

Express Yourself: A Study on Expressive Writing and State Anxiety

Emerald Norman

Emeraldn@andrews.edu

Behavioral Sciences Department, Andrews University

Harvey J. Burnett, Jr., Research Mentor



Abstract

The overall goal of this study is to determine the efficacy of expressive writing as an intervention tool for state anxiety utilizing a randomized control trial (RCT) method. It will look specifically at positive, negative, temporal, and insight words to analyze the effect they have on the effectiveness of this intervention over time.

Research Question

How effective is expressive writing as an intervention tool for reducing state anxiety? Does the use of positive affect words, insight words and present time orientation words increase this tool's effectiveness?

Methods

- IRB approval was obtained through Andrews University (IRB #16-106)
- Data will be collected from 63 students of Andrews University who are 18 and older, randomly assigned to two conditions.
 - Expressive writing condition:** For this condition the participant will write about a stressful life event for 10 minutes. The prompt was developed by Gortner, Rude, and Pennebaker (2006).
 - Superficial writing condition:** This condition is the control for this study. The subjects assigned to this condition will serve as a basis for comparison to the expressive writing conditions.

Measures and Conditions

Group	Baseline	Condition (Treatment)	Immediately After Disclosure	Post Disclosure (30-Minutes)	Post Disclosure (15-days)
1	ST AI survey	Expressive writing	ST AI survey	ST AI survey	ST AI survey
2	ST AI survey	Superficial writing	ST AI survey	ST AI survey	ST AI survey

Note: Survey (Demographic Questionnaire) given prior to 'Baseline'.

Expected Results

- Researchers expect to find a difference in state anxiety over time in subjects who underwent expressive writing treatment when compared to the control condition.
 - The greatest difference in anxiety is expected from subjects who wrote using positive affect words, insight words, and present orientation words.

Hypothetical Model

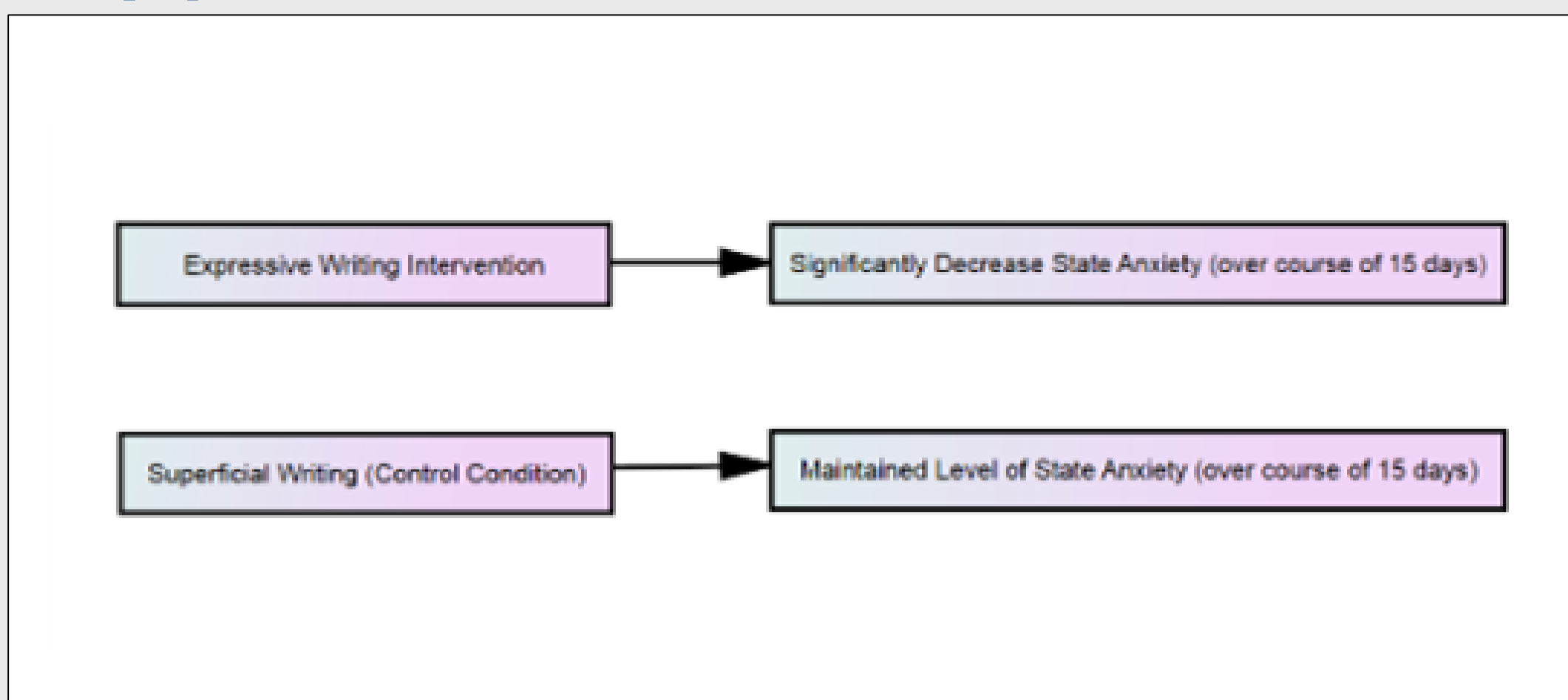


Fig. 1 gives graphic representation of hypothesized results.

