The Return of Suppressed Thoughts in Dreams

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Introduction
Wishes suppressed during the day assert themselves in dreams - Freud

Sigmund Freud
- Nothing occurs by chance; actions and thoughts are motivated by unconscious
- Repressed urges and impulses must be released in someway, often surfacing in disguised forms like dreams

Dream Rebound Study
- The study examined a basic version of Freuds theory
- Tests if thought suppression would adapt dream content to a suppressed thought regardless to whether that thought was emotionally charged
Introduction

Suppressed Thoughts

- Suppressed thoughts are more reachable under mental load or stress
- Thoughts are often suppressed by people after a traumatic event
- Suppression is a strategy of self-control

- Topics that frequent the mind and are connected to emotional experiences are known as "current concerns"
Method

Participants & Design

- UT- San Antonio undergraduates
  - 202 women, 128 men
  - Mean age = 20.36 years
- Randomly assigned to a condition of a 3x2 design
  - Instruction: suppression, expression, or mention
  - Instruction target: crush vs. Non-crush

Procedure

- Told to wait until bed time to open sealed envelopes
- Pre-sleep task (all conditions):
  - Think of two people they know
    - "Crush"
    - "Non- Crush"
  - Identify both persons by initials
  - Give rating on a seven point scale:
    - "not at all attracted" - "extremely attracted"
  - Engage in a thought task
Method

- **Thought tasks:**
  - Suppression task:
    - Suppress thoughts of one of these people for 5 minutes.
    - Record stream of consciousness
    - Indicate any occurrence of this person by making a check mark
  - Expression task:
    - Focus on thoughts of the target
  - Mention task:
    - Supply initials of indicated person before writing
    - Think about anything at all
- All participants sleep for the night afterwards, as they would normally
Method

- **Post-sleep task:**
  - Record all dreams from the night
  - Rate how much they dreamed
  - Rate how much they dreamed about both their crush and non-crush
  - 16 participants reported consuming alcohol the night before
    - These reports did not differ by condition, did not interact when added to the design
    - Remained in the analyses.

- One of two raters blind to condition and hypotheses:
  - Coded stream of consciousness reports and dream reports for a number of mentions of crush and non-crush
  - Rated emotional intensity, valence, and eroticism of dreams
  - Effective reliability was a minimum of .93 across 19 participant subsample
Results

- Manipulative Effectiveness
  - Attraction was greater to "crushes" versus "non-crushes"
  - Checkmark frequency during stream-of-consciousness reports was greater for expression versus suppression and mention
  - References to the target were greater in mention and expression than in suppression
  - Low level of Target occurrence in Suppression
Results

- **Dream Self-Ratings**
  - Likert Scale was used to collect data
  - 87.7% of people did not disagree with the statement "I dreamed last night"
  - More people dreamed about their "instruction target" versus their "nontarget"

- Suppression and Expression had increased dreaming about the target
- Mention had no effect on target occurrence
- Suppression had the most impact
Results

- Dream Reports
  - Averaged 85.9 words but did not vary by condition
  - More references to the target person than the nontarget
  - References about the target person increased when the target was the crush

- Interaction between instruction condition and person coded
  - More target person references in suppression condition
  - No difference in reference to target/nontarget between expressed and mentioned conditions

- Suppressed target references occurred more often
Results

- 28.8% dreamed about the target vs. 17.1% about nontarget
  - 34.1% in suppression, 28.2% in expression, & 24.3% in mention for target dreams
  - Dreams for nontarget were 19.1% in suppression, 16.5% in expression, & 15.8% in mention

- Coded for emotional intensity, emotional valence, and eroticism
  - No emotional intensity or emotional valence effects
  - Suppression enhanced eroticism of dreams of crush
Is the rebound of suppressed thoughts in dreams interpretable in terms of the influence of changes in brain activation during REM sleep on mental control processes?

- It was determined that suppressed thoughts apparently assert themselves in dreams whether they are about wished-for targets or not.

- What causes this?

- Is this influenced in any other ways?
Is the rebound of suppressed thoughts in dreams interpretable in terms of the influence of changes in brain activation during REM sleep on mental control processes?

- Others suggest that operating processes may not be fully disabled in dreaming.

- This discredits theories of "threat simulation" in dreaming by showing suppressed thoughts recur in dreams.
Thoughts

- Relationship Status of the individuals participating
- Self-Reporting used as a data collection method
  - Likert Scale (sd, d, n, a, sa)
  - Included people who said "Neutral" to whether or not they dreamed