**Emotion Regulation in the Workplace: A Focus Group Exploration**

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Honors Thesis

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**Research Question**

How can we train college students at Malone University to be more emotionally intelligent as a resource to recognize workplace aggression in order to reduce it?

**Rationale**

In all types of businesses--from hospitals to zoos to grocery stores--the essence of the business is best recognized and sustained by people using their hard (or technical) skills related to their field of knowledge to perform and produce the desired results (Wibowoa et al., 2020). This is simply the reality of the world we live in; if one cannot get from Point A to Point B in an efficient and effective manner, she or he is deemed to be poorly skilled and unqualified for the job at hand (Vashisht et al., 2021). I believe that being equipped with the proper hard skills to perform a job well is crucial, but let us not forget that there is a human element that complements the performance element of a job. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is part of this human element. EI is essential in recognizing and preventing workplace aggression that threatens the morale, performance, and sustainability of a business.

When the human element is ignored or discounted, a business--or organization--will notice its people not being able to effectively complete their tasks, fully care about their work, and return day-after-day with the motivation to do well in their jobs (Guy, 2020, p. 327). A business may start to falter as workers struggle to smoothly adapt to new circumstances (Hurley et al., 2019, p. 50); seek resilience (Hurley et al., 2019, p. 50); practice the authenticity needed to produce trust, teamwork, and proper communication (Hurley et al., 2019, pp. 48-49); sustain empathy and compassion (Hurley et al., 2019, p. 51); and maintain all the other interpersonal elements that sustain a business. Additionally, in businesses that have cultures of being intense and serious about job duties and job results, workers may be hesitant to express their emotions in fear that they will be judged to be (emotionally) weak and unqualified to do their jobs compared to their coworkers. My interest in EI compels me to illustrate that emotion is a vital component in every business, a component that should not be ignored, unfairly criticized, or aggressed against (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Bar-On, 2010; Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015).

The roots of my interest in EI stem from having a broad vision. When I contemplated what academic subjects fascinated me to center my thesis on, I remembered that my high school human communications professor presented a statistic that (interpersonal) communication skills were the most important job skill. To my surprise, communication was tabbed to be a more valuable job skill than the cognitive (technical) job skills needed to perform the tasks of the job itself (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2016*)*! After I recalled this episode from two years ago, I knew that this statistic was excellent for testing my curiosity about the vital role that communication has in the workplace. Unfortunately, researching communication is like researching astronomy -- it is too broad of a subject matter for a thesis project. Therefore, I met with some of my soon-to-be thesis committee professors to do some serious narrowing down of my thesis topic. Following a few trial-and-errors in determining a potential thesis topic, I was transfixed by the topic of EI. After reading and noticing the potential impact that EI could have in complementing the technical skills found in the workplace--along with the fact that EI has more room for growth in its research--I was convinced that this was what I wanted to focus my thesis topic on.

In my experience (and I am sure others can testify to this as well), we are moved by our emotions. They are part of human nature. From a spiritual view, I believe that God instilled this emotional aspect in humans as a means of helping us better connect with each other and properly analyze our circumstances. Are my life’s circumstances and feelings indicating that good things are going on in my life right now, or are these deep feelings a signal that things are uneasy? If humans were emotionless, we would be similar to what robots are -- good at completing tasks and having strong cognitive skills, but lacking the ability to sympathize, empathize, and comfort each other. This is why EI deserves the attention that it has slowly gathered in the last 30 years. Determining the role of emotions in society, a society where everyone experiences emotions, seems interesting and essential to the workplace. Given my interests, my goal is to study workplace effectiveness and the role of EI in reducing workplace aggression.

**Literature Review**

**Approaches to EI**

Like other areas of academia, EI has its simplicities and complexities. EI has absorbed a substantial amount of criticism for its measurement vagueness (Jadhav & Mulla, 2010, p. 248); lack of scientific validity (Landy, 2005, pp. 412-413); and contradicting nature of interlinking emotion with cognition (intelligence) (Locke, 2005, p. 426). This has consequently generated a spectrum of research with claims that are unfulfilled. Nonetheless, this area of research is simple to grasp; EI can be described as, “the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Additionally, EI is commendable in the fact that this type of intelligence can be trained in people to exalt their own emotions while simultaneously reacting to the emotions of others in a more effective manner (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This improved simultaneous delivery and reception of emotions will theoretically enhance one’s, “ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). As seen in the United States, the human element is widely disregarded and undermined in the workplace compared to the demand for high performance and cognition (Guy, 2020, p. 327). This undermining particularly causes things like workplace aggression to threaten the overall growth of a business as well as the contributions made by hard skill performance. Furthermore, workplace aggression brings intimidation, rudeness, tyranny, and/or emotional abuse (Dupré & Barling, 2006) which explicitly and implicitly jeopardize the safety, well-being, and health of the workers (European Commission, 2002, as cited in Martin 2014, p. 28). When properly noticed and respected, EI can help round out the emotional and general human aspects found in the workplace, aspects that are fundamental to our existence and daily operations of businesses.

