

A painting of a room with a doorway leading to the ocean. The room has white walls and a green carpet. A doorway on the right side of the frame opens up to a bright blue ocean under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the white wall.

When You Put Things Out of Mind,  
Where Do They Go?

Daniel M. Wegner

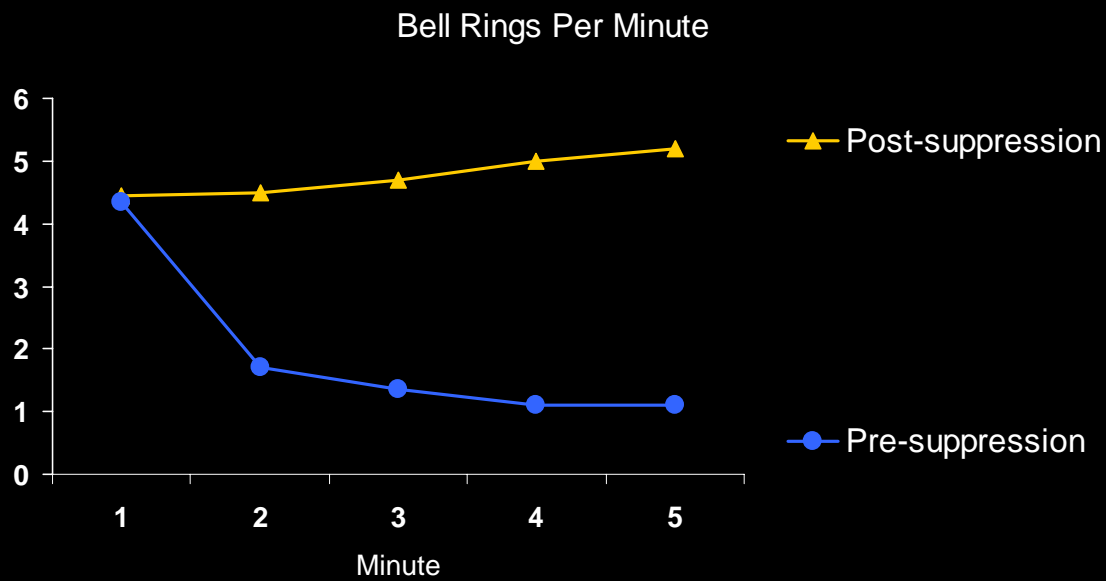
Try to pose for yourself this task:  
not to think of a polar bear, and you  
will see that the cursed thing will  
come to mind every minute.



Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1863)  
*Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*



