



Sleepsex: Uncovered

MICHAEL MANGAN, PH.D.

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Michael Mangan, Ph.D.

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I dedicate this book to all who chose to share with me, and with Sleepsex: Uncovered readers, a very private part of their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night to your bed partner's amorous advances only to discover that he or she happens to be dead asleep? Have you ever been told that you engage in some type of sexual activity while you are asleep? If you've had either of these experiences, you're not alone. However, you may *feel* alone in your experience because sexual activity during sleep—"sleepsex"—is not widely recognized as a type of sleep-associated behavior.

If you have had direct experience with sleepsex, or are simply intrigued by the topic, this book will provide answers to many questions you may have. In the first chapter I summarize what has been written on sleepsex by sleep experts. Useful information is presented in question-answer format. The bulk of the remainder of *Sleepsex: Uncovered* is made up of brief, and in-depth, sleepsex "stories." These stories reveal what direct experience with sleepsex was like for over 60 persons, and how it affected them.

The stories you will read were provided to me by visitors to "www.sleepsex.org"—a Website I set up to provide information on sleepsex. Comments such as these from visitors to the site suggest that they found the site to be a useful resource and a source of comfort and support:

"I just wanted to let you know I truly appreciate the effort and time you've put in creating your site. I appreciate the fact that you take this disorder seriously and offer a supportive network to many with this issue."

"I've just discovered your webpage. I've been searching and searching the web for months, trying to find information on this

subject. I am a 37 year-old woman and I initiate sexual contact with my husband while I'm sleeping. My first husband told me I did this, but I didn't believe him. After 10 years of marriage to my second husband, I no longer doubt that I do this."

To those who are curious about, or who have personally encountered sleepsex, it is my hope that this book will similarly helpful and informative.

CHAPTER 1

Sleepsex: Q & A

When “odd” things happen to people, they usually seek out information about whatever it is that has happened. Typically, there are tons of questions that need quick answers.

In this chapter I have anticipated some of the questions that you may have about sleepsex. The answers I have provided come straight out of recent clinical articles written by sleep experts, and from popular articles featuring expert commentary. As far as I know, the information is up-to-date and correct.

Q: What kind of sex do people engage in during sleepsex?

A: Sexually oriented touching and fondling of a bed partner’s genitalia are common. Intercourse is another known form of sexual behavior that occurs during sleep. Additionally, I know of at least one clinical case study of sleep masturbation that has been published (Wong, 1986), and I have received many descriptions of sleepsex experiences, submitted by both men and women, involving masturbation. Oral and anal sex seems to be less common, but does occur according to reports I have received.

Q: How many people “have” sleepsex?

A: According to some estimates, about 120 million Americans suffer from a sleep problem; nearly 60% of them have a diagnosed, chronic disorder. Doctor David Rosenfeld of the Los Angeles Kaiser Permanente Sleep Medicine Clinic (who wrote

one of the first scholarly articles on sleepsex) has suggested that sleepsex may actually be much more common than realized—both among people with diagnosed sleep problems, and also among non-patients. According to one report, Rosenfeld (quoted in Pasick, 2000) was said to have estimated that 1 percent of the general population may have had direct experience with sleepsex.

Like some other sleep disorders, such as sleep disordered breathing, sleepsex may be predominant among males. At the present time, there are no reported cases in the clinical literature of women who have engaged in sleepsex (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998).

From most reports I have received, it is clear that men do seem to initiate intercourse more so than women. However, I have received numerous reports from women who claimed to have initiated intercourse, masturbate, and engage in oral sex while they were asleep. So, what is unclear is whether or not males initiate intercourse *as well as* engage in other types of sexual activity more often than women.

Q: How do people feel about sleepsex?

A: Most women and men, whose experiences I have included in this book, indicated that they were distressed about their own or their partner's sleepsex. In fact, there have been sleepsex events that have had very serious consequences. For example, in one documented case, sleepsex resulted in the arrest and prosecution of a man for sexual battery.

Details of this case include a normal, healthy, 45 year-old male waking to the screams of a 14 year-old girl—a friend of his daughter's—who was spending the night at his home. Evidently, he had gone to bed as usual. Later, while asleep, he had walked downstairs to where the two girls were sleeping. He then began fondling his daughter's young friend—she woke up and began screaming. The police were called and he was forced to explain his behavior to them. He was then arrested and charges of sexual

battery were leveled against him. At the time he was happily married and had no history of sexual misconduct.

While both he and his spouse believed he had been sleepwalking, his attorney advised him to “forget about this business of sleepwalking” because “a jury would never believe it” (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998). Cases like this have led Dr. Colin Shapiro (who first described cases of interactive sleepsex) to suggest that, “Individuals with undiagnosed sexual behavior in sleep (SBS) are at risk of being accused of sexual assault” (Shapiro, Fedoroff, & Trajanovic, 1996, p. 367).

Other anecdotal accounts of women’s experience depict almost rape-like situations in which they have been violently forced by their unconscious husbands and boyfriends to have sex. In some instances, these women maintain that their bed partners are nearly impossible to awaken.

In a situation involving masturbation, a young man had “crashed out” on a hotel bed along with his girlfriend and her female friend. To his horror, he woke to find that he had masturbated upon his girlfriend’s friend. In another case, a woman had near nightly episodes of masturbation in her sleep. This put a strain on her relationship as her male partner was very disturbed by it and he did not believe that she was actually asleep.

Let me say here that all is not gloom and doom when it comes to sleepsex. In some cases, sleepsex may be considered to be a perfectly “normal” occurrence—like nocturnal emission (i.e., “wet dreams”) (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998). Some welcome the experience and treat it as an exciting dimension of their sex life.

I have received a number of reports, both by men and women, who thought sleepsex was “great” and found it to be a “real turn-on.” Indeed, sleepsex between “consenting” partners can be benign and may even stimulate positive changes in partner’s sexual relations.

For example, in one recorded case, a man had nightly intercourse with his girlfriend with no recollection of their lovemaking in the morning. One night he began snoring during intercourse.

As comical as it may sound, this was a rather rude awakening for them both to the fact that he was initiating sex in his sleep. Evidently, his sexual demeanor was more aggressive and dominant when he was asleep and included “playful biting” and “talking dirty.” This couple eventually sought a medical explanation for his behavior. She also requested that he begin to include some of his sleeping sexual behavior into their daytime sexual relations (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998).

Taking all this into consideration, I think it is safe to say that how someone responds emotionally to sleepsex, either as a recipient or an initiator, depends a lot on the person (or persons) involved, and on the particulars of the situation. Generally, how people feel about sleepsex is not a black or white topic. Rather, it is a complex one, involving many shades of gray.

Q: Is sleepsex a sleep “disorder”?

A: Currently, sleepsex has not been classified as a unique type of sleep disorder. Rather, sexual behavior during sleep might best be described as another type, or variant of, sleepwalking (Rosenfeld, & Elhajjar, 1998).

Sleepwalking is a classic type of sleep disorder called an “arousal disorder” (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998). Arousal disorders, of which there are several, can be more generally classified as “parasomnias.” Parasomnias are disorders that include behaviors and experiences that intrude upon the sleep process and create sleep-disrupting events.

Sleepwalking tends to run in families, and is more common in childhood and early adolescence. Onset of sleepwalking in adulthood, especially in the absence of childhood sleepwalking, is rare. It is presumed to be caused by abnormalities in the brain’s arousal mechanisms (i.e., the biological processes that play a role in waking from sleep).

There are five different levels or “stages” of sleep. Stages 1-4 are “non-REM” (i.e., non-rapid eye movement) stages. Stage 5 is known as “REM” sleep, and is the stage most dreaming occurs

in. Arousals usually occur when a person is “cycling up” toward awareness from the deeper stages (e.g., 3 or 4) of non-REM sleep. Sleepwalking is known to occur during stages 3 or 4. These are sleep stages that are typically reached within two hours after falling asleep.

During this sleep phase, a person is partially asleep and partially awake. What this means is that persons are able to engage in complex behaviors, like walking, eating, and sexual activity, while they are, according to some experts, still “half” asleep.

Therefore, while sleepsex behaviors, such as masturbation, fondling, or initiating intercourse may lead an observer to conclude that the person engaging in the behavior must be fully conscious, in actuality, the person may not be aware, or conscious in the same sense as when they are awake. Moreover, it is often the case that they will be unable to recall fully, or even partially, what happened during the episode. Additionally, they may act like a completely different person than when awake while in this state.

Q: What causes sleepsex episodes?

A: Arousal disorder events such as sleepwalking may be triggered by forced, or involuntary, arousal from sleep. For example, nighttime movement or bodily contact may be enough to trigger an event. Having another type of sleep disorder such as sleep apnea, periodic limb movement disorder, restless limb disorder, having epilepsy, being over-tired, or taking various types of medications, may also lead to arousal disorder events.

Factors that may precipitate sleepsex episodes that have been suggested in clinical case studies include: alcohol and/or polysubstance abuse, fatigue (sleep deprivation), and psycho-physiological stress (Shapiro, Fedoroff, & Trajanovic, 1996). Other precipitating factors, according to reports from visitors to sleepsex.org who responded to the question “What do you think causes your or your partner’s sleepsex to occur?” include: drug and alcohol use, fatigue, stress, length of time between sex, infre-

quent sexual activity, low interest in sex while awake, coming into contact with bed-partner during sleep, dreaming, dream-like sexual imagery, and sexual arousal prior to sleep.

The precipitating factors reported by sleepsex.org visitors are generally consistent with those reported by Shapiro et al., (1996). Interestingly, these reports extend Shapiro et al.'s observations to include contact during sleep, low sexual interest, infrequent sexual activity, dreaming, and sexual arousal prior to sleep. This suggests that there may be an association between touching one's bed partner, level of sexual motivation (sexual "drive"), sexual arousal, and sexual dreams or dream-like imagery, and the occurrence of sleepsex episodes.

To scientists who study sleep abnormalities, the cause of sleepsex, by and large, remains a mystery. Speculation about the cause(s) of sleepsex does suggest a combination of biological and psychological factors. One possible psychological explanation as to why it occurs involves the classical Freudian notion of dreams serving a wish-fulfillment function. That is, during the day persons have sexual urges that they are unable to act upon. Later, while dreaming, they experience, and physically act out, their repressed sexual desires (Shapiro, Fedoroff, & Trajanovic, 1996).

Some scientists who have studied sleepsex argue that it may not be explainable in terms of dreaming and wish fulfillment. The reason being that during REM stage sleep, there is near total skeletal muscle relaxation. Because dreams usually take place during the REM stage of sleep, acting out sexual wishes while dreaming could not occur because persons in this stage of sleep are essentially paralyzed. Therefore, these researchers suggest that persons with sleepsex may be experiencing—and acting upon—non-REM imagery that, like dreams, can also be sexual in nature (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998).

It is clear that dreams can be sexual and are associated with sexual arousal in sleep. This relation has been demonstrated in laboratory settings. Sexual arousal is actually fairly common during REM sleep, and is characterized by the presence of an erec-

tion in males, and by the presence of an engorged clitoris, and vaginal lubrication, in women.

What is unclear is whether or not sexual dreams are directly linked to the occurrence of sleepsex. In cases in which there is a subjective association (i.e., the sleeping person, once awakened, links his/her sleepsex with a dream), the individual has likely acted on residual memories of REM dream content, and the behavior has actually occurred during a non-REM state. As I mentioned before, because of the lack of muscle tone characteristic of REM sleep, it would be physically impossible for a person to act out a sexual dream with a bed partner.

One exception to this rule is in cases of REM-Behavioral Disorder (RBD). Persons with this type of disorder are able to act out their dreams because the paralysis normally associated with REM sleep is interrupted.

Some sleep disorder experts (quoted in Raphael, 2000) have indicated that sleepsex may be associated with RBD. However, as Rosenfeld and Elhajjar (1998) have pointed out, research has shown that there is an absence of sexual behavior associated with RBD, both in humans and in animals. This suggests that sleepsex is not necessarily associated with RBD.

The bottom line with respect to the apparent sexual dream-sleepsex linkage is this: However obvious the association between sexual dreams and sleepsex may seem to those who have experienced it, from a scientific standpoint there is no clear evidence in support of such an association. Moreover, sexual behavior during sleep may not even necessarily have a direct psychological precursor, such as dreaming (REM), or non-REM sexual imagery (Rosenfeld & Elhajjar, 1998).

To further complicate the picture, some doubt may be cast on the association between sleepwalking, and sleepsex activities involving an erect penis such as intercourse and masturbation. Why? Because research has shown that erections are unlikely to occur during non-REM stages of the sleep cycle, such as during

stages 3-4 (slow wave) sleep. And, as I mentioned before, sleepwalking occurs during slow-wave sleep.

However, according to one sleep expert, Dr. Harvey Moldofsky (quoted in Raphael, 2000), director of the University of Toronto Centre for Sleep and Chronobiology, it is possible for erections to carry over from REM sleep (a sleep stage in which they are common) into non-REM sleep. Additionally London neuropsychiatrist Peter Fenwick has suggested the following:

“Sexual behavior can be carried out during slow-wave sleep and is associated with sleepwalking. The sexual behavior can be either simple or complex and will typically last for a few minutes. In the simple cases the sleepwalker may caress or stroke their partner’s body; these movements may sometimes apparently be more sexually directed, with groping or caressing of the partner’s genitals. Sexual intercourse is not reported in sleepwalkers but because it is now accepted that the somnambulistic episode merges into a dissociated state, on theoretical grounds it is perfectly possible for a sleepwalker in the later stages of somnambulism to become sexually aroused and have intercourse. In the more complex cases a sleepwalker will leave their bed and if there are other sleepers in the house may get into bed with them or may interact in a sexual way with other members of the household” (Fenwick, 1996, p. 127).

Thus, if we accept Fenwick’s (1996) and Rosenfeld and Elhajjar’s (1998) arguments, sleepsex is most likely a type of sleepwalking. It is an arousal disorder with its origins in genetic inheritance. Additionally, there does not appear to be a necessary psychological precursor to sleepsex activity, such as a sexual dreaming.

Perhaps the most basic issue with respect to the cause of sleepsex concerns whether or not, or to what extent, “sleepsexers,” are actually awake and conscious. Rosenfeld and Elhajjar (1998) have suggested that:

“It is a difficult task to decide whether unusual behavior in the sleep setting represents frank sleepwalking occurring during true sleep,

or whether the behavior represents such varied phenomenon as a confusional arousal, nocturnal delirium, sleep drunkenness with automatic behavior, an overlapping mixture of states as in so-called 'status dissociates,' malingering or other volitional, willed behavior" (p. 274).

In short, Rosenfeld and Elhajjar (1998) have indicated that, "the very issue must be raised as to whether sleepwalking in general, and sexual behavior in sleep in particular, are even occurring strictly in the sleep state" (p. 274). In light of this statement, while I do suggest that it may be a good general practice to give people who act sexually while (ostensibly) asleep the benefit of the doubt when they claim to have been asleep, there is the possibility that they may not have been sleeping at all.

Q: Is it dangerous to "have" or to be around others with sleepsex?

A: In general, persons who "have" sleepsex *may* be a danger to themselves and to others because they are at risk of being accused of sexual assault (Shapiro et al., 1996). However, whether or not a particular sleepsexer actually is "dangerous" depends almost entirely on how their behavior is perceived by those who witness their sleepsex episodes.

