

## Toilet Thinking Phenomenon: Psychological Study on Increased Focus and Creative Ideas While on the Toilet

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of "toilet thinking" the emergence of creative ideas while using the toilet has garnered little academic attention despite being commonly reported. This study explores the psychological underpinnings of this phenomenon by examining cognitive conditions conducive to creativity in private and distraction-free environments. Through surveys and qualitative interviews with 30 respondents aged 16–25, findings reveal that 71% have experienced creative thoughts while in the toilet. Key contributing factors include a sense of relaxation, minimal external pressure, and uninterrupted solitude. These conditions are associated with the activation of the brain's Default Mode Network (DMN), which facilitates reflective thinking and idea incubation. Respondents reported engaging in mental activities such as reflection, daydreaming, and social media use while in the toilet, suggesting that the space serves not only biological but also psychological functions. Despite the spontaneous nature of toilet thinking, most ideas are often forgotten due to a lack of immediate documentation. The study concludes that private, calm environments like toilets may significantly contribute to creative thinking processes and opens pathways for further research in cognitive psychology and innovation studies.

**Keywords:** Toilet thinking, Creative cognition, Default Mode Network, Idea incubation, Reflective thinking, Private space

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### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of creative ideas emerging while someone is on the toilet, known as toilet thinking, is a topic that has not been widely studied academically but is interesting to explore (Martosenjoyo., 2022). Many people report that inspiring moments, solutions to personal problems, or new ideas actually emerge while they are sitting on the toilet (Siegel., 2020). This situation seems to contradict the common view that productivity and creativity only occur in formal and stressful work environments (Schepers & Van Den Berg., 2007).

In cognitive psychology, states of relaxation and calm are often associated with increased creative activity (Smith., 2007). One important concept that supports this is the activation of the default mode network (DMN), a brain neural network that works when individuals are not focused on external tasks (Batubara & Awangga., 2020). The DMN plays a role in reflective thinking processes, free association, and future planning—all things that are relevant to creativity (Yeh, Hsu & Rega., 2019).

Toilets, although socially viewed as private spaces with biological functions, actually offer ideal environmental conditions for DMN activation (Molotch & Noren., 2010). When someone is in the toilet, they are usually alone, unhurried, and free from interruptions (Kristensen., 2004). This situation indirectly creates a psychic space that allows the process of idea incubation to occur (Ritter & Dijksterhuis., 2014).

The concept of incubation in creative psychology explains that solutions to a problem often appear not when thinking about it consciously, but when the brain is given a break to rest from the pressure of thinking (Gilhooly., 2016). The toilet can function as a mental break that allows this to happen (Ma, Tian & Yang., 2024). Thus, toilet thinking can be seen as a spontaneous form of unintentional idea incubation (Gilhooly., 2016).

The purpose of this study is to scientifically explore the phenomenon of toilet thinking through psychological and theoretical approaches. By combining survey data, qualitative interviews, and neuropsychological theory, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how and why creative ideas can emerge in seemingly mundane and irrelevant situations such as being on the toilet.

## METHODS

This study employed a descriptive design with a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach to understand the phenomenon of toilet thinking, which is the increased focus and emergence of creative ideas while on the toilet. Thirty participants, aged 16–25, were selected using purposive sampling based on the criteria of having experienced moments of idea emergence while on the toilet and willing to provide consent for participation. The instruments used were a survey questionnaire containing demographic questions, frequency of experiences, types of ideas that emerged, and several open-ended items to explore experiences further. A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore cognitive processes and subjective contexts in greater depth. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using percentages and simple cross-tabulations, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify recurring patterns and themes. The instrument's content validity was obtained through a literature review and limited pilot testing, while the reliability of the qualitative data was maintained through triangulation and member checking. All research procedures adhered to ethical aspects, including providing informed consent, data confidentiality, and participant anonymity.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In a survey of 30 adult respondents aged 16–25 years, 71% stated that they had experienced the emergence of creative ideas while in the toilet. Some of them even routinely use the time in the toilet to reflect or think. This finding shows that the toilet not only functions as a physical space for biological needs, but also as a psychic space for reflective and creative thinking processes.

**Frequency of Idea Emergence,** The majority of respondents (50%) stated that they had experienced the emergence of ideas once or twice while in the toilet, while 28.6% stated sometimes and 21.4% stated often. No respondents admitted to never having experienced this. This shows that the toilet can be an unexpected but fairly common place for creative thinking processes to occur.

