

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Do You Have to Say it? Reflection versus Expression in Committed Relationships

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The find-remind-and-bind (Algoe, 2013) theory of gratitude hypothesizes gratitude is not only beneficial intrapersonally but also interpersonally as it brings our attention to the positive attributes of others. However, despite evidence that gratitude may benefit relationships, a limited number of studies have examined how gratitude could be used as a couple intervention. The current experimental couples study compared outcomes of a reflective, intrapersonal journaling gratitude intervention, an expressed, interpersonal gratitude condition, and a control condition. Heterosexual married and cohabitating couples were recruited via social media to participate in a randomly assigned intervention for two weeks. Couples completed pre- and post-intervention assessments of gratitude, relationship satisfaction, and relationship maintenance behaviors, creating two time points of between-group data collection. Multilevel modeling procedures were used to analyze the data, following previous recommendations on dyadic data (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Couples in the expression and reflection groups were found to have greater relationship satisfaction outcomes than the control group. Relationship maintenance behaviors and grateful mood were not impacted by the intervention. Further, there were no detectable differences between couples' outcomes in the expression group versus the reflection group. The

findings contributed to the validity of gratitude as a relational intervention, and the utilization of gratitude as a possible supplement to empirically validated couples therapies is discussed.