

An Account of the Physiological and Psychological Differences  
Between Lucid and Non-Lucid Dreams

A Senior Studies Report

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**To Sarah Elizabeth Borg**

**The girl who makes all my dreams come true.**

**&**

**To my mother**

**The woman who made it possible for me to dream.**

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### **Abstract**

Lucid dreaming is a state in which the sleeper becomes alert and conscious that he or she is dreaming. The actual imagery experienced in this state is often claimed to be far more vivid and full of life than in normal, non-lucid states and it is extremely difficult for even the most experienced lucid dreamers to determine whether the experience is in waking reality or not. In this state the dreamer is able to take control over what is dreamt, and the experience is most often accompanied by a grand and euphoric sense of power, pleasure and heightened senses. The phenomenon of the lucid dream doesn't fit traditional ideas about dreaming and only in the past decade has there been any interest shown in this area by the scientific community, or awareness of it in popular culture. Ten years ago many psychologists and neurophysiologists refused to even acknowledge its existence. However, through the research efforts of Stephen LaBerge at Stanford University and Keith Hearne in England, the physiological and psychological affects of lucid dreaming has been more readily examined on a scientific level.

For many years psychologists have argued over the validity and necessity of dream interpretation in therapy. The possible use of dream interpretation as therapy, and dreams themselves, has always been questioned. James L. Fossage (1981) summarized the findings of such dream analyzers as Freud with, "The psychological function that dreams serve is, as with all clinical data, the pivotal theoretical dimension that structures and guides clinical understanding and interpretation (p.249)." Within classical psychoanalytic psychology, Freud's conception of dreams as primarily energy discharging and wish fulfilling in function has undergone limited modification in theory through the development of ego psychology. Traditionally, psychoanalysts, have viewed dreams as a product of regression to an infantile mode of thinking, called primary process, wherein drives are discharged through hallucinatory wish fulfillment.

According to Fossage (1981):

Freud discovered that unconscious processes as manifested in dreams and symptom formation were ruled by a mode of mental organization different from that mode used in our conscious mental activity which he called primary process and secondary process, respectively (p.252).

These wish fulfillments are defensively disguised through the dream-work mechanisms in order to provide censorship of the dream for the dreamer. Now, in psychoanalytic theory, both primary (immediate energy discharge) and secondary (delayed energy discharge) processes, as well as unconscious ego and superego functions, are considered to be operational in dreaming. According to Fossage (1981), "Observations that dreams, at times, involve highly developed problem solving secondary-process activity can now be explained as a momentary expression of nonregressed ego functioning (p.251)." For example, Arlow and Brenner (1964) maintain that "... during dreaming the mind functions in a more primitive and infantile

way than during waking life, i.e. that during the dream there occurs a profound regression in mental functioning (p.135)."

Scientist and psychologists can say that they are far from having exhausted the possibilities of understanding the world of dreams opened by Freud, but their attention is increasingly drawn to the form and function of dreaming rather than to the dream's content. It is the form and function which reflects and helps to illuminate the disturbances in the functioning of the ego (Segal, 1983).

Freud called dreams the royal road to the unconscious, and today virtually all forms of psychotherapy use the patient's remembered dreams in the therapeutic struggle for insight and self-awareness. But only through lucid dreaming can you yourself "will" a confrontation with difficult emotional issues and try to resolve them. For the first time, this makes possible what psychologist Joseph Dane of the University of Virginia calls "intra-personal psychotherapy," in which a person enlists both "waking and dreaming consciousness" to work on their own psychological fears and dilemmas firsthand in their own mind (p28).

Lucid dreaming is waking consciousness within a sleeping state. The term Lucid Dreaming was coined by a dream researcher by the name of Frederick van Eeden, using the word "lucid" in the sense of mental clarity (p13). Gackenbach and Schillig (1992) say that, "In a lucid dream the dreamer's waking consciousness surfaces into the dream in a manner that they feel they are suddenly in possession of their normal waking memories and thoughts, but know that they are actually asleep and dreaming (p1)."

Hearne (1989) has this to add: "It is probably more accurate to say that the onset of lucidity is the switching-in of long-term memory circuitry, providing the dreamer with fuller information to assess the situation in which the dreamer finds him/herself (p122)."

