Coping with Lack of Control in a Social World

**Edited by MARCIN BUKOWSKI,
IMMO FRITSCHE, ANA GUINOTE
and MIROSŁAW KOFTA**

ROUTLEDGE

COPING WITH LACK OF CONTROL IN A SOCIAL WORLD

Coping with Lack of Control in a Social World offers an integrated view of cutting-edge research on the effects of control deprivation on social cognition. The book integrates multi-method research demonstrating how various types of control deprivation, related not only to experimental settings but also to real-life situations of helplessness, can lead to a variety of cognitive and emotional coping strategies at the social cognitive level. The comprehensive analysis in this book tackles issues such as:

- Cognitive, emotional and socio-behavioral reactions to threats to personal control
- How social factors aid in coping with a sense of lost or threatened control
- Relating uncontrollability to powerlessness and intergroup processes
- How lack-of-control experiences can influence basic and complex cognitive processes

This book integrates various strands of research that have not yet been presented together in an innovative volume that addresses the issue of reactions to control loss in a socio-psychological context. Its focus on coping as an active way of confronting a sense of uncontrollability makes this a unique, and highly original, contribution to the field. Practicing psychologists and students of psychology will be particularly interested readers.

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COPING WITH LACK OF CONTROL IN A SOCIAL WORLD

An introduction

Marcin Bukowski, Immo Fritsche, Ana Guinote and Mirosław Kofta

The need for personal control is one of the most critical dimensions of people's lives. Losing a job, having health problems, experiencing the death of a loved one are just some of the most vivid situations that make us realize the deleterious consequences of losing control over our lives. Whereas some of these instances involve people's independent ability to achieve what they want, such as performing well on a task or protecting their health, many instances of having or losing control are inherently linked to the social context. As a highly interdependent social species, humans' personal control, be it of a large or small scope, variety and intensity, might be jeopardized in nearly all social contexts: at school, in the family, at work, or in political life.

At the same time, being united in collectives or groups has helped humans develop a tremendous mastery of their physical environments (e.g., living in communities regardless of weather conditions, travelling to the moon) and a possibility to study the foundations of their very existence. Ironically, these collective vehicles of human agency can also be seriously threatened. Put differently, the complexity of human relations and personal motives can affect people's sense of control in multiple ways. Individual actors and groups can increase one another's sense of control (e.g., by facilitating joint projects or providing strength in numbers), decrease control (e.g., by inducing powerlessness or social inequalities that force membership in disadvantaged groups) or restore control (e.g., when, after control loss, friends and members of groups provide a sense of safety or security). Given the importance of the social context for individual control, several questions arise, such as: What are the antecedents of control gains and losses in social contexts? How does lacking control shape the ways individuals think, feel, and act? And what are the coping mechanisms deployed by individuals when control is lost? The aim of this book is to address these issues. By providing a concerted effort to understand control in social contexts, this book aims to contribute to a better understanding of one of the

fundamental human needs – the need for control – and its role in the dynamics of social relations and human social cognition.

Past and present of control research

What is personal control?

Personal control has been defined as the extent to which a person can produce desired outcomes and prevent undesired ones (Antonovsky, 1979; Gurin, Gurin, & Morrison, 1978; Skinner, 1996). When people think that they can achieve such desired ends, they have *personal control*, also labeled sometimes as *perceived control* or *sense of control* (Abeles, 1991; Gurin & Brim, 1984). In this understanding, control involves the self as agent, who is focused on introducing changes in the social or physical environment with her/his behaviors as the means to achieve this goal (Skinner, 1996). This basic definition emphasizes effectiveness in dealing with the environment, changing the surroundings to fit the needs of the individual (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). In this sense, personal control resembles the notion of general self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and refers to such constructs as need for autonomy, competence, or mastery as different possible sources of motivation for personal control. Nowadays, however, psychologists prefer a broader conceptualization of this construct. They believe that people can restore or maintain control not only through direct action tendencies but also in indirect ways, when they accommodate to environmental constraints in order to satisfy their needs (Landau, Kay, & Whitson, 2015; Rothbaum et al., 1982).

