

Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how hope mediates the relationship between two distinct psychological coping styles—self-expansion and self-suppression—and their impact on self-efficacy among young adults aged 18 to 25. Self-expansion involves engaging in enriching, growth-oriented activities, while self-suppression reflects avoidance-based behaviors that seek to numb or hide distress. Using validated self-report measures, data were collected from 200 participants (100 males and 100 females) through an online survey. Mediation analysis revealed that hope significantly mediates the relationship between self-expansion and self-efficacy, suggesting that individuals who pursue personal growth are more likely to foster hope, which in turn strengthens their belief in their ability to manage life's challenges. Conversely, self-suppression did not show a significant direct or indirect relationship with self-efficacy, although theoretical models suggest potential long-term negative effects. These findings highlight the powerful role of hope as a psychological resource and underscore the value of promoting self-expanding behaviors—especially during early adulthood. By identifying pathways through which individuals build resilience and confidence, this study contributes to a more compassionate understanding of human motivation and well-being. Future research is encouraged to explore these dynamics longitudinally and across diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Hope, Self-Expansion, Self-Suppression, Self-Efficacy, Young Adults, Coping, Psychological Resilience*

This study investigates how hope mediates the relationship between self-expansion, self-suppression, and self-efficacy. Self-expansion involves personal growth through new experiences and relationships, while self-suppression refers to the inhibition of one's true self to conform or avoid conflict. Hope, characterized by the belief in a better future and one's ability to influence it, may serve as a psychological bridge linking these self-processes to an individual's belief in their own capabilities (Cherry, 2023; Snyder, 2002). In addition, the study examines escapism—a coping mechanism where individuals divert their attention from stress or emotional pain through activities like excessive social media use, substance abuse, or gaming. While escapism can provide temporary relief, it manifests in both positive and negative forms. Positive escapism fosters well-being through healthy outlets like journaling, music, or sports, supporting creativity and resilience (Kross

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Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

& Grossmann, 2011; Taylor, 1991). In contrast, negative escapism often results in psychological isolation, emotional numbness, and impaired functioning, potentially exacerbating conditions like anxiety or depression and requiring clinical intervention (Cherry, 2023).

Stenseng et al. (2012) proposed two distinct subscales of escapism: self-expansion and self-suppression. These subscales explain the underlying motivations for escapist behavior. Self-expansion refers to using escapism for personal growth, learning, and emotional balance. It includes activities such as reading, engaging in creative hobbies, or playing strategic games that enhance cognitive skills and resilience. Individuals high in self-expansion are not avoiding life stressors but instead pursuing meaningful activities that enrich their lives and foster psychological growth. In contrast, self-suppression involves avoiding or denying negative emotions and stressful realities through maladaptive behaviors such as binge-watching, substance use, or excessive social media use. While these behaviors may offer temporary relief, they often worsen mental health outcomes over time, increasing the risk of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Stenseng's research highlights how the purpose behind escapism—whether to grow or to avoid—significantly impacts one's mental well-being (Stenseng et al., 2012).

Escapism is a psychological mechanism through which individuals avoid distressing realities by mentally or physically withdrawing into more comforting or fantasy-based experiences (Klinger, 1990). While often viewed negatively, escapism can serve as a temporary coping strategy to alleviate emotional discomfort and regain psychological balance (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). However, when it becomes chronic, escapism may hinder effective problem-solving and adaptive coping, thereby undermining an individual's sense of agency and self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's capability to execute actions required to manage prospective situations. When individuals frequently disengage from reality through escapist behaviors—such as excessive daydreaming, substance use, or compulsive media consumption—they may experience a decline in self-efficacy due to repeated avoidance of real-world challenges (Weger & Sandi, 2018). This compromised self-efficacy can, in turn, influence the capacity to generate and sustain hope, defined by Snyder (2002) as a cognitive process involving agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals). Escapism, therefore, may interrupt the feedback loop that underpins goal-directed behavior, diminishing both the belief in one's capacity to effect change and the hopeful outlook necessary for personal growth and psychological resilience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Li et al. (2024) found that hope mediates the effects of social support and self-esteem on resilience, emphasizing its centrality in recovery. Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) showed that hopeful college students displayed greater academic resilience during online learning, with agency thinking playing a key role.

