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Andrew Brittingham

Samantha Morris

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A Comparison of Emotional Regulation Strategies

Andrew Brittingham, Samantha Morris
Department of Psychology, Longwood University
Dr. Timothy Ritzert, Psyc-461



Introduction

- Many life experiences may elicit difficult emotional responses, and an inability to cope in healthy ways with difficult emotional experiences can have a variety of negative impacts. (Tyng, Amin, Saad, & Malik, 2017).
- *Emotional Regulation Strategies*: An attempt to alter or modulate either emotional cues themselves or the subsequent response to various emotional cues. (Gross & John, 2003).
- Emotional regulation strategies have been shown as an effective mechanism in coping with difficult emotions. (Wolgast, Lundh, & Viborg, 2011).
- *Cognitive Reappraisal based emotional regulation*: Reconstructing an emotionally evoking event in a way that aims to change the emotional impact an event has on the individual (Wolgast et al., 2011).
- *Acceptance based emotional regulation*: An individual allowing themselves to fully experience their emotions while resisting the urge to control or change their emotions in any way. (Wolgast et al., 2011).

Research Question and Hypothesis

- Do emotional regulation strategies effectively reduced levels of subjective distress?
- We predicted participants utilizing cognitive reappraisal and acceptance based emotional regulation strategies would report lower levels of subjective distress and lower heart rates compared to the control group

Methods

- 76 participants
- Participants were randomly assigned an emotional regulation method to utilize while viewing a video about animal cruelty designed to elicit emotional distress
- After the video, participant's heart rates were taken and participants filled out the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) as well as a brief multiple choice question quiz
- The PANAS is a 20 item questionnaire used to examine an individual's positive and negative affect
- For this study, only the negative affect items of the PANAS were utilized for data collection
- The quiz was designed to evaluate participants attention during the video and to act as a manipulation check

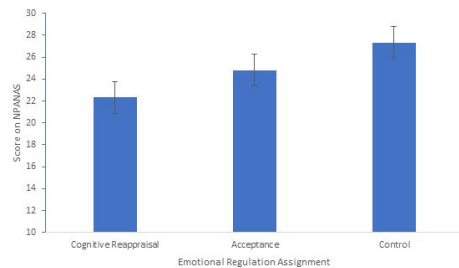


Figure 1. NPANAS scores, $F(2, 75) = 2.536, p = .86$

Results

- Our hypothesis was overall not supported
- See Figure 1. for NPANAS scores
- Higher scores on the NPANAS indicate greater levels of subjective distress than lower scores.
- See Figure 2. for heart rate data
- Participants across all conditions had similar heart rate.
- One way ANOVA for NPANAS and IV:
 $F(2, 75) = 2.536, p = .86$
- One way ANOVA for heart rate and IV:
 $F(2, 72) = .924, p = .402$

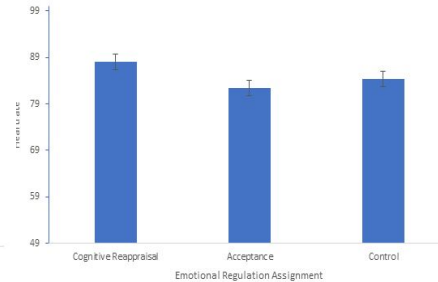


Figure 2. Heart rate, $F(2, 72) = .924, p = .402$

Conclusion

- Negative emotions are experienced frequently and may be potentially alleviated by emotional regulation strategies
- Cognitive reappraisal and acceptance were not shown to be effective in alleviating subjective distress, and participant heart rate did not differ significantly in any condition

Limitations

- Many participants may not have adequately understood how to implement their emotional regulation strategy as reflected by failed manipulation checks
- The format and pacing of the study may have confused participants, particularly with the heart rate monitors

Future Directions

- Future studies could devise a more effective manipulation check and clearer instructions on how to utilize each emotional regulation strategy
- A different measure of distress could be examined, instead of a video clip maybe have participants perform a distress-invoking task

References

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