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Description

Researchers at Stanford University are studying the phenomenon of lucid dreaming -- where the sleeper can actively manipulate and participate in their dreams -- and are teaching people how to use it to their benefit.

Keywords

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Citation

MLA
How to Have Lucid Dreams

MARIA SHRIVER, anchor:

Well as we’ve seen, some people seem able to channel their daydreams into positive results. But what about real dreams? Well, doctors at Stanford University have been looking at the activity that actually occurs in the sleeping brain. And as Keith Morrison reports, they’ve enabled people to communicate from inside the world of dreams.

MIKE LaPOINTE: My first thought was boy, that’s really odd.

KEITH MORRISON reporting:

We are reporting, needless to say, from California.

LaPOINTE: I wanted to fly to Mars.

MORRISON: Just the same, in a couple of minutes, what this man is doing may actually make sense.

Unidentified Woman: Until I met you people, I’ve never tried flying.

MORRISON: At least I hope it will.

LaPOINTE: Can I take these off now?

MORRISON: Yes, please do. But understand, Mike LaPointe is not crazy, he is a frontiersman, a pioneer, as is Milt Wolpin.

MILTON WOLPIN: We’re deviants. We’re deviants. Maybe a little creative, who knows, I don’t know.

MORRISON: Actually, these people can afford self-mocking because they’re on to a perfectly fascinating something. They are unlocking the barriers of sleep, they are walking on dreams.

LaPOINTE: We’ve had--we’ve some really nice letters from quadriplegics, who say, “You don’t know what it means to me to be able to run and to dance, and again, to me, it feels just as real as it does when it did when I could walk.”

MORRISON: Scientists have been working at this for a long time now. For fifty years, they’ve been wiring up sleep-deprived college students, counting alpha waves and rapid eye movements and so on, and so on. We’d be stretching it to call Dr. William Dement the father of sleep in this country, but he has certainly found out some amazing things about that one third of our lives.

Dr. WILLIAM DEMENT: Most of us now believe that the brain during sleep is doing probably as many
things as it’s doing in the waking state. And, you know, it’s just a different, in different I think in the most incredibly exciting sense, I mean really different.

MORRISON: A lot of this came out of Stanford University, where Dement looked at sleep disorders such as narcolepsy, that reflex of falling asleep when confronted with stress. But I digress, forgive me. The story here is about dreams, lucid dreams.

Dr. STEPHEN LEBEAR: OK, we’re going to be measuring eye movements and brain waves from Michael while he’s sleeping.

MORRISON: And the key figure here is a man named Stephen Lebear. In this presentation he’s preparing his assistant, the fellow in the goggles, to have a lucid dream. In other words, Mike LaPointe will be fully asleep and fully conscious at the same time.

LaPOINTE: Comfortable.

Dr. LEBEAR: Good, good night, pleasant dreams, good luck.

LaPOINTE: Good night.

Dr. LEBEAR: While Michael’s asleep in the next room, we’re monitoring here, all night long, all of his physiology that will tell us when he’s dreaming. So we measure eye movements and brain waves. These two channels are the left and right eye movements, and this bottom on here represents the light signal. When he shows rapid eye movements, his eyes are darting around, we know that he is dreaming. At that point, we turn on the flashing light, which then enters into his dream, and if his mind is at all functioning, he says, “Ah, that’s the flashing light from the dream light, and so I must be dreaming.” So then he becomes lucid and then is able to control his dream.

LaPOINTE: I was in a non-lucid dream, I didn’t know that I was dreaming, and I was walking down a beach, and suddenly the sun started to rise and set above the ocean, four times a second, as fast as the lights were flashing. And I immediately looked at that and first-- my first thought was, “Boy, that’s really odd.” And then it struck me, “Oh, that’s because I’m in a dream, and that’s the dream light.”

Dr. LEBEAR: He then signals to us by moving his eyes left-right, left-right, like that and we see it here on the computer screen.

LaPOINTE: We used a pre-arranged eye movement signal which tells the people in the--in the laboratory that the dreamer knows that he or she is dreaming.

MORRISON: Amazing? Yes. And it seems to have the added benefit of being true.

Dr. DEMENT: In REM sleep, the brain is more active than the waking state. And so, you know, the big exciting question is what’s it doing? But no one could--could grasp the concept that the brain could be as active as the waking brain, with the EG pattern’s looking just like wake movements, and yet be asleep.

MORRISON: Milt Wolpin’s world is by comparison, determinedly low-tech.

WOLPIN: Well there’s a man by the name of Paul Foley from Germany, who reports that he worked with I think around a hundred subjects. And he had them say to themselves, ten to fifteen times a day, “Am I dreaming or not?” And he reported that around ninety percent of them became lucid dreamers within a month.

MORRISON: No labs, no sleep-starved students, only surveys. And even after thirty years of clinical psychology, Wolpin is surprised to find how many tell him they can do this already. His initial studies
have been expanded to include sessions with people who dream lucidly all by themselves. Hans Pencil for one.

HANS PENCIL: Well, if it--if it were unpleasant, I’d try to make it pleasant.

WOLPIN: And you could?

PENCIL: Yes, right. If I felt trapped in a room, “OK, I don’t want to be trapped in my dream,” so the walls disappeared.

WOLPIN: Right.

PENCIL: And the--the flow of the dream changed, you know.

WOLPIN: Right.

PENCIL: And then let’s say after a while I get into another unpleasant situation, well I could change that again. Very often I could change from simple black and white to color.

MORRISON: And Betsy Pegg.

BETSY PEGG: I’m smiling because I have one sort of favorite nightmare. There’s a pla…

WOLPIN: You have a favorite nightmare?

PEGG: Yes. The pla-- There’s a place in the house I grew up in, it’s an old wine cellar, and I was always afraid of it as a child and for some reason it’ll come up in my dreams and I’ll feel myself walking towards it and I get almost there and it’s down in a subbasement and I realize where I’m going, and then I’ll just say, “Oh, I know what I’m doing.” That’s enough of this, and I can really--I’m lucid enough that I can force myself into something different.

MORRISON: And says Wolpin, it appears most people can train themselves to dream lucidly, with no scientific hardware.

WOLPIN: I’ve done it to myself, and within ten days, I had three lucid dreams.

MORRISON: And to what end? Well, to practice your tennis backhand if you want, or work out some personal dilemma in the safety of a dream, or just have fun.

WOLPIN: Uh, as you might suspect, one of the major things that people like to do in lucid dreams is have sex.

MORRISON: And some things that may be even more important than that.

LaPOINTE: One of the real important things about lucid dreaming is for the first time, we can have people who are conscious and communicating to the physical world from within the dream state, and you can learn about a lot of powerful things from that.

MORRISON: We were not surprised to find that this man has both spiritual and commercial goals in mind. This summer LaPointe and Lebear plan to teach lucid dreaming. Teach it. And next year market a home version of the dream goggles, which we can only assume will give new meaning to the phrase, “I’ll sleep on it.” Keith Morrison, NBC News, Los Angeles.

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