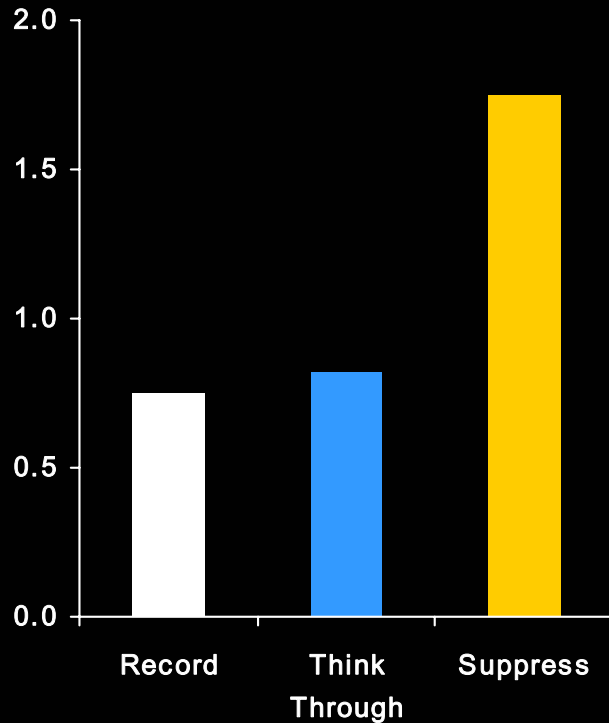
# Rebound



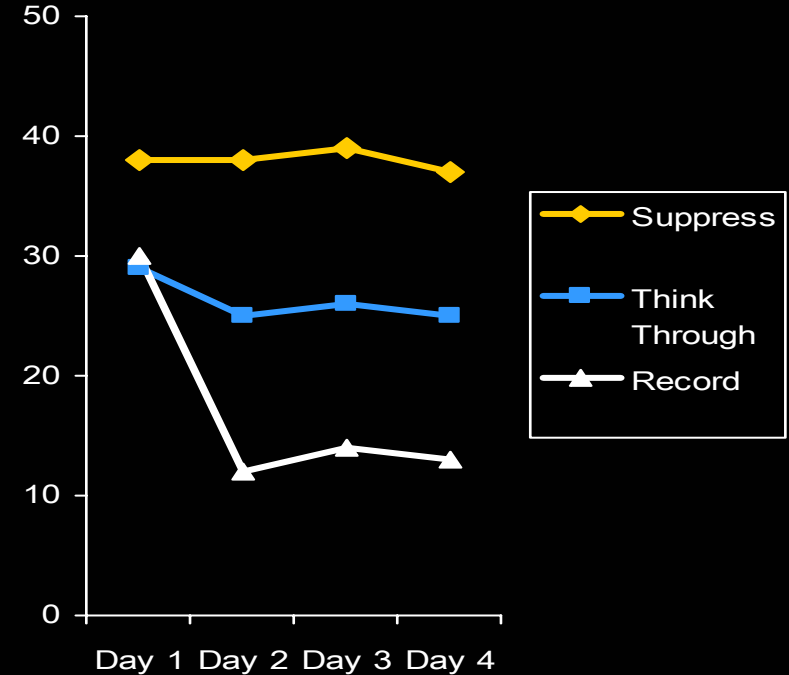
# Chronicity

## Personally Relevant Intrusive Thoughts Outside the Laboratory

Mean number of thoughts  
between meals over four days



Mean rating of discomfort (0-100)



# Ironic Process Theory

An **intentional operating process** searches for mental contents to create the desired mental state

