

The interpretation of independent agents and spiritual content in dreams

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Summary. Mystical experiences and spiritual dreams have been studied to learn how to define them, who has them, and why. Rarely is the content taken seriously except as evidence of physical or psychological pathology, religious beliefs, or the influence of local culture. A challenge posed by spiritual dream content and mystical experiences in general, is that spiritual experiences refer exclusively to things that cannot be tested because they supposedly exist in a non-physical continuum. For this reason, spiritual or mystical content is generally described as 'subjective' in the literature. However, there can be some overlap with objectively veridical psi content. This research utilizes a single dataset comprised of 34 dream journals containing 12,224 dream records produced by this author over the past 27 years to explore the relationship between veridical and spiritual content in dreams. The results suggest that it is unreasonable to characterize all spiritual content as subjective when veridical secondary evidence is available. It also suggests that so-called 'folkloric' or 'primitive' explanations for dreams are more consistent with the data than modern psychological, cultural, or neurological explanations.

Keywords: Spiritual, mystical, dream, veridical, Near Death Experiences (NDE), Out-of-Body Experiences (OBE), ghost, spirit, religious

1. Introduction

In the study of dreams, one inevitably encounters spiritual dream content. These types of dreams are the basis for many beliefs in religions around the world. Spiritual dreams are taken seriously by scholars as an expression of faith or religious culture, but not as reflections of what may be an objective reality. One reason for this is that they often have no real-world reference points to check for validity. Another is that the most well-known examples, such as those in the Bible, Torah, and Koran, are so archaic that there is no way to determine the fidelity of the reports. Last, contemporary theories of dreaming favour the premise that there is no independent source of dreams because all dreams originate from the mind of the dreamer alone. Therefore, they are not communication but, at best, predictions based on subconscious analysis of probabilities. The argument is persuasive in the face of weak evidence, but not all evidence on this subject is equal.

In this article I propose to tackle the problem of agency, that dreams may not originate solely in the mind of the dreamer and that they do represent objectively real communications from an independent non-local source. To do this, I will explore a large series of my own dreams, recorded regularly since September 15, 1989. The focus is on spiritual dreams, particularly those that purport to feature an independent agent as the source of the dream.

The continuity hypothesis and the influence of everyday concerns

According to some authors, dreams are a subjective and personal experience that satisfy the purpose of 'coping with problematic aspects of reality' for the dreamer (King & DeCicco, 2009; Kuper, 1979). This is done with the aid of previous experience in combination with one's knowledge, training, beliefs, and desires (MacDuffie & Mashour, 2010). This is called the 'continuity hypothesis'. The continuity hypothesis expects that all dream content is in some way the product of previous experience or knowledge.

Symbolic dream content

According to the continuity hypothesis, past events and knowledge are converted into symbolic language that creates scenarios to communicate ideas, solve problems, or express fears from the unconscious mind (Budd, 1999; Revonsuo, 2000b). However, Revonsuo (2000a) cautions against the unwarranted assumption that dreams are populated with symbols by pointing out that 'One can always get rid of dream elements that do not fit in with one's favourite theory by saying that they actually stand for something else' (p. 1069).

Claimed links between dream imagery and previous knowledge of waking reality are credible only if there is evidence to suggest a connection, and a connection should not be assumed in the absence of a sensible link (Doubrovsky, 1960). Creating symbolic links is made more difficult if the things being linked are improperly identified. This issue is raised from a neurological point of view by Schredl and Wittman (2005), who point out that 'sleep is not directly measurable...this leads to the problem of validity, i.e., is the dream report an appropriate account of the dream experience' (p.485).

An example of an identification problem is presented by a reincarnation case from nineteenth century Japan. Ac-

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cording to contemporary accounts, a boy named Katsugoro claimed to have lived before as a boy in a different village, with a different family (Bolitho, 2002). He described a period of time that elapsed between the two lives wherein he was approached by a sage-like man who brought him to his new family. Katsugoro's sister claimed to have had a dream of either the same sage, or a similar one.

For the people who met Katsugoro at the time, the identity of the sage was critical to understanding his experience. One scholar felt that the sage had to be the bodhisattva Jizō. If correct, then the boy's account was consistent with Buddhist beliefs regarding reincarnation. Another scholar identified the sage as a tutelary deity, an identification consistent with Shinto, Japan's national religion. To support their claims, both scholars queried the boy and his sister at length regarding the appearance and behaviour of the sage. Based on the answers, each scholar managed to identify the sage as a different personality. What is lost in the attempt to identify this figure is the boy's original description of an unidentified elderly sage-like man who helped him select his next family. The boy didn't say he was a bodhisattva or a tutelary deity. To him, the dream figure was an old man.

It might be interesting to try and determine who the sage was, but another approach would be to try and verify the elements of the boy's story that can be verified by comparison with physically available evidence. American researcher Ian Stevenson has attempted to independently verify elements of testimony given by children related to purported past lives (Stevenson & Samaratne, 1988). In the cases where Stevenson and his colleagues were successful, the cases are described as 'veridical' because they had been verified. Similarly, Ullman and Krippner have compared dreams with later events to identify veridical dreams (1970).

When dream events correspond to events or information that could not plausibly have been known by the dreamer at the time of the dream, they create evidence to undercut the continuity hypothesis. This is because, if all dreams are based on past knowledge, then they cannot contain information beyond the dreamer's existing knowledge or ability to predict.

Spiritual dreams create special problems. Because they often contain imagery that is wholly disconnected from physical existence, they cannot be compared to anything for veridicality. This makes it easier to accept the hypothesis that they are symbolic, even if the symbols do not always originate from pre-existing knowledge.

Previous exposure to religious content and dreaming

The identification of spiritual content can be contentious, due to the many emotionally charged associations some people have with religion, as well as to the competing definitions of the word 'spiritual' that accompany the many approaches to spirituality found in the world today. A natural assumption regarding spiritual dream content is that it is influenced or inspired by past religious training, or passively absorbed knowledge from one's environment. In the literature of dream studies, it is not difficult to find examples of dreams that have been interpreted this way (Hobson & Schredl, 2011; Jung, Franz, Henderson, Jacobi, & Jaffe, 1968; Schredl & Wittman, 2005). However, this is not always the case.

In a study of Scottish school children, previous knowledge of religion did not always correlate with dreams of a religious or mystical nature, nor did a lack of such knowledge or training prevent the occurrence of such dreams (Adams, 2001). Some, but not all, children attending parochial schools admitted to having had dreams of a religious nature, as did children from secular schools who identified themselves as atheists. Similarly, in a pharmacological study by Barrett, Johnson, & Griffiths (2015), 184 study participants were asked to complete a 'Mystical Experience Questionnaire'. Among other things, this study showed that mystical experiences as defined by their questionnaire were not limited to those with a religious background or experience. Based on these findings, it is plausible that a religious or spiritual background is not a requirement for dreams containing religious or spiritual content.

The frequency of spiritual or mystical dreams is not easy to find, but they do not appear to be common. For instance, in the online sleep and dream database managed by researcher Kelly Bulkeley, a search of the 36,888 dream records for dreams coded as 'spiritual dreams' yields 144 (0.39%) records. Findings from a study of 98 seizure patients are consistent with a finding that spiritual dreams are rare. In the study, 55% of participants remembered a subjective experience associated with the seizure, but none satisfied the criteria for a mystical experience as measured by Hood's Mysticism Scale (Greyson, Broshek, Derr, & Fountain, 2014).

A definition of 'spiritual'

There are many different understandings of the meaning of the word 'spiritual'. In a study by Ross (2016), six principal themes emerged, not all of which are compatible. The themes are roughly divided according to differing levels of belief in God, ranging from atheism (absence of spirituality) to metaphysical or religion-oriented belief in a superior creative power, either embodied in the person of God or as an abstract concept. None of the definitions provided by Ross suggest why the word 'spiritual' has the word 'spirit' as its root, unless it is the assumption that God is a kind of spirit. Papers on metaphysical subjects, however, propose a clear link between the existence of non-material 'spirits' with spirituality (Roll, 1974). Indeed, it is purported communication with mediums that led to the creation of at least two modern religions: Spiritism (Kardec, 2010) and Spiritualism (Myers, 1920). With this in mind, the word 'spiritual' is used here to describe something that is 'of the spirit'.

The terms 'spirituality' and 'mysticism' are related but not interchangeable. To show this, the Casto Spirituality Scoring System (the Casto scale) (Krippner & Sulla, 2011) is compared to the Mystical Experience Questionnaire (R.W. Hood, 1975) (the Hood scale) in Table 1. Both scales were developed to identify spiritual and mystical content. The Casto scale modifies categories from the Hall/van de Castle scale (1966) so that each item is related to reverence and sacred qualities. The Hood scale has a focus on enhanced sensory awareness and knowledge. The two tools are quite different, though one might expect them to identify similar qualities (table 1).

In general, studies of mysticism tend to focus on traits found in the Hood scale: ineffability (difficulty of verbal expression), noesis (insights into truth), transiency (brief and intermittent experiences), and passivity (implication of a

Table 1. The Casto and Hood mystical scales compared

Casto scale (Krippner, Jaeger, & Faith, 2001)	Hood scale (R.W. Hood, 1975)
Spiritual objects/objects of focus and reverence	Ego quality
Spiritual characters/beyond knowledge, inspires reverence	Unifying quality
Spiritual settings/associated with reverence	Inner subjective quality
Spiritual activities/beyond understanding, inspires reverence	Temporal/spatial quality
Spiritual emotions/associated with reverence	Noetic quality
Spiritual experiences/direct contact w God, sacred	Ineffability
	Religious quality

higher power) (Francis, Littler, & Robbins, 2012 p. 945). Studies of spiritual dreams emphasize the relationship of dream content to a sense of reverence or the sacred (Krippner & Sulla, 2011).

Another perspective on ‘mystical dreaming’ is presented by Bulkeley (2009), who found the following eight motifs in one study: ‘...death, Christianity, light, precognition, reassurance, nightmare, epistemological uncertainty, and impact—no memory (p. 35)’. The first of these motifs, death, is illustrated by a ‘visitation’ experience where a deceased relative visits a living one. This type of dream does not satisfy the ‘reverence’ criteria of the Casto scale but does refer to ghosts, understood to be spirits. Bulkeley’s ‘reassurance’ criterion is specifically associated with reassurance after the death of a loved one. Together, these death-related criteria are mundane in comparison to the Hood and Casto criteria because they are focused on physical rather than spiritual or universal concerns. The criterion of light as a metaphor for divine reality is familiar from NDE studies (Greyson, 2003; Ring & Cooper, 1997). Epistemological confusion is defined by Bulkeley as uncertainty whether dream events are objectively real, and ‘impact-no memory’ is when a dreamer remembers having experienced a powerful dream but wakes with no recall of the dream itself. These appear to be derived from after death communications, specifically as experienced during an NDE.

The difference between the reverence-orientated Casto scale and the mysticism-orientated Hood scale could be characterized as the difference between non-secular and secular perspectives on spirituality. Ross (2016) proposed a group of definitions that together form a gradient between theism and atheism (table 2). This can be used to bridge the two views of spirituality.

