

I often ask myself “what does being awake really mean?”

Throughout my life, I have always been gripped by two different worlds: my dreamworld and reality. My life is colored by a lingering inability to distinguish between the two. A red notebook sits on my nightstand, filled with scribbles outlining outrageous, vivid dreams. Through this project I began to make sense of the madness that erupts out of the subconscious by interviewing teenagers on the role of dreams in their lives.

My short film, “Isadora’s Room,” is a visual depiction of a woman’s reminiscence and psychoanalysis of her dreams. Creating in such isolation forced me to use myself as my medium... just me and my Iphone. My bedroom morphed into a set, and I suddenly had an entirely new wardrobe and makeup look. I am living out of a suitcase, so my camera and photography equipment are collecting dust in a straw basket at home. I used what I have with me to create and curate Isadora’s world.

My shots are inspired by logic-defying dreams such as shadowy figures lurking, the dreamer falling, and waking up from a nightmare on the merge of death. I depicted dreams from my interviews, as well as my own recurring dreams to create this fragmented story. I interspersed clips of Isadora’s present and images from her dreams to show how often she fails to differentiate between the two.

I am always caught daydreaming: in class, with a group of friends, staring out of the car window. A phrase that's often thrown around is “didn’t mean to burst your bubble!” I have always thought of my dreamworld, composed of visions fabricated by the subconscious, as my bubble. It is thrilling, blissful, and goose-bump-inducing. I used images of bubbles throughout the film, and the eventual popping of the bubble symbolizes the harsh beckoning of the real world.

Alexandra B.
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I. INTRODUCTION TO DREAMS

Flip flip,
Cheek to silky pillow,
Eyelids shut,
Black.

Petty worries, revelations of teenage love and friendship,
Deep slumber,
Stories unfold,
Twitch, twitch...

Light peaks through linen curtains,
Jolt.

Was I.... just... dreaming?

dream

/drēm/

noun

1. a series of thoughts, images, and sensations occurring in a person's mind during sleep.
"I had a recurrent dream about falling from great heights"
2. **Similar:** fantasy, nightmare, vision, hallucination¹

REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep stimulates the brain.
The body is temporarily paralyzed.
Emotions heighten, logic disintegrates with the orange sky...
Outrageous visions soar.
With the resurgence of wakefulness, the mind is left with a
hazy impression of profound discovery.

•

I never wanted to draw a line between a dream and reality.
They held hands and skipped together,
until crowds of faces told me to keep my head out of the clouds
Told me that gray concrete and twisted priorities and lies that
melted into the skyline were reality
Told me that from the moment I pressed my head against pilly
sheets, everything that followed is fake
A concoction brewed up by my psyche, something not to be
trusted or rehashed.



Isa and Devon by the Lake

¹ Dictionary.com, "Dream."

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Contemplating my own dreamworld, I realized that dreams are so cruelly confined to the individual's mind. I interviewed teenagers native to New York and California about their relationships with sleep and dreams. I asked them to recall vivid dreams and explain their relationships with dreaming throughout their young lives and during the current pandemic.

“When I was younger... I would be dreaming and it would be like a cinema. It was like I was the director, star and audience in one. The dream and I were independent beings. The dream was created on its own and ran by itself but I just interfered when needed. It really was like a film crew and movie making production.”

- Evelyn



Clara daydreams

II. THE ESCAPE

Fantasies of bliss run wild during the night, an escape from the monotony of the everyday life.

“I dream of the ocean a lot. The colors, the textures, the smells, the movement. My bed swallows me and the sheets turn to silk. I'm just sort of suspended while wrapped in these silk sheets then I start to sway and I slowly transition to laying on the ocean surface. Waves lapping over me with cold kisses. It's one of those dreams that is so real it feels like you're there, really feeling those things.”

- Evelyn



Mama in Teal blanket

III. THE NIGHTMARE

Creatures lurking in the dark. Death, gore, apocalyptic scenes...

Some call nightmares “threat rehearsals,” a space where the mind rehearses threats to everyday life. Others see nightmares as working through stress and pre-existing trauma.

Why are dreams separated from ‘real life’ experiences? The human mind is more active during a dream than when it’s awake.² Reality is black and white, but dreams house layers of beauty, unleashing the energy bottled up inside, threatening humanity’s guard. Dreams force a fostering of a brutally honest relationship between humans’ minds and bodies.

“I was driving through a field of flowers and it was like a Monet painting... it was amazing.”

- Vaughan

“I had a dream I was flying on a blue bird.”

- Adelle

Escapism is also represented in the world of dreams through lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming is a state of consciousness during a dream. It is a form of ‘metacognition,’ or awareness of awareness.

Is lucid dreaming an attempt to gain control over the uncontrollable? Lucid dreaming can help people overcome nightmares and relieve anxiety, and it can be used to treat PTSD. Although there are many benefits to lucid dreaming, does this desire to make decisions while asleep exemplify the hunger for power in humans? Perhaps humanity should let the natural power dynamic rest and be overtaken by the subconscious mind.



Ale's thoughts

“No matter how hard I tried to run fast my body wouldn’t move and I was stuck.”

- Sophia

² *Brainy Dose*, “14 Interesting Psychological Facts About Dreams.”

“I’ve had so many disaster dreams recently... of school shootings and bombings.”