A worst-case scenario might be when a sleeping person engages another sexually, and this other is left feeling victimized. In such a case, the sleepsexer has become a danger to both him/herself, and to others. In such a case, the "victim" may seek legal action against the offender.

Q: What are the legal implications of sleepsex?

A: For those whose sleepsex has landed them in legal trouble, the possibility of an acquittal may not be that great. Juries and judges may be very dubious of defenses in which sleepwalking, or sleepsex, is claimed as the cause of the offense. Whether or not the offender claims to have acted while asleep may be quite irrel-

evant to the victim, or to judges and jurors, who may be prone to sympathize with the victim.

According to Rosenfeld and Elhajjar (1998) some authorities have gone so far as to state that, "Any reports of sexual arousal generally disqualifies the act of sleepwalking (as an explanation for criminal behavior)" (p. 274). Rosenfeld and Elhajjar were, however, quick to point out that they did not agree with such a statement, presumably because of the complexities of the association between sleepwalking and sexual arousal.

In sleep-related cases of sexual offending in which forensic testimony is sought, some experts say that sleep studies are a necessary component of the criminal trial proceedings. However, whether the results of such clinical information would serve to cast a reasonable doubt on a defendant behavior is anyone's guess.

Fenwick (1996) has provided an excellent summary of the legalities of sleepwalking and sexual offending. In his extensive discussion of sleepwalking and its association with sexual offending he made the point that, "It is important in any case... that medical evidence should clearly establish that sleep automatism occurred" (pp. 132-133).

What is a sleep automatism? Fenwick (1996) has offered, respectively, the following as medical and legal definitions of an automatism:

"An automatism is an involuntary piece of behavior over which an individual has no control. The behavior is usually inappropriate to the circumstances, and may be out of character for the individual. It can be complex, coordinated, and apparently purposeful and directed, though lacking in judgment. Afterwards, the individual may have no recollection or only partial and confused memory for his actions. In organic automatisms there must be some disturbance of brain function sufficient to give rise to the above features." (p. 125).

"The state of a person who, though capable of action, is not conscious of what he is doing... it means unconscious, involuntary

action, and it is a defense because the mind does not go with what is being done." (p. 125).

According to Fenwick (1996), there are two types of automatism—"sane" and "insane." Sane automatism arise from external factors such as a head injury or an injection of a drug like insulin. Insane automatism arise from internal, intrinsic factors, such as so-called "diseases of the mind." They are prone to reoccur, and may lead to violence.

If an offending person's sleepwalking is determined to be due to intrinsic factors, then it may be classified as an insane automatism. In such cases, acquittal "by reason of insanity" may be possible. Actually, Fenwick cites a fairly recent legal precedent (1991) in Britain in which sleepwalking was determined to be an insane automatism. There was no comment, however, as to the outcome of the case.

It is not my intention to belabor the legal aspects of sleepsex. As this is not my focus I will end this discussion by presenting Fenwick's (1996) criteria for determining whether or not an event, such as a sleepsex event, is a case of sleepwalking/sleep automatism. These may be useful to those who might be forced, God forbid, or are being forced, into claiming sleepwalking as a defense:

History

- Family history. It is essential to inquire in detail about other family members who sleepwalk.
- Childhood sleepwalking. It is common for the onset of sleepwalking to be in early childhood.
- Adolescent sleepwalking. Although most sleepwalkers start in childhood, a few do begin in adolescence. However, most adolescent sleepwalkers will have a childhood history of sleepwalking.

- Late onset sleepwalking is rare, and usually only occurs after a precipitating cause, for example head injury. Regard with suspicion any episode of sleepwalking, which is said to be the first episode, particularly in an adult.

Specific Factors

- Episodes occur only during slow-wave sleep, and thus are most likely to occur within two hours of sleep onset, though they may occur towards the end of the night.
- There must be disorientation on awakening. A straight arousal into clear consciousness is unlikely to occur on awakening from a sleep automatism. Such an arousal usually indicates an arousal from dreaming sleep, unless the automatism is in its later stages, when consciousness return may be abrupt, without confusion.
- Any witness to the event should report inappropriate automatic behavior, preferably with an element of confusion.
- There must be amnesia for the event. Memories are poorly recorded during stage four sleep and equally poorly recalled. It is possible for fragments of distorted memory to be retained.
- Trigger factors are important. Drugs, alcohol, excessive fatigue, and stress can all precipitate a sleep automatism.
- Inquire carefully for sexual arousal (penile tumescence in men); its presence makes a sleep automatism highly unlikely.

- The nature and quality of the previous sleep mentation must be that of stage two, three, or four sleep. It is helpful if it is non-narrative, and non-dreamlike with only a vague visual content, and consists mostly of thoughts and feelings.
- Attempts to conceal the crime are most unusual.
- It is helpful if the crime can be shown to be out of character for the individual.

Q: Is any research being done on sleepsex?

A: Sleepsex has captured a fair amount media interest. For some reason people just seem to be attracted to the topic. I have been contacted by a producer of the television magazine “48 Hours,” and by a Discovery network producer who was putting together a program on sleep disorders. I have also given two interviews, one with a Canadian newspaper and another with *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.

In contrast, scientific activity with view to studying, and eventually explaining sleepsex does not seem to have gathered much momentum. At present, there are only a very limited number of sleepsex cases that have been captured in the clinical literature.

One reason for this may be that sleepsex is probably very difficult to study under controlled, “scientific” conditions such as those found in sleep-study environments. There is also the problem of obtaining persons to study. Needless to say, the potential for embarrassment of the person, or persons, being studied is enormous.

Additionally, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that sleepsex may be “just” another type of sleepwalking. This does not mean that sleepsex does not have its own particular causal factors, course of development, and treatment (if it is problematic to those involve, that is). What this does mean is that sleepsex may not currently merit closer examination among scientists be-

cause there is already quite a bit known about sleepwalking. Plus, there are probably more common, and more serious, sleep disorders needing to be studied that are more likely to attract all-important research grant monies. So, for the time being, and perhaps for the foreseeable future, sleepsex may primarily be subject matter for journalists.

While the work on sleepsex I present in this book is “unscientific” in the sense that I have not rigorously tested some particular hypothesis or another, I have gathered information on people’s sleepsex experiences and perceptions. Thus, in a way, I am making observations, and making observations is often the starting point for subsequent scientific investigations.

The sleepsex stories you will read about in chapters three through six are, as far as I know, authentic. My observations and conclusions are based on first-hand reports of people’s experience with sleepsex. My goal was not to “prove” anything about sleepsex. Rather, my goals were to record a variety of experiences, and to discuss how people have reacted to their experiences.

In addition to collecting sleepsex experiences, I gathered responses to an eight-item survey that was posted on sleepsex.org. The goals of posting the survey were to begin to collect some demographic data on sleepsex.org visitors, and to obtain responses to basic questions pertaining to people’s experience of, and perceptions of, sleepsex. In chapter two, the next chapter, I discuss the survey results.

CHAPTER 2

Sleepsex.org Survey

For nearly two years I have collected sleepsex.org visitors input on questions pertaining to sleepsex. As of September 2001, there were a total of 204 respondents to most of the items on the survey. What I discovered about survey respondents was this:

- The majority were men (men, 61%; women, 39%).
- The majority was between 26 and 40 years of age.
- The majority (68%) indicated that they had not heard of sleepsex prior to visiting the sleepsex.org Web site.
- Roughly half (53%) indicated that they had personally experienced sleepsex.
- Nearly all (95%) indicated that useful information about sleepsex is difficult, or somewhat difficult, to find.

First of all, these results suggest that there is not a huge difference between the number of men and women respondents. Statistically speaking, the difference may be significant (I did not test for this), but the percentages suggest that a substantial number of both sex may have been seeking information about sleepsex,

and at the very least, were willing to take the time to complete the survey.

It is interesting to note that nearly 70 percent of respondents had not heard of sleepsex prior to visiting the site. This suggests that sleepsex is indeed a relatively obscure type of behavior, and is not widely known to exist. I have no population statistics to support this interpretation, but my hunch is that if you ask a random sample of 100 people if they have heard of sleepsex, substantially less than half would respond in the affirmative.

Slightly more than half said that they had personally experienced sleepsex. This suggests that at least some of the persons who visited the site had had sleepsex experiences, *and* had never heard of it. This interpretation is consistent with some of the experiences visitors have contributed. Some mentioned that their sleepsex experiences left them alarmed and confused. In one case, a woman reported that although she had looked diligently for information, she had found basically nothing. She said she was quite relieved when she eventually found the sleepsex.org Web site.

Indeed, the vast majority of respondents indicated that information about sleepsex was difficult to find. There simply is not a lot of material out there in print, scientific or otherwise, which attempts to describe, and explain, sleepsex.

Three survey items pertained to respondents' experience of, and perceptions of, sleepsex. The results were:

- Most (63%) indicated that it is not hard to believe that sleepsex can occur.
- The majority (78%) did not believe, or were unsure, that sleepsex would be frightening to experience.
- The majority (74%) agreed with the statement that sleepsex might be, or is pleasurable.

That slightly over half of the respondents disagreed with the statement “It’s hard to believe someone could actually initiate sex while they are sleeping” is not surprising since around half of the respondents indicated they had had first-hand experience with it.

For the 37 percent who indicated that it was hard to believe that sleepsex could occur, the big question is why? If people can walk around, talk, drive cars, eat, and engage in all sorts of other complex behaviors in their sleep, why is it hard to believe that they could behave sexually? It could be that these doubting individuals had not heard of sleepwalking. More likely, they were not aware of the many varieties of behavior—like sexual behavior—that can occur during sleepwalking episodes. Or they were familiar with the many variants of sleepwalking, but found sexual sleepwalking to be too much of a stretch.

Undoubtedly, sex brings up all kinds of issues for people. It could be that, at least for some people, when forming opinions about what’s possible for a person to do when they’re asleep, sex overreaches the boundaries of possibility. This finding has implications for persons looking for support: It should not be expected that *everyone* will believe that sleepsex can occur. If persons want and need people to *really* believe them, they may be in for a struggle.

The minority of respondents indicated that sleepsex would be frightening. While examining sex differences for each survey question was impossible due to the structure of the survey, my guess is that most of the 49 persons who indicated that sleepsex might be frightening were women. I say this because women submitted the bulk of the experiences I have collected, and most were quite distressed about their male partner’s aggressive sleepsex behavior. One person even feared for herself and for the safety of her children.

Fear is an emotion that, at least in American culture, is more easily and honestly expressed by women. And in the vast majority of sleepsex cases I have collected, women were on the receiv-

ing end of men's sexual advances. That some respondents, probably women, indeed appeared to find it frightening came as no surprise given the almost universal reporting of men's aggressive, robot-like behavior during sleepsex, and also the difficulty some recipients had in stopping their male partner's behavior once it had begun.

Despite the fears of some, a clear majority of respondents indicated that sleepsex may be, or is, pleasurable. My hunch is that among this majority are both men and women respondents. Some of the women, although not most, who submitted experiences described their sleepsex experiences as a "real turn-on." In one case in which a woman was the initiator, her male partner is noted to have said that he liked their sex better when she was asleep because she was more dominant. Some reported liking their partner's "completely uninhibited" behavior, and that they were better in bed when they were asleep. Be that as it may, most of the men and women who submitted their stories were in distress over what I have called the "dark" side of sleepsex—the topic of chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

The Dark Side of Sleepsex

In addition to the survey questions, sleepsex.org Web site visitors were invited to share their sleepsex experiences. Respondents voluntarily submitted a variety of sleepsex experiences. In total, 51 women and men have allowed us a glimpse into this very personal and private part of their lives. Their anonymity has been preserved.

In formulating their submissions, participants were asked to speculate on the causes of their own, or their partner's sleepsex. They were also asked whether sleepsex had been a positive or negative experience for them. And finally, they were asked to describe their experience(s).

As it is with most events we experience in life, there are multiple perspectives from which they might be viewed. There are usually two sides to every story and usually some gray area in-between. The experience of sleepsex, it appears, is no different.

In this chapter, I will share with you experiences that express a decidedly negative view of sleepsex. You will encounter stories depicting what might be called the "dark" side of sleepsex. All of the stories contain some element of sleepsex that was disturbing to the persons involved.

Because there were common themes or threads tying some experiences to others, I took the liberty of organizing like submissions under descriptive headings. The headings represent the different types of sleepsex experiences people have had. Addi-

tionally, the types of experience are arranged hierarchically. This means that I begin my discussion with the most common type of experience, and end with the least common type.

This hierarchical arrangement does not mean that, for example “Aggression: Fear and Guilt” is the predominant type of negative experience characterizing sleepsex. It is impossible for me to make such a claim at this point. What the hierarchy does indicate though is that those having some types of experiences were more likely to share them than those having other types of experiences. One final note: Because I have discussed the reported causes of sleepsex in chapter one, I will not discuss them here, even though they do appear in some cases.

Negative Types of Sleepsex Experience

- I. Aggression: Fear and Guilt
- II. Masturbation: Shame and Disgust
- III. Sexual Abandonment: Disappointment and Frustration
- IV. Sexual Vocalization and Movements: Anger and Jealousy
- V. Sexual Prowess: “He says it’s better when I’m asleep”
- VI. A Problem with Lust

I. Aggression: Fear and Guilt

“I have not been able to find a cause for his sleepsex. It occurs whether our sex life is either active or inactive at the time. The episodes almost always occur when I have been up, and then get into bed next to my husband. Once he feels me next to him he will grab me and an episode will occur. My husband can be very aggressive and I have occasionally had trouble fighting him off. On these occasions I am afraid he will hurt me, not on purpose, like a rape situation, but rather injure me by being so forceful. He also talks during these episodes and uses exceptionally vulgar language. This problem has not hurt our relationship in any way, but has made for a few sleepless nights when he awakens me. I have to deal with the problem.”

“I don’t know what causes it. He suffers no other sleep problems, but his brother suffers from night terrors. He is not dreaming, not suppressing sexual desires, or pretending to be asleep. I know these things for a fact. I feel it is simply a sleeping disorder, possibly an extension of sleepwalking. However, my husband does not presently, and never has, sleepwalked. I think this is a topic that really needs to be researched and taken seriously! I often wake up in the middle of sleepsex dreaming I’m being raped. It also causes us to be extremely tired the next day. It causes tension in our marriage because he is too embarrassed to seek help. Sleepsex is an experience I do not wish on anybody. It will start when he rolls over, almost robot like, and aggressively goes straight for my panties. He rips my clothes off and proceeds to do his thing. During this I am asleep and wake up with him on top of me. He is totally asleep and can’t help it. If I’m more awake than asleep, I push him off, and he rolls over snoring. If I am more asleep than awake, I pretty much incorporate what’s going on into my dreams and it’s terrifying.”

“During his sleepsex episodes, he becomes very aggressive and violent and then claims he does not remember anything. Everybody we have talked to, neurologists, psychologists, etc., can’t explain it, but see it as a huge danger to our children and me. The only medicine they have tried is Ritalin (20 mg) before bed. This does not work and our doctors don’t know what to do next. I had to call 911 last night because of a violent attack.”