The categories of spiritual experience described by Ross show how the Hood scale is more closely aligned with the senses-orientated or spiritual themes, while the Casto scale is a combination of senses and sacred-orientated themes. Bulkeley’s criteria is presented in the context of agnostic or atheistic explanations for religious experience from the fields of psychology and neurology. The Ross scale allows different perspectives on mystical experience to be discussed together rather than adopting criteria from any one perspective along the gradient of atheism to theism.

The three scales presented here, Casto, Hood, and Bulkeley approach the identification of spiritual dream content differently, and thus can be expected to identify different content as spiritual.

Reference models

Like cognition, dream content can be said to reside entirely within the structure of the mind and has no physically testable attributes. To analyse spiritual content, reference models based on the literature of dreaming and spirituality are presented here to see which is the best fit. The models are modified from Bulkeley’s list of four models: psychopathological, cultural, pure consciousness, and four ‘marks’ (ineffability, noesis, transience, passivity) adopted from William James (Bulkeley, 2009).

Neurological/psychological model

Religious, spiritual, and mystical experiences are grouped together by Beaugard and Paquette (no relation to this author) (2006) as ‘RSMs’. According to them, studies in the field of spiritual neuroscience assume that RSMs and all other human experience is brain-mediated. This is because brain activity can be linked to specific types of actions, such as meditation and prayer. They tested this assumption in a study of Carmelite nuns where blood oxygen level dependent signal changes among participants were measured as they meditated. This was compared to results from a previous study that used functional magnetic resonance imagery (fMRI) to compare brain activity during meditation. Their conclusion was that ‘...several brain regions and systems mediate the various aspects of mystical experiences’ (ibid. p. 188).

The findings of Beaugard and Paquette are representative of the neurological/brain-based model of spiritual and mystical experience. According to this model, spiritual and mystical experience are the product of neurological pathology. Other examples of this perspective can be found in studies of mystical experiences among head trauma patients (Cristofori et al., 2016) and in an introduction to a special issue on neuroscience and the paranormal, published in the journal *Cortex* (Brugger & Mohr, 2008). In that article, anomalous experiences such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition, all of which can be found in the literature of spiritual and mystical experiences, are defined as delu-

Table 2. Categories of spiritual experience (Ross, 2016)

1	Belief in an abstract power or being	Senses-orientated (spiritual)	Similar to Hood
2	Moments of awe and wonder	Senses-orientated (spiritual)	Similar to Hood
3	Belief in a divine being	Sacred-orientated (religious)	Similar to Casto
4	Adherence to spiritual/religious belief system	Sacred-orientated (religious)	Similar to Casto
5	Unique potential of each person	Self-orientated (agnostic/atheist)	Similar to Bulkeley
6	Independent self without desire for spiritual or religious belief	Self-orientated (atheist)	Similar to Bulkeley

sions. These are contrasted with the lack of belief in paranormal experiences among those with a 'healthy' mind (ibid. p. 1292).

Although framed as cognitive disorders relevant to neuroscience, the explanations for belief in paranormal phenomena presented by Bruggar & Mohr (2008) centre on similar explanations found in psychology studies. These explanations are grouped as 'misinterpretation of normal experiences' and 'misinterpretation of anomalous experiences'. Some of the cognitive factors responsible for belief formation described are: base rate fallacy, selective remembering, egocentric bias, and misconceptions of randomness. These are held responsible for such things as belief in ghosts, reincarnation, spirit communication, clairvoyance, NDEs, and hallucinations.

Bulkeley writes that 'It would be more accurate to regard [spiritual experiences] as expressions of a latent prototype in the dreaming imagination that is variably activated according to cultural, psychological, and physiological factors in each individual's life' (Bulkeley, 2009 p. 40). This characterization of dream activity is solidified in a later paper co-authored with McNamara where spiritual dreams are described as 'religious delusions' (Mcnamara & Bulkeley, 2015).

The neuro-psychological model used here assumes that:

- Spiritual and mystical experiences are produced entirely by the brain of the percipient.
- All paranormal beliefs are delusions created by misinterpretations of normal and anomalous experience.

Parapsychological model

Reincarnation studies present data showing that purported past life memories of children have led to the identification of matching previous life personalities (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2002; Mills, 1990; Stevenson & Keil, 2005) The number and replicability of these studies has led some authors to cautiously propose that reincarnation is the best explanation for the phenomenon of children who remember verifiable previous lives (Stevenson, 1987). These are consistent with mediumship studies by Bieschel & Rock (2009) and Schwartz (2011) that indicate the continued existence of personality after death. Dream telepathy studies of Krippner and Ullman (1970) establish that mind-to-mind communication can take place during sleep, while research by Stevenson (Stevenson, 1992) suggests that paranormal communication in dreams can also take place between a sleeper and a deceased personality.

The parapsychological model has several components, not all of which must be present. However, if the Casto, Hood, and Bulkeley criteria are used as a starting point, we see that NDEs, OBEs, reincarnation, and mediumship all contain essential elements of an RSME. The parapsychological model of spiritual and mystical experience requires the following:

- A 'spirit' that can survive bodily death.
- Non-local mental communication with spirits.

Primitive/anthropological model

Mystics in some non-western cultures view dreams as direct communication between dreamers and spirits, angels, and God (Ewing, 1990, 1994; Johnson, 2015). An example of this is found in Pakistani spiritual initiation dreams where

Pakistani men are inducted into a particular Sufic order within the dream. These dreams qualify as mystical as defined by Casto and others because they contain one or more indicators of reverence. One of the examples provided in Ewing's (1990) study is an example of precognition as well. In it, a man meets his future guru, and references are made to the name 'Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti' and food. Eleven years later, the dreamer saw a man whom he recognised as his spiritual master from the dream. This man seemed to recognize him as well, then asked him to make some food for a beggar on behalf of the saint Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti. The account ends with the guru stating that his instructions to cook food for the beggar and to give it in the name of the saint were done to fulfil the dream.

According to Ewing '...such [an initiation] dream, therefore, has its sources in an intentionality external to the dreamer, that of the Sufi saint who has sent the dream' (1994 p. 577). In this case, the saint is an independent agent because he, not the dreamer, sent the dream. Ewing further states that according to Islamic tradition, true dreams come from God, while 'false dreams' originate in one's physical needs and desires that corrupt the dream. Ironically, in the example he provides, the dream is sent by the saint, not God.

Zulus who participated in another study unanimously nominated 'ancestor spirits' as the source of their dreams (Johnson, 2015). 'They ask, what are the ancestor spirits (the projected positive side of the Self) trying to tell the dreamer's ego? (p. 281)'. To find out, members of some tribes have practiced dream incubation. This is the practice of attempting to exert control over the content of one's dreams through some overt act, such as meditation or prayer. The practice is reported to have been widespread among members of some ancient religious communities (Patton, 2004). The anthropological model of spiritual and mystical experience is similar to the parapsychological model, but it is more confident in claiming that the source of spiritual experiences is independent and divine. For this study, the anthropological model requires the following components:

- The presence of divine independent agents, objects, or events
- Direct and purposeful mental communication from divine independent agents

The models used for comparison are:

- Neurological/psychological: All dream content is generated by the physical properties of an individual brain. Spiritual themes in dream content are the product of neurological interactions with a person's knowledge, experience, and psychological factors such as hopes and fears. This model is incompatible with the parapsychological and primitive/anthropological models.
- Parapsychological: The origin of dream content is ill-defined but can include paranormal interactions. Paranormal interactions include mind-to-mind communications where some part of the dream content originates from an independent source. This model accepts the possibility that some dream content can be explained by the neurological/psychological model but is more cautious regarding the primitive/anthropological model.
- Primitive/anthropological: Spiritual dream content is direct communication from spirits and/or God. This is incompatible with the neurological/psychological model but partly compatible with the parapsychological model in that it accepts paranormally-derived knowledge. It is incompatible with the parapsychological model regard-

ing attribution of the source of paranormal knowledge when that source is identified as divine.

In all of these categories, it is important to note that in the articles reviewed for this study, it is tacitly assumed by most researchers that mystical experiences are in some part based on prior experience, such as religious training, media influences, or reading. An exception to this is the primitive model, but we only know of this model through the work of anthropologists, who tend to view spiritual content as a cultural by-product rather than direct communication from spirits or divine figures.

Some have argued that the results of mediumship studies do not prove survival, but 'superpsi', the theory that unobservable but powerful psi effects allow mediums and others to acquire knowledge thought to be unknown or lost (Braude, 1992). This theory is beyond the scope of this study because superpsi as presently conceived cannot be disproven. Braude raises the point that mediumship studies (and presumably any study that touches on survival) are vulnerable to the criticism that superpsi is the best explanation for data that suggests survival of death. Both suffer from the same problem. The evidence, if there is any, is non-physical. Thus, neither can be observed or tested physically.

Independent agents

In some near death experiences (NDEs), independent agents either show or describe content that later proves to be veridical (Lundahl, 2001). In dreams, independent agents have been reported to show information related to spiritual themes (Jones & Fernyhough, 2008). In very rare cases to be discussed later in this article, they do both. These figures bridge the gap between spiritual and veridical content, thus providing a reason to question a) any explanation that spiritual content must be subjective and b) the validity of non-veridical spiritual content. In this study, spiritual dream content is reviewed in the context of independent agents.

Research concerned with survival theories (the survival of consciousness after physical death) sometimes make reference to empirically real but non-physical figures such as ghosts and spirit guides (Beischel & Rock, 2009; Betty, 2006), both of which are described as superstition or folklore elsewhere (Jacobs, 1989; Rist, 1963). The reasoning among sceptics is that there is insufficient evidence to claim that ghosts and spirits are anything more than wishful thinking, self-deception, hallucination, or fraud. However, the field of parapsychology has presented arguments supported by evidence that argue the possibility that such figures are empirically real (Betty, 2006). For instance, mediumship studies elicit information from mediums that is thought to be unknown to all but the perceived 'ghost communicator' as a way to establish a connection to a real but deceased person (Beischel & Rock, 2009). Reincarnation studies have used the memories of young children who claim to remember a past life as a point of comparison with known details from the life of the purported previous incarnation (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2002; Stevenson, 1987). In these studies, the existence of a consciousness independent of a physical body is strongly implied. It is possible to support claims of these types because there is something physical to compare the information to: records of the lives of real deceased persons.

In the spiritualist churches of New Orleans and the Muslim Temior Senoi of Malaya, spirit guides are sometimes iden-

tified as the ghosts of deceased relatives (Jacobs, 1989; Noone, 1939). This conforms to mediumship research, where spirit guides can be, but are not always, a known but deceased person (Beischel & Rock, 2009). Spirit guides are also sometimes described as named figures from the Bible, Christian saints, or unknown personalities (Jacobs, 1989).

In an example from Nez Perce myth 'Coyote and the Shadow People,' the same ill-defined figure is described as 'the death spirit', 'the ghost', 'a shadow', and 'spirit guide' (Ramsey, 1978). The Nez Perce death spirit has its counterpart in the ancient Greek concept of a daemon, a spirit given to each person by God as a kind of invisible protector and advisor, like a guardian angel (Rist, 1963). As with the shamans of North America, these spirits could be consulted by oracles (Gillen, 1989) or in one's dreams for information about health, the future, or matters of philosophical or religious interest.