**Causes of Idea Emergence,** Respondents mentioned several causes that might trigger the emergence of ideas. The most common answers were because there was no pressure from the surrounding environment (35.7%) and because of the calm and undisturbed atmosphere (28.6%). Only 14.3% said they were not sure. These results strengthen the assumption that a space free from distractions and social pressures supports deeper thinking processes.

**Mental Activities in the Toilet,** The most frequent mental activities in the toilet are reading/viewing social media (42.9%), followed by contemplating or thinking about personal problems (21.4%) and daydreaming (7.1%). Only one respondent (7.1%) stated that they did nothing. This shows that even though the toilet is a biological space, many individuals use it as a time for mental activities.

**Sense of Relaxation and Freedom of Thought,** As many as 50% of respondents admitted that they sometimes felt more relaxed and free to think when they were in the toilet, while 28.6% stated rarely, 14.3% always, and only 1 person (7.1%) felt that they did not at all. This supports the idea that the private and minimally disturbed toilet atmosphere allows for mental calm.

**Conditions Triggering the Emergence of Ideas,** The majority of respondents (57.1%) mentioned feeling relaxed and calm as the main condition for the emergence of ideas in the toilet, while 21.4% mentioned being in no rush. This reinforces the importance of a relaxed mental state to trigger creativity and reflective thinking. **Awareness of Using the Toilet to Think,** Most respondents (57.1%) stated that they did not intentionally but often think while in the toilet. Only one person (7.1%) consciously used it, and 28.6% stated that it was rare. This shows that this mental activity is more spontaneous and unplanned.

**Response to Ideas That Emerge,** When ideas emerge, respondents most often forget after leaving the toilet (42.9%), while others choose to remember and write them down later (35.7%). Only a small number immediately note down ideas on their cellphones (14.3%). This shows the potential for losing ideas due to a lack of habits or facilities to record immediately.

**Comparison of Toilets with Other Places,** As many as 42.9% feel that the toilet is more often a place for ideas to emerge than other places, while 35.7% feel that it is less common. This shows that toilets can have special characteristics that support the emergence of ideas, although not for everyone.

**Other Private Spaces for Thinking,** As many as 57.1% of respondents also experience creative ideas in other private spaces such as bedrooms or while taking a shower, and 42.9% admit that they sometimes experience the same thing. This strengthens the hypothesis that a quiet and distraction-free private space is very conducive to the creative thinking process. The results showed that most respondents had experienced the emergence of ideas while in the toilet, either accidentally or occasionally, with the most supportive conditions being when feeling relaxed, calm, and free from environmental pressure. The dominant mental activities carried out in the toilet include reading social media, reflecting, and daydreaming, which shows that the toilet functions not only as a biological space, but also a psychological space that supports the thinking process. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of toilet thinking, namely a person's ability to think more reflectively and creatively in a private space such as a toilet, because there are minimal distractions and it provides a moment of calm. A calm atmosphere and a relaxed body are the main factors believed to trigger the emergence of ideas, although most respondents did not consciously use the time in the toilet to think. Unfortunately, many ideas are forgotten because they are not immediately recorded, although some respondents admit that the toilet is a place that generates ideas more often than other places. This finding supports the understanding that toilet thinking is a spontaneous form of cognitive activity that has the potential to be explored further in the context of creativity and problem solving (Malafouris., 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the survey results of respondents aged 16–25, it can be concluded that the bathroom is not merely a space for fulfilling biological needs but also functions as a psychological space that supports reflective and creative thinking. Most respondents admitted to experiencing the emergence of ideas while in the bathroom, especially under calm, relaxed, and low-pressure conditions. Activities such as reflection, browsing social media, and daydreaming are common, suggesting that the bathroom provides a conducive atmosphere for mental engagement.

The concept of toilet thinking the emergence of creative thoughts in private, distraction-free spaces is reflected in these findings as a spontaneous yet significant phenomenon in facilitating thought processes. Although most respondents do not intentionally use bathroom time to think, they still experience moments of inspiration in that space. Unfortunately, many ideas are forgotten due to the absence of immediate documentation, highlighting the need for greater awareness of the importance of capturing unexpected ideas.

Interestingly, some respondents also reported experiencing idea emergence in other private spaces like bedrooms or while showering, reinforcing the notion that privacy and calm are critical factors in creative thinking. Therefore, these findings open opportunities for further investigation into the potential of toilet thinking in cognitive psychology and innovation, and encourage new approaches to understanding how space and environment influence a person's thinking abilities.

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