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HYPNOTIC DREAMS AS A LENS INTO HYPNOTIC DYNAMICS[1]

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The hypnotic relationship is an important parameter for both experimental and therapeutic contexts. Hypnotic dreams may serve as a lens to examine the hypnotic relationship. By answering 5 questions per item, 70 judges rated 12 accounts of brief hypnotic dreams conducted as part of the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, Form C. The data show that the judges were able to correctly discern highly from less hypnotizable individuals. Interestingly, highly hypnotizable females coached by a male hypnotic operator had more sexually charged dreams than either less hypnotizable females or males regardless of hypnotizability. These findings contextualize for further research and therapy transference issues related to the hypnotic relationship and the use of hypnotic dreams.

Whether hypnotic or nocturnal, dreams have enthralled the minds of clinicians, researchers, and the general public who all struggle to interpret this complex daily occurrence. Hypnotic dreams are advantageous because they permit dream-like phenomena in a waking state.

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A hypnotic coach can guide a patient into dreaming, either during a session or after the hypnotic state using a posthypnotic suggestion (Tart, 1966). Consequently, the patient, or subject, may drift into a dream-like experience without sleeping, allowing the coach to follow as the patient describes the wandering dream (Newman, Katz, & Rubenstein, 1960). Though theories suggest that hypnotic dreams may physiologically resemble the waking state (B. Domhoff, 1964), people tend to construe both hypnotic and nocturnal dreams as genuine dream experiences (Moss, 1967). The mistaken notion that hypnosis is akin to sleep heavily taints most research into this phenomenon (Pace-Schott, Solms, Blagrove, & Harnad, 2003). One way to resolve this putative conflict is to recognize that dreaming can occur outside of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, while REM sleep does not necessarily involve dreaming (Solms, 2000; G. Domhoff, 1996). In addition, both nocturnal and hypnotic dreams employ similar psychological constructs (Barrett, 1979; B. Domhoff; Sacerdote, 1968). The content of hypnotic and nocturnal dreams is largely indiscernible (Sweetland & Cuay, 1952) and both have, historically, been interpreted using similar models (Mazer, 1951). Many practitioners continue to use psychodynamic accounts of dreams in therapeutic contexts (Frenkel, 2009; Linden, Bhardwaj, & Anbar, 2006). While modern sleep research has substantively elucidated how we sleep and dream (Hobson, Pace-Schott, & Stickgold, 2000), some practitioners still rely on accounts heavily enjoined with Freudian interpretation (Freud, 1900; Morewedge & Norton, 2009; Sacerdote, 1968).

Hypnotic dreams can serve as clinical indices to elucidate personally meaningful life themes, problems and conflicts, as well as parameters of interpersonal relationships and rapport (Lynn, Maré, Kvaal, Segal, & Sivec, 1994). Linden et al. (2006) found that using hypnotic dreams practitioners could help children work through their nocturnal nightmares, suggesting that hypnotically induced dream review might be a viable therapeutic tool.

Interestingly, hypnotic dream content varies based on a subject's hypnotizability. Indeed, hypnotic depth correlates with subject accounts of more vivid hypnotic dreams (Tart, 1966). For the highly hypnotizable, hypnotic dreams closely resemble both nocturnal and daydreams, all three states containing significant dissociative content (Barrett, 1979). Factors such as absorption (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974), dream involvement (Spanos, Nightengale, Radtke, & Stam, 1980), tendency to have sophisticated nonliteral dreams (Sweetland & Cuay, 1952), and ability to dream on a chosen subject (Zamore & Barrett, 1989) all correlate with hypnotizability. The current study takes a different approach to the study of hypnotizability and investigates whether a naïve population can determine suggestibility simply from reading the content of hypnotic dreams.

Hypnotizability, however, is not the only factor that influences hypnotic dream content. Who and what the dreamer recently saw may affect the content of the dream, highlighting the importance of the relationship between the hypnotic operator and hypnotic dreamer (Fisher, 1953). In addition, Farber and Fisher (1943) reported that the inherently dependent relationship of the subject on the experimenter affected the thoughts unraveled in the dream product. The patient is reacting not only to the suggestion to dream but also to the analyst, or hypnotic operator, who is suggesting the dream process (Shevrin, 2003).