The modern psychology-based interpretation of these myths, and dreams that resemble them, can be a convoluted attempt to connect dream elements to known events or concerns in the dreamer's life. However, such connections are not always convincing. For example, in an example presented by Jung, et al. (1968), the authors attempt to identify the figure of a white monkey that appears in a patient's dream. After determining that it represents 'the Trickster', they go on to write that 'The dreamer himself could offer no personal association that could explain why the monkey was white' (p. 109) and then proceed to conjecture that that this colour imbued the monkey with a 'god-likeness' (p. 109). Even when the dreamer does provide a personal association, the connections are weak, including the mention of a 'guide' who is interpreted by the authors to be the dreamer's analyst. No basis for that identification was provided.

Swedish philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg claimed to see and hear spirits and angels during sleep and waking states. These figures provided him with information about 'the afterlife' (Jones & Fernyhough, 2008). Similarly, the spirit guide(s) presented in Kardec's work (2010) offer unverifiable but intelligent information about the nature of the afterlife. Spirit guides, or figures like them, are frequently reported in Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) as well (Bonenfant, 2000; Dell'Olio, 2010; Knoblauch, 2001), and all behave in much the same way as spirit guides described in other sources.

There are four principal types of spirits or spirit guides found in the literature: ghosts, spirits of the living during sleep or meditation (Gurney, 2010), spirits with no known connection to a living or deceased person (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975), and higher order spirits, such as angels or named religious figures (Jones & Fernyhough, 2008). Sometimes, the literature provides examples where these dream figures furnish veridical information about distant events (Betty, 2006; Haraldsson & Gerding, 2010) and the future (Beischel & Rock, 2009).

The congruence of related descriptions of spirit beings across cultures in combination with veridical elements suggests that dream figures can be independent from the dreamer. How, though, should spiritual information presented by these dream figures be treated when there is no reference to waking reality? The danger of accepting dream content as valid without any method for checking the information is illustrated in a study by Ring (1988) wherein he describes 'prophetic revelations' that, according to his informants, were most likely to happen in 1988. Thirty years later, there is no indication that the events described in his

study can be reliably linked to any known world events. One could infer that the dreams referenced by Ring were dramatizations based on more mundane personal content as opposed to genuine prophetic revelations, but whatever the reason, their lack of veridicality (so far) should inspire caution.

2. Method

2.1. Longitudinal study

This research was conducted as part of a longitudinal single-subject case study, begun on September 15, 1989 and continuing to the present day. In this case, the data collected are records of this author's dreams over a period of over twenty-seven years. Longitudinal studies are not common in parapsychology because they require considerable time and a subject or subjects that can reasonably be expected to produce the data required for the study (White, 1992). This approach is uncommon but not unheard of. For instance, Nancy Sondow, president of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR), studied her own dreams for evidence of precognition (Sondow, 1988).

An advantage of longitudinal single subject studies is that they allow for deeper analysis than that afforded by collections from multiple subjects over a shorter time span. For instance, studies of dreams that collect data over a few weeks or months may only be able to capture participant's current beliefs or concerns. Moreover, it is less likely they will capture extraordinary experiences because those are by definition rare.

Sondow, like others before her (Dunne, 1927; Graff, 2007), studied her own dreams for reasons similar to my own. We experienced dreams that appeared to be precognitive, found them interesting, and proceeded from there by creating dream journals. The journals were then studied for evidence that would support or discredit the hypothesis that the dreams were precognitive. The motive for these studies was different from those inspired by psychologists like Freud (1900), who analysed their own dreams to determine the source of dream content. In Freud's case, it was inevitably some form of memories from his past, such as when he links a dream of a book about cyclamen with an event from his childhood when his father gave him a book to destroy. The logic he uses to interpret the dream amounts to a grouping of associations "cyclamen—favourite flower—favourite food—artichokes; pulling to pieces like an artichoke, leaf by leaf..." until his interpretation is settled.

The kind of analysis Freud and others engaged in, for instance the group of Jungian dream interpreters who first identified a white monkey as God and then as the patient's psychologist (Jung et al., 1968), involves removing oneself from the manifest dream content and attempting to find the latent content through a sequence of association. This process can be interesting for finding hidden meaning, but it works against discovering credible evidence of precognition or other forms of psi, because the further removed the latent material is from the manifest, the easier it is to disguise errors of interpretation when comparing a dream event to a supposed related one in the future. When this happens, as is inevitable, credibility is lost. For this reason, among others, I have not engaged in this kind of analysis of my dreams. Another is that among "solved" dreams—dreams whose origin can be plausibly identified—there is little sup-

port for the credibility of traditional psychological dream analysis. An example comes to mind that might initially appear interesting as a candidate for analysis, but later events recommend otherwise.

The following is an abbreviated version of my notes from a dream recorded on April 2, 1990

*'Cleaning up a pot full of *ick* [excrement]...Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah are there. Someone wants to know if I would like to see them perform, but I'm not interested. A display case with some very unusual watches'*

Several weeks after the dream, on April 28, 1990, I spent the day with friends near Battery Park, in Manhattan. Some of the events from the day matched my notes (including items not referred to here). From my notes:

'Tom Hanks and an actress like Daryl Hannah were there to play exhibition tennis. I'm asked if I'd like to watch [free tickets], but I'm not interested. [My friend] Barry and I witnessed a very disgusting and similar thing on the street [Barry pointed at a standing homeless man as he defecated into his hand and placed the excrement in a trash can] and at a bookstore, while looking at books, Barry shows me some of his watch designs [something that was new to me].'

The correspondence of these unusual details that occurred on the same day and within a span of a few hours of each other to a group of dream images from the same evening are not only unpredictable, but unlikely to have been predicted via any form of analysis.

2.2. The journals

The original purpose of the project was to prove that precognition did not occur in dreams. To do this, I had decided to keep a dream journal for up to a year, in the expectation that any seemingly precognitive dreams would prove on examination to have been the product of faulty memory or some other non-psi explanation. Only nine days after making the first entry in the journal, I had an unimpressive but veridical example regarding a surprise phone call from a relative I hadn't heard from in quite a while. Over the ensuing weeks and months, more and more of these dreams appeared, some unimpressive, involving only one or two veridical details, and others that contained many veridical details, including one dream from 17 May, 1990 that had 33 veridical line items that correlated well with the 9/11 attacks in New York City over ten years later (Paquette, 2012a). Some dreams with veridical details also contained spiritually oriented content, which could not be verified but nevertheless raised the question of whether it was genuine.

2.3. The journal database

The database is comprised of 34 transcribed dream journals. Journals #1-2, and 19-34 have been transcribed verbatim but, with the exception of notable dreams, journals 3-18 have been transcribed as summaries. Starting with journal #34, dreams were no longer written on paper, but written in an iPad app and emailed to my email account. This reduced transcription time to zero and provided an independent date and time stamp to each record. The total word count for the transcribed journals is 867,287, exclusive of notes.

The date of the first entry is September 15, 1989. The cutoff date for the study is September 10, 2016. This cov-

ers a period of 9,857 days. Twenty dreams that predate the journal were written from memory in the first year after the journal was started, with approximate dates. These are all identified as belonging to 'journal 0'. Journal zero dreams are not included in the calculation of elapsed days. The total number of daily entries ('records') for this period is 4,178 or 42.38% of the total period covered. The number of days for which there is no record is 5,679, or 57.61%. The 4,178 records are sub-divided into 12,224 'dreams'. Dreams are differentiated from records as thematically dissimilar scenes from the same evening, separated by periods of wakefulness. A 'scene' is, for the purposes of this study, identical to a 'dream.' If a dream is interrupted by waking and then continued after an entry in the journal is made, both 'scene' entries are counted as a single dream because they are thematically related. When this happens, a note is made of when the first scene ended and the next began.

2.4. Coding criteria

To code dream scenes for the study, four categories of coding criteria were used. The first was my own design (Paquette criteria), which asked whether the dream is 'spirit-related'. To be spirit-related, the dream had to include elements that either explicitly referred to or implied the existence of spirits or a non-material environment. This included references to ghosts, reincarnation, spiritual realms, and communications that evinced noetic knowledge. Religious references were coded as 'spirit-related' or 'ersatz' depending on their function within the dream. This coding method is similar to that used by Krippner et. al. (2001) for 'spiritual objects' on the Casto scale.

After determining that a dream met the 'spiritual' criteria, the dreams were coded based on the kind of spirit referenced in the dream, if any. The three groups are:

1. OBE point of view (POV)—this is a dream that appears to be an OBE, thus implying the existence of spirit
2. Ghost—the spirit of a deceased party
3. Spirit—the spirit of an unknown party with no known or suspected connection to an incarnated existence

The ghost and spirit categories are segregated because dream figures identified as ghosts in dreams tend to behave differently from dream figures identified as spirits. For instance, 'ghosts' in dreams will show me the circumstances of their death, while a 'spirit' will not refer to themselves in a way that implies they have ever lived or died. Ghosts are often concerned with people they knew during life and will bring me to see them, but spirits evince no interest in personal attachments of that kind. These figures should not be confused with fleeting or nebulous figures that others might describe as ghosts or spirits on the basis of their ephemeral quality. If anything, both ghosts and spirits, as recorded in my journals, are more solid, clear, and 'present' than other characters, such as living persons known to me, observed during veridical OBEs (Paquette, 2012b). Last, dreams were coded based on spirit behaviour (whether the figure behaves as if lucid or not, is teaching, giving advice or a warning, etc.), and whether noetic knowledge is given.

The second category of coding criteria is based on the Casto scale discussed in the introduction (Krippner et al., 2001). This was used to code dreams based on the following factors: spiritually-themed objects, characters, settings, activities, emotions, and experiences that evoked feelings of awe or reverence.

The third coding category is based on parts of the Hood scale of mystical experiences (R.W. Hood, 1975). These were used to identify noetic information, loss of sense of ego, space/time, dispassionate understanding, excitement, and awe. The fourth category is based on the McNamara & Bulkeley (2015) spiritual content criteria, which were: death, Christianity, light, reassurance, nightmare, epistemological uncertainty, ineffability, precognition, time (timelessness), and positive affect. These four scales were used to cast the widest net possible, and then to cross-reference selections across coding categories to narrow the selections to the strongest matches.

2.5. Core characteristics

After the dreams were coded in a Filemaker Pro database, the results were exported to SPSS statistics 23 for analysis. At this stage, the goal was simply to determine what type of content was most common in the journal, most common within spiritual dreams, and which dreams had overlapping content, particularly veridicality. 'Veridicality', as the term is used here, refers to dream content that has in some way been verified. For instance, the information seen in the dream may be corroborated by a witness to a precognitive dream, the subject of an OBE dream, or news items that match dream content. Veridicality had been coded separately in earlier studies (Paquette, 2012a, 2012b), but includes the following: whether the dream contains veridical content (yes/no), the degree of veridicality as measured by number of veridical elements, realism (unrealistic, weak, natural, or hyper-real), and authenticity (correct/incorrect, consistent/inconsistent).

