

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Self-affirmation involves reflecting upon one's values or strengths. The self-affirmation theory was popularized by the social psychologist Claude Steele (Stanford University School of Education), and it remains an interesting topic among both researchers and practitioners.

The general aim of the research project is to deepen our knowledge of self-affirmation – determine whether and how self-affirmation works in the context of dealing with chronic disease. The proposed research applies concept of self-affirmation to reduce anxiety, depression, and improve well-being in psoriasis patients over both the short and longer term. The project focuses on specific areas where our understanding of self-affirmation is superficial or uncertain. The first goal is to explore the effects of self-affirmation on emotion regulation processes (cognitive coping strategies). It was hypothesized that participants creating self-affirmation will report a significant increase in the use of positive cognitive coping strategies (such as putting into perspective) and a reduction in the use of negative cognitive coping strategies (such as catastrophizing). Besides knowing if self-affirmation works, it is crucial to know how it works. The mechanics of self-affirmation remain unclear, therefore the second objective of this project is to determine psychological mediators explaining the effects of self-affirmation, and identify favourable/boundary conditions. Furthermore, the proposed research project will show both the short and the longer-term effects of self-affirmation on anxiety, depression, and well-being. The literature brings conflicting results and therefore this topic is worth further investigation using randomized controlled trials (where participants are randomly allocated to one of the study' conditions, minimizing potential bias). Finally, the proposed research project opens up new avenues of research in the field of experimental manipulations of self-affirmation, by testing a specific, body-related self-affirmation intervention. The aim is to compare effectiveness of general self-affirmation intervention with more specific one, that focuses on body-related aspects. To produce high-quality results, two randomized controlled trials will be conducted. Interventions will be delivered under real-world conditions.

Taken together, the proposed research project involves the exploration of relevant issues facing the self-affirmation theory that remains popular and interesting topic among both researchers and practitioners (e.g., due to its applicability). The project focuses on specific areas where our understanding of self-affirmation is superficial or uncertain (i.e., longer-term effectiveness, mechanisms of self-affirmation, and favourable/boundary conditions). Moreover, the proposed research project opens up new avenues of research in the field of experimental manipulations of self-affirmation, by testing a new self-affirmation intervention that focuses on body-related aspects. Furthermore, to our knowledge, there are no studies that demonstrate whether a manipulation aimed at a self-affirm may affect mental health outcomes in patients dealing with chronic illness. The proposed project aims at filling this void. Psoriasis is a common chronic skin disorder that is associated with both physical and psychological burdens. To date, an extensive literature describes the co-occurrence of psoriasis and anxiety, negative self-image, depression, and suicidal ideation. There is a need for interventions designed to reduce negative mental health outcomes and improve well-being of psoriasis patients. This is not an applied project in a strict sense, however, it might contribute to developing and testing interventions designed to reduce negative mental health outcomes and improve well-being of psoriasis patients.