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Benefits and Applications of Journaling: Exploring the Lower Boundary for Effective Dosage in Non-clinical Populations

Ryan Hunsaker

Patrick Steffen

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Benefits and Applications of Journaling:

Exploring the Lower Boundary for Effective Dosage in Non-clinical Populations

Ryan Hunsaker

Mentor:

Patrick Steffen, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology



Introduction

- Written expressions of emotion have been shown to produce favorable outcomes in both spheres of **physical** health and **mental** health (Murray, 2009; Pennebaker, 2000).
- Although scientists have identified to some degree *what* the effects of journaling are, much less is known regarding exactly *when* this impact is most likely to occur (Pennebaker, 2000).
- Several studies have shown clinically significant benefits for brief journaling interventions (e.g., Greenberg, Wortman, & Stone, 1996; Burton and King, 2008), but the long-term benefits and the lowest dosages necessary for these benefits are debatable.
- The current study provides an opportunity to assay the therapeutic effects of a brief journaling intervention
- The author proposes that a 15-minute journaling intervention will lead to significant health benefits, which will still be apparent after two weeks.

Methods

Design: An empirical study administered using SONA and Qualtrics.

Participants:

61 BYU undergraduate students (21 male, 40 female).

Measures:

Perceived Stress Questionnaire – A psychosocial measure.

Patient Health Questionnaire, 15-item version (PHQ-15)
– A perceived biological measure.

Procedure:

