

Thought patterns in daily life predict emotion regulation flexibility and well-being

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Introduction

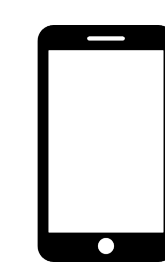
- Emotion regulation refers to the ability to manage, control, and modulate emotional responses, which is essential to well-being.
- Adaptive emotion regulation requires individuals to flexibly choose strategies based on contextual demands [1].
- Ongoing thought patterns also vary across individuals and contexts [2, 3].

Research questions:

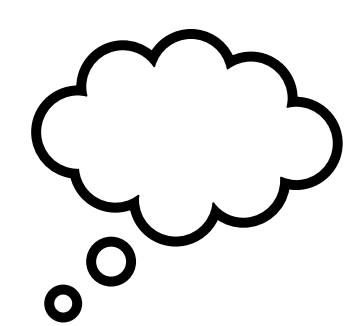
- Do ongoing thought patterns reveal people's ability to regulate their emotions in an adaptive, flexible manner?
- What are beneficial and detrimental features of ongoing thoughts for well-being?

Methods

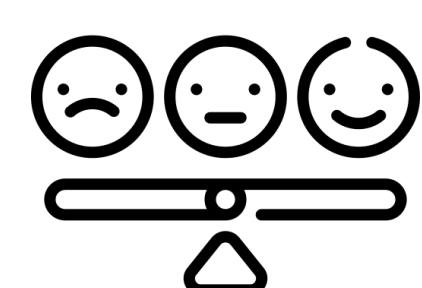
- Participants (N=115, 77 female, age:18-40 [M=19.45, SD=3.3]) completed phone-based experience sampling in their daily life (3,334 observations in total, 5 prompts/day, 7 days)



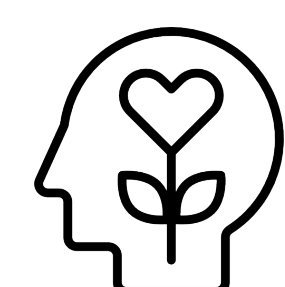
Measures:



Ongoing thoughts: 16 items characterizing ongoing thoughts in daily life (e.g., My thoughts involved future events.)



Emotion regulation: 11 strategies for coping with emotional responses (e.g., I changed the way I was thinking about the situation.)



Well-being: 4 items characterizing momentary well-being (loneliness, stress, anxiety, social/emotional support)

Results: Patterns of ongoing thought

Pattern 1
("Deliberate-Focus")

deliberate
knowledge
absorption
focus
problem
word
detailed

Pattern 2
("Emotional-Intrusive")

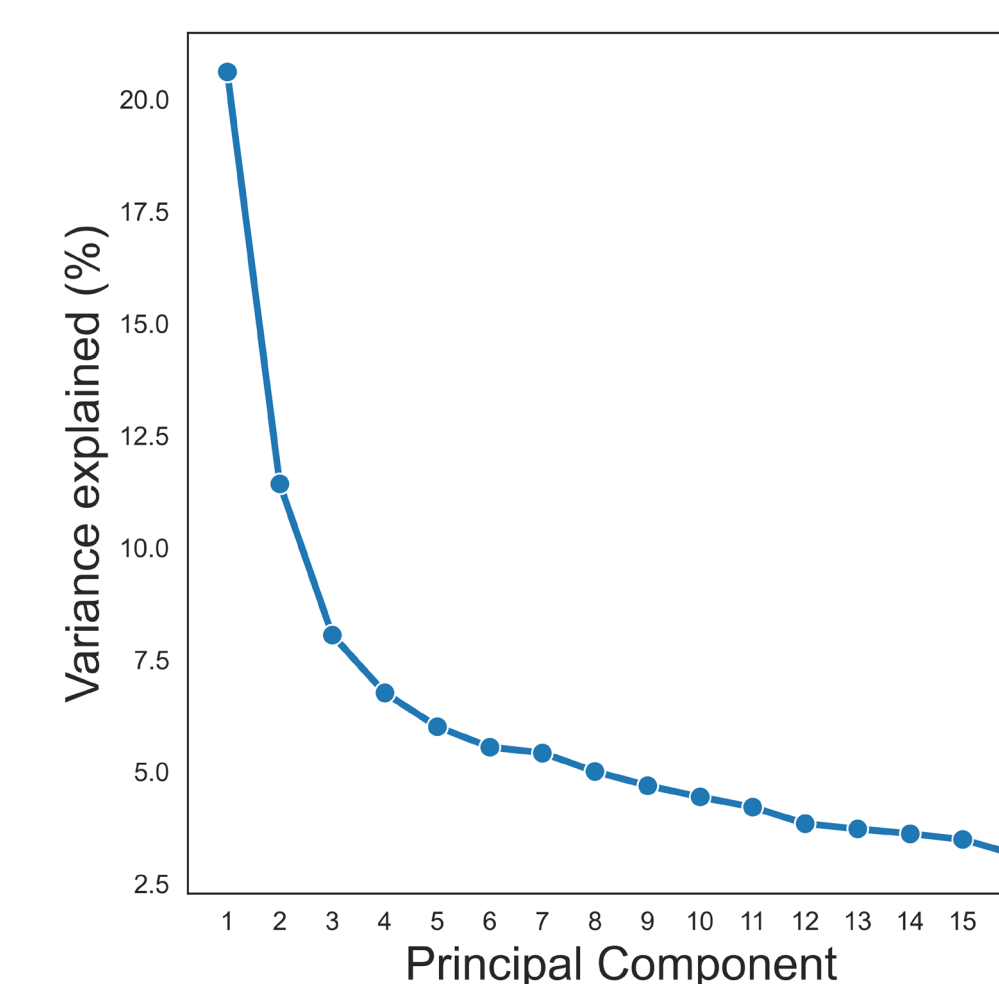
distraction
past
intrusive
emotion
word
absorption
sound
problem