What happens when control over the environment is threatened? Most probably, people become involved in restoration or repair of control, which could manifest in efforts to change the environment, but also, as recently stressed, in attempts to adjust the self to the environment if the latter is seen as unchangeable (Landau et al., 2015; Rothbaum et al., 1982; Thompson, Sobolew-Shubin, Galbraith, Schwankovsky, & Cruzen, 1993). As this volume demonstrates, people's struggles with perceived lack of control result in an impressive diversity of responses, ranging from action, approach tendency, and engagement, through compensatory reinterpretations of situations and the self, to withdrawal, avoidance, helplessness, and relinquishment of control.

Originally, inspired by learned helplessness theory, research on the psychological consequences of uncontrollability focused on exploring mental deficits induced by lack of control, and on the implications this knowledge has for understanding depressive disorders (Hiroto & Seligman, 1975; Seligman, 1975). Quite early, however, Wortman and Brehm (1975) realized that – depending on the severity and duration of control deprivation – either coping or withdrawal/escape (helpless-like) responses become more likely. Further research, in line with Wortman and Brehm's intuitions, revealed the whole complexity of human psychological response to loss of control. Nowadays, students of control deprivation no longer portray people as passive victims of uncontrollability, but as active agents trying to

regain threatened control by whatever means available. Of course, as will be shown, researchers would not deny that control deprivation may result in helplessness and depression. However, the evidence discussed in this book shows that getting into a state of mental passivity and withdrawal from active coping is the last, rather than the first, human psychological response to loss of control. Even a longstanding threat to control (such as when realizing the inevitability of one's own death) may still lead to compensatory or symbolic responses. Also, researchers assume that, in order to explain which particular response to lack of control emerges, one must take into consideration the specificity of mediating cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes.

Social dimensions of coping with lack of control

How do we cope with lack of control? This crucial question has already been addressed by research rooted in clinical, developmental, personality, or motivational psychology (Brehm, 1966; Burger, 1992; Langer, 1975; Mikulincer, 1994; Skinner, 1995). For a long time, however, this research line addressed the individual person and the interplay of internal cognitive, affective, and motivational processes engendered by threat to control. Even though it is true that personal control, as well as control deprivation, is experienced by the individual, in this book we turn readers' attention to the fact that personal control is deeply embedded in the social context. The social environment seems to be a critical factor that allows us to understand the emergence of uncontrollability perceptions and their subsequent management. The current book examines how the social context can affect one's sense of personal control, as well as how losing personal control affects how individuals feel, think, and act in relation to their social environment. In particular, we focus on threatened personal control, and the role other people and groups play in arousing feelings of control loss as well as in the ways of coping with these feelings.

Control in a social world

We believe that an important gap in earlier research on control deprivation was that it failed to consider the social context (with the notable exception of studies on powerlessness; e.g., see Guinote, 2010; Smith, Jostman, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008; Weick, Guinote, & Wilkinson, 2011; Wilkinson, Guinote, Weick, Molinari, & Graham, 2010). However, within the past two decades a growing body of research unravels the importance of social determinants and consequences of perceived lack of control (e.g., Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Fritsche et al., 2013; Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008; Landau et al., 2015; Pittman & D'Agostino, 1989; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). This research shows that lack of personal control has profound implications for people's social cognition and behavior. The experience of personal control is affected not only by social comparisons with more or less powerful others (Festinger, 1954), but also by the fact that humans are highly interdependent, and dependency creates the seeds for control gains and loss (Emerson,

1962; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). These recent advancements in social psychological research highlight a number of dimensions in which the social context can be relevant for the study of personal control, its loss and its restoration. All these dimensions are carefully analyzed in this book.

First, the cognitive, affective, and motivational effects of control loss on how we perceive and understand other people are studied. Following experience of control loss, our perceptions of people substantially change. Partly, this change is due to purely cognitive demands that control-depriving situations impose on our minds (e.g., control deprivation results in mental overload and deficit of free cognitive resources, see Kofta & Sedek, 1998). At the same time, it is a well-established finding within the literature on motivated social cognition that in cognitively demanding circumstances people are likely to process information in a strategic way, aimed at restoring their deprived needs (Fiske & Taylor, 2008; Kunda, 1999). In this book, we bridge those two perspectives by examining what situational factors related to control loss can inhibit or enhance strategic and goal-directed cognition and action.