“I really don’t know what causes it. He’s never had this problem before. I don’t know why he’s doing it, and I have no clue as to how to stop it. I’m afraid of my husband when he’s asleep. I fear for my daughter. I try to be understanding and to feel that this is not his fault, but I’m still angry and hurt. I’m afraid he’ll hurt me again. My husband is wracked with guilt and has lost all positive self-image. I awoke one night to my husband on top of me. I was pinned to the bed (I was laying on one of my own

arms and covered in a heavy bed spread) and was unable to get him off of me. He started having sex with me. I was unable to wake him. He finished and immediately woke up. He was horrified to see what he had done. He stated that he had a dream that we were having sex, but in his dream it was consensual. In his dream he saw everything from a third person perspective. We are trying to find a cause and solution to this.”

“I think what causes it is the length of time between sexual intercourse. When it happened I felt as if he did not care that I did not want to. It was almost like being raped. This is not a positive experience for me.”

“I have no idea what causes it. When it happens, I feel as if I am being sexually assaulted. I am a rape survivor, so this behavior has caused problems for my husband and me.”

“The last episode happened a few months ago. I awoke with his hands around my neck while attempting to initiate. This scared me at first. But as time passed, I could vaguely remember and also have somewhat adjusted to the sleepsex in our lives. I was able to confuse him into going back to sleep by diverting his attention physically. He rarely responds to my voice while initiating. He does have a history of violent nightmares and sometimes acts them out. I was concerned that he might start to incorporate them with the sleep sex. Since then I’ve been dreaming of being attacked and raped. I feel insecure and not as confident as I used to about our situation. I thought things were under control. He still initiates on a weekly basis—he more than I. Dr. David S. Rosenfeld recommended that he take Klonopin but we’ve yet to pursue medical attention for this. Do you think my family or I could be in danger?”

“When it happened a few nights ago, I was terrified. Being a victim of sexual child abuse, this did not go over well. He was

very aggressive and uncaring for me during the sex. We talked about it for hours to figure what had happened and he swore he woke up only during climax. Now that I have reading the information on this site (sleepsex.org), I feel better about the situation and am relieved. Now, we can do something to solve the problem.”

“Often, I wake up while my husband is having sex with me. I am a deep sleeper, so sometimes I don’t know about it until the morning when I see my clothes are off, and other evidence of an occurrence. Sometimes he listens to my heart and my breath to make sure I am asleep. He seems to not be able to control this urge. He always apologizes. Sometimes he doesn’t remember what he’s done. Sometimes he (admittedly) pretends to be asleep. At other times, he swears he is. I feel completely violated in every way. All trust is gone because he promises to stop and never does. No one believes that I have this problem. All they say is, “You’re married, what’s the problem?” The problem is that I did not consent!!! Married or not, I should have a say in what happens to my body!! I love him, but this has got to stop! I don’t know how much longer I can take the fear of going to bed with my Jeekyll-and-Hyde husband or the ridicule from family, friends, and so-called “professionals”!! Even our clergy told us to just go to bed and have marital sex and everything will be ok! They even told me not to leave the marital bed, no matter what! Obviously we both have sleep problems, mine is hypersomnia and his is...I don’t know what! When will anyone understand how painful this is for us both? And where can we go for help?”

“The incident occurred on our second date. We were sleeping next to each other; we had not been sexual prior to this except for very minor touching earlier in the evening. We had discussed that neither of us wanted anything else to happen. I woke to find him touching me very sexually. It was extremely scary. I was dreaming at the time and remember feeling him touch me

and trying to understand what was going on in the context of my dream. I finalized realized what was happening and I pushed him away. I believe that he acted in his sleep. We are having a difficult time dealing with this, as it was only our second date. I am still not sure that we will be able to have a healthy relationship because of this event.”

“When I was with my girlfriend, I would feel very aroused before going to sleep, but we would not have sex for some reason. Usually on a night like this, I would take my girlfriend when I was asleep. I recently shared a bed with one of my friends, who is female and extremely beautiful. I had been out drinking, and tried to have sex with her while I was asleep. I felt terrible about it when she told me what had happened. She was a good sport about it, but I still feel like I assaulted her. We have put it behind us, but I cannot put it behind me. A couple of my girlfriends have just had fun with it and enjoyed it while it happened.”

“I am in a relationship with a girl who is worried about my sleepsex disorder. This is causing a huge rift between us, and I am afraid I may lose her unless I do something that stops the sleep sex. I have been doing this for years, but never really considered it a problem. Even though I am very aggressive when I start being sexual while asleep, I can be shrugged off very easily. My girlfriend is afraid that if I do this when she is there, then what could I be doing went she is not there? This scares her and she may leave me because she does not know why it happens or what causes it. I need to find a way to curb this and to find out why it occurs. I have read in other Web forums a general theme of prior sexual abuses and stress being the common factors. I would like any and all information that can help me out. Should I see a doctor, and whom would I see? Please help, as I don't want to lose my relationship.”

“What do you think of a woman and a man going out drinking together on a first date, who then return to his place, fall asleep together, then the next day she claims date rape? How many men have been accused of this horrible act? Can this disorder run in families? Can it be used as a defense in a court of law? Who would you find to testify about the real problem sleepsex is to many people? That it occurs without the person knowing or remembering? That they could pass a lie detector test with flying colors because they truly believe that they never had sex? Or what about a woman who initiates during sleep, sleeps through parts of the act, then claims rape? Would it be the man’s fault if he doesn’t know about her disorder? She can still cry rape. I wonder if some of the cases about the date rape drug (and I mean only some) are really this un-talked-about disorder? I would love to hear what you think on these points.”

“It was just this new-year’s eve 2000, and I went into my room to sleep because I was so tired from dancing and drinking. As I was sleeping, resting, or whatever you want to call it, several people came in and out of my room wishing me happy new year and told me to get up and come party more. Well, this one friend of mine came in and she kissed me on the cheek and the rest is history. The thing is, I don’t know what happened and I am afraid that I hurt her or violated her will in some way, or that I was too aggressive. The worst part is if I did do something deplorable, I did it unknowingly. I don’t really want to know what could have caused that kind of behavior from me and I don’t even know what really happened. All I know is I feel that I have done something wrong, and that some part of me exists that wants to engage in that kind of behavior when I consciously try to avoid it. Perhaps that is the crux of the matter. I may have acted out a lot of repressed sexual energy that I was unwilling to deal with, and then could not control it at all. I am confused and lost and hope to find peace and resolution to this dilemma.”

“I need a professional opinion. I am a 27-year-old former adult youth group leader. I moved in with a family and shared the room with their son who was 14 years old at the time. We have always had a great relationship, and I have never had any desire towards this kid, or any other boy for that matter. He was sleeping in my bed one night, (I have never made any bones about this—I’ve always been kind of a big kid and an affectionate adult leader and have never really given that a second thought) and we woke up during the middle of the night and he claims I was giving him oral sex. I was horrified! I couldn’t believe that that had happened! I have absolutely no recollection of it happening other than he told me that’s what had happened. I do remember waking up and seeing where I was and it shocked the hell out of me. I also remember that I was having a dream of some experimental behavior that my twin brother and I had engaged in when we were teens. I have never wanted to deal with it, and I am ashamed to talk about it. But I couldn’t believe that it had happened and it made me sick! What do I do? I’m going to be charged with rape of a child in the third degree and I can’t believe this is happening. Has this been documented before? I need a professional opinion because, frankly, I’m very scared and some people don’t believe me. But **THAT’S THE WAY IT HAPPENED!!!** I have **NEVER** longed for this kid in that regard, and do **NOT** have any sexual feelings towards males. I’m confident of my heterosexuality, but this has really shaken him, his family, and me. Consequently an investigation has developed and I fear it’s going to go to trial. I **AM TERRIFIED!** What do I do? I have not had any impulses towards this kid so why did this happen? The only thing I can think of is because of that stinking dream, and because I haven’t really gone through counseling and put my past behind me is that why it reared its ugly head in my sleep? **HELP!!!!!!!”**

“My wife was on antibiotics and birth control pills at the same time, so we were told to use a backup method. I had sex

with her while asleep without a condom, so we are afraid of possible pregnancy. Also, she feels unsafe in bed.”

“My sleepsex causes fear and tension about sleeping together.”

“One of many causes could be alcohol, stress, lack of sleep, exhaustion, and being aroused before sleep. My wife is scared to sleep in bed with me after occurrences of sleepsex. My self-image has been ruined by my bouts of sleepsex.”

“I don’t really know what causes it, possibly lack of sex in general. Our marriage is suffering because of this. My wife feels as though she is being sexually abused or raped. I don’t know how long the episodes last or when they occur. My wife has told me that it is almost a nightly ordeal. I have scheduled an appointment with my doctor and will take him this information. Hopefully a solution can be found to save our marriage.”

“I think what causes it is that I feel extremely aroused, sometimes with dreamlike images, other times simply with the need to have sex. The images are often of the fantasy-rape variety, in which I feel very aggressive, sometimes angry or vengeful. Knowing that my wife is not greatly offended by sex most times, I take advantage of it. Times that other women have been in my bed, it has never occurred. I think that they would probably have been upset by it. At times that my wife doesn’t want it, she is usually able to tell me “no” once or twice, with a shove, and I will go back to sleep. Sometimes I masturbate.”

“I am 34 years old and have been told by my partner for the last three years (increasing in frequency) that I was initiating sexual behavior one hour after falling asleep. This behavior was typical every time alcohol and sleep deprivation were present. My eyes were open and my speech unaffected by my excessive drinking. My partner habitually checked the time before sleeping and is

definite on the one-hour lapse in which I would awake to this behavior. I have gone through overnight, and day sleep tests as well as MRI and hypoglycemia tests. All of these revealed normal results, with the exception of my being grossly sleep deprived. I am looking for any information or persons that could provide further answers. My preliminary diagnosis was REM behavior disorder, though tests could not confirm this. Alcohol induced parasomnia was then suggested, but I have not done a study using alcohol. My episodes last 5-15 minutes and start with fondling. When my partner realizes I am “different” she leaves the room. She says I become briefly agitated (verbally). She says I immediately return to sleep. I have what I call pictures of some of the episodes, but I cannot assemble anything from one picture. When I look at it, I get a scared feeling. I am guessing these pictures registered one out of ten episodes. Please help! Thank you and God bless you!”

II. Masturbation: Shame and Disgust

“I think what causes it is the lack of awake sex. My sleepsex episodes (masturbation) definitely increase during the dry spells. My husband doesn’t know I do it. I hide it from him. I feel very guilty about it—like I’m cheating.”

“I have no clue what causes it. I wake up about 3 hours after we go to bed to him masturbating, either with one or both hands in his boxers. Sometimes he’ll grab me with one arm. I don’t know how to tell him though without embarrassing him. We are not sleeping together, but we are both very satisfied in the relationship. For example last night, we were both sexually satisfied . . . we fell asleep and a few hours later he was rubbing himself. It never has happened before—this is my first experience with this. It is very weird to me, and it will negatively affect the relationship such that I don’t want to go to bed with him if it is not resolved. Also, I think if I tell him he does this, he will be very embarrassed and will not want to stay over anymore. He

also sleep-talks quite a bit, and has had one episode of sleepwalking with me there. I mentioned these things to him and he said when he was younger he sleepwalked a lot. I just don't know how to bring up the sleep-masturbating."

"I'm 23 years old and already have a very turbulent life behind me. Now I'm confronted with the disorder 'sleepsex.' I have felt very much alone throughout my struggles, but now I found all these other people with the same problem on this Website (sleepsex.org) and it comforts me to know that I'm not a freak. While I'm sleeping I masturbate myself (this I hear from my boyfriend). Sometimes it happens very often, sometimes less. He claims I'm very much awake, only I don't remember anything. I went into therapy (and still am for about 1 1/2 years now) and went to a sleep institute. I got all these things wired to my head to register my brain activity during my sleep, but nothing strange came up (I did this twice). Unfortunately, my boyfriend still thinks I'm very much awake because sometimes I have my eyes open. When he gives me some information about how everything goes, he says I change my methods. So for him that is proof that I'm awake otherwise I would do the same thing again! I also started taping myself during my sleep and when we would sleep together. I have done this for about a year now too. I'm so hurt by him not believing me and feel so disappointed. Frustration is one of my feelings too, because I have tried everything in my power to make it go away and to save our relationship. But how can you make something go away that you don't have any control over, or recollection of? My boyfriend is so hurt, because he thinks I'm lying to him. I don't know what to do anymore. It is destroying the both of us. He's not willing to do a lot for this problem, because according to him, I can only save this relationship by starting to tell the truth. And that is what I have been doing for the last two years. I hope that somebody can give me some comforting words because my relationship is at the moment of ending and I don't know where to turn to anymore."

“I have no idea what causes my sleepsex. It may be related to consumption of alcohol, but on other occasions, alcohol has not been consumed. Here’s my story: I went on a trip with my girlfriend and one of her friends. I drove all night to get there. When we arrived, I did not go to sleep. Instead, we began to drink and enjoy the sun. When we returned to our motel. We had some food and went to sleep. When I awoke, I found myself above my girlfriend’s friend and had masturbated on her. I felt so stupid and I don’t think she believes that I have no idea of what went on. She thinks that I was awake. It is small consolation that my girlfriend knows what happened.”

“I would say alcohol adds to it as a cause, but mostly how I’m feeling before I go to bed (stressed, worried). I’m not sure because I have no recollection of any thing happening. I go by what my friends say. I have never had sex with anyone in my sleep (unless I don’t remember). I just rub my penis. I have never ejaculated from it. I just started doing it a month or two ago. It’s embarrassing when I spend the night at someone’s house.”

III. Sexual Abandonment: Disappointment and Frustration

“I find myself having sex dreams about my boyfriend even if we have had sex prior to going to sleep. Sometimes I am half awake when I am trying to have sex with him. Other times I am totally unaware of what I have done or have tried to do. It is very bothersome for him because it generally wakes him up and, of course, he gets mad. He doesn’t believe me when I tell him that I was dreaming about sex with him, or that I was asleep. I know what the problem is, but don’t know what to do to solve it short of breaking up with him. I am not being totally satisfied sexually, which he knows, so therefore it comes out in my dreams. I find myself trying to suck him or fuck him in my dreams and also acting it out with him. The things we did in the beginning of our relationship he doesn’t want to do now. But he expects

me to settle and not be with anyone else. I do love him, but can't continue not being completely satisfied in bed. I know that sex isn't everything in a relationship, but it is an important part of the relationship."

"My 'ex' used to be totally disinterested in sex, but often I found him amorous in the middle of the night. Once he awakened, he would apologize and go back to sleep, leaving me all revved up with no place to go. It was weird, to say the least. I felt very cheated. Our relationship eventually ended. I still wonder what that was all about. It makes a woman feel very unloved to have a partner who suddenly turns off once awake."

"I am not sure what causes it. However, it always occurs after he has fallen asleep before me. When I decide to go to sleep and lay close to him (i.e., touch him), he then begins the sleepsex episodes. This occurs about 2 to 3 times per week. He always wakes from his sleep, but usually it is because I tell him to wake up. Or he wakes after ejaculation only to think that I initiated the sex and he had nothing to do with it. He becomes very aggressive during such episodes and makes very loud groaning or moaning sounds. We have talked about these episodes, most of the time joking about them. However, it has become a problem for me because when he is awake his sexual desire is not very strong. Only about once a week when he is awake does he initiate sex and he is basically not interested in it the rest of the week while awake. I have become very insecure in our relationship due to this and wonder if allowing him to act out these sleepsex episodes is the right thing to do."

"I have been known to masturbate in my sleep and also to masturbate my partner almost to climax. As soon as she gets near, I stop and prevent her from climaxing."

