

Dream Content and Political Ideology

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This pilot study focuses on the relationship of dream content and political ideology in a contemporary U.S. context. The study involved 56 people, 28 (14 male and 14 female) who identified themselves as members of the political right and 28 (14 male and 14 female) who identified themselves as members of the political left. "Most recent dream" reports from these subjects were analyzed using Hall and Van de Castle content analysis categories. Following that quantitative analysis, each dream was analyzed in terms of its narrative qualities (themes, images, emotional patterns, etc.). Although the small size of the study makes it impossible to offer definitive interpretations, the findings are suggestive: people on the political right had more nightmares, more dreams in which they lacked personal power, and a greater frequency of "lifelike" dreams; people on the political left had fewer nightmares, more dreams in which they had personal power, and a greater frequency of good fortunes and bizarre elements in their dreams. These findings have plausible correlations to certain features of the political ideologies of people on the left and the right, and merit future investigation in larger-scale studies.

KEY WORDS: dream content; political ideology; political right; political left.

Over the past several decades a large body of research has developed in which correlations are identified between dream content and variables such as age, gender, psychological boundaries, and various forms of psychopathology (i). However, few investigators have looked at possible connections between dream content and elements of the dreamer's culture. A small research literature does exist in which dream content from people of different ethnic and/or national identities are analyzed and compared (ii). Unfortunately these studies are flawed by serious methodological and conceptual problems. In terms of methodology, the reliance on quantitative content analysis alone neglects the linguistic conventions, narrative patterns, and moral traditions that distinguish the waking and dreaming lives of people from different cultural groups (iii). In terms of conceptualization, most cross-cultural dream research uses an overly broad and simplistic notion of cultural identity. Such generalized categories as "nationality" and "ethnicity" make it difficult to identify with any reliability meaningful patterns correlating dream content with particular aspects of the dreamer's culture.

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The effort to discover such patterns between dream content and culture remains worthwhile, however. Major psychological theorists have long emphasized the vital importance of social and cultural influences on the psychological development of the individual (iv). In this view, human nature and human development across the life span are best understood, indeed can only *be* understood, in terms of a dynamic interplay between the individual and his or her cultural environment. Several prominent cross-cultural psychologists and psychological anthropologists have emphasized this same point by describing the deeply mutual influence of psychological development and cultural context in a variety of regions outside North America and Western Europe (v). When this point about the powerful influence of culture on individual development is combined with the strong evidence that dream content is continuous with the waking life conceptions and concerns of the dreamer (vi), a good justification is provided for fresh attempts to identify meaningful correlations between dream content and culture.

The present study represents a first effort to investigate the relationship of dream content and political ideology in a contemporary United States context. Political ideology is an appealing cultural variable to study for several reasons. First, most people are easily able to describe where they stand in the contemporary political landscape. This makes it relatively simple to distinguish different cultural groups for the purposes of comparative analysis of dream content. Second, a number of people feel great emotional intensity about their chosen political causes. For such people their political affiliation is a major element in their psychological identity, their sense of *who they are*. This increases the likelihood that political ideology as a cultural variable will have a discernible presence in dream content, particularly in the dreams of people who profess a strong adherence to a particular political party or ideological point of view.

The third reason why political ideology is an interesting cultural factor to study in dream content is that it holds the promise of opening new ways of looking at the world of contemporary politics. In the aftermath of the 2000 U.S. Presidential campaign, in which the Republican George W. Bush defeated the Democrat Al Gore in a extremely controversial and bitterly contested election, it seems relevant to explore the question of why the members of the country's two major political organizations are so profoundly divided against each other. The angry, mutually scornful arguments between leading Republicans and Democrats indicate that the differences between the two political groups go much deeper than public policy and ultimately touch on issues that are psychological and even existential in nature. The present study represents a first step in the investigation of dream content as a possible means of identifying and understanding those deeper-lying differences between liberals and conservatives. Seen in this light, the study offers a dream-oriented contribution to cultural criticism, political philosophy, and the psychology of belief.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study involved a total of 56 people, 28 (14 male and 14 female) who identified themselves as members of the political right and 28 (14 male and 14 female) who identified themselves as members of the political left. The dreams were gathered using a "most recent dream" survey form (vii) in conjunction with a survey asking several questions about the individual's political beliefs. The subjects were students at several different U.S. colleges.

All of the subjects were in their late teens or twenties (mean age 20.9 years). The 56 dreams analyzed here represent a selection from a larger set of more than 400 most recent dream reports I have gathered since 1996. The majority of the college students filling out these reports did not claim a strong affiliation with any political ideology. This is perhaps to be expected, given the generally low interest U.S. college students have in politics. However, a significant number of the students filling out the dream and political beliefs survey did express a definite attachment to a particular political ideology, and these were the reports used for the present study. Respondents who said they were registered Republicans, considered themselves conservative, favored the Republican candidates in the recent Presidential election (Bob Dole in 1996, George W. Bush in 2000), and expressed disfavor toward the Democrats were identified as belonging to the political right, and respondents who said they were registered Democrats, considered themselves liberal, voted for the Democratic candidate in the recent Presidential election (Bill Clinton in 1996, Al Gore in 2000), and expressed disfavor toward the Republicans were identified as belonging to the political left.

