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Volume 12

Washington University
Undergraduate Research Digest

Spring 2017

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Recommended Citation

Lydon, Sean, "Cognitive Effects of Hiding Emotion in a Social Situation" (2017). *Volume 12*. 126.
https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wuurd_vol12/126

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COGNITIVE EFFECTS OF HIDING EMOTION IN A SOCIAL SITUATION

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Expressive suppression (i.e., active efforts to minimize emotional expression) has been shown to impair explicit and episodic memory in delayed recall tasks, but it remains unclear how this regulatory strategy influences cognitive processing in a socially stressed environment. Past studies have focused on testing cognitive performance using less interactive stimuli, such as video clips and pictures, to elicit emotion. Research suggests that cognitive processing in a realistic, social atmosphere will have a discriminating effect on attentional resources in suppressors compared to non-suppressors. In the present study, cognitive performance was measured with three types of tasks: immediate recall, verbal fluency, and arithmetic processing. Undergraduates were randomly instructed to hide emotion (suppression condition) or uninstructed (control condition), then participated in a mock job interview. Self-reports of emotional experience, use of emotion regulation, and state social anxiety were collected following the interview. The interviews were filmed to allow for behavioral analysis. We hypothesized that suppressors would show decreased cognitive performance as well as experience higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to uninstructed participants. Analysis showed that participants reported equal usage of expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal. Within these strategies, results suggest that attentional resources are equally unaffected in high stress social situations. Additionally, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were both equally effective at regulating positive and negative emotional experience. This study incorporates strong emotional and social factors in measurements of immediate cognitive processing to provide a new direction for the study of cognitive performance in emotion regulation.