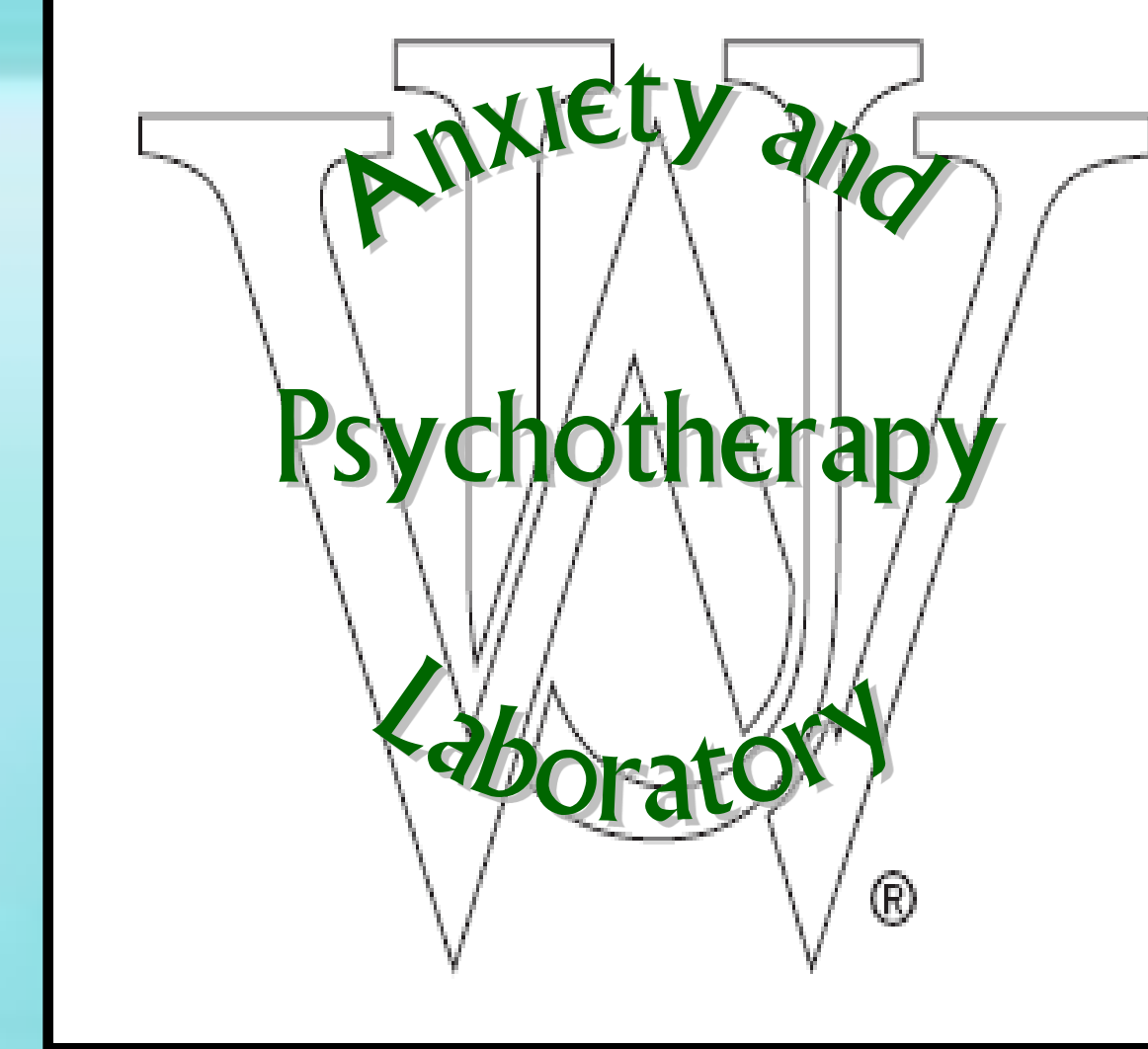




Does Talking about Ethnic Identity Decrease State Anxiety?

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Abstract

Previous research has found that ethnic identity may be protective from psychological symptoms (e.g., Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009). However, few studies have examined the relationship between ethnic identity and state and trait anxiety. In two samples ($N = 151$; $N = 91$) we examined the relationship between ethnic identity, state, and trait anxiety. Furthermore, we tested if talking about ethnic identity (as compared to talking about membership in any group not defined by ethnicity) decreased state anxiety levels. Results indicated that talking about ethnic identity decreased anxiety levels significantly more so than talking about membership in a group more generally.

