

Abstract of thesis entitled:

The Health Benefits of Expressive Writing and Self-compassion Journaling among
Self-critical Individuals

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Expressive writing has been demonstrated to be successful in promoting physical and psychological health in previous research. However, the overall effect is inconsistent and small. Thus, new ingredients should be added to the existing writing paradigm, to enrich its beneficial effects on health. In particular, the present study proposed and examined self-compassion as a potential supplement of the existing expressive writing paradigm. In addition to examining the effect of self-compassion journaling on physical and mental health, the mechanisms of expressive writing and self-compassion journaling, as well as the moderating role of self-criticism on the effect of expressive writing and self-compassion journaling on physical and mental health were also examined.

In the study, all participants were randomized into 3 groups: (1) self-compassion journaling, (2) expressive writing, and (3) time management writing

as control. On 3 days within one week following the baseline assessment, participants wrote according to writing instructions specified for their assigned conditions, and engaged in a 20-minute writing session. Participants then completed the post-writing assessment immediately after the final writing session, and the follow-up assessment 4 weeks after the final writing session. Results of the present study suggested both expressive writing and self-compassion journaling were effective in reducing physical health problems. No change in physical symptoms at the follow-up assessment was observed in the control group. However, significant reduction in physical symptoms was observed in both the expressive writing and the self-compassion journaling groups, with the self-compassion journaling group showed a larger effect on physical symptoms reduction than the expressive writing group. On the other hand, results of text analysis showed both the expressive writing group and the self-compassion journaling group wrote more positive and negative emotion words, first person singular and plural pronouns than the control group, which provided indirect evidence to support emotion regulation and resilient self-concept construction as the underlying mechanisms of expressive writing and self-compassion journaling. In addition, unique quadratic pattern of change in mood regulation ability in the expressive writing group and unique quadratic pattern of change in self-kindness in the self-compassion journaling group were observed. In addition, more use of negative emotion words and

increase in self-kindness were found to be associated with decrease in physical symptoms at the follow-up assessment, suggesting emotion regulation and resilient self-concept construction may work differently in expressive writing and self-compassion journaling. Also, self-critical individuals were found to benefit more than counterparts who are low in self-criticism in expressive writing condition. Applications of expressive writing and self-compassion journaling in self-help interventions were also discussed.

Keywords: self-compassion, expressive writing, self-criticism