

Targets of Erotic Dreams and Their Associations With Waking Couple and Sexual Life

Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel¹, Marie-Ève Daspe², Yvan Lussier¹, and Antonio Zadra²

¹ Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

² Department of Psychology, Université de Montréal

Erotic dreams are common, but the ways in which they reflect waking day romantic relationships remain understudied. We examined the targets of erotic dreams reported by 470 men and 575 women in a romantic relationship as well as the associations between these targets and measures of couple and sexual life. Over 95% of all participants reported having erotic dreams. Women were more likely than men to report that their erotic dreams included their current partner, whereas men were more likely to report dreaming of someone other than their current partner, especially an acquaintance. Logistic regression analyses revealed that individuals in relationships of longer duration, with higher relationship satisfaction, greater sexual desire, and higher frequency of sexual intercourse with their partner were more likely to report erotic dreams involving their partner, whereas participants in relationships of shorter duration and with lower relationship satisfaction were more likely to report erotic dreams involving an ex-partner. Individuals reporting extradyadic sexual behaviors were less likely to have erotic dreams involving their current partner and more likely to dream about an ex-partner or an acquaintance. These results are consistent with the continuity hypothesis of dreaming showing that dream content tends to reflect waking thoughts and concerns.

Keywords: erotic dreams, couple functioning, sexuality, dream content, dream target

Following the landmark findings first published in the late 1940s and early 1950s by the Kinsey Institute (Kinsey et al., 1948, 1953), numerous questionnaire-based studies have shown that erotic dreams are highly prevalent, with ~85% of

Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8634-3463>

Marie-Ève Daspe  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7262-7174>

Antonio Zadra  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3671-7081>

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel, Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Pavillon Michel-Sarrazin, 3600, rue Sainte-Marguerite, C.P. 500, Trois-Rivières, Québec, Canada. Email: marie-pier.vaillancourt-morel@uqtr.ca

men and 75% of women reporting having experienced an erotic dream at least once in their life (Griffith et al., 1958; Nielsen et al., 2003; Schredl et al., 2004; Yu, 2008; Zanasi et al., 2012). Moreover, studies on the actual frequency of sexual dreams in people's everyday dream reports (Hall & Van de Castle, 1966; Mathes & Schredl, 2014; Zadra, 2007; Zadra & Gervais, 2011) reveal that between 4% and 12% of men's dreams and 4% to 8% of women's dreams contain sexual experiences, ranging from sexual thoughts or proposals to kissing and fondling to intercourse.

One important finding on the content of sexually toned dreams is that only a minority of these dreams include the dreamer's current or past romantic partners (Clarke et al., 2010; Zadra, 2007; Zadra & Gervais, 2011). In fact, in ~70% of women's erotic dreams and up to 90% of men's erotic dreams, the identified sexual target is not the dreamer's current sex partner, but rather another character such as an acquaintance, colleague, stranger, or public figure (Gutiérrez-Puertas et al., 2017; King et al., 2009; Yu, 2013; Zadra, 2007). Even in individuals involved in a committed relationship, research shows that the dreamer's current partner only figures in about a third of reported sexual dreams (King et al., 2009; Younis et al., 2017). Little is known, however, about the significance of these observations or the factors that may account for them.

One way of conceptualizing the nature of the associations between targets found in people's erotic dreams and their waking life is within the broader framework of the continuity hypothesis of dreaming, one of the most widely accepted and studied models of dream content (Domhoff, 2011). The continuity hypothesis of dreaming posits that dreams reflect people's most salient waking experiences and concerns (Domhoff, 2003; Hall & Nordby, 1972; Schredl, 2003). In line with this conceptualization of dreams, a vast number of studies have documented various ways in which dream content relates to the dreamer's waking thoughts, concerns, and emotional experiences (De Koninck et al., 2016; Domhoff, 1996; Eichenlaub et al., 2018; Malinowski et al., 2014; Sikka et al., 2018).