Introduction

- Ethnic identity
 - “Self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership of a social [ethnic] group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p 225)
 - Positively related to self-esteem, social connectedness, sense of community, positive affect, and life satisfaction (Lee, 2005)
 - Negatively related to depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007)
- Ethnic identity and anxiety
 - Little research has examined the relationship between ethnic identity and anxiety
 - Ethnic identity was indirectly related to anxiety through perceived stress (Bernat et al., 2002)
- We examined the relationship between ethnic identity, state and trait anxiety
- We measured state anxiety before and after an ethnic identity discussion

Hypotheses

- Trait and state anxiety would be negatively related to ethnic identity (Study 1 and 2)
- Self-disclosure about ethnic identity would lower state anxiety levels (Study 1)
- Participants who discuss their ethnic identity will report lower levels of anxiety than participants who discuss group membership (Study 2)

Participants

- **Study 1:** 155 students
 - Mostly women ($n = 102$; 66%)
 - Caucasian ($n = 91$, 59.1%), Asian/Asian American ($n = 46$, 29.9%), African-American ($n = 10$, 6.5%), Multi-racial ($n = 6$, 0.6%)
 - Median age was 19.82 ($SD = 1.74$)
 - Most ($n = 132$, 85%) were U.S. citizens
 - Mean generational status of 3.19 generations ($SD = 1.52$).
 - English as the primary language spoken in home ($n = 121$, 78%)
 - Chinese ($n = 15$, 9.7%), Korean ($n = 14$, 9.1%), and other ($n = 4$, 2.6%) as the primary language
- **Study 2:** 91 students
 - Mostly women ($n = 64$; 70%)
 - Caucasian ($n = 53$, 58.2%), Asian/Asian Americans ($n = 25$, 27.5%), African Americans ($n = 6$, 6.6%), and Multiracial ($n = 3$, 3.3%)
 - Median age was 19 ($SD = 1.09$)
 - Most were U.S. citizens ($n = 80$; 89.9%)
 - Mean generational status of 3.06 ($SD = 1.56$)
 - English as the primary language spoken in their home ($n = 73$, 81.1%)
 - Chinese ($n = 4$, 4.4%), Korean ($n = 5$, 5.5%), and other ($n = 6$, 6.6%).

Measures

Multi-Group Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised

(MEIM-R; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Ong, 2007)

- Measure of strength of ethnic identity that can be used with different ethnic groups
- We used the 6-item revised MEIM

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Beiling et al., 1998)

• 7-item measure of trait anxiety

Brief State Anxiety Measure (BSAM; Berg et al., 1998)

- 6-item measure of state anxiety
- Used to measure state anxiety before and after ethnic identity discussions

Procedure

- **Study 1:** Participants filled out MEIM and STAI
 - Participants were interviewed about ethnic identity
 - How do you define ethnic identity?
 - “What does your ethnic identity mean to you?”
 - Participants filled out the state anxiety measure before and after ethnic identity discussion
 - A measure of state anxiety was computed using the difference between a participant’s anxiety score after the discussion minus anxiety scores before the discussion.
- **Study 2:** Participants filled out MEIM and STAI
 - Participants were randomly assigned to discuss either ethnic identity or membership in any group
 - Ethnic identity questions (same as above)
 - Group membership questions
 - Please describe a group, club, team, or sport which you are involved in and what participation entails.
 - Is membership in this group important to you?
 - Completed state anxiety measure before and after discussion
 - A measure of change in state anxiety was created for anxiety produced during the manipulation as in Study 1

Results: Study 1

Zero Order Correlations:

- Ethnic identity was *not* significantly correlated with
 - trait anxiety ($r = -.03$, $p = .694$)
 - state anxiety before ($r = -.02$, $p = .775$) or after ($r = -.082$, $p = .33$) the ethnic identity discussion

Ethnic Identity Discussion:

- To test if anxiety was significantly lower after the ethnic identity discussion we conducted a paired t -test
- Anxiety levels after the ethnic identity discussion ($M = 14.19$ $SD = 3.41$) were significantly lower than anxiety levels before talking about ethnic identity ($M = 15.20$, $SD = 4.18$), $t(147) = 3.96$, $p < .001$, $d = .27$

Results: Study 2

Zero-order Correlations:

- There were no significant correlations between ethnic identity, state, and trait anxiety (all $ps > .286$)

Ethnic Identity Manipulation:

- Individuals in the ethnic identity discussion condition ($M = -.21$, $SD = 3.20$) had a significantly different degree of change in anxiety than individuals in the group membership discussion condition ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 3.25$), $t(90) = -2.89$, $p = .005$, $d = .61$
- Individuals in the ethnic identity discussion showed some decrease in anxiety, whereas participants in the group membership discussion condition showed an increase in anxiety over time

Discussion

- In two studies, state and trait anxiety were *not* significantly correlated with self-reported trait levels of ethnic identity
- However, **discussion** of ethnic identity lowered anxiety levels for the average individual in Study 1
- There is something specific about contemplating or discussing *ethnic* identity that does not *increase* anxiety
 - Not attributable to talking about group membership
- Integrating discussion of ethnic identity into existing anxiety treatments could be beneficial
 - Discussion could improve rapport with a therapist in initial sessions
 - Discussion of ethnic identity could be modified to serve as a coping mechanism both in and out of session
- Future research should test if talking about ethnic identity lowers anxiety in clinical populations