Out of the more than 400 reports I have gathered to date, the largest number of these "politically active" subjects were women on the political left; the smallest number were men on the political right. This itself is an interesting finding, and it underscores the difficulty dream researchers often experience in recruiting male subjects from college student populations. Because many studies in the dream research literature draw their data from college students, this sampling bias towards the female left may have an important influence on the findings of those studies. If it is true, as I suspect it is, that most dream researchers are themselves members of the political left, this prejudicial influence may regularly go unnoticed and unappreciated.

For the present study I took the total number of male rights, 14, and randomly chose an equal number of dream reports from the other three groups, yielding a total set of 56 dreams. These dreams were coded using the Hall and Van de Castle content analysis categories for characters, social interactions, emotions, settings, misfortunes, and good fortunes (the latter using a newly modified six-point scale I am developing in coordination with Bill Domhoff). Each dream was coded by myself and one or two additional researchers who were blind to the political affiliation of the dreamers and the overall purpose of the study. Following that quantitative analysis, each dream was analyzed in terms of its narrative qualities. Thematic similarities and contrasts were identified in the dreams of the two groups, and these similarities and contrasts were related on one hand to the content analysis findings and on the other to the major ideological principles affirmed by members of the left and right in contemporary U.S. politics.

The limitations to this study are significant. The sample size is small, making it impossible to derive any firm conclusions from the data. No further information was gathered from the subjects on such issues as dream recall, personality characteristics, or psychological boundaries, making it impossible to connect the present findings to research on those topics. Most contemporary college students have little involvement with or interest in politics, so as a group they may not be a good indicator of political attitudes in other age groups. Although I myself am not an exclusive partisan on either side (I was born in a Republican family, but now usually vote Democratic, although I like many ideas of the Libertarians and also the Greens), my personal political beliefs undoubtedly constrain my analysis and influence my interpretations. For these reasons, the following results are best

understood as suggesting *possible* correlations that can only be validated by future research drawing on much larger and demographically representative sets of dream reports.

CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

The major points of interest in these findings (see Tables I and II) are:

- On the male/female character percent, people on the left were more likely to have females as characters in their dreams, while people on the right dreamed twice as much about male characters as about female characters.
- People on the left had fewer familiar characters, fewer friends, more family members, and fewer animals; people on the right had more familiar characters, more friends, fewer family members, and more animals.
- People on the left were less often the initiator of aggressive interactions in their dreams, and their aggression was less physical in nature; people on the right were more often the aggressors in their dreams, and their aggression was more often physical.
- People on the left had a greater number of dreams involving friendliness and good fortune, and fewer dreams involving misfortune; people on the right had a greater number of dreams with misfortunes, and fewer dreams with friendliness and good fortune.

The most distinctive features in terms of gender differences between and within the ideological groups can be summarized as follows:

- Male rights had the lowest percentage of family members and instances of sexuality, and the highest percentage of animal characters and being the aggressor.
- Male lefts had the highest frequency of female characters, and the fewest instances of aggression.

Table I. Female Dreams (All Numbers are Percents)

	Female left	<i>h</i> vs. Female norms	Female right	<i>h</i> vs. Female norms
Characters				
Male/female	63	+.31	65	+.35
Familiarity	68	+.19	75	+.35
Friends	30	-.14	43	+.12
Family	33	+.30	28	+.19
Dead/imaginary	0	-.19	0	-.19
Animal	0	-.41	5	+.02
Social interactions				
Befriender	47	0	47	0
Aggressor	0	-1.22	50	+.35
Physical agg.	56	+.44	80	+.97
Settings				
Indoor	78	+.36	75	+.30
Familiar	73	-.14	82	+.08
Dreams with at least one:				
Aggression	43	-.03	43	-.03
Friendliness	86	+.95	71	+.60
Sexuality	7	+.16	14	+.39
Misfortune	29	-.10	36	+.05
Good fortune	50	+1.09	14	+.30

Table II. Male Dreams (All Numbers are Percents)

	Male left	<i>h</i> vs. Male norms	Male right	<i>h</i> vs. Female norms
Characters				
Male/female	33	-.69	67	-.01
Familiarity	44	-.02	53	+.15
Friends	37	+.12	53	+.44
Family	7	-.15	0	-.70
Dead/imaginary	3	+.26	0	-.12
Animal	7	+.04	13	+.24
Social interactions				
Befriender	63	+.25	63	+.25
Aggressor	50	+.21	67	+.55
Physical agg.	44	-.11	50	0
Settings				
Indoor	53	+.08	67	+.37
Familiar	70	+.18	67	+.11
Dreams with at least one:				
Aggression	29	-.38	36	-.23
Friendliness	43	+.09	36	-.05
Sexuality	7	-.15	0	-.70
Misfortune	43	+.14	50	+.28
Good fortune	29	+.63	7	+.05