After coding the dreams, the core characteristic of each coding method (core theme) was listed separately and given a yes/no value to determine whether the dream content would be described as spiritual based on combinations of the different scales. The four values extracted from the four coding scales were:

1. Paquette criteria: Independent agent present

These figures sometimes explicitly identify themselves as independent agents, but this criterion includes figures that behave as if they are independent of the dream.

2. Casto scale: Reverence or awe associated with any dream element

All of the Casto scale criteria include 'reverence' as a characteristic of spiritual-themed content. This item sums up the six Casto items as positive for spiritual content if any one of those items is positive.

3. Hood scale: Noetic information

The Hood scale was designed to measure mystical experiences whose characteristics emphasize qualities such as sensation of loss of ego, sense of universality, and difficulty of verbal expression. These themes are extremely rare in the journal, making them ineffective criteria for discriminating spiritual from non-spiritual content. Of the remaining Hood scale items, noetic information was the most distinctive criteria and it represented the general quality of other criteria from this scale. Noetic information, as defined here, is information that appears to come from an independent source or is beyond my knowledge at the time.

4. Bulkeley criteria: Veridicality

The most relevant of the Bulkeley criteria was 'precognition'. For the study, the term precognition was translated as 'veridical' to accommodate veridical dream content

that was non-precognitive, such as veridical out of body experiences (OBEs). The other themes found in the Bulkeley criteria are either redundant or not relevant to this data. For instance, death and reassurance are both related to the presence of ghosts, both of which are captured with the independent agent criteria from the Paquette scale. Epistemological uncertainty, uncertainty whether the dream is real or not, is rare in the journal (n=5), so it cannot be used as a criterion for the purpose of differentiating content.

It was difficult to code for positive affect because it is a subjective criterion. A person may die within a dream and that could be considered 'negative' because some people think of death as a negative quality, but this is not true of everyone and not in every situation. Because 'positive' and 'negative' are inherently subjective values, rather than intrinsic to specific content types, this criterion was ignored.

5. Paquette v2 criteria (V2): content characteristics

In addition to coding dreams to identify whether they had spiritual content, dreams were coded based on the type of content they contained. New codes were generated as needed, but all of the dreams could be described with the following eight codes: lesson, revelation, warning, challenge, message, service, comforting, and prophetic. They are not exclusive codes, meaning that some dreams are positive for more than one.

The V2 codes are defined as following:

- Lesson: I am taught something within the dream, regardless of the presence of an instructor. Lesson content is generally spiritual in nature.
- Revelation: Knowledge on an epic scale is 'revealed' within the dream.
- Warning: I am given an explicit warning, generally related to a future event.
- Challenge: Sometimes coded as a lesson, these entail the undertaking of an arduous challenge for the purpose of learning something.
- Message: An explicit delivery of a message within the dream, where an independent agent states this purpose and then delivers the message.
- Service: Dreams where an independent agent performs a service for me, asks me to perform a service for someone else, or I actually perform such a service.
- Comforting: This designation is similar to service, but when the service performed appears designed to comfort another. This is distinct from the Bulkeley 'reassurance' criteria, which is specific to reassuring the dreamer after the death of a loved one. Here, 'comforting' can refer to comforting the dreamer or any dream figure, and the nature of the comfort can encompass any subject rather than being limited to death.
- Prophetic: Similar to revelation, but not necessarily 'epic', and these must contain a source for the prophetic information in the form of an independent agent. This is different from 'precognitive' which does not require the presence of an independent agent.

3. Results

908 dreams coded as spiritual

The process of coding the dreams was extremely laborious. The first pass involved reading every dream in their entirety to determine if any part of the dream could be interpreted as

having spiritual content according to the Paquette criteria. If a dream could be interpreted that way, it was marked for further coding against the remaining three criteria. Of the 12,224 dreams in the database at the cutoff date for the study, 908 were identified as potentially spiritual dreams by the Paquette criteria. These 908 dreams were then read multiple times in their entirety to be coded for each of the coding systems used here.

The continuity hypothesis is not supported by this research

The dreams collected in the database used for this study do not support the theory that continuity from waking to sleep states has a significant influence on dream content. This is because clear examples of continuity were exceedingly rare; to date there are only 10 dreams coded this way out of 12,224. That said, the database undoubtedly contains dreams that other researchers would assume are based in some way on past experience. There are a few reasons I may code them differently:

- The dream contains insufficient detail to distinguish a past event from a similar future event. Because veridical precognitive dreams exist in the database, it is not assumed that all dreams are related to the past unless proven otherwise. They are regarded as neutral unless evidence exists to place them in the past or future. This prevents low detail dreams of repetitive mundane activity from being coded as artefacts of previous knowledge or experience.
- A veridical OBE can describe events in someone else's life. If sufficient detail exists to establish veridicality for the distant (OBE) event, it can be distinguished from my previous personal experience.
- Literal veridical content in general, regardless of psi type. There are 433 veridical dreams in the database, of which 284 are coded as having 'natural' realism. This code means that the dream content is explicitly not symbolic and that there is a one to one correspondence between dream elements and the elements they are matched to in waking life. For example, on May 10, 1990, I dreamed of an acquaintance named David who lived in Atlanta (I lived in New Jersey at the time). In the dream, I saw a car that had its roof smashed by a tree branch in a recent storm. In the dream, I am told it is the second time this has happened this week to the same person. I then observe that David is talking to a stranger. After waking, I called David to confirm the dream. He said that on that morning, he had met someone in the parking lot who rents space in the same office building David worked in. He told David that the roof of his car had just been smashed by a tree branch in a wind storm, and the same thing had happened to his wife's car the previous week (Paquette, 2012a). This is a one-to-one correspondence of dream imagery to a specific incident connected to the subject of the dream on the same day as the dream. With so many dreams that can be shown to be literal, I am not inclined to accept dream content as symbolic without reasonable evidence. My goal is to avoid complicating the analysis by inserting conjecture where it is not warranted.
- My own background as an atheist caused me to consciously avoid opportunities to learn about spiritual subjects from early childhood. I was not just disinter-

ested but hostile to the idea of spirituality, mysticism, and religion until my mid-twenties. After that, I was more tolerant but remained uninformed about spiritual and religious subjects until 2004, when, at the age of 39, my dreams prompted an interest in whether they were consistent or inconsistent with any form of religious teaching. Until I was 39, I had only been to a church a maximum of five times as an unwilling child and had never read any portion of a Bible or other religious work. As an artist, I remained naïve regarding the religious themes found in many Renaissance artworks, though I was familiar with the images themselves. For instance, I was unaware that many of the most popular subjects refer to the last three days of the life of Jesus or what the difference was between the Old and New Testament portions of the Christian Bible.

- Many of my spiritual dreams predated 2004, thus making it unlikely they were influenced by prior knowledge. Even the dreams that post-dated that interest often contained content that was new to me until after I started researching the relevant dream.

Two examples of early spiritual dreams

The first two examples of spiritual-themed dream content in my dreams date to 1981, before the journal experiment began. In the first of the dreams, a female figure I assumed to be an angel brought me to a beautiful heaven-like place. In the second dream, two men I identified at the time as angels brought me to a different heaven-like place. Both were very strong dreams during which I experienced awe and reverence. To this day, I remember both clearly and in considerable detail. They contained religious/spiritual figures (thought at the time to be angels), took place in a spiritual setting (interpreted to be heaven), had an emphasis on the quality of light, and in the second one, music like choruses of angels. In short, these were both classic examples of religion-influenced spiritual dreams. However, I was an atheist with no religious training and very little knowledge of religion at the time. On the basis of my atheistic beliefs, I decided that both dreams were the product of the same unknown brain functions that produce other dreams, possibly influenced by casual encounters with religious imagery in popular media. And for the record, I was somewhat mortified to have had the dreams.

One could argue that the dream figures identified as 'angels' were not actually angels. I accept the possibility and think it is actually quite likely that they represented, or were, spirit beings of a high order. Lacking the vocabulary at the time to describe them any other way, I called them angels as a matter of convenience. The same could be said of my identification of the place as 'heaven-like', though that is not the same as declaring that the locale was definitively 'heaven'. However, these distinctions may be an unnecessary semantic distraction from the bigger picture: in both dreams, a spirit figure of some kind brought me to an achingly beautiful place that was suffused with brilliant light, love, reverence, and music. Those details are sufficient to classify the dreams as spiritual, regardless of the identity of the characters or the location. That isn't to say their identities are wholly unimportant, but this article is more concerned with evaluating whether dream figures can be described as being in some way independent of the dreamer regardless of what their identity or classification might be.

Dream figures

In the years following those first spiritually-themed dreams, more examples of spiritual content appeared in my journals. They were initially ignored due to my lack of interest in spiritual subjects and the lack of 'real world' references for validation. However, there have been a small number of dreams that contain both veridical and spiritual content. Those dreams tended to feature dream figures that behaved as if they were aware of my sleep state and their own state (deceased, sleeping, or unknown). Those figures are referred to here as 'independent agents'.

In a private communication with Robert Waggoner (2015), author of *Lucid Dreaming, gateway to the self* (Waggoner, 2009), he cautioned me to be aware of the difference between what he described as a 'thought form', a figure that was created by and dependent upon the dreamer's thoughts, and a 'non-thought form', a figure that appeared to be independent of the dreamer. In this article, the term 'independent agent' refers exclusively to what are thought to be non-thought forms on the basis of their behaviour and the quality of information presented. That said, a clarification on the subject of lucid dreaming is useful here. Waggoner's study of lucid dreaming has led him to use lucid dreams as a tool to understand the meaning of dream content (Waggoner, 2009). He accomplishes this for the most part by taking advantage of the lucid state within a dream to mentally query dream figures about dream content.

In my case, though I have 130 lucid dreams recorded in my journals, there are no examples containing the type of behaviour described by Waggoner, where the dreamer asks questions of independent agents for the purpose of clarifying dream content. This may be because I noticed very early that any attempt to interact with a dream had the tendency to disrupt it. For this reason, when I use the term 'lucid dream' it should not be interpreted to describe a dream where the lucid state is used to explain or explore the dream. Rather, it describes a dream within which I am explicitly aware that I am dreaming. That is all it means, nothing more.

Scale choice

Clear differences appear in the type of dreams identified as spiritual within each scoring system. Of the 73 dream scenes identified as spiritual according to the Bulkeley scale, for instance, only 22 (30.14%) match the noetic criteria, but noetic content is found in 70.65% (n=65) of Casto scale dreams (n=92) and 54.59% (n=214) of Paquette scale dreams (n=392). Similarly, the Bulkeley scale identifies the fewest (and smallest proportion) of dreams containing independent agents (n=41, 56.16%) compared to Casto (n=64, 69.57%) and Hood (n=214, 87.35%). Moreover, to take an extreme example, only 7 dreams (n=908, 0.77%) meet all four core criteria from each of the four scales, showing a low level of agreement between the scales (table 3).

