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Seeking Solace: Regret, Grief, Anxiety

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Seeking Solace: Regret, Grief, Anxiety

How can design, photo, video, and other media

solve emotional distress resurfaced from dreams?

Rebecca Schroeder

Submitted to the University Honors Program at

Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for graduation with university honors

19 March 2016

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Introduction

Seeking Solace: Regret, Grief, Anxiety is a triptych video and artifact piece inspired by the abstract analysis of my dreams. It recognizes worries held within my subconscious and brings them to life through graphic design, photography, and video. My goal was to discover "How can design, photo, video, and other media solve emotional distress resurfaced from dreams?"

I was inspired to pursue this direction based on the frequency, vividness, and perceived importance of my dreams. One in particular caused me to take action to research and express myself. In April of 2015, I had a dream that I made a world of my own creation. It was a stark contrast from the stressful life I was taking part of at the time. A friend of mine within the dream said these words: "In this world there are no limitations". In many ways, I thought she was right. In the world of dreams there are no limitations. The mind is vast and the imagination can take us anywhere at anytime. All of our experiences and memories throughout our lives are embedded into our subconscious, providing source material for these dreams. Often times, where our mind takes us is sad or frightening- topics we try to avoid or have forgotten over time. I believe the subconscious is bringing these experiences back to the conscious mind because it wants us to confront and put these underlying thoughts to rest, to heal, and to be happy. The dreams I was having were showing the same characters, scenes, and situations with persistence making me feel anxious and stressed throughout the day. With graduation around the corner, I wanted to put these past problems to rest and focus on the amazing future ahead. This curiosity inspired me to start my quest to seek solace.

On my seek for solace I began to research different therapeutic methods to slow down the occurrence of nightmares. In today's practice, art therapy was being used in hospitals, schools,

and counseling sessions to help patients reduce emotional distress. Current techniques include coloring, painting, drawing, and sculpture.

With my four-year background in graphic design I began to wonder if the principles and elements of design could also help resolve emotional distress. Graphic Design is the art of combining image and type to communicate, educate, and advertise. Although often deemed more "commercial", design's versatility of its applied principles and elements such as line, form, and balance, are endless and it amazed me how it had not been previously explored.

Upon further investigation, I also found that occupational therapy methods involving movement and interactive activities benefited patient's motor skills as well as their emotional health. Similar to occupational therapy, the movement of film and the process of creating were both methods of movement and interaction which had the potential to benefit emotional health.

Research and Methodology

Personal Research

I began my research by collecting and analyzing over eighty dreams that I had over a year's time. After analyzing the symbols, contexts, and meanings within my dreams in relation to past, present, and future events as well as referring to dream symbolism keys, I concluded that regret, grief, and anxiety were the most common themes embedded into my dreams.

Visual and Literature References

I then proceeded by gathering visuals and book sources to understand the scope of dreaming and how it could be confronted by art and occupational therapy as well as be represented through different media such as design, photo, and video. To first address my questions generally, I researched the process of sleeping and dreaming. I discovered that even if one does not remember their dream, they still dream. Those who recall their dreams tend to

experience more sleep disturbances throughout the night. Those with more imaginative or creative dreams have statistically been female or artistic individuals. Dreams occur in cycles throughout the night and due to unpopular belief, they can happen outside of REM (Rapid Eye Movement).

I then researched Freud and Jung who were known as abstract psychologists of the late 1800's who studied dreams. They believed that dreaming showed people's hidden fears, wants, and desires. Even though their views are often not considered in today's clinical psychology studies, they have forever impacted the study of psychology and dreams.

I then began to research methods of art therapy as a method of healing. I learned that there is often confusion between art therapy and occupational therapy. Art therapy focuses more on the fine arts such as painting, drawing, and sculpture. Occupational therapy focuses more on music, video, and dance. This made me wonder if I could challenge the stereotypes of art therapy by expanding beyond their fine art tools into the movement and interaction seen in occupational therapy.