Pattern 3
("Image-Sound")

image
word
past
other
emotion
sound

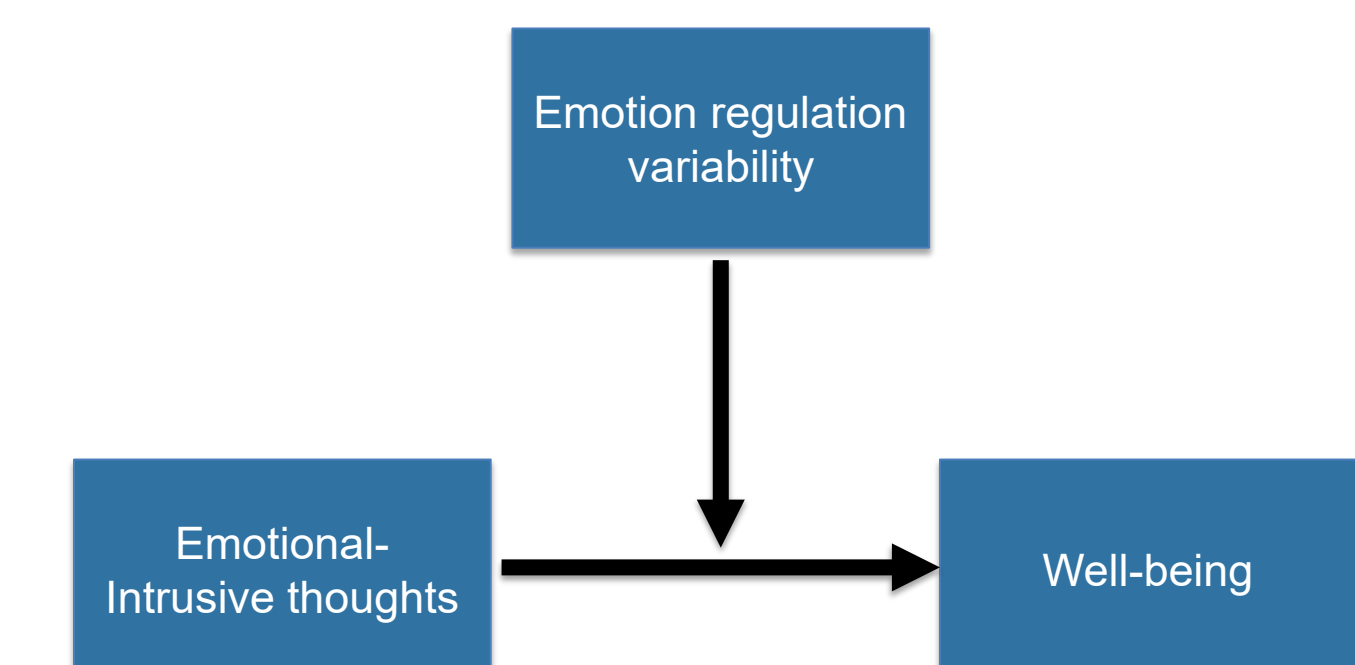
