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'Sweet Dreams'

Abstract

Dreaming is a common phenomenon that has left scientists unsure for years. They are aware and able to identify the five main stages of sleep, and what occurs in each one. However, no one is exactly sure why we dream at night. Two psychologists, Sigmund Freud and Antti Revonsuo, are creators of the most popular and faithful theories. Along with these theories, comes a series of interpretations by psychologists. They take conventional dreams such as, falling dreams and chasing dreams that most people are said to experience once in their lifetime, then they uncover the meaning of it.

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Dreaming is a common term with a complex background that occurs in five stages of sleep. There are many theories and interpretations stated as to why this fascinating phenomenon occurs.

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Dreaming is known to all of mankind and is part of a crucial process that occurs every night. There are many scientists that have theories declaring its reason, and psychologists to interpret them.

Introduction

“A dream is a microscope through which we look at the hidden occurrences in our soul.” -Erich Fromm

Dreaming is the file of images, thoughts, memories, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep. Each and every human being experiences this 'unconscious state of mind' when we rest our heads for a quick nap, or when we go to bed each night. What most humans do not understand is how our normal lives can quickly turn bizarre in only five stages of sleep. All of these strange dreams we come across usually possess an underlying message.

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Analytical Stages of Sleep

The human body is capable of many incredible things. The most astonishing bodily function able to be performed is the gradual process of falling asleep and dreaming. This mechanism takes place in five different stages of sleep, separated into categories of 'REM sleep', and 'non-REM sleep'. The first stage is examined as the beginning of the transition phase; here is where we linger in between trying to stay awake and entering 'light sleep'. This typically happens for only seven minutes and it's the body's gentle way of relaxing itself for the preparation of sleep. Stage two is additionally known as 'light sleep'. *As our body slows down, the activity of the brain decelerates, along with the heart rate, and our breathing.* ("Activating Evolution") Also, eye movement reduces or maybe even stops completely. This stage allows the body to reach a state of alleviation as the body temperature reduces to a comfortable state, adapting itself for a deep sleep.

Stage three is the commencement of a deep sleep which is also referred to as 'slow wave sleep'. *This stage is where the brain waves in our body become 'delta waves', which is a scientific term for slow brain waves.* (Sowder) The muscles throughout the body loosen up, and

our breathing becomes calm, almost like we are meditating. The body is so far into sleep that it is strenuous to wake up the sleeper; this is also where children would have encounters with bed wetting. The deepest stage of sleep is the fourth, here is where the brain waves are extremely slow and show no sign of erratic bursts of brain activity. *Scientists declare stage four is also where tissue repairs occur along with the secretion of hormones for growth and development of the body.* (Sowder)

Rapid Eye Movement sleep transpires in stage five, which consists of dreaming. Our eyes begin to move, and our heart rate, brain activity, and breathing accelerate to an active level equivalent to being awake. *The arms, legs and main muscles in the body emerge into a type of paralysis that inhibits the sleeper from reacting to the dream; this is why we experience helplessness in our dreams.* (Sowder) This process of sleep fuels parts of the brain that are used for memory and learning, concluding why we can only see people and places that are familiar to us in dreams.

Theoretical Explanations

“A dream is a wish your heart makes, when you’re fast asleep.”

- Walt Disney

Sigmund Freud says in his popular book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *“The virtuous man contents himself with dreaming that which the wicked man does in actual life.”* (Freud) Although the theories as to why we dream are not completely legitimate, there are ones that are more sensible and scientifically proven than the rest. Sigmund Freud, who was a famous psychologist, states,

All dreamers are poets because poetry and dreaming are parallel in reasonable ways. Just like poetry, our dreams allow us to express hidden emotions that we feel on a regular basis in our waking life. In dreams we unite symbols with sentiments to represent a story that is wished to be pursued. (Freud)

He also called dreams, *“Those poems we tell ourselves at night in order to experience our unconscious wishes as real.”* (Freud). Therefore, the desires we crave stimulates our mind to produce these stories in our head that allow us to say what we want, and be who we want to be without real life consequences.

Another authentic theory is ‘The Evolutionary Theory’. This states that, *we dream to practice responses to threatening situations in our everyday lives.* (Simons) This theory is believable because many common dreams consist of a sense of exigency that forces us to react to realistic circumstances. Antti Revonsuo, who is a Finnish cognitive scientist, pronounces and has shown that,

The fight-or-flight part of our brain (the amygdala) is more alert than average when we are in REM sleep. When our body reaches REM sleep, the brain signals a reaction as if it was being physically threatened for survival. Even the part of the brain that exercises punching and running is vigilant, and progressively fires more and more energy even though our limbs are in paralysis. (Simons)

Consequently, Revonsuo and other scientists say that dreams are evolutionary adaptations, in other words, we dream in order to prepare our self defense strategies in night time remoteness. Therefore, our fight-or-flight reaction improves in real life.

Scientific Interpretations

“Dreams say what they mean, but they don’t say it in daytime language.”

- Gail Godwin

The most universal dreams people will have are the most eccentric. Everyone’s dreams are unique and have different emotions beneath the surface, but, the most significant dreams are surprisingly similar to others. A common dream that is described is falling, there is nothing to hold onto and the bottom seems so far away. Frequently, this sort of dream symbolizes the dreamer is feeling overwhelmed about real life. *It represents that there is a loss of control within the dreamer’s life because there is nothing to hold onto as the fall occurs. Overall, this type of dream corresponds to the feeling of failure or loss.* ("Dream Moods") This sort of dream takes

place in the first stage of sleep, and is often followed by a *myclonic jerk*, (“Dream Moods”) which is the twitch that many people do after drifting off.

One of the most familiar dreams to human beings is chasing dreams. Typically, we dream about running and attempting to hide from a chaser; this is triggered by the instinctive response to being physically threatened in a well-known environment. Psychologists believe we have these types of dreams because *we have let go of a piece of ourselves (usually a hooded figure) that we have pushed aside and it haunts us by chasing us.*(Anderson) Also, if we lack coping abilities or tend to run away from stressful situations then this type of dream happens. Often when these scary dreams occur, the chaser gets closer to us and we instantly wake up. This is because our adrenaline is pumping so hard that it startles our body and we wake up gasping, screaming, or sweaty.

Conclusion

“For often, when one is asleep, there is something in consciousness which declares that what then presents itself is but a dream.” - Aristotle

Dreaming is known to all of mankind and is part of a crucial process that occurs every night. There are many scientists that have theories declaring its reason, and psychologists to interpret them. We will all lay our heads down tonight and dream of a better place or maybe even experience a nightmare. The human body is unwillingly able to endure the riveting process of sleeping, and unlike most things, it is completely out of our control. It remains as one of the most mysterious and compelling controversies as scientists are not completely certain or able to prove the theories stated are valid. However, there are professionals able to interpret different types of dream humans have in common, despite the curiosity and uncertainty of presented beliefs.

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