

Title: Effects of Expressive Outlets on Mood and Emotion

Presenter: Leena Bowman, Laura Locken, Irvine Valley College

Mentor: Kari Tucker-McCorkhill

Previous research shows conflicting findings regarding the relationship between expressing negative emotions and well-being (see Bushman, 2002; Lyubomirsky et al., 2006), with some showing improvements in mood after expressing negative emotions and others showing a decline. The purpose of the present study was to examine differences among ways of expressing a personal frustrating experience on changes in reported mood (i.e. frustration, negative affect, and positive affect). Because journaling has been identified as a helpful expression method (see Phillips & Rolfe, 2016; Alford et al., 2005), it was expected that writing and talking about their frustration would result in greater improvements in mood compared to those who did not have an expressive outlet. Fifty-four students from Psychology courses at a community college volunteered to participate for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three expression groups (writing, talking, control). Participants completed a frustration packet (i.e., a collection of guidelines to prompt participants to focus and think about a frustrating event for a five-minute period). All participants completed measures of frustration, negative affect, and positive affect at the start of the study, after the manipulation, and at the end of the study. A manipulation check showed that the frustration packet successfully induced frustration in all participants. Results showed that although there were no differences among the expression groups, all participants improved as a result of their assigned method. These results suggest that writing or talking about, or even taking a two-minute break can be effective for mood improvement.

References

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