Note. The "*h*" statistic measures the magnitude of the percentage differences between the dreams in this sample and the Hall and Van de Castle norm dreams. If the *h* is 0, that means the dreams in this sample are identical to the norm dreams on that particular content item. If the *h* is positive, that means the dreams in this sample have more instances of the particular content item than do the norm dreams; if the *h* is negative, the dreams in this sample have fewer instances of the particular content item than do the norm dreams. For more information on this form of statistical analysis, go to www.dreamresearch.net.

- Female lefts had the lowest percentage of being the aggressor in their dreams, and the highest frequency of friendliness and good fortunes.
- Female rights had the highest frequency of sexual interactions and physical aggression.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The most interesting differences between the two ideological groups emerge in a narrative analysis that is guided by the quantitative findings of content analysis. In a study like this, with a relatively small number of subjects, the statistical frequencies produced by content analysis are likely to be skewed and qualified by various factors. Let me emphasize again that I present the findings of this study *not* as definitive facts but rather as suggestive indications of the influence of cultural ideology on dream content. Indeed, I do not believe that quantitative analysis of dream content, no matter how large the sample size, is sufficient for a full understanding of the relationship between dreaming and culture. This points to the broader methodological aim of my study, which is to illustrate the fruitfulness of combining quantitative and qualitative modes of investigation. The statistics presented above are important, but they do not by themselves tell the full story—attention to the actual dreams themselves, to their images, themes, and narrative patterns, is absolutely necessary. What follows is a qualitative analysis of the dream reports that is guided, enhanced, and disciplined by the content analysis data. Although my specific focus is on dreams and political ideology, I hope researchers interested in other topics relating to culture will consider adopting this kind of dual methodological approach in their work (viii).

Pregnant/Caring for Children

FL 8 Taking care of her young niece

FL 11 Blissful pregnancy

FR 5 Spoiled baby→kitten

FR 12 Unwanted baby, but no abortion

FR 13 Pregnant again, and disappointed

[Note: the full text of these and all the other dreams used in this study can be found at www.kellybulkeley.com.]

The fact of young women having dreams of pregnancy and caring for children makes good sense in terms of their place in the human life cycle, and also in terms anticipatory function of certain dreams (ix). Becoming pregnant and raising children is a major life cycle event, and several studies have detailed the role of dreaming in connection with pregnancy, birth, and childrearing (x). The occurrence of so many dreams with this specific theme indicates its salience as a concern in the waking lives of these young women. None of the male subjects had dreams involving the care of children, which may highlight the widespread imbalance between women and men in terms of responsibility for childrearing. I would venture to say that most young women are keenly aware of this societal imbalance; if so, then such awareness would very likely contribute to the feelings and images in their dreams about having a child.

Looking first at the two dreams of the female lefts, "Taking care of her young niece" is the most detached, benign and, emotionally moderate of the five pregnancy and child caring dreams. The dreamer takes care of a young niece (in all four other dreams the child is the dreamer's own), and although she experiences some difficulties and minor misfortunes, the unpleasant feelings are never felt as threatening or overwhelming. "Blissful pregnancy" is a strikingly positive dream, indeed a truly transcendental experience of the supreme *goodness* of pregnancy.

The three dreams of the female rights are all negatively toned and include misfortunes, sadness, and criticism towards self and others. In "Unwanted baby, but no abortion" the dreamer feels hopeless about an unwanted pregnancy, and she struggles with her beliefs about abortion being wrong. The dreamer of "Pregnant again, and disappointed" was evidently pregnant once before in waking life, and in her dream she finds herself pregnant again out of wedlock, which results in feelings of deep disappointment. "Spoiled baby→kitten" is not as sharply negative as these two, but the dreamer is critical towards her unexpected child and feels no particular sense of alarm or concern when the child suddenly turns into a kitten.

One of the most passionate public policy differences between people on the political right and left regards the legality of abortion. People on the right call themselves "pro-life"; they affirm the fully human status of a fetus and they denounce abortion as murder of the innocent. People on the left call themselves "pro-choice"; they affirm a woman's right to control her own body and they denounce the patriarchal oppressors who seek to deny that right. Looking at the five pregnancy and childcare dreams in this political context, it is immediately striking that in "Unwanted baby, but no abortion" the (female right) dreamer reflects *within the dream* on her opposition to abortion. The dream gives this young woman an *experience* of what it would be like to be unexpectedly pregnant, and it makes her face the emotional dimensions of her moral belief that abortion is wrong. The unsettling effect

of the dream is indicated by the dreamer's closing comment that she felt relieved to wake up. We do not know if the dream had any specific effect on this young woman's waking life political views, whether it confirmed her opposition to abortion or changed her mind on the issue. In either case, it is plausible to suggest that the dream provoked a new sense of emotional actuality and experiential immediacy to her future thinking about whether abortion is right or wrong.