Among the findings put forth by the handful of studies on correlates of sexual dreams, the observations that the occurrence of such dreams often parallels the frequency of sexual intercourse (Younis et al., 2017), of orgasmic experience (King et al., 2009), and time spent thinking about sexually related fantasies (King et al., 2009; Schredl et al., 2009) are consistent with the continuity hypothesis of dreaming. In addition, one study of 98 female undergraduates found that dreams about infidelity were associated with having had an unfaithful partner and with higher daytime levels of romantic jealousy. However, the same study also found that sexual dreams involving the current partner or sexual targets other than one's current partner were unrelated to dreamer's level of relationship satisfaction (Clarke et al., 2010). Similarly, a study of 211 married Egyptian women found that sexual dreams were unrelated to overall sexual satisfaction but were related to the frequency of sexual intercourse with the partner (Younis et al., 2017). Whether these findings hold true for men or in more diverse, nonstudent samples of women in committed relationships has yet to be investigated.

Current Study

The first objective of the present study was to document the targets of erotic dreams (i.e., romantic partners, ex-partners, acquaintances, public figures,

imaginary individuals, and strangers) in a large sample of men and women currently in a romantic relationship. In line with previous findings, we predicted that a majority of erotic dreams would feature targets other than the dreamer's current romantic partner and that the proportion of erotic dreams involving the current partner would be lower in men than in women.

The second objective was to examine the associations between the various targets found in erotic dreams of individuals currently in a romantic relationship and a range of indicators of couple and sexual life. Specifically, we examined the associations between these targets and sex (i.e., men and women), relationship duration, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual desire, frequency of sexual intercourse with one's partner, and extradyadic behaviors. We expected, based on the continuity hypothesis of dreaming, that scores on measures of sexual and couple life would be associated with related content in erotic dreams. For instance, we predicted that a higher frequency of sexual intercourse with one's partner would be related to sexual dreams involving the current partner, whereas extradyadic behaviors would show stronger relations to sexual dreams featuring targets other than the current partner.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A community-based convenience sample was recruited via online advertisements on social media, e-mail lists, and posters or flyers in high schools, colleges, and universities in and around a medium-sized city in Canada. Participants interested in completing an online anonymous survey about sexuality and relationship functioning accessed a hyperlink leading to a consent form followed by a series of self-report questionnaires, all of which were hosted by *FluidSurveys*. To be eligible for the current study, interested participants had to be aged 16 years or older and currently involved in a romantic relationship. Participants were offered a chance to enter a draw in which they could win one of ten \$50 prizes. The study was approved by the [Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières'] Institutional Review Board.

Of the 1,087 volunteers who gave their consent and met the inclusion criteria, 1,045 (96.1%) completed the required questionnaires and were thus included in the study. Among these, 45% ($n = 470$) were men and 55% ($n = 575$) were women. Participants' sociodemographic characteristics are presented in [Table 1](#).

Measures

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Items regarding participants' sociodemographic characteristics were used to gather information about sex, age, highest education level, relationship status, sex of the partner, and relationship duration. Sex was coded as 0 = *women* and 1 = *men*. Relationship duration varied between 1 = *less than one month* and 25 = *more than 10 years*.

Erotic Dreams

Two items were used to assess the frequency of erotic dreams and the target of these dreams. No definition of erotic dreams was presented to participants. First, one question asked participants if they had erotic dreams. Answers to this item were

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics for the Total Sample and for Women and Men Separately

Sociodemographic characteristics	Total sample N = 1,045 % (n)	Women n = 575 % (n)	Men n = 470 % (n)
Age			
16 to 25 years	45.7 (478)	55.8 (321)	33.4 (157)
26 to 35 years	30.8 (322)	30.4 (175)	31.3 (147)
36 to 45 years	14.9 (156)	10.3 (59)	20.6 (97)
More than 46 years	8.5 (89)	3.5 (20)	14.7 (69)
Highest education level completed			
High school or vocational	17.9 (187)	16.9 (97)	19.1 (90)
College	31.7 (331)	36.0 (207)	26.4 (124)
Undergraduate	32.9 (344)	34.6 (199)	30.9 (145)
Graduate	15.0 (157)	9.9 (57)	21.3 (100)
Relationship status			
Dating without cohabiting	31.2 (326)	35.0 (201)	26.6 (125)
Cohabiting	53.4 (558)	54.3 (312)	52.3 (246)
Married	15.1 (158)	10.4 (60)	20.9 (98)
Sex of the partner			
Same-sex relationship	6.8 (71)	3.5 (20)	10.9 (51)
Mixed-sex relationship	91.5 (956)	94.6 (544)	87.7 (412)
Relationship duration			
Less than one year	19.1 (200)	21.9 (126)	15.7 (74)
One to three years	24.7 (258)	29.0 (167)	19.4 (91)
Three to ten years	36.0 (376)	35.0 (201)	37.2 (175)
More than ten years	18.8 (196)	12.3 (71)	26.6 (125)

