

Abstract

Dissertation: The Role of Awe in Cognitive Restructuring, Cognitive Reflection, and Cognitive Flexibility: A Psychotherapy Analogue Study

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Awe has the properties of prompting individuals to reevaluate their worldview, rely less on heuristics, and enhance mental flexibility. This is the first known study assessing the utility of awe in a psychotherapy analog. Participants were randomized into either an awe induction or neutral group. All participants were shown videos that guided participants in restructuring their thoughts. Between the two groups, significant differences were detected among all four variables, including cognitive restructuring ability, belief in participants' restructured thought, cognitive reflection, and cognitive flexibility. Notably, only three of the four variables resulted in differences in the hypothesized direction, with the awe induction prompting greater cognitive restructuring ability, cognitive reflection, and cognitive flexibility. However, greater cognitive flexibility was only reached by participants who reported extreme elevations of induced awe. The neutral condition group produced higher ratings of belief in their restructured thoughts. The results of the current study warrant further investigation into the therapeutic utility of awe. Application toward theory, future research, and counseling psychology are discussed.