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Looking inward: shifting attention within working memory representations alters emotional responses.

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Source

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Abstract

Selective attention plays a fundamental role in emotion regulation. To date, research has examined individuals' use of selective attention to regulate emotional responses during stimulus presentation. In the present study, we examined whether selective attention can be used to regulate emotional responses during a poststimulus period when representations are active within working memory (WM). On each trial, participants viewed either a negative or a neutral image. After the offset of the image, they maintained a representation of it in WM and were cued to focus their attention on either neutral or arousing aspects of that representation. Results showed that, relative to focusing on an arousing portion of a negative-image representation within WM, focusing on a neutral portion of the representation reduced both self-reported negative emotion and the late positive potential, a robust neural measure of emotional reactivity. These data suggest that selective attention can alter emotional responses arising from affective representations active within WM.

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