It is also plausible to suggest that the dreamers of the extremely negative "Pregnant again, and disappointed" (from a female right) and extremely positive "Blissful pregnancy" (from a female left) were strongly impacted by their dreams (xi). "Pregnant again, and disappointed" has several elements which relate it to other nightmarish-type dreams that evidently serve a kind of psychological warning function in people's lives (xii). Dreams of this type provide the dreamers with a frighteningly vivid experience of what they do *not* want to happen, with the consequence that the dreamers become much more vigilant in waking life toward whatever threatened them in their dreams. By contrast, "Blissful pregnancy" seems to offer the dreamer extremely powerful encouragement to *become* pregnant, giving her a spiritually toned experience so tremendously joyful that the young woman can hardly convey it in words. She finishes her survey report by saying, "I have to emphasize the calm and contentment, the overwhelming love I have for this child welling up within me." It is easy to postulate a strong Darwinian value for extremely positive and intensely memorable dreams of this specific type. Any species in which the females regularly experienced such stimulating imaginative anticipations of the deep existential pleasure of bearing a new life would be a very fertile and prosperous species indeed.

An evolutionary perspective may also cast some light on an interesting feature of the third female right dream, "Spoiled baby→kitten." At the beginning of this dream the young woman has an unexpected baby, which later turns into a kitten; then the dreamer is surrounded by fish with bulging eyeballs, and when the dream finally ends she says "I remember waking up with the smell of salt water and fish." What is intriguing here is that this sequence *reverses* the chronological evolution of life, which has proceeded from the ocean, to fish, to mammals, and then to humans. If this dreamer (like the other female rights) is anxious about the possibility of becoming pregnant and having a child, her dream could be seen as a symbolic repudiation of the procreative process and an expression of the desire *not* to have a child right now—although the smell of salt water and fish the young woman experiences upon waking (a very unusual type of carry-over phenomenon) could well be an even deeper symbolic *affirmation* of the procreative process.

The Murder of Family Members

FL 1 Cook kills her mother

FR 1 Her policeman father is killed

FR 6 Burglar kills her father

FR 9 She kills her brother

Staying with the women's dreams for a moment, I would like to consider another small set of dreams sharing a distinctive narrative theme, in this case the murder of a family member. This theme is almost surely related at one level to the developmental challenges facing most young adults when they go to college. For many people in their teens and early

twenties, college represents a dramatic detachment from their immediate families. They may be living on their own for the first time, in a place far from their family's home, meeting new people and learning many new things about the world. Such an experience naturally generates a significant degree of anxiety, and this anxiety just as naturally expresses itself in vividly frightening dreams. From a developmental psychology perspective, a dream of the death of a parent or sibling would be an especially shocking, but still understandable, metaphorical expression of the dreamer's fear that going away to college will cause the "death" of his or her traditional family relations.

The prominence of this type of dream would be anticipated by Freud, who devotes a key section in Chapter 5 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* to "Dreams of the death of persons of whom the dreamer is fond (xiii)." (This section is where Freud first lays out his theory of the Oedipus complex.) Freud explains these dreams as products of deeply repressed feelings of sibling rivalry and oedipal tension that are present in all families. I do not have the associations to legitimize any psychoanalytic interpretations of these dreams, but I do find Freud's basic idea helpful in focusing attention on the complex emotional crosscurrents inherent in almost any family constellation. This ambivalence is particularly clear in "She kills her brother," where the female right dreamer is attacked by her brother, kills him in self-defense, and then cries desperately when she realizes he's really dead. It is hard to imagine a better dream illustration of Freud's comments about sibling rivalry than this. "Her policeman father is killed" and "Burglar kills her father" both involve the murder of the dreamer's father and consequent feelings of overwhelming grief and sadness. If we follow Freud's thinking here, several questions arise. Do nightmares like this reflect an outburst of heartfelt concern about the welfare of the dreamer's father, an emotional upsurge that couldn't be moderated and contained by ordinary dream mechanisms? Or do such dreams reflect the dreamer's deeply frightening desire to *do away* with her father, so she can go off to school and perhaps find a husband who will replace him? Could the nightmares reflect *both* of these psychological forces, and perhaps many others besides? The only way to answer these questions with any confidence is to conduct new research in which most recent dream reports are augmented by detailed personal interviews. For the moment, we can say with confidence that the data gathered for the present study provide good evidence to support the hypothesis that the strong and deeply ambivalent emotions many college students feel toward their families are reflected in their dreams and nightmares.

