

ENGAGEMENT OF COGNITIVE CONTROL AND DOWN-REGULATION OF NEGATIVE AFFECT

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive strategies can be used to regulate emotion. For example, thinking about the specific details of an emotional situation (i.e., specific thinking strategy) decreases negative affect (Philippot et al., 2006). However, exactly how and why this cognitive strategy is effective is still unclear. There is also indirect evidence for an inverse relationship between cognitive control and emotion. This study examined whether (a) engagement of cognitive control (CC) results in decreased negative affect (NA); (b) whether CC is involved in the specific thinking strategy; and (c) whether negative mood also results in poorer CC performance. In this study, NA was elicited by a public speaking task. This study involved four groups: (1) a specific thinking group, expected to exhibit a decrease in negative affect; (2) a cognitive control group (performance of the OSPAN task); (3) an overgeneralized thinking group, which has not been found to decrease NA; and (4) a non-emotional control group. Subsequently, all groups performed the Stroop task. Performance of a second in a series of CC tasks has been found to produce poorer performance (possibly due to resource depletion). The cognitive control group did not decrease in NA after engaging CC. Further, there was suggestive evidence that the specific thinking group engaged CC, but no evidence to support that engaging CC decreased NA. Finally, NA was not found to decrease performance on CC tasks. These findings support that CC may not directly decrease NA and NA may not decrease CC.