Often revered as an omnipresent being, the hypnotic coach can become an icon of emotional dependency for the patient (Fisher, 1953). This relationship of dependence may foster a sexual dynamic, infusing the dream responses with erotic content (Dreikurs, 1962; Merrington, 1981). Research findings concerning the practitioner-patient relationship, including the one involved in hypnosis, suggest that affective reactions and at least some dimension of sexuality often permeate the clinical experience (Adrian, 1996; Hawkins, 1993; Merrington, 1981).

The present study explored how both hypnotizability and the hypnotic operator influenced dream content. Examining whether naïve judges could detect transference-like dynamics and erotic responses, we sought to explore how the presence of an operator could affect dream content. We expected hypnotic dream content to reliably correlate with hypnotizability, as rated subjectively by blind judges. We used transcriptions of hypnotic dreams, taken from dreamers who encountered a male hypnotic operator (author AR), to explore whether female dreamers manifested more subjectively erotic content in their dreams than either, or both, males and less hypnotizable females.

METHOD

Subjects

In return for class extra credit, 70 Cornell University undergraduates (20 male; 50 female) were recruited for this study (mean = 19.8, *SD* = 1.4 years, range = 18–24 years).

Materials

Transcribed verbatim from video footage of the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, Form C (SHSS:C; Weitzenhoffer & Hilgard, 1962), the hypnotic dreams used in this study had been administered and recorded by the senior author. All individuals appearing on video, members of the Weill Medical College of Cornell University or the New York Presbyterian Hospital, consented to releasing their tapes for the purpose of this study.

In line with a power analysis to guarantee proper statistics, 12 dream transcriptions were pseudorandomly chosen from a pool of 38 accounts while preserving the following characteristics: three from highly hypnotizable males, three from less hypnotizable males, three from highly hypnotizable females, and three from less hypnotizable females. Highly hypnotizable individuals were first assessed using the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A (HGSHS:A; Shor & Orne, 1963) and then scored 10 to 12 on the SHSS:C, whereas less hypnotizable persons scored 1 to 3. The nature of the suggestions to dream followed the text of the SHSS:C in letter as well as in spirit:

> Neither you nor I know what sort of a dream you are going to have, but I am going to allow you to rest for a while and you are going to have a dream . . . a real dream . . . just the kind you have when you are asleep at night. When I stop talking to you very shortly, you will begin to dream. . . . Now you are falling asleep . . . deeper and deeper asleep . . . very much like when you sleep at night. . . . Soon you will be deep asleep, soundly asleep. As soon as I stop talking you will begin to dream. When I speak to you again you will stop dreaming, if you still happen to be dreaming, and you will listen to me just as you have been doing. Now sleep and dream.

The dreamers then spent 120 seconds uninterrupted. Thereafter, AR asked for an account of their dream experience. The following account is a typical excerpt of one such dream by a highly hypnotizable female (transcriptions of all 12 dreams used in this study are available upon request):

Dreamer: Hmmm . . . I took the subway and then I kind of flew out of the window onto this big, uh, stork or swan or something and then I rode that like far up in the sky.

AR: Uh huh.

Dreamer: And then I kind of jumped off and I had a parachute and then you were sitting in a chair and saying that I could fall and it would be really slow and then you kind of melted away but I still heard your voice . . . and then the parachute disappeared but I just fell on the cloud . . . and then, then the cloud rained and I was in the raindrops and the raindrops fell on my face, and then I was painting that face that the raindrops fell on . . . . It's a face with green eyes and purple eye shadow on top of the eyes and pale skin like my skin. . . . And then I looked back and the painting was on a brick wall and then that was the end.

Procedure

After obtaining consent, the experimenter provided each subject with a brief description of the experiment and handed out a hard copy account of 12 hypnotic dreams, a questionnaire containing five

questions (see below), and a rating sheet. Transcriptions of the 12 hypnotic dreams followed five random orders. The questionnaire consisted of the following questions to be rated from 1 to 12 (1 was always lowest/least and 12 highest/most):

1. It is known that people differ in their susceptibility to hypnosis. Based on the dream, how **hypnotizable** would you predict this subject to be?
2. Dreams may differ in how sexual they seem. How **sexual** is this dream?
3. Dreams may differ in how shallow or detailed they seem. How **dense** is this dream?
4. Dreams may differ in how calm/serene or exciting/arousing they seem. How **exciting** is this dream?
5. Some people believe that individuals undergoing hypnosis may develop a romantic interest in their hypnotic operator. Based on this hypnotic dream, how likely is it that the dreamer displays **romantic interest** in the hypnotic coach?