EI was first developed and appeared in the public landscape after the work of Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990. Salovey and Mayer (1990) summarized EI as the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotion knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth. Despite the thoroughness of EI’s definition, it has been susceptible to criticism from scholars who mistakenly judge EI to be a collection of personality traits (Davies et al., 1998, p. 1013) or a collection of repackaged interpersonal skills (Woodruffe, 2001). To combat misperceptions about what EI is, Salovey and Mayer emphasized that their definition of EI, “fits within the boundaries of conceptual definitions of intelligence” (p. 187). Additionally, Mayer et al. (2004) contended that their theory empirically meets the standards of traditional intelligence (p. 200) and “takes the emotional intelligence terminology seriously” (p. 197).

Mayer et al. (2000) asserted and defended their development of EI to be a true form of intelligence and went a step further, analyzing EI as a set of trainable abilities. Furthermore, they described the ability model as focusing “on the interplay of emotion and intelligence as traditionally defined” (p. 86). EI is about ability, not personality traits (Mayer, 2009). The focus on EI as a set of abilities implies that a person can increase EI through experience. These academic discussions have led to the creation of the ability models, which suggest EI as a type of intelligence that utilizes cognitive ability (Mayer et al., 2000). Furthermore, these ability models describe and illustrate EI as “the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought” (Mayer et al., 2008, p. 511). From a pragmatic viewpoint, having the ability to better control one’s emotions and interpret the emotions of others should improve a worker's functioning if s/he applies these EI skills in the workplace. Nonetheless, the ability model of EI has been contested within a similarly popular yet different model of EI.

Five years after Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) popular proposal of EI as an ability, Daniel Goleman (1995) desired to help contribute to the further development of this area of research. However, he sought to simplify this seemingly broad set of constructs down into terms that could (a) be better understood by the common person and, more importantly, (b) inform people that they could use EI to be successful in many areas of life (Boyatzis et al., 2000). Goleman (1998, pp. 317-318) garnered interest in EI because he saw the potential room for growth in knowledge in facilitating the emotional aspects found, particularly, in the workplace. After studying the work by Salovey and Mayer (1990), he constructed his own model of EI that is founded on five "emotional and social competencies, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills" (Goleman, 1998, p. 318). Under each of these five components, there are twenty-five specific sub-competencies that better articulate each of the five components (Goleman, 1998, p. 318). This model was later reframed into four competencies (“clusters”), which include "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills" (Boyatzis et al., 2000).

The use of emotional and social competencies in EI by Goleman (1995) has resulted in academicians identifying his work as a mixed model of EI, compared to Mayer et al. 's (2004) ability model. To provide some more clarification about Goleman’s model, Kelton (2015) pronounced that, “a ‘mixed’ model of emotional intelligence combines personality traits and competency traits and ‘mixes’ these traits in with Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso’s ability model” (p. 470). This mixture of personality traits (“enduring dispositions in behavior that show differences across individuals, and which tend to characterize the person across varying types of situations” (Diener & Lucas, 2021, Vocabulary)) and competencies (“the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that contribute to individual and organizational performance” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017, para. 1)) with abilities (“a cognitive ability based on the processing of emotion information” that is evaluated with “performance tests”; Fiori & Veselyi-Maillefer, 2014, para. 4) leads Goleman’s (1998) model to violate assumptions that EI is a form of intelligence because it commingles traits, competencies, and abilities.

After Salovey and Mayer (1990), Mayer and Salovey (1997), and Goleman (1995), EI’s integrity as an ability-based model was challenged by Petrides and Furnham (2001). Their approach model is known as a trait EI model, and they claim that ability models have inadequate measures (found in self-reporting studies) and conflicting assessment properties. For example, Mayer and Salovey were assessing behavioral tendencies and self-perceived abilities rather than assessing--and fully discovering--the actual maximum EI abilities of the research participants (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Therefore, EI is judged by Petrides and Furnham to have behavioral tendencies and self-perceived abilities within a personality framework. Nonetheless, Petrides and Furnham stated that trait EI encompasses personality dispositions (such as empathy and assertiveness from Daniel Goleman’s [1995] work) as well as ability EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), social intelligence (Thorndike, 1920), and personal intelligence (Gardner, 1983). Since trait EI encompasses these personality dispositions and abilities, Petrides et al. (2001; as cited in Petrides & Furnham 2001, p. 437) said that trait EI, “should be expected to relate and predict constructs like satisfaction with life, depression, and coping styles.”

