

Lucid Dreaming: Future of Mental Disorder Treatment

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ABSTRACT

Lucid dreaming is a dream when the dreamer is conscious of the fact that he or she is dreaming and can gain control over the activities within the dream. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the potential clinical approaches of lucid dreaming as it provides the lucid dreamer with many benefits revolving around mental well-being. Research evidence that lucid dreaming might contribute to mental and physical health hasn't been widely reported to the public yet. However, using lucid dreaming with a therapeutic purpose on a handful of research participants, it has been clear that it improves self-esteem, which positively impacts one's mental health, as well as creativity due to increased activities while lucid dreaming. Since sleeping is also associated with other psychological and physical benefits, lucid dreaming is quite a harmless treatment compared to other medications. Lucid dreaming is a potent technique to treat mental illnesses and improve patients' conditions.

Keywords: Lucid dreaming, mental illnesses, therapy.

Subject: Psychology

INTRODUCTION

A dream can be another reality. In fact, lucid dreaming is when the dreamer is fully conscious that he or she is dreaming; thus, having control over what happens in that particular dream. Possibly, lucid dreaming can have therapeutic purposes for mental health patients with some conditions without a definite cure. In one study, it was shown that the technique of lucid dreaming was associated with alleviating mental health and self-confidence by having dominion over the events in the "alternate reality" (Doll et al., 2009). The study shows the potential for the growth of this technique, and how it can be further developed into a treatment for people suffering from mental disorders. Additionally, another study clearly shows how lucid dreams can help a patient's psychological resilience after a traumatic event (Soffer-Dudek et al., 2011). The approach presented here is thoroughly backed up with evidence and reasoning. This paper argues that the method of lucid dreaming can potentially be a solution to better multiple mental illnesses considering the positive effects lucid dreaming can have on human minds. It initially demonstrates the beneficial influences on the human brain, then discusses the multitudes of advantages of the results proposed, and finally states how modern medicine can move forward with the use of lucid dreaming. Promoting increased self-confidence and creativity, the practice of lucid dreaming lessens anxiety and can be therapeutic, and it can potentially develop into a new treatment for mental illnesses that we do not have a cure for yet.

METHODOLOGY

The information in this research paper is collected from previous research done by professionals. The sources have been checked thoroughly to determine their credibility and relevance to the topic, and the researches vary in the years they were conducted to provide changing viewpoints toward the topic matter. Although the paper lacks first-hand experience of the matter since it is medical-related and requires many professional techniques, the research referenced below shows plentiful careful observations when patients were experiencing lucid dreaming for medical purposes. The topic of lucid dreaming is still under the veil for the wide public; thus, some resources limit its potential. However, the conclusion drawn from this research paper provides valid points that answer the question of why lucid dreaming is essential to the field of neurology and treating mental illnesses.

Lucid Dreaming and Mental Health

Research has continuously shown that the practice of lucid dreaming has a positive impact on one's self-esteem in real life—bettering one's mental health. Research conducted a decade ago showed that frequent lucid dreamers had better mental health, fewer complaints, and increased self-esteem (Doll et al., 2009). Being aware of the fact that one is dreaming means that one can control what happens in the dream. Just like the sense of achievement when something goes as planned in real life, having everything the way one would want in dreams can surely enhance self-confidence that even affects one's real life outside of the dreams. Further, another study clearly exhibited the result that those with high lucid dream control reported fewer psychopathological symptoms compared to those with low lucid dream control (Aviram and Soffer-Dudek, 2018). Clearly, having low lucid dream control would mean that not everything goes as one would want in the dreams, and this sounds a lot like nightmares. However, when one gains control over the events in the dream, the psychopathological symptoms, such as a change in mood, excessive anxiety, and feelings of distress, were much lessened, leading to better mental health. Moreover, one research over 528 participants demonstrated that a lot of lucid dreamers reported benefits of lucid dreaming on their overall mental well-being and half of the lucid dreamers noted that lucid dreams have also contributed to their physical health in response to improved mental health (Erlacher et al., 2016). This particular research shows the positive effects lucid dreaming can have on mentally ill patients since mental illness can have detrimental effects on the body as well. However, utilizing lucid dreaming can solve both of those issues at once—improving mental health as well as physical health.

Lucid Dreaming and Neurocognitive Activities

Since lucid dreaming is rather a unique way of dreaming, it utilizes different parts of the brain that wouldn't be activated in normal sleep. Research proves that this increased activity in parts of the brain leads to an enhancement in creativity, as well as critical thinking. Considering that lucid dreaming is a hybrid sleep, meaning that the brain is half awake, the frontal areas of the brain, which usually would be suppressed during normal sleep, are more activated during lucid dreams (Dresler et al., 2012). The study further notes that lucid dreaming activates cortical areas of the brain, and this helps psychotic patients who, in fact, have impaired cortical areas—thus, helping to reactivate the weakened part of the brain of the patients (Dresler et al., 2012). The parallel being shown here clearly demonstrates the positive effects of lucid dreaming on mental health patients and how this technique can be used as a new therapeutic approach to test the already existing antipsychotic medications. This neurocognitive evidence can also allude to the evidence that lucid dreams can lead to increased insight, critical thinking, and vigilance compared to normal sleep cycles. In fact, research that underwent structural and functional MRI clearly shows that lucid dream participants had greater gray matter volume in the frontopolar cortex compared with non-lucid dreamers (Filevich et al., 2015). This means that lucid dreamers are associated with higher neural activities in areas responsible for thought monitoring; therefore, lucid dreaming has an impact on one's critical thinking and metacognition (Filevich et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

While scientific contributions continue to be made each day, there are some mental illnesses that either don't have the right treatments yet or only have a medication to treat them. The evidence is clear: The practice of lucid dreaming can be an alternate treatment for those mental illnesses considering the fact that it can provide not only increased mental health but also improved thought processes. Although there hasn't been much research on the discussed topic, among the research that is done, the results are quite intriguing. Many participants of the research proved that lucid dreams are beneficial for their mental and physical well-being after experiencing control over one's own dreams. Being able to direct what happens in the dream, the participants experienced higher self-esteem and self-confidence when they returned to reality. Additionally, lucid dreaming, being a hybrid state of dreaming, increases activities on brain parts that can enhance one's critical thinking abilities as well as creativity. Also, when there are patients with impaired parts of the brain that corresponds to the parts that lucid dreaming awakens, lucid dreaming can stimulate the activity on those impaired parts, leading to better conditions for mentally ill patients. Using lucid dreaming with a therapeutic purpose can also give patients a break from medications, enhancing their physical health as well. With much potential in the growth of lucid dream therapy, there should indeed be more research on the positive effects of this technique on patients and more scientific development towards it.

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