This leads us to the second social dimension for personal control: strategic perception of other people and social groups driven by the motive to restore or compensate for a threatened sense of control. As has been recently demonstrated, a variety of strategies allows perceivers to regain control, such as self-definition in terms of agentic ingroups (Fritsche et al., 2013; Greenaway et al. 2015), or to compensate for control loss, such as heavy reliance on order-providing beliefs and ideologies (social, religious), search for individual or collective allies, but also blaming powerful, individual, or collective enemies (Kay et al., 2008; Rutjens, van Harreveld, & van der Pligt, 2013; Sullivan, Landau, & Rothschild, 2010; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008).

A third important dimension on which the interaction between the social context and a sense of personal control is analyzed in this book relates to the notion of social power. The experience of control deprivation emerges not only as a consequence of one's own deficient abilities and lack of competence in fulfilling personal goals, but also due to the fact that other people (e.g., superordinates, members of a higher status group) have social power over one's life. More and more studies consistently show that being in a subordinate position dramatically changes the way we think and act (e.g., makes us reluctant to use categorical perception, makes us endorse more egalitarian values and life goals than powerful counterparts, etc.; Guinote, Cotzia, Sandhu, & Siwa, 2015).

Thus, in our book we take a socio-motivational perspective and highlight the fundamental role of thinking about other people, and about oneself in reference to them, as a way of dealing with lack of control. This does not mean that the impressive tradition of research on control deprivation as an individual experience will be ignored. Instead, the chapters in this volume are deeply rooted in previous, experimental research on control motivation by examining how cognitive and affective changes induced by uncontrollability can influence the way we think about others and emotionally react to them. In particular, we will review new findings suggesting that, when deprived of personal control, people deliberately or automatically

seek out effective cognitive and behavioral strategies that help them to regain control and feelings of mastery. Human actions aimed at restoring personal control will be analyzed from the agentic point of view, emphasizing the active role of the person in the coping process when faced with uncontrollability (see, e.g., Kofta, Weary, & Sedek, 1998). However, we will also show how such coping efforts – particularly when repeatedly failing to restore control – might in fact result in growing cognitive and affective malfunctioning and behavioral disruption.

Book contents

In this volume, we are particularly interested in studying complex and dynamic reactions to control loss in various social contexts, related to interpersonal as well as intergroup processes. This perspective allows us to bring basic research on control motivation in touch with such important social instances of uncontrollability as being confronted with unexpected and highly threatening events in the social world (e.g., unemployment, terrorist attacks, etc.), lacking social power, being a member of a low-status and/or stigmatized group, living in poverty, experiencing helplessness in the course of school learning, being subordinate in an organization, or being a target of discrimination (de Lemus, Spears, van Breen, & Telga, Chapter 9, this volume; Fiske, Ames, Swencionis, & Dupree, Chapter 10, this volume; Guinote & Lammers, Chapter 11, this volume; Rydzewska, Rusanowska, Krejtz, & Sedek, Chapter 4, this volume; Mühlberger, Jonas, & Sittenthaler, Chapter 13, this volume; Sullivan & Stewart, Chapter, 6, this volume). Our social world creates a nearly infinite number of occasions in which personal control might be threatened or totally eliminated.

Analyzing experiences of control loss in social settings not only allows us to identify the real-life context in which it typically emerges and reconstruct the experience dynamics, but also to recognize the ways of coping typical for those settings. Interestingly, people's responses to control loss in social contexts may themselves change the social context, such as, for instance, increasing people's inclination to social conflict when powerful enemies or conspirational actors are blamed for misfortunes (Sullivan & Stewart, Chapter 6, this volume) or when people praise their ingroups while derogating (e.g., ethnic) outgroups (Stollberg, Fritsche, Barth, & Jugert, Chapter 8, this volume). At the same time, personal control loss seems to drive people's readiness to build up friendship networks (Guinote & Lammers, Chapter 11, this volume), to be an active part in collective endeavors or social movements (Stollberg et al., Chapter 8, this volume) or to resist social inequality (de Lemus et al., Chapter 9, this volume). Moreover, placing both appraisals of and responses to lacking control in real-life social contexts helps us to better understand the critical moderators that determine the strategy of coping people are likely to choose.

In this book, we focus on three main thematic areas. Firstly, we explore cognitive, emotional, and socio-behavioral reactions to perceived uncontrollability (i.e., the effects of various states of uncontrollability on cognitive performance and social

information processing strategies). Then, we focus on various socially grounded responses to control deprivation, such as compensatory or active coping, both serving the functions of control maintenance or restoration (the effects of control loss on perceiving others and thinking about individuals and groups are mainly considered in this part). Finally, we relate the notion of uncontrollability to issues of powerlessness and intergroup cognition by studying how powerless or subordinate people think about others and what emotions guide their thoughts and actions (i.e., the role of group membership and identification in combating feelings of uncontrollability and uncertainty, but also the social implications of uncontrollability and powerlessness are examined in this part).

