

Understanding Your Feelings: Emotional Granularity Influences On Coping

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Opportunity

- **Emotional granularity** describes the adaptive value of putting feelings into words with a high degree of specificity and precision (Kashdan, Feldman Barrett, & McKnight, 2015).
- Studies has shown that those with high negative emotional granularity engage in more positive daily activities (Starr R., Hershenberg R., Li. I, Shaw, A., 2017) and may be linked with better coping skills.
- The relationship between emotional granularity and coping remains understudied in the context of specific emotional experiences outside the lab.
- This study aims to connect emotional granularity to levels of coping, the degree to which individuals react to negative experiences, either positively or negatively.
- **Hypothesis:** Low emotional granularity increases the risk of these unhealthy emotion-regulation strategies and disorders due to poor daily responding to poor negative affect.

Protocol

- 12 participants (4 men, 8 women) between the ages of 18 to 29 years (M=22.29, SD=3.87) completed 8-hour real-world experience sampling sessions for 14 days
- **Experience Sampling:** Sustained increases in heartbeat not due to motion prompted participants to complete brief emotional experience evaluations on a smartphone. Participants also completed an end-of-day survey to provide narrative details of their day and to further rate their affective experience of each event.

Approach

Granularity Measure

- As part of the end-of-day survey, participants endorsed the intensity to which they felt certain emotions from a list of common positive and negative emotion terms (e.g. Happy, Sad, Angry, etc.) during the time of the event.
- Patterns of co-endorsement of emotion terms over the 14 experience sampling days were used to determine the granularity level (high/low) of each participant.

* 6. Thinking back on this time in your day, rate how strongly you were feeling each of the following emotions at the time you received this prompt?

	Not at all						Very much
Afraid	<input type="radio"/>						
Amused	<input type="radio"/>						
Angry	<input type="radio"/>						
Bored	<input type="radio"/>						
Calm	<input type="radio"/>						
Disgusted	<input type="radio"/>						
Embarrassed	<input type="radio"/>						
Excited	<input type="radio"/>						
Frustrated	<input type="radio"/>						

Figure 1. – List of common emotion terms participants were presented with in the end-of-day survey

Coping Measure

- Participants rated various appraisal questions on the end of day survey, e.g. “How well were you coping emotionally with whatever was happening when you received the prompt?”, “How predictable was whatever was happening when you received the prompt?”
- A mean score of participant’s ratings for the appraisal questions on coping and predictability was calculated for events that participants endorsed as 'Sad'.

Results

Self-reported levels of coping and predictability in relation to negative emotional granularity

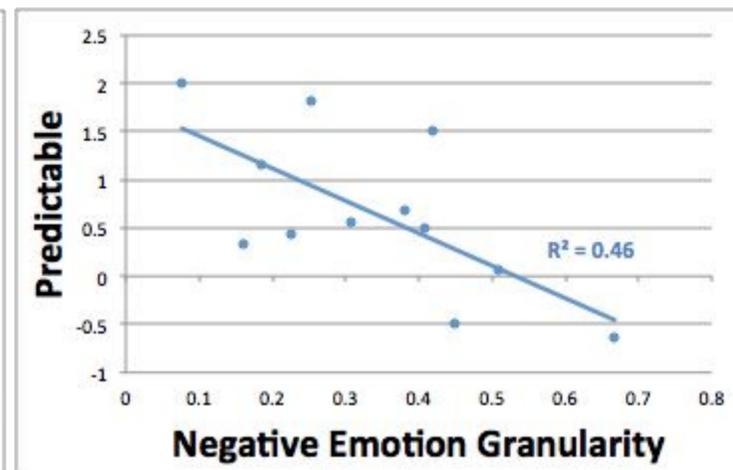
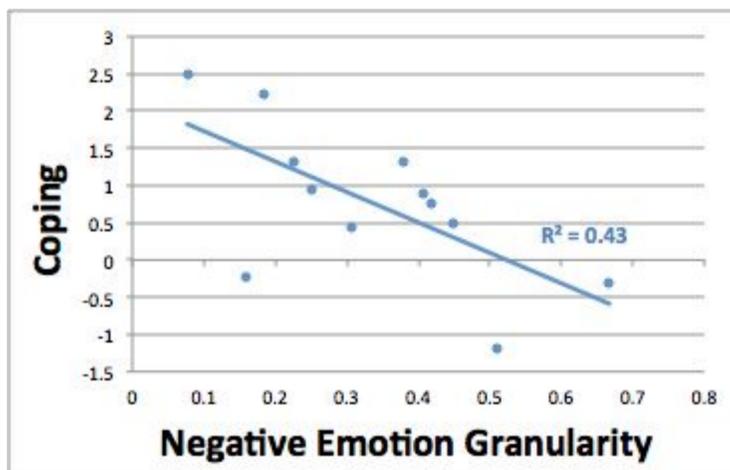


Figure 2.

Figure 3.

References

Kashdan, T. B., Barrett, L.F., McKnight, P. E. (2015). "Unpacking Emotion Differentiation: Transforming Unpleasant Experience by Perceiving Distinctions in Negativity." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24(1): 10-16.
 Starr, L. R., Hershenberg, R., Y. Irina, L., Shaw, Z. A. (2017). "When Feelings Lack Precision: Low Positive and Negative Emotion Differentiation and Depressive Symptoms in Daily Life." *Clinical Psychological Science* 5(4): 613-631.

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Impact

- The use of experience sampling triggered by ambulatory sensors allows us to look at the emotional granularity of participants based on their response to everyday stressors, and to further evaluate their ability to cope in these situations.
- Our results suggest that granularity has a significant impact on the risk to various mental illnesses resulting from poor coping mechanisms, just not in the way we had predicted.
- There are important moderators to the relationship between emotional granularity and coping that have not been studied in previous research.
- Identifying emotional granularity as an important variable related to emotional coping skills will ultimately enable us to develop novel interventions to promote healthier emotional regulation strategies to treat mental illness.
- Such interventions could potentially both prevent emerging mental illness and decrease the number of individuals already burdened by mental illnesses like depression and anxiety.

