

Proceedings from the Second Annual Lucid Dreaming Symposium Session 1: What is a Lucid Dream: Psychological and Physiological Considerations

Varieties of Experience from Light Induced Lucid Dreams

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This will be fairly brief for reasons you will hear shortly. I was planning to report on two content analysis studies: one on a single subject, and one on a larger group recorded in the laboratory. However, there are some problems with the group study that I will discuss later.

First of all, I'd like to say that these studies were done using the Hall and Van de Castle content scales. What both studies had in common was a comparison of lucid dreams induced without a light stimulus and lucid dreams induced by the light mask (Editors Note: For a report of early results with LaBerge's lucid dream induction device see his article later in this issue of *Lucidity Letter*). We were looking for any differences in dream content, other than the obvious existence of light in one set of dreams, that would tell us whether or not light-induced lucid dreams differ from spontaneous ones. The overall impression gathered from the single subject data was that out of 120 some scales there were 2 or 3 significant differences, which is really to say that the two categories of lucid dreams are very much alike in content. Outside of the initial lucidity stages, or the induction stages, you don't see any striking differences.

I think there is a relation between these induction differences and the kinds of differences we have found in the past comparing wake-initiated lucid dreams to the dream-initiated type. There are two distinct forms of spontaneous initiation of lucid dreaming. The first is: you are in the middle of a dream and something about the dream tells you that it's a dream, but there is no discontinuity, and, if you look at the physiology there is no indication of awakening at that point. This is the dream-initiated type. The second type involves an awakening during a REM period. There is a brief awakening that lasts from two seconds to, at most, two minutes, and the person returns directly to REM sleep and then has a lucid dream, often maintaining continuous awareness as he reenters the dream state.

If you look at the first scenes of the dreams, you find very striking differences in the content of the wake-initiated lucid dreams versus the dream-initiated. You'll find, for example, in the wake-initiated variety there are many more accounts of floating and flying, body image distortions, and reports of out-of-body experiences. Whereas, if you do the same kinds of analyses in any scene other than the first scene, there is no difference between the two types. So, it doesn't seem to matter how you get started being lucid, because you build up a context from whatever you are doing in the dream, and

soon leave the initiation scene, going somewhere else entirely, and there are no remaining large differences between the two types of dream. And this is the same as what we have observed with the light-initiated versus non-light-initiated lucid dreams.

However, there were a few apparent differences that may be worth thinking about. For the single subject, the data consisted of 18 lucid dreams induced by light over a period of a year and a half versus a random sample of 18 of her lucid dreams out of 60 that were not induced by light over the same period of time. For some reason, which I can't say I understand, there was more flying in her non-light induced lucid dreams--we'll call them spontaneous, although that's probably not strictly correct. If it was typical for her to recognize she was dreaming because of flying, then you can see that if light is not causing the lucidity, there will be more occurrence of flying in the non-light induced lucid dreams. This could be tested by doing a scene by scene analysis comparing, say, the first scenes versus other scenes, and I would predict that there would be no difference between the two induction types in that case.

There were also some significant differences in the scales of sex and friendliness. Unfortunately, these scales are somewhat mutually exclusive. You have an interaction that might be a friendly interaction, but if it's got sex in it is scored as sex and not friendliness. What we found is that the light-induced lucid dreams had less friendliness and more sex. How much sex did they have? Well, 17 out of 18 light-induced lucid dreams, and 8 out of 18 spontaneous ones included sex. Now that sounds to me like quite a lot of sex. Indeed, I was somewhat surprised that nothing like this emerged in the study Jayne talked about.

To continue now, in this single subject study, there was also a difference in the amount of social interactions in light-induced versus spontaneous lucid dreams. And there was a difference in the amount of social interactions with females. This is a female dreamer, and there were about twice as many interactions with females in the spontaneous lucid dreams. This finding also turned up in the second study, in which we compared 34 laboratory light-induced lucid dreams to 34 laboratory non-light induced lucid dreams.

I'm not going to go into detail on this study because I think it's fairly confounded by sex differences. The two groups were unbalanced with something like 65 percent females in the light-induced and only 18 percent in the other, so I believe most of the differences found are probably sex differences.

There were two other elements in the findings that I thought were interesting, and even if they did include sex differences, the scores were in the opposite direction from what would be predicted by sex differences alone. There were 16 versus 5 occurrences of aggression, combining physical and non-physical aggression, in the light-induced versus non-light-induced lucid dreams. I have a feeling that this has something to do with people's experiences with the light. People sometimes describe it as painful, that this light flashes and it represents something they have to do something about, and perhaps it gives them an aggressive impulse. Now, since the group with the largest amount of aggression was the one with the largest number of females, and since this is the opposite of what you'd expect from sex differences, it may be a real difference.

I would predict, by the way, that there is going to be a sex difference for sexual activity of females and males in lucid dreams. I don't think sex in 17 out of 18 lucid dreams is typical of males. I've seen similar accounts for four females, but I haven't seen any males for whom every lucid dream includes sex. A remaining difference in this laboratory sample is flying; there is less flying again in the light-induced sample. This is perhaps again for the reason that in the light-induced dreams there are no cases of initiation by flying, so I think these differences will disappear if the initiation scene is disregarded.