- Erica

Nightmares can be caused by anxiety, stress, traumatic events, substances, and sleeping disorders.³

“I have been conscious in my dreams before. One time I had this dream where I was on the side of a cliff with a friend then I pulled him down and we were falling and I legitimately felt like we were falling... Suddenly we were in this animated open forest and there was a door on the side of the cliff, so we went through it and God was there... Then God let us back through the door, and I said STOP it’s a trick and then God whispered to me... ‘okay you two can go back to earth now’ and that’s where it ended.”

- Julia

“I dreamt I walked down to the basement to get wine from the cellar... and all of the corks just started popping off of the bottles... they started shattering... and then spiders just started flying out of the bottles and attacking my face.”

- Tyler

Why do we dream? A night’s sleep would be smooth and peaceful if late hours were devoid of otherworldly scenes.

The individual’s creativity, outrageous fantasies, and subconscious irrational fears need a space to run wild. Sleeping is a daily ritual during which most assume the brain is deactivated, yet it is working in overdrive. If there is no interference, dreams remain one of the only facets of life that humans do not have power over.



Window to Brooklyn

“My dreams scare me sometimes, but the idea of dreaming doesn’t necessarily scare me... I find it so amazing how we have these hidden parts of ourselves that we can’t access when we believe ourselves to be fully “awake”. But what even is awake.”

- Julia

³ Sussex Publishers, “Nightmares.”

IV. DREAMING AMIDST A PANDEMIC

Life itself is a fever dream right now.

Empty streets, masked mobs, lingering distance, bodies being wheeled out of hospitals and buried in ditches, complete lock down, social isolation, a seemingly doomed near future.

Dreams are exposing universal panic and stress amidst the pandemic.

The New York Times draws parallels between the current state of the world and a dystopian society:

“The surreal reality of American cities and towns also mirrors the half-remembered, half-empty approximations explored in sleep, ordered by the same pliable, foggy logic... an invisible plague makes people fall gravely ill seemingly at random; touching anything — everything — is banned.”⁴

Stress and trauma prompts lighter sleep, making humans more prone to dream and remember the content.

Due to the Coronavirus, there has been a spike in vivid, frequent, goose-bump inducing dreams.

Dreams of escape, of sickness and contamination, of indulgence, and of social taboos are soaring. Dreams such as these have been reported during times of trauma, times of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and war.

“I dreamt of my prom... which is probably not gonna happen now.”

- India

“I keep having food dreams... of this specific dish from this Italian restaurant on the Upper West Side called Carmines... as soon as this is all over I’m getting that pasta!”

- Jeremiah

“It was me and my friends at a house and people started getting sick and it was so out of hand... I entered this lucid dream state... so I flew to Manhattan and just spent 15 minutes totally awake, yet not, flying above the city. It was amazing... I could feel the wind and everything in real life while I was flying, but at the same time I knew I was dreaming.”

- Theo

There is so much fear in the world during this unprecedented time. Dreams are a manifestation of what is ‘unacceptable’ to feel, think, or speak out loud during the day. There is deep guilt in complaining while people are dying, so these thoughts are confined to the mind, disguised by symbolism.

“I had a vivid dream of being at the airport with my family traveling back home, and then sirens went off in the airport and we all had to run outside.”

- Julia

⁴ Weaver, Caity. “Why Am I Having Weird Dreams Lately?”



Amalia through the Fence

The New York Times draws parallels between the current state of the world and a dystopian society:

“The surreal reality of American cities and towns also mirrors the half-remembered, half-empty approximations explored in sleep, ordered by the same pliable, foggy logic: Masks are pilloried until they are mandatory; liquor stores open early for sexagenarians only; an invisible plague makes people fall gravely ill seemingly at random; touching anything — everything — is banned.”⁵

Six feet. Gloves. Mask. Squirming, cooped up in a dark apartment, staring out of a single window frame...

Dreaming in unison with the rest of the world.

⁵ Weaver, Caity. “Why Am I Having Weird Dreams Lately?”

A pause prompts contemplation and analysis, a deeper understanding of the harmony between the conscious and subconscious.

Is the unconscious mind shared by all of humanity active during this charged time?

During times of strife, the psyche may unlock the collective unconscious...

This stored collection of knowledge inherited at birth is unleashed to be utilized in this chaotic era.



Sigmund Freud once called dreams the “royal road” to the unconscious.⁶

“I believe that dreams are the gateway to all of the power of our minds that we can’t access. Like Freud, I believe that they’re a portal to the subconscious... so I always analyze them.”

- Julia

⁶ Team, GoodTherapy Editor. “Dream Analysis.”



Window to the Meadow

Dreams see familiar faces. When humans dream, they see the strangers from the train, the kids from the park, businessmen seen in passing on the sidewalk. These figures are subconsciously collected and stored for dream-fuel, to turn ordinary people into actors in the brain's grand production: a dream.

I can't help but wonder about how the little girl in a pink frilly dress or the old woman in a floral sweater from my dream last night are right now. Are they healthy? Are they safe? Are they with loved ones? In a hospital bed?

Eyelids shut...

When your fingers sink into the crinkled lines of the sheets, let them dip into lava

When you're pinned up against a cliff, let your cheeks be caressed by the pirate's machete

When your wrists begin to itch, imagine the poison ivy climbing up them, twisting around them

And now, as the world pauses, I'm giving you the power that they tried to take away from me...

The power to dream.

The power to follow the trail of your thoughts, let yourself be gripped by hallucination.



Ellie + Julia's dream Meditation

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