

## **Dreams**

I am fascinated by the idea of translating personal images from one's mind into a comprehensive piece of artwork. Exploring artists such as Theo Ellsworth who have attempted to incorporate images of the mind into their work, I became increasingly curious about how I could potentially depict imagery personal to me. My project aims to project the most internal parts of my mind, and allow my own personal visions to see the light of day.

I am compelled by the notion that a vision created purely by our subconscious could still have the same emotional impact as something that may occur in reality. Our brains technically hold our entire being: our personality, thoughts, emotions, everything. It may be unsettling to recognize how little control we have over the thoughts that enter our mind. I hope the view may consider the power our brains hold over us. I observed through my research the extent to which our brain can make us believe illusions are reality, whether it be for just a moment in a dream or a long-term delusion people with mental illnesses may experience. Considering this, the question remains: why do our minds summon the thoughts it does? Where do they come from? How do they impact our emotional state? In my research, I found numerous theories around why dreams may occur but was surprised to find how little scientific research has been able to conclude about the purpose and functionality of dreaming.

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# Dreams

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## Phantasmagoria

Humans have been dreaming since the beginning of time. We may not always be able to remember them when we awake, but it is proven that dreams almost always occur during the REM part of the sleep cycle. While this is a common phenomenon, the functional purpose of the visions we see while asleep remains for the most part, an enigma. Theories have been posed throughout history as to why we might see such illusions in our sleep, these ranging between various symbolic meanings. Some speculate that dreams occur to convey messages that can only occur during slumber, while others' even contemplate our dreams ability to predict future events in the conscious world. Some dreams are vivid, while others fade away into a perplexing blur by the time we get up in morning. At a certain intensity, dreams may even wake us in the middle of the night. We have distinguished a difference between bad dreams and good dreams by labeling frightening imagery as "nightmares," sometimes leaving us unnerved in the real world. As the prioritization of sleep declines in today's society, ignorance towards dreams, as well as the importance of our subconscious thoughts and emotions stunt our creative potential and negatively impact the quality of life itself.

Sleep is a basic necessity for survival, so it's rather baffling to see just how undervalued sleeping at night has become in today's world. It is recommended that adults strive for [\[1\]](#)seven-to-nine hours of rest, while children are encouraged to sleep for as much as nine-to-eleven hours. However, anyone in today's society has come to face or at least taken note of the routine we are customarily expected to follow. Nearly all students as well as the majority of members in the workforce are expected to lead similarly scheduled lives in order to stay consistent with one another. Even with the standard nine-to-five work day, humans continue to believe there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish their never ending to-do lists. Nevertheless, the reality of the matter is that humans are simply not evolutionarily equipped to execute some of the tasks we have set for ourselves. Afterall, like many animals, we are meant to go to sleep at sunset, and be awakened by the rising sun. The invention of electricity thoroughly disrupted our natural sleep cycles. Light Bulbs essentially gave us the privilege of sight after the sunset, not unlike other innovations, made our daily lives seemingly easier. Luxuries become irresistible as they are implemented into societal norms, slowly indicating to us humans that there is usually a way to reach above what we thought to be possible and exceed natural limitations in our abilities. However, it is needless to say that the curiosity and determination of our species is inevitable. We must put our needs into perspective and maintain a sufficient amount of concern towards our most basic habits: eating, sleeping, exercising, etc. As more and more individuals are being granted the freedom to choose the lives we lead, we have the opportunity to thrive instead of just survive. Society is beginning to neglect these first key steps.

It is clear that developed nations are becoming increasingly oblivious to what mankind is capable of enduring. Basic human habits are not only necessary for survival, but have a direct impact on mental health. Aside from day-to-day struggles, a lack of sleep, food, exercise, etc. is an undeniable factor in our emotional well-being. Sleep enforces four prominent cycles, REM sleep likely the most researched. The REM cycle essentially provides us with a special state in our sleep where our minds are nearly as active as when we are awake. According to an interview published by *New Science*, people that suffer from depression spend a greater amount of time dreaming during the night. The most prominent function of sleeping is to bring down our autonomic levels, giving our body a break from our conscious lives. However, if we do not complete the cycle of arousal in the external world, we must do so in our only other state: sleep. This basically means that failure to resolve issues during the day may lead to an increase in

dreaming to work through worries or stressors preventing us from functioning at our highest potential. Research shows depressed individuals may experience an extensive amount of REM sleep, the most common time for dreaming to occur. This is important to note for individuals experiencing depression due to the extensive levels of energy required to produce an active dreaming state-of-mind. This may lead to a less restful sleep, resulting in people feeling exhausted in the morning no matter how many hours they may have spent asleep. This cycle allows us to retain new memories as well as restore our natural brain chemistry. Individuals may recount their experiences with dreams in varying ways, ranging from recurring dreams, nightmares, or simply being unable to recall any dreams at all. Humans assume themselves to be sophisticated when in reality we are not powerful enough to overcome our basic needs. Therefore, mental health is highly dependant on sleep; acknowledging our bodies and minds basic evolutionary demands.

