



Sleep Paralysis: Night-mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body Connection (Studies in Medical Anthropology)

Shelley R. Adler

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You fall asleep, but are soon disturbed by a strange noise. When you try to sit up, you find you are paralyzed; with sickening dread, you sense an evil presence approaching....

Sleep Paralysis explores a distinctive form of nocturnal fright: the "night-mare," or incubus. In its original meaning a night-mare was the nocturnal visit of an evil being that threatened to press the life out of its victim. Today, it is known as sleep paralysis—a state of consciousness between sleep and wakefulness, when you are unable to move or speak and may experience vivid and often frightening hallucinations. Culture, history, and biology intersect to produce this terrifying sleep phenomenon. Although a relatively common experience across cultures, it is rarely recognized or understood in the contemporary United States. Shelley R. Adler's fifteen years of field and archival research focus on the ways in which night-mare attacks have been experienced and interpreted throughout history and across cultures and how, in a unique example of the effect of nocebo (placebo's evil twin), the combination of meaning and biology may result in sudden nocturnal death.

Sleep Paralysis: Night-mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body Connection (Studies in Medical Anthropology) Details

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From Reader Review Sleep Paralysis: Night-mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body Connection (Studies in Medical Anthropology) for online ebook

Michal says

mindblown phenomenon...absolutely fascinating reading on academic level without mystifying bullshit

Megan Marvel says

If you are interested in understanding more about that feeling of helplessness when you wake up from a nap and cannot move, read this book.

Em says

An interesting topic. Sleep paralysis refers to the stage between being awake and being asleep where a person may feel paralysed, frightened, the presence of someone else in the room, and a pressure on their chest. It was misunderstood for many years, and people were reluctant to talk about it in case they were seen as crazy. Sleep paralysis has also been attributed as the cause of many alien abductions, repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse, and evidence of witchcraft. After a discussion of sleep paralysis, particularly focused on its history and cultural explanations, the book focuses on one group: Laotian Hmongs who immigrated to the United States.

In the 1980s, a number of healthy Hmong male immigrants in their 30s died suddenly in their sleep. Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS) was most likely to occur within two years of moving to the US. Research found that it may be linked to a genetic cardiac abnormality, where an instance of unusual electrical activity in the heart could cause cardiac arrest. However, the biomedical theory doesn't explain why it was so much more common in men than women, and happened shortly after immigrating. The author describes the cultural background and beliefs of the Hmong people to complement the biomedical theory and complete the puzzle.

After immigrating to the US, like many refugees, the Hmong were under a lot of stress. Stress affects sleep and releases cortisol, both of which can put extra strain on the heart. However, Hmong people (and other East Asian immigrants) experienced SUNDS while others did not due to their cultural beliefs. Most cultures have a way of explaining sleep paralysis, and to the Hmong, the explanation is an evil spirit called dab tsog. If the Hmong people do not carry out their cultural rituals properly (e.g. do not feed their ancestor spirits annually), the dab tsog may visit. Dab tsog is more likely to visit men because traditionally they are responsible for performing these rituals. The Hmong know that dab tsog doesn't kill on the first visit -- it's a warning to seek out a shaman and undertake rituals to bring back their protective ancestor spirits. If this isn't done, dab tsog may return.

In the US, these rituals were almost impossible to do -- because the immigrants were split up across the country, it was unlikely they'd be near a shaman, and they couldn't sacrifice animals to appease the ancestors. Since they were unable to perform the rituals, they experienced the nocebo effect. This is the opposite of placebo (a beneficial effect caused solely because the patient believes in the treatment), and they believed

they were at an increased risk of the dab tsog returning to suffocate them to death.

Due to the high stress experienced by the Hmong immigrants (e.g. unable to practice rituals, dispersal of clans, threats to traditional gender and age hierarchies, difficulty with language and employment, survivor guilt and PTSD), they were more likely to experience sleep paralysis. Those with the underlying cardiac disorder were more likely to experience a heart attack. When the next incidence of sleep paralysis occurred, the men believed it was dab tsog coming to kill them. Their stress levels spiked and triggered the heart condition, causing death.

SUNDS became less common as Hmong immigrants moved to live closer to each other within the US, forged stronger and new support networks, and gained employment and English language skills. Those who experienced dab tsog were now in a cultural setting equipped to help, which removed the nocebo effect. Now if they experienced a second incidence of sleep paralysis/dab tsog, they did not experience the same spike in stress that triggered the cardiac arrhythmia.

This is quite a long review for me, which I guess proves that the content was interesting. I learnt a lot. It's fascinating that a typically harmless experience, sleep paralysis, could become deadly because of cultural differences.

Ariadna73 says

For my Spanish review; click here: <http://lunairereadings.blogspot.com/2...>

This is a book that tries to dissect the common phenomenon of the night-mare; with an hyphen; because it is in certain cultures believed to be the visit of a spirit (called the night-mare); who infuses terror and prevents the dreamer from being capable of any movement. Some recreational drugs such as PCP or Ketamine are also used for the same purposes; because of the overwhelming horror sensation that delivers a potent dosis of adrenalin in the sleeper's system. In any case; this books tries to cover all the possible viewpoints and explanation for the night-mares; and tries to be rigorous and serious. It is also well written; although it can be heavy and complicated in some places. I liked it in general; and would re-read some of the passages; because the depictions are really interesting and easy to identify with.

!Tæmbu?u says

KOBOBOOKS

Rock Angel says

note: A next

<http://theweek.com/article/index/2202...>

"Adler makes the provocative claim that the Laotian immigrants of the 1980s were in some sense killed by their powerful cultural belief in night spirits ...

Her argument amounts to a stirring and chilling case for the power of the nocebo, the flip side to the placebo

effect."

"The ethnic group fought a guerrilla war against the government of Laos with U.S. backing during the Vietnam War. When the Laotian communists won, many Hmong struck out for America to avoid reprisals. The U.S. government decided to scatter the Hmong randomly across the U.S. to 53 different cities, breaking up the immigration patterns we generally see. In short order, the Hmong organized and made a "secondary migration" to California, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Unemployment was obscenely high, and the sense of community that many had enjoyed in the old country was gone.

Some Hmong felt that they had not properly honored the memories of their ancestors, which was a known risk factor among the Hmong for being visited by the tsog tsuam."

Sleep paralysis is known to just about all cultures:

Among Hmong ppl: "tsog tsuam"

Among the Chinese: held by a ghost - "bei gui ya"

In Newfoundland: the Old Hag

...

Sistermagpie says

Cool overview of the phenomenon of sleep paralysis considering both the scientific/physiological explanations and the folklore surrounding it. As the author points out, these two things often affect each other and people sometimes incorporate what they know of one into the other.

The author also talks about a rash of deaths of immigrants to the US that seem to be linked to it. Usually of course you don't die from this experience, but given the right psychological state, beliefs and the enough stress, this can result.

One of the most interesting things I learned in it was that the term "night-mare" probably originally referred to sleep paralysis and not the bad dreams we use it to refer to now. "Mar" was a demon that sat on the chest, probably coming from an ancient word relating to crushing. Lots of cultures have a name for this same demon or phenomenon that relates to that.
