
Individual differences in emotion regulation: Why so negative?

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Abstract

In the last decade a substantial body of research has highlighted the neurobiological mechanisms by which negative emotions can be regulated. Such research has obvious direct implications for mood and anxiety disorders, in particular major depressive disorder. Neglected in such research is the importance of positive emotions and the ability to effectively regulate positive emotions in order to sustain motivation and psychological well-being. In this talk, I will present cross sectional and longitudinal fMRI results involving both healthy as well as clinically depressed individuals that highlight the importance of individual neurobiological differences in the regulation of positive emotion. Results in healthy individuals indicate the involvement of prefrontal-striatal circuitry in up-regulating and maintaining positive affect. This circuitry is compromised in clinically depressed samples, who show less sustained striatal activation and prefrontal-striatal connectivity than healthy controls. Striatal activation and prefrontal-striatal connectivity correlates positively with pre-treatment self-reported positive affect as well as the degree of improvement over the course of pharmacological treatment for depression.

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