

## **Experiential Characteristics of Dream–Reality Confusion**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Dream–reality confusion (DRC) is the difficulty or impossibility of determining whether an event or experience took place during wakefulness or was the content of a dream. The main goal of the present exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the experiential characteristics of DRC, particularly the private concepts of this phenomenon, factors that might cause and affect DRC, as well as its consequences and strategies for discriminating memories of dreams from memories of waking experiences. Thirty participants took part in the study (21 women and 9 men), which consisted in episodic interview. The findings indicate that DRC is usually related to taking dream content for reality; the opposite situation – taking real experiences as dream content – is relatively less common. Most cases of DRC occur shortly after a dream – often just after awakening. There are two main methods of determining if an experience really happened or was a part of a dream: reflection and collation. Dreams confused with real events are realistic and usually concern common, daily routine situations. Realistic dream content is also the main cause of DRC; the dreamer’s traits, states or actions are a less common cause.

The results obtained seem to support relationships between DRC and dream recall, fantasy proneness and stress. DRC is more frequently accompanied with negative than with positive or neutral emotions, mainly with anxiety and confusion. Although DRC may entail some consequences in waking life, it scarcely affects every day functioning or self-concept. Despite some limitations, the results obtained are mostly consistent with previous research and might provide a promising direction for future investigations.

**Keywords:** Dream Content; Dream–Reality Confusion; Qualitative Study; Source Monitoring; Realistic Dreams