RESULTS

We used the mixed linear model in SAS v.9.0 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC) for all of the following statistical data analyses. A priori hypotheses were tested using hierarchical well-formulated mixed model analyses of repeated measures over the raters' responses. Rating scores were entered as dependent variables into a model that included dreamer (12 hypnotic dreams), question (5 questions), age, sex (male, female), category (highly hypnotizable female/male, less hypnotizable female/male), and degree (highly hypnotizable, less hypnotizable) as covariates. Included in all models were each of the two-way interactions for dreamer, question, age, sex, category, and degree. In addition to parameter estimates and associated p values of component terms in the analyses of fixed effects for the final models, we also examined the least square means and standard errors to assist in the interpretation of the significant findings.

Whereas the data show that the raters' age did not have a significant effect on the estimates provided, $F(1, 4066) = 1.08$, $p = .2996$, raters' sex did have a significant effect, $F(1, 4066) = 9.68$, $p < .005$. On all questions, male raters gave higher scores than their female colleagues. The difference was significant ($p < .0005$) for Questions 1, 3, and 4 corresponding to hypnotizability, density, and arousability, respectively.

For hypnotizability (Question 5), the blind raters ranked the dream accounts of highly hypnotizable persons significantly higher compared to less hypnotizable individuals, $F(1, 767) = 313.02$, $p < .0001$. This was true for the dreams of both males, $t(1, 767) = 6.73$, $p < .0001$, and females, $t(1, 767) = 18.29$, $p < .0001$, but the difference was more significant for the ratings of female dreamers (Figure 1).

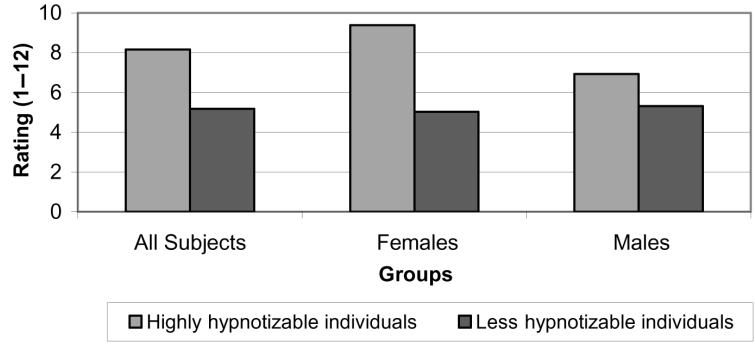

Figure 1. **Mean hypnotizability rating for highly and less hypnotizable individuals.**

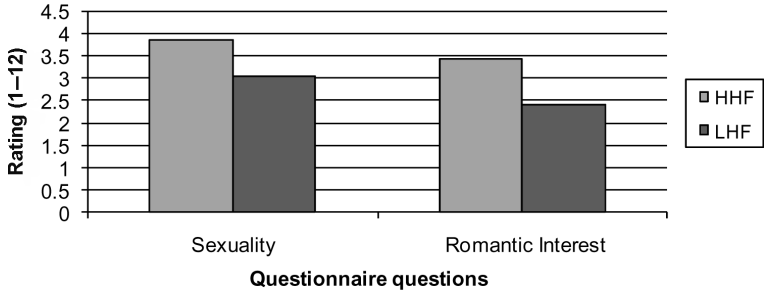

Figure 2. **Mean sexuality and romantic interest ratings for highly hypnotizable females (HHF) and less hypnotizable females (LHF).**

Data regarding dream density (Question 3) also show that compared to less hypnotizable persons, highly hypnotizable individuals received significantly higher scores, $F(1, 767) = 274.84$, $p < .0001$. This was the case for both males, $t(1, 767) = 2.95$, $p < .005$, and females, $t(1, 767) = 20.50$, $p < .0001$. Excitement (Question 4) was similarly significant, $F(1, 767) = 407.34$, $p < .0001$, for both males, $t(1, 767) = 3.94$, $p < .0001$, and females, $t(1, 767) = 24.61$, $p < .0001$. Sexuality scores of male dreamers did not significantly differ as a function of hypnotizability. However, highly hypnotizable females received significantly higher scores for both sexuality, $t(1, 767) = 4.24$, $p < .0001$, and romantic interest, $t(1, 767) = 5.48$, $p < .0001$, compared to less hypnotizable females (Figure 2).

