven people's comments could be construed in the light of an attitude change in the direction of personal growth and freedom. This would correspond to Faraday's (1974) belief that, "ordinary lucidity indicates steps on the way to liberation". Karen, Sharon M. and Bonnie described the effect of their lucid dream as a relief from feeling they were victims of worry. Bonnie changed her attitude concerning her job search and financial worries. Sharon changed her attitude about spending. Karen changed her attitude toward work concerns. Jim and Pam's dreams signified a change in attitude toward greater self-validation versus dependence on validation by others. Jim changed in terms of sexual satisfaction and Pam in terms of personal reality.

Fox's (1962) perspective that lucid dreams reflect growth in critical self-reflection is also present in seven of the eleven dreams of this sample. However, only one person (Pam), indicated that this self-reflection was significant. There were also four responses that correspond to Garfield's (1974) perception of lucid dreaming and adventure: Kathy's experience of flying over the abyss, Sharon shopping without spending, and Brian and April's experience of flying in their yards. While the characteristic was present, no one indicated that this element was significant. This common lucid theme of flying is again reminiscent of the sense of freedom and control associated with lucid dreams, which is in contrast to the theme of anger (fire and explosion) in the nightmares.

Previous research has indicated (Gackenbach, Cranson, & Alexander, 1987; Gackenbach and Bosveld, 1989; Hunt and McLeod, 1984) that there is a connection between lucid dreams and meditation. Those that considered lucid dreams most significant expressed interest in and experience with meditation. April expressed a "moderate interest and some experience" and Clare indicated "high interest and no experience." Interestingly, Clare reported that she was actively using meditation for insomnia at the time the significant lucid dream occurred. However, the lucid dreamers

who indicated the most interest in meditation also had archetypal dreams and considered them the most significant. As far as effort or training, the participants from the dream class recognized or incubated lucid dreams more easily than those in the dream group. While lucid dreamers in both groups found the lucid dreams interesting, they did not all rate them as most significant.

Perhaps the spiritual disciplines of both Buddhism and Shamanism use meditation and lucid dreaming as training for controlled access to altered states of consciousness and the realms of the imagination that are used for the healing of selves and others. There is also evidence herein that meditation and lucid dreaming enhance the ability to break out of old, self-destructive patterns by increasing freedom of choice in dreaming and waking "realities". Thus, lucid dreams may be one of the ways in which discipline and control can be taught in altered or shamanic states of consciousness.

Conclusion

As expected, these research conclusions are limited by the small number of research participants, which were primarily from a white, middle class, suburban population. Although there was a mixture of sexes and ages, the small number makes this study valuable primarily as a pilot project.

The archetypal dreams were valued as the most significant. Although they were frequent enough to be reported, they were reported as occurring less frequently than the other two dream types. Nightmares and lucid dreams were seen as significant but to a lesser extent.

What was claimed to be most significant for the archetypal dreamer was the positive life-changing effect and the experience of personal validation experienced through these dreams. Those that most valued their nightmares had somewhat conflicting statements of significance. Some claimed they motivated change, others, that they prepared them for the inevitable. Some found they intensified attachments, others found they increased independence. The qualities of the lucid dreams that were most valued as significant were their sense of power and control resulting in personal growth.

It is also possible to conceptualize nightmares, lucid dreams and archetypal dreams in a shamanic context. These dreamers, especially the archetypal, expressed some level of skill in altered states by means of meditation and therapy, had numinous connections with the divine as dream encounters with Christian "mythological" figures and expressed some level of healing in waking life. Nightmares can be conceptualized in a shamanic mode most when they contained images of body fragmentation and transformation which are comparable to shamanic initiations, while the lucid dream association is found in controlled journeying in altered states.

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¹ Two of these are nurses

² Of the four people who considered nightmares their most significant dream, two have a genetic connection to schizophrenia which was divulged without being solicited. Sharon M.'s father and Karen's brother were diagnosed schizophrenics.