

"FALLING" WHILE FALLING ASLEEP: SEX DIFFERENCES¹

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Informal observation suggested to us that females report the hypnagogic experience of "falling" more often than males do. We devised a 40-item questionnaire to assess how frequently "falling" and other hypnagogic experiences found in an extensive literature review (Schacter, 1976) are remembered and reported by males and females. A scale was used in which participants checked whether they "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "frequently," or "always" experienced the phenomenon in question.

Data collected from 49 male and 47 female Duke undergraduates were given stepwise multiple discriminant analysis (Dixon, 1970) in an attempt to separate males from females. The "falling" item was the single best discriminator; "falling" was reported more frequently by the females ($F = 6.92, p < .02$). A simpler cross-validation two-item questionnaire asking how often when almost asleep one remembered the experiences of "falling" and "tasting" (a control item which had not differed between the sexes in the first test) was given to 126 male and 233 female Duke undergraduates. On a four-item scale, women reported hypnagogic experiences of "falling" more often than the men ($\chi^2 = 11.40, df = 3, p < .01$), but they did not differ on the taste control item.

McKellar (1957) argued that the hypnagogic "falling" experience is a common one, based on questionnaire data. Foulkes and Vogel's (1965) experimental data did not support this assertion. Whether the sex differences in reports of the hypnagogic "falling" experience detected in our questionnaire studies will also be found in experimental investigations less dependent on cognitive factors such as long-term episodic memory and judgment is a problem for future study.

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