Working through negative emotions: Lingering anger or sadness

Stephanie Nardone
nardones@uwindsor.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries

Consistent with the TCPS 2 (4.7) this is a research summary provided to participants and should not be considered a formal publication of results.

Recommended Citation

This Completed Summary is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship at UWindsor. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Result Summaries by an authorized administrator of Scholarship at UWindsor. For more information, please contact scholarship@uwindsor.ca.
When working through an emotional injury, does the resolution process depend on whether one is sad vs. angry? From a sample of 242 participants who were distressed about a past interpersonal interaction, two groups were identified: individuals who presented with anger ($n = 70$), and individuals who presented with sadness ($n = 97$). Participants were randomly assigned to expressive writing conditions that fostered emotional experiences of either anger-before-sadness or sadness-before-anger (2x2 design). Conditions differed by only the sequence in which participants wrote about anger and sadness. Results showed that the presenting emotion and order of anger and sadness both significantly predicted post-intervention sadness intensity, whereas only the order of emotions significantly predicted post-intervention anger intensity. (a) For participants who presented with sadness and wrote about sadness first, sadness intensity significantly decreased from pre- to post-intervention. (b) Those who presented with sadness but wrote about anger first, did not experience a significant pre-post change in sadness. (c) Among participants who presented with anger and wrote about anger first, anger intensity significantly decreased from pre to post-intervention. However, (d) individuals who presented with anger and wrote about sadness first, did not report a pre-post change in anger intensity. The most beneficial sequence of emotion, depends on one’s target emotion. Furthermore, irrespective of group, participants reported lower post-intervention levels of the emotion that they wrote about first, relative to those who wrote about that emotion second, suggesting that the last emotion in a sequence is particularly influential in the amount of change.