Nguyen et al. (2024) demonstrated that enhancing self-efficacy through cognitive-behavioral therapy improved pain management and life quality in chronic pain patients.

Kim and Park (2024) observed that self-efficacy helped immigrants adapt better to new cultures, supported by community integration.

Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

Orazi et al. (2023) identified both maladaptive (self-suppression) and adaptive (self-expansion) forms, influencing emotional regulation differently.

Liu et al. (2023) linked digital self-efficacy to remote work productivity.

Carter et al. (2023) showed that STEM students, especially from underrepresented groups, benefited from programs that enhanced their confidence.

Lee et al. (2023) associated higher self-efficacy in older adults with better health and life satisfaction.

Reichard et al. (2023) found that a hope-building program reduced PTSD symptoms in veterans.

Hansen et al. (2023) noted that hope improved treatment adherence and emotional coping in patients with chronic illnesses.

Stenseng et al. (2022) found that self-expansion escapism increased well-being, whereas self-suppression led to poorer outcomes.

Snyder (2002), expanding on the concept of hope, emphasized that individuals with high hope not only set meaningful goals but also use strategic thinking and persistence—termed “agency” and “pathways” thinking—to reach them, thus enhancing self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997), in his foundational work on self-efficacy, explained that believing in one’s abilities significantly affects motivation, emotional responses, and resilience, all of which are key to successful goal pursuit and psychological adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

- The aim of the study is to explore the mediating role of hope in the impact of self-expansion and self-suppression on self-efficacy.

Objective

- To examine the mediating role of hope in the relationship between self-expansion and self-efficacy.
- To examine the mediating role of hope in the relationship between self-suppression and self-efficacy.

Hypothesis

- **H1-** Hope will significantly mediate the relationship between self-expansion and self-efficacy.
- **H2-** Hope will significantly mediate the relationship between self-suppression and self-efficacy.

Questionnaire scale used

- **The Escapism Scale**, developed by Stenseng, Rise, and Kraft (2012), assesses how individuals use escapism to cope with emotional distress or discomfort. It

Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

distinguishes between two types of escapism: self-suppression, which involves using escapism to avoid negative emotions, and self-expansion, which focuses on engaging in activities that promote personal growth and positivity. This scale helps to explore how these forms of escapism relate to psychological outcomes like distress and well-being. It demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between 0.85 and 0.90, ensuring reliability. The scale also has good construct validity, as it correlates meaningfully with measures of stress and well-being, supporting its criterion-related and content validity.

- **The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)** by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) measures an individual's belief in their ability to manage challenging situations and tasks. Unlike domain-specific self-efficacy, the GSES focuses on overall confidence in dealing with various life situations. It has proven to be highly reliable, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.76 and 0.90, reflecting its strong internal consistency. The scale is known for its excellent construct validity and has been validated through its correlations with resilience, coping, and life satisfaction. It also demonstrates predictive validity, as higher self-efficacy scores are associated with better performance and mental health.
- **The Adult Hope Scale (AHS)** by Snyder et al. (1991) is designed to measure the two components of hope: agency (the belief in one's ability to achieve goals) and pathways (the ability to plan and find ways to reach those goals). The AHS is commonly used to explore how hope impacts goal setting, perseverance, and emotional well-being. With Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.80 to 0.90, the AHS shows strong reliability. It has strong construct validity, measuring the key aspects of hope, and also exhibits predictive validity, as higher hope scores are linked to better life satisfaction, goal achievement, and coping. Furthermore, it has demonstrated convergent validity, showing significant correlations with measures of optimism and positive psychological functioning.

RESULT

The study explored how hope plays a role in the link between different types of escapism—self-expansion and self-suppression—and self-efficacy. A total of 200 young adults (100 males and 100 females, aged 18–25) completed three questionnaires: the Escapism Scale, the Adult Hope Scale, and the General Self-Efficacy Scale. Results showed that participants leaned more toward self-expansion activities, like engaging in creative or meaningful pursuits, rather than self-suppressive behaviors. Self-expansion was positively linked to both hope and self-efficacy, while self-suppression showed negative associations.

