

Dreaming: Lucid and Non

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I restrict my comments to two areas where LaBerge's remarks have implications for the study of ordinary (nonlucid) dreaming (which must comprise at least 99.44% of human dream experience). The first area is the potential of lucid dream techniques in addressing problems in mainstream dream psychology, and the second is where LaBerge discusses ordinary dreaming per se.

1. LaBerge indicates that lucid dreamers can solve the deficiencies of prior attempts at correlating sleep physiology and dream psychology: unlike nonlucid dreamers, lucid dreamers can be trained to remember to perform and to signal specified actions during the dream, thus making it possible to correlated dream events with their physiological accompaniments in a highly precise way. Now, it's not surprising to me that if someone remembers that she's supposed to hold her breath and then signals that she has in fact done this, the intervening recording would indicate a respiratory pause. But does this have anything to do with mind-body relationships during ordinary dreaming, which has, on the face of it, a different organization of mental functions than lucid dreaming, and in which people aren't remembering or otherwise trying voluntarily to manipulate their real and/or imagined body state?

One answer might be that what is surprising is that people can remember that they're supposed to hold their breath, can voluntarily attempt to do so, and can signal their accomplishment to the experimenter while asleep and dreaming. Well, yes and no. Yes, they're asleep in the sense that LaBerge's data indicate all this can happen without EEG "signs" of wakefulness and in the surrounding context of dream-like imagination. But both "sleep" and "dreaming" are defined by sets of convergent indicators, ideally by the convergence of all members of these sets. At least one member in each case is psychological—e.g., to be asleep is to be unaware and unreflective in specifiable ways. If someone gives you "The Power of Being Awake and Aware in Your Dreams" (LaBerge's subtitle), then it's by no means clear to me that we're still talking about sleep and dreaming in the usual way, nor that observations from awake-aware sleep and dreaming necessarily generalize to ordinary sleep and dreaming. Put another way, when a major component of any system such as sleep or dreaming is altered, it's a different system. The kind of dream-content protocols LaBerge uses to illustrate lucid dreaming are sufficiently different from laboratory REM dreams (and from the remembered content of my home dreams) to lead me to believe that lucid dreaming is indeed a different animal than ordinary dreaming (and if it weren't, why would LaBerge so enthusiastically be urging us to change our style of

dreaming?). But he can't have it both ways; if lucid dreams are different, their immediate general relevance is problematic.

How are they different? Here, it seems to me is where the most interesting implications for ordinary dreaming lie. Theoretically, the issue is this: when you change ordinary dreaming by adding a self which intends and reflects, what else changes alongside this change? This is one way of evaluating the role played by the absence of self in ordinary dreaming, and is perhaps the point at which lucid dreaming data could be most relevant to ordinary dream psychology. However, at present, there seem to be no systematic data comparing the REM-monitored lucid vs. nonlucid dreams of the same dreamer. Lucid dream research seems to be repeating the same mistake ordinary dream researchers made a couple of decades ago: namely, it's doing all kinds of research but the most basic kind: good phenomenological description and comparison. LaBerge himself notes that not all lucid dreamers agree on the nature of lucidity, which further suggests the need for standardized data collection and evaluation—in the laboratory.

2. At several points, LaBerge's account comes to focus on ordinary dreaming. I take exception to the following of his assumptions about such dreaming.

Dreaming is more like perceiving or living life than like imagining. This assumption justifies attempts to make dreaming lucid—if this is what dreaming is, why not be fully aware? Dreaming no doubt simulates waking experience, and far better than waking imagination or mental imagery generally can. Moreover, this simulation is accomplished through recruitment of systems and processes used in perception and real world adaptation. But these facts do not refute the key observation that dreaming is symbolically instigated—that it is imaginative hallucination rather than perception. That dreaming is different from perception and life is just this way raises interesting questions for lucid dream advocates. Is it necessarily as adaptive to be self-aware in dreaming's kind of cognitive reprocessing as it is in waking sensory processing? If so, why is nonlucidity so pervasive during dreaming?

"Perceptual vividness is probably the main criterion we use to judge how real something is" (p. 89). Thus, waking mental imagery is typically not hallucinatory because it is "pale," and dreaming is hallucinatory because it's vivid. On the evidence, and on some of LaBerge's own arguments, this assumption must be false. Some people can have highly vivid episodic recollections or waking imagination experiences without hallucinating, and many people have "pale" and sketchy non-REM imagery which they take to be "real." And, the distinction between lucid and non-lucid REM imagery is not so much in the quality of its imagery as in the interpretation given the imagery. LaBerge's (and others') suggestions for inducing lucidity are techniques for altering not image quality but the quality of the interpretation or

comprehension supplied to imagery. LaBerge's "levels" of lucidity are levels of comprehension, specifically, degrees to which the dreamer has access to her or his full mnemonic repertoire.

REM sleep = dreaming. For LaBerge, if chickens and human infants have REM sleep, they dream, and the function of dreaming is formally identical with the function of REM sleep. It's surely clear by now that dreaming can and does occur in the adult human in other states than REM sleep. There also are both data and conceptual considerations suggesting that dreaming may have cognitive prerequisites making it much less pervasive phylogenetically than is REM sleep. Thus, REM sleep is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of dreaming. LaBerge's own account makes it clear that lucid dreaming occurs at sleep onset, and his observations in fact suggest that sleep onset may be a more appropriate reference point than REM sleep for lucid dream phenomena. At sleep onset, as in lucid dreaming, various features of a standard (nonlucid) dream-production system can be altered in interesting ways with instructive consequences. Because altered (or defective) operations of a system often are most revealing of its components and their functions, lucid dreaming has the same potential for elucidating REM dreaming as do extra-REM forms of dreaming. But, lucid dreaming's value won't be the sort that LaBerge promises—where observations from lucid dreaming can be generalized immediately and directly to nonlucid dreaming. Rather, it will come from the kinds of inferences we can draw from reliable differences between the two phenomena.

Reference

LaBerge, S. (1985). *Lucid Dreaming*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.