"First of all, I am a male and I am gay with a partner of the

same sex. We have been together for five years. It hasn't been an easy five years for numerous reasons. One is our lack of, or infrequent, sex life, plus the lack of real satisfaction during sex. I believe the above statements would define why I am having my sleepsex disorder. There are times when I am dreaming of him and I having one kind of sex or another. Then I wake up doing or trying to do what I was just dreaming. There are times when I am dreaming of sexual contact and am acting them out with him and not even remember it the next morning. I'm not sure if you want any details or not, but here goes a few. Sometimes I am trying to have intercourse with him with me on top. Other times I am giving him oral in my dreams and wake up doing it. And other times I am masturbating him. I don't remember doing it at all. It doesn't happen all the time, just occasionally. I believe there are other factors in our relationship that contribute to the sleepsex disorder, which is probably why I should get out of the relationship. But that isn't what this is all about to begin with. I'm sure that heterosexuals aren't the only ones that have sleeping disorders, no matter what type they are."

IV. Sexual Vocalization and Movements: Anger and Jealousy

"I don't remember anything when it happens. He (my husband) says I seem like I'm having sex (I moan and move my body). I think it's caused by stress. My husband seems angry—like I've done something, or I'm hiding something from him."

"My sleep sex is disturbing because it seems to be initiated when I'm suffering from low self-esteem in my current relationship. I have problems comparing myself to my fiancée's ex-wife who is younger, more beautiful, more successful in her career, and the mother of his son. My fiancée is 12 years younger than I, and also very attractive, successful, and brilliant. In my 'bad' dreams, I vocalize and otherwise act like I'm having sex while calling out an ex-boyfriend's name. I have absolutely no memory of this in the morning—only a very upset fiancée. I haven't got-

ten any answers from the professionals I've contacted at three major sleep centers. Most sites say sleep talking is not a problem, ever. It's a big problem for my fiancée and me."

V. Sexual Prowess: "He says it's better when I'm asleep"

"I have always done different things in my sleep since I can remember (talking, kicking, screaming, etc.). I recently found out sleep problems are hereditary. My two-year-old daughter has night terrors. A guy friend of mine needed a place to stay for a couple nights so I said he could stay with me. We slept in the same bed. The next morning he told me that I had gotten up at night, went into the kitchen, got ice and performed oral sex on him with the ice. Which I have never even done while I was awake. He told me he tried to wake me at first, but after it didn't work he was scared to keep trying. So he let it happen. He also said it was better than when I was awake. I was very upset but I feel better now that I found this Website (sleepsex.org)."

VI. A Problem with Lust

"I think what causes it is sexual arousal during sleep, or that I sense my wife's presence and then attempt to have sex with her. This has caused my wife to feel I have a problem with lust. It is not a positive thing for us."

Discussion

What can be learned about sleepsex from these experiences? Without a doubt, the majority of the experiences have to do with fear and anxiety over one's own, or a partner's sleepsex. In nearly all cases in the "Aggression: Fear and Guilt" group, it was women who reported either feeling afraid of being hurt, or of being assaulted sexually by an aggressive, robot-like, male. What appears to add to the negativity of the experience is a prior history of being sexually assaulted. Clearly for women with this sort of experience, sleepsex is a very real problem.

On the other hand, men typically expressed fear and guilt

over acting sexually toward someone without their consent. In no case involving intercourse did a male complain that a female had assaulted him. What was especially disturbing to men was the feeling that they were guilty of sexual assault.

Next in the hierarchy is shame and disgust stemming from masturbation. The good news is that masturbation is normal—most men and women do masturbate. But let's face it: Most do it when they're awake.

Needless to say, it would be incredibly embarrassing to be discovered masturbating by someone else—especially when that person is not a sex partner. Not only would it be embarrassing, but being caught masturbating is possibly hazardous to one's own reputation, and to another's (the unintended viewer) psychological well being.

In American society, masturbation remains an intensely personal activity that's usually done in private. When it happens in the context of a sexual relationship, and it creates a problem, then if possible, it must be discussed as openly as possible. However, exposing one's self to someone who is not interested in seeing such a thing, even if it occurs during sleep, is a formula for disaster.

Experiences with themes of sexual abandonment and frustration numbered equally with masturbation-type experiences. What characterized these persons' sleepsex experiences were confusion and disappointment over a partner's lack of sexual desire when awake, coupled with their initiation of sexual behavior during sleep, coupled with the sleepsexer's sudden "turning-off" upon waking. Also, a complaint advanced primarily by women concerned being left unsatisfied by their sleeping male partners. Specifically, some men reportedly engaged their female partner in sex, and then stopped all activity once achieving their own orgasm.

Clearly, questions about one's sexual adequacy and appeal may arise in such cases. This is, of course, a concern that should not be left un-addressed as a couple's sex life is often linked to

other important aspects of their relationship. Moreover, it simply hurts emotionally to feel unwanted sexually. To the extent sleepsex exacerbates existing tensions around sex it may pose a serious threat to a relationship if it is not discussed.

Experiences concerning sexual vocalizations and movements feature issues of jealousy and low self-esteem. In these cases, there seems to be a defensive, and/or a self-defeating component to the sleepsexer's behavior. Specifically, to defend against feelings of inadequacy, one of the individuals you read about may have been unconsciously attempting to reject her partner before she herself was rejected.

The self-defeating component pertains to the effect that the sexual behavior and vocalizations are actually achieving. In short, bed partners who witness this type of display eventually become angry, and the relationship is possibly put into jeopardy. In the end, nobody gets what they really want: security, love, and acceptance.

In *Sexual Prowess*: "He says it's better when I'm asleep," the writer appeared to be upset about her sleepsex in general. Another, and more interesting interpretation is that the writer was upset because her husband said he enjoyed sex with her more when she's asleep than when she's awake. Now this doesn't necessarily have to be a problematic situation, as you will see in the next chapter. However, as in cases of sexual frustration mentioned above, doubts about one's sexual adequacy may become an issue. Finding out that your partner prefers to have sex with you when you are asleep may be a very uncomfortable position to find yourself in, especially if you are experiencing tension in your sex life anyway. Again, in such cases, sleepsex may serve to exacerbate already existing problems.

Finally, in "A Problem With Lust" the individual indicated that his wife suggested that "lust" was causing his sleepsex. Although this view of sleepsex has a decidedly religious, puritanical tone to it, such assumptions as to the causes of sleepsex should not be taken lightly. There are many, many religious persons in

America and other cultures who take their religious beliefs very seriously. Not only do they have strong beliefs, but they also behave in ways that are consistent with their beliefs. If you have any doubt about the power of beliefs to motivate behavior, think again. Think of September 11th, 2001.

Given that this is the case, I suggest that explanations with religious or spiritual overtones ought to be complemented by scientific ones. The simplest explanations are usually the correct ones—this is a scientific canon. In cases of sleepsex, it appears that lust, passion, or sexual desire, does come into play. However, where these emotions come from, and how they come to be expressed behaviorally, are the really big questions. My preferred answer is, quite simply, they come from the brain. If it is a problem, we must consider sleepsex to be a problem of the brain, and not an expression of human weakness or sin.

CHAPTER 4

The Bright Side of Sleepsex

As I mentioned in the introduction, all is not gloom and doom when it comes to sleepsex. In this chapter, you'll find stories submitted by people that have had more positive experiences with sleepsex. Although they constitute a minority, the various experiences related by these persons suggest that sleepsex can be handled with a sense of humor, and can be a welcome addition to a couple's "regular" sex life.

While sleepsex may cause problems, or exacerbate existing problems a couple may be having, it may also serve to bring those problems—such as sex-life issues—to light so that they can begin to be worked through. Indeed, sleepsex may prompt couples to begin to talk more openly, and honestly, about sex in their relationships.

Positive Types of Sleepsex Experience

- I. Midnight Delight: "It's a real turn-on"
- II. Sexual Prowess: "It's better when he's/she's asleep"
- III. Growing Together: Trust and Learning
- IV. Humor: "We are able to joke about it"
- V. Passion

I. Midnight Delight: "It's a real turn-on"

"The causes are unclear to me. He says that he remembers dreams of fighting or work. He never remembers having sex, or

dreaming of sex. He does have a history of sleepwalking and acting out in his sleep. He can be violent, but the sex part is usually rapid, hard, but not violent. It's a real turn-on to be woken up in the middle of the night to being caressed, kissed, and undressed."

"I believe what causes it is sex-appeal. It is an extreme turn-on to be awakened by my boyfriend fondling me. I love the fact that we can have sex all the time. I have also had sex with him without him waking up. That is amazing as well."

"I feel that dreaming of sex causes my sleepsex. My boyfriend thought I was awake at first when I put the moves on him in bed. I later awoke to us having sex. It actually it was a pleasant way to wake up since I enjoy our sexual intimacy. Luckily, he wasn't traumatized. He just thought it was kind of quirky."

"My husband and I have been married for two years now. We have a wonderful, frequent, varied, playful sex life. But, my husband masturbates in his sleep several times a week, sometimes moaning and groaning. I have read that it scares some women. It doesn't affect me that way. Frankly I think it's a turn on. If that is the way he needs to work out his fantasies, that's ok with me. I do not feel at all threatened by these events."

"I feel sure that I am sleep deprived when this occurs. Now that I know about it, it has answered many questions as to things that have happened in my past. I thought I had been date-raped in college. I am certain now that I was not. His (the person I thought date-raped me) reaction just did not make sense to me. He kept saying that I was "fine with it" and that I had started it. I thought he was trying to make me think I was crazy (I had fallen asleep in his dorm room). That was the most significant episode. There have been three others that I can think of—the first beginning in the 9th grade. I was spending the night with a

friend and fell asleep while watching a movie with her cousin who lived with her. To my knowledge, nothing happened. Later, he told people he had “felt me up” so I confronted him and asked why he was telling people that. He completely believed that he had. It was weird because he’s not a mean guy; he just has a big mouth I guess. I am sure now after 14 years that it did happen. I just did not recall having the experience. In high school, I spent the night with a girlfriend, I had been asleep, but woke up with her pushing me away. I told her I was sorry and that I must have thought she was my boyfriend. It was really weird (I am not a lesbian). In college I fell asleep at my house with a date and woke up with his hands all over me. I told him to leave. The next day I ran into him and he said, “When are we going to finish what we started?” Like I had done something! His reaction was so weird to me. Now that I know about sleepsex, it all makes sense. There you go. Currently, my experience of sleepsex is positive. It’s great to wake up making love to my husband. He likes it too.”

“I am not sure what the cause may be, nor am I sure how long the episodes last. Most times I have just a vague memory of the event, but my wife reports some great sex. Often times she thinks I am awake until we are finished. She reports that I roll over and then am immediately sleeping. Events occur usually between 2-4 am. My wife reports that she very much enjoys the sex on most occasions, except when she has to work early. In such cases she says she can just roll away and I seem to stop. My first known occurrence was at age 18 while dating my future wife. We had never had sex, but fell asleep together and had sex. She thought I was awake and I never told her I had been asleep until years later.”

II. Sexual Prowess: “It’s better when he’s/she’s asleep”

“It happens for a few months, and then stops for about one year. For us, sleepsex occurs in an off and on fashion. When he is very tired it seems to trigger episodes. Usually if we have had sex

earlier in the day it will not happen. I laugh and tell him he is like a totally different person. He is more aggressive, but not in a scary way. In our waking sex, it is like he doesn't know all the right spots, but when he's asleep, it seems as though he wrote the book on spots. He usually wakes up if it goes into full intercourse. I actually love it!!!! Foreplay galore."

"Sleepsex is great. My husband initiates it while we're asleep and then we wake up in the middle of making love. Often times it's better when he's asleep because we are completely relaxed and uninhibited. On occasions, I am still awake and not in the mood. In these cases, I tell him he needs to get some sleep and to roll over, which he does. He doesn't remember a thing in the morning."

"I think what causes it are stress, fatigue, and daily medications (e.g., pain pills). This is real—I have experienced this with my ex-husband and my current husband, that's why I know I must also be an initiator. My current husband has a history of sleep disorders (e.g., sleepwalking, etc.). My 'ex' has only experienced sleepsex with me, even though he's been remarried once more since our marriage ended. I usually wake while I am initiating and then fall back to sleep. My current husband (who also initiates sleepsex) usually never wakes until the very last couple of minutes. Usually, he does not remember all of the details and doesn't really know why he does it. He continues to blame me—our little running joke. I enjoy having sleepsex with him more when he's sleeping than when he's awake because he's a totally different person who's completely uninhibited."

"I am not sure what causes this in my case. He (my partner) says I have fewer inhibitions when I am asleep. I initiate it. My husband tells me that I fling my leg over him and wrap my legs around him. He figures I want sex and complies. He said I am more into the lovemaking when I am asleep than when I am

awake and he actually enjoys it more. If I partially wake up, I tend to dream the same dream, incorporating the lovemaking into the dream. I have read on other sites that this is a form of sleepwalking. I sleepwalk monthly and sleep talk almost nightly.”

“I do not know what causes this in my case. I do not remember when I do it, I have only have been told that I do. He (my partner) likes my more dominant behavior.”

III. Growing Together: Trust and Learning

“Although he’s an ‘ex’ now, we both loved sleepsex, and thought it was more common. What did surprise me at first was my occasional extreme change in character when I was asleep and initiating, I didn’t believe him the first time he told me what I’d done the night before, but he loved it. He knew things about me at that point that I didn’t. It was a rare opportunity to build trust, learn about each other and myself. Fifteen years later that trust remains in our friendship. Watching him was every bit as fun, too. Enjoy!”

“I think what causes it are thoughts during the day and being too tired or unmotivated to follow through with my partner. The last occurrence happened after a night out for dinner and one drink. We came home and started a movie (comedy with typical sexual overtones at times) and we fell asleep. At some point later, it happened. I had a foggy recollection in the morning, and when we talked about it, it was confirmed. She said I woke up right as she was cleaning me up. I remember that, but only for a moment. So far, our experience has been positive. My sleepsex has given us an opportunity to discuss a new topic and grow and get to know each other better.”

IV. Humor: “We are able to joke about it”

“I am not sure what causes it. He is more likely to do it when he drinks or when we have not had sex for a couple of days, but

he often does it when he has not been drinking, and when we have had sex that night. Its kind of funny and we are able to joke about it.”

“I think what causes it is that he feels aroused when he is sleeping; he is dreaming of sex. The sleepsex is more of a joke between us, although we both want to know more about it because it is quite regular. Also my partner has never done it before in previous relationships. We have sex often, so it’s not like this is the only type of sex we have. The only time it is negative is when he starts to bring me to orgasm but goes back to sleep before I climax. Luckily this doesn’t happen very often. Usually he begins with foreplay that is the same as when he is awake. Most of the time he wakes up a while after he starts, and then we have sex as usual. Sometimes if he is masturbating me he may fall back asleep.”

V. Passion

“I think it’s a passionate response to stress alleviation. He loves his work; he thrives on it. We spend two nights a week together. He works until two or three in the morning, wakes at 7:00, again works until about 2:00, goes home and naps for a couple of hours, then repeats the cycle again. His passion for his work is channeled when he is at his most creative. I’ve never viewed this as deviant, just a healthy expression of a man’s love for his work and his woman. We maintain healthy sexual contact when we are awake. I tell him about the sleepsex, and we marvel at his passion that is directed at me. Am I the cause of the passion? Not all the time. However, his passion for me drives the passion for the sleepsex.”