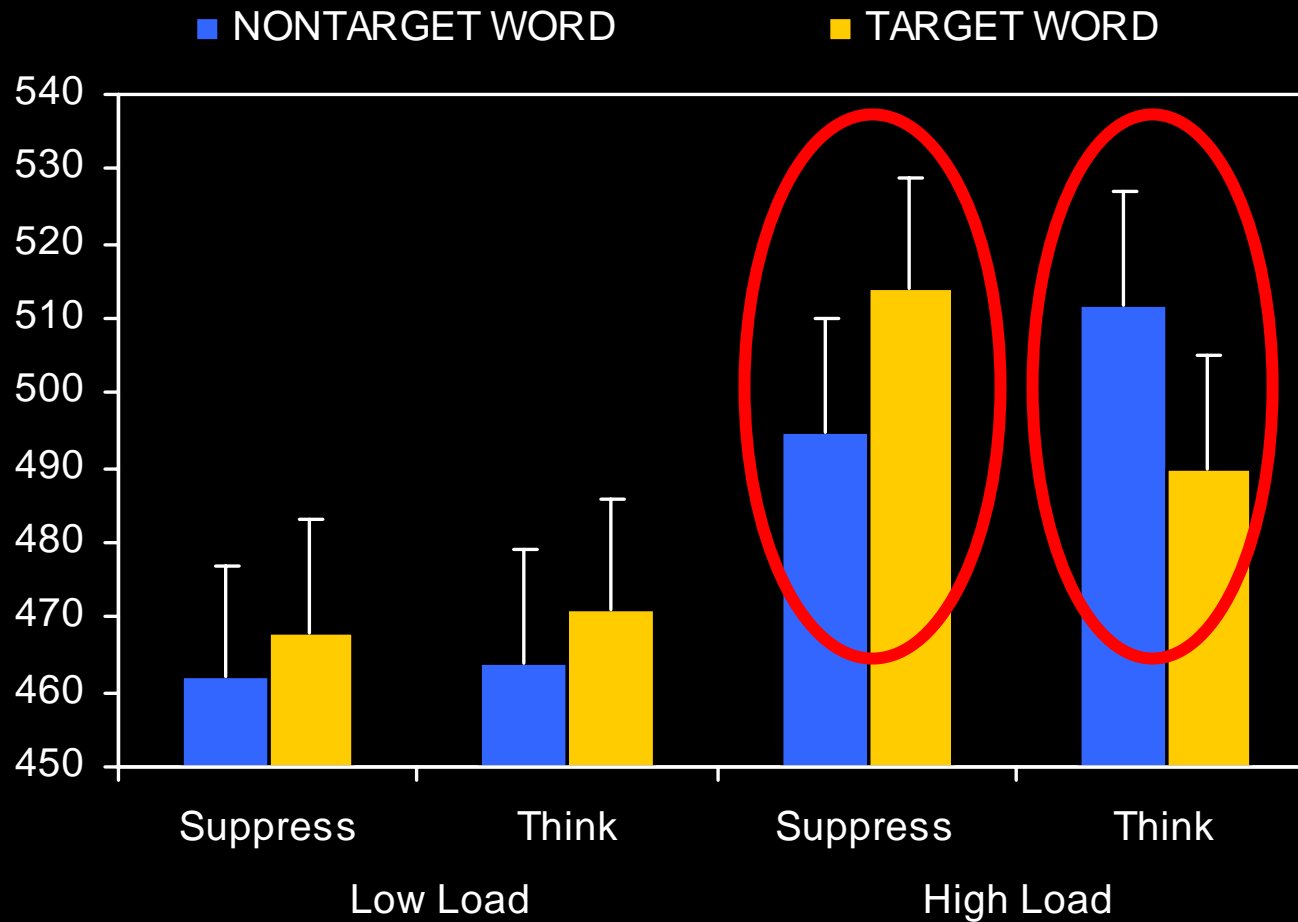
- Effortful
- Conscious
- Interruptible

An **ironic monitoring process** searches for mental contents that signal the failure of mental control

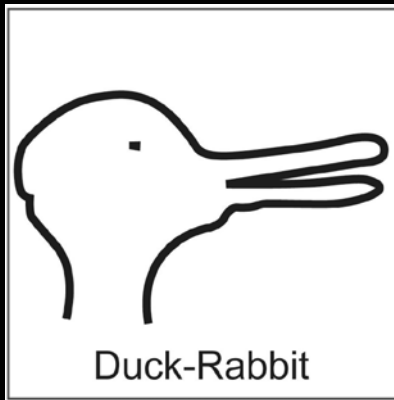
- Automatic
- Unconscious
- Uninterruptible

# Hyperaccessibility

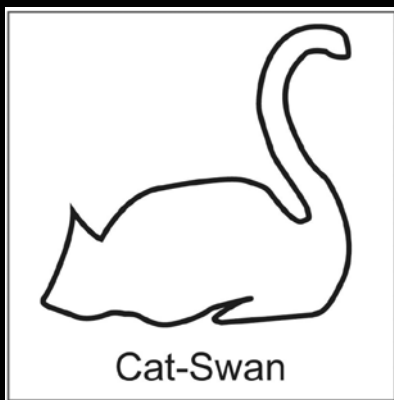
Color-naming Reaction Times (msec)



# Perception

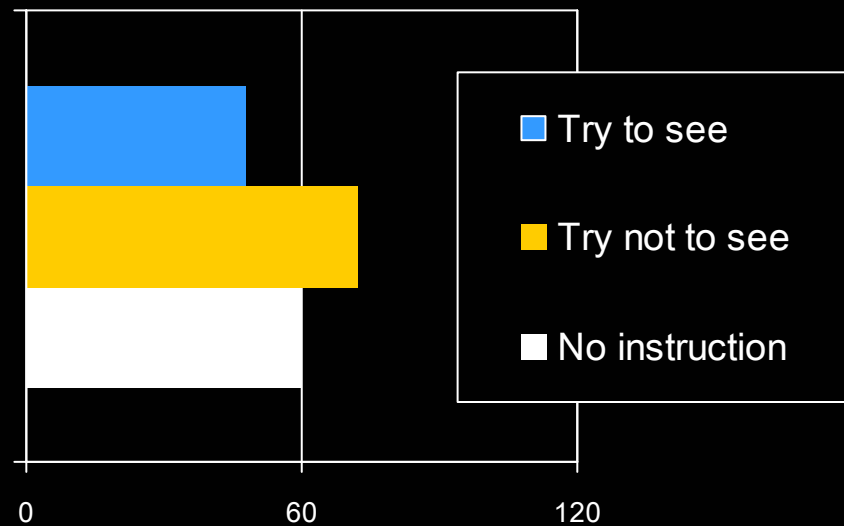


“Try not to see the duck” vs.  
Try to see the rabbit”



