The “Writing Cure” as a Solution to Underperformance on High-Stakes Tests

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Discussion

During high-stakes tests, students choke under pressure (no write condition). However, we show that when students are asked to write, pressure-induced drops in performance are eliminated and performance accuracy can even increase under pressure (expressive writing condition).

Why does expressive writing lead to a gain in performance under pressure? It is generally believed that pressure (and stereotype threat) may serve to both prompt worries about the situation and its consequences and to prompt individuals to monitor step-by-step execution in an attempt to ensure the optimal performance they are concerned about achieving (Beilock et al., 2004). If writing serves to alleviate the worry component of pressure, then pressure-induced attention to math problem solving may be beneficial.

School Based Intervention

Past demonstrations of ST based interventions have been shown to be successful in a classroom setting (Cohen et al., 2006).

We are preparing to administer our expressive writing intervention at a local high school in Chicago, IL to see if it helps to boost final test scores—especially for individuals who may be aware of stereotypes about how they should perform in a particular domain (e.g., girls and math).

Method

Participants: Parental consent will be solicited for the entire 9th and 10th grade class (approximately 200 students will take part).

Measures:
- Short Mathematics Anxiety Scale (sMARS; Alexander & Martray, 1989)
- Subject interest

Procedure:
- Session 1: At least one month prior to the expressive writing intervention, students will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires designed to assess students domain anxieties, interest in various subjects, and emotional regulation strategies.

Dependent Variable: Math problem accuracy and RT

Key References & Acknowledgements

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References


Figure 3 - No Pressure

Figure 4 - Pressure

Figure 5 - No writing vs. Expressive Writing

Figure 6 - No writing vs. Expressive Writing