ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Testing a Theory of Psychological Restoration Through Self-Actualization Processes

by

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The purpose of this study is to test a new theory of psychological restoration based on self-actualization processes. Specifically, this study focuses on testing whether intentionally directing attention to enjoyable and creative activities that are self-actualizing results in psychological restoration. An experimental, four group, pretest-posttest design was employed using a sample (n = 142) of university undergraduate students. Participants were randomly assigned to groups. Participants in Groups 1 and 2 completed a 20-minute high cognitive effort creative writing task based on a photograph of a natural or urban scene, respectively. Group 3 participants completed a 20-minute high cognitive effort, low creativity note-taking task. Group 4 participants completed a 20-minute low cognitive effort, low creativity card-sorting task. Measures of daily hassles, positive and negative emotion, and directed attention capabilities were obtained at the pretest. Measures of self-actualization, directed attention capabilities, psychological restoration, assessment of restoration efforts, positive and negative emotion, and satisfaction with creative output were obtained during the posttest. Psychological restoration and satisfaction with creative output outcomes were greater for
the natural writing task compared to the note-taking task (p < 0.008). Self-actualization and satisfaction with creative output outcomes were greater for the sorting task compared to the note-taking task (p < 0.008). The mediating effect of self-actualization was present when comparing the natural writing task and note-taking task (p < 0.05) and the urban writing task and sorting task (p < 0.05). The results suggest the potential value of distinguishing between self and other-directed attention, which to date has not been discussed in the literature.