

Some Fascinating Stuff about Dreams
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Steven Campbell, Intelligent Heart

Dreams remain one of psychology's great mysteries.

We sleep for a third of our lives, so we may dream for five or six full years over our lifetimes. And although no one knows the exact purpose of dreaming, the phase of sleep during which we dream (called REM sleep – for Rapid Eye Movement) seems vital to your functioning during the day.

So...here is some fascinating stuff about our dreams.

What Dreams Mean

Many researchers now believe that dreaming mediates memory consolidation and mood regulation, a process a little like overnight therapy. They are the stories the brain tells during the REM (rapid eye movement) stage of sleep. People typically have multiple dreams each night that grow longer as sleep draws to a close.

Are dreams based on real life?

Dreams DO have a common consistent characteristic. They always involve YOU in some way! In other words, YOU are always in them.

In addition, dreams typically involve elements from waking life, such as people we know or familiar locations. However, they also often have a fantastical feel, and you may live out scenarios that would never be possible in real life, although those scenarios aren't always positive.

Can we interpret our dreams?

People have always tried to figure out the meaning of their dreams. In fact, dream interpretation emerged as a field of psychological study back in 1899 when Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Most experts now disagree with his conclusions, and some don't believe dreams signify anything at all.

But people continue to mine them for clues to their inner lives, creative insight, and even hints of the future.

Why We Have Nightmares

Nightmares can give us feelings of terror, anxiety, or despair, and lead to distress or sleep problems like insomnia. Research has identified a range of causes for nightmares, including post-traumatic stress, anxiety and changes in our bodies.

Are nightmares based on real-life experiences?

“Re-experiencing” is a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, also known as flashbacks. These involuntary recollections often manifest in the form of nightmares that can cause significant emotional distress. Even when the dreams are not exact replays of a trauma, they may have a strong symbolic connection to the event.

Do children have more nightmares than adults?

Terrifying dreams that rouse people from sleep plague children more often than adults, and nightmares can be especially vivid for young children because they may have a harder time separating fantasy from reality. But at least half of grownups also have occasional nightmares, although fewer than 10 percent report frequent or recurring episodes.

Lucid Dreams

In a lucid dream, you *know* you’re dreaming. You not only remember your dream, but you actively participate in the activities taking place within it. You might even determine its content.

For example, last night I dreamed that Mary and I drove up to the top of Mount Hood to see the snow. However, I made the wrong turn and drove over a VERY high cliff and our car plunged into the snow below us. However, the snow became cotton and we weren’t hurt at all.

So...there are at least four levels of lucid dreaming:

1. Knowing that you are dreaming
2. Being able to control your own dream actions in a wake-like fashion
3. Being able to manipulate your dream surroundings
4. Being able to manipulate the dream actions of other people in your dreams

How do lucid dreams work?

Research suggests that the brain undergoes a physiological change during lucid dreaming. In fMRI studies, certain parts of your brain have been shown to activate when the brain begins lucid dreaming. This appears related to the “waking consciousness” that characterizes lucidity.

And finally, can we have better dreams?

Good question! Dr. Susan Whitbourne has written an excellent [article](#) on Three Ways to Have Better Dreams in the September 30, 2017 issue of Psychology Today, which you can Google.

Enjoy!!