EMOTIONAL DISCLOSURE THROUGH WRITING AND DRAWING: A CONTROLLED TRIAL ON EMOTION REGULATION, COPING, AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

A dissertation submitted

by

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EMOTIONAL DISCLOSURE THROUGH WRITING AND DRAWING

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Abstract

Regulating emotions is important for a number of adaptive outcomes such as satisfaction with life and coping. Research has demonstrated that the inability regulate emotions can impact on health, psychological conditions, social functioning, and can increase the use of maladaptive coping strategies. Therefore, strategies that facilitate emotion regulation become imperative to well-being and coping outcomes. Recent studies have investigated the efficacy of emotional disclosure writing as an emotion regulation technique and found effects such as increased life satisfaction, improved interpersonal relationships, and improved coping. The purpose of this study was to determine if emotional disclosure through drawing would have an effect on emotion regulation, well-being, and coping similar to the effects of emotional disclosure writing, as this would enable illiterate or hard-to-reach at-risk populations to benefit from the effects of emotional disclosure. The study used a community sample ($N = 115$) in a controlled trial design with five experimental conditions; emotional disclosure writing (EDW; $n = 29$), emotional disclosure drawing (EDD; $n = 22$) placebo writing (PDW; $n = 18$), placebo drawing (PDD; $n = 16$), and control ($n = 30$). Emotional disclosure participants drew or wrote about their emotions for 30-60 minutes once a week for 4-weeks, placebo groups focused on the contents of their wardrobe. Participants in the writing and drawing conditions filled in PANAS-X questionnaires prior and after their weekly sessions. Outcomes were measured prior to and 6-months post disclosure. Data were analyzed using Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance to evaluate within and between group differences. There were significant effects on the COPE subscales of Positive Reinterpretation and Growth ($F(4, 81) =$}
3.13, \( p < .05 \)), Mental Disengagement \( (F(4, 81) = 3.23, \ p < .05 \) ), and Active Coping \( (F(4, 81) = 6.16, \ p < .001 \) ), Religious Coping \( (F(4, 80) = 3.11, \ p < .05 \) ), Restraint \( (F(4, 81) = 4.60, \ p < .05 \) ), Substance Use \( (F(4, 81) = 4.19, \ p < .01 \) ), Planning \( (F(4, 81) = 7.72, \ p < .01 \) ), and the OQ-45 interpersonal relations scale \( (F(4, 81) = 2.56, \ p < .05 \) )

In these analyses, participants in the disclosure groups outperformed those in placebo or control. Furthermore, the EDD group reported greater increases in adaptive coping strategies and greater decreases in maladaptive coping strategies compared to the EDW group. No effects were found for satisfaction with life. The PANAS-X analyses showed a group effect on positive affect \( (F(3,82) = 3.13, \ p < .05 \) ), with significantly larger increases for the EDD group. There was also a time*group interaction on negative affect \( (F(9,252) = 2.26, \ p < .05 \) ) suggesting significant increases in negative affect in EDW, whilst the EDD group decreased. In summary, this suggests that EDW and EDD differentially affect emotion regulation and coping. This has implications for the application of emotion regulation techniques.
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Dedicated to Uncle Andy
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