



Thought Rebound

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Wegner's Dream Rebound Experiment

According to studies, thoughts suppressed may resurface or manifest themselves in the future in the form of dreams. Psychologist Daniel M. Wegner proves this in his experiment on effects of thought suppression.

Thought rebound is what happens when people try to suppress a thought or memory. People's minds' immediate response to undesirable thoughts is to try and forget about them, pushing them back into their subconscious. But instead of doing good, there is a tendency for these thoughts to creep their way back into our minds in the form of dreams, thus sometimes making the situation worse.

Professor Daniel M. Wegner and his colleagues centralized their experiment on the phenomenon of thought rebound, elaborating Sigmund Freud's well-known account of dreams. His theory says that that wishes suppressed during the day find expression in dreams manifesting thought rebound.

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Method

Subjects were asked to try not to think about a white bear for a span of 5 minutes, then for the

succeeding 5 minutes to think about the white bear. During the experiment, participants said aloud whatever thoughts they were having and each time they thought of the white bear, the bell rang.

Wegner and his colleagues then studied the dreams of 295 students. Before the subjects went to sleep, they spent 5 minutes writing down their thoughts. The primary instruction is for them to not think about a specific person whom they regard as a friend or have a crush on, do think about that person or simply write the person's initials.

Results

The results from the bear experiment is that, participants who first tried to suppress their thoughts rang the bell almost twice as often as subjects in a control group. It seemed that the very act of first trying to suppress a thought made it fight back all the stronger.

The subjects on the latter experiment reported that upon waking in the morning, they had dreamed about the person they did think about before going to bed, or tried not to think about the night before. Roughly a third of those who tried not to think about the person dreamed about the particular person while only a quarter of those in the group encouraged to think about the person or asked to write initials.

Conclusion

Thought rebound is manifested in other research studies of similar type. It was observed that the same results were found even when people were not directly instructed to suppress particular thoughts, and were instead just encouraged to do so through subtle forms of manipulation. This was later termed as Post-Suppression Rebound Effect and is deemed crucial to many aspects of our daily life experiences.

Application

People in so many kinds of situations use thought suppression, sometimes even without knowing it. One example of this is when it comes to substance cravings. For those who are trying to get over an addiction, or let's say trying to quit smoking or going on a diet, the subject may use thought suppression to fight the craving but this was proven to be counter-productive because of thought rebound. A study found that smokers trying to suppress thoughts about smoking were found to have higher cravings than those who didn't try to suppress their thoughts (Salkovkis & Reynolds, 1994). Other situations where thought suppression is present are in cases of intrusive memories and depression.

Sources

[Why Thought Suppression is Counter-Productive](#) ^[1]

Suppressed Thoughts Rebound in Dreams (link disappeared)

Dream Rebound: The Return of Suppressed Thoughts in Dreams [2] by Daniel M. Wegner, Richard M. Wenzlaff, and Megan Kozak

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Links

[1] <http://www.spring.org.uk/2009/05/why-thought-suppression-is-counter-productive.php>

[2]

<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/40063960?uid=3738744&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21100951934203>