The highest number of spiritual dreams were found using the Paquette (n=392, 43.17%) and Hood scales (n=245, 26.98%), both of which emphasized noetic information and independent agents. The Casto scale, which emphasized reverence, and the Bulkeley criteria, largely adopted from NDEs, identified far fewer dreams (n=92, 10.13% and n=73, 8.04%, respectively). Dreams were next grouped based on the type of spiritual figures found within them, to see what influence, if any, this had on dream content.

Table 3. Breakdown of dream characteristics for all dreams coded as 'spiritual' within each coding method

Category	Casto		Hood		Bulkeley		Paquette	
Reverence	92	100.00%	65	26.5%	9	12.33%	64	16.33%
Noetic	65	70.65%	245	100.00%	22	30.14%	214	54.59%
Veridical	9	9.78%	22	8.98%	73	100.00%	41	10.46%
Independent agent	64	69.57%	214	87.35%	41	56.16%	392	100.00%

Dream figure types

Of the 908 dreams identified as spiritual, 218 (24.01%) did not contain spiritual figures (table 4). Of the remainder, spiritual figures belonged to three principal categories: ghosts (n=305, 33.59%, OBE spirits (n=100, 11.01%), and spirits that could not be identified as ghosts or as OBE spirits (n=163, 17.95%). This latter category includes spirit guides, because they have no known connection to a living or deceased person. In addition to these three categories, Angels, faeries, named Biblical characters, God, religious professionals (like priests or monks), and gurus respectively account for between 1.10% and 3.08% of the dream figures encountered. The last four types: animals, other, demon/devil, or named mythological, each represent less than 1.00% of the total.

The way the characters listed in table 4 were labelled varies depending on the dream content itself and the group type. For instance, the category 'fairies' includes all types of dream figures that could be described as folkloric 'nature spirits'. These figures are generally unambiguous, but not in all cases. In one of these (non-lucid) dreams, I ask a dream figure if she is an elf, and she denies it. Lacking any other method of identifying the figure, she was coded as a 'nature spirit' despite her denial within the dream. There is only one dream containing a figure identified as a 'demon', on the basis that the creature appeared to be unambiguously a demon in the sense that 1) in the dream itself I thought he was a demon, and 2) he was oversized, half-human, half-animal, brutish, violent, and powerful.

The 'ghost' category is meant to accommodate dream figures that behave as ghosts, that is, the spirits of people or animals that have lived but died. Some figures are assigned to this category because they unambiguously belong to it. For instance, in a dream dated May 14, 1991, I observed as an elderly black woman sits under a tree, then dies, and I see her ghost emerge from her body, whereupon I say 'There, it wasn't so bad, eh?' In other dreams, the presence of a ghost figure is determined based on inference. For instance, in many dreams, a person will approach me directly for the purpose of showing me what appear to be fatal wounds: a missing arm or leg, gashes in the torso made by a golf club, bullet wounds, their body buried under rocks, drowned, and so on.

Figures classified as 'angels' could in many cases be classified as 'non-ghost non-OBE spirit' as well. In only one dream are 'angels' unambiguously angels. The figures in this group appear to belong to a higher level of a spiritual hierarchy than all other spirit-related figure types other than 'God'. They remain classified as 'angels' despite this ambiguity as a way to distinguish this special class of characters from other spirit types. The 'named Biblical' category of dream figures contains dream figures named as people familiar from the Bible or connected to Jewish or Christian history, such as Mary, Jesus, St. Francis, and Methuselah.

The category 'God' is separate from the named Biblical group because it is a notable group in its own right. Dream figures are not identified as 'God' on the basis of any kind of deduction or inference. In each case, within the dream the figure is clearly, solidly, unambiguously God, with no room for doubt. If there were doubt, the figure would be coded differently. Whether it is correct to have this impression within a dream is a different question, but it is the impression I had during the small number of dreams that fit this description. Moreover, the strength of 'God' identifications is stronger than the identification of any other dream figure type that has ever appeared in one of my dreams, including family members and close friends, by several orders of magnitude. Of some interest is that Jesus has appeared in a few dreams with God as a separate being, and never as God, as Christians would expect. Instead, Jesus comes across as spiritually powerful and important, but less than the spiritual radiance of God. This is incompatible with Christian doctrine, which states that Jesus is a form of God; and with Jewish doctrine, which does not acknowledge Jesus as God or a prophet. It is somewhat compatible with Muslim beliefs, which accept Jesus as a prophet, but not as God.

I am aware that dreams containing a figure identified as God or other figures claimed by various religions are inherently controversial. However, they are mentioned here and coded separately as such for the purpose of presenting the most accurate and complete record of dreams found within the journal that met the criteria used to identify spiritual dream content. Although dreams wherein 'God' appears are not numerous (n=15, 1.65%), they match many of the

Table 4. Spiritual figure types found in dreams

S. Char type	N
Ghost	305
None observed	218
Non-ghost, non-OBE spirit	163
OBE spirit	100
Angel	28
Faerie creature	24
Named Biblical	18
God	15
Named religious	15
Guru	10
Animal	8
Other	2
Demon/devil	1
Named mythological	1
Total	908

criteria used to select spiritual dreams: Independent agent (n=13, 86.67%), spiritual activity (n=73.33%), spiritual experience (n=12, 80%), noetic (n=12, 80%), message (n=9, 60%), reverence (n=14, 93.33%). At the same time, only one of these dreams (6.67%) contains an overtly religious (Christian) reference.

Dream figures identified as God or other types of spiritual beings are not interpreted as symbolic representations of something else for the same reason that none of the other characters found in the journals are presented in that way: because it would distort the raw data and mislead the reader. Alternative explanations will be discussed in the discussion chapter of this article.

Ghosts

The largest group of spiritual dream figures is 'ghosts' (n=305, 33.59%) but many of those dreams did not meet any other criteria for identifying spiritual content. Of this group, only 28 (8.40%) contained noetic content, 26 (7.80%) were veridical, and 7 (2.10%) had content that evoked reverence. In comparison, dreams with characters identified as non-ghost, non-OBE spirits (n=163, 17.95%) match other spiritual criteria more often. In this group, noetic information is found in 232 dreams (74.40%), veridicality in 28 (9.00%), and reverent themes are found in 73 (23.40%).

Other differences are found between character type groups. However, outside of the categories that collectively make up less than 3.00% of the total dreams, none of the categories are completely consistent. Therefore, some categories tend to have no spiritual content apart from the presence of a spiritual character while others tend to contain numerous examples of spirit-themed content. Neither however, is completely free of exceptions. For instance, in 27 of the ghost dreams, the apparent purpose of the dream is to show or describe the circumstances of death. This type of dream would not ordinarily meet other criteria for having spiritual content because there is no reverent quality to it, nor is the information it contains noetic. In 28 others, ghosts do provide noetic knowledge.

An exception to the tendency among ghost dreams to be devoid of spiritual content is found in a dream from September 26, 1989. In it, I encountered a ghost, saw how he died, and had it explained to me by another character, an independent agent identified as the living daughter of the ghost. This figure went on to ask my assistance in explaining to the ghost that he had died, a fact he had not yet accepted. If not for the second figure who served to explain what I was seeing, this would not match other spirit criteria. Because the figure was there, it also was positive for the presence of an independent agent, service, and message content.

Independent agents

Independent agents are found in 392 dreams. Of those, 214 (54.6%) also contain noetic content, 64 (16.3%) meet the Casto reverence criteria, and 41 (10.5%) are veridical. Overall, this makes the presence of independent agents the most reliable method for identifying spiritual content.

Independent agents appear in two ways: implicit (n=284, 72.45%) and explicit (n=144, 36.73%). In an implicit appearance, the figure is identified as an independent agent based on behaviour within the dream that is consistent with independence. For instance, in a dream dated 2/1/1989, a character stated the following: 'That was your astral body I cut

with my sword', and then, 'if you ever return to New York, your physical body will die as well, in the same fashion as all the others.' This statement showed an awareness of the difference between astral and physical states as well as of the present in relation to the future, something that would require lucidity on the part of the figure. The dream contained other information that connected it to a group of dreams that collectively provided details relevant to the destruction of the World Trade Center on 9/11/2001 (Paquette, 2012a). This fact makes sense of the warning because at the time of the dream I lived a few blocks away from the World Trade Center in a building that was part of the no-entry disaster zone after the collapse of the towers and nearby buildings.

An explicitly independent agent is a character that refers to its state, though not always in the same way, from within the dream. For example, on 12/28/2007, I was in Paris, France when I recorded a dream encounter with a woman from Africa. She had a message for me and was quite urgent about delivering it. Moreover, '...she said it was important I pay attention because either she or I would be waking soon and would have to attend to our bodily needs' (journal entry dated 12/28/2007). This reference to our respective sleeping bodies reflects conscious awareness on her part of her state and mine. For this reason, the dream is coded as containing an independent agent. It is also coded as containing an OBE spirit because she stated within the dream that we were both OBE for the purpose of communicating while dreaming. Her message was coded as prophetic, but it has not occurred to date, so it is not coded as veridical.

Classification as symbolic

The question of whether the figures within these groups are symbolic or literal was not considered for this stage of the study. Instead, they are identified according to how they are identified in the dream itself. This is in keeping with coding norms used in my study of symbolic dreams where, to be classified as symbol, the content had to meet an unambiguous standard first (Paquette, 2016). The criteria are:

- It is an efficient way to convey a specific message.
- It does not appear to be a regurgitation or reflection of the dreamer's thoughts or concerns.
- Clarity of communication is improved by the use of symbolic rather than literal presentation.

The following criterion is not required to meet the definition of 'symbolic' used here, but it is met by some dream content and strengthens identification of dream content as symbolic:

- There is a character in the dream who makes or draws attention to the symbol. This shows that the source of the symbol is, at least apparently, independent.

The criteria described here are designed to prevent the false identification of symbolic content by ensuring that all symbolic content performs the normal function of symbols: to communicate original information efficiently from one or more parties to another (p. 204).

Spiritual objects or settings

Some dreams contain no figures but do inspire a sense of awe or reverence. For instance, on October 24, 2009, I wrote the following in my journal:

'I see all the things of the universe woven together in a huge spiral funnel shape. Each item emanates or projects

knowledge of God; even those that deny God do this, for that is how they are built. In this way, the information is projected everywhere, without exception.'

In this dream, I saw everything in the universe woven together in such a way that I was aware of how all of it, all of the trees, plants, animals, objects, and people, regardless of their beliefs or whether they were animate or inanimate, worked together in support of the existence of God. Objects made by people emanated knowledge of God because they had been created by beings created by God, out of materials created by God. Atheists were created by God, and by their denial of God, they drew attention to the topic of God's existence. In the dream, I was made aware of how everything in the universe, even seemingly opposing forces, projected outwardly in all directions knowledge of God.

The image of a cornucopia of opposing things woven together is symbolic. It meets the criteria of efficiency (it is a simple, easy to remember image with considerable meaning), it did not characterize my thoughts at the time, the use of a symbol improved the quality of communication, it serves the purpose of communicating an original message, and I was informed of the meaning of the image within the dream itself.

