

Ethical Issues for Applications of Lucid Dreaming: An Introduction

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Editor's Note: We present here Joe Dane's cogent introductory remarks for the panel discussion on ethical issues in the 1987 meeting of the Lucidity Association. It is interesting that, in voicing his concerns about the possibility of disruptive effects of lucidity induction, he also cites an example of a clinically significant reaction from his experience with hypnosis. It might be illuminating to investigate and compare disruptive experiences from a variety of imaging disciplines, including non-lucid dreamwork. . . .

I'd like to start out by acknowledging a couple of things. One is to thank Stephen [LaBerge] and Jayne [Gackenbach] for allowing me to participate in this. I feel a little bit like an interloper. It's been a number of years since my original work, back in 1980, with lucid dream induction on nonlucid dreamers, using hypnosis, personal symbols and waking suggestion. Since that time I've shifted over to a medical setting using hypnosis with medical conditions. Nonetheless, I was originally trained as a psychotherapist and, in that context, given that that's still my main identification, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this. I should indicate, by the way, that since I'm out of the lucid dream and dream research areas, there may well be current developments or attitudes of which I am not aware. I have to acknowledge that right away and apologize right in the beginning, just in case. Again, thank you. The two general areas that seem to me a good place to start are:

1. Dream control; and
2. Is or is not lucid dreaming "dangerous?"

I'd like to do is go ahead and begin with a couple of general observations on those two topics. The first observation is a matter of curiosity and the second will be a bit of a clinical caution.

Dream Control and Media Hype

First, I'm curious as to whether or not it's really just the popular press that's pushing for the idea of what sounds like total dream control. I wonder about this because I have yet to talk directly with anyone who clearly believes that total whole-sale control of dreams by waking consciousness is a desirable goal. I'd welcome being corrected on this, but I would like to ask now just for a show of hands, and this is with all due respect. Is there anyone here who believes that total waking control of dreams is the

way to go? [Discussion clarifies that no one does.]

Well, we'll probably end up in the same place then from what I'm hearing. My concern arises from seeing lots of "dream control" in the popular press. That is what gets touted. As a matter of fact, Stephen, I saw your audio tape entitled "Dream Control." There is a problem with the position of "total dream control," which seems to suggest that dreams have nothing positive to offer in their uncontrolled state. I'm not sure that's the implication but it would seem to be that to me.

My suspicion is that the seeming differences in opinion about dream control are really based in lack of clarity, or at least specificity, in what we mean by control. Given our presumably mutual enthusiasm for dreams here, I suspect that we really all basically agree that in some cases, yes, conscious control of the dream content is highly desirable. At the same time, however, the dream may have a corrective agenda, or a message of its own which needs to be respected, which I think gets back to the point of balance, or mutual control.

If we do basically agree on these points, and I again welcome being corrected, then it just may be that the goal of wholesale conscious control of dreams is more a product of media hype than considered clinical opinion. If that's so, I wonder if we don't have an ethical obligation to actively oppose such "misverbage" in the press about the desirability of dream control, or rather, total dream control. I wonder if the ethical imperative isn't to clarify that we're talking more about conscious control in dreams, not necessarily conscious control of dreams. Not to clarify this seems logically inconsistent with our touted respect for dreams. It's also contributes by omission to the very dismissal of dreams that we all claim to oppose.

At the same time, the realities of dealing with editors and Madison Avenue types may make such clarification difficult, if not impossible. I would be interested to hear of any accounts of that kind of problem in dealing with this literature.

Potentially Disruptive Inductions

My second general observation is a clinical caution and a concern having to do with lucid dream training. This may be specific to my own experience, so I'd be interested to hear from others on this topic. My own experience is that such training can be psychologically challenging or even disruptive to some individuals who other-wise seem well adjusted. This may be due to the use of hypnosis in my study, and/or the use of personal symbols. In any event, the experience was clearly disruptive for some of the subjects despite my having screened out subjects for psychological vulnerability. I am disturbed to consider what the outcome for these individuals would

have been if there had not been adequate follow-up of their experience during and shortly after the study.

I am aware that my comments may be dismissed by some as alarmist and even proprietary—as if I am promoting the old "only the experts can deal with dreams" argument. I do not mean that. I simply find that my own experience suggests that it's useful to ask questions like:

"Is lucid dream induction ever dangerous?"

"Are there psychologically vulnerable individuals in whom lucid dream induction might be disruptive or inadvisable?"

"If so, when? to whom?"

"How does one know ahead of time?"