Lucidity usually begins in the midst of a dream, when the dreamer realizes that the experience is not occurring in physical reality but is a dream. Often this realization is triggered by the dreamer noticing some impossible or unlikely occurrence in the dream,

such as meeting a person who is dead or flying. Hearne (1989) describes the difference in lucid and normal dream state in this way, "Usually, in a normal dream, nonsensical situations are accepted without qualm, but in a lucid dream the dreamer is as conscious as when awake (p75)." The actual imagery experienced in this state is often claimed to be far more vivid and full of life than in normal, non-lucid states and it is extremely difficult to ascertain whether the experience is a waking reality or not (Godwin 1994).

The basic definition of lucid dreaming requires nothing more than becoming aware that you are dreaming. However, the quality of lucidity varies greatly. When lucidity is at a high level, you are aware that everything experienced in the dream is occurring in your mind, that there is no real danger, and that you are asleep in bed and will awaken shortly. With low level lucidity you may be aware to a certain extent that you are dreaming, perhaps enough to fly, or alter what you are doing, but not enough to realize that the people are dream representations, or that you can suffer no physical damage, or that you are actually in bed.

While asleep the human body goes in a cycle. At the very threshold of sleep, as the muscles begin to relax, there is a transitional state, often referred to as the hypnagogic. This is distinguished by a sense of drifting or floating off, which for some, is accompanied by vivid, almost psychedelic images. Many sleepers even experience a hypnagogic startle as they literally fall asleep. This often jolts a person enough to wake them up. Once asleep the sleep cycle begins the first stage of a four stage series. The first stage is marked with spiky, rapid alpha waves, which are detected by an EEG (electro-encephalograph) which record the changes in brain-wave patterns. These gradually give way to the slower and more rhythmic theta waves of light slumber. This stage can be as short as a few seconds or as long as ten minutes. The theta waves are then joined by rapid bursts of brain activity, shown on the EEG as groups of sharp jumps known as spindles. These are synchronous with other waves known as K-complexes which show as steep inclines and deep rifts.

About twenty minutes after the beginning of the sleep cycle the large and relatively slow delta waves begin to replace the spindles and K-complexes. This marks a stage which most psychologists consider to be the really deep plunge into the void of sleep. Subjects awoken from this stage often feel fuzzy and disorientated and want to return to sleep again and report that their mental activity is more akin to thinking than to dreaming. The next stage of sleep is REM sleep. Chocroverty (1994) describes the sleep process in this way:

The first REM period lasts only a few minutes and is followed by progression to stage II, III, and IV of NREM sleep before the second REM sleep begins, which increase in duration as the night goes on. Thus, a full sleep cycle consists of a sequence of NREM and REM in which each cycle lasts about 90 to 110 minutes. Generally, 4 to 6 cycles are observed during a nights sleep (p9).

REM (Rapid Eye Movement) stage of sleep is marked by these characteristics: blood pressure rises, pulse quickens, and the brain waves become remarkably similar to those when we are awake. The rest of the body, except for the rapid eye movement and tiny spasms and twitching of the fingers and toes, becomes virtually paralyzed. It is thought that this is nature's way of protecting the sleepers by preventing them from taking violent action which might be appropriate to whatever was being dreamed. This paralysis may have evolved to limit sudden movement by a sleeping animal which might alert a nightly predator. A person abruptly awoken from REM sometimes has difficulty moving for a few seconds. This phase of paralytic immobilization seems to be controlled by nerve centers in the primitive brain stem. This state might account for many of the nightmare situations in which the dreamer is being chased or trying to move within a dream and finds their limbs are being dragged or slowed.

Upon hearing about lucid dreaming for the first time, people are often intrigued but once they have learned a little more about it they often question what it's purpose is. On the surface lucid dreaming can come off as being merely another avenue for



entertainment, a built in "virtual reality game" so too speak. The first thing that attracts people to lucid dreaming is often the potential for adventure and fantasy fulfillment. Flying is a favorite lucid dream enjoyment, as is sex. Many people have said that their first lucid dream was the most wonderful experience of their lives. A large part of the extraordinary pleasure of lucid dreaming comes from the exhilarating feeling of utter freedom that accompanies the realization that you are in a dream, where there will be no social or physical consequences of your actions. If you consider that in dreams, you know you are dreaming, you are in principle free to do anything, and restricted only by your ability to imagine and conceive, not by laws of physics or society, then certainly it can be seen as an entertainment outlet. This uncontrollable arena also allows for much more since a person is given an environment in which anything and everything is possible. It may be easier to provide a sample of what some people have been able to achieve with lucid dreaming than to give a definitive answer of its potential uses. Here is an example from Stephen LaBerge (1980):

I realized I was dreaming. I raised my arms and began to rise. I rose through black sky that blended to indigo, to deep purple, to lavender, to white, then to very bright light. All the time I was being lifted there was the most beautiful music I have ever heard. It seemed like voices rather than instruments. There are no words to describe the JOY I felt. I was very gently lowered back to earth. I had the feeling I had come to a turning point in my life and I had chosen the right path. The dream, the joy I experienced, was kind of a reward, or so I felt. It was a long, slow slide back to wakefulness with the music echoing in my ears. The euphoria lasted several days; the memory, forever (p3).

