DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE AFFECT
ON CONTEXT PROCESSING
Theresa M. Becker
John G. Kerns, Masters Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Context processing is thought to be a central component of cognitive control involved in maintaining goals. Context processing impairments have been implicated in psychopathology, with suggestions that the interaction between context processing and the occurrence of emotions might be important for some mental disorders. However, the specific influence, if any, of briefly elicited negative and positive affect on context processing remains unclear. In this research, I used three separate tasks (i.e., the Preparing to Overcome Prepotency (POP) task, Stroop task, and AX-CPT task, respectively) to examine the influence of briefly elicited negative and positive affect on context processing in undergraduate students. In the first study, negative affect facilitated context processing performance; whereas positive affect impaired context processing. However, the influence of affect on context processing in this task may have been confounded by the influence of affect on decision processes. In contrast to the first study, the second and third studies found evidence that briefly elicited negative affect increased errors on context processing tasks. Conversely, positive affect did not have a significant effect on context processing performance. Overall, these results suggest that negative affect may disrupt context processing and the maintenance of task critical goals. An influence of negative affect on context processing could have important implications for some aspects of psychopathology.