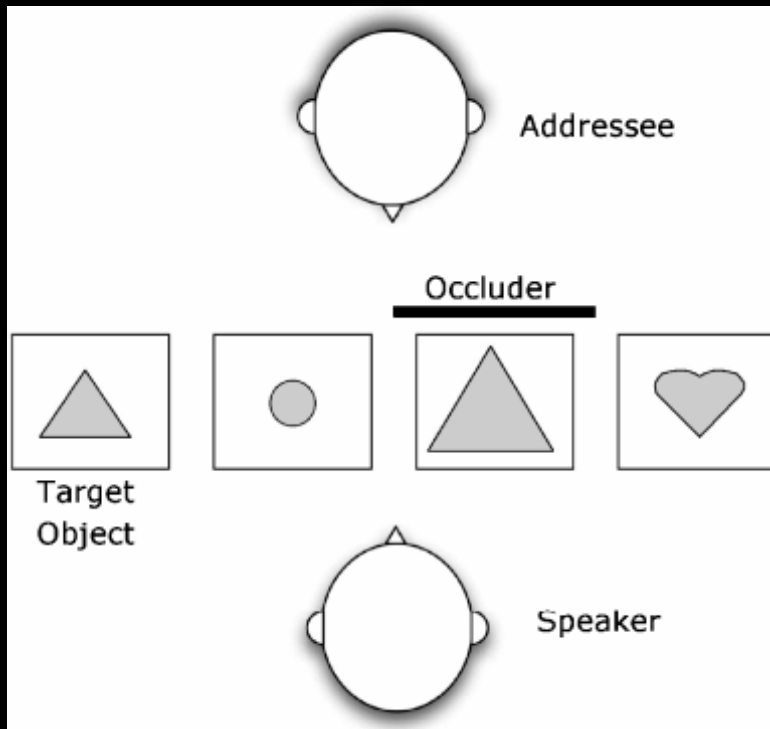
“Try not to see the cat” vs.  
Try to see the swan”

Seconds holding down key to report seeing target

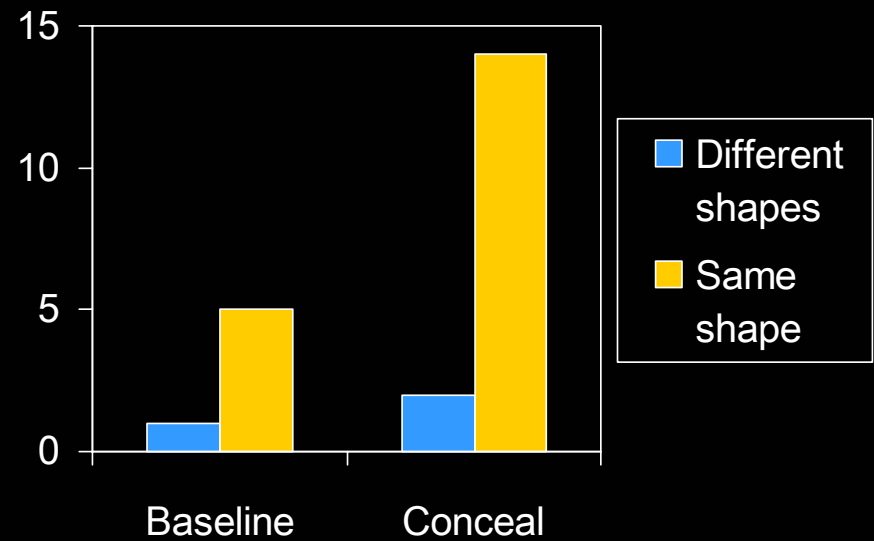


# Deception

Instruction: Identify the target object to the addressee



Percentage of foil-contrasting modifiers (e.g., "small triangle")



