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“Is Lucid Dreaming Just a Phenomenon or a Learned Skill?”

Jordan H. Boldt

“I am in the middle of a riot in the classroom. Everyone is running around in some sort of struggle. Most of them are Third World Types, and one of them has a hold on me—he is huge, with a pockmarked face. I realize that I am dreaming and stop struggling. I look him in the eyes and, while holding his hands, speak to him in a loving way, trusting my intuition to supply the beautiful words of acceptance that flow out of me. The riot has vanished, the dream fades, and I awaken feeling wonderfully calm [1].”

Lucid Dreaming: (n.) a dream state in which one is conscious enough to recognize that one is in the dream state and which stays in one’s memory

Have you ever been dreaming and suddenly realize you were dreaming and could control your dream? Maybe in your dream you were walking along huge bluffs looming up above the coast, completely transfixed in this beautiful dream, but suddenly you have the realization that you are in fact, in a dream. With this realization you are aware you can do anything, because you are dreaming. So you decide you want to fly, and you step off the bluff, and soar up into the sky. This is an example of a lucid dream we all wish we could have, but the truth is, most lucid dreams may not be so light-hearted. Certain conscious decisions in lucid dreams are a lot less substantial; maybe instead of taking the left turn, you decide to go right. There are little decisions during the course of a dream that lucid dreamers have the ability to change, and along the way, they may even change the entire plot of their dream.

Sometimes people happen to “fall” into these lucid dreams without ever purposely trying to induce it. Some could say it is happenstance, others say they’ve practiced the art of lucid dreaming. So the question is, is lucid dreaming a mysterious phenomenon you happen to experience? Or is it a learned skill?

Frederik Willems van Eeden, a Dutch psychiatrist and writer, coined the term ‘lucid dreaming’ in 1913. Philosophers such as Aristotle transcribed accounts of lucid dreaming much earlier; but modern research and discovery into the phenomenon of lucid dreaming, were not introduced until LaBerge began conducting his research in 1980 [1].

“Paul Tholey describes the characteristics of lucid dreaming as follows:

- full awareness of the dream state
- awareness of the possibility of making free decisions
- clear consciousness of the dreamer
- perception of all senses
- full memory of waking life
- full memory of all lucid dream experiences in the waking state and in the lucid dream state
- awareness of the meaning of symbols” [2]

In a lucid dream, the dreamer is consciously aware that they are dreaming and are able to exert some amount of control over the dream. They can quite literally

change the course of their dream. Lucid dreams are much more realistic and vivid than a regular dream, because the dreamer is actually “experiencing” the dream. “[If] the sleeper perceives that he is asleep, and is conscious of the sleeping state during which the perception comes before his mind, it presents itself still, but something within him speaks to this effect. The image of Koriskos presents itself, but the real Koriskos is not present . . . For often, when one is asleep, there is something in consciousness which declares that what then presents itself is but a dream (Aristotle, 1952: 702ff) [3].”

Lucid dreaming is not just a “neat trick” that some people happen to be capable of doing, or something we can teach ourselves to do, it also has many therapeutic benefits. One of the biggest benefits is using lucid dreams to treat nightmares. People who suffer from nightmares have been introduced to the idea of inducing lucid dreams where the dreamer can then have the ability to change the outcome of the nightmare. The dreamer has the ability to literally face their fears and control the plot. Research showed that 2 months after experimenting with lucid dreams, most dreamers had an overall better sleep quality as well as less frequent nightmares [3]. Although nightmare treatment is the most common benefit, other therapeutic potentials are still being explored.

Lucid dreaming can be determined by three ways, the first is the more obvious way, having the dreamer wake up and be able to recount the dream. Another way to determine lucid dreaming is through eye movement signals in response to light, first discovered by LaBerge. And lastly during observations, an increase in beta-1 could be seen in lucid dreamers, which was presented in the left parietal lobe of the brain. The parietal lobe is area of the brain that represents self-awareness and semantic understanding [2].

How often can someone experience a lucid dream? Well that depends on the dreamer. Patricia Garfield said she could experience 4 to 5 lucid dreams during the course of a month. She was able to do so by simply repeating a mantra to herself before bed, “Tonight I will have a lucid dream.” Now imagine someone who discovers an even more effective way to induce lucid dreams. LaBerge created a process (MILD) Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams. This 5 step process to induce lucid dreams allowed LaBerge to experience lucid dreams nearly 21 times over the course of a month. With enough practice, LaBerge was practically able to induce a lucid dream whenever he wanted [1].

Studies show that those that participate in lucid dreaming programs, also increased their levels of dream recalls. Participants were asked to record their dreams in a dream journal as soon as they woke from their lucid dream, answer questionnaire scales, and laboratory awakenings. [4]

As Zadra, Donderi, and Pihl discuss using Tholey’s (LDI) Lucid Dreaming Induction technique, lucid dreaming can become a learned skill to those with or without prior lucid dream experience. [5] Discussed above, there are multiple experiments and techniques in which lucid dreaming can be a product, signifying the ability to *learn* how to experience a lucid dream.

Lucid dreaming was first coined as a phenomenon, mysterious, and unpredictable. As research progressed, it was discovered that the “power” of being able to lucid dream could be harnessed. With enough practice, virtually anyone could enter a lucid dream, and gain the ability to change the course of their dream. From the research

discovered, it's safe to say, this phenomenon is indeed a learned skill, practiced by many. Who wouldn't want to change a dream or two?

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