The data also show that highly hypnotizable females were rated as containing significantly more sexuality in their dreams than either highly hypnotizable males, $t(1, 3062) = 9.19$, $p < .0001$, or less hypnotizable

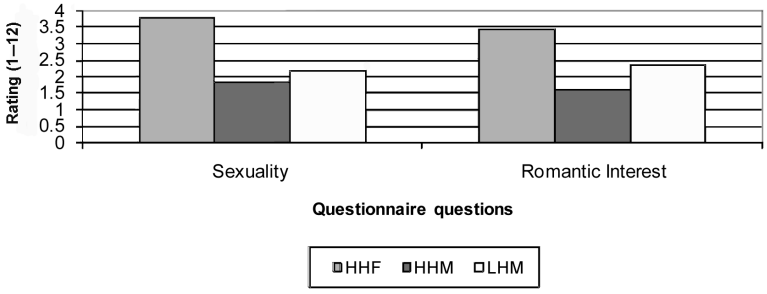

Figure 3. **Mean sexuality and romantic interest ratings for highly hypnotizable females (HHF), highly hypnotizable males (HHM), and less hypnotizable males (LHM).**

males, $t(1, 3062) = 7.58$, $p < .0001$. In addition, highly hypnotizable females were rated as having more romantic interest, based on their dreams, than either highly hypnotizable males, $t(1, 3062) = 8.50$, $p < .0001$, or less hypnotizable males, $t(1, 3062) = 4.96$, $p < .0001$. Whereas highly hypnotizable males did not significantly differ from less hypnotizable males in ranking of sexuality, $t(1, 3062) = -1.61$, $p = .1075$, less hypnotizable males were actually rated as having more romantic interest than highly hypnotizable males, $t(1, 3062) = -3.53$, $p < .0005$. In general, female dreams were rated significantly higher than male dreams on both sexuality, $t(1, 2443) = 8.73$, $p < .0001$, and romantic interest, $t(1, 2443) = 5.74$, $p < .0001$ (Figure 3).

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics that address the judges' reliability scores.

DISCUSSION

Our findings show that male and female raters significantly differed in their ranking of hypnotic dream accounts. At least for three of the questions, male raters scored dream accounts significantly higher compared to female raters. Raters gave dream accounts from highly hypnotizable individuals higher hypnotizability scores compared to those from less hypnotizable persons. Furthermore, raters also ranked the dream accounts of highly hypnotizable individuals as more detailed and exciting. Thus, based on responses from blind raters reading over accounts of hypnotic dreams, it is possible to discern highly from less hypnotizable individuals. Notably, the difference in hypnotizability ratings between highly and less hypnotizable individuals was larger for female dreamers.

Although no dream was overtly sexual, raters were apparently sensitive to such allusions in dream content. Highly hypnotizable males

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Question	Dreamer	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error Mean	Median	Mode	Variance	Range
1	12	4.47	2.26	0.27	4	2	5.12	9
2	12	1.96	1.87	0.22	1	1	3.49	9
3	12	2.29	1.63	0.19	2	1	2.64	9
4	12	2.06	1.36	0.16	2	1	1.85	5
5	12	1.56	1.33	0.16	1	1	1.76	9
1	38	7.96	2.19	0.26	8	8	4.8	10
2	38	2.27	1.7	0.2	2	1	2.9	8
3	38	5.66	2.64	0.32	5	3	6.98	11
4	38	5.26	2.49	0.3	5	5	6.22	10
5	38	1.8	1.55	0.18	1	1	2.39	8
1	27	1.89	1.42	0.17	1	1	2.02	7
2	27	1.2	0.63	0.08	1	1	0.39	3
3	27	1.31	0.67	0.08	1	1	0.45	4
4	27	1.2	0.55	0.07	1	1	0.31	3
5	27	1.1	0.42	0.05	1	1	0.18	3
1	3	6.57	2.66	0.32	6	10	7.09	10
2	3	1.61	1.27	0.15	1	1	1.6	7
3	3	2.93	1.8	0.21	2	2	3.23	8
4	3	2.59	1.61	0.19	2	2	2.59	6
5	3	1.41	0.83	0.1	1	1	0.68	5
1	25	6.11	2.69	0.32	6	8	7.23	11
2	25	2.8	2.37	0.28	2	1	5.61	10
3	25	4.26	2.32	0.28	4	2	5.38	9
4	25	3.4	1.87	0.22	3	4	3.49	8
5	25	3.77	3.03	0.36	3	1	9.16	11
1	31	5.56	2.25	0.27	5.5	5	5.06	10
2	31	1.53	1.4	0.17	1	1	1.96	8
3	31	3.86	2.02	0.24	4	4	4.1	9
4	31	3.11	2.05	0.25	2.5	2	4.22	10
5	31	1.43	0.89	0.11	1	1	0.8	5
1	5	8.4	2.09	0.25	8	10	4.39	9
2	5	2.86	2.29	0.27	2	1	5.25	9
3	5	7.24	2.67	0.32	7	7	7.14	11
4	5	6.71	2.38	0.28	6	6	5.66	10
5	5	2.14	1.99	0.24	1	1	3.98	9
1	2	9.53	2.08	0.25	10	10	4.34	9
2	2	4.14	3.13	0.37	3	1	9.81	11
3	2	8.63	2.54	0.3	9	7	6.44	10
4	2	8.29	2.81	0.34	9	8	7.89	9
5	2	4.33	3.14	0.38	3	1	9.85	10
1	9	5.66	2.3	0.28	5.5	7	5.3	10