provided on a 4-point rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*very often*). Participants who reported having erotic dreams were then asked to identify the person or persons that usually featured in these dreams. The six choices were their current partner, an ex-partner, an acquaintance (including friends and colleagues), a public figure, an imaginary person, and a stranger. Each target was coded as a dichotomous variable, with 0 = *no erotic dream with this target* and 1 = *erotic dreams usually include this target*.

Relationship Satisfaction

A shortened four-item version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Sabourin et al., 2005; Spanier, 1976) was used to assess subjective global evaluation of relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction as measured by the DAS does not explicitly measure sexual satisfaction. The first three items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), and the fourth item is scaled on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*perfectly happy*). Global scores ranged from 0 to 21, with higher scores indicating higher levels of relationship satisfaction. The four-item version shows good psychometric properties (Sabourin et al., 2005). In the current study, Cronbach's α was .80.

Sexual Satisfaction

One item was used to assess subjective global evaluation of sexual satisfaction in the past month. This item was rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*extremely unsatisfied*) to 6 (*extremely satisfied*), with higher scores indicating higher

sexual satisfaction. Previous research has demonstrated the validity of single-item measures to assess sexual satisfaction (Mark et al., 2014).

Frequency of Sex With Their Partner

One item was used to assess the frequency of sexual intercourse with the current partner in the past month. This item was rated on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (*less than once a week*) to 5 (*more than five times a week*).

Sexual Desire

One item from the Arizona Sexual Experiences Scale (McGahuey et al., 2000) was used to assess the level of sexual desire in the past month as a gauge of their overall libido level. This item was rated on a 6-point rating scale, ranging from 0 (*no sex drive*) to 5 (*extremely strong*).

Extradyadic Sexual Behaviors

Three items were used to assess any type of sexual exchange with someone other than the current partner. Participants were asked whether, during their current romantic relationship, they ever (a) had sexual intercourse with another partner than their current partner, (b) flirted online with another person than their current partner (e.g., seduction behaviors, express their love, compliment), and (c) had sexual exchanges on Internet with another partner than their current partner (e.g., sexual conversation, live video sex). These items were rated 0 = *no* or 1 = *yes* and combined into a single variable coded as 0 = *no extradyadic sexual behavior* and 1 = *at least one type of extradyadic sexual behaviors*. Correlations between these items ranged from $r = .32, p < .001$, to $r = .57, p < .001$.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25 to examine sample characteristics and differences between men and women. To handle missing data on the independent variables, ranging from 0% for sex to 7.6% for the frequency of sex with the partner, logistic regression analyses were conducted in *Mplus* Version 8.0 using the full information maximum likelihood estimation method (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). All independent variables were included simultaneously in the prediction of each erotic dream's target with a log-based link function and maximum likelihood estimates (ML). Examination of the data showed that all study variables were normally distributed as indicated by skewness and kurtosis indices ranging between -2 and 2 . Twelve multivariate outliers were identified based on the distribution of residuals in the prediction of an ex-partner as the target of erotic dreams. As logistic regression is considered more robust with respect to outliers than linear models and given that the inclusion of outliers did not affect the significance level and strength of coefficients, the final analyses were based on all available data.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Of the 1,045 participants, 95.1% ($n = 470$) of men and 96.5% ($n = 555$) of women reported having erotic dreams. This difference between men and women was not significant, $\chi^2(1) = 1.31, p = .252$. Of note, 15.8% of men and 18.4% of

