



Dream a little dream

A student going to school without clothes on has most likely never happened. Rarely are people chased through a misty black forest by hungry, growling wolves. And really, when was the last time someone woke up with a snake perched on their chest? For most, these happen every night in the comfort of their own homes.

Dreams have long been of interest to those baffled by such a strange phenomena, the topic has triggered number of theories, studies and experiences.

In an attempt to shed light on the subject, Dr. Steve Smith, professor of psychology at Texas A&M, said numerous methods exist to explain why people dream.

"You could take a biological [approach]," Smith said. "Dreams are associated with what is called Rapid Eye Movement (R.E.M.), which means while you are dreaming one of the characteristics is that your eyes jiggle around."

Smith said R.E.M. sleep is necessary for a good night's rest.

"Studies have shown that when people are deprived of R.E.M. sleep they become cranky and irritable," Smith said. "This shows it is important to have this sleep, and with it dreams."

Smith said sleep in this state is called paradoxical sleep.

"What is interesting about the R.E.M. state is that if we look at your brain activity and compared it with

the brain activity of someone who is awake, it would be pretty much the same," Smith said.

"But if you look at the muscle tone of a person who is dreaming, they have very little. They do not seem particularly capable of moving themselves that much."

Smith said it is ironic the brain appears awake while the body and muscles are asleep. Some also have suggested R.E.M. sleep tunes up the visual system as well.

He said another approach to explaining dreams is the Freudian or psychoanalytical method.

"A Freudian might say that we dream because in our day-to-day experiences, we experience things that frustrate or bother us," he said. "These are things we are sometimes unable to resolve."

Smith said dreams serve as solutions to the problem.

"A dream provides a setting where we can resolve, through this dream fantasy, these unresolved conflicts," he said. "For example, if there is someone you really do not like, you are not allowed to kill people [in real life], but in your dream you can."

Smith said this approach helps people handle their daily activities.

"This serves the function of allowing us to get our frustrations

out," he said.

"So we can live like civilized people."

Jill Bradshaw, a biology graduate student, said she once dreamed because of a change in her daily routine.

"I was on a diet," she said. "For nights I dreamed I was eating mass quantities of food."

Smith said this sort of dream is an example of an unresolved conflict. Dreams can be elaborate and can vary from person to person.

"If you ask two different people to tell a story, one might give you a three-liner and another might go into great detail," he said. "That same kind of difference is the case with our dreams, as well."

Smith said there are other explanations for why some people dream, or recall their dreams, more than others.

"Dreams are difficult to remember," he said. "You wake up and begin your day and later try to remember, 'What was that dream I had?' Chances are you won't remember."

"If you wake up, lay still and try to recapture some of the images and build on that, you can get a much more vivid recollection of what you just dreamed."

Jane Holden, a junior architecture major, said she uses this method to remember her dreams.

"A lot of my dreams involve elaborate plots," she said. "[But] I can recall everything, even down to the color of the carpet in a building."

STORY BY BRIAN FLEMING
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