Unfortunately for many people, instead of providing an outlet for unlimited fantasy and pleasure, dreams can be dreaded episodes of limitless terror. Unreasonable fear can be defused by facing up to the source, or going through with the frightening activity, so that you observe that no harm comes to you. In a nightmare, this act of courage can take any form that involves facing the "threat" rather than avoiding it. Lucid dreaming may well be the basis of the most effective therapy for nightmares. If

you know you are dreaming, it is a simple logical step to realize that nothing in your current experience, however unpleasant, can cause you physical harm. There is no need to run from or fight with dream monsters. In fact, it is often pointless to try because you have conceived the horror in your mind, and it can pursue you wherever you dream yourself to be. The only way to really "escape" is to end your fear; as long as you fear your dream, it is likely to return. The fear you feel in a nightmare is completely real; it is the danger that is not (LaBerge 1990). Here is one of LaBerge's case studies:

For example, one young man dreamt of being pursued by a lion. When he had no place left to run, he realized he was dreaming and called to the lion to come and get him. The challenge turned into a playful wrestling match, and the lion became a sexy woman. Monsters often transform into benign creatures, friends, or empty shells when courageously confronted in lucid dreams. This is an extremely empowering experience. It teaches you in a very visceral manner that you can conquer fear and become stronger thereby (p192).

Lucid dreaming can also help people achieve goals in their waking lives. There are many examples of ways that individuals have used lucid dreams to prepare for some aspect of their waking lives. Some of these applications include: rehearsal of exercises or skills, creative problem solving, artistic inspiration, overcome sexual and social problems, coming to terms with the loss of loved ones, and physical healing. If the possibility of accelerated physical healing, suggested by reports from lucid dreamers, is born out by research, it would become a tremendously important reason for developing lucid dreaming induction abilities.

According to Tholey (1989): "Methods for inducing lucid dreams fall into two groups: those which enable one to achieve lucidity and those which enable one to retain it (p79)." The ability to have lucid dreams may be within the reach of most human beings. Research on individual differences has not turned up any factors of personality or cognitive ability that substantially predict lucid dreaming frequency. So far, the only

strong predictor of frequent lucid dreaming is high dream recall. This is good news for those interested in lucid dreaming, because it is fairly easy to increase dream recall.

There are also, two pre-sleep psychological factors that have been associated with the frequency of the occurrence of lucid dreams: motivation of the dreamer to have lucid dreams and intention of the dreamer to remember to be lucid during the next dream.

Developing dream recall is the most important prerequisite for learning lucid dreaming, as mentioned above. There are probably two reasons for this. One is that if you do not remember your dreams, you are unable to study them to discover what about them could help you realize that you are not awake. Another is that you might have lucid dreams without knowing it, because you do not remember them. The core of recall exercises are keeping a dream journal, and writing down everything you recall about your dreams, no matter how obscure or fragmented. It is not good to wait until morning to take notes on dreams recalled in the middle of the night because, no matter how clearly they are at the time, they are probably going to disappear entirely from your memory by the time you get up in the morning. Plus, because you have around 4-6 trips through the sleep cycle you are likely to have more dreams before you wake again in the morning. Thus, you should also write down dreams first thing in the morning, before you even think about anything else.

Another dream-recall related exercise is identifying "dreamsigns". Dreams in general seem like life, with some certain notable exceptions. These exceptions are violations of normal expectations about the behavior of the world. So, the need to get to know what our individual dreams are like, and in particular, what is dream like about them that is important. This can be accomplished by collecting a journal of dreams and analyzing them for dreamlike elements. These particular elements are called "dreamsigns". Dreamsigns are peculiarities that appear often enough in a person's dreams to be reliable signposts of the dream state. By studying their dreams one can

become familiar with their own personal dreamsigns and set their mind to recognize them and become lucid in future dreams.