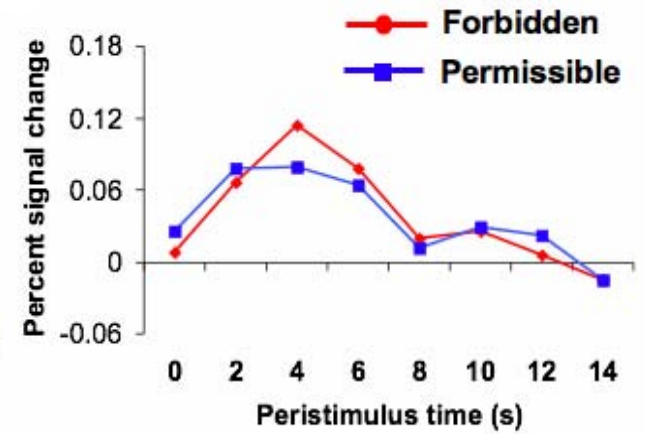
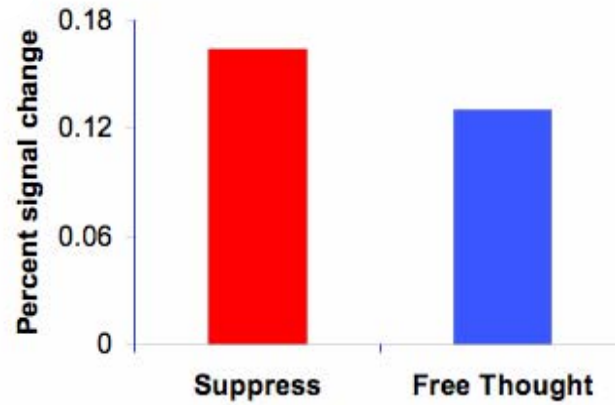


# Brain Activation

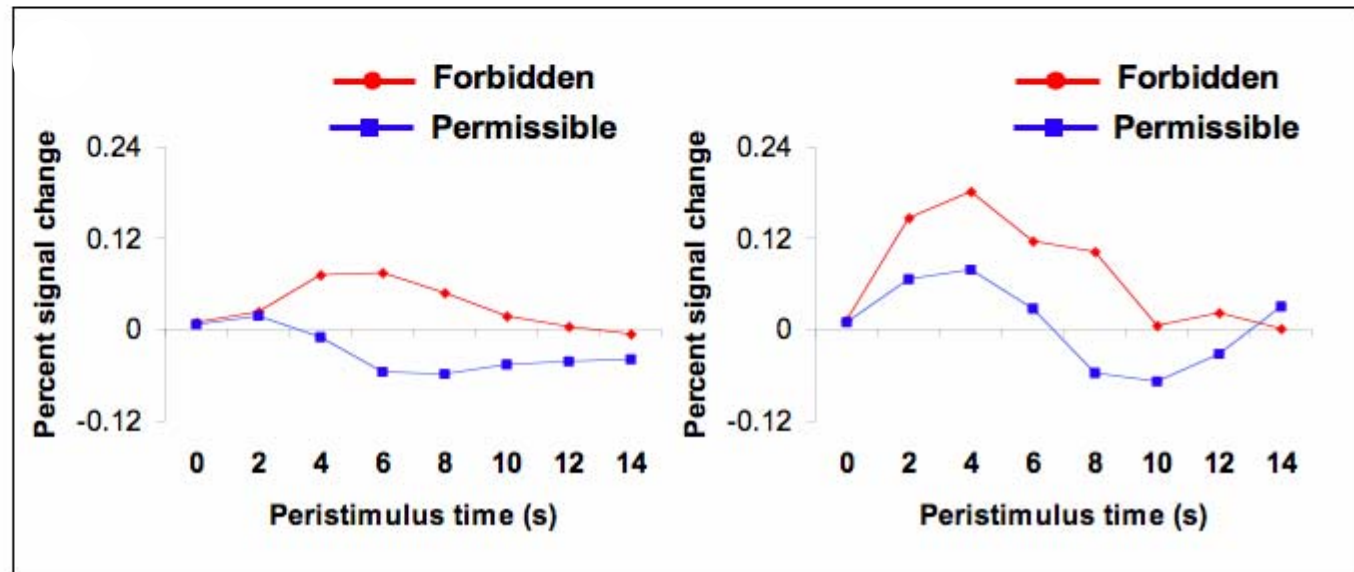
