

Varieties of conscious objectless dreamless sleep

Adriana Alcaraz Sanchez, PhD student



University
of Glasgow

Centre for the Study of
Perceptual Experience

CONSCIOUS DREAMLESS SLEEP

- Experiences had during sleep that don't seem to fit with a description of a 'dream'.
 - Experience of a self in a largely non-veridical world while sleeping
(Revonsuo, 2006; Windt, 2010, 2015)
- Wide range of phenomena
 - e.g. sleep thinking and hypnagogic experiences
- **Interesting here**: a particular sort of dreamless sleep experiences described in Indian contemplative traditions (Advaita Vedānta, Yoga, Tibetan Buddhism)
 - Awareness devoid of any object of perception
 - Conscious objectless dreamless sleep

A SPECIAL SUB-CLASS: CONSCIOUS OBJECTLESS DREAMLESS SLEEP

- **Different names:** Luminosity sleep, Sleep Yoga/Yoga Nidra, Witnessing sleep, Clear light sleep, Lucid dreamless sleep

- **Conceptual problems:**

Experienced phenomenology vs theoretical explanation

- Do these descriptions refer to the same sort of experience?
- Different degrees? Is there a paradigmatic instance?

- **Proposal**

Classification of varieties of objectless dreamless sleep experiences

TYPE I TRANSITORY STATES

- **Preliminary stages of Yoga Nidra**

(Saraswati, 1984; Bharati, 2014; Parker et al. 2013; Parker, 2019)

- Some awareness of the threshold of dreaming or dream dissolution (emptiness, void, darkness, absence)
- Objectless, but completely contentless?
- Borderline cases: A subclass of these might actually be **dreams**:
 - E.g. *Imageless lucid dreams*: minimal form of dreaming. They preserve a minimal sense of spatiotemporal location (Windt, 2010; 2015)

TYPE II
NO
TRANSITION

- ‘*Clear light sleep*’ (Padmasambhava & Gyatrul, 2008; Wangyal Tenzin, 1998, Rinpoche, 2002:65)
 - Recognition of ‘*the awareness*’
 - Vivid or clear awareness
- No content of awareness, but there is **some sort of awareness of the state itself**

TYPE III
NO CONTENT

- Just phenomenal consciousness, no further phenomenology associated
- **No recognition of the state when is unfolding;** only once is terminated
 - E.g. Some *white dreams*
- **Conceptual problems**
 - Can this state be had? Seems *possible*
 - And if it does, can it be reported? *Probably, not always*

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Type I, Type II, Type III, all, none?
- Current available descriptions are: (i) anecdotal reports, (ii) not clear to what experiences they refer to, (iii) not first-hand
 - ✓ More **detailed reports** on conscious objectless dreams experiences are needed
 - ✓ **Lab-based studies** on dreamless sleep experiences