The three "family murder" dreams are all from female rights. A comparison of their major narrative elements with those of the one family murder nightmare from a female left brings into view several interesting points. Like the other three, "Cook kills her mother" involves the abrupt murder of a family member, and in this dream the murder of the dreamer's mother is compounded by the equally abrupt suicide of her father. But this dream is very different from the other three in several significant ways. First, in "Cook kills her mother" one of the dead family members (her father) does not stay dead, but comes back to life. Second, the dreamer makes an active effort to do something about the murder, calling 911 and persisting until her call for help goes through. Third, the killer in the dreams reappears and engages the dreamer in a conversation, trying to explain to her the "logic" behind the killing. And fourth, the dream ends on a bizarre note, with the dreamer suddenly and absurdly "stuffing her face with raviolis." This strange final image is in striking contrast to the endings of the three female right dreams, where the young women awaken in tears, deeply shaken and still feeling sorrow for the family member they lost in the dream.

Taking these distinctive elements into account suggests that the female left dreamer of "Cook kills her mother" is able to have a nightmare of a parent's death and still maintain a degree of functional agency and emotional balance within the dream. She maintains the ability in the dream both to deal with the crisis and to ignore it. The danger of losing her family, and the powerful anxieties generated by that prospect, do not utterly overwhelm her, as they seem to do in the other three women's dreams. Freud would surely find it significant that in this dream it is the young woman's mother (her oedipal rival) who dies, while her father (her oedipal object) is the one who comes back to life.

None of the males of either ideological group had a dream with this family murder theme. Could it be that separation from one's family is a bigger, more frightening issue for college-age women than men? A feminist perspective would suggest the answer is yes because young men typically have a much wider variety of career options after leaving home from college than do women. Young women, on the other hand, usually feel some degree of pressure from parents, peers, religious traditions, and other cultural forces to seek an "Mrs." Degree in college and find a man who will be a good husband and provider. If there's any validity to the feminist line of thinking, this pressure may be felt especially acutely by women on the political right, given that conservative Republican ideology tends to favor traditional gender roles for men and women. This would also help to make sense of the fears of female rights in their dreams of unexpected pregnancy and childrearing, because having an "illegitimate" child can be a devastating blow to a woman's chances of assuming a traditionally female gender role. The political right's strong affirmation of traditional "family values" and its correspondingly sharp denunciation of pre-marital sex and out-of-wedlock pregnancy may have a significant influence on these young women's dreams relating to family issues. In both sets of dreams considered so far, the female rights are notably more anxious about the possibility of unexpected shifts, changes, and ruptures in their family relations.

Nightmares

- FL 1 Cook kills her mother
- FR 1 Policeman father is killed
- FR 6 Burglar kills her father
- FR 7 No wedding dress
- FR 9 She kills her brother
- FR 12 Unwanted baby, but no abortion
- FR 13 Pregnant again, and disappointed
- FR 14 Mass suicide→zombies
- ML 6 Exam, tiger and elephant
- ML 7 Weird telephone keypad
- ML 14 Fighting corpse in car
- ML 9 Girlfriend is cheating
- MR 3 Driving at man in dark
- MR 5 Going bald
- MR 7 Switch with suicide friend
- MR 8 Chased, paralyzed
- MR 9 Friend's name on tomb

MR 13 Exam nightmare
 MR 14 Bears in public restroom

Several of the dreams discussed so far (all from female rights) qualify as nightmares in the sense of disturbing, negatively toned dreams involving threats, dangers, and/or misfortunes. This points to the clearest distinction between the dream content of the two ideological groups: people on the political right had many more nightmares than do people on the political left. Fully half of the dreams from male rights and female rights are nightmares (7 out of 14 dreams for each group). By contrast, male lefts had 4 nightmares out of 14 dreams, and female lefts had only 1.

These differences in frequency correlate with several qualitative differences in the dream narratives. Many researchers regard helplessness and powerlessness as the central element common to nightmares (xiv). If we look carefully at the specific situations in which dreamers on the left and right experience helplessness and examining in detail their reactions to those situations, we find several intriguing patterns. Starting with the males, men on the right had nightmares with much more physical danger and more fear; by contrast, men on the left had nightmares that were much more likely to occur in familiar settings and with familiar characters, and that included more elements of hope, power, and agency amid the nightmare scenario. Comparable patterns emerge with the females: the nightmares of women on the right had a more overwhelming and distressing quality than did the nightmares of the female lefts.

