

Relevance of Dream Lucidity to Dream Theory Via Content Analysis

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For various reasons dream lucidity has not seemed especially relevant to dream theory--partly because little or no content analysis of these dreams has been attempted, and partly owing to what I think are two red herrings: First, so much discussion has gone into whether those dreams are part of REM physiology (they do seem to be)- with so little attention given to what they are re content--that what has been missed is that they can be taken as showing a rare but often spontaneous and unsought transformation that is the opposite of what Rechtschaffen calls the "single mindedness" or ordinary dreaming and so establishes an underlying cognitive dimension on which all dreams seem to vary. And this dimension, whatever else it is, involves a progressive cognitive—abstract transformation of ordinary dreaming. The rarity and existence of those dreams are of about equal importance theoretically!

The second point of current reluctance seems to be based on a more "clinical" view (possibly correct) that since we understand little re the ultimate functions of dreams, their deliberate change or control seems questionable. But nothing need be said either way about the comparative personal value of dream lucidity in attempting a cognitive account of how they are possible.

Briefly, content analysis--both descriptive and more quantitative approaches--shows that the state of mind in lucidity is especially close to that emerging from research on "insight meditation" and out—of—body experience (although important distinctions should be drawn between "ordinary" lucidity, dream control, and various forms of pre—lucidity). While the rarity of lucidity does call attention to a normal "single mindedness," it is also striking that this dimension only exaggerates the same dimension of cognitive clarity—uncertainty or "perspective" in wakefulness. Given the overlap between lucidity, out—of—body experience and meditation (so that lucidity could not be a mere "accident" of REM arousal, whatever aid that might also provide), I do not see how the basic phenomenon can be explained apart from positing a "decentering" or "taking the role of the other" with respect to visual imagination (with reference also to Piaget's "beginning discussion of the "affective schemata" and their development). Some recent data from our lab is especially intriguing from the point of view, I've taken. First it appears that Green's early statements about the comparative realism of lucid and pre-lucid dreams were a partial function of her limited sample (from which she did some very fine classificatory-descriptive work). Instead, in the 'study with Bob Ogilvie, our lucidity subjects had very bizarre dreams compared to more typical laboratory subjects and the most bizarre reports came from prelucid episodes -- with full lucidity episodes showing either bimodal distributions or a return to nonlucid levels. Yet all of the full lucidity episodes also showed prelucidity indicators. It is important then that there is evidence that dream

bizarreness is associated with waking creativity (and a small recent study of my own -- with Theresa Casteels -- shows low level but significant correlations between subjects with high waking visual imaginative levels (physiognomic cues), dream bizarreness, and dream length, but not with a measure of waking verbal creativity (fluency in word associations). [EDITOR'S NOTE: Recent data from our lab with a measure of verbal creativity showed no difference between frequent lucid, infrequent lucid and non—lucid dreamers who were female. However, for males, frequent lucid dreamers were significantly more creative than infrequent lucid dreamers but did not differ from non-lucid dreamers -- Gackenbach and Hammons, 1982.] Accordingly, it may be that we have tentative evidence that the tendency to lucidity develops along with bizarreness (both showing a manifestation of visual creative imagination or of cognitive intelligence of some sort), and that these both appear together with “prelucidity” (scoring for Green’s criteria), while the final unstable and rare push to full lucidity would inhibit or subordinate or “use up” bizarreness -- suggesting that they may make use of the same underlying cognitive processes. Anecdotally we also know that once lucidity is stabilized, high levels of dream bizarreness can return as part of its further development.

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