Researchers and dream enthusiasts have developed a number of techniques for inducing lucid dreams. The simplest of them is the reality testing technique. Questioning the reality of the environment five to ten times a day puts a person in the habit of testing the dream state. In Tholey's opinion (1989), "If a subject develops while awake a critical-reflective attitude toward his momentary state of consciousness by asking himself if he is dreaming or not, then his attitude can be transferred to the dream state (p82)." Another way of testing reality is to wear a digital watch or write a "C" on the palm of the hand, and check it every so often during the day. If the time on the digital watch looks distorted or the "C" has changed in any way then the person is dreaming. Because in the dream state the brain has no external material object to view time or the "C" on the palm from the objects begin to break down, change, or deteriorate.

Here is a more in-depth list of specific techniques for inducing lucid dreams as described by Paul Tholey (1989):

**The Image Technique**--In this technique the subject concentrates while falling asleep only on visual images. Although there are considerable differences among individuals, the following sequence of images has been frequently observed: Initially the subject sees flashes of light and rapidly changing geometric forms. Then come images of objects or faces, until finally complete sceneries are constructed which at first only flash in and out, but then later become more stabilized.

**The Dual Body Technique**--With the aid of this technique, which is comparable to the so-called astral projection, it is possible to produce a variety of out-of-body-experiences. The subject detaches themselves from the immobile body by means of a second body, the 'astral body'. In contrast to esoterical views we should emphasize that we are discussing dream-like experiences and not real processes. The only important thing is to imagine intensively that one has a second, moveable body with which one can float out of, fall out of, twist out of, or in some other fashion detach oneself from the immobile body. After separation from the immobile body, the second body, which is initially 'airy' or 'etherical', solidifies until it appears to be completely identical to the usual waking body.

**The One-Body Technique**--The one body technique is simpler-one merely makes the immobile body (appear to be) moveable again. The subject attempts to imagine that he is in a different situation or in a different place from the physical body, which is sleeping in the bed. It is relatively easy to bring about this experience because one receives in this state hardly any sensory information concerning the physical world.

**The Image-Body Technique**--In this technique, the subject concentrates not only on the visual images but also equally strongly on his own body. If the subject suggests to himself in a relaxed state that his own body is light and can move freely, then it can occur that his phenomenal body begins to move. It seems to glide into the dream scenery or even to drive or ride into it, if an appropriate vehicle is imagined. In the initial stage the subject observes a moving pattern of dots; later, when a scenery is established, he sees, a wandering herd of sheep, a passing flock of birds, or something similar. One seems to be put into a dream scenery in which one can freely move, similar to the feeling in the method mentioned above

**The Image-Ego-Point Technique**--This technique differs from the preceding one only in that the subject also concentrates on the images seen while falling asleep. If a visual dream scenery has become established, then it is possible to travel into this scenery. The ego-point can under certain circumstances enter into the body of another dream figure and take over its 'motor system'.

The lucid dream induction techniques are designed to help people achieve lucidity by giving them the capability to place themselves in a lucid dream state and retain it by testing their state of consciousness. It is difficult to obtain a truly representative measurement of the effectiveness of the techniques. Nonetheless, research with various versions of the techniques have shown that it definitely helps people have more frequent lucid dreams.

To evaluate the process of initiating a lucid dream technique I decided to experiment with one of the given techniques. I chose the Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams (MILD) technique developed by Dr. Stephen LaBerge for his Ph.D. dissertation. This technique is one of the most powerful and easiest to learn and engage in. I also chose this technique because of the short period of time I had to work with. The MILD procedure is explained by LaBerge as follows (1990):

**1. Set up dream recall**

Before going to bed resolve to wake up and recall dreams during each dream period throughout the night or whenever it is convenient.

**2. Recall your dream**

When you awaken from a dream period, no matter what time it is, try to recall as many details as possible from your dream. If you find yourself so drowsy that you are drifting back to sleep, do something to arouse yourself.

**3. Focus your intent**

While returning to sleep, concentrate single-mindedly on your intention to remember to recognize that you're dreaming. Tell yourself, " Next time I'm dreaming, I want to remember I'm dreaming. " Really try to feel that you mean it. Narrow your thoughts to this idea alone. If you find yourself thinking about anything else, just let go of these thoughts and bring your mind back to your intention to remember.

**4. See yourself becoming lucid**

At the same time, imagine that you are back in the dream from which you have just awakened, but this time you recognize that it is a dream. Find a dreamsign in the experience; when you see it say to yourself: " I'm dreaming! " and continue your fantasy. For example, you decide that when you are lucid you want to fly. In that case, imagine yourself taking off and flying as soon as you come to the point in your fantasy that you realize you are dreaming.

