

# External Control of the Stream of Consciousness: Stimulus-Based Effects of Unintentional Thought Sequences

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The contents of our conscious mind can often seem unpredictable, whimsical and free from external control.

Despite these intuitions, previous research utilizing the Reflexive Imagery Task (RIT) has shown that, under certain conditions, an individual thought can be elicited reliably and unintentionally by external stimuli (Allen et al. 2013).

In the RIT, participants are instructed to *not* think of the name of an object that is presented on-screen. Invariably, participants fail to do so, and subvocalize the name of the object on the majority of trials. Studies 1 and 2 build upon the RIT paradigm in order to further examine the predictable and automatic nature of conscious contents elicited by external stimuli.

In Study 1, the word frequency of the object name is manipulated within the RIT paradigm. In this study, we examined if the word frequency of object names could affect the rate and the speed at which object names are subvocalized.

In Study 2, we examined if two unintentional thoughts could be elicited from a single stimulus, similarly to the way one thought follows another in the stream of consciousness.