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Enhancing Self-Efficacy Improves Episodic Future Thinking and Social-Decision Making in
Combat Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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Abstract

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is associated with maladaptive changes in self-identity, including impoverished perceived self-efficacy. This study examined if enhancing perceptions of self-efficacy in combat veterans with and without symptoms of PTSD promotes cognitive strategies associated with positive mental health outcomes. Prior to completing a future thinking and social problem-solving task, sixty-two OEF/OIF veterans with and without symptoms of PTSD were randomized to either a high self-efficacy (HSE) induction in which they were asked to recall three autobiographical memories demonstrating self-efficacy or a control condition in which they recalled any three autobiographical events. An interaction between HSE and PTSD revealed that individuals with symptoms of PTSD in the HSE condition generated future events with more self-efficacious statements than those with PTSD in the control condition, whereas those without PTSD did not differ in self-efficacy content across the conditions. In addition, individuals in the HSE condition exhibited better social problem solving than those in the control condition. Increasing perceptions of self-efficacy may promote future thinking and problem solving in ways that are relevant to overcoming trauma and adversity.

Keywords: *Self-Efficacy, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Combat, Autobiographical Memory, Future Thinking, Social Problem- Solving*

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