These are types of questions which all workshop leaders probably face with any sort of psychologically oriented material. But they seem especially pertinent with respect to lucid dreaming where rigid boundaries between waking and dream consciousness literally seem to no longer exist. They are all the more relevant if one adds the component of hypnosis to the induction procedure. I add this simply because hypnosis was a major component of the induction study that I did.

Again, my biases show. I was recently working in the pain clinic with a radicular sympathetic dystrophy patient for alterations in blood flow. During our second hypnosis session, she said "Gee! I know why I'm so good at this (i.e. hypnosis). This is what I used to do when my mother beat me!" With that she spontaneously regressed to age three when she was hiding in the closet from her mother. Over the next two or three weeks that person decompensated as she became increasingly overwhelmed by memories of physical abuse by her mother and sexual abuse by her father. She lived several hundred miles away. Fortunately, there was an excellent in-patient setting in her area with an excellent treatment program for sexual abuse, and this person recovered very nicely. She has gradually been able to separate the spontaneous state-dependent recall of the original abuse which was stimulated by the state of hypnosis (I am assuming here that her hypnotic capacity was used as a child to separate herself off from the trauma), and can now use hypnosis for controlling the pain and swelling without eliciting these memories. The point is there was a very significant clinical reaction to that particular state identified as hypnosis.

I'm not sure if "hypnosis" is as much the mediating variable of these types of

reactions as it is the person's expectations for what hypnosis can do (e.g., uncover painful memories and make one reveal them). My concern is that I have had several psychologically untrained people writing to me that they would like to use hypnosis, and that they would like to get transcripts of the hypnotic induction that I was using because they would like to use it with high school students. I think there are some cautions to be had here. While most people never experience difficulties with hypnosis, the hypnotic state can, especially with any sort of age regression, elicit highly unexpected but clinically significant reactions. Those using hypnosis should be equipped to respond appropriately and the hypnosis should be done in a context that provides genuine opportunity and expectation for redress and follow-up in the event of any untoward reaction.

Dreamer Ethics and the Unconscious

Now I would like to shift gears and simply establish some background for our later discussions. It seems useful to remember that ethics, in general, implies a host of variables, all of which may be different for different individuals. Ethical decisions imply consideration of value systems, goals, ends, means, purposes, intent, context, et cetera. In addition ethics involves, typically, a continuum from absolutism to relativism—difference between asking, "Is it good or bad?" versus, "When is it good or bad?" In short, ethics reflects one's basic philosophical stance and perspective on a host of issues.

With respect to the ethics of dream control, however, the fundamental issue would appear to involve one's beliefs and attitudes about the so called unconscious. More specifically, does the unconscious exist, and if so, what is its relationship to the conscious ego? If one accepts that the unconscious ego exists, then the next question becomes, "To what degree do I accept the somewhat anthropomorphic formula: waking consciousness = ego consciousness, dream consciousness = the unconscious?" In short, the ethics of dream control can depend heavily on one's view of the relation between waking and dream consciousness, and this in turn, on one's view on the so-called unconscious.

My own bias is that something like the unconscious does exist, although I'm more likely to call it the unaware rather than the "unconscious" dimension. My further bias is that the ethics of attempting control of dreams are the same as those of attempting to "control" the unconscious in waking life. Those who believe the un-conscious is basically Freud's seething snake pit of repressed id might well favor total conscious control. However, others, including myself, believe the unconscious has both positive and negative aspects. It is both a pit of snakes and a source of creative inspiration and vision. From this perspective the goal is to foster the positive and minimize the

negative. The question then becomes, what are the ethics of control in this process of fostering the positive and minimizing the negatives.

Further, I wonder if by "control," don't we really mean "influence," "guide," "teach," "encourage," and even "cooperate"? For example, when we look at the history of mankind, conscious control of the unconscious seems laughably impossible, yet we attempt it every day when we "work" on ourselves and our "bad habits." We say, "I must not let myself do that," as if some part of us could control, prevent or gain permission for certain behavior. To me the ethics of dream control is precisely the ethics of interaction between these so called parts of the individual.

Another major form of attempting to control the unconscious in daily life is called psychotherapy. It's precisely here, I believe, that we have a ready made model for ethics concerning dream control. That is the ethics of doing dream control are the same as the ethics for doing psychotherapy. Of course that raises all of the old questions about who knows best, the therapist or the client, about respect for the client versus therapeutic manipulation, and about overt control versus influence and cooperation. All these questions come back to haunt us in the context of ethical lucid dream induction.