One way of interpreting these patterns is to say that people on the political right not only have more nightmares, but their nightmares are more *nightmarish*, more dominated by the profound helplessness that is the essence of a frightening dream. Perhaps this reveals a meaning to the fact that four of the female right nightmares involve religious rituals: a funeral ("Policeman father is killed"), a wedding ("Pregnant again, and disappointed"), a wedding ("No wedding dress"), and a blessing ("Mass suicide→zombies"). Religious rituals, among their many functions, serve the valuable social function of articulating and managing people's existential fears, particularly fears of frailty, weakness, imperfection, and impotence (xv). It could be that these women are drawn not only to conservative political ideology but also to religious rituals as ways of expressing and regulating their deepest anxieties. More research on this point would be interesting, particularly in light of a dream like "Mass suicide→zombies," with its suggestion that it is the religious ritual *itself* that is responsible for generating existential terror and a sense of powerlessness.

Boyfriends and Girlfriends

FL 2 Boyfriend's happy party
 FL 4 Ex-lover's massage
 FL 7 Boyfriend's mom yells at her
 FL 9 Tempted to leave her boyfriend
 FL 12 Seeing the girl she loves
 FR 2 Making out with Puffy Combs
 FR 3 Singing to boyfriend
 FR 7 No wedding dress
 FR 8 Kissing ex-boyfriend, disgusted

ML 1 Playing rugby with girlfriends
ML 6 Exam, tiger and elephant
ML 8 Sex with twins
ML 9 Girlfriend is cheating
ML 10 Talking about Mexico trip
ML 13 With girlfriend, in snow
MR 12 Mafia restaurant

The frequency of boyfriends, girlfriends, and potential romantic partners in general as characters in these dreams makes good sense in life cycle terms. Several developmental psychologists identify this age as a key time in the emergence of a capacity for intimacy (xvi). Anyone who has ever taught undergraduates would most likely agree. Most college students are far more interested in each other than they are in classes. Particularly in the spring, when the weather gets warmer and clothing more scant, the central emotional interest in the lives of these young people are the hopes, joys, and sorrows of their romantic relationships. The continuity of this emotional interest across the waking and dreaming life of college students is amply illustrated by the dreams gathered for this study.

The distribution of boyfriend/girlfriend characters is not even, however. The 14 dreams of the male rights include only 1 dream with a romantic partner, while about a third of the dreams of female rights, female lefts, and male lefts include such characters (4, 5, and 6, respectively). In that single male right dream ("Mafia restaurant"), the young man's girlfriend is simply mentioned as a companion, with no lines or action after that. Is there any meaning to this disparity in the distribution of boyfriend and girlfriend characters? Based on the data at hand, it is impossible to say whether the male rights do not have girlfriends in waking life or simply do not *dream* about their girlfriends. In either case, this feature of their dreams may be correlated with their political ideology's relatively strong appeal to men in general. For several years now American politics has been riven by a "gender gap" in which a solid majority of men favor Republican candidates and causes while an equally solid majority of women favor Democratic candidates and causes. Reflecting on the dreams in this context of gender and politics, it would seem that in both the dream content and the political ideology of conservative young men, women play a decidedly minor role.

Turning the point around, it is also remarkable that male lefts dream about their romantic partners more than do either group of females. Again, it is impossible to know if male lefts have more romantic partners in waking life or simply dream more frequently about romantic partners. But if the lack of girlfriends in the male right dreams has any connection to the generally masculine tenor of their political ideology, it is likely that the abundance of girlfriends in the male left dreams is connected to the generally feminine qualities of their political ideology. Recalling the quantitative data, the male lefts have a much higher male/female ratio in comparison to the male rights, and also in comparison to the Hall and Van de Castle norms (xvii). Hall and Domhoff have emphasized that the male/female ratio is the most durable patterns distinguishing the dreams of men and women: men's dreams have twice as many male characters as female characters, while women's dreams typically have an equal number of males and females. This "ubiquitous sex difference" has been identified in the dreams of U.S. college students over a half-century of research (xviii). It has also been found in the dreams of populations from several other nationalities and cultural groups (xix). Taking this typical ratio of male and female characters as a baseline, male lefts have dreams that are more like those of average women, while male rights have dreams that

are even more masculine than those of average men. Male lefts in their dreams are much more interested in women, and male rights in their dreams are much more interested in other men.

The dreams of female lefts and female rights are not strikingly different in terms of their male/female character patterns. Dreamers in both groups experienced both positively and negatively toned interactions with romantic partners (who are all males, except in "Seeing the girl she loves," the only overtly homosexual dream in the set). Female lefts and female rights both had dreams involving troubling, morally ambivalent interactions with ex-boyfriends (discussed in the next section). The dreams of the young women in both groups showed evidence of strong emotional attachment to their romantic partners.