In literature regarding graphic design, I found a lot of inspiration from image as text designers. These designers create typography within a space using elements within the space to spell them out. These designers were essentially creating a stage for their subject, like a theater. I related this to dreams and how they often seem like theatrical performances we watch when we sleep. There is always a setting, a cast of characters, and props. This made me wonder how I could visual represent these "theatrical items" in my work.

In literature regarding film and video, I found a lot of inspiration from projection digital artists. These artists project video onto a subject, prop, or wall to communicate a message. The

act of projecting an image can be seen as symbolism of projecting your thoughts, visions, or emotions.

Experiments

I then proceeded by conducting a series of nine expressive experiments *(Figures A-1 through A-9)* which can be seen with descriptions in *Appendix A: Experiments*. The goal from these experiments was to study dreams literal and abstract meanings, clichés and stereotypes, as well as artist processes, expressive outlets, and different aesthetics.

Interview

Lastly, I interviewed Dr. Anderson, a clinical psychologist and professor at Bowling Green State University. Dr. Anderson had explained that the brain dreams when it is bored. I found our discussion very valuable because he had challenged me to think critically and view dreams from a scientific perspective. Upon telling him my dreams, he was surprised at their vivid and realistic nature. He was intrigued but went on to say that current clinical psychologists dismiss abstract methods of analyzing dreams such as the works of Freud or Jung. From our conversation I had gathered that this is partially because it is hard to base a person's subjective thoughts of themselves and their dreams on a body of other people. Many people also have a difficult time seeing emotions and feelings as factual information because they are not able to be precisely written down or calculated. The brain also undergoes a chemical and systematic process to make dreaming even happen, making it seem like more of a systematic occurrence rather than an abstract one. Understanding his perspective was important in the research of my project because it encouraged me to critically think about other points of view and other contexts and aspects of dreaming.

Artist Statement

Seeking Solace: Regret, Grief, Anxiety (Figure 1) is a triptych video and artifact piece inspired by the abstract analysis of my dreams. It recognizes worries held within my subconscious and brings them to life through graphic design, photography, and video. The process of creating provides a new perspective of looking at both art and occupational therapy as methods of solving emotional distress.



Figure 1. Seeking Solace: Regret, Grief, Anxiety

Final Installation in the Bachelor of Fine Arts Exhibition

I have recorded over 80 of my dreams in the past year. In these dreams, regret, grief, and anxiety are common themes. These themes are represented in three triptychs that cycle through past, present, and future problems. The cycling of the triptychs simulates the dream cycles one's brain undergoes during sleep. Corresponding artifacts invite the viewer to interact with this creative healing process.

Regret responds to dreams about the struggles with past human relationships. Light serves as a dual symbol expressing both confrontation and forgiveness. The book served as a performative artifact that encouraged me to convert my negative memories into positive experiences.

Grief responds to dreams about the loss of a loved one in the present. Through rediscovery and repurposing of past items, it encouraged me to focus on the history and memory of the individual and helped me find comfort in these items.

Anxiety responds to dreams about the fear of future events. It utilizes repetition and disorder to describe that I am not fully in control of the future. The balance serves as a visual representation of weighing priorities to find emotional equilibrium.

Final Results & Conclusion

I presented my final work at the Bachelor of Fine Arts Exhibition in the Dorothy Uber Bryan Gallery on March 19, 2016 – April 3, 2016. Presenting these personal works in a public setting created a sense of honesty and vulnerability between me and the audience. Physical artifacts encouraged the audience to engage and interact with this therapeutic process *(Figure 2).*

The creation of this body of work was a successful tool of solving emotional distresses due to its repetitive, focused, and expressive nature. Working with previously unexplored media encouraged me to solve problems in new ways. This creative process reduced the amount of bad dreams regarding past regret and present grief. Although helping me cope throughout the process, the works responding to anxiety did not fight off dreams as effectively because these events have yet to occur in real life.



