

Dream world a strange, scary place for liberals: Meanwhile, conservatives dream of mundane events and monogamous sex, writes Chris Lackner.

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If you've recently dreamed about sex with a stranger, flying or the dead coming back to life, chances are you're probably a liberal instead of a conservative.

A dream researcher from John F. Kennedy University in California has discovered fundamental differences between the dream worlds of people on the ideological left and the ideological right.

Among his findings, Kelly Bulkeley discovered that liberals are more restless sleepers and have a higher number of bizarre, surreal dreams -- including fantasy settings and a wide variety of sexual encounters. Conservatives' dreams were, on average, far more mundane and focused on realistic people, situations and settings.

"Conservatives seem to have more of a focus on the here and now and the material world whereas liberals, in contrast, seem to have a much wider sphere of imaginative activity," he said.

"They don't just dream about what is, but what could be or what they wish could be," Mr. Bulkeley said.

His research is being published in an upcoming issue of *Dreams*, a journal published by the American Psychological Association.

Out of the 134 liberals who participated in the study, 91 per cent said they recently dreamed about sex; only 76 per cent of 100 conservative subjects admitted the same.

But Mr. Bulkeley said the two political stripes showed very different tastes in dream partners.

Liberals were far more likely to have sexual dreams about strangers and a variety of partners, while liberal women showed a greater tendency towards same-sex fantasies than their conservative counterparts (24 versus four per cent).

"Especially for liberal women, there was a far greater variety in sexual partners and incidents of homosexuality," Mr. Bulkeley said. "Liberals tended to show a greater willingness to experiment with different things."

Conservatives, by comparison, were far more likely to report having sexual dreams about their spouse or

current partner.

While left-wingers might be more adventurous in the subconscious bedroom, they're also more likely to wake up in a cold sweat.

Liberals showed slightly higher levels of nightmares than conservatives -- a statistic at odds with a similar dream study Mr. Bulkeley conducted in the late 1990s.

He said the ideology of the United States' governing party may affect the dream patterns of Republicans and Democrats.

While conservatives deplored former president Bill Clinton's reign in the 1990s, liberals are currently both furious and fearful of the Bush administration, he said.

"With the change from the Clinton to the Bush administrations, there are waking world reasons for liberals to be more concerned and stressed, and conservatives to be less concerned," Mr. Bulkeley said.

"Dreams are like political cartoons of the mind -- mental op-ed columns. Sometimes dreams reflect internal commentaries on the state of things."

The study includes some of the dreams recounted by liberals, such as the following nightmare: "I was at a presidential rally where George W. Bush was speaking. There was so much red, white and blue. Bush speaks: 'There are those who say that we are giving up our civil liberties. But I say, we should be proud to sacrifice our freedoms for America!' The crowd went wild, clapping, cheering and waving flags. I awoke in a cold sweat."

Not surprisingly, Republicans had much more benign dreams about their commander-in-chief: "I was friends with George W. Bush and we were working together on his ranch. I was happy to be there."

Mr. Bulkeley said that the most surprising result in his study is that conservatives showed a higher tendency for lucid dreaming -- being aware they were asleep. Conservatives largely reported using their "dream awareness" to wake themselves up from uncomfortable situations and nightmares, he said.

Overall, conservative males appear to sleep the most soundly and remember the fewest dreams, while liberal women are the most restless sleepers and fantastical dreamers.

"While some of my colleagues think my research reinforces the stereotype of repressed, uptight conservatives, it also shows that many liberals may be hanging on the edge of mental well-being," Mr. Bulkeley said. "There may be a lot of hidden distress and unpleasantness in the liberal mind."