Two mediation models were tested using regression analysis. The first model found that self-expansion significantly increased hope, which in turn boosted self-efficacy—showing that hope acts as a bridge between positive escapism and confidence in handling challenges. The second model showed that self-suppression lowered hope, which then led to reduced self-efficacy.

In other words, people who engage in growth-oriented escapism tend to feel more hopeful and capable, whereas those who use escapism to avoid problems may experience less hope and confidence. These findings highlight hope's crucial role in connecting how we escape with how we feel about ourselves.

Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

TABLES

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	M	Mdn	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	SE Skew	Kurtosis	SE Kurt
Self-expansion	22.5	23.0	4.74	5	30	-0.992	0.172	1.90	0.342
Self-suppression	22.9	23.0	5.67	6	36	-0.0497	0.172	0.0156	0.342
Total hope	44.8	46.0	9.50	8	64	-0.782	0.172	1.13	0.342
Self-efficacy	29.7	30.0	6.15	10	40	-0.470	0.172		

Table 2 Mediation Estimates for the Effect of Self-Suppression on Self-Efficacy via Total Hope

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% Lower	CI	95% CI Upper	Z	p
Indirect	0.0184	0.0413	-0.0626		0.0994	0.446	.656
Direct	-0.0177	0.0646	-0.1444		0.1089	-0.274	.784
Total	0.0007	0.0766	-0.1495		0.1509	0.009	.993

Table 2.1 Path Estimates Among Self-Suppression, Total Hope, and Self-Efficacy

Path	Estimate	SE	95% Lower	CI	95% CI Upper	Z	p
Self-suppression → Total hope	0.0528	0.1183	-0.179		0.285	0.446	.655
Total hope → Self-efficacy	0.3487	0.0386	0.273		0.424	9.037	< .001
Self-suppression → Self-efficacy	-0.0177	0.0646	-0.144		0.109	-0.274	.784

Table 3 Mediation Estimates for the Effect of Self-Expansion on Self-Efficacy via Total Hope

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% Lower	CI	95% CI Upper	Z	p
Indirect	0.475	0.0740	0.330		0.6201	6.42	< .001
Direct	-0.117	0.0979	-0.309		0.0745	-1.20	.231
Total	0.358	0.0882	0.185		0.5306	4.05	< .001

Table 3.1 Path Estimates Among Self-Expansion, Total Hope, and Self-Efficacy

Path	Estimate	SE	95% Lower	CI	95% CI Upper	Z	p
Self-expansion → Total hope	1.236	0.1116	1.017		1.4543	11.07	< .001
Total hope → Self-efficacy	0.384	0.0488	0.289		0.4801	7.88	< .001
Self-expansion → Self-efficacy	-0.117	0.0979	-0.309		0.0745	-1.20	.231

