

Lucid Dreams:
the First Virtual
Reality

Psychological

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For ages people have thought of dreams as curses or blessings that we could not prevent nor manipulate. This "place" called our dreams has constantly puzzled us, because it is here where all things are possible and seem to occur. In our dreams we perform superhuman and wonderful feats that would normally be impossible in the "awake world". We find the men or women of our dreams, depending on our sexual orientation. While we dream, these wonderful things become our temporary reality. Yet sometimes while dreaming we may experience the most horrifying events imaginable, called nightmares. Everyone has their own version of horror, my most terrifying nightmare has been where my family and friends have been taken control of by evil monsters that cannot be stopped. Rather than kill me they make me watch old 1970's television shows over and over. For years, men have thought that there should be a way of preventing or controlling these nightly events.

Humans must, like any animal, sleep. We do not fully understand why we must sleep. We only know that if we are deprived of sleep long enough that we will most certainly die. The same is true for dreams and dreaming(1). If we sleep long enough we will reach an advanced stage of sleep where our body begins to experience rapid eye movement (REM). It is during this REM period that we experience most of our dreams. Many scientists try to speculate the reasons for dreaming through biological or psychological means. This proves to be very frustrating for someone trying to find empirical meaning and truth about his or her dreams.

There are countless books written about dreams with just as many different interpretations and meanings for specific dream references. For psychics, astrologists, or psychologists who attempt to interpret dreams, there are numerous factors that must be

considered when endeavoring to find meaning in a dream. Because of these numerous factors that contribute to the condition of dreaming, many different paths have been created for exploration.

From Freud's sexual symbolism to the current random recollection theories diversity in dream interpretation abounds. However, there is a way to dream and not be at the mercy of your subconscious mind.

For the past ten years a bright psychologist at Stanford University, by the name of Steven Laberge, has been studying dreams and the physiology of the human body during the dream state. His research may sound commonplace if it weren't for the added fact that he is training people to control their dreams. His subjects are learning to become aware of their dream experience as it is happening. Once they are aware of their dream they can simply take complete command of their dream and can consciously cause anything to happen. To the semi-conscious mind the experience is virtually identical to being awake. This concept is nothing new, in fact many of us will experience at least one of these dreams in our lifetime.

There are a variety of stimuli that he uses to induce this state of mind. One method is playing a tape recording of the phrase "This is a dream" during the sleeper's REM. He may also use conditioned tactile stimuli. Light, however, appears to be the best stimulus means of providing an external cue to the sleeper that they are dreaming. This is because environmental light seems to be easily incorporated into dreams and, when properly conditioned, reminds dreamers that they are dreaming(6). Use of a special light device has been promising: 55% of 44 subjects had at least one lucid dream during one study(5). The possibilities for human progression that this concept creates seem to have no bounds.

For years psychologists and others have sought to find a perfect semi-conscious state of mind where a subject will have a strong link with their subconscious and may even interact with an interviewer using this frame of mind. Another name for this state of mind is called hypnosis. Although the "lucid" state of mind that Dr. Laberge's patients experience is not completely conscious or subconscious, they are still asleep, and the world that they are in is very detailed and just as realistic as our waking world. That is what puzzles most people who look into his research. Although not mentioned by Dr. Laberge in his studies, I think that there is a definite opportunity for a great unlocking of the secrets of the human mind.

Many practical applications exist for lucid dreaming. There are of course the obvious,

nightmare therapy, self-confidence enhancing, and general mental health improvements, but there are so many more ideas not yet explored. Some of these may include depression therapy for physically handicapped people allowing them a very real sort of fantasy fulfillment. Paralytics can walk, dance, fly, or do as they wish sexually whenever they choose. The possibilities for creative problem solving seem to be obviously enhanced. There even seems to be a great amount of possible sensorimotor practice that could possibly be used by stroke or other nerve damaged patients. And finally to quote Dr. LaBerge(1),

"lucid dreaming can function as a "world simulator." Just as a flight simulator allows people to learn to fly in a safe environment, lucid dreaming could allow people to learn to live in any imaginable world; to experience and better choose among various possible futures."

What makes humans extraordinary in the animal kingdom is our awareness of being. It is an awareness of our life and existence coupled with our advanced capacity to reason that makes us different than the other animals of the Earth. I believe that it may not only be our awareness of thought, but the exact capability of being aware somehow of our subconscious motivations. A strong sense of our subconscious can be obtained in a state of sleep where the sleeper is fully aware not only that he or she is dreaming, but that he or she is actually sleeping. Humans can now do this regularly without any type of influencing hypnotic suggestion given by a hypnotist. This state of mind seems to be more powerful than any kind of hypnosis, even self-hypnosis. I believe that somewhere locked inside our minds is an empirical understanding of our existence not just an awareness.

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