This dream is coded spiritual because of its noetic quality and references to God. It is not categorized as a 'God' dream, because no figure identified as God appears in the dream, nor is it clear that it is 'sent from' God as a religious person might claim. The dream record may appear to some readers as if it contains conclusions or an interpretation regarding the content. However, what is recorded is an earnest attempt to capture the exact impression I had in the dream itself, as accurately as possible, albeit in a simplified way.

In another example of a spiritual dream that does not contain any kind of spirit, an object is the focus of attention: a ring with the inscription 'Find Me, Love Me, Fear Me.' My impression within the dream was that the 'me' written on the ring referred to God. This impression was not formed after waking. On the basis of this connection the dream was coded as spiritual. Neither of the examples just provided contain independent agents, so if that were the sole criteria used to identify spiritual content, it would have missed these dreams and others like them.

Some readers might wonder if both of these dreams, and others referenced elsewhere in this paper, could have been inspired by or influenced by my study of the Bible in 2004 and 2005. It is a fair question, and it may be partly true, but not in the way one might expect. Firstly, that explanation does not explain the 384 spiritual dreams experienced before 2004. Secondly, I had no interest in, knowledge of, or training related to the Bible or other religious texts prior to 2004. I had been an atheist since early childhood, avoided churches, had no interest in befriending people who were religious, and had nothing but scorn for the subject. My attitude started to change due to the findings in my dream journal, but this did not extend so far as to study religion at any level until 2004, when I was 39 years old.

To my knowledge, in every case where a dream in my journal coincided to some degree with Biblical content (usually Old Testament or Torah), I only discovered these similarities after mentioning the dream to someone at church who then found the references for me within the Bible or Torah. This includes dreams that pre-dated the questions by many years. On none of these occasions was I aware of

the specific significance of the dreams beforehand, though I was generally aware that dreams involving spiritual subjects were likely to be meaningful to people with religious interests. I was also generally aware that a religious interpretation was likely with some dreams, but usually had to do some research to discover why. In addition, my spiritual dreams often conflicted with the views and teachings at the churches I attended in 2004-2005. The clearest example of this is that some of my dreams could be used to dispute the Christian notion of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine that the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth is literally God.

There are 15 dreams that include an appearance by God as a dream character and 9 with Jesus. In all of them, it is clear that the characters are distinctly different. Of greatest import to a Christian is that in my dreams, God is unambiguously greater in size, power, strength, authority, and every other dimension of personality than Jesus. There is no question in these dreams that the two could not be mistaken for each other in any way. Although I am neutral on the subject of church doctrine in the sense that I am unperturbed by it regardless whether I agree, modern Christian doctrine would describe those dreams as heretical because they conflict with one of the fundamental precepts of their faith, that Jesus is God and that the Holy Trinity is their vehicle for explaining how God could also be Jesus (and the Holy Spirit).

One could argue that I had unconscious awareness of the Bible from my reading of it in 2004, but my reading of the Bible was guided by my dreams, not the other way around. In practice, this meant that I would have a dream, write it down, then later in the week mention it to someone at church who would then either immediately or some days later point me to a passage that I would read for the first time. I did read ahead on occasion, but according to notes in my journal, any influence from this would be minimal. Where an influence could have been exerted is that my interest in studying spiritual dream content led me to meditate more frequently and the quality and frequency of those dreams increased. However, there have been other times in my life where I have spent extended periods painting outdoors (I am an artist) instead of working in an office, and during those periods the frequency of memorable dreams with spiritual content also increased. Because 384 of the spiritual dreams occurred before the 2004 date, I am not inclined to attach great significance to the brief period during 2004-2005 when I studied the Bible. However, I do acknowledge that my interest in spiritual content may have increased the frequency of spiritual content in my dreams at that time.

Intensity

Dreams recorded in my journals are assigned intensity values on a scale from zero to five. A zero-intensity dream is one where I remember some details from the dream, but not the impression of experiencing the dream. A level one dream retains an impression of the experience, but it may be incoherent or weak. A level two dream has enough detail to establish a coherent sequence, but I may not understand my role within the dream. At level three, the dream is clear, well-remembered, coherent, and to an extent visceral. These dreams may also contain strong impressions. Some would describe these as 'big dreams' on the basis of their level of detail and memorability. However, an intensity three dream, while matching the general characteristics of

big dreams described elsewhere (Bulkeley, 2016; Jung et al., 1968), remains well below the intensity of level four and five dreams. At level four and five, I can be aware of things outside physical space and time and these are very intense. Some are highly emotional. Of the 12,224 dreams reviewed for this study, only 38 (0.31%) are assigned intensity values of four or five. The highest word count for one of these entries is 2,948, also the longest in all of the journals. Eight others are between 1,029 and 1,732 words. The shortest is 95 words, making it slightly higher than the average word count for any dream in the journal (75.73 words). Of these 38 dreams, 35 (91.43%) are identified as containing spiritual content by the Paquette criteria. However, among the 908 dreams identified as containing spiritual content, the 35 high intensity dreams represent a minority (3.5%) of the total. From these figures it is clear that intense dreams are highly likely to contain spiritual content, but the presence of spiritual content does not imply high intensity values.

Of the 35 high intensity dreams, six (17.14%) contain a named religious figure. Among the 908 dreams coded as containing spiritual content, 64 (7.05%) contain a named religious figure (God, Jesus, Satan, Mary, etc.).

OBE POV

A significant number of dreams (n=267, 29.52%) are coded as perceived from an OBE point of view. A typical example comes from a dream dated 1/5/2014: 'I am in New York when I get the idea I am out of my body. I decide to fly upward, which I do, but get much higher than I intended. The view I have is like what I might expect to have if I was in a helicopter.' In others, I receive explicit training how to have an OBE from gurus or other spiritual figures. For instance, in a journal zero dream from approximately 2/1/1988 I dreamed that 'Swami Satchidananda comes to me and says, "It's time I showed you how to come out of your body." He then pulls my astral body loose from my physical body.' That dream was followed by others over a period of years where I became more and more accustomed to the practice, usually with the guidance or supervision of an independent agent. Although both of these dreams are coded as spiritual because of the OBE element, the first is less interesting than the second as far as spiritual content is concerned.

Death-related

Of 392 dreams coded as containing independent agents, 178 (45.40%) are death-related. The code 'death-related' can refer to the death of someone within the dream, a reference to a death in the past or future, or to something that implies death, such as ghosts or reincarnation. Ghosts appear in 136 (34.70%) of these dreams, and reincarnation is referenced in 17 (4.3%). A typical example of one of these dreams is dated 2/14/1990. In it, a 'spirit' brings me to aid the ghost of a man who had been a pub owner in life. The ghost feels remorse for his habit of encouraging drunkenness to increase sales. I advise the ghost to seek out alcoholics and counsel them against drinking. The ghost objects that the living cannot see or hear him. I allow that this is true on the conscious level, but that they will sense his urgings. This dream was coded as containing an independent agent, a ghost, death-related (because of the ghost), lucidity (on my part), service (my aid to the ghost), comforting (to the ghost), and a lesson (the presentation of the problem to be solved).

Veridicality

Veridical content is found in 73 dreams coded as spiritual (n=908, 8.04%), but in 41 (10.43%) of 393 dreams coded as containing an independent agent. This is compared to 433 (3.54%) veridical dreams out of a total of the 12,224 dreams included in this study. A minority of OBE-coded dreams (n=33, 12.4%) contain veridical content. However, veridicality as measured by number of veridical content items shows that only seven dreams (n=73, 9.59%) contain six or more matched line items (table 5). This means that if matching line items are used as the basis for establishing significance, most of the veridical dreams in this group do not have statistically significant correlations.

The line item method is best used when dream content has no clear relationship to potential future or distant events. For instance, in a veridical dream dated 7/4/1990, I meet a stranger, a young woman who described her name in this way: 'She says a name that sounds like "Marcia" but when I repeat it back to her she says 'not exactly, but close. It is also similar to but not the same as a department store. My last name is exactly the same as a department store'. Later on the same day as the dream I met a stranger in New York's Central Park that matched the physical description of the woman in the dream. I noted this to my wife, and then asked the woman's name. It was 'Macie Sears', a very good match for the description in the journal. She is the only person I have ever met with either name. In this example, the number of veridical line items (n=7) helps establish a relationship between the dream and the later event.

In the sample of dreams investigated for this study, 68.5% have only one or two matching line items. This is not enough to establish validity if the method relies on matching a larger number of line items. However, the reason for using a large number of line items is when the dream itself does not contain explicit references to a future or distant event that the dream might be connected to. It is rare for that to be the case, but among spiritual dreams it is more common. For instance, in a dream dated 3/13/1990, a lucid dream character, the ghost of a recently deceased relative, asked me to pass on a message to another relative. The message was that she would no longer appear in his dreams. Two days later I met with the intended recipient of the message and told him the dream. He said that on the same night as my dream, he'd dreamed of the same person and that she had said goodbye to him. In this case, the only item that could be verified was verified: the message that the ghost was 'leaving' (saying goodbye to) this other relative. In this case, the specificity of the dream makes it easier to accept as veridical because it was targeted at a specific person and that person received a similar message in the same way on the same night.

Table 5. Veridicality of dreams coded as spiritual and veridical

Line items	Frequency	Percent
0 (unspecified)	4	5.5
1-2 matched	50	68.5
3-5 matched	12	16.4
6-9 matched	3	4.1
10+ matched	4	5.5
Total	73	100

Veridicality is correlated with the presence of independent agents ($n=908$, $p=.010$) and death-related dreams ($n=908$, $p=.035$). However, veridicality is rare among dreams that contain independent agents and noetic information ($n=22$, 11.50%) making it an uncertain criterion for finding spiritual content.

Scale comparisons

The variety of content found in dreams identified as spiritual demonstrates a flaw in the criteria used to identify spiritual content. It is that each of the scales is designed to find a certain type of content. The Bulkeley scale is oriented in favour of death-related content, the Casto scale favours religious or reverent themes, noetic knowledge is favoured by the Hood scale, and independent agents by the Paquette scale. Each is capable of finding content within each of these sub-groups, and each is in its own way 'spiritual'. For this reason, it cannot with justification be said that any one of these criteria is better than the others at finding generic spiritual content. That said, some of the criteria included in the Bulkeley and Hood scales did not occur once in all of the dreams investigated here. These were: 'ego quality' (lack of ego), 'unifying', and 'inner subjective quality'. Other Bulkeley criteria that were found in small quantities are: epistemological uncertainty ($n=5$, 0.60%), nightmare ($n=13$, 1.40%), and reassurance ($n=22$, 2.40%). Ineffability, a quality often described as a component of NDEs, was found in only 22 dreams (2.40%) in this study. The remaining dreams were easily described in words.

Common themes

Active agent

A common theme in many of these dreams is that of an active independent agent intruding into my dream to interact with me. In each example, the interaction seems to be in the form of assistance. This is consistent with the indigenous beliefs of many non-industrial cultures, who regard dreams to be interactions with spirits. These are usually benign, such as ancestors, saints, angels, or even God, and take the form of assistance to the dreamer.