women reported experiencing erotic dreams “often” or “very often,” with no significant difference between men and women, $\chi^2(1) = 1.14, p = .286$. The frequency of erotic dreams as well as the reported target of these dreams for the overall sample and by sex are presented in Table 2. Chi-square tests showed no significant difference between women and men’s self-reported frequency of erotic dreams or in the proportion of women and men reporting that their erotic dreams included an ex-partner, a public figure, an imaginary person, or a stranger. However, women were significantly more likely than men to report that their erotic dreams included their current partner, whereas men were significantly more likely than women to report that their erotic dreams included an acquaintance (see Table 2). A significantly greater proportion of women (16.9%, $n = 97$) than men (10.6%, $n = 50$) reported that their erotic dreams included only their current partner, $\chi^2(1) = 8.31, p = .004$, Cramer’s $V = .09$. Erotic dreams featuring a target other than their current romantic partner were reported by a significantly greater proportion of men (84.4%, $n = 394$) than women (79.5%, $n = 454$), $\chi^2(1) = 4.06, p = .044$, Cramer’s $V = .06$. Means, standard deviations, ranges of all correlates of erotic dreams’ target as well as correlations between them are presented in Table 3.

Correlates of Erotic Dreams’ Target

Logistic regression analyses were conducted including sex, relationship duration, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual desire, frequency of sexual intercourse with the partner, and extradyadic sexual behaviors as predictors of each target category found in the erotic dreams. The regression coefficients and the odds ratio for each target of erotic dreams are shown in Table 4.

When examining the current partner as the usual target of erotic dreams, the model accounted for 9.9% of the total variance. Results indicated that individuals in relationships of longer duration, with higher relationship satisfaction, greater sexual desire, and higher frequency of sexual intercourse with their partner were more

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Erotic Dreams Reports in the Total Sample and for Men and Women Separately

	Total sample $N = 1,045$ % (n)	Women $n = 575$ % (n)	Men $n = 470$ % (n)	Chi-square tests between women and men
Frequency of erotic dreams				
Never	4.1 (43)	3.5 (20)	4.9 (23)	$\chi^2(3) = 2.27, p = .519$
Sometimes	78.8 (823)	78.3 (450)	79.4 (373)	
Often	13.6 (142)	14.4 (83)	12.6 (59)	
Very often	3.5 (37)	3.8 (22)	3.2 (15)	
Erotic dreams’ target				
Current partner	52.2 (545)	57.9 (333)	45.1 (212)	$\chi^2(1) = 17.00, p < .001$ Cramer’s $V = .13$
Ex-partner	23.6 (247)	25.2 (145)	21.7 (102)	$\chi^2(1) = 1.77, p = .183$
Acquaintance	44.6 (466)	40.7 (234)	49.4 (232)	$\chi^2(1) = 7.86, p = .005$ Cramer’s $V = .09$
Public figure	7.7 (80)	8.0 (46)	7.2 (34)	$\chi^2(1) = 0.22, p = .643$
Imaginary person	21.6 (226)	20.0 (115)	23.6 (111)	$\chi^2(1) = 2.00, p = .158$
Stranger	35.7 (373)	35.0 (201)	36.6 (172)	$\chi^2(1) = 0.30, p = .582$

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Predictors of Target of Erotic Dreams

Predictors of target of erotic dreams	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i> or % (<i>n</i>)	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sex (1 = men)	1,045	45.0% (470)	0-1	—					
2. Relationship duration	1,030	17.38 (6.28)	1-25	.19***	—				
3. Relationship satisfaction	1,016	15.80 (3.40)	1-21,33	-.08*	-.18***	—			
4. Sexual satisfaction	973	4.48 (1.44)	1-6	-.08*	-.27***	.50***	—		
5. Sexual desire	1,017	3.22 (1.13)	0-5	.25***	-.19***	.26***	.30***	—	
6. Frequency of sex	966	2.48 (1.10)	1-5	-.11**	-.39***	.36***	.61***	.38***	—
7. Extradyadic behaviors	992	42.1 (440)	0-1	.11***	.03	-.16***	-.01	.04	-.05

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .010$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4
Results of Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Each Target of Erotic Dreams

