



Abstract

To cope with challenges, some people spontaneously boost the self by affirming their core values; this is known as spontaneous self-affirmation. The current study was designed to test the relationships between individual differences in spontaneous self-affirmation (SSA; Harris et al., 2019) and other ways of coping with challenges and threats (e.g., emotion regulation skills, coping skills). Seventy-seven participants completed an online survey that included the SSA measure, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (two facets: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression; Gross et al., 2003), Coping Skills (Hamby et al., 2013), Mindful Attention and Awareness Scale (Brown et al., 2003), and Trait Self-Control (Tangney et al., 2004). SSA was significantly and positively correlated with cognitive reappraisal, coping skills, and trait self-control. Because the SSA is a new measure, this study adds evidence that spontaneously self-affirming is related to but distinct from other ways of coping with threats.

Introduction

The general self-affirmation theory is the idea that humans have a response to threats through cognitive processes, physiological adaptations, and behavior (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Research suggests that spontaneous self-affirmation can be associated with better mental health and physical well-being (Emmanuel et al., 2018). The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between spontaneous self-affirmation and emotion regulation by surveying individuals on concepts such as, suppression and reappraisal, coping skills, self-control, and mindfulness. The item that measures spontaneous self-affirmation, known as the Spontaneous Self-Affirmation Measure (SSAM; Harris et al., 2019) was only published in 2019 which limits the amount of relationships that can be drawn from previous research on the self-affirmation theory.

Figure 1.

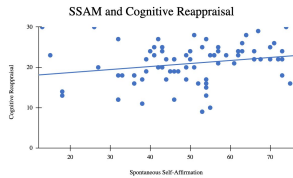


Figure 2.

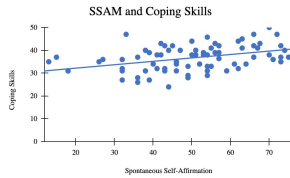
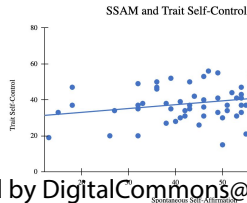


Figure 3.



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Methods

Participants

Data was collected from people 18 years of age and older ($N=77$, $M=20.61$, $SD=6.3$). There were 65 women ($M=48.5$, $SD=13.91$) and 11 men ($M=59.6$, $SD=13.62$). The study was conducted as an online study using SurveyMonkey (survey and data collection website).

Procedure

1) Demographics

- Gender
- Nationality
- Age

2) Questionnaires:

Spontaneous Self-Affirmation (Harris et al., 2019)

13 questions rated on a scale of 1 (disagree completely) to 7 (agree completely)

- When I feel threatened or anxious by people or events I find myself thinking about my strengths
- When I feel threatened or anxious by people or events I find myself thinking about my values
- When I feel threatened or anxious by people or events I find myself thinking about my family

Emotion Regulation (Gross & John, 2003)

10 questions rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 3 (neutral) to 5 (strongly agree)

- When I want to feel more positive emotions (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about.
- I keep my emotions to myself.
- When I want to feel less negative emotions (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about.

Coping (Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2013)

13 questions rated on a scale of 1 (not true) to 2 (a little true) to 3 (somewhat true) to 4 (mostly true)

- When dealing with a problem, I spend time trying to understand what happened
- When dealing with a problem, I try to see the positive side of the situation
- When dealing with a problem, I try to step back from the problem and think about it from a different point of view

Mindful Attention Awareness (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

15 questions rated on a scale of 1 (is almost always) to 2 (is very frequently) to 3 (somewhat frequently) to 4 (somewhat infrequently) to 5 (very infrequently), and to 6 (almost never)

- I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.
- I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.
- I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.

Self-Control (Tangney & Baumeister, 2004)

13 questions rated on a scale of 1 (not at all like me) to 3 (sometimes like me) to 5 (very much like me)

- I have a hard time breaking bad habit
- I am lazy
- I say inappropriate things

Results (See Table 1)

- The more people self-affirmed the more they used cognitive reappraisal as an emotion regulation (See Figure 1)
- The more people self-affirmed the more they used positive coping mechanisms (See Figure 2)

- Suppression was not correlated with self-affirmation
- Mindfulness is positively correlated with self-affirmation but the correlation was not significant
- The more people self-affirmed the higher the rate of self-control (See Figure 3)

Table 1

Means, SDs, and Correlations										
Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1. SSAM	49.7	14.7	-.23*	-.01	.40***	.18	.33**			
2. Cognitive Reappraisal	20.9	4.9		-.04	.27*	-.09	.08			
3. Expressive Suppression	11.6	3.3			-.05	-.20	-.02			
4. Coping Skills	36.6	5.5				-.06	-.02			
5. MAAS	3.5	.93					-.46**			
6. Trait Self-Control	39.3	9.6								

Note. Questionnaire. SSAM = Spontaneous Self-Affirmation Measure

Questionnaire. MAAS = Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

This study was an exploratory study to observe correlational trends in individuals between spontaneous self-affirmation and emotion regulation. The results collected in this study support ideas from previous research that spontaneous self-affirmation can be associated with cognitive reappraisal, coping, and self control. There were several limitations in this study that limit the conclusions drawn. The data is currently still being collected, which could alter the current results. The SSAM is a new measure so there is a limited amount of research to compare this study and its results to. Future research should assess the trends among gender, as this study noticed differences in results from male participants to female participants.

References

Harris, J. L., & P. A. P. (2019). Spontaneous self-affirmation: A new measure and its relationship to emotion regulation and coping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 116(1), 1-15.

Acknowledgements and Contact information

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