

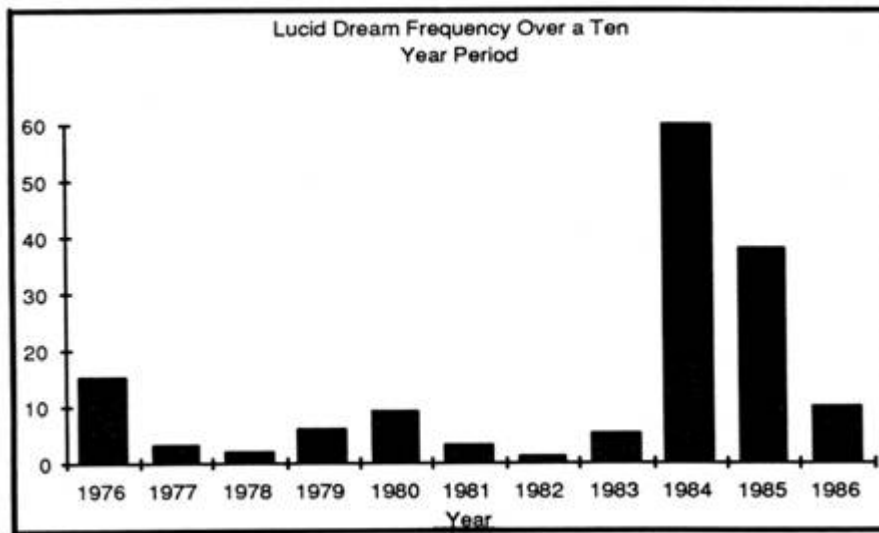


Problems at Refining the "Lucid" Label: Shooting at a Moving Target

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In 1976, when I began dreaming dreams in which I became "conscious" without waking up, I recognized that something new was going on, and wanted to know what it was called. A psychologist patiently explained to me that it was impossible that I had become conscious while I was asleep, because one is unconscious while asleep, by definition. In the spring of 1983, after seven years and many bookstores, I was relieved to finally encounter a less controversial word, "lucid", in Charles Tart's book *Altered States of Consciousness*. Later the same year I found Scott Sparrow's book on *Lucid Dreaming--Dawning Of The Clear Light*, which also gave me labels for pre-lucid and false awakening dreams, as well a number of new perspectives. In the interim, however, I continued to evolve independently, and developed a number of my own ideas. The fact that the phenomenon was completely unknown to me, and yet my very first fully lucid dream bore marked resemblances to reported dreams of earlier lucid dreamers suggests activation of a coherent organic/mental faculty of some kind. In this dream there was an immediate recognition of a new state of mind like that of waking consciousness. This judgement was made while still dreaming, felt and voiced not only by the main character of the plot where my identity resided, but also acknowledged as an achievement by other characters of the plot that embodied critical attitudes. When I made the right responses to an annoying situation, four judges begrudgingly decided I must be doing "all right" because I was still in the dream. The very first dream also found me reflecting, making decisions, feeling a great deal of curiosity about my own state of mind and how much I could directly affect the dream environment, exploring, experimenting with my own "sensory" perceptions, and testing the substantiality of the images. It was a

surprisingly long dream, I was to find out from subsequent experiences.



Fully Lucid Dream Subtypes

One of the first activities I engaged in after finding the new vocabulary was to try to sort my recorded dreams. The dreams "lucid" in my mind were the obvious peak experiences which included distinct alteration to a state more like waking than dreaming. There had emerged two other kinds that also seemed more like waking than dreaming. One version included an enjoyable sense of mental clarity but not the sense of uplifted emotion. The other bogged down in a lot of laboring mental effort, with a clouded feeling-tone like that of finishing a college term-paper after having missed two nights of sleep. Occasionally there would be dreams where the experience of lucidity was quite definite, but so brief that I could not tell which of these three subcategories best fit the experience. Lucid dreams perceived as out-of-body experiences (OBE) were very rare; usually when I saw a separate body image of myself asleep on a bed, I felt there were multiple images of myself in the lucid dreams and my "real" physical body was probably around somewhere but just an unimportant category for the time being. But none of these dreams seemed like the same type of experience as ordinary dreams, or even like the few extraordinary high dreams I knew. They also had a sense of depth quite unlike the semi-conscious edge-of-sleep "snapshots" (hypnagogic images) that had started to appear in my head several years before the lucid dreams.

