

Sweeter dreams in a peaceful mind

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A new study by researchers from the University of Turku, Finland and the University of Skövde, Sweden shows that people with more peace of mind in the waking state have more positive dreams, whereas those with more anxiety in the waking state have more negative dreams. This means that dream experiences, as revealed in recalled and reported dreams, may reflect a person's mental health.

It has long been assumed that the content of dreams can tell us something about the person's well-being. However, so far dream researchers have mostly studied the dreams of people suffering from various disorders and we know very little about the positive side of well-being: do happier people have happier dreams? Well-being researchers, on the other hand, have specifically studied happiness, but have neglected an important aspect of well-being—peace of mind.

- We wanted to address these important gaps in both dream and well-being research and to study how dream emotions are related to not only different aspects of

waking ill-being, but also to different aspects of waking well-being, including peace of mind. In fact, this is the first study to look at how peace of mind relates to dream content, says Pilleriin Sikka, Doctoral Candidate in Psychology at the University of Turku and Lecturer in Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Skövde, and lead author of the article published in the Nature group journal *Scientific Reports*.

- Peace of mind is a state of inner peace and harmony, a more complex and durable state of well-being traditionally associated with happiness in the Eastern cultures, Sikka continues.
- Even though it has rarely been directly measured in studies of well-being, in several philosophical traditions and spiritual approaches, peace of mind has always been regarded as central to human flourishing, adds co-author Antti Revonsuo, Professor of Psychology at the University of Turku and Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Skövde.

The researchers asked healthy participants to fill in a questionnaire that measured their waking ill-being and well-being. Then, during the following three weeks the participants kept a daily dream diary in which, every morning upon awakening, they reported all their dreams and rated the emotions they experienced in those dreams. Results showed that individuals with higher levels of peace of mind reported more positive dream emotions, whereas those with higher levels of anxiety reported more negative dream emotions.

These findings show that if we want to understand how dream content is related to waking well-being, it is not enough to measure only the symptoms of mental ill-being but we should measure well-being in its own right. Surprisingly, those aspects that are typically considered and measured as 'well-being' were not related to [dream](#) content. So there seems to be something unique about peace of mind and anxiety, Sikka explains.

The researchers propose that individuals with higher levels of peace of mind may be better able to regulate their emotions not only in the waking state but also during dreaming, whereas the opposite may be true for those with higher levels of anxiety.

In future studies we should explore whether better emotion regulation capacity, and self-control in general, is indeed something that characterises people with higher levels of peace of mind, and whether improving such skills can also lead to more peace of [mind](#), Sikka concludes.

More information: Pilleriin Sikka et al, Peace of mind and anxiety in the waking state are related to the affective content of dreams, *Scientific Reports* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-018-30721-1](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-30721-1)

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