

Extra Credit: DREAM REPORTS (1 point)

The most interesting way to study dreams is to keep track of your own and see what, if anything, they seem to say about you. First, how do you recall a dream? Many people can do this with no difficulty. If you are such a person, write down an interesting dream according to the instructions below. Other people wake up every morning without recalling dreams, even though we know from laboratory studies that everyone dreams several times a night. If you are this kind of person, you'll have to work hard to capture a dream. One thing that helps is to tell yourself before you fall asleep that you will remember a dream, and that if necessary you will wake up to record it when it happens. Another trick is to place a pen and pad of paper so you can jot down dreams as soon as they occur. (You'll need a light or flashlight near the bed.) You might also use a small tape recorder. Try not to move much physically as soon as you awaken; just reach over for your notebook and start writing. Moving a lot tends to make the dream dissipate from consciousness. Finally, if these efforts aren't sufficient, you can set your alarm an hour or so early and tell yourself that when the alarm goes off you will notice what you've been dreaming and write it down (or tape-record it). (The most memorable dreams tend to occur late in the sleep period, perhaps because you are partially awake then and able to hold the dream in short-term memory.)

Now, assuming you've managed to recall a dream, here's how to report it for this assignment. Please follow these instructions carefully. (1) Describe the dream itself, just as it happened, in a column running down the center of the page (see examples below). Initially you will scribble your dreams on a notepad. Later, I want you to **type** out your dreams (especially if you would like my comments on your dream). (2) Draw a line from every image, phrase, or sentence that means something to you (e.g., it's something that really happened to you recently, it's a scene from childhood, it's a place you once visited, it's something your father used to tell you). In the margin, at the end of each such line, write neatly what you know about this component of the dream (see examples). (3) At the end of the report, type what you think the dream as a whole means (if anything; it's fine to say it doesn't mean anything if you honestly can't see a meaning in it). If you have questions about the dream, include those as well and we will attempt to answer them. (4) Indicate at the very end whether: (a) you do not want me to mention this dream in class (some later class, not this semester's class) or (b) you don't mind if I discuss it (let me know if you also want me to change any names and places that might be mentioned in your dream to make it even less identifiable as yours).

What if you simply can't recall a single dream during the next several weeks--something that happens to a few students in every class where I assign this exercise? I don't want you to admit defeat until you're absolutely sure you can't remember a dream, but if you really can't, you are obviously allowed to skip this exercise (because it is extra credit).

Example 1:

In the dream I was being chased by a horrible, evil-looking man with piercing red eyes. I jumped in my car, but he kept chasing me and sometimes was in front of the car and sometimes grabbing me from the back seat. While I was speeding along, I saw a guy sitting on the curb smiling--a guy from my high school, the scum of the earth, someone I hated (and still hate). While the monster man with the piercing red eyes was in front of the car, I drove back and forth over him, trying to kill him. But each time I thought he was dead, he came back to life and continued to torment me.

they were really red & scary!

he seemed to regrow his arms & legs

Dreamer's Interpretation. I'm not sure what this was about. I often have nightmares in which I am chased or my life is in danger. The guy from my high school is someone I haven't seen or thought about for ages. He had red hair, which might be related to the monster-man's red eyes. (That's the only connection I see between the two characters.) When I woke up, I was sweaty and tense and still wanting to kill the red-eyed man. The feeling may have something to do with my current situation. I am forced by lack of money to live with my divorced sister and her bratty children while I go to college. The kids keep getting into my drawers, reading my diary (which includes details about my sex life), and stealing my dope. I have sometimes felt that I would like to kill them.

My Comments. This young woman worked for me as a research assistant for two years. Over time she felt more and more comfortable talking about her personal life. One day, when I asked if I could use her dream report in class, she mentioned that she now remembered that the red-haired guy from high school was the leader of a group of boys who used to harass her--for example, by getting into her desk when she was at lunch, destroying her art work, etc. (She is, and probably was then, a talented artist.) Her sister's children made her feel the same way--intruding into her private space, destroying what she valued, etc. Thus, the dream seemed to pull together current and past feelings. Finally, many months later when we were talking about rape in one of my classes, she remembered (or first became willing to say) that the high school guys had not only invaded her desk but also gang raped her! (The earlier phrase, "getting into my drawers," might have been a hint at this, since it can mean "getting into my pants.") Thus, the dream may have had several parallel levels of meaning: the manifest or surface content (the monster-man story), the battle with her niece and nephew, the battle with her high school harassers, who invaded her desk and her body. This is a good example of the way Sigmund Freud unraveled the meaning of neurotic symptoms and ordinary dreams. No doubt, not all dreams are this significant, and even if one of yours is, it might take us a long time to understand it. Still, the example gives you something to shoot for: Try to pay attention between images, to figures of speech, etc.

Example 2:

*I was
trying to
sit
both
ways*

My boyfriend and I were going up the chairlift at Breckenridge (a ski area in Colorado). I kept straddling the seat in funny ways, doing all kinds of things that would make it hard to get off at the top. When we got to the top, we had to swim up from the bottom of a pool of water toward the top. On top there were all kinds of people gathered. I was scared to death for some reason; I wanted to turn back. But they all said they'd "been through it" and there was no problem. Then I noticed that on the diving board was a naked person with lots of electrodes attached to his body. He was about to dive in and be electrocuted. I became even more terrified, but my boyfriend said not to worry, he would protect me. As the person on the diving board prepared to jump, I heard the sounds of machine gun fire and woke up crying.

Dreamer's Comments. We really did go to Breckenridge to go skiing, so that part of the dream was fairly real, although I hadn't tried to straddle the seat! We went swimming there too, at a hotel. The rest of the dream has something to do with the following facts: (1) Before falling asleep I was reading in Time magazine about terrorists in the Middle East. That's where the images of torture and machine guns probably came from. (2) Yesterday evening my boyfriend and I were talking--again--about getting married after he graduates this year. I am very reluctant to do that, but he keeps trying to push me. In the dream I was afraid, and my boyfriend was saying there's nothing to be afraid of.

My comments. This student, a college junior when she had the dream, did a pretty good job of analyzing it, but she could have seen and said even more. She "straddles" her seat in the chairlift; "straddling the fence" is a common image for not wanting to make a difficult decision or commitment (in this case, between marriage and break-up). The people around the pool are like married friends and family members who say, "Come on! We're married and it's not so bad. What are you afraid of?" (She confirmed, when I talked with her later, that people had actually been saying things like that to her.) The person on the diving board ("naked"--and defenseless?) suggests another figure of speech which provides a clue to the dream's meaning: "about to take the plunge." Freud and other psychoanalysts have found many such figures of speech lying behind dream images. It's as if each of us is a poet in our dreams. In this young woman's dream the person who is about to take the plunge is diving to a horrible death, suggesting what the dreamer (or at least one part of her mind) thinks about getting married (to this particular guy, at this particular time). Careful discussion of this dream made the dreamer more aware of her ambivalence concerning marriage, and she eventually told her boyfriend to forget it.

Don't be surprised if your dreams aren't this "heavy." I've deliberately used some exceptionally important examples. Most dreams are less significant and less revealing than these. Still, I suspect that even dreams that seem trivial mean something, and I would like you to look into the matter personally. Talk to me if you're having difficulty.

Label and attach your dream reports to this packet of materials. Reports are due with all the other extra-credit materials (last day of class).