Thus, the "lucid" label was a good fit for a number of dreams. The "false awakening" label was also easy to incorporate into my mental machinery because I had had an extremely vivid dream of this type 20 years earlier while baby-sitting late at night in my teens. The pre-lucid label was a horse of a problematical color, however, because here I tangled with some preconceptions of my own. At first the balance and clarity of the lucid mind state seemed to me to have little to do with a decision-making process in which you wondered if you were dreaming, and then mistakenly decided you were not. Pre-lucid

seemed an inappropriate label especially since I couldn't remember having this type of dream other than the teenage false awakening.

Two other types of relatively rare dreams seemed to me to be much more relevant to the onset of my lucid dreaming, those I labelled "ecstatic" ("high") dreams, and "focussing dreams." While in process, the high dreams did not feel like preparatory dreams, but may have been, because they largely disappeared when fully lucid dreams arrived. However, with the focussing dreams, (which I have not seen described elsewhere) there was a clear and distinct sense of "practicing" for something even while the dream was in process.

In "high" dreams as I experienced them, some image or element of the dream, the landscape or a bird, suddenly becomes beautiful usually without any alteration in form. The whole dream alters character in the same way and I seem to vibrate (somewhat mindlessly) with the image. This is definitely an altered state, but rarely effects changes in the plot other than to a temporarily halt forward movement. In several cases, I just looked out a window and shifted into this state as I saw the vibrant green scenery or the moving of the leaves. Once I saw sparrows sleeping in the bottom of a lake, rising up one by one and toe-dancing on the water, triggering off this state as they broke the surface of the water. The exquisite element of some lucid dreams is like a more reserved version of what I am trying to describe, but the strong sense of identity of lucidity practically nonexistent here.

The set of dreams I labelled "focussing dreams" had scenes in them which forced mental and visual concentration. In one focussing dream I was afflicted with tunnel-vision while crossing a street, and had to carefully put one foot in front of the other while focussing on a particular brick in the wall on the other side. In another, while lighting a cave full of candles, each would flame up more easily than the last as I approached it with a match, so eventually I just had to look at one in order for it to burst into flame. In a third dream of this kind, I dreamed I was looking at a picture in which I saw myself moving down a trail in a beautiful state park; as I disappeared off the left-hand edge of the picture I would reappear on the right. When, after several tries, I widened my field of vision to keep both sides of the picture in focus at the same time, the figures could not disappear, but began to pile up on the path. Suddenly everything joined and I myself, all-of-me, was "in the picture" (with a bad case of eyestrain which persisted into waking!). A lengthy plot went on from there.

Lucidity In Its Inclusive Form

To these homegrown ideas my reading supplied the more traditional concepts of prelucid and false awakening dreams as being indicative of lucid dreams to come. This must be true for some people, even though I had not dreamt these types of dreams for years before the onset of lucidity. Then, believing myself to have gotten everything all straightened out, I made a startling discovery. Although I had by now read the words in several contexts, by several authors, it had not registered that the word lucid was most often being used to include ANY "dream awareness" dream in which the dreamer knows

he or she is dreaming, not just those which shift into the waking-style consciousness of full lucidity. I was so busy pouncing on and amalgamating this sought-after word, I didn't notice at first that it didn't quite fit my preconceptions. (See Charles Tart's essay on terminology in lucid dream research; Tart, 1984).

Finally, I saw that the most inclusive forms of the prelucid and lucid terms as they are being used in the questionnaire-based research projects I've encountered, are based on simply whether or not a question, a bit of mental data, passes through the mind of the chief character of the plot where the dreamers identity resides. Is it a dream? If s/he THINKS of the question (or makes a statement) the dream is no longer ordinary: a right answer means its a lucid dream, and a wrong answer means its a prelucid dream. In either case the critical event is whether a certain thinking-recognizing process has occurred.

Full Lucidity Exclusive of Dream Awareness Dreams

In my own case, a smaller subset of these dreams was originally pursued as the target, based on patterns dependent on my right-brain gestalt detector, which wanted the answers, to two questions: "Am I dreaming, and do I have THAT type of waking style awareness?" Even smaller definitional subsets were based on the answers to the second question, based on energy/feeling-tone situations rather than yes/no questions. In keeping with this was the unconscious assumptions that prelucid structures rely on strengthening non-rational skills.