Figure 2. People interacting with the artifacts of the installation

Overall I would like to explore these creative techniques further upon other dream types that I have. I believe the success of these experiments could be applied to current therapeutic practices for children and adults.

Appendix A: Experiments

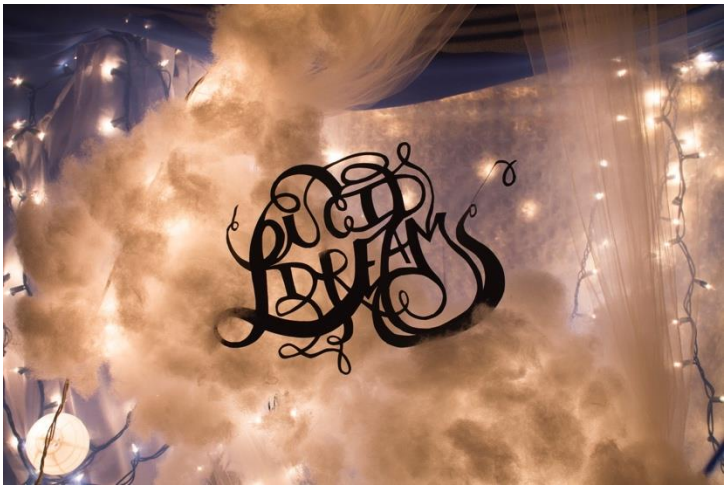


Figure A-1. *Lucid Dreams*

This experiment uses hand-lettered design and hand-made crafting to create an atmospheric visual to represent the word "dream" based on symbolism and clichés.

Letters were drawn and then cut from black card stock. Cloud shapes were made from hanging lanterns and pillow stuffing. These items as well as blue chiffon, white tulle, and lights were hung on strings over a backdrop stand.

The main goal of this experiment was to work through common clichés in hopes of drawing out more meaningful symbols for my final body of work.



Figure A-2: I'm Sorry

This experiment responds to a dream that I had in which I felt guilt and regret with a former friend. It uses light as a symbol of guilt and confrontation to spell the words "I'm Sorry".

Letters were cut out of black cardstock and were taped to the end of the desk lamp. When turning on the light, the light shines through the holes and reveals the typography. An abstract figure is seen in the 'O' of the phrase. It can be interpreted as a human figure either looking up at the light, or down at its shadow.

This experiment was used in my final body of work.



Figure A-3: I Forgive You

This experiment responds to the same dream described in Figure 2. Instead of using light as a symbol of guilt and confrontation, it uses it as a symbol of truth and envelopes the figure as a form of forgiveness and relief.

This piece is a self-portrait. Letters were drawn on the face with eye-liner and wetted down to show the action of crying. She brushes her hair away as the light shines on her revealing the true feelings of both herself and her adversary.

This experiment was used in my final body of work.

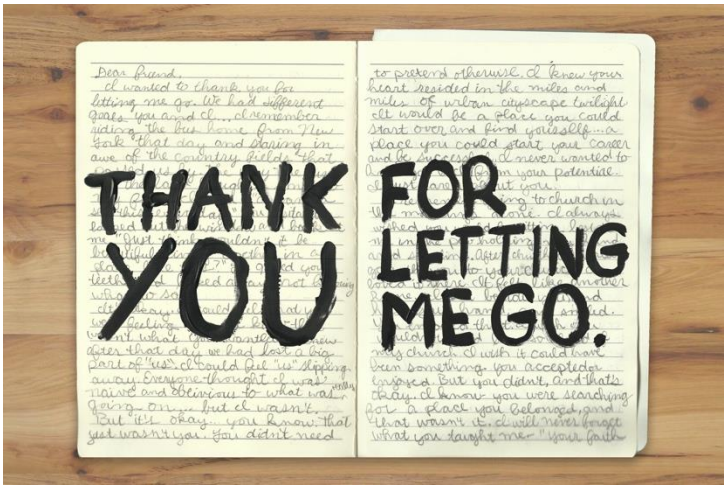


Figure A-4: Thank You for Letting me Go

This experiment responds to the same dream described in Figures 2 and 3. This piece encouraged me to convert my negative emotions into positive experiences in the form of a letter.