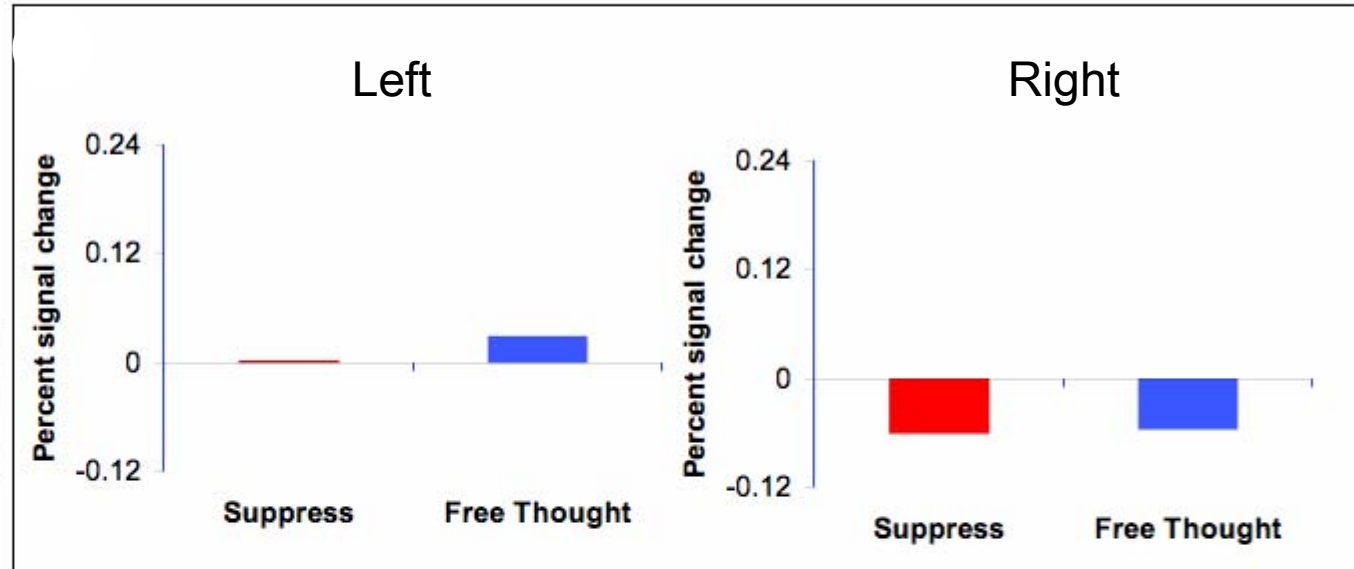
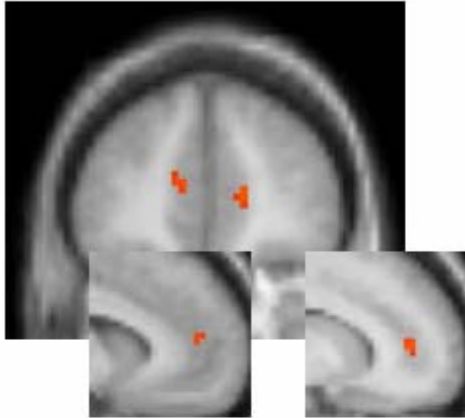
## Task blocks (6 functional runs, task order reversed for 3)