Predictors	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>p</i> value	<i>OR</i> [95% <i>CI</i>]	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>p</i> value	<i>OR</i> [95% <i>CI</i>]
		Partner			Ex-partner	
Sex (1 = men)	-0.60 (0.14)	.000	0.55 [0.42, 0.73]	-0.23 (0.16)	.168	0.80 [0.58, 1.10]
Relationship duration	0.03 (0.01)	.009	1.03 [1.01, 1.06]	-0.07 (0.01)	.000	0.94 [0.91, 0.96]
Relationship satisfaction	0.06 (0.02)	.005	1.07 [1.02, 1.12]	-0.06 (0.03)	.013	0.94 [0.89, 0.99]
Sexual satisfaction	0.06 (0.06)	.351	1.06 [0.94, 1.20]	-0.06 (0.07)	.374	1.10 [0.81, 1.08]
Sexual desire	0.19 (0.07)	.005	1.21 [1.06, 1.38]	0.10 (0.08)	.198	0.96 [0.95, 1.28]
Frequency of sex	0.18 (0.08)	.030	1.20 [1.02, 1.41]	-0.04 (0.10)	.682	1.08 [0.80, 1.16]
Extradyadic behaviors	-0.34 (0.14)	.011	0.71 [0.54, 0.93]	0.61 (0.16)	.000	1.84 [1.35, 2.49]
		Acquaintance			Public figure	
Sex (1 = men)	0.33 (0.14)	.016	1.40 [1.06, 1.83]	-0.09 (0.26)	.730	0.92 [0.56, 1.51]
Relationship duration	-0.02 (0.01)	.051	0.98 [0.96, 1.00]	-0.03 (0.02)	.194	0.97 [0.94, 1.01]
Relationship satisfaction	-0.01 (0.02)	.711	0.99 [0.95, 1.04]	0.04 (0.04)	.340	1.04 [0.96, 1.13]
Sexual satisfaction	-0.07 (0.06)	.259	0.93 [0.83, 1.05]	0.05 (0.12)	.687	1.05 [0.83, 1.32]
Sexual desire	0.02 (0.07)	.766	1.02 [0.90, 1.16]	0.00 (0.12)	.993	1.00 [0.79, 1.27]
Frequency of sex	0.07 (0.08)	.366	1.08 [0.92, 1.26]	-0.15 (0.15)	.325	0.86 [0.64, 1.16]
Extradyadic behaviors	0.59 (0.13)	.000	1.80 [1.39, 2.34]	0.36 (0.25)	.145	1.43 [0.88, 2.31]
		Imaginary person			Stranger	
Sex (1 = men)	0.12 (0.16)	.468	1.13 [0.82, 1.56]	-0.07 (0.14)	.641	0.94 [0.71, 1.24]
Relationship duration	0.01 (0.01)	.662	1.01 [0.98, 1.03]	0.02 (0.01)	.135	1.02 [0.99, 1.04]
Relationship satisfaction	0.01 (0.03)	.830	1.01 [0.96, 1.06]	0.03 (0.02)	.288	1.03 [0.98, 1.07]
Sexual satisfaction	-0.03 (0.07)	.653	0.97 [0.84, 1.12]	-0.14 (0.06)	.023	0.87 [0.77, 0.98]
Sexual desire	0.06 (0.08)	.459	1.06 [0.91, 1.23]	0.13 (0.07)	.049	1.14 [1.00, 1.30]
Frequency of sex	-0.07 (0.10)	.455	0.93 [0.77, 1.13]	-0.00 (0.08)	.965	1.00 [0.85, 1.17]
Extradyadic behaviors	0.23 (0.16)	.146	1.26 [0.92, 0.71]	0.04 (0.14)	.769	1.04 [0.80, 1.36]

Note. *OR* = odds ratio; *CI* = confidence interval.