The letter was written for the intention of not sending it, but to force me to confront my problems and grow from them. Writing them down made these problems more tangible and accessible. After writing the letter, I finger-painted the phrase on another piece of paper and overlaid the images digitally.

This experiment was used in my final body of work.

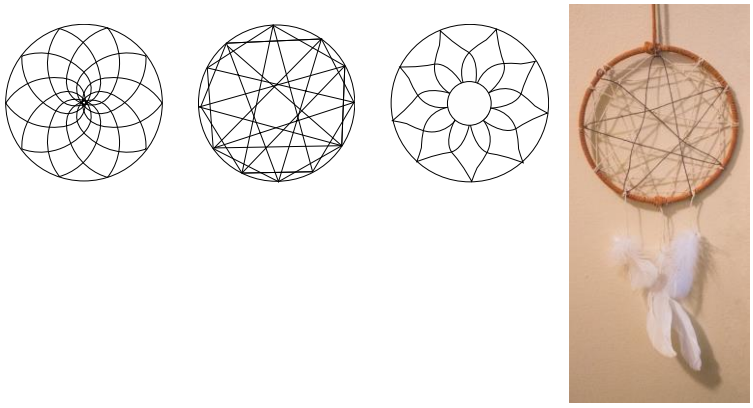


Figure A-5: Dream Catcher Patterns

This experiment researched the history and cultural meaning of dream catchers and how their patterns could be used graphically in my work.

Shown here are digital renditions of the patterns. On the right-most image is a dream catcher that I made from a steel ring, leather strips, hemp cord, and feathers.

Although graphically interesting, I felt that this direction was a little cliché for my topic and could also be culturally offensive to some viewers.



Figure A-6: Hand-Written Typography

This experiment involved writing an alphabet and converting it to a typeface. I was inspired to pursue this direction because of the characters who appeared regularly in my dreams. My goal was to overlay this text over imagery to show the dialogue between characters.

Seen here are alphabets made from my mother's and my hand-writing.







Figure A-7: Late to Church

This experiment involved creating double exposure photography digitally to tell the story of a dream in a very surreal way. These seven photos serve as a storyboard to a dream that I had about being late to church.

The images overlaid show different angles of the same scene, similar to the theory of cubism. They also show images of past and future events. This represents the hazy quality of dreams in which it is hard to understand the sequence of events.

Although I did not pursue this direction in my final body of work, I found these to be a powerful series of images. I am interested in continuing to experiment with this aesthetic.



Figure A-8: Home

This experiment uses physical hand prints and digital blend modes to reveal stories and meanings in an abstract way based on the dream discussed in Figure 7.

My family members stamped their hands in ink and pressed them on paper. I then scanned these prints and used digital blend modes to mask the images inside of them to reveal their identities and importance as characters in the context of my dreams.

The line of hands reveal all of my family member's hands. The big hand-print is my mother's, whose image is masked inside the print. I then experimented making typography from the hand-print, which you can see in the word "Home".

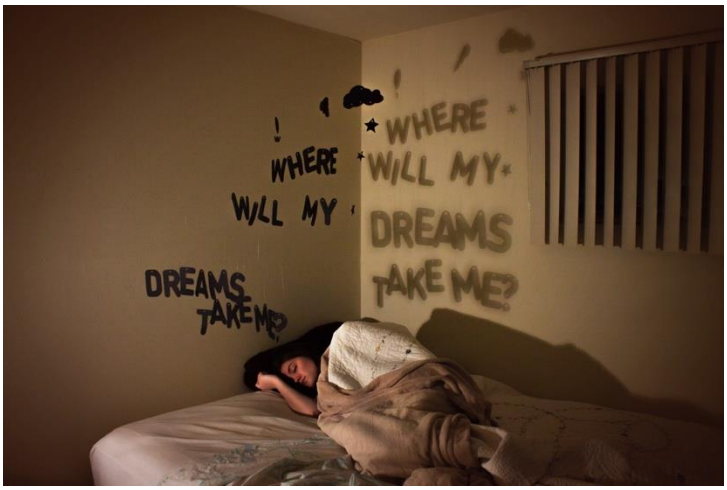


Figure A-9: Where Will My Dreams Take Me?

