The challenge of persuading people with depression to seek help

Jason T. Siegel
Professor of Psychology
Claremont Graduate University

Depression

- Major depressive disorder (MDD) is one of the world’s leading causes of disability; it affects 350 million people worldwide and is responsible for 800,000 deaths annually (World Health Organization [WHO], 2016).
- MDD affects approximately 16.6% of American adults in their lifetime (Kessler et al., 2005).
- U.S. lifetime prevalence rates of minor depression range from 10% (Kessler, Zhao, Blazer, & Swartz, 1997) to 30.6% (Kessler, McGonagle, Swartz, Blazer, & Nelson, 1993).

Depression and Help Seeking

- Each year, approximately 850,000 people commit suicide as a result of the Depression (WHO, 2012).
- 15-20% of people with depression end their lives through suicide (see Miret, Ayuso-Mateos, Sanchez-Moreno, & Vieta, 2013 for a review).

Depression

- Approximately 60-70% of people with mental illness never seek treatment (Henshaw & Freeman-Doan, 2009).
- Half of the people who commit suicide do so without telling another person of their plans (Kisely, Campbell, Cartwright, Bowes, & Jackson, 2011).
Increasing help-seeking

- Good goal, but difficult to achieve (Klimes-Dougan et al., 2013).
- Sometimes efforts seem successful, but are only successful on those who are not depressed (Goldney & Fischer, 2008).
- Why, oh Why?

The ideal message recipient

- Positive attitudes toward help-seeking

If attitudes are negative...

- Weak attitudes
  - Limited certainty
  - Limited extremity
  - Limited elaboration
  - High ambivalence

When the message arrives...

- Minimal counterargumentation
- Fair, unbiased processing
Are people with depression ideal recipients?

**NO!**

Beck’s (1976) Cognitive Theory of Depression

- **Cognitive Triad**
  - Negative views of oneself, one’s experiences, and one’s future
- **Negative Schema**
  - Depressed individuals’ negative bias
  - Negative information
- **Cognitive Errors**
  - Ex. absolutistic dichotomous thinking

Do people with depression have positive attitudes toward help seeking?

**NO**

Higher levels of depression are associated with reduced intentions to seek help.

(Siegel, Lieneman, & Tan, 2015)

Do people with depression have weak attitudes toward help-seeking?

**NO**

- High certainty
- High extremity
- High elaboration
- Low ambivalence
Do people with depression process message in a fair and unbiased fashion?

• Increased negative cognitions towards D-PSAs associated with depression.

An illustration

• Siegel et al. (so close to going out)
• Depressed individuals:
  – “The video really hit home with me because it is very difficult to find the friend that will really be there for you when you need it.”
  – “I feel like I need one of those friends. I also felt bad because I do not have friends to go out with on a Saturday night. I just stay home all the time.”

An illustration

• “I wonder if I have a friend like that. I identify with the person in the video, I know what it feels like to feel all alone all of the time. No matter who is around you just feel alone and horrible.”
“It made me sad. I brought tears to my eyes. I’m not in a good place in my life. I have no friends local to me and I have lived in this rural place for 2 years. I will never make friends here. I need friends. I wish I had friends. I used to have friends.”

Rather than inspiring me to be a better friend to those who I know are having mental health issues, it made me feel incredibly isolated. It made me feel as though I would likely have no one to turn to if times got hard.”

Keeler and Siegel (2016, J of Affective Disorders)

Is all hope lost?

NO!
Some things we cannot change...

- Attitudes toward help-seeking will be negative.
- Attitude strength will be strong.
- Self-relevant information will be processing with a negative bias.

We might be able to change....

- Amount of counterargumentation.
- The perceived value of the message.
- For a very brief period, the emotions they feel.

Reducing counterargumentation

- Siegel, Lienemann, & Tan, 2016 — Clinical Psychological Science

Mistargeted Communication

- Walster and Festinger (1962)
  - “It is widely believed that a communication, if inadvertently overheard, is more likely to be effective in changing the opinion of the listener than if it had been deliberately addressed to him” (p. 395).
  - “Do you know someone who fights depression?”
Mistargeted Communication

- Study A
  - Print PSA
  - General Help Seeking Intentions
- Study B
  - Video PSA
  - Help Seeking Intentions (web site)
  - Attitudes Toward Help Seeking (semantic differential)
  - Help Seeking Outcomes Expectations

Mistargeted Communication (Study B)
Results

Reducing Counterargumentation

• Quick summary
Increasing perceived message value

• Functional Matching
  — Attitudes can simultaneously serve multiple functions (Shavitt, 1989).
  — Persuasive communications will be more effective to the extent that they address the target attitude's psychological motivation (i.e., “the personal and social needs and goals, plans and motives being served by attitudes and actions” Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Miene, & Haugen, 1994, p. 1130).

