Executive functions responsible for thought suppression:
An attempt to integrate research in two paradigms

Abstract for general public

The vast majority of people experience unwanted thoughts. These so-called intrusions appear in many situations. For example, when we are facing a challenge, thoughts about potential failure may interfere. When we want to quit smoking, we could be bothered by thoughts about cigarettes. Often without any particular reason, there appear upsetting thoughts about a painful past or uncertain future. Intrusions, although being a common experience, affect most people who suffer from certain mental disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder. The goal of the project is to examine how effectively we can suppress our thoughts. Can attempts to get rid of unwanted content be successful? Maybe, avoiding what we do not want to think about makes us think about it even more. At present, it is difficult to provide a clear answer to these questions. Research on thought suppression has yielded contradictory results. Research conducted in the so-called *white bear* paradigm shows that thought suppression has paradoxical countereffects. On the other hand, studies in the *think/no-think* paradigm indicate that we effectively forget about suppressed content. With such different results, there is a doubt as to whether both types of research explore the same phenomenon. In this project we study relations between performance in two thought suppression procedures. The goal is to check if higher effectiveness of thought suppression in the *white bear* experiment is associated with better suppression in the *think/no-think* procedure. In addition, there will be carried out tests for certain cognitive functions that are hypothesised to be involved in thought suppression. This may provide an answer to the question whether the same or other functions are responsible for thought suppression in different paradigms. Moreover, there is planned research on thought suppression strategies. It is expected to indicate what we can do to increase our chances of getting rid of unwanted content.