This experiment uses cut-out letters, light, and shadow to create typography in the location of where dreams most-often take place.

Each letter was hung from the ceiling and staged properly to create the shadows on the wall. The difference between the real and shadow letters hints at the difference between the real and the dream world. I was inspired by the variety of locations and situations represented in my dreams.

Appendix B: Final Works

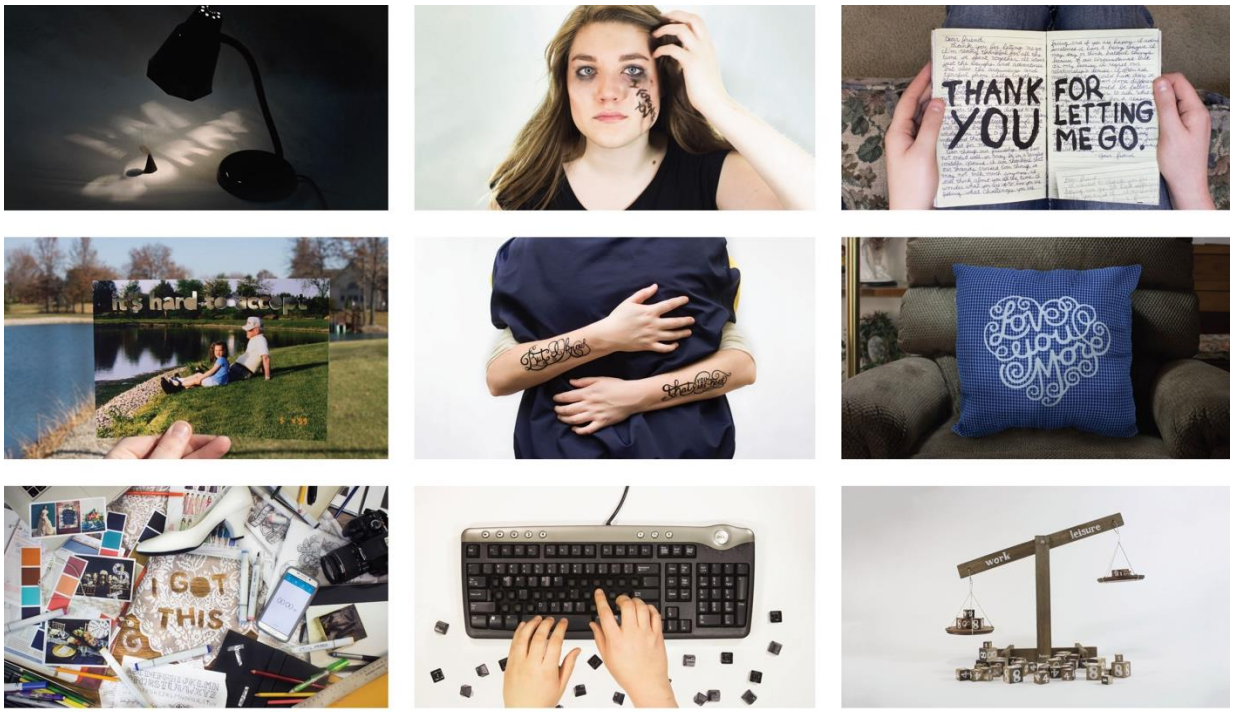


Figure B-1: Seeking Solace: Regret, Grief, Anxiety (Screens)

These are the compositions of my final body of work which were displayed as three sets of triptychs on tv screens which cycled through on a loop. The top row responds to past regret, the middle row responds to present grief, and the last row responds to future anxiety.