(*Continued*)

Table 1
(Continued)

Question	Dreamer	Mean	Std Dev	Std Error Mean	Median	Mode	Variance	Range
2	9	5.03	2.96	0.35	4	4	8.75	10
3	9	3.87	1.9	0.23	3	3	3.62	8
4	9	3.43	2.09	0.25	3	2	4.36	9
5	9	3.71	2.93	0.35	2	1	8.61	11
1	22	4.27	3.53	0.42	3	1	12.43	11
2	22	1.86	1.65	0.2	1	1	2.73	8
3	22	4.07	3.22	0.39	3	1	10.39	11
4	22	2.9	2.29	0.27	2	1	5.22	8
5	22	1.64	1.56	0.19	1	1	2.44	7
1	35	7.27	2.32	0.28	8	8	5.36	10
2	35	2.44	1.75	0.21	2	1	3.06	7
3	35	4.93	2.2	0.26	4.5	3	4.82	9
4	35	4.04	2.09	0.25	4	2	4.36	8
5	35	2.03	1.76	0.21	1	1	3.1	8
1	21	9.54	2.05	0.24	10	10	4.19	9
2	21	4.29	2.99	0.36	3	1	8.93	11
3	21	7.87	2.8	0.33	8.5	10	7.82	9
4	21	7.86	2.62	0.31	8	10	6.88	10
5	21	3.6	2.82	0.34	3	1	7.92	11

did not differ from their less hypnotizable peers in the raters' sexuality scores. However, dream accounts from less hypnotizable males were scored as having more romantic interest relative to highly hypnotizable males. Interestingly, compared to less hypnotizable females, highly hypnotizable females received scores indicating more sexual content and heightened romantic interest based on their dream accounts. Although this latter result is likely a consequence of the hypnotic operator being male, it highlights the psychodynamic role of transference and sex differences in the hypnotic relationship.

Our results illuminate the role of sex in the hypnotic process from an unusual angle. In the SHSS:C, the hypnotic dream item is the only time a subject can leisurely express his or her dissociative thoughts to the hypnotic coach. It is therefore conceivable that perusal of such communication may reveal extant, if ulterior, nuance.

Limitations and Caveats

All dream accounts in this experiment had been acquired through initial SHSS:C sessions with a male operator. The sex of the hypnotic operator likely influenced our findings. Specifically, this fact is likely

responsible for the finding that raters reported dream accounts of female participants as more sexual and more romantic than those of male participants. Further research examining the role of comparable male and female hypnotic operators may shed more light on the hypnotic relationship and such psychodynamic components as transference. Different hypnotic operators would likely respond differently to analogous situations, not to mention dissimilar circumstances. Since dream accounts are highly variable, the hypnotic operator may have responded differently in distinct dream contexts. In this regard, procedural uniformity should be better controlled in future assays.

Finally, at least two reasons may account for a general low-score bias. First, most raters were naively critical of hypnosis and thought it to be a myth. This predisposition may have affected their rating to be overly conservative. Second, the rating scale (1 to 12) may have skewed the results since most people are accustomed to decimal scales (e.g., 1 to 10). In this regard, the 12-point scale was used to keep in line with the intake SHSS:C scores.

