INTRODUCTION

The present work investigated how reappraising (i.e., altering the meaning of) social exclusion feedback affects performance on a self-regulation task. A review of the relevant literature indicated that two possible and contradictory outcomes were likely.

Prediction 1:
- Researchers demonstrated that social exclusion impaired subsequent attempts at self-regulation. However, because reappraisal “short-circuits” threats, this typical effect on self-regulation could be eliminated.

Prediction 2:
- Research indicates that engaging in self-regulation reduces the capacity, and in turn, the effectiveness of successive attempts at self-regulation. Therefore, by reappraising social exclusion feedback—a self-regulation strategy—the typical self-regulation impairment effect could be greater than when the feedback is not reappraised.

METHOD

- After completing a series of personality scales, participants (N = 62) were accurately told whether their responses were consistent with the traits of extraversion or introversion.

- Participants were then randomly assigned to receive feedback indicating that this aspect of their personality meant they would either have few and poor quality relationships in the future (exclusion feedback) or they would have many quality relationships in the future (acceptance feedback).

- Participants were then randomly assigned to spend 4 minutes either writing why this feedback was invalid (reappraisal condition) or writing something about themselves (control condition).

- Following the reappraisal task participants were given a poorly copied page of text (see Figure 1). Participants were instructed to cross out all instances of the letter “e” in the text unless this letter was next to or one letter away from another vowel.

- This or similar tasks have been used in previous self-regulation research.

RESULTS

- The primary dependent measure was the proportion of correctly crossed out “e”s.

- Analysis indicated a significant Feedback X Reappraisal Condition interaction, F(1, 61) = 6.66, p = .01 (see Figure 2).

- Specifically, the analysis revealed that in the control condition, participants who received the exclusion feedback performed significantly worse on the self-regulation task than participants who received the acceptance feedback, t(28) = 2.60, p < .05. This self-regulation impairment effect is consistent with previous research.

- Critical to the present work was how participants would perform when they reappraised the task. Analysis showed that the self-regulation impairment effect was not present when participants reappraised the feedback as invalid, t(29) = 1.16, p = .25.

CONCLUSION

- These data suggest that reappraisal is an effective strategy for coping with social exclusion. Even though the capacity to self-regulate is limited, participants who engaged in this particular self-regulation strategy did not sustain the typical self-regulation deficits. One explanation for these results is that reappraisal does not rely on the same source as other self-regulation strategies. A more likely explanation is that reappraisal effectively and efficiently “short-circuits” the threat of social exclusion, and thus, eliminates the typical pattern of self-regulation impairment seen in those who are socially excluded.

Figure 1
Stimulus for E-Self-Regulation Task

Participants were given 3-minutes to complete this task.

Footnotes & References:

1. These data were collected at The University of Mississippi. This poster was presented at the 2008 meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Albuquerque, NM.

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