**5. Repeat**

Repeat steps 3 and 4 until your intention is set, then let yourself fall asleep. If while falling asleep, you find yourself thinking of anything else, repeat the procedure so that the last thing in your mind before falling asleep is your intention to remember to recognize the next time you are dreaming (p65).

My test components included:

Place: Saint Meinrad College (my own room)

Dates: February 1st-14th

Subject: White, 21 year old male (myself)

Environment: Dark, quite, slightly warm, and comfortable

Technique: Mnemonic Induction of Lucid Dreams (MILD)

Preparation: For 1 month before testing I kept a dream journal to increase dream recall.

2/1/96 Attempted MILD technique for the first time, but I'm so tired that I lose myself in thought about some other things and drift off to sleep. Waking I realize I've had my

first lucid dream. Stephen LaBerge had mentioned in some of his case studies that he had reports of beginners luck and I guess I'm living proof. Here is the dream:

I was at my home town of Madisonville near my church. It was a dark and dreary dream (I believe it was raining). A woman and man, whose faces I cannot remember, but were familiar to me, were trying to put a padlock necklace looking device around my neck to turn me into a mindless zombie that they could control. I ran away and hid in a scrap yard. I ducked behind some 55 gallon drums when I saw head lights coming towards me. I knew in my mind that they would eventually find me and that there was no where I could hide. At that moment (almost like instant clarity) I realized I was dreaming. For an instant I felt as though I was actually squatted down behind these drums and could hear the rain and feel the ground beneath my feet. I then made a conscious choice to leave the dream and wake up (I did this so that I would not get caught). I woke and checked my alarm clock and it had 30 minutes left to go before it was to ring.

This lucid dream would be classified as low level lucidity, since I was only able to become conscious but not able to alter or control anything in my dream other than my willingness to leave. I left, however, because I was afraid I of being caught by the people chasing me, so I was still unable to realize that no harm could come to me. These are all typical components of a low level lucid dream.

2/13/96 My second lucid dream was more intense and successful than my first. I was able to keep my mind on the thought of having a lucid dream, keep my body relaxed, and allow my mind to put pictures before my closed eyes. The awakening was not as revelational as I had thought it was going to be, but there was certainly an "awakening" within me. I thought I was in the "real world" yet knew I wasn't. (Hard to put into words actually). However, I was unable to contain my control and I had it only momentarily. Here is the dream:

I was standing on a cliff (cliffs of Dover I think) and there was a castle behind me. When I felt the breeze hit my face and the ocean and all my other senses become active I instantly became conscious that I was asleep. I pulled a boulder from the side of the castle and chucked it into the ocean. Once the boulder hit the water I was taken from the cliff and put on top of the boulder. Here I lost control, but retain my awareness. I was sinking with the boulder in the ocean and I began to see scenes from the movie Waterworld, which I had seen for the first time a couple of nights before. I saw the remains of buildings under water, just like in the movie. I was awoken when I felt a cable pull upon the boulder which shook me awake, literally. I awoke and felt as though I had a normal dream though the experience seemed much more real than my normal non-lucid dreams.

Initiating lucid dreams, in a way, is like a double edged sword. It entails much concentration and focus, but if you focus too much or concentrate too hard then you will not be relaxed enough to allow your imagination to set the dream scene, or possible cause a mental block. Too much concentration could impede rather than assist in bringing about a lucid dream state. I found this to be true as I had a great deal of difficulty trying to follow through with the MILD technique. Along with concentration much time is needed to allow one to get into the rhythm of the technique. An inexperienced lucid dreamer cannot expect to just hop right into a lucid dream with the use of a technique in one night or even one week. All other factors in an individuals life must be placed on hold and/or in good standing, so that no distractions are taking away from the concentrated task of attempting to lucid dream. I learned through my experiment that a person must be willing to put the time and effort into the lucid dream technique, and anything else would produce little results.

Still, once you have accomplished a lucid dream does not necessarily mean you will retain it. I lost control of my last lucid dream and left hastily in my first. So the problem does not end at having a lucid dream, but extends also into retaining and



remembering them. It is even possible that you may have a lucid dream and not remember it in the morning. Again, there are techniques one can learn that would assist in retaining and remembering the lucid dream.

