

Study Debriefing (SAMPLE)

This study is concerned with the control of unwanted thoughts. Previous studies have found that under some conditions people experience the return of the very thoughts they try not to think about. Although you may be able to control your thoughts for a brief time, thoughts that are intentionally suppressed often return by “popping” into mind or by influencing later perception and judgment.

How was this tested?

In this study, you were asked to perform two tasks--thinking about a red snake, and trying not to think about a red snake. All participants performed these same tasks for 5 minutes each, and they each talked into a tape recorder during both tasks, reporting their ongoing stream of thoughts. One group performed the suppression task first, followed by the thinking task, whereas the other group performed the thinking task first, followed by suppression.

Hypotheses and main questions:

We expect to find that suppression prompts lower rates of mentioning of the red snake than does directed thinking--but that suppression still does not eradicate such mentioning completely. When we examine the frequency and duration of mentions of red snakes that appear in the tape-recorded protocols, we expect to find indications of thought return even during suppression.

We are also interested in the influence of the suppression task on the thinking task. We suspect that when people suppress a thought, an automatic mental process is introduced that searches for that thought--and this process increases the likelihood that the thought will come to mind later when it is being summoned intentionally. So, we expected more time would be spent talking about the thought during the “think period” for those participants whose think period followed suppression than for those whose think period preceded suppression. We are predicting a post-suppression “rebound” of unwanted thoughts.

Why is this important to study?

The rebound of thoughts following suppression may be relevant to everyday difficulties in mental control. People who try to diet by suppressing thoughts of food, for example, might find their minds far too actively interested in food when they later let down their guard. Other thoughts we suppress--secrets, embarrassments, could paradoxically become more prominent in mind as a result of our attempts at mental control. The questions of how and when mental control might have these unwanted effects are still very much open to psychological research.

What if I want to know more?

If you are interested in learning more about the problems people encounter in trying to control their thoughts, you may want to consult:

Smith, John. Red snakes and other thoughts: Suppression and the psychology of mental control. FSU Seminole Report. If you would like to receive a report of this research when it is completed (or a summary of the findings), please contact (Researcher Name) at (Researcher phone number and Researcher email).

If you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this experiment, please contact the FSU IRB Secretary at (850) 644-8633.

Thank you again for your participation.

SAMPLE DEBRIEFING

Thank you for your participation in today's study. Social psychologists are interested in understanding the connections between people's moods and their behavior. Some studies have indicated that, for example, when we feel happy or angry, we are more likely to fall back on a stereotype in order to make a social judgment about an individual. This is a relatively new area of research, however, and psychologists have not examined the effects of several types of emotions on how people make social judgments. Our experiment today concerned how Caucasians who are made to feel guilt will report their attitudes toward non-Caucasians. Much research suggests that, while many people endorse the value of social equality, and they would describe themselves as non-prejudiced, their actual behavior can reveal subtle biases against the members of minority groups. Thus, we are discovering whether Caucasian individuals who feel guilt express more or less egalitarian attitudes toward non-Caucasians depending on whether the guilt is associated with an act against a Caucasian or non-Caucasian experimenter. Our study today addresses this issue.

Our study is addressing how guilt affects the expression of intergroup attitudes, and how it affects the tendency to rely on stereotypes in making social judgments. More specifically, we are investigating whether 2 different types of guilt might affect social judgments and stereotyping. Some researchers suggest that the affect directly resulting from an intergroup context (an interaction with an outgroup member (or members) is different from the affect one has in situations unrelated to the intergroup context. In our study, some individuals are made to feel guilt by accidentally toppling over the experimenter's research notes. In fact, we rigged the chair in these conditions so that it would tip to the side if anyone touches it. There was never really any thesis being conducted; so if you toppled any notes, do not worry, the "notes" were only a prop for the experiment. The question of interest is, how will this guilt feeling (which is about the effect one's action had on either a Caucasian or non-Caucasian experimenter) affect one's attitudes toward non-Caucasians and one's tendency to use stereotypes to make a judgment about a non-Caucasian? We want to determine if the guilt makes people's attitudes toward non-Caucasians more egalitarian and whether it reduces the tendency to use stereotypes in judging others.

All the information we collected in today's study will be confidential, and there will be no way of identifying your responses in the data archive. We are not interested in any one individual's responses; we want to look at the general patterns that emerge when the data are aggregated together.

Your participation today is appreciated and will help psychologists discover more ways of promoting prosocial behavior and intergroup harmony. We ask that you do not discuss the nature of the study with others who may later participate in it, as this could affect the validity of our research conclusions. If you have any questions or concerns, you are welcome to talk with (Researcher Name) at (Researcher phone number and email) of the FSU Psychology Department. If you have any questions about subjects' rights, you may contact the FSU IRB Secretary at (850) 644-8633. If your participation in this study has caused you concerns, anxiety, or otherwise distressed you, you may contact the FSU Counseling Center at (850) 644-1234. If you would like to learn more about this research topic, we suggest the following references:

Smith, Jane (1990). Emotions, arousal, and judgments: A model of affect and stereotyping.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.