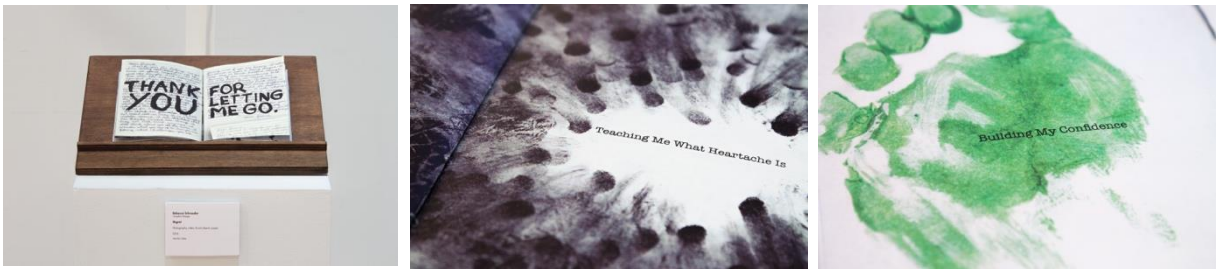


Figure B-2: Regret Artifact and Page Details

This artifact belongs to the triptych "Regret" and responds to dreams about the struggles with past human relationships. This book served as a performative artifact that encouraged me to convert my negative memories into positive experiences in a way that engaged and evoked the same feelings from my audience. This book was made with handmade paper and coptic bound to show its genuine, honest, and vulnerable nature. Simple type treatments are supplemented by powerful visuals to tell a relatable story of loss and regret. The book sat on top of a wooden stand and invited guests to pick up, read, and interact with the book.



Figure B-3: Grief Artifact and Detail

This artifact belongs to the triptych "Grief" and responds to dreams about the loss of a loved one in the present. Through rediscovery and repurposing of past items, it encouraged me to focus on the history and memory of the individual and helped me find comfort in these items. This pillow is hand-stitched from my grandfather's shirt who passed away in October of 2016 just months before the debut of my body of work. Screen-printed on the shirt is hand-lettered type of the words him and I said to each other throughout my life. These were also his parting words to us. The pillow sat on a stand and invited guests to look close and touch the hand-crafted features.



Figure B-4: Anxiety Artifact and Detail

This artifact belongs to the triptych "Anxiety" and responds to dreams about the fear of future events. It utilizes repetition and disorder to describe that I am not fully in control of the future. The balance serves as a visual representation of weighing priorities to find emotional equilibrium. On top of the scale platforms lies 24 hours of time with the remaining hours of the week scattered about the bottom creating anxiety and impatience for the future. The balance invited guests to add and remove hours to both sides to represent their perception of their busy lives.

Annotated Bibliography

Borysenko, Joan. *Guilt Is the Teacher, Love Is the Lesson*. New York, NY: Warner, 1990. Print.

This book focuses on a down-to-earth account of accepting, learning, growing, and letting go of the past to focus time on making change in your life. The author recalls misfortunate experiences that she had and dwelled on for a long time. She writes in an eloquent way in hopes of letting go of her past anxieties.

"Clinical Psychology vs. Freudian Psychology." Personal interview. 26 Oct. 2015.

Talking to Dr. Anderson opened my eyes to current ways of thought on clinical psychology. Dr. Anderson had explained that the brain dreams when it is bored. I found our discussion very valuable because he had challenged me to think critically and view dreams from a scientific perspective. Upon telling him my dreams, he was surprised at their vivid and realistic nature. He was intrigued but went on to say that current clinical psychologists dismiss abstract methods of analyzing dreams such as the works of Freud or Jung. From our conversation I had gathered that this is partially because it is hard to base a person's subjective thoughts of themselves and their dreams on a body of other people. Many people also have a difficult time seeing emotions and feelings as factual information because they are not able to be precisely written down or calculated. The brain also undergoes a chemical and systematic process to make dreaming even happen, making it seem like more of a systematic occurrence rather than an abstract one. *"Could dreams really happen just because the brain is "bored"?"* I also wondered, *"Can emotions be represented as factual? How could they present themselves as real and valid arguments or obstacles?"* It intrigues me that over a 150 years have passed since we have truly considered abstract methods of analyzing dreams.