likely to report that their erotic dreams usually include their partner. Analogously, individuals who reported extradyadic sexual behaviors were less likely to dream about their current partner than those who did not reported extradyadic sexual behaviors. When an ex-partner was examined as the usual target of erotic dreams, the model accounted for 9.0% of the total variance. Results indicated that individuals in relationships of longer duration and with higher relationship satisfaction were less likely to report that their erotic dreams usually include an ex-partner, whereas those who reported extradyadic sexual behaviors were more likely to dream about an ex-partner. Examining acquaintances as the usual target of erotic dreams, the model accounted for 4.3% of the total variance. Results indicated that men and individuals who reported extradyadic sexual behaviors were more likely to report that their erotic dreams usually include an acquaintance. When examining public figures or imaginary persons as usual targets of erotic dreams, the models accounted for 2.3% and 1.1% of the total variance, respectively. Results indicated that none of the predictors were significantly associated with either of these targets. Finally, examining strangers as the usual target of erotic dreams, the model accounted for 1.6% of the total variance. Results indicated that individuals with higher levels of sexual satisfaction were less likely to have erotic dreams that usually include a stranger whereas individuals with greater sexual desire were more likely to dream about a stranger.

Discussion

The present study extends previous research on erotic dreams by examining the targets of erotic dreams reported by people currently in a romantic relationship as well as the associations between different targets and a range of indicators of waking couple and sexual life. In our large sample of men and women currently in a romantic relationship, 95% of men and 97% of women reported having erotic dreams, with no significant sex differences in the frequency of such dreams. These estimates are higher than those reported in past studies (Griffith et al., 1958; Nielsen et al., 2003; Schredl et al., 2004), particularly in women, and attest that erotic dreams are near-universal experiences for partnered individuals. These relatively high rates may be explained by our lifetime assessment and by the use of the term erotic dreams, which may better describe women's dreams than sex dreams, which are sometimes confused with wet dreams (Younis et al., 2017). In addition, because our sample of participants were recruited as part of a larger study on sexuality and relationship functioning, they may have been particularly interested by these topics. However, ~16% of men and 18% of women reported experiencing erotic dreams "often" or "very often," which support that these sexually related dreams are usual. Although the lack of a significant sex difference in the prevalence of erotic dreams contrasts with results from some studies (Gutiérrez-Puertas et al., 2017; Schredl et al., 2009), it is consistent with findings from Canadian samples (Zadra, 2007; Zanski et al., 2012). Thus, cultural differences surrounding sexuality and open attitudes may be at play in the general prevalence rate of sexual dreams in men and women.

In line with our hypothesis and past research (King et al., 2009), our findings showed that targets of erotic dreams of partnered individuals were varied and not limited to one's current partner, suggesting that erotic dreams are a common outlet

for or reflection of partnered individuals' sexual thoughts and fantasies. Despite this variety in targets, 58% of women and 45% of men reported that their erotic dreams usually include their current partner, with current partner being women's most commonly reported target. These rates are higher than past studies' estimates (29% to 34%; King et al., 2009; Younis et al., 2017). Our broader assessment of the person usually included in the erotic dreams of partnered individuals as opposed to the person present in one's last sexual dream or over a short period of daily dream diaries may account for these higher estimates.

That said, the fact that only 14% of participants reported that their erotic dreams only involved their current partner indicates that extradyadic sexual dreams are common, if not the norm. Moreover, the frequency of erotic dreams including different targets was the same in men and women with the exception of current partners being more common in women's erotic dreams and acquaintances being more common in men's erotic dreams. Because the few past studies of erotic dreams in partnered individuals were only conducted in women, our data not only extend previous findings but are in line with research showing that a larger proportion of men's sexual fantasies involve someone other than their current partner whereas women report a larger proportion of fantasies about their current partner (Hicks & Leitenberg, 2001). Moreover, as in Schredl et al. (2009), these sex differences were not explained by difference in women's and men's waking couple and sexual life (e.g., sex drive, sexual satisfaction).

Not only partnered individuals have erotic dreams about someone other than their current partner, our results indicate that who people dream about in their sexual dreams reflects their couple and sexual life. Specifically, individuals in relationships of longer duration, with higher relationship satisfaction, greater sexual desire, higher frequency of sexual intercourse with their partner, and those who did not report extradyadic sexual behaviors were more likely to report that their erotic dreams included their partner, whereas those in relationships of shorter duration, with lower relationship satisfaction, and who reported extradyadic sexual behaviors were more likely to have erotic dreams involving an ex-partner. Thus, erotic dreams that include the current partner are more strongly associated with satisfying romantic relationships, including more frequent and exclusive sexuality. These findings indicate that the people partnered individuals dream about in their sexually toned dreams reflects their waking romantic and sexual life thoughts and behaviors and, as such, extend the continuity hypothesis of dreaming (Domhoff, 2003; Hall & Nordby, 1972; Schredl, 2003) to erotic dreams.