Let us now briefly introduce the major ideas and findings discussed by the authors in this volume. In the first section – *Cognitive, emotional, and socio-behavioral reactions to uncontrollability* – the types of basic psychological responses people exhibit after being control deprived are discussed.

In the first chapter, entitled "From coping to helplessness: Effects of control deprivation on cognitive and affective processes", Bukowski and Kofta analyze various types of cognitive and emotional reactions to lack–of–control experiences. The authors propose that coping and helplessness perspectives can no longer be seen as competitive views of reactions to control loss, but actually address different stages of confrontation with uncontrollability (coping in early stages, helplessness in the late stage). They argue that impairment of information processing after exposure to uncontrollability is, paradoxically, due to the fact that people are cognitively active (continue problem-solving attempts in an objectively uncontrollable situation). Prolonged, intense, cognitive coping aiming at control restoration can result in growing behavioral uncertainty (i.e., uncertainty about how to act) and cognitive deficits at a basic, attentional level of information selection, as well as at a more complex, reasoning level of information integration into meaningful mental models.

Greenaway, Philipp and Storrs, in the second chapter, entitled "The motivation for control: Loss of control promotes energy, effort, and action", review up-to-date research that provides evidence for enhanced motivation to restore control following relatively short-lasting exposure to control deprivation. Individuals become initially energized by loss of personal control but after an extended period of exposure to control-depriving situations people can become listless and passive, as described by early work on learned helplessness. Greenaway and colleagues also point out some important social consequences of the finding that loss of control facilitates effortful pursuit of personal goals: in such circumstances, people increasingly focus on achieving their personal goals at the expense of social goals (such as keeping or building positive interpersonal or intergroup relationships). Thus, in some circumstances, goal competition between one's own and social goals, induced by loss of control, might lead to increased prejudice towards outgroups and other forms of social aggression.

Kossowska, Bukowski, and Sankaran in Chapter 3 – "Ironic effects of need for closure on closed–minded processing mode: The role of perceived control over

reducing uncertainty" – analyze circumstances in which people who are chronically motivated to reduce uncertainty and use closed-minded, effortless cognitive strategies become prone to apply more open-minded and effortful ways of thinking. The authors argue that perceived control over reducing uncertainty plays a key role in determining the way people will react to situations that disconfirm their expectations (about themselves or about the world). Kossowska et al. demonstrate that when people are highly motivated to reduce uncertainty (i.e., have high need for closure), but feel that they cannot reduce it (i.e., have no control) they might abandon their dominant, effortless cognitive strategies and achieve certainty via more effortful and deliberative information-processing strategies. This extends previous research that deemed the latter strategies to be typical for people with low need for closure.

Chapter 4, entitled "Uncontrollability in the classroom: The intellectual helplessness perspective", by Rydzewska, Rusanowska, Krejtz, and Sedek addresses the issue of uncontrollability and intellectual helplessness in an applied, educational context. Their research shows that faulty teaching promotes development of intellectual helplessness, and that the phenomenon itself is context-dependent (e.g., helplessness in math classes appears to be unrelated to helplessness in native language classes). Importantly, its detrimental effects on math achievement remain significant after controlling for math anxiety. Also, these studies show that even chronically helpless students are not totally passive, but frequently engage in active "survival strategies", which only simulate understanding of the lesson content (such as acquiescing when new material is presented, or talking at high speed about everything that pops to mind in response to the teacher's question).

In the next section, *Socially grounded responses to control deprivation: From compensation to active coping*, the role of the social context (other individuals, ingroups, and outgroups) as a resource that can help people to cope with a situation that threatens personal control is discussed.

In Chapter 5, "Compensatory control theory and the psychological importance of perceiving order", Rutjens and Kay focus on the function of compensatory control. In contrast to the majority of researchers viewing compensatory control strategies as indirect ways of satisfying a basic need for personal control, the authors argue that compensatory control efforts following personal control threat (e.g., through endorsement of external agents of control such as God or government) ultimately help to regain order and meaning in the perceived world. To support their view, the authors refer to several findings from their own laboratory showing that: (a) personal control and perceived external control (e.g., of powerful social and spiritual agents) operate in a hydraulic fashion; (b) priming randomness increased both motivation to exert personal control and belief in a controlling God; (c) affirmation of order (that does not involve external agents) appears to be sufficient for downregulating threats to control.

