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How anxious individuals polyregulate? Insights from an experimental emotion polyregulation study.

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A growing body of literature in affective psychology proposes that individuals use several emotion regulation (ER) strategies in a single emotional episode to cope with their arising feelings. Historically, the relationship between ER and negative affective conditions of anxiety has been of considerable theoretical and clinical interest, which connection gets more and more attention in polyregulation studies as well.

In this study, we assessed how anxiety impacts ER using a polyregulation paradigm.

135 healthy individuals filled in the DASS-21 questionnaire followed by an emotion-inducing task consisting of neutral, negative and positive movie clips. During the task, participants were instructed to focus on their emotions and on changes in their subjective experience. After the clips, the participants' affective states were measured including valence, arousal and controllability, and state PANAS. Moreover, participants were asked to indicate whether they used ER strategies to cope with their emotions from a list of 13 adaptive and maladaptive strategies.

Results showed heightened negative affect and uncontrollability of emotions induced by the negative clips in participants with higher level of anxiety. Higher anxiety scorers indicated the use of more ER strategies in a single emotional episode: they applied the same amount of adaptive, but more maladaptive strategies.

Our results are in line with previous monoregulation studies regarding the effect anxious symptoms (e.g. tension and the feeling of uncontrollability) have on emotional processes. Future studies of polyregulation should involve interviews and physiological measures to give a more detailed explanation of the relationship between anxiety and affective functioning.

Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am within 6 years of receiving my Ph.D.

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