Edwards, David G. *Art Therapy*. London: SAGE, 2004. Print.

This book includes many definitions for Art Therapy. These definitions include… "a form of therapy in which creating images and objects plays a central role [between a psychologist and a client]", "Releasing the unconscious by means of spontaneous art expression", and "a form of psychotherapy that allows for emotional expression and healing through nonverbal means." The author also notes that it is an interdisciplinary practice across health, medicine, and art. Those who experience illness, trauma, challenges in living, and seek personal growth. "Through creating art and reflecting on the art products and processes, people can increase awareness of self and others, cope with symptoms, stress, and traumatic experiences etc…" Art therapy leaves possibilities for client to make positive changes with self, relationships, and overall quality of life. The needs vary among individuals. Often confused with occupational therapy who may use art in activities but Art Therapy is specifically trained in art- typically painting, drawing, and sculpture. Performance and music is often associated with Occupational Therapy. Focus on importance of symbolism and art. Human communication takes many forms and often words tend to dominate society. Some emotional experiences are beyond words. Alternative medium of expression furthers a person's emotional growth, self-esteem, and psychological and social integration. Line, color, and shape provide a lasting impression of an emotional state. History in art healing rituals. The romanticism period brought about subjectivity and self expression- nature, emotion over reason, Expressionism brought representation of emotion in paint strokes. Surrealism brought unconscious liberating feelings.

Garfield, Patricia L. *The Healing Power of Dreams*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991. Print.

This book explains metaphors and symbols found in our dreams that represent physical

ailments or future unfortunate happenings. It also explains the process of falling asleep and dreaming. This process begins when we first fall asleep and our brain waves begin to slow and regulate breathing. After sleeping from 90min, brain waves begin to accelerate and sexual organs become aroused, breathing, temperature, and heart rate quickens. This is when REM or Rapid Eye Movement occurs and you begin to dream. She claims that those who remember their dreams have many sleep disturbances in the night. She goes on to explain the importance of dreams being that they are a form of contact showing unrecognized emotions about what is happening to your body. She recommends creating personal proverbs for your dreams, or solutions based on the vulnerabilities presented. She encourages making illustrations and keeping journals of dreams to record one's mind state to create valuable document for self-discovery. Illustrations defuse anxiety. She explains that each phase of sickness and returning wellness is traced in our dream imagery.

Gilroy, Andrea. *Art Therapy, Research and Evidence Based Practice*. London: SAGE Publications, 2006. Print.

This book discusses art therapy's current research and practice. It lists effective therapeutic methods including painting, sculpture, and art. Through this project, I hope to look beyond these methods. It also talks more about children and art therapy. My project will offer a different perspective as I am a young adult who is currently undergoing a lot of change.

Hall, Calvin S., and Vernon J. Nordby. *A Primer of Jungian Psychology*. New York: New American Library, 1973. Print.

This book briefly accounts Jung's thoughts about psychology. Jung thinks abstractly which often is not considered in current science. His views are less extreme then Freud however, has his reasoning is less sexual.

Hanhardt, John G. "From Screen to Gallery." *American Art AM ART J* 22.2 (2008): 2-8. Web.

From Screen to Gallery: Cinema, Video, and Installation Art Practices

This article goes into account of influential videographers in the world of digital art. It talks about the symbolism and reasoning behind the aesthetics of digital art and how it conveys a message. In my body of work, I hope to project image or animate a photograph to convey a complex emotional meaning that relates to my dreams.