Having started out primarily interested in lucid dreaming in the narrower sense, and then going through the process of retraining myself to think in the wider sense had some interesting results. A certain set of dreams were made more significant, if for no other reason than other people saw them as so during the course of research projects. I began to pay attention to them more, and then the number of fully lucid dreams as well as other new dream types increased even though I was not particularly focussed in that direction. This effect is seen in the accompanying table: I participated in one of Scott Sparrow's lucid dream studies in early 1984.

The Problem of Evolution

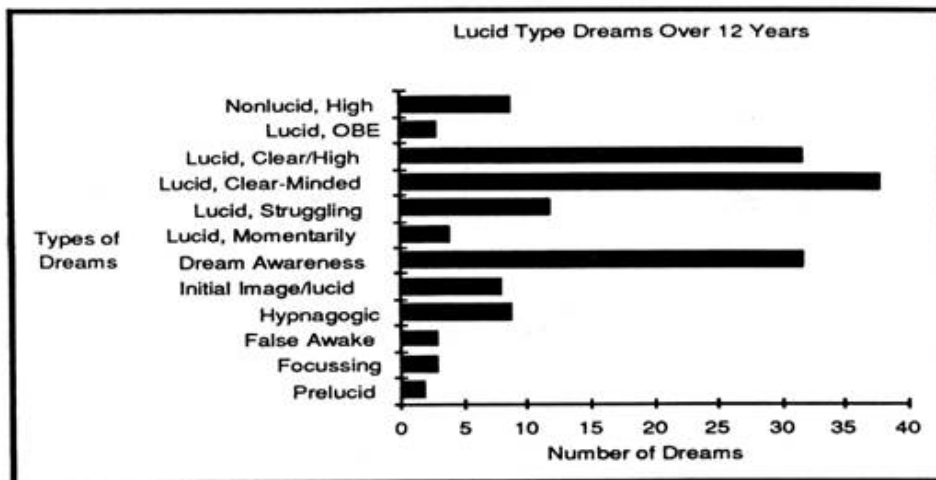
A particular problem I've found with categorizing my own dreams is that they begin to evolve as soon as any attention is paid to them. Various discrete types start to join together. To give an example, when I first started seeing hypnagogic images as I fell asleep, they were easily distinguishable from dreams, because they were all still-life snapshots with a peculiar nonsymbolic feel to them. As a result I rarely wrote them down or paid attention to them. After a while they started to include moving pictures, and developed a more symbolic, less random feel to them. Now, sometimes I can "jump in" and take part, join in the movie so to speak, which (speaking subjectively again) sometimes does and sometimes doesn't turn the experience in symbolic dream.

Of course a hypnagogic image that evolves into a dream (called an initial dream

on the chart) first emerges during drowsy waking consciousness, and develops character and lucid plot dimensions as the dreamer falls more and more into sleep. In addition, in the middle of the night while dead asleep I've had a few dreams in which "I" make a remark that some (not all) of the images in the dream are hypnagogic images, not dream images. While this is illogical in the same way that conscious dreaming might be considered illogical, it does point to a peculiar "flat" nondepth dimension in some of those types of images. Thus, even though most sources I read agree with my original felt-sense of hypnagogic images as being different than dreams, I see a distinct evolution in progress, joining these images together with "initial" lucid dreams.

The Problem of Levels of Understanding

It would be interesting to see the results of studies that painstakingly separate fully lucid dreams, hypnagogic images and lucid awareness dreams, and their various possible combinations. My own conversations on these subjects make me pessimistic about the possibility of obtaining reliable distinctions, unless, of course conveniently measurable physical analogs can be located. A ten-year-old child can understand when asked whether s/he was dreaming during the dream. The distinctions between lucidity, waking consciousness, and unconscious dreaming are far more subtle, however, and hard for nonlucid dreamers to comprehend.



When two lucid dreamers communicate on the subject, the spark of understanding flies. But when a lucid dreamer tries to query a nonlucid dreamer as to whether or not he or she has ever become fully conscious or lucid when dreaming, the answer may still be an erroneous yes because a respondent who has never had the experience may believe a mentally busy dream or especially clear dream fills the bill. S/he also may realize something different is in the air, but doesn't want to admit that s/he is lacking that particular experience. I suspect that even the most elegantly designed discriminatory studies would come back with questionable results.

References

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