Ethical Reflection

FL 4 Ex-lover's massage
 FL 9 Tempted to leave her boyfriend
 FL 10 Cruel soccer game→flying
 FR 5 Spoiled baby→kitten
 FR 8 Kissing her ex-boyfriend, disgusted
 FR 12 Unwanted baby, but no abortion
 ML 11 Sleeping man's money
 MR 4 Charity to starving children

The dreams gathered in this study included several in which the dreamer engaged in some form of ethical reflection: thinking about right and wrong, questioning what is proper behavior in a given situation, judging the actions of others and oneself, confronting a temptation to do something immoral. Ethical reflection is widely regarded as a sophisticated form of brain/mind functioning (xx), so its frequent appearance in these dreams is intriguing. No empirical research has ever focused on the process of ethical reasoning in dreaming, but it might be worth pursuing this topic for its value as a source of evidence in the evaluation of dream theories that deny and active role to high-order brain/mind systems in the dreaming process (xxi).

The dreams of ethical reflection in this study have several qualities that closely correspond to other distinctive narrative qualities already mentioned. In the dreams of people on the right, morally troubling things occurred which the dreamers did not cause and cannot remedy on their own ("Spoiled baby→kitten," "Kissing her ex-boyfriend, disgusted," "Pregnant, but no abortion"), and ideas about what is morally proper come from an outside source ("Charity to starving children"). By contrast, in the dreams of people on the left, the dreamer had some degree of agency in ethical reflection and behavior, deciding what was right on their own ("Stealing man's money") and resisting the temptation to do wrong ("Tempted to leave her boyfriend"). The most interesting dream in this regard is "Cruel soccer game→flying," from one of the female lefts. This young woman dreamed of a group of young children who were being forced to play in a violent soccer game with older men. Just as she thought to herself in the dream how "odd and cruel" this is, she became lucid and remembered that she can fly if she wants. Thus, the dreamer's moral condemnation of the soccer game was immediately followed by a dramatic shift in self-awareness and the discovery of an amazing power to rise above the earth and soar with freedom through

the sky. If it is true, as many philosophers (xxii) and developmental psychologists (xxiii) claim, that mature ethical reasoning depends on an ability to adopt a transcendent, non-ego centered perspective on problems and conflicts, then this young woman's dream may signal in a dramatic and deeply *embodied* fashion the emergence of that very conceptual ability.

Lifelike and Bizarre Dreams

Most Lifelike

FR 4 Watching a DVD with her friend
FR 10 Consoling her friend
FR 11 Sale at the Gap
ML 4 Renting with his brother
ML 10 Talking about Mexico trip
MR 1 Talking with his old friend
MR 6 Two Georges
MR 10 Animal Behavior Class
MR 11 Late for class

Most Bizarre

FL 1 Cook kills her mother
FL 10 Cruel soccer game→flying
FR 14 Mass suicide→zombies
ML 14 Fighting corpse in car
MR 14 Bears in public restroom

"Bizarreness" is a notoriously difficult term to operationalize in the study of dreams. But researchers from Freud and Jung onward have recognized that one of the most distinctive features of dreaming is that many (though not all) dreams include elements that deviate drastically from ordinary waking life. The frequency in dreams of strikingly unusual characters, settings, events, and images is a basic phenomenological fact that any theory of the nature and function of dreaming must address.

For the present study I used the term "bizarre" in opposition to "lifelike." I first identified those dreams that appear the most similar to the actual daily experiences in the waking lives of the dreamers. These dreams involve entirely familiar characters (friends, relatives) and settings (school, home), and they generally consist of a single scene that is relatively short, coherent, and lifelike. In narrative terms, the dreams portray events and experiences that seem either to have actually happened in the dreamer's recent life or could plausibly happen in the very near future. Another way to characterize these dreams is this: if the reports were not framed as dream experiences, they would be indistinguishable from ordinary waking experiences.

Of the 9 lifelike dreams identified in the total set, the majority of them were from people on the political right (3 for female rights, 4 for male rights; 25% of all the dreams from the right). Male lefts had 2 dreams of this kind, and female lefts none at all.

With this definition of lifelike dreams in mind, bizarreness in dreams can be conceptualized as the effect generated by patterns of dream elements that deviate in different ways from ordinary waking reality, including unfamiliar characters, strange or distorted settings, elaborate multiscene plots punctured by sudden shifts and changes, and events and experiences that are either highly improbable or totally impossible in the conventional world. On the whole, dreamers on the left had more of these elements than did dreamers on the right, which was suggested in the content analysis findings by their greater frequency of good fortunes.

While this is not the place to discuss in more detail the definition of dream bizarreness, I believe a brief consideration of what I judge to be the most bizarre dreams in this set can add to the primary question here of the relationship between dream content and political ideology.