Increasing perceived message value

• Pilot studies identified reasons for help-seeking that matched both functions.
• Ads were created based on these messages.
• Functional matching was accomplished through inquiries about why the respondent may or may not consider help-seeking.

Increasing perceived message value

• Functional Matching
  — The social-adjustive function is the motivation to maintain one’s social relationships.
  — The object appraisal function is the motivation to determine how the attitude object can advance one’s motivations, goals, and values.

Increasing perceived message value

• Can we maximize the impact of the ads by using two-sided, rather than one-sided, messages?
Increasing perceived message value

Positive emotion infusion

- The schema of people with depression can be briefly influenced (Clark & Beck, 1999).
- Can we induce elevation and thereby influence help-seeking intentions?
- Elevation (Haidt, 2000; Thomson & Siegel, 2017).

Elevation and Help-Seeking

- Research Plan (Siegel & Thomson, 2017):
  - Study 1: Is elevation correlated with help-seeking among people with depression?
  - Study 2: Can we increase feelings of elevation among people with depression?
  - Study 3: Does increasing elevation lead to increased intentions to seek help?
  - Study 3a: Is increased help-seeking for depression a response to any increase in positive emotion?

• Quick summary
Positive emotion infusion

- 3 studies
  - Study 1: Is elevation correlated with help-seeking among people with depression?
  - Study 2: Can we increase feelings of elevation among people with depression?
  - Study 3: If we infuse elevation, will it increase help-seeking among people with depression?

- Do the gratitude findings replicate?

Study 1

- Results:
  - BDI scores significantly ($p < .01$) correlated with:
    - Elevation ($r = -.39$)
    - Gratitude ($r = -.44$)
    - Help-seeking Intentions Composite ($r = -.37$)
    - Help-seeking Intentions Interpersonal ($r = -.40$)

Study 2

- Elevation Manipulation (recall):
  - Now it is time for you to tell us about yourself. Specifically, we’d like to ask you to tell us about an occurrence in your life that led you to feel elevated. Please think of a time when you witnessed someone do something extremely moral for someone else. Two rules: (1) You cannot be the recipient of the extremely moral act. (2) The recipient of the extremely moral act cannot be someone close to you (e.g. family member or close friend).
Study 2

• Gratitude Manipulation (recall):
  – Now it is time for you to tell us about yourself. Specifically, we'd like to ask you to tell us about an occurrence in your life that led you to feel grateful. Please think of a time when someone did something very generous for you.

Study 2

• Story conditions
  – Story about a nurse at a hospital who witnessed someone be a living donor for a friend

• Elevation:
  – If you were the volunteer at the hospital, how would you feel after witnessing the events in the story? What thoughts would go through your mind? Please describe as vividly as possible how you would have felt if you were the volunteer?

• Gratitude
  – If you were Jeff, how would you feel after your friend donated her liver to you? What thoughts would go through your mind? Please describe as vividly as possible how you would have felt if you were Jeff?

Study 2

• Elevation and gratitude were successfully induced.

Study 3

– Outcome measure:
  • Help-seeking intentions
    – Romantic partner
    – Friend
    – Parent
    – Non-parent family
    – Mental health professional
    – Website
Study 3 (Results)

- **Elevation**
  - Story: Significant differences for overall help-seeking composite (romantic partner*, friend, parent, non-parent family, mental health professional*, website*).
  - Recall: Significant differences for website and romantic partner.

- **Gratitude:**
  - Story: Significant differences for friend.
  - Recall: Significant differences for parent.
  - Reports of guilt among people with depression

Positive Emotion Infusions

- Quick summary

Future Directions

- Alert the masses
  - Siegel, Lienemann & Rosenberg (2017)
- Other positive emotions (e.g., savoring).
  - Straszewski & Siegel (2018)
- Attitude Strength Diagnostic
  - Siegel & Tan (in preparation)
- Self-Distancing
- Reduce Stigmatization

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