In Chapter 6, entitled "Perceived uncontrollability as a coping resource: The control-serving function of enemies and uncertainty", Sullivan and Stewart discuss the meaning and adaptive functions of control-related experiences from the

perspective of cultural–existential psychology. They assume that, following threat, people either engage in denial, or in projection of anxiety onto the external world (e.g., by searching for an external source of their misfortunes). In contrast to existing literature, which focuses on the compensatory role of benevolent external agents, the authors argue that making malevolent agents (e.g., personal and political enemies, conspiring groups) salient might also regain a sense of personal control. This happens because identifying a particular focal enemy allows people to reduce anxiety resulting from perceptions of the world as a source of a multitude of unpredictable and uncontrollable hazards (and so helps to impose meaning and structure). The authors review several studies from their own and other laboratories in support of this view.

Hayes, Prentice and McGregor in Chapter 7, "Giving in and giving up: Accommodation and fatalistic withdrawal as alternatives to primary control restoration", discuss the interplay between primary and secondary control, mostly in the context of the fundamental Piagetian distinction between assimilation and accommodation. They propose that secondary control might be a highly effective, avoidance-oriented resolution of threatened primary control, its essence being a change in one's own beliefs and knowledge structures in accordance with situational demands (accommodation process). They present evidence that – following mortality salience – participants with low (but not high) self-esteem accommodated their beliefs in accord with evidence inconsistent with their worldview. However, accommodation going too far (resulting in changing a person's core, not only her or his peripheral beliefs) appeared to be no longer effective in coping with the terror of death.

In Chapter 8, entitled "Extending control perceptions to the social self: Ingroups serve the restoration of control", Stollberg, Fritsche, Barth, and Jugert point to the fact that people develop not only personal but also group identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When deprived of personal control, an individual may therefore regain a sense of an agentic self by pursuing shared ingroup goals and defining the self in terms of an agentic ingroup. Instead of representing a case of vicarious (secondary) control, they argue, ingroup identification, ingroup bias, and conformity with ingroup norms may in fact be expressions of primary control efforts at the group level. The authors discuss how mechanisms of secondary vicarious control through external agents (Kay et al., 2008) can be empirically distinguished from processes of extended primary control through the ingroup. They conclude that, so far, the present findings do not allow for a clear-cut judgment of which specific process – compensatory control or group-based control – is involved, calling for future research.

De Lemus, Spears, van Breen, and Telga in Chapter 9, "Coping with identity threats to group agency as well as group value: Explicit and implicit routes to resistance", focus on the psychological roots of social resistance, understood as a group's opposition to societal circumstances that perpetuate social disadvantage and low status of group members. The authors argue that threats to social identity cannot be reduced to questioning group value (as many social psychologists seem to assume), because they simultaneously threaten collective agency (ability of the group to change their fate). Low ingroup status implies lack of power and

collective self-efficacy, that is to say, deprivation of control at the group level. But at a more subjective level, group members are able to exert psychological control as a resistance strategy. Therefore, threats to group identity (e.g., when stereotypical expectations as to a woman's traditional, inferior social role are made salient) could provoke resistance not only at the explicit level (e.g., support for collective actions), but also implicitly (e.g., activating ingroup bias). The authors describe a series of experimental studies supporting their predictions about implicit resistance, and discuss them in terms of their implications for group agency.

In the last section of the book, called *Uncontrollability, powerlessness, and intergroup cognition*, the ways people psychologically cope with lack of control are analyzed in the context of outcome dependency, power, or economic and social status relations.

Fiske, Ames, Swencionis, and Dupree in Chapter 10, entitled "Thinking up and talking up: Restoring control through mindreading", address the hypothetical role of predictability and controllability motives in outcome-dependency contexts. The authors analyze asymmetrical dependency, with special focus on the psychology of those subordinated (with relatively low status and power). In an impressive series of studies, the authors show that being subordinated results in more vigilance to a high-status (power-holding) person and better encoding of diagnostic (inconsistent) information, processes presumably in service of regaining predictability and control over the partner's behavior. However, when no control restoration is possible, then people switch to defensive distortion: they tend to discount negative information about the power-holders and focus on their benign, positive traits.

