

The Science of Lucid Dreaming: The Electronic Media Effect

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Psychologists are disproving the age-old claim that video games are rotting our brains. A leading figure in this research is Jayne Gackenbach, a lifelong lucid dreamer and dream scholar from Grant MacEwan College. For years, Gackenbach has been reporting the connection between video game play and lucid dreaming. Parents may gaffaw, but high-end gamers report many more lucid dreams than the public at large.

Why is this? Gackenbach has argued in the past (2006) that video game play increases “lucidity” because game play encourages absorption as well as enhanced reaction time, attention span, spatial skills, and problem solving skills (p.97). Both video games and lucid dreams are a kind of “virtual reality,” creating the perfect workshop for manipulating reality and honing certain kinds of cognitive skills.

Consciousness and Multi-Media

Recently, Gackenbach expanded her research claim. In the March 2009 volume of the journal *Dreaming*, she found evidence to support the hypothesis that not just video games, but the entire range of multimedia and electronica available today is correlated with more lucid dreams. The research suggests that with our highly saturated media landscape (video games, mp3 players, DVDs, computer/Internet) comes greater self-awareness in our dream lives. In particular, media that encourage “interactive” experiences and social connectivity show the highest lucidity stats for dreamers.

Gackenbach makes clear that this doesn't mean that playing a Blood Elf in *World of Warcraft* and being glued to your iPhone is the path to greater lucidity. Always careful, she leaves open the possibility that there is a third factor accounting for this affect.

Granted, this research backs up countless gamers' personal experiences that video games help them to make quick decisions in their dreaming and waking lives, developing a sense of personal empowerment while fostering strong bonds with their peers.

And this is also the best defense for kids when their mothers say, “Go play outside!”

The Lucid Generation

Judging by how many more media-assisted activities are available for youth today, perhaps we really are encouraging the most lucid generation in history. Of course, there's more to lucid dreaming than self-awareness.

Armed with a socially-critical perspective, I think that Gackenbach's video game research illustrates how our media-driven society encourages certain kinds of consciousness, with values such as self-reflection, volition, and knowing how you fit into the group. (This doesn't critically reflect on Gackenbach's interests, by the way, as she has also published many papers on other aspects of lucidity such as “witnessing” dreams in which the dreamer does not test how much dream control is possible).

Ultimately, we need to balance this kind of lucidity with other values, such as gratitude, selflessness and knowing when *not* to be in control. In my humble opinion, I think that lucid dreaming, over time,

naturally encourages all these ways of being. Conscious growth is awkward at times, yet we eventually find the balance within ourselves.

But if not, there's a meditation podcast on my iPhone I can listen to one more time....

References cited:

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Ryan Hurd is a dream researcher and writer at dreamstudies.org, and he doesn't really have an iPhone. Yet.