

NOTES ON: "A BRIEF EXPLORATION INTO THE NATURE OF LUCID DREAMING

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'Lucid dreaming' is best defined as 'being aware that you are dreaming whilst you are dreaming'. This piece of research draws from three sources of information: a) the author as a subject (who experienced 23 lucid dreams while research took place), b) questionnaire responses of 15 other lucid dream subjects and 15 non lucid dream subjects and c) past literature. The author looks at the dream world from lucid experiences within the dream and discusses apparent abilities and limitations of the lucid dreamer while in the dream world.

INTRODUCTION

'Lucid dreaming' is a term introduced originally by van Eeden (1913), and the most useful definition of this phenomena is "being aware that you are dreaming, whilst you are dreaming" (or perhaps an "altered state within an altered state" (Kelzer 1987, p215)). In this state, you generally have total control over your own actions, and a degree of control over your dream environment. The author's intention was to explore the nature of lucid dreaming, (for example, to see what can and can't be done within the dream world) using his own and fifteen other subjects' experiences along with previous literature on the topic. The author has a history of occasional lucid dreams, about one every six months for the last five years, since reading LaBerge (1985). He used no techniques in the past, finding that lucid dreams would just happen. Previous to this research, he wrote down the odd dream (about 3 a year). During the research (four months), he kept a diary of 138 dreams, 23 of which were lucid. It is suggested that the dramatic rise in lucidity was due to the largely increased interest he displayed in his dreams. The other subjects were taken from the Staffordshire area and especially Keele University.

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS FINDINGS

There follows six points of interest that the author found with his research into the nature of the lucid dream world

1) THE LIGHT SWITCH PHENOMENON

Hearne (1981 & 1982) reported what he called the 'light-switch' phenomenon, where light switches and other electrical components fail to work when switched on/off in dreams. He suggested that there may be a limitation on adjusting the brightness level in a dream. Moss (1989), however found that lights could be turned on (so that the brightness level of the room increased significantly) if both the switch and light were in view at the same time. This result was verified by the author. Moss suggested that if only the switch was in view, the action was vulnerable to failure. One subject in this research noted that if you need the light to come on, it won't, but if switching the light on is a natural part of going into a new room, it is

likely that it will work. The author found it possible to turn lights on and off by will-power and despite a television initially refusing to switch off, he found that he could manipulate the on/off button by willing it to move and this proved to be successful.

2) SPECIAL ABILITIES

'Abilities' are regarded here as things that can be done in lucid dreams that cannot be done in waking life. A common lucid dream ability is flying (author and 46.7% of subjects), and different people choose different ways. Examples of techniques of flying are: flapping one's arms, levitating and remaining upright, the 'superman' position, keeping at an angle between upright and horizontal, lying on one's back, jumping in huge leaps, swimming in the air. Some people, seem to have a sense of control that I call the "video effect", where they can create (or choose) a dream, replay a dream, pause the dream, stop the dream and jump into a new one, or stop the dream and wake up.

Other abilities found in this study are: intangibility (e.g. walking through walls, doors and bookshelves (called the 'phantom effect' by Covello 1984, p89), metamorphosis (e.g. changing body shape into a cat - one subject reported that she had transformed her body into fire and another time into an escalator hand rail), going 'out of body', willing things into existence and out of existence (e.g. a person of choice), willing things on and off (e.g. light switch, television), telekinesis (i.e. moving objects about by will), teleportation (either from one place to another, or from one dream to another), shooting lasers/fireballs from the body at an object/person, showing great strength, engulfing a hand in flames with no burning sensation

3) LIMITATIONS

A common limitation agreed by most of the subjects, was an inability to control waking up from the dream. Some found it hard to stop waking up, others found that they wanted to wake up, but couldn't. Two subjects found that by trying to fly as high as they could, they reached a 'ceiling point', where they could go no further. Another reported ceilings appearing in the sky, and then finding herself in a room. She found she could burst through the ceiling as if it were paper, fly up, but have to repeat the process because she found yet another ceiling awaiting her. It was also found that the speed of flying was restricted (perhaps to about 30-40 km/h at ground level), but distance could be covered more quickly by flying high and then in a certain direction. Two subjects were sometimes troubled by only being able to fly short distances. One subject reported digging as deep as he could, but soon hit a level of hard ground that couldn't be penetrated. Others found themselves "at the edge of the world looking over". Other limitations included: restriction by waking life emotional taboos, reading print difficult due to the prints' evasive nature (agreeing with Fox (1962) e.g. the words in a book changing shape, changing language, becoming blurred and illegible, or disappearing altogether.)