Closing Remarks

Speculating beyond the data, we can contextualize the hypnotic relationship as relevant to the outcome of future experiments and potentially useful in clinical therapeutics. Nineteenth-century experimentation with suggestion and hypnotherapy led to the growth of modern psychotherapy; moreover, the therapeutic element in psychoanalysis may be suggestibility (Chertok, 1984a, 1984b, 1986). In this regard, psychoanalysis, through transference, perhaps has not disengaged from hypnosis but has merely changed terminology (Chertok, 1968; Norman, Blacker, Oremland, & Barrett, 1976). The relationship between the hypnotic operator and the hypnotic subject may be a rich source in the clinical setting. Indeed, transference-based therapy is an effective treatment for personality disorders (Clarkin, Levy, Lenzenweger, & Kernberg, 2007; Gabbard & Horowitz, 2009). Capitalizing further on the transference relationship and hypnotic dreams, working with patients on the nonsymbolic level can be a powerful way to eventually effect changes on the symbolic level (Lecours, 2007). For highly hypnotizable people, who are most consistent over dream states, guided fantasy can be useful in psychotherapy (Barrett, 1979). Moreover, guided dream review may be an effective clinical tool to treat a wide variety of conditions from severe nightmares (Linden et al., 2006) to borderline personality disorder (Gabbard & Horowitz, 2009) and posttraumatic stress disorder (Abramowitz, Barak, Ben-Avi, & Knobler, 2008). Additional studies of hypnotic dreams will likely further unravel how this phenomenon can function as a lens to elucidate the hypnotic relationship and the complex breadth of dream states.

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Hypnotische Träume als eine Linse für die hypnotische Dynamik

Amir Raz, Heather R. Schweizer, Hongtu Zhu und Elizabeth Nellie Bowles

Zusammenfassung: Die hypnotische Beziehung stellt einen wichtigen Parameter sowohl im experimentellen als auch im therapeutischen Kontext dar. Hypnotische Träume können als Linse genutzt werden, um die hypnotische Beziehung zu beleuchten. Durch Antwort auf 5 Fragen pro Item beurteilten 70 Urteiler 12 Beschreibungen kurzer hypnotischer Träume (durchgeführt als Teil der Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, Form C). Die Daten zeigen, dass die Urteiler korrekt in der Lage waren, hoch Hypnotisierbare von gering hypnotisierbaren Teilnehmern zu unterscheiden. Interessanterweise zeigten hoch hypnotisierbare Frauen, die von einer männlichen Person betreut wurden, stärkere sexuell beladene Träume als gering hypnotisierbare Frauen oder Männer beider Gruppen. Diese Befunde liefern wichtige Anhaltspunkte für weitere

Forschung zur Übertragung im Bereich der hypnotischen Beziehung und zum Einsatz hypnotischer Träume.

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Les rêves hypnotiques comme lentille d'éclairage de la dynamique hypnotique

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Résumé: La relation hypnotique constitue un important facteur tant dans le contexte expérimental que dans le contexte thérapeutique. Les rêves hypnotiques peuvent être comparés à une lentille d'éclairage qui nous aiderait à examiner la relation hypnotique. En répondant à 5 questions par item, 70 juges ont noté 12 récits de rêves hypnotiques courts, induits à l'aide de l'échelle de susceptibilité hypnotique de Stanford, formulaire C. Les données montrent que les juges ont été capables de distinguer correctement les sujets hautement hypnotisables des sujets qui l'étaient moins. Fait intéressant, les femmes hautement hypnotisables dirigées par un hypnotiseur de sexe masculin faisaient des rêves à contenu érotique supérieur à ceux des femmes moins hypnotisables ou à ceux des hommes, quel que soit le degré d'hypnotisabilité de ces derniers. Ces résultats replacent dans leur contexte, pour recherche ultérieure et transfert thérapeutique, les questions liées à la relation hypnotique et à l'utilisation des rêves hypnotiques.

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Los sueños hipnóticos como una puerta a la dinámica hipnótica

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Resumen: La relación hipnótica es un parámetro importante tanto para el contexto experimental como para el terapéutico. Los sueños hipnóticos pueden servir como una puerta para examinar la relación hipnótica. Al responder a 5 preguntas por reactivo, 70 jueces evaluaron 12 descripciones de sueños hipnóticos breves obtenidos como parte de la Escala de Susceptibilidad Hipnótica de Stanford, Forma C Los datos muestran que los jueces fueron capaces de discernir correctamente los individuos de alta vs. baja hipnotizabilidad. Es curiosos que las mujeres altamente hipnotizables con un hipnotista hombre tuvieron más sueños con un contenido sexual que las mujeres poco hipnotizables o los varones independientemente de su hipnotizabilidad. Estos resultados contextualizan cuestiones relacionadas con la transferencia de la relación hipnótica y el uso de sueños hipnóticos para la investigación y terapia futuras.

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