The question then becomes, " Should we continue to explore and practice lucid dream induction techniques? " Could this lucid dream clarity, energy, and sense of renewed vitality be compared to the euphoric "buzz" or "high" experienced in drug use? Is lucid dreaming simply another avenue of escape discovered by psychologists to evade everyday conflicts? Lucid dreaming experiences have been compared, by some psychologists and neurologists, to the delusional state of mental patients who cannot distinguish reality from non-reality, which is common to schizophrenics. This statement is supported by Godwin (1994):

Both the lucid dreamer and the psychotic appear to have experiences of an awesome state, often cosmic in dimension, in which the subject is surrounded, and even penetrated, by threatening forces of both good and evil. These must be placated, fought or communicated with, in order to survive. To both the lucid dreamer and the psychotic the whole of Nature, and its parallel spiritual dimension, is teeming with spirits, gods and powers, with each and every object having its own unique life and place within the cosmic scheme of things (p100).

Gackenbach and Bosveld (1992) observed that, "Paradoxically, the pleasure of lucid dreams, together with the power of the conscious mind to control them, may lead dreamers into the habit of turning nasty dreams into sweet ones. The very appearance of consciousness contaminates the dream with the attitudes and coping strategy than are employed by the dreamers while awake (p28)." However, lucidity and control in dreams are not the same thing. It is possible to be lucid and have little control over dream content, and conversely, to have a great deal of control without being explicitly aware that you are dreaming. Nonetheless, becoming lucid in a dream is likely to increase your deliberate influence over the course of events. Once you know you are dreaming, you

are likely to choose some activity that is only possible in dreams. You always have the choice of how much control you want to exert, and what kind. The single most destructive advice is to encourage people to manipulate their dreams to have happy endings. Gackenbacka and Bosveld say, "I encourage people to use lucidity to explore the dream rather than to control it (p28)."

On the other hand, the easiest and wisest kind of control to exert in a dream is control over your own behavior. This comes in especially handy in nightmares. In this regard Gackenbach & Bosveld (1992), and other psychologist believe it is often better for people to start up terrified from a nightmare than to awaken calm from a lucid dream that the dreamer has sugarcoated. Erik Craig (1986), a Massachusetts-based existential psychologist, worries that lucidity may serve as:

a narcissistic flight from one's fuller, though perhaps less appealing, possibilities. A high school student who dreamed that her father was a ship's captain oblivious to a raging storm that threatened to sink his vessel. At this point, the woman turned lucid: She realized that she could stop the storm and did so. This made her feel great, but by altering the dream the woman was avoiding her distress over her father's alcoholism. Lucidity allowed her to bolster her defenses against the awareness of these painful but important truths (Gackenbach & Bosveld p28).

The nightmare forces the dreamer to recognize that he/she has some conflict or trouble in their life. If you become lucid in a bad dream, you could try to do magic to escape the situation, but many times this does not work very well. Stephen LaBerge believes that, "It is generally much more effective, and better for the dreamer psychologically, to recognize that, because they are dreaming, nothing can harm them. Their fear is real, but the danger is not. Changing attitude in this way usually defuses the dream situation and transforms it into something positive (p25)."

Other psychologists like Paul Tholey (1989), of the University of Frankfurt in Germany, support Stephen LaBerge (1990) and has also done research in lucid dreaming. Tholey has found that lucid dreaming has several therapeutic advantages.

First, lucidity seems to create an environment in which the dream ego is less afraid of threatening figures or situations and is more willing to confront them. Second, the ability to manipulate dream content allows the dream ego to get in touch with places, times, situations, and persons that are important to the dreamer and that he/she desires to investigate or confront.

The trouble with lucid dreaming is that it steadily places the dreamer in more and more unknown territory and often disturbingly far from the safety of familiar surroundings. The reason for this is because the techniques for inducing lucid dreams focus upon putting an individual in a state where they have seemingly magical abilities, see colored auras, have intuitive glimpses of the future, or enter ecstatic trances and have out-of-body experiences. This activity is certainly not a recommended practice for the wary, timid, or unstable. Because of the possible ill effects it is certainly necessary for more research to be conducted upon the long-term effects of lucid dream practice. Still, despite the present limitations of lucid dreaming and its research as a therapeutic technique, it can nevertheless be a valuable tool for level-headed individuals seeking self-understanding. And what about the estimated 58% of men and women who will spontaneously experience a lucid dream at least once in their lives? Just remember not to take yourself, or your dreams, too seriously. After all they are only dreams.

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