Lupton, Ellen, and Jennifer C. Phillips. *Graphic Design: The New Basics*. New York: Princeton Architectural, 2008. Print.

This book describes graphic design elements, which are used to create design, as well as principles, which are the laws of design. Elements include line, shape, direction, size, texture, color, and value. Principles include unity, emphasis, scale, balance, and rhythm. It continues to talk about the power of using these methods independently and cohesively and how doing so can create an aesthetic and imply meaning. Point, line, and plane are considered to be the building blocks of design. From these elements, designers are able to create images, icons, textures, patterns, diagrams, animations, and typography.

Lupton, Ellen. *Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students*. New York: Princeton Architectural, 2004. Print.

This book explores the complexity of typography. First, it explores the letter's anatomy, size, scale, and use. It then dives into kerning, tracking, adjusting line spacing, alignment,

and hierarchy to find a visually solved composition. It then looks at single and multi-column grid structures, the golden mean, and modularity.

McCormick, Lara. *Playing with Type: 50 Graphic Experiments for Exploring Typographic Design Principles*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

This book explores fifty different typographic experiments based on the importance of letters, project meanings, alphabets, lettering, context and application, and installation. The aesthetic of my future body of work is inspired by installation and image as text typography which is shown in several examples throughout this book. These examples include type that is made out of food and then cooked, spaces that have been interacted with to create natural typographic forms etc. This book serves as a visual inspiration to my Honors Project.

Mondloch, Kate. *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2010. Print.

This book describes screens as "illusionist windows and physical, material entities" and a barrier. It screens one from the world it holds inside. Focuses on European and North American installation made with electronic screens from the late 60's to today studying influential contemporary video artists such as Peter Campus which was taught in ARTC3440. Book looks at use of film, video, and computer screens as actual art objects. Book explores the use of screens and projectors in art and how their relationship with audiences have changed over the years. The role of the spectator and their reaction and interactions with the space and time. A digital picture frame or window.

Robbins, Arthur. *The Artist as Therapist*. New York, NY: Human Sciences, 1987. Print.

Aesthetics involves making the inanimate animate through communication and expression in art. Reflection of fusion and separation. Aesthetic expression compliments self-expression. Art expression needs secondary process functions of rationality and judgment to give form and shape to one's personal image. This book explores art principles and elements found (same as design principles and elements) and their context in creating therapeutic art. These include form, texture, color, volume, space, movement, balance, and abstraction. Art therapy combines aesthetic and psychological principles to shape verbal and nonverbal communications referencing objective and subjective reality.

Wu, Ge, Phillip Gough, and Caitilin De Berigny (Onaclov) Wall. "Multiple-channel Video Installation as a Precursor to Transmedia-based Art." *Technoetic Arts Technoetic Arts* 10.2 (2012): 329-39. Web.

Zucker, Fiona, and Jonny Zucker. *Dream Healing- Book and Card Pack*. Birmingham, AL: Sweet Water, 2014. Print.

This book is graphically designed kit that includes a deck of cards featuring common symbols and imagery of dreams. The user can match symbol cards together based on the reflection of their dream and see what these symbols mean individually and cohesively. This kit provides an interesting graphically way to look at the topic of dreams and communicating with an audience.

Zukav, Gary, and Linda Francis. *The Heart of the Soul: Emotional Awareness*. New York: Simon & Schuster Source, 2002. Print.

This book focuses on the importance of being emotionally aware and mentally healthy. When we become aware of our emotions, we become aware of our pain. Although this process is unpleasant is rewarding. In this inspirational piece, it goes on to say that we are

not mere bodies or minds, nor molecules or enzymes, and that we are all more than a temporary presence in the Universe. We forever impact those around us, especially through our emotional connections. The authors focus on the importance of the human soul and experience, as well as the journey and spiritual growth one proceeds on when learning from their past mistakes or pain. We are inseparable from one another "Their pain is ours, and our pain is theirs." Find the roots of our insecurities inside of us and pull them out. This is the path to authentic power.