Our results are in line with findings showing that the occurrence of erotic dreams is often proportional to frequency of sexual intercourse with one's partner (Younis et al., 2017). Regarding relationship satisfaction, our results contrast with those of Clarke et al. (2010), who found that dreaming about a current partner was unrelated to relationship satisfaction. However, their small sample was limited to undergraduate women, and their assessment was limited to a single dream experienced over the past week. Our finding that erotic dreams involving one's current partner are associated with longer relationships runs counter to findings showing that sexual fantasies about alternative partners increase over the development of a couple's relationship (Hicks & Leitenberg, 2001). This association may be tied to the individuals people's waking thoughts are most often about. However, when

current relationships are new, people may still be in a grieving process, which may include dreams about the ex-partner (Field, 2011).

Individuals who reported extradyadic sexual behaviors were more likely to dream about an ex-partner or an acquaintance and less likely to dream about current partner. Erotic dreams, in these cases, may well have incorporated the person with whom the individual had extradyadic sexual behaviors. Indeed, extradyadic sexual behaviors are usually associated with an important amount of strain, and emotionally intense waking-life experiences have been shown to have the greatest likelihood of being incorporated in dreams (Eichenlaub et al., 2018; Malinowski & Horton, 2014; Schredl, 2006).

Our findings also revealed that individuals with lower levels of sexual satisfaction and those with greater sexual desire were the most likely to have erotic dreams involving a stranger, whereas no significant predictors were found for erotic dreams involving imaginary persons or public figures. Sexual dreams about strangers may thus be more closely related to individual sexual factors, whereas sexual dreams about imaginary or public figures may emanate from sexual fantasies, exposure to pornography, or be related to events outside the romantic relationship (Yu, 2012, 2013).

Limitations and Future Studies

Although the present study makes up for some limitations of past research in this field by studying a large sample of men and women currently in a romantic relationship and assessing several potential targets of erotic dreams as well as indicators of couple and sexual life, our findings should be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, the correlational design makes it impossible to determine causal associations, and daily diaries or longitudinal studies should be employed to address questions regarding directionality of associations. Second, all data in this study, including on erotic dreams, were collected via retrospective self-report measures, which have some inherent biases and are dependent on individuals' self-perceptions. Memory distortion may affect the accuracy of reports of erotic dreams as well as of their targets. As no definitions of erotic dreams was presented to participants, which sexual activities were considered as an erotic dream is unknown. Moreover, the questions about targets of erotic dreams referred to the other person usually included. Thus, targets that were only rarely included in erotic dreams were not assessed, which could have biased our findings. Daily home dreams logs used within a prospective day-by-day design (Samson-Daoust et al., 2019) would permit to better assess a variety of targets and examine couple and sexual life-related predictors of erotic dreams at the between-subjects as well as within-subject levels of variance. Finally, one recent evolutionary model of dream function, known as the social simulation theory of dreaming (Revonsuo et al., 2016), has proposed that dreams play an adaptive functional role by simulating and strengthening our social perceptions, cognitions, and interactions. Given that this theory postulates that dreamt simulations improved the survival and reproductive success of our ancestors, the role that sexual dreams and their potential targets may play in this conceptualization of dreaming and contemporary social environments warrants further study.

Conclusion

The present study helps advance our empirical understanding of erotic dreams and their correlates, an area of research that has received surprisingly little attention in the fields of sexuality as well as of dreaming. Taken as a whole, our findings are in line with the continuity hypothesis of dreams by showing that the people partnered individuals dream about in their erotic dreams tend to reflect their relationship-related concerns and experiences. Understanding how sexual dreams are associated with different waking relational and sexual needs may be of clinical interest, as dreams can offer a window into people's waking life preoccupations and concerns and their exploration help clients gain insights about themselves and the nature of their past and ongoing relationships (Edwards et al., 2013; Hill, 2003; Pesant & Zadra, 2004).

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