Time 1

Questionnaires

Journal Positive Experiences

OR

Journal Daily Events

Questionnaires

PSS &
PHQ-15

14-18
Days

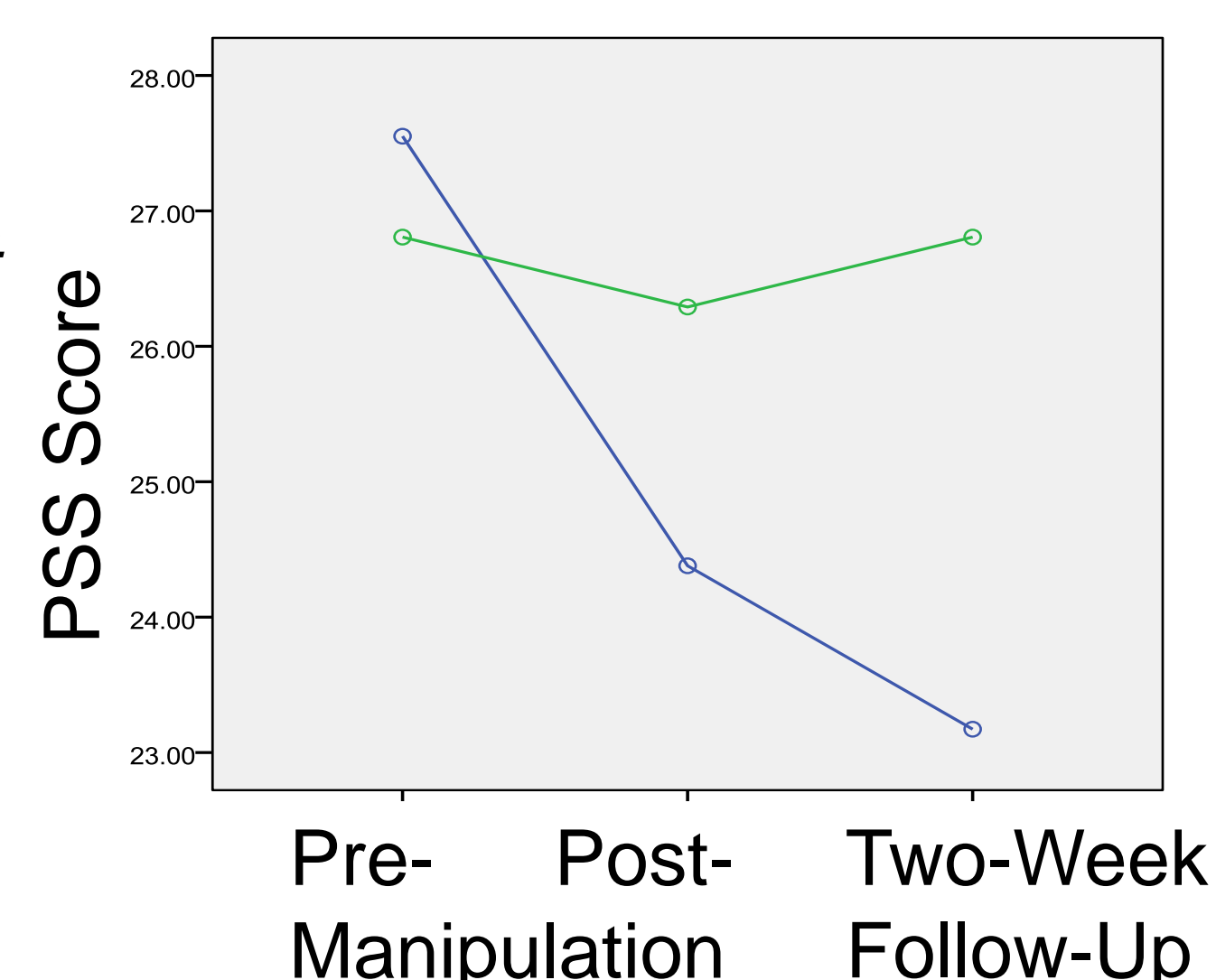
Questionnaires

Covariates

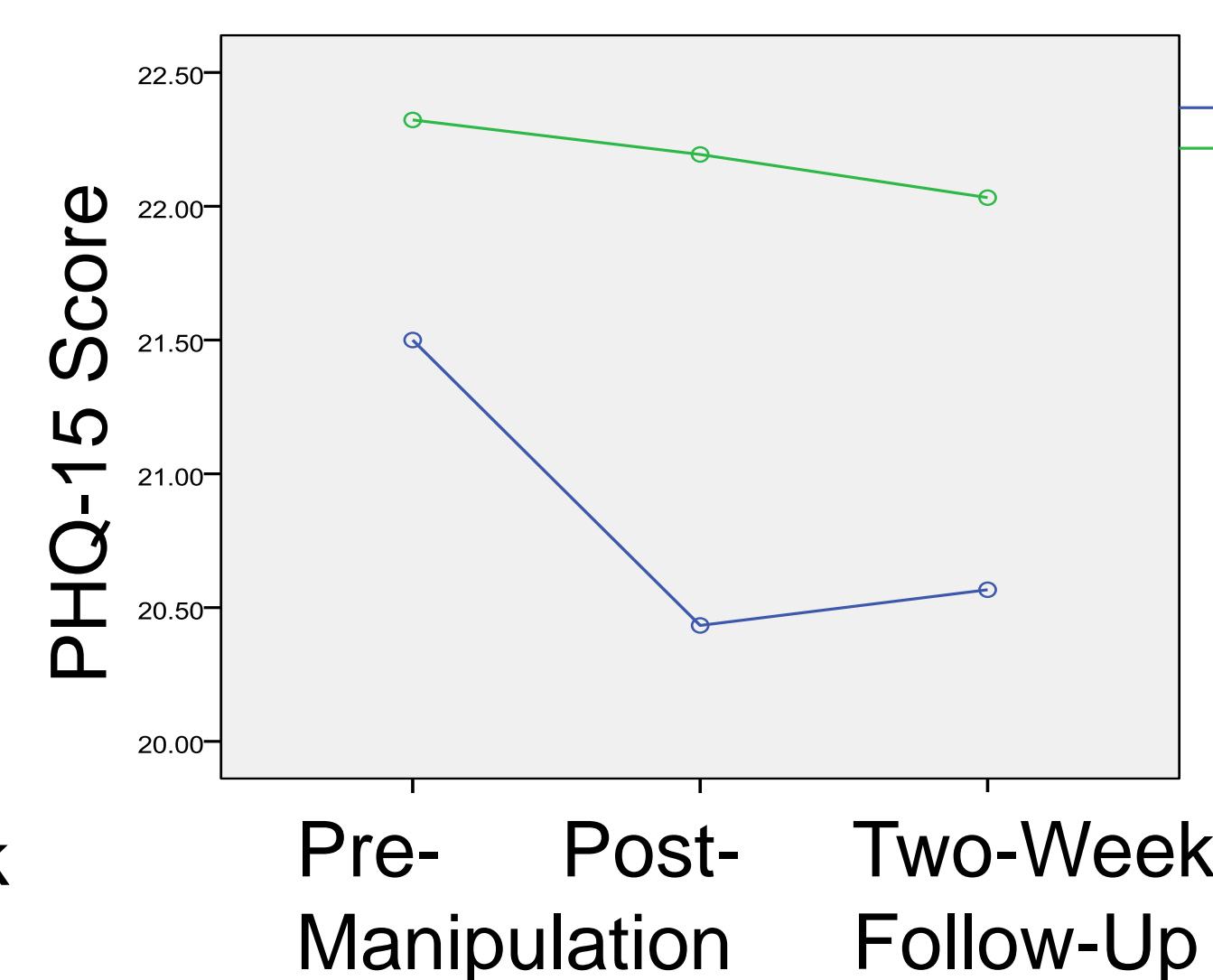
PSS &
PHQ-15

Health Measures Over Time

Stress



Physical Symptoms



Data Analysis

Demographics

Age	19.8 (2.2)	20.8 (5.5)	.35
Gender (% Female)	67	65	.86
Ethnicity (% White)	93	97	.53

Covariates

Pre-experiment Energy	5.2 (1.6)	5.2 (1.7)	.91
Pre-experiment Mood	6.8 (1.4)	6.6 (1.7)	.72

Manipulation Check

Positive Emotion Expression	3.80 (1.98)	1.71 (.91)	.00**
Negative Emotion Expression	1.13 (.94)	.53 (.52)	.00**

Dependent Variable

Stress

Pre versus Post	-3.17 (3.95)	-.52 (3.74)	.01*
Post versus 2-weeks	-1.07 (5.56)	.52 (7.26)	.34

Physical Symptoms

Pre versus Post	-1.07 (1.57)	-.13 (1.93)	.04*
Post versus 2-weeks	.13 (2.86)	-.16 (3.26)	.71

* Significance at the $p < .05$ level
** Significance at the $p < .01$ level

Results

- No significant differences were found between groups for relevant demographic variables and covariates.
- Manipulation check showed both positive *and* negative emotion words increased for the experimental group as anticipated.
- Journaling significantly benefited health (in terms of both stress and physical symptoms) in the short-term, but failed to significantly benefit participants in the long-term.

Discussion

- Based upon the current study, one should take the findings of articles that show long-term health benefits of small journaling interventions (Burton & King, 2008) with “a grain of salt.”
- Limitations of the current study: The length of the writing prompt was not uniform for all participants due to the setup on Qualtrics (i.e., people timed themselves).
- Suggestions for future research:
 - Future studies should chart how long the effects of journaling last by more frequently administering questionnaires.
 - Due to the great variability we found between subjects it would be suggested that future studies only use single-subject design methodologies.

References

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