4) DEGREES OF LUCIDITY

Kelzer (1987, pp212-3) distinguishes between being in control over a dream and being in charge within a dream. This seems a reasonable distinction as the lucid dreamer generally

has a sense of freedom and control over himself within the dream, but controlling the environment is a different matter. It is possible to alter things for a while (perhaps by will) but the world will soon change, flipping out of the lucid dreamer's control. There seems to be little control over the dream disappearing and waking occurring.

The author found that some lucid dreams can have less "clarity" than others, where the lucid dreamer battles to retain lucidity. Other lucid dreams are very clear, and one feels in total control of one's body and thoughts. However, even when one experiences good clarity, there is still a pull to obey waking rules (moral and physical) and not break taboos. It is easy to think "I am lucid and can do anything I want", but it is sometimes hard to follow this through. For example, the author lost a contact lens in a lucid dream and spent ages trying to get the lens back in, when he didn't really need it to see. It is easy to get caught in an emotional situation, become angry or afraid, and then forget that the cause could be ignored. It is sometimes hard to realise that obstacles do not have to be treated in the same way as reality.

5) BAD PRESENCES

There is often a 'bad presence' in lucid dreams, described by some people as:

- ominous & freaky,
- inducing unease,
- suffocating,
- scary,
- something not right,
- terror/dread inducing,
- spine tingling,
- evil & undesirable
- dense,
- oppressive
- troublesome

One subject mentioned hyperventilating and groaning in dreams in connection with the bad presence. The bad presence experience is not mentioned much in the literature, though it occurred in 43.5% of the author's lucid dreams, and in the dreams of 66.7% of the subjects questioned. The author has found that he can make this dread feeling appear and disappear at will while lucid. It is very similar (if not the same) as the nightmare sensation of 'a demon' (incubus/succubus) sitting on one's chest. It is suggested that both lucid dreams and nightmares occur at (or cause) a point of heightened awareness, which is closer to the waking state than normal dreams

6) OTHER WORLD DREAMS

One subject reported that as well as having lucid dreams, he also has what he terms "other world dreams". He says that they differ from lucid dreams in that they are more like mythological world dreams which feel perhaps even more real than reality itself. He still has

awareness (ie 'lucidity') in this other world, but is unable to leave the dream voluntarily (unless via an exit or by waking up naturally) There are only a few entrances into this world, and these 'gateways' usually appear in normal dreams. Entrances include: dark damp caves, dark woods, sea or water (usually underground waterways), doors at the bottom of many sets of stairs, small doors/drawers in old houses. Most entrances are dark but can be found in lucid dreams. Teleportation seems to be another method, by willing oneself into this other world. The subject reports willing himself from a lucid dream to the 'world of the dead' (which was similar if not the same as the "other world"), where he spoke telepathically to a creature which had sprung up from a pool of water.

CONCLUSION

Is there a 'dream boundary' which restricts us from flying too high or digging too deep? Is there an edge to the dream world? These limitations are reported by some subjects, but can they be generalized? Are they dream world limitations or merely the limitations of the particular dreamer? Perhaps there are no hard and fast rules with regards to the dream world. Even Hearne's 'light switch phenomena' (1981) has been shown to be fallible.

Lucid dream research is still very much in its infancy. It is an exciting area of dream study, and being able to control dreams from within may help to speed up the work. Lucidity makes dream study more predictable and focused, and with the event of such devices as the 'Dream Machine' (Hearne 1990) and the 'DreamLight' (Laberge and Rheingold 1990), the predictability could be increased even more

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