

DEMYSTIFYING OUR DREAMWORLD

A

As a teenager, Brenda Giguere went ice skating with her friends every week, but they improved much faster than she did. She could only go round in circles and got fed up with watching her friends effortlessly switching from backward skating to forward. Lying in bed one night, she thought she would try to practice those backward moves in her sleep. "Before long I was dreaming I was skating and I got very excited. It was so realistic. I felt the sensation of skating backward – the movement of my legs, the cool air, the feeling of propelling myself this way. Suddenly it all made sense as a set of logical, fluid, sequential body movements."

B

Brenda later found out she had experienced what is called a "lucid dream". Lucid dreaming is one of the most controversial areas of dream research, partly because of misperceptions over how much individuals can influence their dreams – or indeed, whether they should. Those in favor say that lucidity is an important step in understanding dreams and argue that lucid dreams can take the horror out of nightmares, inspire new ideas, promote self-healing of physical ailments and unravel mysteries of the psyche that can improve a person's well-being.

C

Lucid dreaming is a technique that has been practiced by Tibetan Buddhist priest for more than a millennium. Writings by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle also refer to the conscious exploration of dreams. And when the discovery of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep 50 years ago opened up new avenues of sleep research, it also strengthened the argument for lucidity. Today, the leading guru in this field is Stephen LaBerge, who founded the Lucidity Institute in 1987.

D

LaBerge believes that the state of awareness reached during lucid dreaming is akin to that of being awake. With colleagues, he has developed electronic devices that give the dreamer a reminder during REM sleep to try to become lucid. The "NovaDreamer" is a sleep mask that emits a flashing light or sound cues when the user is dreaming (detected by eye movement). LaBerge claims that this increases the dreamer's chances of becoming lucid threefold, as evidenced by research he has carried out. Ed Wirth, who has used the NovaDreamer, says the flickering image of a TV screen. Of the 600 or so dreams a year that effect is powerful and overwhelming. He flies in his dreams, and walks through walls: "You can turn a threatening situation into a funny situation. It eliminates the whole nightmare. They, in effect, have changed my life. For me, it's an exploration".

E

Not everyone shares this enthusiasm. Rosalind Cartwright, the grande dame of sleep medicine research, believes the whole concept has been overblown. Cartwright, director of the Sleep Disorders Service and Research Center at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, says: "It's a wish to control things out of their usual function and time. It is trying to redesign the mind in a way I don't think is necessarily helpful. It gives people false hope."

F

LaBerge admits he doesn't have all the answers yet, but feels lucky to be able to work in such a fascinating field. His goals are simple: to learn more about lucid dreaming and to make it more accessible to the public. At the moment, he's experimenting with chemical inducements to increase the release of acetylcholine, the main neurotransmitter in REM sleep, in order to encourage seasoned lucid dreamers to have more of them. He's also testing herbal supplements such as galantamine, which is extracted from daffodil bulbs, to promote a similar effect. But LaBerge laments that more isn't being done. Research funds are not exactly pouring in for lucid dreaming, and his business operates on a shoestring with a six-member staff, lots of volunteers and funding from grants, donations and sales.

I. The reading passage has six paragraphs A-F. Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings below.

- I. Interacting with others in your dreams
- II. A competitor exploiting the commercial side
- III. Scepticism within the specialist field
- IV. Dream to improve your technique
- V. Not just a modern-day phenomenon
- VI. The product to enhance your dreamtime
- VII. Undermining rumours in the press
- VIII. A bridge between sleeping and walking
- IX. Current research priorities

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| 1. Paragraph A ____ | 4. Paragraph D ____ |
| 2. Paragraph B ____ | 5. Paragraph E ____ |
| 3. Paragraph C ____ | 6. Paragraph F ____ |

II. Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage?

TRUE – if the statement agrees with the information

FALSE - if the statement contradicts with the information

NOT GIVEN – if there is no information on this

- 1. Brenda Giguere was able to put what she had experiences into practice.
- 2. Advocates of lucid dreaming claim that it may contribute to a person's thought processes.
- 3. According to the writer, the detection of REM sleep has been the most important breakthrough in sleep research for half a century.
- 4. The NovaDreamer operates purely in relation to the user's eyes.
- 5. According to LaBerge's findings. Wearers of the NovaDreamer are three times more likely to experience a lucid dreamt
- 6. Cartwright criticizes lucid dreaming for being an unnatural practice.
- 7. LaBerge's latest tests focus on subjects who have never experienced lucid dreams.