Self-Affirmation as a Stress Buffer

Denice Higareda
Stress Impairs Cognitive Function

Carmen Sandi
Things to Know

➢ Self-affirmation
  ○ The act of acknowledging one's values

➢ Experimental Group
  ○ Those that wrote about their top ranked value

➢ Control Group
  ○ Those that wrote about their 9th ranked value

➢ CCAT
  ○ Criteria Cognitive Aptitude Test
I have the ability to overcome any challenge life gives me
Literature Review
Affirming one's values to protect the integrity of the self

Claude Steele
Self-affirmation allows for threat accommodation

David Sherman
Women in STEM have a stronger threat to the self

Akira Miyake
Self-Affirmation Improves Problem Solving Under Stress

David S. Creswell
Does Self-Affirmation Buffer High School Students’ Perceived Stress When Taking a Cognitive Ability Exam?
Self-affirmation will act as a buffer towards students perceived stress and those with a higher perceived stress will perform better on the CCAT
The Experiment
SELECTION
PERCEIVED STRESS

01 Unexpected Events
02 Control
03 Management
VALUES

➢ Friends & Family
➢ Religion
➢ Independence
➢ Spontaneity
➢ Sense of Humor
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Math &amp; Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Spatial Reasoning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DESIGN

77 Students

34 Control
  - Low Stress
  - High Stress

40 Affirmation
  - Low Stress
  - High Stress
Data Analysis
In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

- **Self-affirmation**
  - Never: 3
  - Almost never: 9
  - Sometimes: 8
  - Often: 10
  - Very often: 7

  > 45% felt upset over unexpected events

- **Control**
  - Never: 1
  - Almost never: 4
  - Sometimes: 14
  - Often: 11
  - Very often: 10

  > 53% felt upset over unexpected events

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**UNEXPECTED EVENTS**
In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

1. Never: 4
2. Almost Never: 6
3. Sometimes: 13
4. Often: 11
5. Very Often: 3

- 37% felt as they had control over their irritations

In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?

1. Never: 3
2. Almost Never: 9
3. Sometimes: 23
4. Often: 2
5. Very Often: 3

- 12% felt as they could control their irritations
Management

Self-affirmation

➢ 41% could not cope with the things they needed to do

Control

➢ 50% could not cope with the things they needed to do
PERCEIVED STRESS

Self-affirmation

Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Stress</th>
<th>High Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-affirmation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
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</table>
40% of those in the self-affirmation condition wrote about friends/family

Variety of values written about with no commonalities between low and high stress categories
### Manipulation Check

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Affirmation</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Self-affirmation group viewed the value they wrote about as more important to them in their lives.
- Control group viewed the value they wrote about as not significantly important to them in their lives.
Those in the self-affirmed relationship had a higher CCAT score than those in the control group (23%).

Those in the self-affirmed condition, with high stress levels performed better than those in the control condition (17%).
Those in top level math classes performed better on the CCAT test than those in the first.
The Claims
Foundational:
○ Those in the affirmed condition performed slightly better on the RAT test than those in the control

My study:
○ Those in the affirmed condition performed better on the CCAT task than the control
Foundational:
   - Self-affirmation improved the RAT score of those with chronic stress (compared to control)

My study:
   - Self-affirmation improved the CCAT score of those with high stress (compared to control)
Foundational:
- Individuals in the control condition with high stress, performed significantly worse than those with low stress

My study:
- Low stress individuals and high stress individuals performed relatively the same
CLAIMS

➢ Foundational:
  ○ Self-affirmation can buffer the main effects of chronic stress on RAT performance

➢ My study:
  ○ Self-affirmation has a small buffer effect on high stress on CCAT performance
Final Thoughts
LIMITATIONS

➢ Arterial pressure
➢ Heart rate
➢ Time management
IMPLICATIONS

➢ Ongoing stressors
➢ Honor system
➢ Stress is absolute


Works Cited


Works Cited


SELF-AFFIRMATION
AS A STRESS BUFFER

Denice Higareda