- 120 sec **Suppression** with button press for white bear thought
- 28 sec **Manual response** with button press at light onset
- 120 sec **Free thought** with button press for white bear thought

# Right DLPFC: Sustained activation during suppression task



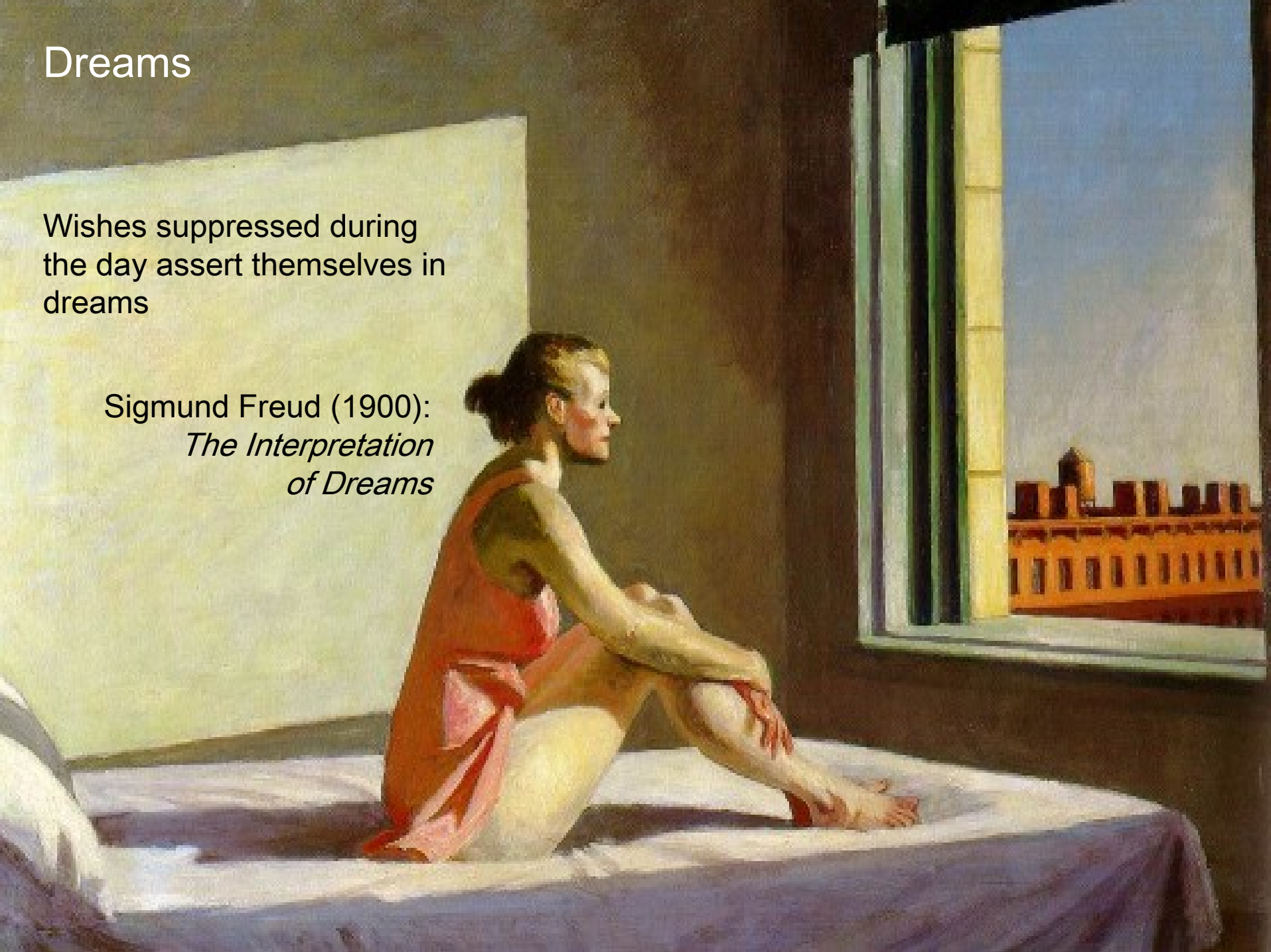
# Bilateral ACC: Transient activation during suppression intrusions



# Dreams

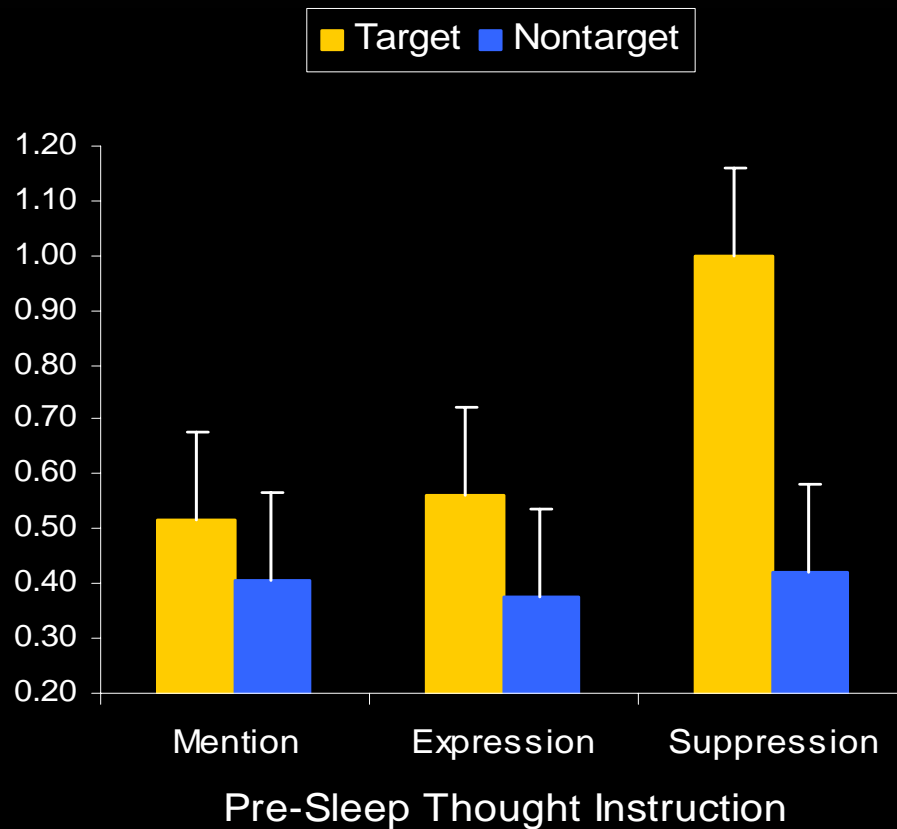
Wishes suppressed during the day assert themselves in dreams