Discussion

In all of the above experiences, the participants expressed their positive impressions of sleepsex. What are absent in these peoples’ submissions are indications of fear, confusion, anger, shame or embarrassment. These more negative reactions were quite appar-

ent among the experiences of those distressed by sleepsex. From these stories, we can learn something about what characterizes the brighter side of the sleepsex experience.

“Midnight Delight” experiences top the list, and are so named because in nearly all of them, the men and women indicated that they very much enjoyed waking up to being touched, and more generally, to a sexually aroused partner. In some cases it appeared as though both partners were enjoying their waking sex-lives, and that sleepsex had simply been integrated into their sex life as a whole.

The persons involved seemed to have accepted it, and were enjoying it. Additionally, it appears that if the “awake” partner was not interested in having sex, then the sexual advances of the sleeping partner could be easily stopped. This, of course, stands in contrast to the more negative experience of being unable to stop an aggressive, and even violent, bed partner.

The “Sexual Prowess” theme showed up in the previous chapter as one of the “dark” types of sleepsex experience. Well, like I said before, there are two sides to every story. In these particular cases, the individuals reported that they enjoyed sex with their sleeping partner, even more so than when they were awake. In one instance, a woman reported that it seemed as though her sleeping partner “wrote the book on spots” when he was asleep, whereas when he was awake, he was not as good in bed. One man apparently liked his partner’s more sexually dominant behavior. In short, both men and women appeared to be more “into it,” and were less inhibited, while asleep.

The upside to this is that couples are enjoying each other. The downside, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, is when being better, or more exciting in bed when asleep creates or exacerbates relationship problems.

Whether or not a couple is having problems in their sex life, “Growing Together” types of sleepsex experience can be used as an opportunity to build trust and open lines of communication about sex. I was very encouraged to find that some couples actu-

ally used sleepsex as a means of building trust and intimacy in their relationships. If those involved are able to talk openly about it and learn from it, then the sleepsex experience can be a positive one.

The section on “Humor” showed that some people are able to laugh about sleepsex. Viewing it with a sense of humor seems to be a characteristic of couples who appear to be dealing successfully with sleepsex.

Generally, handling potentially difficult situations with humor and understanding is a characteristic of happy couples. It may be that the couples you read about in this section were simply happier together than couples with a dimmer view of sleepsex. This, however, was impossible for me to know. It was apparent though that couples who viewed sleepsex with a sense of humor may also have not been experiencing the more serious problems associated with some cases of sleepsex, such as aggression. To put it plainly, the more problematic sleepsex becomes, the less people may be able to joke about it.

Passion, our last experience type, is a crucial element of relationship satisfaction. While there are many other important characteristics, such as commitment and respect, passion is one component of love that is important, and that is sorely missed once it goes away. If it is absent, people want it; they seek it out.

If one can accept the passion of a sleeping partner and actually explain his or her behavior in terms of passion, then it may be a very positive experience. Part of the equation may be, however, that there is also normal sexual contact between partners when they are awake. As we saw previously, it can be a real let-down if a partner is very passionate while sleeping, but upon waking, immediately turns off.

Let me say before moving on, that it is clearly possible to enjoy and have fun with sleepsex. But it can also be quite a disturbing and disruptive experience. How it is experienced appears to depend a lot on what exactly happens during an episode (Is it

scary? Embarrassing? Fun?), how the sleepsex is viewed and reacted to, by those involved, and on the personality and personal history of the persons involved.

CHAPTER 5

Women's Stories: In-depth

The stories in this chapter and the next are longer, and more detailed, accounts of sleepsex experiences. This chapter contains stories women contributed. Men's stories are included in the following chapter. All participants provided their stories to me either by telephone interview or in writing.

The names used are fictitious, but the stories are real. The interviews and written submissions were guided by four basic questions that appear in the body of each story. By and large, all stories contain clear responses to these questions. I have edited the submissions that appear here, and in chapter six for purposes of readability only.

“Susan”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My first experience was with my husband. We'd been married for two years. The way it happened was that, because I am an insomniac, I went to bed after him. He was asleep when I got into bed. Shortly thereafter, he rolled over and aggressively started going for me. This happened a few more times in the next couple of weeks. I told him about it, but he said he could not recall. I thought he was lying until I realized that he really was really asleep. He is much more aggressive. Sometimes I am half asleep

when he does it. Sometimes when I wake up a little more, we end up doing it. He usually wakes up before ejaculation. It seems to happen when he's stressed or fatigued (i.e., sleep deprivation). It used to happen a lot more frequently, once a week or so at times. That is the most frequent it has ever been. The least is once every two or three months. His family has a history of sleep disorders. His dad is an insomniac, one brother sleepwalks, and his other brother has night terrors.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

When I first started telling people, they said he was pretending. They thought it was funny. In our “regular” sex life, he's sweet and romantic, and we have lots of foreplay. During sleep, it's like he has “radar.” He goes straight for my underwear, in a “robotic like” way. He is very focused. Our “waking” sex life is lacking now because he comes home exhausted. I think this may be a factor in triggering the sleepsex. Although it doesn't seem like too much of a factor because it happens when we are busy sexually. I think sleepsex has contributed to our current lack of sex. We argue about it, and he's embarrassed by it. He's worried that he will try something with one his friends when he goes fly fishing with them (they all sleep together in the back of a truck). However, he still doesn't think it is that serious of an issue for us.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

I have had one very bad experience. Right before we went to bed one night, we had watched a movie about bands and their groupies. Later, he did it while we were both asleep. This was traumatic for me because I ended up incorporating it into a dream I was having and I consequently dreamed I was being raped. When I first told him he couldn't believe it. He felt terrible and slept on the couch the next night.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

At first I was annoyed and upset about it. I was on the Internet every day trying to find some information about it. The first year I felt very negatively about. Now I have subconsciously accepted it, I suppose. Now I just go with the flow. It is mostly a major annoyance. If I could do something to stop it, I would. It is not a positive thing in our lives. We're not doing anything about it. He does not think it's a big enough issue, and it's too embarrassing to talk about with a doctor. Overall, if it really was a bigger deal he would get help. I have just accepted it. Mostly I am half-awake while it happens. Usually half way through it, I am pretty aroused so we just end up doing it. He wakes up before he ejaculates and cannot believe he was actually doing it. He's says he was not dreaming—everything is just a “blank” up to the point when he wakes up. If I am not in the mood and am awake enough to do so, I just bump him, and he usually stops. Bumping him usually works to deter the episode.

“Debra”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I had never heard of sleepsex until a year ago. My son was having night terrors repeatedly each night, and I could get no help from local docs. So I started reading. As I was reading, I finally decided to find out what sleepsex was, and “surprise,” I discovered that other people don't wake up having sex at 2 am!

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

One thing that stood out almost immediately was that I had once accused a guy of date rape (not formally), but he kept saying it was I! I had many, many other incidences in my life with

this, and I just thought I had been a target and that guys would just wait until I was asleep.

*Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you?
How so?*

I didn't have a problem spending the night with a boyfriend or date, but my intentions were not to sleep with them. I was horrified on three different occasions to discover that we had done something sexual (not always full intercourse), but they always acted as if it were my fault!

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I have been married for five years now, and have woken up a few times in the middle of intercourse. I know I am the one starting it. I can remember incidences as far back as the 8th grade when I fell asleep with a girlfriend's brother on the couch. He swore he "felt me up" and I knew he didn't. I could tell he really thought he did, and now I'm sure it must have happened. If there is a doctor listening, I am certain now that my sleepsex is triggered by sleep-disordered breathing (now secondary to a sinus infection usually), mixed with drinking alcohol. I had my tonsils out at 26, and before that time I am certain I was having apnea. This apnea, or (in my son's case, upper airway resistance) is the trigger for the confusional arousals. I don't drink now like I did in college, but if I have a sinus infection and drink one or two glasses of wine, that is when it is most likely to happen. One more concern I have in case anyone is interested is that I could have tried to prosecute that one case. I woke up with my skirt hiked up and my panties pushed over but I was completely dressed! I just knew it was he trying to take advantage. There is a possibility that there is a guy out there in jail for sleepsex that the woman had! That is why I am sharing my story.

“Cathy”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I was dating this guy in college, we weren't boyfriend and girlfriend, but we had started hanging out quite a bit. The sex was really good, and there was an intense attraction between the two of us. Well, after a month or so he was staying over at my house a lot. We usually would have sex before we went to bed. One night, I awoke to the bed moving. I was facing the wall and he was on my opposite side. I was afraid to look over because I thought he was awake and perhaps and playing with himself. I heard the sound of him “beating” himself, and I didn't know what to do. I made noises, coughed, moved a little, but I still was afraid that maybe he was awake. At first, I thought he was awake and just adjusting or something like that. But he was breathing quite heavily, from what I remember, and it continued for at LEAST half an hour. The breathing was getting deeper and deeper, and I thought he was going to ejaculate. To my knowledge, he did not. I was so in shock I couldn't look at him the same in the morning. I know he was not awake. I didn't want him to stay over anymore, however, I was curious. The next time he slept over, I made sure to please him a lot before we went to bed. I also made sure that I fell asleep facing him. Again, I was awakened by a beating noise, and by the bed moving a bit. I opened one eye to peek over at him. It was so weird. He looked so asleep, completely out, but at the same time I could see his hand moving back and forth under the blanket where his penis was. He was moaning a little and the breathing was again heavy. I moved the blanket around a little so I could check out what was going on. He indeed had his hand under his boxers and was stroking himself, very quickly. Not just rubbing, I'm talking the man was whacking it. But all the while he was asleep.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This may have happened one more time, but from then on, things just weren't the same. I felt that maybe I wasn't doing it for him, but I realized this wasn't true. I found it to be very disturbing and made excuses when he wanted to stay the night. I lost attraction to him because I feared falling asleep with him.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

When a man is awake and masturbating, yes, it's a turn-on to me. But to see him doing that in his sleep just completely devalued our sexual relationship to me.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I met someone else shortly afterward. Needless to say, the men I have since dated do not share this problem.

“Jackie”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My first experience with sleepsex was with my husband. We had gone to bed as usual. We go to bed at the same time typically, but he usually goes right to sleep while I read for a half hour or so. I had been sleeping for probably around three hours when I awoke to my husband caressing my buttocks. I let him do it for a while, and then he began to go for my genitals. I thought he was awake because we sometimes wake up in the middle of the night and have sex. But when I spoke to him, he did not respond. I was very surprised, as this had never happened before. I shook him a little, but it did not stop him. I was becoming aroused by this time, so I let him continue to play with my genitals. He then got on top of me and continued with the

foreplay—to suck and bite my breasts. This was unusual behavior for him as we hardly ever have foreplay anymore. Then he began doing something that he never ever has done before—moan loudly. I was afraid he would wake our daughter up who sleeps in the room next to us, so I grabbed his head and held it to my breasts. He continued to moan, although it was muffled now. He had an erection at this point that he began rubbing against my leg. He had one hand on my butt and the other one was holding his penis to my leg. This was something else he had never done. I helped him to find my vagina and put his penis in. I know this is a lot of “gory detail” but I am only including it because I think it was an incredible and unusual experience. He began to thrust away like a machine—he did not stop once, and it went on for a long time—maybe for 15 minutes. He had a very intense orgasm, moaning and grunting the whole time. I had never seen him ejaculate so much. I wanted him to keep going so I could orgasm, but unfortunately, he just rolled over and began snoring. I took care of myself by masturbating. In the morning I confronted him with it. I asked him if he could remember what happened. He laughed and said he did not know what I was talking about. I told him exactly what had happened and that he was like a different person. He was shocked, but eventually took my word for it because he did have a history of sleepwalking when he was younger. From this time onward, he would initiate sex around two or three times a month.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

It didn't really affect our relationship at all.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

I actually enjoy it quite immensely. The only thing that I do not like about it is that we do not connect emotionally whatsoever when it is happening. He just begins, does it, and then rolls

over asleep. This is disappointing to me because I like to have some tenderness along with our sex. Also, it is very one-sided. Although he touches me and gets me going, it always leaves me unsatisfied and horny as hell. I wish he could, and I know this is impossible, give a little bit more to me during it. For now I just live with it. When I am in the mood I really like it when it happens. When I am tired and do not feel like it then it is a major hassle. Now that I know he's asleep, if I do not feel like following through with him, I just give him a hard push and he backs off. Sometimes I sleep in the guest room if I am really tired. Sleepsex has generally been a positive experience for me because he pays more attention to foreplay when he's sleeping. Plus he is not that sexually interested in me anymore, but when he's asleep, it's like he's the most passionate person I can imagine. It's really very strange.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

We are not doing anything about his sleepsex because it's not really a problem for us. If it ever became an issue, we would probably talk about it more and try to figure out how to help him stop it.

“Belinda”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

Sleepsex happened to me when I was 16 years old. I was spending the night at a friend's house one weekend. When we spent the night at each other's homes, we usually would sleep together in the same bed, or one of us would sleep on the floor in a sleeping bag. This particular time we were sleeping together. We lay in bed talking and listening to music for about an hour before we began to try to fall asleep. That's all I remember of the events leading up to my sleepsex experience. I think it must have

been very late at night when I woke to the bed shaking quite a bit. And what did I see? Well for one, my friend had the covers completely off of her, and her nightshirt was hiked up clear under her armpits. She was not wearing a bra so I could see her breasts. I noticed that she was breathing very heavily. I also noticed that her right hand was down her underwear and that it was moving very fast. I was very shocked. I had never seen anyone else masturbating before and I barely knew how to do it myself. I elbowed her hard in the ribs once and told her to knock it off. It did not stop her. When I did it again, she woke up and was extremely disoriented. She did not know what she had been doing and denied it at first. I insisted that she had been playing with her self. She insisted that I was lying and said that she could not remember anything about it. She denied it up and down; there was no way I could convince her that I was telling the truth. So I pointed out that her covers were off and that her nightgown was up. At this point she began to believe me. She was incredibly embarrassed and begged me not to talk to anyone about it. I did not.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

We are still friends to this day. We talk about it sometimes because, and here's the funny part, I know that I currently masturbate myself when I am asleep! I know this because the same thing that happened to us now happens with my boyfriend, only now I am the one doing it! My boyfriend says it happens almost every night. It's very regular and he does not interfere with me. He says I am "wild" when I do it. It has not affected our relationship at all. We're both okay with it.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

I can't really say whether it's a positive or negative thing—

neutral I guess. This is because I can never recall what I do and it doesn't seem to bother my boyfriend.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I can see it as possibly being a problem if we break up. Then I will have to worry about anyone else I sleep with caring or not. For now, so far so good. It's just kind of strange and is a funny coincidence because of what happened when I was younger.