Sleep therefore acts as not only a time for rest but also a way to subconsciously address the problems of our daily lives. For creative thinkers, dreams may act as a therapeutic gateway to imagery and concepts for themselves as well as the artist's audience. Artists such as Theo Ellsworth strive to harness the imagery within our subconscious to influence the artwork they produce. Dreams are arguably the only way for our conscious mind to get in touch with our subconscious. There may be some value in connecting with our subconscious in order to work through problems, fears, stressors, etc. we may have never known to be present in our lives. Dreams are arguably a translation our subconscious creates to communicate thoughts and emotions we should consider in our day-to-day lives.

#### Personal Narrative

I was compelled by the notion that a vision created purely by our subconscious could still have the same emotional impact as something that may occur in reality. As a result of these new insights into the impact of dreams, I sought to study my own visions in relation to my sleep patterns and personal mental health. To stimulate my memory, I began my process by recounting a variety of dreams from my childhood. As I wrote in my journal, I was surprised to find how vividly I could remember some dreams while others slipped my mind over time, leaving me with only a vague memory of an image or feeling. I found myself straining my mind to recall memories no one else had access to. Things that never occurred before my eyes in the real world, but affected me all the same. This thought process led me to a nightmare that was still very prominent in my mind, one where I accidentally turned a kid into a killer clown. I found my own dreams very odd to recollect. While they all seem rather silly to me now, in the moment some of my nightmares felt like the epitome of terror at the time. This one scared me to the point where I refused to sleep in my own bedroom.

After recording the clown dream in as much detail as possible, I began to remember what happened in reality once I awoke. I remember waking up abruptly and my body shaking vigorously. I had been asleep with grandmother's old wooden bed pressed up against the window of my yellow room I now shared with my sister, soundly in her crib in the corner where my bed used to be. I vaguely remember getting up and walking down the hallway to my parents room. Walking to my parents room at night is a very vivid and nostalgic childhood memory of mine, which I assume to be a common childhood memory for many others. I scrambled to my mother's room on many occasions during my childhood. The reasoning varied between nightmares, fevers, nausea, etc. As the years went on, the trek up to my mom's room was usually because I felt like I was "spinning," as we called it. It was not until much later that I realized these were actually intense irrational panic attacks. Completely oblivious to the extent of my anxiety at the time, I naturally struggled to identify and regulate my overwhelming emotions throughout my childhood.

The clown nightmare initiated a turning point in my childhood. The yellow room that had always felt safe and private to me was now not only inhabited by my little sister, but a disturbing memory that I irrationally (but full heartedly), believed to be a time of danger. At such a young age, I believe the dream was intensified to the point where I was nearly convinced the illusion was reality. The idea of sleeping in that room became terrifying and unappealing to me. Luckily, my mom understood that since we had an extra bedroom, it wasn't unreasonable for me to move into the guest bedroom downstairs. I didn't realize the irony at the time, but both the beginning and the end of the clown dream was set in that very downstairs guest room. I clearly remember the dream commencing with my Nonna comforting me on the couch in the guest room and ending with me running out the guest room door to escape the killer clown. Before the guest room became my bedroom, the floors were covered in an ugly white rug that shed all over the place. I mention this rug because while it existed in reality, I also distinctly remember it being in my dream. I was compelled by some of the imagery in the clown dream because most of the dream occurred in places that existed in real life. If images in a dream correspond to reality, it is much easier for figments of the imagination to have more of an impact on one's emotional state. In other words, I was terrified because everything in my nightmare felt so real.

To be fair, I was only four, but the extent of my distress made me consider the power our brains hold over us. Our brains technically hold our entire being: our personality, thoughts, emotions, everything. It may be unsettling to recognize how little control we seem to have over the thoughts that enter our mind. I have realized that sometimes it may be valuable to analyze or at least consider the random ideas that pop into our brains instead of dismissing them entirely. When I became curious about the degree to which our brain can make us believe fallacies of reality, I realized just how relevant the images we often disregard as illusions of the mind. Whether it be for just a moment in a dream or a long term delusion people with mental illnesses may experience, we need not limit ourselves to our conscious mind when evidently our subconscious is equally vocal.

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