

Writer's Note:

My interest in the subconscious stems from an early fixation on dream interpretation. I have always been curious about the secrets of the unconscious mind, but until now I never thought to open a book and start learning. My research has opened my mind to an entire realm of new ideas and theories. This is a subject that still has a lot to be discovered, and I believe that we will never truly know it all. That might sound disheartening, and maybe a little frustrating, but I think it's like a giant mystery...something to be explored, and that's what makes it so exciting.

Possibly many hundreds of secrets are buried deep inside your mind this very minute. Maybe they are there for a reason; maybe you put them there yourself because you were scared or hurt. Maybe you've never even considered the possibility that you do not fully know yourself. Maybe you are content with your understanding of the world and your interpretation of who you are. I'm not. I have so many questions that sometimes I don't even know where to begin, so I'll start by asking the same question I asked my third grade teacher during silent reading hour. What is our subconscious? According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, "Of or concerning the part of the mind of which one is not fully aware but which influences one's actions and feelings." According to my teacher: "Shhh! No talking!" In simpler terms: the subconscious is a state of mind that we are only aware of when we are unconscious. (Also, it's a bad idea to test boundaries during class two days after your teacher returned from the hospital for a gallbladder surgery). I believe that most of our thoughts, memories and emotions inhabit the subconscious part of our mind. They are only recalled to consciousness when we need them or when they are forced to the surface, and of course- in dreams. A lot of what is in our subconscious mind is a catalog of information and old memories and faces. What I want to know is what secrets I have hidden in the depths of my subconscious. What is my subconscious hiding about my true self? I believe that it is impossible, at least currently, to fathom all the facets of our souls because our minds are so complex and we are so easily distracted by what's around us. However, I do believe that it is possible to better understand yourself by opening up your mind and closing off distractions. I find that when I am writing or painting or even simply sitting in silence by myself for a while it can be extremely helpful and relaxing. By entering this meditative state, the subconscious mind wanders freely. If we provide an outlet, those secrets locked inside our subconscious will become available to us, and through thoughtful analysis we can hope to better understand what the foggy symbols and half-remembered dreams are trying to tell us.

In November of 1899, psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a book discussing the theories of the unconscious mind. The book did not gain popularity until several years later, when Freud began to catch the public's eye. His method of psychotherapeutic healing- psychoanalysis spurred his fame into present day and made his name in history. Now, *The Interpretation of Dreams* is a book widely regarded to be essential regarding the unconscious mind. Though the theories have little to no scientific evidence and have become outdated, his ideas surrounding the unconscious mind are still relevant. (In many ways, and much of what he says is still believed to be true.) One of the methods introduced in Freud's book is still used in psychotherapy today. In this method, a client might be asked to think back to their dream and recall something; an object perhaps, or even something as simple as a color or a name. The client would then associate that with another object, and another until they reached the source. As Freud said, "Dreams are the royal road to the unconscious." For example: one might recall seeing a horseshoe, which makes them think of ranching which brings to mind

the summer they lived on the family farm, which makes them realize that their dream was an allusion to something that happened that summer. This realization is something once hidden in the subconscious, brought out through symbol interpretation. “No mortal can keep a secret. If the lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore” (Freud 58). Freud believes that the subconscious mind *wants* to share its secrets, and provided an outlet, those secrets would come pouring out: “Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psychic; its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs” (Freud 214). Freud is saying that the subconscious mind is filled with so much information about the world and about the individual self. It is actually so hard to understand what subliminal messages the subconscious might be trying to communicate to the self, and they are often misunderstood. Freud believed that the main indicator was dreams. I believe that there are easier ways to open up the mind and expose unconscious desires. I believe that our subconscious mind makes itself heard in the visual arts.

In *The Age of Insight*, a book by neuropsychiatrist Eric Kandel, we are taken on a journey to a very special time for development in many fields. Vienna, 1900—a new beginning for science, medicine and, of course, art. In this book, Kandel analyzes the minds of prominent Vienna artists from that time, such as Gustav Klimt, Otto Schmidt and Oskar Kokoschka. He follows the Darwinist theory that “Creativity stems from conscious access to underlying, unconscious forces” (Kandel 14), and follows “Freud emphasized that much of mental life is unconscious; it becomes conscious only as words and images” (Kandel 18), meaning that the most reliable way to get insight of the human psyche is to look at written words and pictures. We are very vulnerable when expose ourselves in this way, and therefore there is much to be learned from looking closely at artwork and writing. Through this book, I learned that it is possible to complete a thorough study and analysis on a piece of artwork, and that by doing so, we can learn much about the subconscious desires of the artists, as well as about their mental state of mind. Kandel teaches the reader that in order to glean as much knowledge as possible, one must look closely and look far out. Look for symbols and signs. Pay attention to the details. And remember, as Freud once said, that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. It is harder to analyze one’s own artwork in an unbiased way, but that shouldn’t stop anyone from trying. If you really want to learn about who you really are, if you’re actually interested in uncovering the secrets in the hidden parts of your mind, then you can do it.

There are several ways to access the hidden parts of the mind. In *Dream Power and Shaman Energy*, a book by Will Adcock, Rosalind Powell and Laura J. Watts, it is suggested to find one’s “sacred space,” which is a meditative place, either physical or mental, where our subconscious mind is free of the worldly distractions. In the sacred space, our inner desires, secrets and hidden truths are brought to the surface. By providing an outlet, such as dreams, writing, dance or art, those inhibitions can be released. It is explained that these secrets are usually important symbols, and that we can better understand ourselves by trying to better understand our dreams. “The information that dreams are trying to convey can be divined by the simple expedient of questioning whoever or whatever is in the dream.” (14). Our minds are vast and complicated, and it can be very hard to understand what our subconscious is trying to tell us. But, by reflecting on dreams, or looking at a piece of artwork created in one’s sacred space, we can get a better grasp on the message that our subconscious is trying to convey. The writers of *Dream Power and Shaman Energy* suggest paying close attention to these points: significance, theme, setting, people, feelings, symbols and words or phrases. By studying these small details, it

is possible to come to a fuller understanding of the self, and possibly unearth some of the secrets hidden deep inside. It's a lot of work, but in the end, it will pay off to be able to understand yourself at a deeper level.

The subconscious is so complex and vastly unique that I don't think we will ever fully understand it. However, with such great minds at work, we've developed ways to delve deeper into our own hidden thoughts and desires. There are many secrets to unfold, and I believe that through using Kandel's book as my guide, I can analyze my artwork and come out of the experience not only knowing myself better, but also as a more experienced artist and a freer thinker.

Bibliography

Adcock, William, Laura J. Watts, and Rosalind Powell. *Dream Power and Shaman Energy: Using the Insights of Dreams, Shamanic Ritual and Mandalas for Personal Transformation*. London: Southwater, 2010. Print.

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