Previous Results

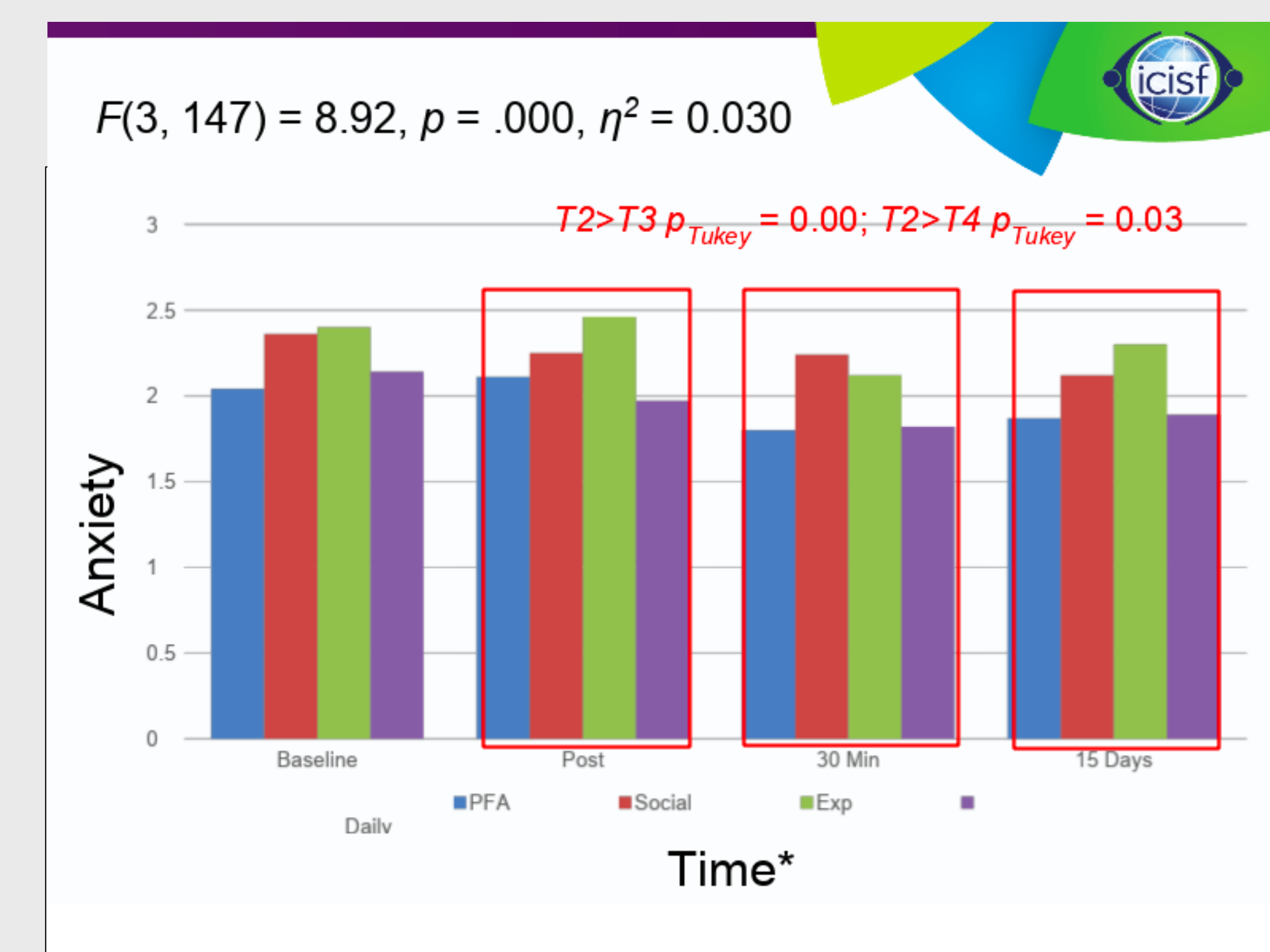


Fig. 2 shows the collected data from 2016-2019 and illustrates expected trends in state anxiety levels after treatment.

Current Progress

- <130+ subjects have been collected for the PFA study. 63 total have been collected for the expressive writing study.
- Researchers are now in the process of re-coding the anxiety and demographic survey data. An ANOVA will be used to compare the results of the two conditions.
- Researchers are also in the process of cleaning up the writing samples so they may be processed through the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) analysis program.

Implications of Study

This study will add to the literature on the use of expressive writing to reduce state anxiety through a randomized control trial method. This is significant because anxiety is degradational to health (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005) and expressive writing is a simple and cost-effective method to reduce anxiety. The hope is that the results obtained from this study can be utilized across the nation to create targeted programs that effectively treat anxiety.

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