The purpose behind independent agent interactions

Despite superficial differences, interactions with independent agents were consistent. The primary categories of interaction associated with these were: 1) ghosts identified as independent agents would come to me with a message to deliver or to show the circumstances of their death, 2) spirits identified as independent agents would come to me with a message or task designed to enhance my spiritual development. For the most part, this type of content cannot be verified. In the case of information or messages from ghosts, if their identity is unknown, there is no way to check the information. Spiritual training provided by spirits is also unverifiable because there are no physical references to compare them to. For instance, in a lucid dream dated 8/11/1990, I am warned by a tribunal of spirits that my thoughts and actions in dreams are real and must be controlled so that I do not allow damaging thoughts to influence the development of my character. This may make sense from a psychologi-

cal and spiritual point of view but cannot be proved by any conventional means.

Noetic and veridical

Another quality found in these dreams is that they provide information that is not explained by prior life experience. The presence of veridical dreams in this group, and there are 73 (8.00%) of them, makes it difficult to accept that 'noetic information' could be explained as simple fancy or imagination. In one example that was in part an inspiration for this study, a combination of veridical information and non-veridical noetic information is provided. Because this dream illustrates well the problem posed by some spiritual dreams, an abbreviated description is provided in the next paragraphs.

Hybrid dreams

Some of the spiritual dreams are what I called 'hybrid' dreams: dreams that contain both veridical content and content that cannot be checked for veridicality. The expression 'cannot be checked for veridicality' as it is used here refers exclusively to content that cannot be compared to any event, thing, person, or quality specific to waking experience. This is in contrast to content that could be checked but was found to be inconsistent. For example, on 4/29/2004 I woke from one of the most intense dreams I had ever experienced. It scored a five on the intensity scale, one of only eight such dreams in the entire journal and featured nothing less than the creation of the universe in what seemed to be explicit detail. The dream was structured with what could be described as veridical 'bookends' that framed the non-veridical content of the dream. To better understand this dream, the 1,273-word record is condensed here to a few essentials.

In the first bookend, I am living as a guest in a house owned by someone else, with furniture and food provided by a benefactor, but which is of poor quality by my standards. I appreciate that I have a benefactor but am ungrateful because the quality of everything is below my normal standard of living. The town appears to be medieval, I sleep on a vermin-infested mat on the floor and observe as people dressed in orange costumes play soccer in the street below me. I want to be friends with these people, but as I think that, the scene disappears. This is the end of the first bookend.

Next, I find myself outside of space and time, where I discover a book on a pedestal. It is a large and ancient-looking book, but the pages are all blank. Another peculiarity of the book is that opening it causes me to levitate upward with the book, and closing it causes me to gently return to the floor. Now, some of the people I'd seen in the street, who I understood are now my friends, enter the room. I want to play a joke on them by showing them the blank book that levitates. At first, I think my trick has worked when one of the friends opens it and says 'why, it's blank', but then something odd happens.

The pages started filling with words, page after page after page of information on absolutely everything. The words then overflowed the book and cascaded out of it like an unstoppable waterfall of information. It filled the room, the world, and the universe itself with all this information.

But it wasn't just information. The words weren't simply a dead record of facts, but they somehow were the things they described. The words made all the things they described at the same time as they recorded what they were, why they were there, how all these things behaved together. There was also information about the workings of the world and universe itself... There were records on every person who had ever lived, was living, or ever would live. I saw my own file and grabbed it to read later. Even the glimpse I had was enough to know that the file was total; nothing whatsoever missing from it. When I grabbed my file, I noticed another thing: Every person in this place was subject to the rules of He Who Wrote the Book. 'The Book' might sound like a Bible, but a Bible is written for mankind. This book seemed to be for the Writer himself, his own record of things, some of which are in the Bible, but a great deal more than that as well.

in the remaining bookend, I have returned to the medieval town, where I talk with some people in a village square about my responsibilities to the author of Creation. I don't want to follow his rules, but they say it is important that I do. This was the dream that made me curious enough about spiritual dream content to visit a church and see whether there was any connection with the material in my dreams.

At the time of the dream, it did not occur to me that the bookends might literally be precognitive, but at least one of them was. Two years later, I was experiencing financial problems but had been offered a job overseas, in Europe. I accepted the position, but because of my financial condition, my new employer had to provide me with an apartment, groceries, and furniture for the first couple of months I was there. The town, to my surprise, was a medieval village founded in the thirteenth century. Both of the apartments we lived in at first had vermin problems; the first had mice brazenly running across the floor, and the second was infested with wood lice. Because my cot was so full of these unpleasant insects, I took to sleeping on a threadbare mat on the floor. On one of these days early in our stay, I happened to look out the third-floor window onto the street and witnessed the very scene from my dream: people in orange costumes in a medieval city playing soccer. It was the year of the World Cup, and the locals were wearing the national colour, orange, in honour of their team. The final scene hasn't played out to date, but it is consistent with the town I live in, which has open medieval-era village markets at several locations throughout the town. At the time of the dream it hadn't occurred to me that it was possible for medieval and contemporary elements to co-exist, primarily because my perspective as an American didn't consider European norms.

The question raised by this dream and others is, if the portion of the dream that can be verified proves to be veridical, can the remainder of the dream be accepted even if it cannot be checked? If so, then Creation, in a form largely identical to that found in religious texts, may be a better description of the origin of the universe than competing 'Big Bang' theories. The problem is that the images of Creation presented in the dream cannot be distinguished from imagination, apart from the ineffability of the material. This dream contains precognitive detail related to my move to Europe, but the rest cannot be empirically verified via comparison to real world observations. This leaves the credibility of the dream in an interesting position, where the part that can be

verified is verified, but the part that cannot be checked remains an open question.

The Creation dream met only one of the Bulkeley criteria for spiritual themes, precognition. It did not match 'Christianity' because there were no overtly Christian references. In contrast, it met all of the Casto criteria, and many of the Hood and Paquette criteria. It is precisely this kind of dream content I intended to investigate with this study, but the variety of spiritual content categories as defined by the various scales used made it difficult to identify them reliably. For instance, in another veridical spiritual dream from 1985, I experience events related to an aborted mugging that would occur two weeks later. During the dream I had a very intense OBE, thus causing the dream to be classified as spiritual because OBEs imply the existence of a spirit and a spiritual dimension of existence. The dream did not present the kind of awe-inspiring content of the Creation dream, nor does it inspire the same kind of questions.

Comparison to reference models

Of the three reference models described in the Introduction, only two: parapsychological and primitive/anthropological are viable explanations for the data in this study. This is because veridical content argues strongly against the neurological/psychological model, which does not account for such things as precognition, veridical OBEs, and after death communications, all of which are found in the journals investigated here and in other studies.

The parapsychological model does not dispute the possibility that paranormal communication might have a divine independent source, but it does not embrace it either. The primitive/anthropological model asserts that dream communication is often divinely inspired. For this reason, the only reference model that fully agrees with the content of my journals is the primitive/anthropological model. However, this is only if the journal entries are taken at face value as if they are empirically true, despite the difficulty of establishing their credibility. As Ring (1997) showed earlier, accepting a dream at face value can lead to error. In this context, the parapsychological view is the safer option because it only accepts as much as can be proven, without taking a position on content that cannot be proven.

Use of secondary and hybrid examples to determine credibility

There is some precedent for an objective measure of a spiritual experience, in the form of Marian apparitions experienced by multiple witnesses simultaneously. In the well-known Medjugorje apparitions claimed by six children, evidence exists to suggest that the apparitions were not subjective (Pandarakalam, 2001). For instance, medical tests performed on the percipients showed that during their shared visions, their eyes became fixed on the same point, their breathing was nearly simultaneously altered, and perception of pain diminished during the vision. All six subjects described the same content during their visions, thus establishing a method to consider the possibility that their visions were shared and thus could not have been subjective. Superpsi, or telepathy among the percipients could also account for these observations, but as noted earlier, superpsi cannot be proven because it cannot be falsified. As for telepathy, whether the apparition is independent of all six subjects or a shared telepathic fantasy cannot be determined.

Regardless of the actual cause, the explanation is likely to involve psi of some kind, and the fact that similar observations were made of six subjects independently of each other does support a face value interpretation.

The dream journals investigated here contain fourteen examples of 'shared dreams', dreams where two or more people experience the same or substantially similar dream content. For instance, on 4/3/1991 I dreamed of an acquaintance who 'threw out' a baby boy in such a way that he was certain to die. Shortly after this dream, I ran into a woman I knew who told me she had a dream about the same person on the same night. In it, a baby had been 'left out to die'. At the end of her dream, I appeared to her and asked her to tell me of the dream after she woke. We not only had similar dream content on the same night, but it referenced the same person and her dream referenced me as well—in such a way that my figure in her dream can be identified as an independent agent. We never discovered if the man in the dream had anything to do with a baby dying, but of greater importance is that it provides plausible evidence for an independent agent, in this case my figure in my friend's dream.

The fact that shared dreams are found in the journal is suggestive, but not definitive on the credibility of spiritual dreams. This study is more concerned with dreams such as the one where I witnessed the creation of the universe and others that, if not intrinsically 'religious', would still be regarded as religious because of their resemblance to the teachings of various faiths.

Prophetic dreams

In the Ring (1997) study, he described a number of prophetic dreams that appeared to describe a return to Earth by Jesus, or an apocalyptic battle, or both. Based on information contained within the dreams in his sample, he posited that they were converging on the year 1998 as the date when the events described in the dreams or premonitions would happen. That is twenty years ago now, and none of the events have occurred. It is partly due to public reports of failed predictions like this that I find so-called 'prophetic dreams' troubling. A second reason is that people from different religious faiths can easily misinterpret such dreams in the context of their religion and react in an emotional manner. That said, I have had a number of dreams like this myself, at least one of which does contain veridical content. For the sake of providing a complete overview of the dreams discovered in this study, they will be mentioned here, but I do not want any reader to misunderstand and think that the mere act of presenting them is equivalent to an endorsement of the content.

The 'Holy city' dream

On 6/21/2005 I recorded a dream coded as a 'big dream', with an intensity of 5 that met all of the Casto criteria for a spiritual dream, all but the ghost criteria of the Paquette scale, several of the Hood criteria, but none of the Bulkeley criteria. It featured an unambiguous appearance of God, who said the following to me as I lay in bed, 'I speak to you so that you may hear...These things will shortly come to pass: we are in a holy place, a cave near the city of [pronounced 'yay-roo-shai-eem']. The relics in this place are holy and will soon be recovered to man. When the discovery is made, this city, which is fallen and corrupt, will be re-

stored and sanctified to its former state. At that time the city will be known by its true name instead of the false name it has borne for many years. This ground is holy, but unknown to man. Above us is an unrighteous city. When the discovery is made, I will be known to all. This city will be holy again.'