“Becky”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I am 21 years old and have been married for three years. I started having sex and spending the night with guys early—when I was 16. So by the time I was married and sleeping with my husband I had quite a bit of experience. Nothing prepared me for my husband's sleepsex though. The first time it happened was about a year after we got married. Our sex life was what you call normal I guess. Part of our sex life includes mutually masturbating each other and sometimes doing it in front of each other. So, when he started masturbating in his sleep, I was not surprised to see it. What surprised me was that he was doing it while completely zonked out! The way it happened the first time was that I woke up to his groans and to the bed shaking. I had seen him masturbate many times before, but not like this time. He was completely involved with it—moving his hips, moaning, and really going at it. He even had one finger up—well you know where. He never does this when we're awake and will not even let me do it even though we know it's supposed to intensify an orgasm. He just does not like it and has told me so. Upon seeing this I was surprised. I was also surprised by his vigor. I asked if he wanted me to take over, but it was like I was talking to a brick wall. His eyes would open and close almost automatically—like

someone was pulling a string, and his whole body was rigid. I did not understand what I was seeing. All I could tell was that he did not respond to me—as if I was not there, and that he was doing stuff he never does. The thought occurred to me then that he must be unconscious. I had not heard of sleepsex before, but I did have some personal experience with sleepwalking. Because I used to sleepwalk and do all kinds of strange things during my sleepwalking, I thought that maybe he was sleepwalking too—but in a different way. He actually did not orgasm, but woke up when he still had his hands on his penis. He said to me “What did you see? What was I doing?” I told him he was playing with himself. At first he was confused, but then he realized that I was telling the truth. I said it had really turned me on and we ended up doing it. It was great. We fell asleep without talking about it further. In the morning though, I told him everything that I had seen. He laughed and could hardly believe it. But the fact was that he had done it. Nowadays, it happens every once in a while. Not often, maybe two times a month. It usually happens when he’s very tired or when he’s had some alcohol. In fact, the first time he did it he had stayed up all night the night before. So I think these two things—drinking and fatigue—may have something to do with it. We have not done an “experiment” to see but we may.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This has affected our relationship in a positive way. I can see a part of him that he cannot so I feel I know him more deeply. I can tell him things about himself that he does not know.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

The result of this is that we trust each other more and are more open about our sexual fantasies.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

We have not told anyone about this (he's too embarrassed) and do not feel like we need to. If it ever becomes a problem, we would not hesitate to go see someone though. I think if people have sexual problems in their relationship, they should not waste time in getting help. I think sex is such an important part of a good relationship and that problems that have to do with your sex life should not be ignored.

“Racheline”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I am writing my story because I think what happened because of my sleepsex should never happen to anyone. I am 16 years old and it happened about a year ago. I have had what some would consider a pretty rough life. My mother, sisters, and I have been “on the run” for a long time because of my father. He was abusive to my mother and so she finally left. He is crazy and would not leave us alone so we had to leave the state we lived in. My mother has not been well for a long time. She is depressed I think, and is not able to work. Occasionally my sisters and I stay with people who have volunteered to take us in. Well, it's not exactly volunteer work because they get money for it, but it's part of a social service program. We only go when things get really bad with my mom at home. I have never sleepwalked before so I was very shocked when my sleepsex happened. We were staying at this couple's house, my sisters and I this one time. We had stayed there before and they were very nice people. I liked them and they seemed to like us. There was never any weirdness from either of them. Well this one night I apparently got up out of bed and went into the living room. I was sleeping in a long t-shirt with nothing on underneath it. What happened was that I got onto one of the couches and began to masturbate myself. I

had done this a couple of times before when I was awake, but it was not something I did regularly. I know some girls who do it all the time in the bathtub and they have told me I should try it, but I never really understood what they got out of it because I couldn't seem to do it right. Anyway, there I was on the couch doing it, when the guy comes out. According to him, he saw me doing it and became aroused. I know this because we had to talk about it after it happened. He sat down next to me and began to masturbate himself. He didn't know I was sleeping so he tried to get me to do it. I would not and also would not talk to him. I just kept doing it. Well what happened next is the really bad part. The wife got up and saw what was going on. All hell broke loose then. The lights went on and I woke up. There we were sitting on the couch together looking like we had been doing something mutual. I was extremely confused and felt like I was in a dream. His wife told him to get away from me and told me to go back to bed. I did, all the while saying, "I didn't do anything! I didn't do anything." I could hardly sleep the rest of the night. I heard them fighting in the next room. She started crying and then I heard him leave. He went out and got a hotel room.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

The next morning we all got up together. My sisters had no clue, but they could tell something was wrong. I didn't tell them what had happened because they really didn't need to know. The woman got me by myself and we had a talk. She asked me what I was doing on the couch in the middle of the night. I said I did not know. She of course had trouble believing me. She asked if her husband had done anything with me and I told her I did not know and that I couldn't remember anything that happened before she turned the lights on. She told me what she had seen and I couldn't believe it. I told her I would never do something like that and that I didn't have any attraction towards her husband.

She handled it pretty well under the circumstances I think, because it really appeared as if I had seduced her husband into having sex. But I really did not. She told me that we all would have to go stay with someone else and that she would have to write up an incident report. It was all very serious. It felt like the whole world had blown up in my face and that I was the one at fault. I am not a slut and have never even been with a guy. This ruined my relationship with these nice people and I am sure it hurt their relationship.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

I never saw them again. I did have to talk to someone at the agency about it in great detail. They have their own ways of dealing with stuff like this when it happens and I guess I did my part. We just were never able to go back there—not like I wanted to. Also I was separated from my sisters all other times we went to stay at people's homes. I felt bad about this because I am the big sister and we are all very close. I only stay with women now. I feel I have a black mark on me and I can't get rid of the feeling that I did something wrong. This has been a completely negative experience.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

They try to talk to me about it in counseling, but all I can tell them is that as far as I know, I didn't do anything. I am not being "treated" or anything, they just try to bring it up when I meet with the counselor. They do not believe I was sleeping but I know I was or else I would remember exactly what happened and I do not. I showed them this Web site (sleepsex.org) and they still didn't believe me. They said it did not make any difference because what had happened had happened and that's all there is.

“Kelley”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My husband has nearly nightly bouts of sleepsex. I suppose the first time it happened was shortly after we began sleeping together before we were married. I think a lot of people have experienced this because every other friend of mine that I have told has said that it has happened to them at least once. I think it has to do with dreaming because my husband, when he has woken up during an episode, tells me he was dreaming of sex. The sex is not necessarily with me, which makes me feel a bit hurt, but it seems as though his dreaming triggers it. The way it usually happens is that I am asleep and then he wakes me up by going for my crotch. I rarely get into it and almost always shove him off of me. This works to stop it most of the time.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

I love him very much, but it is getting hard to take this behavior. I feel as if I am married to two separate people. One of them is a nice guy, with whom I have “normal” relationship with; the other guy is this “night prowler” who pounces on me every other night.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

It has not been positive for me or us. He knows it bugs me and he feels ashamed of his behavior.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

We are currently trying to get in to see someone. We are hesitant to go see our regular doctor because it is embarrassing. I have heard that some people are given medications. I do not

necessarily want him to have to take anything, but I do not know what to do really. I read an article about sleeping in twin beds. Perhaps we will try that. The only thing about this is that it separates us. Being in bed together is about the only time we have for some closeness and I don't want to disturb that. I just don't know what to do about it.

“Erin”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I will start by saying that I had never experienced anything like this before in my life. I was 28 years old, and had not been that sexually active prior to this happening. I have a history of sleepwalking, but never had any experiences with sexual activity during my sleep. The first time it happened was after I had been out partying with my friends. We had been out drinking, and I have to say that I was pretty drunk. I had consumed probably half a bottle of champagne all by myself and was feeling pretty good. The night went on and on until I finally decided it was time to call it a night. I went home with my roommate and went to bed. I live with three other people, two girls and a guy. The guy is not someone who I have had any sexual contact with or even desire for so my behavior towards him on that night was especially strange. I had been asleep for probably two hours when it happened. My guy roommate—who happened to be sleeping with his girlfriend that night told me what I did. Apparently I had come into his room naked (I sleep naked) and crawled into bed next to him. His girlfriend was on one side of him and I was on the other. Well I guess what I did was put my hands on his genitals and begin to fondle him. Half asleep, he began to respond and get into it a bit. Then he woke up. He says he thought it was his girlfriend at first, and then he realized that it was I. By this time his girlfriend had woken up and was saying, “What the hell are you doing?” I sort of woke up a bit and was very con-

fused. They say I just got up and said I was going to the bathroom. I then proceeded to walk out of the room and back into my bedroom.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

Naturally they both were very upset by what had happened. They sort of ignored me the next morning until I asked them why they were being so bitchy towards me. Well, then it all came out. They told me what I had done and I was shocked. I had a very fuzzy recollection that something had happened during the night, but it all seemed like a dream. Because my behavior was so weird, they were able to write it off as a one-time thing and it did not affect our relationship. But the girl has never looked at me the same way since.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

I would have to say that it was sort of a neutral experience for me. It was not really a negative thing because the consequences were not that bad. I never really was friendly with my roommate's girlfriend so I did not care how she viewed me. My guy roommate was able to laugh about it finally and said that he would keep his door locked to keep it from happening again.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I have had a couple of subsequent experiences since then. Neither has involved my crawling into bed with anyone though. What happens is that I get out of bed and walk into the apartment from my room. A couple of times my roommates have been up and they just point me back to bed. In all cases I have basically no recollection of what I have done. The only change I have made in my life because of this is that I sleep with pajamas on now. I have not gone to see anyone about it because I think

it's just sleepwalking and it rarely happens—maybe a couple of times a year.

“Jill”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

When it happens, I am afraid. The first time was with my present boyfriend. I do not do it—he does. What he does is mostly touch my genitals. We never get into full intercourse because I do not let it happen. He also masturbates in his sleep. Sometimes he masturbates me instead of just touching me. I admit that I get into it sometimes, but not most of the time. Most of the time it wakes me up out of a sound sleep and this is very disturbing to me because I have to go in to work very early. Sometimes he remembers what he does—vaguely—and sometimes he doesn't. When he does remember, it's usually the next day. He asks me if he was doing it again and I tell him “Yes.” It started out being sort of funny, but now it is not funny anymore. It really bothers me to have someone in bed with me who does not remember what he does. I feel as if I am the person who he is touching, but who knows what's going on inside of his head? He tells me sometimes it happens that he has been having a dream about sex. This concerns me and makes me feel unwanted. I mean we have what I think is a normal sex life together. As far as I know he is satisfied. But then why is he dreaming about sex with other women? I am so confused.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This has affected us so much that I may need to leave him. I do not think I can stand to have someone do this repeatedly for the rest of my life.

*Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you?
How so?*

It has been negative, but mostly for me. He doesn't remember much about it when it happens so it doesn't really affect him. He does know that it is bothering me greatly. He wishes that I would "lighten up" about it and not take it so seriously.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

He will not do anything about it because he does not think it's that much of a problem, plus he doesn't have a doctor that he trusts with this kind of information. It is embarrassing to him so he would prefer to do nothing even though it's affecting us. I may have to take matters into my own hands and talk to someone myself.

CHAPTER 6

Men's Stories: In-depth

As in the previous chapter, all of the stories you will read in this chapter are real, but the names are fictitious. These men's stories were acquired, again, by telephone interview or in the form of a written submission.

“Joseph”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

When I was younger, I had a few experiences of sleepwalking, but it seems to have disappeared as I grew older. I have had no instances of sleep disorders until my sleepsex appeared. It is difficult for me to recall exactly when I first knew I was initiating sex while I was asleep. I believe it was while I was in college. I would sleep with my girlfriend(s) and they would tell me in the morning that I had initiated sex during the night. Sometimes I would wake up during an episode and they would tell me that I had been trying to have sex with them. Throughout college it started to happen more and more frequently. I believe there was a clear correlation between alcohol and fatigue and the episodes because my sleepsex would occur when I had been drinking or was sleep deprived.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

My current girlfriend tells me that it happens three or four times a week. She is very supportive and doesn't judge me for my behavior. I am so thankful to have, and to have had, girlfriends who understand. My girlfriend just deals with it. Generally, if she is not in the mood she tries to stop me. She pushes me away and this usually works. Usually I just roll over and go back to sleep. My girlfriend says I am more aggressive, more vocal (moaning), and act differently than when I am awake. My sexual demeanor is quiet different, she says, even forceful at times. We both believe that touching, or coming into contact with each other during the night, triggers it. My sleepsex has not affected my relationships that much. My girlfriends have been supportive. My present girlfriend handles it with humor. She has tried to communicate with me during some episodes, but I usually do not respond.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

For us, the experience has been more on the positive side, or even neutral in the sense that it has not enhanced, or been a detriment to our relationship. It has actually encouraged us to communicate more openly about sex.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

At present, were not doing anything about it. The only real problem it causes us is fatigue. That's the only thing that would cause me to seek help. For now, my girlfriend's efforts to stop me from doing it often work. Humor has really helped—we're open about it, and she's not judgmental. Knowing others are experiencing sleepsex helps too. We try to take a healthy attitude towards it.

“Ian”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My first experience with sleepsex was disastrous. I am 38 years old and have not had any experiences at all with sleepwalking or any other sort of sleeping disorder. I am normal by all standards—I have a family—wife, 13-year-old daughter, a home, a good job, and so forth. My wife and I have the regular problems of married life, but nothing that is too serious. We go on family vacations a couple of times a year and usually go camping for one of them. We have been doing this for years. Last year was no different. We had a trip to our regular camping spot all planned out. What we do is drive there in the afternoon so that we get there in the evening. We then set up camp, relax, go swimming, and cook out. This particular time my daughter brought one of her school buddies with her. Her friend is 13 as well and is a very nice young lady. We have had her sleep over at our home many times without incident. This time it was radically different. It was our second night out and we went to bed when it got dark as usual. My own recollection of the event is extremely vague because I was asleep when it happened. All I have to go on is what my wife tells me and what I remember from the time I woke up. What I did shocked me, traumatized my family, and my daughter’s friend. The girls had brought tents for themselves. They were sleeping in small one-person tents that were set up next to each other and next to the tent my wife and I slept in. Late that night I apparently got up, left my tent and went into my daughter’s friend’s tent. The story according to her is that I lay down sort of semi-on top of her and played with myself for a few seconds. Then I proceeded to forcefully try to get into her sleeping bag with her. I was naked and she only had a t-shirt on. She—my daughter’s friend tried to prevent me from crawling in by pushing me away and yelling. I, along with the rest of my family and the people in the neighboring campsites all woke up

to her screams. I was groggy and astonished at the situation that presented itself to me. The girl would not calm down—and did not clam down until my wife and daughter took her into our tent, away from me. I was able to get some clothes on before two men came over from the other campsites. They were very concerned and upset. They told me they had called 911 and that the police were on the way. I was completely panicked. I tried to talk to my wife, but she told me to stay outside the tent. My daughter's friend was sobbing and calling me a pervert. It was a terrible, terrible situation. The police came and I tried to explain what had happened. The other guys who were there told them what they had heard. The police then talked to the girl—she had calmed down enough to speak to them—and she told them what I had done. I was handcuffed and taken to the station. I was booked on sexual assault of a minor and spent the night in jail. Fortunately I was able to talk with my family and my daughter's friend all together, but in private, the next day. I begged them to believe that I was sleepwalking and that I had no idea what I was doing. The story must have been convincing because all of them believed me. I think they believed me because it seemed so weird and unlike me to do such a thing. The police let me go because we all were able to convince them that it was a freak incident and the girl confirmed this. She told them she was okay and that I must have been sleepwalking. They had a very hard time buying this and treated me like a pervert. We were told not to return to the camp ground again.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This affected my relationship with my family and with my daughter's friend. Fortunately she seemed relatively unaffected by the event and did not tell anyone—including her own family. I was very relieved, but spent many sleepless nights worrying that the whole story would come out and that I would be labeled a child molester. I was also afraid that the girl would be perma-

nently scarred by the experience and that she would change her mind and pursue legal action against me.

*Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you?
How so?*

Sleepsex in this case was a completely negative. But this all happened almost a year ago and so far, so good. What has helped is that we all talked about it. We have not shoved it under the rug. Also, my wife and I scoured the Internet and found the sleepsex.org Web site. This helped a tremendous amount because it showed that lots and lots of people were initiating sex in their sleep. I was not the only one with this sort of experience. After this, I have had infrequent sleepsex episodes. They usually involve me rubbing my wife's buttocks and genitals. She wakes up and so do I. Sometimes we proceed to have sex, but usually I apologize and go back to sleep. Sometimes I do it and do not remember a thing, or have only a very vague memory of doing it.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I have not gone to see anyone about it or tried to do anything to stop it. We just accept that it is something that I do occasionally and leave it at that. We do not have sleepovers at our house anymore. My daughter's friend wouldn't come over even if we would allow it. She doesn't come over any more at all, in fact. This is probably a good thing because I am still so embarrassed by what I did. I have forgiven myself somewhat, and have tried to communicate with the girl to apologize and to "prove" that I am the same guy I was before all this happened, but the connection we had before is destroyed. I do not wish this type of experience on anyone, especially an unassuming recipient. It is a very strange thing to have happen because you mostly cannot remember a thing, and the behavior is something that you would not do in your wildest nightmares. I barely escaped criminal pros-

education that would've ruined my own and my family's life. I traumatized a young girl who didn't deserve to have such a thing happen to her. I am sure she will never forget it. I just hope that it doesn't affect her in any permanent way. So far she seems, according to my daughter, to have gotten over it. They are able to laugh about it now—but it still is a bad memory. I hope she will forgive me one day and come to understand that it was not “me” who did it—it was my sleeping self that did. What this says to me is that I really am two different people—there's my “awake” self, and my “asleep” self. The two are like Jekyll and Hyde.

“Kurt”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My sleepsex, compared to some of the other experiences I have read about, is pretty mild. In my case I almost always wake up, or have a vague memory of what I do in the morning. The first time it happened is about like what happens every time I do it now. It's always the same. I am sleeping with my wife and then begin to fondle her. She wakes up and begins to get into it. Sometimes I wake up enough to have sex—sometimes I wake up, realize what I am doing and then I stop. In either case, I have usually been having a very sexual dream—typically the dreams are about me having sex with other women besides my wife. As I come out of the dream and into awareness, I realize I am touching my wife. Unfortunately this affects my arousal. The sexual interest and arousal just disappears and I feel very disappointed. I have had for a long time now, a lack of sexual interest in my wife. This has not become a serious, relationship-threatening problem for us because we have talked extensively about it and acknowledge that it is an issue for us. I just am tired of not feeling sexual towards her. I feel bad that I am having these great, sexy dreams, where I feel incredibly passionate and aroused,

only to wake up to my wife. This is a great disappointment to me and to her because I almost immediately turn-off. I am sure it hurts her feelings and I feel terrible about my feelings.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

The sleepsex per se, has not affected us. We mostly just chuckle about it when it happens. When we do follow-through on it and have sex, the sex is usually satisfying to my wife. I try to sustain the passion I was feeling in my sleep, but it's nearly impossible to do. I want to feel passionate and really miss having it in our life together. It wasn't always like this. In fact, our sex life in the beginning of our relationship was great. It just has dwindled to practically nothing now. I cannot blame myself and I cannot blame her. It's an "us" issue.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

Like I said before, the sleepsex is not a problem, but it may be a "canary in a coal mine" about our relationship. We now pretty much accept that we are basically a sexually inactive couple and we are doing nothing about it. I think we should do something before it's too late. I think a couple's sex life, when it is lacking, is due to problems in the relationship. We all start out passionate—most of us anyway, and it is natural for this passion to change over time. As passion fades, deep love and respect takes over, and this sustains the relationship, and is a real turn-on in bed. For now we just are not dealing with what may be deeper relationship issues.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

The sleepsex does not occur that often, but when it does, we talk about it.

“Brice”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My sleepsex drives wife nuts. It has since the beginning. It's hard for me to recall exactly when the first time it happened was, but I will try. I think it was shortly after we were married. Unlike a lot of people, we did not live together—or even sleep together prior to being married. We had sex, but we just never slept together. Shortly after we began living and sleeping together, it happened.

As far as I know, I had never done anything like this before. I might have, but I just can't recall. Anyway, what happened according to my wife was that I began pawing away at her in the middle of the night and eventually we had sex. She says she tried to stop me and to talk to me, but I just ignored her and kept on going. She was shocked and angry. She was also a bit scared because I acted so differently. Our lovemaking—during our waking hours—was usually slow and tender, with a lot of foreplay.

We do not usually talk a whole lot during sex either. When I was asleep though, all of my normal behaviors disappeared. I was aggressive, going straight for her genitals. There was no touching or anything that resembled foreplay. Also, I guess I “talked dirty” to her saying things like “fuck me, baby” and “I am sticking it to you hard girly-girl.” Stuff like that. I also cursed up a storm when I had my orgasm.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

Unfortunately, this now happens a lot. Even though I think we have a normal sex life (we do it a couple of times a week) I still initiate sex in my sleep two or three times a week. This is a major disturbance to my wife's sleep and she is very fatigued as a result. She has gotten pretty good at stopping me though—a good shove and a yell usually does it. She also sleeps in another

room a couple times a week. I have only actually woken up once when I was doing it. I could not recall anything about what I was doing prior to waking, but I had a vague recollection of having a sexually charged dream.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

Generally speaking, it is not a positive experience for us.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I have sought help from doctors. The typical reaction I have gotten from them is no reaction. This is very discouraging to me because I really need someone to believe me and to give me good advice. My wife is the only one who really knows what is going on and she cannot even convince them that I am really asleep. What has happened is that they refer me to a sleep disorder specialist, who then recommends that I do a sleep study. I have not followed through with this because it is just too embarrassing and time consuming. Plus, I think my wife would have to be sleeping with me for anything to happen. I have been left with a feeling of hopelessness time and time again. So we just deal with it. We have tried to develop a sense of humor about it, but it is mostly like a dark cloud hanging over us. I really do not know where to go from here.

“Jason”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My wife does me orally and gives me hand jobs in her sleep. This has happened ever since we began sleeping together. It was very odd the first time it happened. I had been asleep for a while—so had she—when I awoke to her fondling my penis and moaning. We usually do not have sex in the middle of the night so I

asked her what was going on. No reply. I thought I must be dreaming because she was doing things to me that she never, I mean never, usually does. She was treating my penis as if it was a sacred object—almost as if she was worshipping it. I won't go into detail, but that's how it was the first time, and still is.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

We talked about it the morning after. She told me that she did not remember a thing. I was amazed of course and tried my best to convince her that she indeed had performed incredible oral sex on me the night before. She laughed and said “you wish” and that was about it. Because it happened again and again, and because I was able to wake her up one night after I had my orgasm—she was convinced that I had been telling the truth.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

The experience of her sleepsex is for me, great. I love waking up to her giving me oral sex. She also gives me hand jobs occasionally, and her “worship-like” behavior is the same in these cases. I am not being arrogant when I call her behavior “worship-like.” This is simply the best way to describe the way she acts. She is also more aggressive and really gets into it—much more than she does when awake. We both are perplexed by this and haven't been able to find a decent explanation. I mean, why does this happen? We have a normal sex life and both of us are satisfied in this domain of our relationship. One thing that may help explain it is that when she was younger—I mean a child—she used to sleepwalk quite often. I have heard that sleepsex is just another type of sleepwalking. I can buy this to an extent, but it does not explain why she seems so different when she's asleep. Actually, I have, we have, stopped trying to explain it. We really do not care anymore and just let it happen. She feels that there is another side of her that she does not know and this is somewhat distress-

ing to her. For me, it's like I sleep with two persons. Both are "good in bed" but one definitely has an edge on the other. I hope it's okay that I say this, and I do tell my wife the same thing so it's no secret that I feel this way.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

We are not doing anything about it. The reason for this is that it has not reached a point where we want to talk to some professional. Plus it is a very personal topic and we live in very small town. I suppose we could go somewhere else and talk to someone, but like I said, it's not really a problem for us. Some people, I am sure, see it as a disorder or as something bad. We do not. It's just another aspect, an odd one at that, of our relationship.

"Anthony"

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

The first time it happened I thought to myself "My God, what have I done?" What I did was basically assault a girl that I had only been on two dates with before. It was when I was in college. I was, and still am I guess, a member of a large fraternity. We had parties at our house with sororities all the time and sometimes we would go on road trips and rent hotel rooms. This particular time, we had all traveled about two hours to a small resort town on the coast. We, my fraternity brothers and I, all had dates with which we were sharing rooms. When I think back on it, these girls were pretty gutsy going with us because they really did not know us that well. My date—a girl I was courting, so to speak, had gone on a couple of dates with me before, but never on an overnigher. I did not assume that anything was going to happen sexually. I was being careful of this one because I really wanted to start a relationship with her and I did not want

to blow it. So, there we were—hotel rooms on the beach—booze, sunshine, and a lot of fun to be had. We spent the day partying on the beach, swimming, getting sunburned. The afternoon came around, and we both—my date and I—were really exhausted. So, we went up to the room to take a nap. She had a bikini on and I had my trunks on when we went to bed. We did not make out or anything like that, we just were lying next to each other, innocently enough, and then we both fell asleep. What happened after we had been asleep for a while just about ruined my life—and hers. I woke up to her yelling at me and pulling hard on my hair. What I had done was this: I had taken down her bikini bottoms and was performing oral sex on her. I had her legs practically locked into my arms and I was aggressively going at her genitals. When I woke up I was extremely disoriented and stopped what I was doing immediately.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

She jumped out of bed, grabbed her bottoms, and locked herself in the bathroom. I could hear her sobbing and cursing at me from in there. When she calmed down enough to talk, she told me to call the police. My gut sank to my ankles and I began to shake and tremble. I spoke to her with my voice wavering uncontrollably. I asked her why she wanted me to do this and she yelled, “You don’t know??” I knew that I had assaulted her sexually, but everything was so fuzzy to me. I really needed just to talk to her to find out what I had done. She refused to come out or to talk to me. Then, in the middle of all this, our friends came in—two couples. They immediately sensed something had happened, that something was wrong. The girls asked where their friend was and then heard her crying in the bathroom. They said, “What the fuck did you do to her???” I could not answer—all I could say was “I don’t know.” I needed more details before I could give an honest answer—and I really did not feel like explaining things to them at that time anyway.

Well, I was then told to get out, so I left. My friends came with me, asking me all kinds of questions. I told them what had happened to the best of my knowledge. They could not believe it. I thought, “This is just great. Not even my own friends believe me.” In the meantime, one of the girls had called the cops. When I heard the siren, I became terrified. I felt like a criminal. I knew that I would have some explaining to do, and I knew that the cops would never believe me. “Yeah, right, frat boy” they would say. And you know what, that’s exactly what they said—well almost. I was arrested and brought to the station. This was a very small town so the police station was basically one room with a converted garage serving as the “jail.” I do not think they deal with too many hardened criminals here—or with cases of sexual battery—the charge that was leveled against me. I felt like a complete loser. Nothing I could say would help me. They had gotten my date’s story and would hardly even listen to me. My date’s parents were called. They came and took her home. My friends saw her before she left. They said that she was still very upset and was crying to her parents. My parents came, and I was released into their custody. They were very confused and upset. I told them what I was being charged with and they could not believe it. When I told them my version of what had happened, my dad said, “That’s it? What makes you think anyone is going to believe you?” My mom started crying and my dad just shook his head. I could not go back to school so I had to take a leave of absence. Pretty soon, the story spread all over campus. I knew a lot of people so the word spread quickly. When this sort of thing happens to a guy, and to a frat guy in particular, it’s guilty until proven innocent. And this was the way things panned out for me. I was eventually able to sit down with the girl and our attorneys—the object of the meeting was to take our depositions. She was going to press charges against me.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

This, I thought, is the worst situation I could imagine for myself. It felt unreal—as if I was part of television show. But the fact is that it was all very real. I was being charged with sexual battery. The case eventually went before a judge. I was convicted of a misdemeanor, and placed under house arrest for three months. I had to wear this transmitter around my ankle. If I left the house, they would know and call my house to make sure I was there. I was not allowed to go back to school, so I missed a whole year. The girl—my date—has never forgiven me. She still thinks that I assaulted her in her sleep. She has the whole campus behind her on this, and I am seen as a dog, a criminal frat boy. It has been a disaster.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

The thing is that she just never listened to me. She never heard my side of what happened except in the presence of her lawyer. We were never able to just talk about it like adults. I am so pissed about this and about how she reacted. It seemed so extreme, like overkill. My parents finally were able to really hear me and I think they believe me now. The sleepsex.org site was very helpful in this respect. So many people—guys especially, have had similar experiences. Some girls even admit that their experience of “date rape” might have actually been sleepsex. I am not minimizing the fact that there are a lot of jerks out there that do horrible things to women, but I am not one of them. I know now I was truly asleep and that I did not intentionally do anything to her. I hope that one day she will believe me. Fortunately, it has never happened again. I am not doing anything about it because it is not really a problem for me. So far, I have had only this one experience.

“Stephan”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I am 32 years old and have been with my current girlfriend for three years. I used to sleepwalk quite a bit when I was small but it pretty much stopped when I was in high school. It happened a couple of times in my teen years but that's about it. I am saying this because I have heard that sleepsex is a kind of sleepwalking and that sleepwalking is something that people with sleepsex have done, or do. I hope this helps. As for my sleepsex, the first time I think it happened was in college. I lived off campus in an apartment with two of my friends. Like a lot of college students, we partied a lot. It would usually start on Thursday nights and end on Sunday. We would not drink all day, but we certainly did all night. One time I was with this girl. She was sort of my girlfriend I guess—she would spend the night a couple of times a week and we did stuff together a lot. Well the story is that I would wake up and just roll over on top of her and start going at it. She was always pretty receptive because we had good sex together and she enjoyed it. No hang-ups. Well, the weird thing about it was that I would never be able to remember what I had done. It was always a blank the next day. She would tell me what I did and it was usually always the same story. I would be zombie-like and unresponsive. I was unemotional, and would not give her any foreplay at all. It basically was all about intercourse and I did it with a blank look on my face. She thought it was pretty funny most of the time because she would try to wake me up by pushing me away and I would just roll back over on top of her and keep trying to do it. I was like a fly that would not go away. Because I was so unemotional she started to call me “Spock.” I thought this was pretty funny, but I was a bit confused about what I was doing. I knew I had sleepwalked when I was younger, but never anything like this. So the name “Spock” sort of stuck to me. My friends found out about it and they of

course said “No way!” But I had to respond with “Yes way.” Fortunately my girlfriend didn’t mind. We only slept together a couple times a week and my sleepsex did not occur that often.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

Now that I am older and have been living with my girlfriend for three years, I have a little more to say about the topic. For one, it has affected my relationship with my present girlfriend. One reason is that I am more aggressive when I am asleep than when I am wake. This I understand is pretty common. This scares her. A relative sexually assaulted her when she was 14 and she has never been able to totally get over it. It has stayed with her all of these years. And then I come along and begin to assault her in her sleep! We both know it is not really my “fault.” It’s just something that I do unintentionally. She is not angry with me about it—it just makes her nervous to sleep with me.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

My sleepsex did not start out to be a problem for us. I actually had told her that I do it sometimes. She told me that we would see how it goes. Now that we’ve been together for so long, and I do it a couple of times a month, it is becoming a negative thing for us because of my girlfriend’s past.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner’s, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I do not think it’s fair that she should have to be afraid of what I do and of me. I get very upset when it happens and I often will sleep in another room. She handles it pretty well, but she is reaching the point where she feels I need to see someone about it. Frankly, I am beginning to think I should see someone too. I suppose I should talk to my doctor, but I feel embarrassed about

it. I can just imagine her face. Maybe I will wait until this book comes out. Then I can take something in my hand to show her.