Lucidity as Intrapersonal Psychotherapy

I would further like to suggest that lucid dreaming itself can be seen as intra-personal psychotherapy, where waking and dream consciousness constantly shift back and forth between the roles of client and therapist. I would like to suggest that the question, "Which knows best, waking consciousness or dream consciousness," is more like a Zen koan than a valid question, because the answer is, "both." The solution to conflict between waking and dream consciousness is resolution and integration, not, "I win, you lose." So when we talk about the ethics of dream control and lucid dreaming, I believe that we are talking about the ethics of enhancing cooperation between waking and dream consciousness, not about the imposition of one will upon the other. We are talking about the ethics of yoga, if you will, in the sense of beneficially yoking waking and dream consciousness in the service of a common goal. That goal is wholeness.

As a way to expand and flesh out the notions that I've been talking about, I would like to suggest that the process of individuation, as described by Jungian psychologists, is perhaps the best model available of what healthy ethical lucid dreaming really is. In discussions between waking and dream ego, James Hall, whom you probably know as a union proponent, states, "The waking ego is like a gate keeper which can permit or deny entrance into the boundaries which he guards, but who is helpless to command

the appearance or disappearance of a particular entrant (content), however much he might desire it." To my understanding of it, this is quite analogous to the type of limits during lucid dreaming on, "control" of dream consciousness by waking consciousness. Consider, for example, the following account of an attempt to use dream lucid-ity for complete control over the dream.

Now I realize that I can control the dream sequence. I decide I want the rain to stop. It doesn't. I wonder to myself why it's so important that it keep on raining, and what the rain could represent. I come to a platform where there are some people standing around. I go from one to another asking them, "What time does the next train leave?" But they all ignore me. It's as if I'm not even there. I begin to feel angry and frustrated but I stop my-self and think, the next one I speak to won't be like this.

Well the next character with whom the dreamer speaks not only answers her question but also provokes her to further self-analysis about the true source of her frustration and anger by responding, "Well, that depends on where you want to go." And with that the dream ends. It's as if the dream has permitted some sort of alteration or control but simultaneously maintained its own control over the presumed agenda of increasing the dreamer's self-awareness.

With respect to the process of individuation itself, Hall notes, "Individuation might be described in terms of the complex theory—Jungian complexes, that is—as the gradual reshaping of the ego under the pressure of the self so that it becomes more inclusive, and more comprehensive. In such an individuation process the contents of the ego continually shift, gradually incorporating certain non-ego complexes, such as the shadow. The reworking of the specific contents on which the ego tacitly relies constitutes the point at which the unfolding of the self through the time-bound ego, generates the observable individuation process. The point at which this process can be most clearly observed is in," Hall says, "dreams." I would suggest lucid dreams would be an even clearer example, which may be thought of, to again quote Hall, as the "metabolism of the ego."

As an example of such a metabolic processes within the lucid dream state I'd like to consider, Stephen, your very fine example that appeared in the original in Psychology Today in 1980.

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.

Here the nightmare has been controlled by confrontation, resulting in spontaneous resolution. It seems plausible that the reported waking sense of calm was a direct result, or at least reflection, of the dreamer's internal reconciliation with presumably formerly unacceptable tendencies toward hostility and aggression. Consistent with Jungian concepts about resolution through juxtaposition of seemingly irreconcilable opposites, the dreamer's lucidity has enabled him to, "metabolize" or transform the dream from one more instance of unconscious projection into a genuine integration of basic impulses.

The unique contribution which dream lucidity adds to this metabolism of the psyche is the degree to which it can facilitate and enhance this process through active conscious cooperation and participation of the waking ego. The basis for this enhanced facilitation is precisely the ability to consciously influence lucid dream content while not being able to control it completely. This atmosphere of enforced autonomy and mutual respect permits an enhanced level of therapeutic encounter between waking and dream consciousness enabling them to achieve a new level of cooperation and integrative negotiation. The ethics of such negotiation, I would contend, are the ethics of dream control.

Just to sum up my argument in simpler words, I think the most desirable and most ethical type of dream control is enhanced control over the dreamer's response within the dream, and not over the dreamer's response to the dream. I would like to add one other question that we might want to address here, and that is, if we accept the idea that dreams have an agenda, that they're corrective or whatever, to what degree does the health of the dream's agenda depend on the waking psychological health of the dreamer? In other words, to what degree can we trust the dream to guide us and direct us? And does psychopathology, as classically defined, suggest that some individuals have something so askew that even their self corrective processes are out of line and that, in fact, to induce lucid dreams in those folks would be likely to result in self-defeating phenomena? What are the implications of this anthropomorphic view of the dream's agenda, and of its own source of self-censure, self-correction?