Research Article Response: Bourke and Shaw

‘Spontaneous Lucid Dreaming Frequency and Waking Insight’ by Patrick Bourke and Hannah Shaw theorize that the ‘insight experienced during the dream state may relate to the same underlying cognition needed for insight in the waking state.’ In more simple terms this means that lucid dreamers gain more insight into their real-world problems through their dreams. They also formulate the hypothesis that frequent or occasional lucid dreamers are more ‘successful’ at completing their compound remote associate problem-solving task as compared to nonlucid dreamers, which in turn, suggests that the insight they gained during their dreams are associated with ‘the same underlying cognition needed for insight in the waking state.

The method used to test their hypothesis consisted of gathering 68 participants between 18-25 years old, 52 of which were female and the remaining 16 were male. Each participant had to meet the criteria of recalling ‘at least one dream per week’ to participate. Test conditions involved participants being tested individually for 25 minutes by the same experimenter in a ‘quiet testing room’. The participants were asked to answer questions about ‘dreaming habits’ and to complete ‘CRA’ problems on a computer. These ‘CRA’ problems assessed insight problem-solving ability. The participants were categorized into three groups of lucid dreamers: ‘Frequent’, ‘Occasional’ and ‘Nonlucid’ dreamers. The ‘Frequent’ group must have experienced lucid dreams more than once a month, ‘Occasional’ lucid dreamers experienced them at least once in their lifetime and ‘Nonlucid’ dreamers must have never experienced a lucid dream. Participants took 5 practice ‘CRA’ problems before taking 30 ‘main CRA’ problems. Each ‘CRA’ problem consisted of three words that had a solution word to create a new ‘compound word or two-word phrase’. The problems were also ordered by difficulty starting
with easy questions first. After the three words for each ‘CRA’ problem were displayed, participants were given 30 seconds to think of a fourth word that could be combined to create a compound word/phrase. Once each participant had come up with a solution they would press a key to turn the screen blank. If participants were able to think of a solution, they had to write down their answer. However, if they could not think of one, they were to leave a blank space instead. I believe using this methodology was appropriate since it allowed Bourke and Shaw to attain fair and thus accurate results on each individual participant. They would be able to easily evaluate and compare the results collected as well as identify any abnormal or anomalous results during the process. The ‘CRA’ problem solving test is a simple yet effective way of testing participants due to its relatively uncomplicated format, thus, can be tested on a broad range of subjects.

The results show a clear disparity in correct ‘CRA’ problem solutions between the three groups. It can be seen that on average, ‘Nonlucid’ dreamers solved 12 problems, ‘Occasional’ lucid dreamers solved 14 problems and ‘Frequent’ lucid dreamers solved 16 problems. The results also show that the ‘Frequent’ group performed better in all areas of the problems, especially in complex problems where the largest discrepancy is shown. On average, ‘Frequent’ lucid dreamers correctly answered ‘3.85’ difficult problems while ‘Occasional’ lucid dreamers solved ‘2.79’ and ‘Nonlucid’ dreamers solved ‘2.15’. This clearly displays a trend in the results that validates the hypothesis which states that ‘Frequent’ lucid dreamers are more successful at completing their compound remote association tasks.
Throughout the study, there are a couple limitations that may have influenced the results. One limitation of the study is that the majority of the participants were female. This therefore could impede the validity of the research. For instance, Lucid dreaming and its relation to problem solving may differ between gender due to women experiencing a different amount of ‘insight’ as opposed to men. Another limitation of the study is that it is all conducted on college students between the ages of 18 to 25. This hinders the researches credibility since it is unknown whether the problem-solving ability differs between age groups.

This article could personally help me with my college education. I am a computer science student and my computer science class primarily consists of high-level problem solving tasks. Therefore, if I am finding difficulty completing a task, lucid dreaming may provide ‘insight’ to the real world solution. This would benefit me greatly as it would not only alleviate potential problems I am faced with but also make me a better programmer.

A criticism I have about this paper is that they do not substantiate their results by repeating the experiment. This could have severe implications on the results which could negatively affect the validity of the paper. Repeating the experiment on the same participants in the future would allow the researchers to observe whether the results stay the same or not. Doing so would allow them to account for any age-related effects on results. Participants could have over/under-performed due to unforeseen special circumstances and so, repeating the experiment could make the entire study more valid.

In conclusion, Bourke and Shaw have gone to lengths in displaying the effects lucid dreaming can have in real world problems and have sufficiently provided the basis to the argument that it
in fact can help in solving them. The reader can understand that the correlation between

‘Frequent’ lucid dreamers and correctly solving problems is not just a coincidence and therefore

their hypothesis is proven to be correct.