



Veronica Job

# Willpower Beliefs

## Ego Depletion - Is it all in your head? Implicit theories about willpower affect self-regulation.



### Principle

Your beliefs about whether willpower can wear out predict whether it actually wears out in practice.

### Quote

“It is important that people understand that their own beliefs about willpower as a limited or nonlimited resource can affect their self-regulation..”

### So What - Application

If your beliefs about willpower affect whether or not it diminishes with use, then it would be helpful to examine your own beliefs and create a new paradigm or story about willpower that suggests it isn't going to wear out when you use it.

Simply having this new belief could positively influence your ability to control yourself in situations requiring self-control.

### The Research Story

Three researchers from Stanford University wanted to know if your beliefs about whether willpower is a limited resource affected whether or not your actual willpower depleted.

Study 1: They asked 60 college students questions about their beliefs on whether willpower wore out or got stronger with use. Then they gave half of them tasks designed to tire them and the other half tasks that weren't tiring. Finally they gave them tasks that required self-control. The students who thought willpower could wear out, did worse after tiring than students who didn't think willpower could wear out.

Study 2: They did the same experiment as study 1 with 46 students, but they manipulated the questionnaire to lead half the students to believe willpower is a limited resource and the other half to believe it's an unlimited resource. The limited resource believers did worse on a self-control task after tiring than the unlimited resource believers.

Study 3: They did the same experiment as study 2 with 77 students and then added a third self-control task to see if maybe the people who believed willpower was unlimited were just tapping into their last stores and eventually would truly tire out. They didn't. Participants were also asked how exhausted they felt. What you believed didn't affect how exhausted you felt, but for those who believed that willpower was unlimited, their exhaustion didn't undermine their performance.

Study 4: They asked 41 college students to list a personal challenging goal. They gave the students a questionnaire 3 times during the semester (including during finals) that asked about their willpower beliefs, everyday self-regulation (how often they ate unhealthy foods or procrastinated), and how well they had regulated themselves in pursuing their personal goal. There was no difference between willpower beliefs at times one and two. However, during finals, which were stressful and demanded more self-regulation, the more participants agreed that willpower is limited, the more they reported unhealthy eating, procrastinating, and not moving toward their goal.

Job, V., Dweck, C. S., & Walton, G. M. (2010). Ego Depletion—Is It All in Your Head?: Implicit Theories About Willpower Affect Self-Regulation. *Psychological Science*, 21(11), 1686–1693. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610384745>

