

Public Abstract

First Name:Theresa

Middle Name:Marie

Last Name:Becker

Adviser's First Name:John

Adviser's Last Name:Kerns

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:FS 2007

Department:Psychology

Degree:MA

Title:DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE AFFECT ON CONTEXT PROCESSING

Many aspects of psychopathology appear to involve a loss of control, and this loss of psychological control could involve problems in cognition, in affective states, or problems in the interaction between cognition and affective states. Goal maintenance (i.e., context processing) is thought to be a central component of psychological control. Impairments in maintaining goals have been implicated in psychopathology, with suggestions that the interaction between the maintenance of goals 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 the ability to maintain task goals 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 goal maintenance in undergraduate students. In the first study, negative affect facilitated goal maintenance; whereas positive affect impaired goal maintenance. However, the influence of affect on goal maintenance 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 goal maintenance tasks. Conversely, positive affect did not have a significant effect on goal maintenance performance. Overall, these results suggest that negative affect may disrupt the maintenance of task critical goals. An influence of negative affect on goal maintenance could have important implications for some aspects of psychopathology.