Sigmund Freud (1900):  
*The Interpretation of Dreams*



# Dream Rebound

Mean mentions of person in dream reports





# Asymmetric Reminding



# Asymmetric Reminding



Priming Asymmetry During Suppression



# Asymmetric Reminding

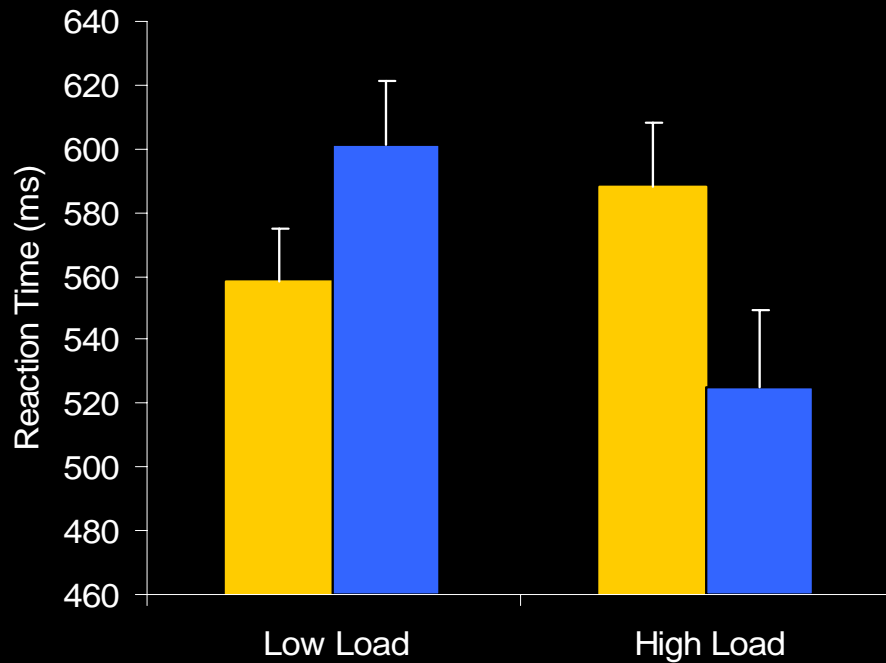


Priming Asymmetry During Suppression



# Asymmetric Reminding

Prime appears 50 msec before target lexical decision



Suppress: Mountain

	Prime	Target
■	Mountain	Climb
■	Climb	Mountain



# Psychopathology





# Psychopathology

## Following instructions to suppress relevant thoughts:

- Increases thoughts of smoking during quitting (Toll, Sobell, Wagner, & Sobell, 2001)
- Increases fear of dentists (Muris, Jongh, Merckelbach, Postema, & Vet, 1998)
- Reduces immune response (Petrie, Booth, & Pennebaker, 1998)
- Increases distress in rape survivors suffering from PTSD (Shipherd & Beck, 1999)

# Psychopathology

## Dispositional thought suppression predicts:

- Depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Wegner & Zanakos, 1994)
- Poor coping in accident victims (Aaron, Zaglul, & Emery, 1999)
- Dissociative memory experiences (Muris & Merkelbach, 1997)
- Intentional self-injury in adolescents (Najmi, Wegner, & Nock, in press)



When you put things out of mind, they never really leave



*With thanks to...*

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