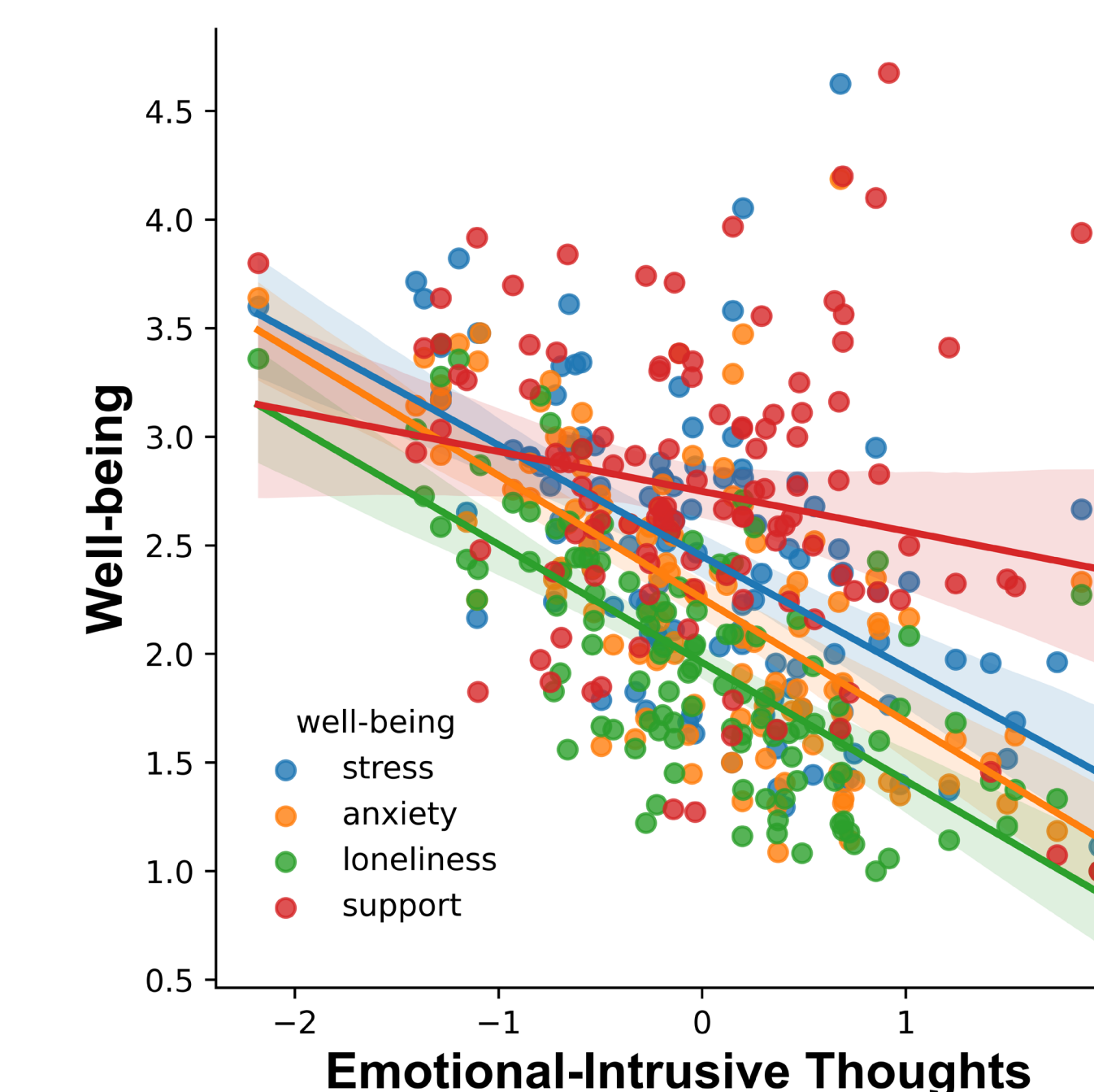
Pattern 4
("Self-Future")