“Richard”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

Boy do I have story to tell. This was the first time I had ever experienced sleepsex. Nobody I have ever slept with had done it to me—sleepsex, that is. At any rate, here goes. It was late when I went to bed. My bed partner, a girl I had been seeing off and on for about a year, was already in bed and had been sleeping for a while. I was really in love with her, and I mean really in love. She was my fantasy woman. Blonde hair, beautiful blue eyes, tall and slender, but with padding in all the right places. There was nothing I wouldn't do for her. I think that I was more into her than she was into me though. I really tried to get her to love me the way I loved her by doing all sorts of things for her. One of the ways I could tell that her interest in me was fading was that our sex life had dwindled to basically nothing. She was not interested in having me touch her and would usually make some excuse whenever I initiated, or go to bed way before me so as to make herself unavailable. I could sense her disinterest and it hurt me. I tried to ignore and deny it, but I couldn't. Well this one night, like I said, I came in after she had been asleep. I got ready for bed as usual and crawled in next to her. I read for a little while and then turned out the light. I got right up next to her in “spoon” position and wrapped my arm around her waist. I love this position because I can smell her hair and feel her warmth. Plus, when she's asleep she doesn't reject me. After a few minutes, I felt her grab my hand and she began moving it all over her breasts. I was shocked, and pleasantly so, because she had not initiated any sort of sexual contact with me for a long time. I was always the one who initiated. So I just went with it. I became aroused and she seemed to sense this as she began to rub her buttocks against my

penis. So, it was happening—we were going to do it. What she did next blew my mind. All of a sudden she became very aggressive and grabbed me with her legs—backwards is the best way to describe it. I was in a reverse scissors hold. Did I fight it? Absolutely not. She was so passionate, which was so unlike her. Well I will avoid any more details because it's really unnecessary. The point is that after a while, I guessed that she must be asleep. She was much more dominant than she ever was in bed, and she was really into it too, which she had not been in a long time. Plus she would not stop for a minute to kiss and talk to me. I just let it happen because it felt good to be wanted. I did not care if she was sleeping or not. Well, right when it was getting good, she woke up. She had this very disappointed look on her face, and said, "I'm sorry." Then she rolled over and went back to sleep. I was very hurt, but a little embarrassed too because I realized that she did not want me awake, but wanted me asleep, and I was going for it sort of without her "consent."

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This affected me deeply. I confronted her in the morning about it as best as I could without appearing to be too "wounded." But I was wounded. She just blew it off and said that it had happened to her before with someone else and that I shouldn't worry about it because she doesn't. I told her it didn't worry me a bit and that I liked it because she never wants to have sex when we're awake. Then we really got into it. We had a big fight and she ended up telling me what a loser she thinks I am and that she doesn't want to have sex with me because I am fat. Well that was all I could take. I told her to get out of my life. And she did.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

The sleepsex started out being a very positive thing for me because I thought my partner was finally showing some interest.

But it was not interest at all. She was asleep, probably dreaming about some other guy. So, overall it was a negative thing for me.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

As far as I know, she is not doing anything about her sleepsex. It sounded like to me that she knew she did it all along and really did not care. For me, it was a chance to feel wanted for a moment. It really hurt me that she did not want me when she woke up. I hope that maybe she will do something about it so she doesn't hurt some other guy. We do not talk, so I just don't know. That sleepsex episode basically triggered the end of our relationship.

“David”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

I have been struggling with this disorder for some time. I cannot recall the first time it happened because there have been so many times. My current wife (I am divorced) says I do it a lot—maybe two or three times a week. I am definitely sleeping because she cannot wake me up and I do not remember what I do. I usually try to have intercourse with her. She says it is like I am on “auto-pilot” and I am a different person. The sex is hard and mechanical and she says I moan and groan and cuss. Most of the time she does not “consent” and shoves me off of her. One time I became very aggressive and was almost able to force her to have sex even though she resisted.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This has affected my relationship with my wife. She is scared to sleep with me and she sleeps in another room most of the time now.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

It has been a very negative thing for us because it is forced and it affects her sleep. I find myself being fatigued when it happens too. I do have some history of sleepwalking. But only when I was younger—maybe when I was twelve or thirteen.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

I have talked to one doctor about it. He has suggested that I do a sleep study at a hospital. So far I have not gone but I will soon. I do not know what causes it in my case. I do know that it is more likely to happen when I am stressed out or have had a few drinks. I do not sleepwalk anymore. The sleepsex is something that I have had to live with for a long time and I want to do something about it before it ruins my relationship. My wife says that she is afraid that I will hurt her or do something to one of our kids.

“Dan”

When did you first experience sleepsex, either as a recipient or initiator, and what was it like for you?

My only experience of sleepsex is when I was a kid, a teenager, that is. I was camping with friends on a small island in the Columbia River. We were all “macho” types of guys with no hint that any one among us was even close to being homosexual. Not that what happened changed my mind that much, but it certainly did make me wonder. Myself, and two friends were sleeping in the same tent. It was late and we had all been drinking. We were drunk I suppose. One other guy had his own tent and had set it up next to ours. Well this guy did something that we all thought was very strange. During the night he got up and came into our tent. He then came over to my sleeping bag and began

to try to get in. He was naked and had a big boner. This was the first thing I noticed. I couldn't believe it was happening. I just said to him "Doug, Doug, what the hell are you doing?" He didn't seem to hear me because he kept trying, and I mean trying hard to get into my sleeping bag with me. It would've been comical if it weren't for that fact that he was obviously aroused. Both of my other friends had woken up by this time and started teasing him. It's funny, but I do not think he woke up at all. He seemed confused and went outside and I could hear him urinating. Most men, this is common knowledge I think, wake up in the morning with a hard-on. I do not know why this is true—I always thought it had something to do with having to go to the bathroom. This was different because he had tried to get into "bed" with me! There was no sex, but I believe that if I would've let him in—which was basically impossible, something might have happened—on his part, not mine.

How has it affected any of your relationships with others (your partner, for example)?

This sort of affected how we viewed him afterwards. We all told him about it in the morning and he did not believe us at first. He was obviously embarrassed and did not want to talk about it. In fact, he just sort of denied the whole thing even though we did everything we could to convince him that he had actually done what we were telling him. Afterwards, we still did things with him, but always with this incident in mind. He was incredibly embarrassed and eventually stopped hanging out with us. It's too bad because he was a good guy. I think he is still in denial about it.

Has sleepsex been a positive or negative experience for you? How so?

I would have to say that this was a negative experience both for me and for him. It was negative especially for him because it was embarrassing to him and affected our friendship.

Are you doing anything about your own, or your partner's, sleepsex? If so what? If not, why not?

For one thing, he was not my “partner” he was my friend. As far as I know, he has not done anything about it. I do not think that he meant to do it. He was probably just sleepwalking. I really think that he thinks we were all just messing with him and that we are the ones who are fucked up. This is absolutely not the case. If any other guys are out there reading this, I would say do not worry about it. If you listen to what your friends say and deal with it, things will turn out okay.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

By now you have had the chance to read through many people's experiences and to learn from them. You have also read my observations. In this final chapter, I offer some basic conclusions about sleepsex.

The first conclusion is that if an individual has a sleepsex experience, and then tells others about it, some will truly believe him or her, and the rest will not. If people with direct experience of sleepsex want others to believe them, they need to get some backup. My suggestion is that such individuals should use this book (since it is the only one of its kind), or a copy of an academic article on sleepsex (see the reference section and the appendix of this book for lists of articles) to support their argument.

I do not know why some people find it hard to believe that someone could initiate sex in their sleep. As I suggested in chapter two, perhaps sleepsex simply overreaches the boundaries of what some people believe is possible. The best remedies for this disbelief are more media attention, and more academic research. The more articles that get done on this topic, the more sleepsex will become common knowledge. Once people know about it, and understand a bit about it, perhaps it will come to be viewed as something that can indeed happen to some people some of the time.

The majority of the reported experiences indicated that sleepsex was troublesome to those who had experienced it. Some

instances appeared to have posed a threat to relationships, and to other important areas of individual's lives.

The preponderance of negative experiences were submitted by women whose male partners aggressively, and sometimes violently, engaged them in sex. Men also expressed that they were distressed about their intrusive sexual behavior towards others.

Below is a summary of the negative experiences people reported. Persons having these feelings, or who had had legal troubles as a result of sleepsex, certainly were not comfortable with the presence of sleepsex in their lives.

Summary of Negative Experiences

- Annoyance, hurt, and anger.
- Fatigue due to frequent episodes.
- Prior history of sexual assault/abuse by sleepsex recipients results in fear and anxiety.
- Disturbing because initiator behaves like a "different person."
- Sex is initiated during sleep but is not initiated during other times.
- Tension, fear, and insecurity about relationship with partner because partner "turns off" when awake.
- Fear of being hurt by a sleeping partner's aggressive, even violent, behavior.
- Fear for the well being of children.
- Feeling guilty, as if one is "cheating" on one's partner because of sleepsex (e.g., in cases of sleep-masturbation).
- Embarrassment—so much so that professional help is not sought when it is really needed.
- Sexual activity is incorporated into dreams and results in dreaming of being raped.
- Sex is non-consensual and feels like sexual assault.

- Confusion and bewilderment about sexual experiences which one has no recollection of.
- Embarrassment and shame because sleepsex had been initiated with friend or acquaintance, or with a date.
- Being charged with sexual battery, date rape, sexual assault, or rape because of one's sexual behavior towards another during sleep.
- Charging someone else (a male) with date rape because one has no recollection of one's own (a female) seemingly "consensual" sexual advances towards the male while asleep.

There is no doubt that sleepsex is troubling to some individuals and couples. However, we also know that the majority of survey respondents indicated that sleepsex might be, or is pleasurable. Additionally, in many cases sleepsex was reported to have been a catalyst for enhanced sexual relations. It had even opened channels of communication, and had enhanced trust, regarding sex.

Below is a summary of the positive experiences that were reported. Persons with positive perceptions and reactions seemed, at the very least, to be comfortable with sleepsex.

Summary of Positive Experiences

- Sleepsex is more enjoyable than waking sex because of the total lack of sexual inhibitions.
- It is a good way to release stress.
- High passion.
- Increased foreplay.
- Sleeping partner has increased sexual prowess.
- A "turn-on" to be woken up in the middle of the night to being caressed, kissed, and undressed.

- Increased sexual “dominance” by females who initiate sex is pleasing to male partners.
- The ability to view it with a sense of humor.
- An opportunity to build trust and to learn about each other.

Using all of the experiences submitted I was able to create what might be called a typology of sleepsex experiences. This typology might be used to qualify a sleepsex experience as being one, or another, type.

The dichotomization of sleepsex into two classes—dark and bright—and the naming of particular “shades” of sleepsex experience does not mean that a person’s unique experience necessarily fits neatly into one class of experience or another. Rather, it could be that one’s experience cuts across some, or all, of the types.

Persons whose experience fell on the dark side typically were in distress. Their experience was not positive, and sleepsex was problematic for them.

Dark (Negative) Types of Sleepsex

- I. Aggression: Fear and Guilt
- II. Masturbation: Shame and Disgust
- III. Sexual Abandonment: Disappointment and Frustration
- IV. Sexual Vocalization and Movements: Anger and Jealousy
- V. Sexual Prowess: “He says it’s better when I’m asleep”
- VI. A Problem with Lust

In contrast (pun not intended), those whose experience fell on the bright side seemed generally unperturbed by sleepsex.

Bright (Positive) Types of Sleepsex

- I. Midnight Delight: “It’s a real turn-on”
- II. Sexual Prowess: “It’s better when he’s/she’s asleep”
- III. Growing Together: Trust and Learning

- IV. Humor: “We are able to joke about it”
- V. Passion

Taking all this into consideration, what can we conclude about how people experience sleepsex? My best answer is that it is not all good, nor is it all bad. Rather, it depends. It depends on the perceptions of the persons involved, and on the particulars of situation. A possible best case scenario is one in which sleepsex occurs within the context of a sexual relationship, both individuals enjoy it, view it with a sense of humor, and accept it as another dimension of their sex life together. A possible worst-case scenario is one in which sleepsex has caused trauma and distress to those involved, and has led to the involvement of the police. An especially bad situation would involve recipients with a history of being sexually assaulted or abused.

What to “do” about sleepsex?

So, what should a person do if they discover that they themselves engage, or a partner engages in sexual activity during sleep? I suggest that the first thing to do is to talk about it openly and frankly, if possible, with all concerned.

Individuals should try first to come to some understanding of the behavior and how it is affecting themselves and others. If one is on the receiving end of sleepsex, the issue ought to be broached in a way that won't put the sleepsexer on the defensive. Remember he or she might not recall a thing. If one is identified as an initiator of sleepsex, my best advice to such an individual is that they believe what they are being told.

Generally, partners who are able to talk openly about sleepsex, and maintain a sense of humor, and/or enjoy the sex, do not perceive it as a serious problem. At times when sleepsex is unwanted by the “awake” partner, simply shoving the sleeping person, or shouting at them to “get off” or to “stop” have been reported to work reasonably well as sleepsex inhibitors.

In some sleepsex cases, it may be more important to try to

understand the behavior than it is to treat it. However, it is a fact that understanding can only take you so far.

While many sleepsex cases may not become serious enough to constitute a problem, some may. In such instances, individuals with sleepsex should seek professional advice from a physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist who specializes in sexual and/or sleep disorders.

In general, sleepsex may tend to be treated as other parasomnias are. Shapiro et al. (1996) have also indicated that clinical management of sleepsex may include “avoidance of precipitating factors, psychotherapy, pharmacological treatment (e.g., benzodiazapines), and dealing with specific sleep problems (e.g., sleep apnea)” (p. 367). Ritalin and Klonopin have also been reported by sleepsex.org visitors as drugs prescribed to them to treat sleepsex. One low-tech solution to sleepsex may also be to sleep in separate beds, or more generally, apart from others, so that the chances of coming into contact with others are reduced.

Given the legal implications of sleepsex, it may make sense to document the behavior, and any action taken to treat it if it is a problem. If possible, this should be done in a way that might make the documentation credible in, and I hate to say this, a court of law. Some people have gotten into serious trouble and have disrupted other people’s lives as a result of their sleepsex. It is possible that if persons have documented their sexual behavior during sleep, and have records of any treatment they have sought for it, then such information may be a tool to use as part of a defense strategy.

As I mentioned in the introduction, at least one expert has indicated that people who engage in sexual behavior while asleep are at risk of being accused of sexual assault. This warning should be taken seriously.

Finally, it is important that I point out that the conclusions and suggestions I have provided here should not be construed as being hard facts or directives. Knowledge created under the most rigorous of conditions is always subject to criticism, and advice is

often found to be incorrect. If it is important to you, I encourage you to think critically about what you have read in this book, to ask your own questions, and to come to your own conclusions, about sleepsex.

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APPENDIX

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