

Positive autobiographical memory and mood induction using soothing images

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Abstract

Imagery plays a critical role in compassion focused therapy (CFT) helping induce the desired mood affect required by the intervention. However, not all individuals have the capacity to produce mental imagery, and therefore require external guidance. Project Soothe, inspired by CFT, was developed to rectify this issue by collecting images that were rated as soothing by the public for potential use in future psychotherapy. As is with CFT, the aim of Project Soothe is to address the emotional distress that affixes a myriad of psychopathologies by utilizing external visual imagery to isolate and promote the soothing affect system. Likewise, this study builds upon Project Soothe by considering positive autobiographical memory (AM) as a way to bolster the mood induced by soothing images. This was achieved using a between group design study: Group 1. the experimental group presented with visual imagery and tasked with recalling positive AM, group 2. a secondary control group presented with visual imagery, while undertaking a minimal distraction task, and group 3. the primary control group presented with visual imagery and tasked to passively view them. All three experimental groups were presented with 12 of the most highly rated soothing images from Project Soothe's database for 1-minute. Findings in this study indicate that passively viewing soothing images leads to the most significant improvement between pre and post negative mood scores and activates the soothing affect system. This finding is helpful for compassion based-interventions such as CFT and Project Soothe who may utilize soothing images to help assist individuals who struggle generating mental imagery. Furthermore, recalling positive AM has a similar impact on pre and post negative mood. In addition, the negative relationship between depressed individuals and negatively rated AM allows future studies to consider research into other dimensions of memory that have otherwise been overlooked.