There was quite a bit of detail to the dream that I have skipped for the sake of brevity, but this is sufficient to provide an impression of how biblical it sounds. At least part of the content is consistent with the following verse from the Bible: 'Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth...' (NASB, 1999 Zechariah 8:3). This dream provides two things: 1) a prophecy as a statement of fact, 2) the prediction is linked to a precursor event (the discovery of the cave) that will lead to the realization of the prophecy. There are dozens of similar dreams in the journals, most of which could be interpreted as describing different aspects of the same sequence of highly significant events. If all of the dreams were like the one just described, there would be no means by which credibility could be ascertained. However, there is a single exception.

The tsunami dream

On 11/22/2004 I wrote the following in my journal: 'An angel comes to me and tells me that a great calamity will occur as a sign that Jesus will return to Earth soon. He then tells me that the dream will repeat three times so that I will know that it is true. Then I see a crowd of thousands of people on a beach running for their lives away from the water. The angel comes back, gives me the same message again, and then I see the people running again. After the second viewing of this sequence, the angel returns one more time, repeats the message, and then I see the people running away from the beach again.' My impression after waking was that hundreds of thousands of people were drowned in the event.

Almost a month later, on 12/20/2004, I recorded the following: 'I'm at a Japanese earthquake watching station. One of the machines appears to predict, or record, a magnitude seven earthquake, but one of the technicians says, 'It's not that big.' I can see a graph in front of me though and I see dozens of quakes represented there, of varying magnitudes. If anything, seven seemed to be at the low end of the scale for this group that seemed to top out in the high eights somewhere. I wonder why no one seems concerned, and a technician says to me, "It's not here," and then he looks to the Southwest and I can see on a globe that he is looking to a place below and to the West of China.'

Three days later, on 12/23/2004, there was an 8.2 magnitude earthquake located between Australia and Antarctica. This spawned dozens of other earthquakes and then, a little over a day later, on 12/25/2004 the 9.0 Sumatran quake that caused what is now known as the Boxing Day tsunami that killed approximately 280,000 people. The tsunami was unique in my experience of news items, but of greater interest is that the 11/22/2004 dream is the first appearance of a tsunami wave in the dream journal. After that dream, there are only three other references to tsunamis, one of which postdates the Honshu tsunami by a month, and another is a reference to the Boxing Day tsunami long after it happened. The third resembles no tsunami known to me.

The questions raised by this dream are: is it veridical? And, can the prophetic content be trusted? It is in the context of dreams like this, which appear to be veridical, that it

can be tempting to accept the prophetic or spiritual content at face value. This is particularly true here, because the independent agent behaves as if showing the tsunami event was an offer of proof for the express purpose of enhancing the credibility of the remainder of his message. This is utterly unlike precognitive dreams where a dream isn't considered precognitive until it is recognized as such after the fact. In this case, a dream figure is explicitly showing me something that he describes as a future event for the purpose of establishing his bona fides so that the second component of his message, also a future event, will be trusted. And then, only two days before the tsunami is set in motion by the Australian earthquake, another dream is consistent with that event. It is here that scepticism is warranted.

There are many failed prophecies like those described by Ring (1998), and even this one has become fourteen years old without the second half being realized. The answer, some would say, is that religious training or ambient knowledge of religion affected my dream, veridical content notwithstanding. That explanation would not account for the tsunami portion of the dream but might be credited for the form taken by the independent agent and the twofold nature of the message. However, the tsunami portion of the message was less important than the portion concerning Jesus. If the independent agent was a typical dream figure designed to explain precognitive content, it does not explain why the veridical portion of the dream, the tsunami, would take second place to a fabrication: the return of Jesus.

To conclude this section, I would like to remind readers that I am not affiliated with any religion, do not agree with many key teachings of various religions (including Christianity), and am made profoundly uncomfortable by dreams such as the one just described.

Previous religious training

In a study by Adams (2001), students from three primary schools in Lincolnshire, UK were asked whether they had experienced dreams of God. Children were then questioned about their religious beliefs and how they felt about the dreams. In the first, a secular school, five of the seven respondents who said they had dreamed of God also stated that they did not believe in God.

It is possible that young children from secular families could be exposed to enough references to God in their daily life to generate a dream of God. However, there are examples of children who have evinced paranormal knowledge contrary to all that is known of their short life history. Researcher Ian Stevenson has studied many such children and has found that it is not only possible for a child to present information that has no known source within their background, but it happens regularly among the cohort of subjects he has studied (Stevenson & Keil, 2005). This is relevant to the present study because of the assumption among some dream researchers that knowledge must be explicable on the basis of prior personal experience.

4. Discussion

McNamara & Bulkeley (2015) describe dreams as responsible for 'religious delusions' based on how brain behaviour during the dream state is particularly efficient at creating memorable and impactful experiences. Dreaming, the authors claim, is a creative act. They then provide several examples regarding the belief among members of 'primi-

tive societies' that dreams are direct communication with ancestors or spirits and how these beliefs form the basis for their religious beliefs. This is then compared to schizophrenia on the basis that the 'religious delusions' are believed by these people.

The research of Stevenson (1992) and his colleagues (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2002; Mills, 1990) shows that dreams are not always a product of known life experience. Research by Krippner & Ullman (1970), shows that telepathy can be found in dreams, thus showing mind-to-mind communication. The research of Beischel & Rock (2009) and others (Haraldsson & Stevenson, 1975) is suggestive that consciousness does survive physical death and that consciousness can communicate after death with the living through mediumship and in some cases, dreams (Stevenson, 1992). In combination, this research contradicts the findings of McNamara and Bulkeley. Superpsi, in the eyes of this author, is an unsatisfying explanation for the dreams described in this study because 1) it is unfalsifiable, 2) it contradicts the content, thus requiring the kind of interpretation cautioned against by Revonsuo (2000a).

What if the purported independent agents found in these dreams are symbolic representations of some kind, or inventions of my imagination? They cannot be verified even if the information they provide can be on some occasions. It has been suggested to me by correspondents that a precognitive dream containing what appears to be an independent agent could instead be an avatar for my subconscious (the independent agent), used for the purpose of conveying precognitive information. To my mind, this is just as unfalsifiable as superpsi. The idea may be an expression of reluctance to accept that which is not proven, but if that is the case, I prefer not to accept an explanation that also cannot be proven (that the independent agent is a subconscious avatar) and allow the question to remain open for the time being.

Taken at face value, the spiritual dreams reviewed here illustrate an alternate non-material side to existence. In this existence, spirits inhabit physical bodies for a time before leaving them in death and then elect to be reincarnated or to continue development as a spirit by serving others. They also depict a universe, not just a world, that is wholly separate from physical reality, and that the universe was created by God. Moreover, they describe spirit beings that exist outside of time who are aware of future events and sometimes share that information with dreamers for unknown purposes. Ghosts, as found in my dream journal, have the normal range of personalities found among the living, but share one thing in common: they remain interested in people, places, things, or events related to their incarnated existence. All of these things are roughly consistent with the principal doctrines of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and nativist faiths.

To complicate the interpretation of this material, the first examples of spiritual content predate any knowledge on my part of religious doctrine, though it did eventually lead me to explore Judaism and Christianity in 2004 and 2005. Also, there are 433 veridical dreams contained in the journals, 73 of which are in dreams coded as spiritual, at least one of which also contains content that would be considered highly significant to adherents of various religions. These dreams support the primitive/anthropological model that dreams are (at least sometimes) the product of communication with God, spirits, and ancestors, provided one accepts

identification of spiritual figures at face value, as is done in anthropological studies for presenting the native perspective on their own dreams.

The dreams discussed in this study also support the parapsychological model, which expects a measure of evidence to demonstrate veridical non-normal communication, such as precognition, veridical OBEs, and after death communications, examples of which are found within dreams coded as spiritual. To be clear, this pattern leads me to reject the neurological model on the basis that it is incompatible with veridical dreams which, by definition, contain information that cannot be generated without a paranormal process. This is unrelated to the identification of independent agents, which are relevant only to deciding between the parapsychological and anthropological models.

Which of the two models is correct? I am uncomfortable suggesting an answer at this time but think the question should be addressed seriously because there is sufficient data here to raise the possibility that some non-veridical spiritual dream content is not subjective but is in some way empirically real. One way this might influence future research is to change the default position from 'spiritual dream content is subjective' to 'spiritual dream content may be subjective'. A way to gather more data on the question would be to have mediums with a good track record attempt to validate dream content by independently attempting to explore the dreams of study participants. Unfortunately, this could also be explained as superpsi or simple dream telepathy, but it could also bring research on this subject a step closer to a conclusive answer. That is, it could provide investigative leads that would prove fruitful, in part by helping to triangulate the data by validating its independence of the dreamer. If, for instance, a medium was able to identify a dream figure who was subsequently found to be, or to have been, a person unknown to the dreamer but a real person, then independence of the medium would also be established. In this way, steps could be taken in the direction of validating independent agents.

5. Concluding remarks

This study has shown the following:

- The continuity hypothesis is poorly supported by the dreams in this sample
- The four coding scales used are different enough to create very different selections of dreams identified as spiritual
- 'Big dreams' as defined by Bulkeley, and by extension, Jung and others, would encompass many dreams contained in the Paquette database that are unremarkable in every way other than clarity of recall
- A religious upbringing, knowledge of, or interest in religious and spiritual topics is not a requirement for having spiritual dreams
- Dream figures identified as ghosts appear much more often in dreams coded as spiritual, but primarily in dreams that focus on the mundane interests of the ghosts themselves
- Dream figures identified as non-ghost spirits appear more often than any other in dreams that contain noetic, or physically transcendent information
- Dreams that could be identified as 'religious' because they include figures such as God and Jesus are not specific to any religion even if the characters are considered proprietary to some religions

- Two examples of hybrid dreams were presented, where veridical information was contained in the dreams side-by-side with information of some interest to religious persons that would be impossible to check due to a lack of any physical reference point. It remains beyond the scope of this study to validate the non-veridical portion of the dreams, but they do leave an important question behind, 'how far can they be trusted?'

The purpose of this study is to consider the possibility that spiritual content in dreams may sometimes be empirically valid. The reason this is asked is that the dream series studied here contains many veridical examples (n=433), each of which call into question conventional assumptions about the nature of dreams. For instance, the continuity hypothesis is an unlikely explanation for veridical dream content, particularly such a large number of veridical dreams. If it fails to explain those dreams, does it remain a valid explanation for all other dreams? Or should its explanatory value be evaluated more critically?

Another key assumption about dream content, particularly spiritual content, is that it is largely or wholly symbolic. Without denying that this is sometimes true, it is an unsatisfying explanation for dream content that later turns out to be a literal representation of events unknown at the time, like the first 'bookend' portion of the dream mentioned on p. 14 of this paper. There may be symbolism contained in the choice of subject, but the literal representation of it is the first layer of meaning, not the symbolic content, if any.

If one can accept the premise that an independent agent exists at all, a dream figure that is truly independent of the dreamer, and that the agent is purposefully communicating with the dreamer, as indicated in some veridical dreams, then there is a basis for suggesting that spiritually-themed dream content is valid. This is because there are examples in this study and others of valid dream content that could not have been known to the dreamer at the time of the dream. However, it is difficult to know whether all spiritual dream content should be accepted at face value, or only some of it. It also leaves open the question whether the content must be interpreted or can be taken literally.

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