

SOCIAL COGNITION (Part 11)

**Emellia Fahariah Binti Jamaludin, Farahiyah Binti Mohamad Zuki , Pazarina Binti Musa,
Nazimah Binti Mohamad@Mohd Noor & Nor `Akmar Binti Yunus**

Thought Suppression

Thought suppression is the act of trying to ignore or control thoughts that we find threatening or distressing. For example, when reminded of an embarrassing incident or a time when you were rejected, you might try to actively push away these thoughts by distracting yourself or trying to think about something else. Interestingly, however, research has shown that the more you try to suppress such thoughts, the more you will experience these thoughts (even if you don't have OCD). As well, if you try to suppress a thought when you are feeling down, anxious or stressed, that thought then becomes connected to that emotional state. Consequently, the next time you feel down or agitated, you are more likely to experience the unwanted thought. And, when you experience the thought, your mood becomes worse.

While according to the web cited from Wikipedia, thought suppression is the process of deliberately trying to stop thinking about certain thoughts (Wegner, 1989). It is often associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which a sufferer will repeatedly (usually unsuccessfully) attempt to prevent or "neutralize" intrusive distressing thoughts centered around one or more obsessions. It is also related to work on memory inhibition.

Thought suppression is different from Freud's (1955) concept of repression, which is unconscious and automatic and has relatively little empirical support (see Eysenck, 1985; Holmes, 1990 for a review). Over thirty-five experiments to date have found evidence for thought suppression and its effectiveness. It can produce paradoxical effects for personally irrelevant and relevant thoughts at both a mental and a behavioral level.

In order for thought suppression and its effectiveness to be studied researchers have had to find ways of tapping the processes going on in the mind so that they may be described. One such paradigm by Wegner, Schneider, Carter & White (1987) was to ask people not to think of a target (e.g. "white bear") for five minutes but if they did to ring a bell.

After this, participants were told to think about the target for five minutes more. Compared to those who had not used suppression there was evidence for unwanted thoughts being immediately enhanced during suppression and, furthermore, a higher frequency of target thoughts during the second stage, dubbed the rebound effect (Wegner, 1989).

This effect has been replicated with different targets (Lavy & Van den Hout, 1990) and even implausible targets like "green rabbit" (Clark, Ball, & Pape, 1991). As a result, Wegner (1994) suggested the "Ironic Process Theory" where two sometimes opposing mechanisms may be at work; one trying to think of something else (for example, something *other* than the bear) and the other, checking in sporadically to see if the thought in question has stopped.