- “Cook kills her mother” (female left), already discussed in the section on dreams of the murder of family members, begins in the very lifelike setting of the dreamer’s home, with her family. Then she says that “out of nowhere” the cook at her parents’ restaurant appears and kills her mother. The dreamer’s father commits suicide, but then he somehow comes back to life. The dream goes on at some length, with several additional scene shifts and emotional incongruities, and it ends with the dreamer “stuff[ing] my face with a huge bowl of raviolis.”
- As mentioned in the preceding section on dreams of ethical reflection, “Cruel soccer game→ flying” (female left) is the only dream that involves the magical ability to fly as well as the metacognitive capacity for self-awareness within the dream state, i.e., lucidity. The dream also involves strange discrepancies in the setting (she says, “I remember thinking how far (how unusually far) the walk to the door was”) and the disturbingly cruel soccer game in which older men were playing against “children (6–7 years old) who had their shirts pulled over their heads” and who were being forced into the game by their parents.
- “Mass suicide→ zombies” (female right) involves the most otherworldly setting of all the dreams. Because it is relatively short, it can be quoted in full: “It was more of a nightmare than a dream, I was standing in a long line with thousands of people in water up to about our waists, we were all being led up to a huge colorful altar, with people surrounding it, where each person was blessed and then killed somehow under water, it was like a mass suicide, and I felt like I was the only person who knew what was going on, everyone else acted like zombies, I freaked out and woke up.”
- “Fighting corpse in car” (male left) starts in a relatively familiar setting, with the dreamer using a pole to push himself down the street on a skateboard, when “suddenly a bright red car comes driving down the street.” The dreamer is alarmed, and then “suddenly as it’s past me, the car swerves to face me and then stops.” He sees that the driver is a highly decayed corpse, and “for some reason this disturbs me. I punch my pole through the windshield, beating the corpse mercilessly, screaming, ‘you’re dead, you’re dead, you’re (expletive deleted) dead!’ over and over at it.”
- “Bears in public restroom” is the longest and most narratively complex of the male right dreams. The characters are vague, the two main settings (a wilderness area and a public restroom) are filled with strange, inexplicable forces, and the dreamer is repeatedly confronted with unexpected problems, dangers, and misfortunes. The dreamer expresses great emotional concern about the possible presence of bears in

the public restroom, and he twice finds bears standing at the urinals. The second bear "turned his head, looked at me, and his eyes changed from white to yellow to red. I shoot at the bear [with a gun], which did no good."

Much could be said about these dreams, the significance of their extremely unusual features, and the general importance of making careful, focused investigations of dream bizarreness. For the moment, however, I want to highlight one point in particular. These highly bizarre dreams provide further evidence for the idea that a major distinguishing theme in the dream content of people on the political right and left is a sense of *having or lacking power*. The highly bizarre dreams of people on the left involve the dreamer taking forceful action in the context of sudden, strange, and deeply unsettling events. In the two highly bizarre dreams of people on the right the dreamers are weak, scared, and helpless against the strange events and experiences confronting them.

COMMENTS ON THE NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

To repeat: The small size of the sample and the limited demographic nature of the subjects make it impossible to offer any firm, absolute conclusions about the distinctive dream profiles of people on the political left and political right. To build on the findings of the present study, future research will have to use a larger sample size, an expanded demographic range, and personal interviews and dream journals to supplement the data gathered via questionnaires.

Keeping the limitations of this study firmly in mind, the question may be asked in closing of how to interpret the differences in dream content between the two political groups. Do the findings of this study offer any insight into the deeper-lying psychological dynamics that motivate people to adopt a liberal or a conservative political ideology?

To summarize the basic findings of this study:

- People on the right had more nightmares and dreams in which they lacked power. They had a greater frequency of lifelike dreams. Female rights were especially anxious about family relationships, and male rights had dreams almost devoid of girlfriends.
- People on the left had fewer nightmares and more dreams in which they had power. They had a greater frequency of good fortunes and bizarre elements in their dreams. Female lefts had an especially high frequency of good fortunes, and male lefts had an unusually high percentage of female characters.

One way to read these findings would be this: The dreams of the people on the political right reveal them to be insecure, anxious, conflict-ridden, and emotionally repressed. When they are not terrified of imaginary threats they cling to the comforts of the status quo. They seek a kind of power through their political views that they lack within their deeper selves. By contrast, the dreams of people on the political left show them to be creative, progressive, and imaginative. They are confident in their abilities and willing to think beyond the boundaries of the present to envision new possibilities for the future.

Such an interpretation would be consistent with the findings of this study. However, an alternative reading with just as much plausibility would be this: The dreams of people on the political right reveal them to be highly attuned to the actual dangers and threats

of the waking world. These people are realistic, grounded, honest about the frailties of human nature in the face of danger, and appreciative of the good things in present-day life. By contrast, the dreams of people on the political left show them to be irrational, naïve, utopian, and deluded by their own fantasies. These people are out of touch with the real world, and they wish for powers they do not have in actuality.

Although they may seem mutually exclusive, both of these interpretations have merit. Indeed, I would suggest the best way of understanding this study's main findings is to appreciate how the dreams reveal both the greatest personality strengths *and* the greatest personality weaknesses of people on each end of the political spectrum.

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