distraction
word
emotion
other
self
future
deliberate



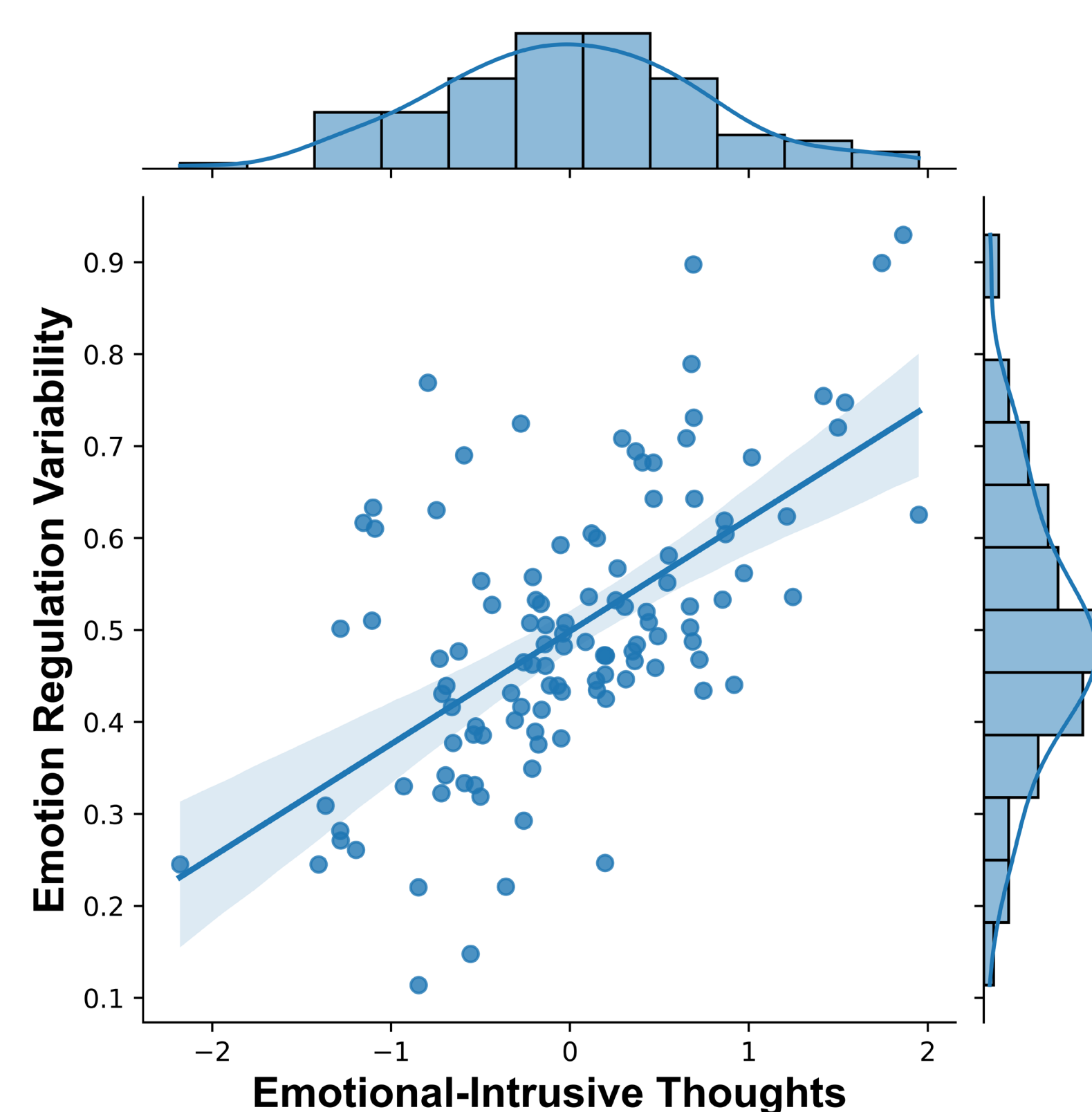
- 4 distinct patterns of ongoing thought were derived from principal components analysis (PCA).

Results: Ongoing thought patterns predict well-being



- Individuals with more positive and less intrusive, distracting thoughts experience less negative affect (stress, anxiety, loneliness).
- This link is moderated by emotion regulation variability.

Results: Thought patterns predict emotion regulation variability



- Individuals who have more positive and less intrusive and distracting thoughts in the real world tend to have higher emotion regulation variability.

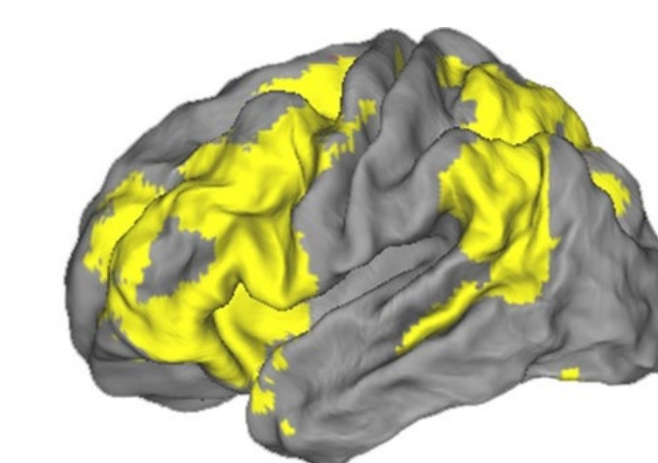
References

- [1] Blanke, et al., (2020). Mix it to fix it: Emotion regulation variability in daily life. *Emotion*, 20(3), 473.
[2] Mulholland, et al., (2023). Patterns of ongoing thought in the real world. *Consc. Cogn.* 114, 103530.
[3] Konuet al., (2021). Exploring patterns of ongoing thought under naturalistic and conventional task-based conditions. *Consc. Cogn.* 93

Conclusion

- Ongoing thought patterns explain variance in emotion regulation variability and momentary well-being.
- Thought patterns featuring emotional, intrusive and distracting content might be a behavior marker of human affect and mental health.

What's next?



Combining fMRI and real-world experience sampling to examine the neural substrates of emotion regulation flexibility.

Inter-Subject Representational Similarity Analysis

