Emotion focused training for emotion coaching – the intervention decreasing the level of self-criticism

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Self-criticism – what?

- Self-criticism is a constant and harsh self-scrutiny and evaluation and feelings of unworthiness, inferiority, failure, and guilt (Blatt & Homann, 1992)
Self-criticism – why?

• Research suggests that high levels of self-criticism plays a central role in various kinds of psychopathology (Shahar et al., 2012) e.g. anxiety, depression, addictions, schizophrenia...

• Self-criticism has serious negative consequences within nonclinical populations (e.g. Whelton & Henkleman, 2002) such as procrastination, interpersonal problems...
Self-criticism – how?

• According to Gilbert and Irons (2004), self-criticism is an essential focus for intervention and can be treated by learning compassion and self-compassion
• In addition, Kemeny et al. (2012) proposed that learning emotion skills can increase compassion too
• Therefore, we were interested in finding whether cultivating emotion skills can influence the level of self-criticism
Aim

- The goal of the study was to examine the efficacy of a 12 weeks, group program EFT-EC in a student population on the level of emotion intelligence, self-compassion, self-criticism and their dimensions
Methods - measures

- **The Forms of Self-Criticism/Reassuring Scale** (FSCRS; Gilbert, Clarke, Hempel, Miles, & Irons, 2004) - Reassured self, Inadequate self, and Hated self
- **The Self-Compassion Scale** (SCS; Neff, 2003) - Self-compassionate responding and Self-uncompassionate responding
- **The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form** (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009) - Emotionality, Sociability, Self-control, and Well-being
Methods - participants

• 128 students of psychology study, due to written form of questionnaire and a lot of missing data only 89 entered the statistical analysis

• The final group consisted of 76 women and 13 men with a mean age of 20.95 years ($SD = 1.73$)
Methods - procedure

- Pre-intervention measures
- Meeting once a week for 1.5 hours for EFT-EC intervention for 12 weeks with a psychologist in a role of facilitator
- Reflection of the meeting (expressive writing - Pennebaker, 2017)
- Daily homework’s exercises sent via email
- Post-intervention measures
Methods - intervention

• Based on Emotion-focused therapy (Greenberg, 2011) and its exercises (Halamová, 2013)
• Exercises - core elements of the emotion coaching from EFT perspective, the expected impact on participants and their motivation to complete them
• Every of 12 sessions - reporting about the homeworks, group exercises and debriefings, instruction to the new homework
Data analysis

- SPSS Statistics-20, program R (Version 3.5.1 - R Core Team, 2018), and the package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012)
- Fit of the model with the data evaluated (maximum likelihood estimator with Yuan-Bentler correction for non-normality and robust Huber-White estimation of standard errors)
- Dynamic structural equations models (two latent constructs: pre-test and post-test, their indicators: items of subscales)
Dynamic structural model
Results

- At least acceptable fit with the data: Inadequate Self (FSCRS), Hated Self (FSCRS), Self-uncompassionate responding (SCS), Well-Being (TEIQue), and Sociability (TEIQue)
- Inadequate Self, Hated Self, Self-uncompassionate responding decreased significantly after the intervention, and scores for Self-control increased significantly. Scores for Sociability increased but not significantly
Discussion

• TEIQue-SF measures trait emotional intelligence, it is promising result that the intervention lasting 12 sessions can change the trait Self-control

• According to Petrides (2009), people who score higher at self-control can control their impulses and regulate their stress without being repressive or excessively expressive
Discussion

• Learning adaptive emotion skills may provide control over undesired emotions that could be otherwise hard to control (Berking, Ebert, Cuijpers, & Hofmann, 2013) and so higher self-control and consequently lower self-criticism.

• Our findings support previous research (Gilbert & Procter, 2006) that self-critical individuals benefit from learning emotion skills.
Discussion

- Self-critical people have difficulties with feeling safe with own emotions because they are overly sensitive to threat (Gilbert & Procter, 2006), more prone to stress and less emotionally regulated. That’s why learning emotion skills lower self-criticism.

- It would be interesting to explore whether EFT-EC also influence the level of stress and add some objective criteria of success for example improving grades at the university or physiological measurements e.g. HRV.
Discussion

• The EFT-EC was more effective for decreasing Inadequate self than Hated self.
• Hated self is more pathological self-criticism and harder to change (Shahar et al., 2012) because it is connected to hatred over self and it goes along with desire to hurt self (Gilbert et al., 2004).
Discussion

• EFT-EC decreased self-criticism without increasing self-compassion. There are certainly other ways of decreasing self-criticism not only self-compassion.
• Based on the previous research on effectiveness of various interventions, whilst some interventions may reduce self-criticism, they may not improve self-compassion or vice versa (Halamová, 2018).
• Theory self-compassion and self-criticism do not form a dichotomous construct.
Discussion

• As the intervention EFT-EC did not impact self-compassion, it could be meaningful to add at least one session dedicated to cultivation of self-compassion directly.

• Such improvement of the intervention might influence not only the level of self-compassion but also multiply the impact on self-criticism as suggested by Gilbert and Irons (2004), who propose that self-criticism can be treated by learning compassion and self-compassion.
Limitation

• No control group
• More women than men in our sample
• Students simultaneously participated in several different courses at the university, however none of them was experiential so we assume that that they did not much influenced the results
Conclusion

- Emotion focused training for emotion coaching aimed to cultivate emotions decreased self-criticism and self-uncompassionate responding
- These results are promising and posit that interventions aiming at emotions can be delivered with impact on self-criticism for student population
Thank you for your attention