How to handle anxiety: The effects of reappraisal, acceptance, and suppression strategies on anxious arousal

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Abstract: It has been suggested that reappraisal strategies are more effective than suppression strategies for regulating emotions. Recently, proponents of the acceptance-based behavior therapy movement have further emphasized the importance of acceptance-based emotion regulation techniques. In order to directly compare these different emotion regulation strategies, 202 volunteers were asked to give an impromptu speech in front of a video camera. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. The Reappraisal group was instructed to regulate their anxious arousal by reappraising the situation; the Suppression group was asked to suppress their anxious behaviors; and the Acceptance group was instructed to accept their anxiety. As expected, the Suppression group showed a greater increase in heart rate from baseline than the Reappraisal and Acceptance groups. Moreover, the Suppression group reported more anxiety than the Reappraisal group. However, the Acceptance and Suppression groups did not differ in their subjective anxiety response. These results suggest that both reappraising and accepting anxiety is more effective for moderating the physiological arousal than suppressing anxiety. However, reappraising is more effective for moderating the subjective feeling of anxiety than attempts to suppress or accept it. © 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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