

The Adaptiveness of Thought Suppression

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In psychological practice, scientific literature, and general belief, the view that thought suppression is non-adaptive or even harmful prevails. This belief, present at least since Freud's time, was reinforced by early studies demonstrating the paradoxical effects of thought suppression. Currently, there are three main sources of evidence for the ineffectiveness or harmfulness of thought suppression: experimental studies, questionnaire studies, and psychological practice. However, each of these sources also provides data suggesting the potential adaptiveness of thought suppression. Experiments on the ironic consequences of thought suppression exhibit low replicability, unlike concurrent studies conducted within the "think/no-think" paradigm, which consistently demonstrate the effectiveness of suppression. Questionnaire studies revealing associations between thought suppression and the occurrence of psychological problems have significant methodological flaws, such as the failure to distinguish between the tendency to suppress thoughts and the susceptibility to intrusive thoughts. In psychological practice, while methods encouraging patients to confront difficult content are predominant, methods based on distraction, which are similar to thought suppression, are also employed. During the presentation, I will examine the available empirical data from the three aforementioned sources and attempt to demonstrate that they contradict the belief in the ineffectiveness and harmfulness of thought suppression. Thought suppression can be adaptive, and future research should specify the conditions under which its use is beneficial.

Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am still a student or have not yet received my Ph.D.

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