In Chapter 11, "Accentuation of tending and befriending among the powerless", Guinote and Lammers focus on how powerless people cope with lack-of-control experiences in various social contexts. Typically, the powerless, in contrast to the dynamic powerful, are seen as socially inactive. However, the authors show that the psychological state of powerlessness triggers multifaceted and dynamic social strategies that serve the adaptation of individuals. That is, the powerless turn to others in order to form stronger social bonds, increase their communal focus, and display more prosocial behavior, are more generous, and show more adherence to social norms. The authors conclude that the priorities of the powerless are to achieve a detailed and complex understanding of the social world, to help others, and to create socially shared beliefs that ensure fairness. Here, the search for communion and social coordination are the coping mechanisms that can help an individual to restore control.

In Chapter 12, "The emotional side of power(lessness)", Petkanopoulou, Willis, and Rodríguez-Bailón focus on the emotions of powerless people and their social functions. The authors argue that emotions mainly serve two broad social functions that are crucial for people's interactions: a social distancing function and an affiliative function. Whereas some emotions, such as sadness, shame, and guilt, help people to get closer to others and affiliate with them, others, such as anger and pride, create social distance and promote competition for status. Powerlessness is most commonly associated with the experience and expression of affiliative emotions, such as sadness and guilt. However, as shown by the authors, when power differences

are illegitimate, then powerless individuals can also display social distancing emotions such as anger. Their function in this case is to regain relative power or status. Eventually, approach–related emotions like anger could also lead powerless people to enhance their personal sense of control.

Mühlberger, Jonas, and Sittenthaler in Chapter 13, entitled "Uncontrollability, reactance, and power: Power as a resource to regain control after freedom threats", begin with the observation that individuals who lack control try to regain it by relying on diverse strategies that often have a defensive nature. Further, they propose that power can be conceptualized as a resource that enables people to regain control because it provides a sense of efficacy, freedom, and control. In other words, individuals who are threatened by control loss but feel powerful manage to free themselves from the negative effects of this threat and engage in information processing relevant to their desired goals. The authors present research from their own lab, revealing that if people's sense of control is threatened but they still feel powerful and have the necessary resources to attain their goals, they are able to refrain from behaving in a defensive and hostile way and instead adapt to the new situation in a more flexible manner.

Summing up, this volume brings together different perspectives on the issue of how people cope with feelings of uncontrollability in their social lives. The variety of theoretical approaches and empirical findings seems to build a coherent picture of a person who, when faced with his or her own inability to control important aspects of the environment, seeks effective social and cognitive strategies that either help to compensate or to regain a sense of control through the self. We hope that this book not only lets us better understand how social–psychological factors determine the way people cope with lack of control, but also reveals how people's desire for control shapes their social environments.

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PART 1

Cognitive, emotional, and socio-behavioral reactions to uncontrollability

1

FROM COPING TO HELPLESSNESS

Effects of control deprivation on cognitive and affective processes

Marcin Bukowski and Mirosław Kofta

1. Facing uncontrollability: Helplessness or coping?

Individual strivings to exert, maintain, or restore a sense of personal control over the environment have long been considered to be a core and basic type of motivation (Bandura, 1977; Burger, 1992; DeCharms, 1968; Skinner, 1996; White, 1959). Early research on the control motive in humans was particularly focused on how control deprivation affects cognitive and emotional functioning (e.g., Hiroto & Seligman, 1975; Seligman, 1975). In his seminal work, Seligman (1975) proposed that prolonged and stable experiences of uncontrollability (operationalized as response-outcome non-contingency) result in the learned helplessness syndrome, including cognitive deficits (understood as the inability to detect new contingencies), a depressed mood, and the inability to pursue important goals. Since then, numerous studies have shown that a lack of contingency between action and outcome results in deterioration of performance and affective disruption (e.g., Hiroto & Seligman, 1975; Kofta & Sędek, 1989; Tennen, Drum, Gillen & Stanton, 1982). Extending Seligman's original framework, Sedek and Kofta (1990; see also Kofta & Sedek, 1998) developed the idea that prolonged, inefficient investment of cognitive effort is a critical aspect of uncontrollable situations, leading to the emergence of cognitive exhaustion. In this mental state, a person shows cognitive deficits in problem solving