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The Influence of Positive and Negative Emotions on Self-Control after Ego Depletion

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Self-control can be described as discounting or changing responses especially under the guidance of desirable responses criteria [1]. Suppressing desire is a major part of daily life and may be necessary for living in a civilized and cultural community. Effortful inhibition prevent antisocial behaviors and impulses and improves effective functions but it threatened by ego depletion. Ego depletion is the state of having limited cognitive and psychological capacity as a result of taxed self-control [2]. When people try to suppress desired reactions or make difficult decisions, their psychological resources would be depleted. Owing to this, depleted person fails to inhibit negative habitual behaviors and a wide range of impulsive responses. These negative behaviors include aggression, inappropriate sexual responses [3], prejudice, overeating of unhealthy food, alcohol consumption, and impulsive spending [1].

Reviewing past work in this area, fatigue is an important physical sign of ego depletion. Many researchers suggested that individuals would report fatigue after ego depletion [4]. So, positive emotion may evoke energy to resist against fatigue to neutralize the impact of ego depletion. Other studies outlined some major functions of positive emotions. Positive emotion has significant impact on people's cognitive abilities by reinforcing memory and judgment and also affect individual's motivation [5]. Therefore, positive emotion can foster psychological resources. In other studies [6], after ego-depletion, video clips were used to generate positive, neutral and negative emotions in participants. The results show that, compared with neutral emotions, positive emotions can effectively reduce the impact of ego depletion. On the contrary, negative emotions restrict the replenishment of individual's psychological resources [6].

Previous studies have provided profound insights into the process of ego depletion and intentional inhibition; however, they have limitations and need to be mentioned in future studies. They studied the impact of emotional valence (the degree of negative or positive). Further research may provide more insight into these processes with testing whether there are differences between distinct forms of emotions (e.g., happiness, excitement, sadness, disgust, fear, etc.). In addition, further study needs to be conducted investigated on a variety of population groups and use other valid ways to induce specific emotion, before generalizing the findings.

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