Abstract

Dissertation: An Examination of the Relationship between Emotional Expressivity and Attitudes toward and Barriers to Seeking Psychological Help

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There is a discrepancy between men and women in regards to utilization of professional psychological services. It has been estimated that two-thirds of all individuals seeking professional psychological services are women. One reason that has been suggested to explain this underutilization of services by men is negative attitudes toward seeking psychological services and an inability to express emotion. The current investigation examined the relationship between men’s emotional expression, their attitudes toward expressing emotion, attitudes toward seeking professional psychological services, and their perceived barriers to seeking help. Participants were 228 men from a large, Midwestern university. Their age ranged from 18 to 50 years with a mean age of 23.34 years. Level of education ranged from freshmen undergraduate students to Master’s level graduate students. Eighty six percent identified as Caucasian and 90% identified as straight, and 6.6% identified as gay. To assess the relationship between the variables canonical correlation analysis was performed. Results demonstrated that men’s actual emotional expression and attitudes toward expressing emotion were related to stigma associated with and barriers to seeking professional psychological services. In particular, the more negative attitudes men had toward expressing emotion and the less emotional expressive they were, the greater their stigma beliefs associated with seeking professional psychological services and the
more barriers they perceived with seeking said services. Findings from this investigation offer areas for future research, including further investigations of the relationship between attitudes toward expressing emotion and stigma associated with seeking professional psychological services. In addition, clinical applications are discussed, including methods to decrease stigma associated with seeking professional psychological services and means to address emotional expression with men in therapeutic settings.