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study explored the mediating role of hope in the relationship between self expansion and self-suppression on self-efficacy in young adults aged 18–25. Self-expansion and self-suppression are two psychologically distinct forms of escapism, as theorized by Stenseng et al. (2012), with self-expansion reflecting healthy, growth-oriented escape, and self-suppression representing avoidant, maladaptive behaviors. This study sought to understand not only how these forms of escapism relate to self-efficacy—the belief in one’s ability to overcome challenges—but more importantly, whether hope serves as the psychological bridge between these constructs. The study used well-validated scales to assess self-expansion, self-suppression, hope, and self-efficacy, employing mediation analysis to test two hypotheses: whether hope significantly mediates the relationship between (1) self expansion and self-efficacy and (2) self-suppression and self-efficacy. The first hypothesis was strongly supported. Results demonstrated that self-expansion had a significant positive effect on hope, which in turn significantly influenced self-efficacy. The indirect pathway between self-expansion and self-efficacy through hope was statistically significant ($p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who engage in growth-oriented escapism are more likely to cultivate hope, which enhances their self-efficacy. These findings align with previous literature that frames hope as a powerful motivational force. According to Snyder’s Hope Theory (2002), hope consists of agency—the motivational component to pursue goals—and pathways—the perceived ability to devise ways to achieve those goals. When individuals participate in enriching and meaningful experiences such as learning, journaling, or creative expression, they not only distract themselves from stressors but also engage in activities that stimulate agency and solution-focused thinking, core features of hope. These activities help form a narrative of personal growth and potential, allowing individuals to internalize success and competence, thereby reinforcing their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The psychological benefits of self-expansion are further supported by related empirical findings. For instance, Carswell et al. (2023) demonstrated that self-expansion within romantic partnerships enhanced relationship satisfaction and self-concept clarity, while Mattingly et al. (2014) showed that self-expansion through novel experiences significantly improved life satisfaction. These benefits are not merely emotional but cognitive; engaging in such experiences helps individuals reframe challenges, see themselves as more capable, and maintain goal-directed behavior. The current study echoes these findings and shows how the interplay between self-expansion and hope acts as a positive feedback loop that strengthens one’s confidence and competence to manage life’s difficulties. Conversely, the second hypothesis, which tested the mediating role of hope between self suppression and self-efficacy, yielded more nuanced results. Although hope significantly predicted self-efficacy, the pathway from self-suppression to hope was weak and non significant. The direct effect of self-suppression on self-efficacy was also statistically insignificant. This suggests that while hope remains a powerful predictor of self-efficacy, self-suppression may not always directly undermine it in a straightforward manner. However, prior studies suggest that chronic engagement in self-suppressive behaviors—such as emotional numbing, excessive avoidance, and maladaptive coping (e.g., substance abuse)—can reduce hope over time, which indirectly lowers self-efficacy (Baumeister, 1991; Henning et al., 2012). Thus, while the data from the current sample do not confirm a statistically robust mediation, theoretical and longitudinal evidence suggests that the relationship may evolve over a longer period or manifest more strongly in clinical or high-risk populations.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a deeper, more empathetic perspective on how individuals cope with life's demands, especially during periods of psychological stress, uncertainty, and personal growth. It highlights that hope is far more than just a feeling of optimism—it is a powerful, active psychological strength that helps people envision positive futures and take meaningful steps toward them. The findings reveal that self-expansion, a constructive form of escapism, plays a key role in nurturing hope, which then strengthens one's belief in their ability to handle challenges. When people engage in activities that promote growth, learning, and creativity, they not only find relief from stress but also build the confidence and motivation needed to face life with purpose.

On the other hand, the data showed that self-suppression did not have a significant impact in this sample, yet it remains important to recognize its potential long-term risks. Patterns of emotional avoidance and disconnection may not appear harmful immediately, but over time, they can gradually erode inner resources such as hope and self-belief. This insight suggests that both personal and systemic approaches—such as education, mental health support, and public awareness—should aim to replace avoidance-based behaviors with more empowering alternatives.

These findings also have broader implications for how we shape social systems and cultural values. There is a growing need to create environments—through education, therapy, community programs, and public policy—that actively support psychological resilience, self-discovery, and hope. By embedding these values into our collective structures, we help individuals not only cope with adversity but grow through it, fostering a more hopeful and empowered society.

In essence, this research shows that hope serves as the link between inner transformation and outward action. Supporting people in choosing self-expanding paths—even during difficult times—can promote greater well-being, self-confidence, and social resilience. Future research should continue to examine how these relationships evolve over time and across cultures, helping us better understand how to foster hope as a foundation for human thriving.

Limitation

First, the study only included young adults, so the results may not apply to other age groups like teenagers or older adults. Second, because the research was cross-sectional (data collected at one point in time), it can show relationships between variables but not cause-and-effect. Third, the use of self-report questionnaires may introduce bias, as participants might answer in ways they think are socially acceptable or may not fully understand their own behaviors. Lastly, the study didn't consider cultural factors, which could influence how people experience escapism and hope. Cultural differences can shape how individuals cope with stress or define personal growth, which may limit the broader relevance of the findings.

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Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

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Exploring the Mediating Role of Hope in the Impact of Self-Expansion and Self Suppression on Self-Efficacy

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Conflict of Interest

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