

Down-Regulation of Love Feelings After a Romantic Break-Up: Self-Report and Electrophysiological Data

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Introduction

- Remaining love feelings for an ex-partner are negatively associated with recovery from a romantic break-up [1]
- So it may be helpful to decrease love feelings for an ex-partner
- Love regulation is the use of behavioral or cognitive strategies to change the intensity of current feelings of romantic love [2]
- Potential regulation strategies:
 - Negative reappraisal of the ex-partner
 - Reappraisal of love feelings
 - Distraction
- **Research question:** How do these regulation strategies change love feelings, valence of affect, and motivated attention for the ex-partner?
- Late Positive Potential (LPP) reflects motivated attention [3]

Methods

- 24 participants (20-37 years, 4 men) who were upset about a romantic break-up
- Regulation task (Fig. 1)
 - 28 regulation prompts in each of the four conditions, e.g.,
 - Negative reappraisal: What is an annoying habit of your ex?
 - Love reappraisal: "It's ok to love someone I'm no longer with"
 - Distraction: What is your favorite food? Why?
 - No regulation: ***
 - 28 pictures of ex-partner
 - Love and valence ratings
- 32-channel EEG registration (Biosemi)
- LPP amplitude (400-1000 ms) in response to ex-partner pictures



Fig. 1 Trial overview of regulation task

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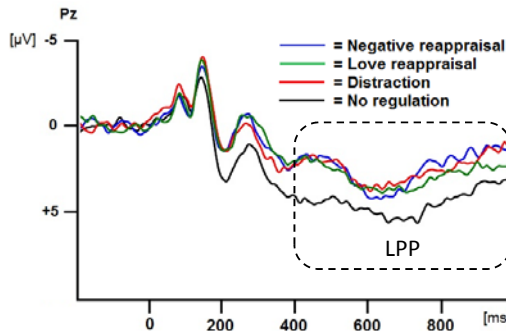
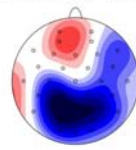
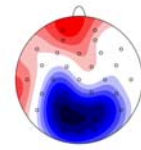


Fig. 3 LPP in response to ex-partner pictures

Negative reappraisal - No regulation



Love reappraisal - No regulation



Distraction - No regulation

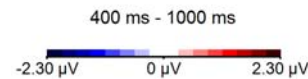
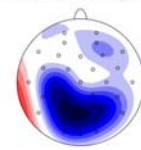


Fig. 4 Scalp topographies of regulation effects

Langeslag & Sanchez (in press) *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*

Results

- Negative reappraisal decreased love feelings and made participants feel more unpleasant, both $ps < .001$ (Fig. 2)
- Love reappraisal did not change how in love or (un)pleasant participants felt, both $ps > .23$ (Fig. 2)
- Distraction did not change love feelings, $p = .98$, but made participants feel more pleasant, $p = .010$ (Fig. 2)
- All three strategies decreased the LPP amplitude, all $ps < .042$ (Figs. 3 & 4)

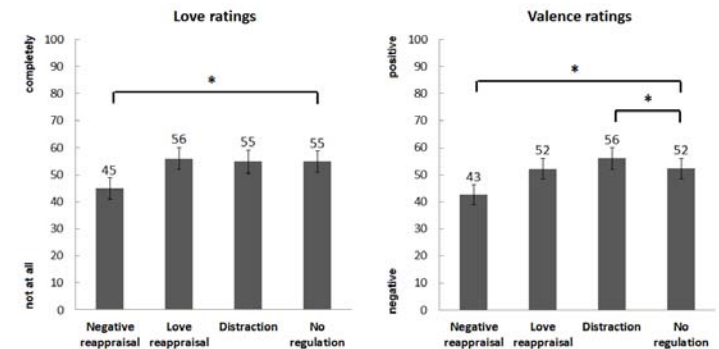


Fig. 2 Love and valence ratings, * $p < .05$

Discussion

- Negative reappraisal is an effective love down-regulation strategy
- Distraction is an effective positive emotion up-regulation strategy
- All three strategies decreased motivated attention for the ex-partner
 - This could make it easier to deal with encounters of (reminders of) the ex-partner
- Love regulation is a promising phenomenon with important everyday life and clinical implications

References

- 1 Sbarra & Ferrer (2006) *Emotion*
- 2 Langeslag & Van Strien (2016) *PLOS ONE*
- 3 Schupp et al. (2006) *Progress in Brain Research*