Researching the Intersection between the Neurobiology and Sociology of Sleep and Sleeplessness in Adolescents

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NIGHT WALKING
A NOCTURNAL HISTORY OF LONDON
MATTHEW BEAUMONT
FOREWORD AND AFTERWORD BY WILL SELF
Sleep is cyclical & lightens periodically: we’re all vulnerable to awakenings

Concept of the ‘insomniac’, defined by their sleeplessness

Effects of disturbed sleep – which is biological – worsened by cultural concepts about sleeplessness
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Are these concepts learned in adolescence? Could this explain why insomnia is rare before adulthood?
Tales of Sleep
- an art workshop -

Kim Whitehead, a clinical physiologist at UCL with a special interest in sleep & wishing to explore links between art & sleep is coming to work with us & our resident artist Frances Newman

on Thursday 15 February
At the Teenage & Young Adult unit on the 3rd floor of the Macmillan Centre, Huntley Street
11am - 1.30pm
The art of medicine

Insomnia: a cultural history

“I cannot sleep”, Alexander Pushkin wrote in his *Lines Written at Night during Insomnia* (1830). “Only the monotonous running of the clock/Sounds around me.” Almost all of us, at one time or another, will have experienced the dreary desperation of insomnia. “The anxiety of the sleeping night”, Pushkin continues in his attempt to capture this intolerable dynamic, “The mouse-like scampering of life”. This “scampering” of daily life into the time set aside for rest has been reported for hundreds of years, but it is particularly pertinent to review the cultural history of sleeplessness from the present-day perspective, a world in which many of us take our electronic devices and daily lives to bed with us.

For many people insomnia is a temporary situation triggered by acute physical illness or psychological stress; but for some it is more permanent. Chronic insomnia affects an estimated 10% of adults in high-income countries and is associated with impaired quality of life, depression, and anxiety. Insomnia is a clinical diagnosis, based on subjective self-report by patients. Interestingly, though, overnight electroencephalography (EEG) brain recordings suggest that some patients with insomnia underestimate the amount they sleep. These misremembered periods of wakefulness may rather reflect hyperawareness of fragmented sleep.

Although insomnia does have a partly biological basis, as a disorder of hyperarousal, it is also shaped by prevailing cultural and historical conditions. In the few remaining pre-industrial equatorial societies, the prevalence of chronic insomnia is just 1–2%; indeed, within these communities there might not even be a word to signify involuntary sleeplessness. Thus, social factors have a determining influence on apparently natural patterns of sleep and sleeplessness. For this reason, insomnia can be illuminated by studies that are multidisciplinary and historically informed, which is a focus of our medicine-humanities project on insomnia.

It is illuminating, in the context of the western world, to compare the centuries immediately before the industrial revolution with the industrial and post-industrial periods. The mainstay of modern treatment of insomnia is the practice of good sleep hygiene—a bedtime routine that regularises sleep. Yet such treatment is usually sought only after sleep difficulties have arisen and become engrained. This state of affairs contrasts with pre-industrial epochs, before artificial lighting and central heating had been invented, when regular rise-times were the norm because they enabled people to take advantage of the availability
Sleep art exhibition Mon 15 – Fri 26 Oct 2018 (weekdays 10:00 - 16:00)
Sleep art evening event Tues 16 Oct 2018 (18:00 - 21:00)

Evening Event: Representing the body: art, physiology and pathology collide

Open to: Alumni | Public | Academic | Student
Admission: Free
Ticketing: Open

Join us at UCL’s Pathology Museum for an evening event to celebrate a newly installed art exhibition which explores the relationships between body matter and the biological rhythms of the brain. Between 6-7pm hear perspectives from artist Andrew Carnie, pathologist Alan Bates, and neuroscientist Kimberley Whitehead, and stay on from 7-9pm for continued discussion as we view the art over drinks to a curated brain rhythm-inspired playlist.

There is no need to book for this event, just turn up!
Symposium

Andrew Carnie, University of Southampton (art) https://andrewcarniesleepproject.blogspot.co.uk

Sofia Eriksson, UCL (neurology)

Nick Franks, Imperial College (neuroscience)

Sasha Handley, University of Manchester (history)

Steffan Blayney, Birkbeck (history)

Simon Morgan Wortham, Kingston University (philosophy)

Frances Knight, UCL (developmental psychology)

Guy Meadows, The Sleep School (psychology)

Public engagement

Lorenzo Fabrizi, UCL (neuroscience)

Jason Rihel, UCL (neuroscience)

James Jepson, UCL (neuroscience)

Alex Solo (DJ) www.mixcloud.com/alexandersolo/babalonia-x-ucl-neuroscience-sleep-cycle-mix-1/

Patient engagement

Subhadra Das, UCL Pathology Museum, Royal Free Hospital (curator)

Frances Newman, UCLH (resident artist)

Guy Noble, UCLH (arts curator)
Neuroscience Research

- Monitoring brain function
- Analysing data numerically

Humanities Research

- Reviewing original texts/archives
- Discussing evidence-based theories

Sleeplessness has biological and cultural basis. Adolescence may be a 'switchpoint' - becoming aware of cultural beliefs about sleeplessness.