A fourth contributor to the area of EI who is worthy of mention is Reuven Bar-On. Bar-On’s (1997) work is similar to Goleman’s (1995) in that they both conceptualized EI as a mixed model involving one’s ability and personality traits and competencies (Pîrvu, 2020; Kelton, 2015). Additionally, Bar-On (1997) and Goleman (1995) shared the general notion that self-awareness acts as the foundation of EI.

Bar-On (1997) designed and developed an EI experimental measurement tool named the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), a tool that situates EI as a mixed model (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2011, as cited in Kelton 2015). Bar-On’s (1997) model identified EI as “an array of noncognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 14). This measurement tool of EI seems to be popularly utilized and esteemed by those conducting EI tests. Along with his EQ-i measurement tool, Bar-On (1997) asserted that EI develops more as one gets older and can be learned, compared to general IQ which is stable across the life span.

The final and most recent notable contributors to the EI literature are Moïra Mikolajczak and her colleagues. Mikolajczak and Peña-Sarrionandia (2015) have generated what is called a “tripartite” model of EI. This model contains three levels of EI: knowledge, abilities, and traits (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015). The knowledge level alludes to what people know about emotions and how these emotions can be utilized to promote emotionally intelligent behaviors that are constructive in a given social situation (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015). The ability level alludes to applying the aforementioned knowledge in real-world situations (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015). The main notion with the ability level is determining whether someone will actually apply their EI knowledge to a given situation in a successful/ideal manner (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015). The trait level alludes to emotion-related dispositions; particularly, the way one typically behaves in emotional situations (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015). The rationale for describing a trait level of EI is that the ability level of EI can be expressed reliably over time; as such the stability of expression may be conceptualized as trait-like (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia, 2015). Between these three levels of EI (which are all stated to be loosely connected), Mikolajczak and Peña-Sarrionandia emphasized the trait level of EI. Moreover, in their meta-analysis of other studies, Mikolajczak and Peña-Sarrionandia recognized that trait level EI has a tremendous impact on four prominent life domains: well-being, health, work performance, and relationships. Although Mikolajczak and Peña-Sarrionandia seemed more interested in the trait level facet of EI, there is a desire to reconcile the trait EI and ability EI perspectives (Mikolajczak, 2009). For instance, Mikolajczak (2009) mentioned that “trying to decide whether EI is best represented as ability or trait amounts to trying to determine whether EI is more a question of emotion identification or a question of emotion regulation” (p. 29). Since all dimensions and levels of EI are essential to complete the EI construct, these levels should shape EI in complementary ways.

**Foundations for the Current Research**

Although it would seem that newer research has better defined EI, that is not the case. Salovey and Mayer’s (1990) pioneering work on EI has been the foundation in leading research for the previous thirty years. The ability model seems to be more widely respected than the mixed models of Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997). According to Mayer et al. (2000), their ability model concentrates on mental abilities, expressed as a “cooperative combination of intelligence and emotion” (p. 397), whereas the mixed models of Goleman (1998) and Bar-On unfortunately “mix mental abilities with personality attributes such as persistence, zeal, and optimism” (Mayer et al., 2008, pp. 503-504). Mixed models of EI have absorbed much criticism because they seem to define EI by omission as any desirable characteristic not exemplified by cognitive ability (Elfenbein, 2008; Locke, 2005; Matthews et al., 2002; Murphy, 2006; Zeidner et al., 2004). Another criticism directed at mixed models is that they are redundant with models of personality (Conte, 2005; Daus & Ashkanasy, 2003; Van Rooy et al., 2006). These critiques have led some academicians to deduce that only the ability EI model is resilient enough to be studied (Daus & Ashkanasy, 2005). At the very least, mixed models have numerous flaws, as they lack empirical bases and conceptualize EI in an excessively broad fashion (Murphy, 2006). Therefore, I choose to utilize and test an ability model (in my intervention and overall research methodology).

**Workplace Interventions Related to Improving EI**

As stated earlier, my research focused on training college students at Malone University to be more emotionally intelligent as a resource to recognize workplace aggression in order to reduce it. In order for these college students to fully understand the environment of the workforce and how EI coexists in the workforce environment, they need to have abilities linked to EI. Studies of EI indicate that being (better) equipped with EI will help with the advancement of a more sustainable work environment (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Martin, 2014; Hurley et al., 2019).

A serious barrier to workplace advancement and sustainability has come to light recently, but this barrier has been present in the workplace since formal workplace environments were formed. This barrier is workplace aggression. Workplace aggression is, “incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, wellbeing or health” (European Commission, 2002, as cited in Martin 2014, p. 28). This aggression is intentionally intimidating, rude, tyrannical, and/or emotionally abusive (Dupré & Barling, 2006), and overt aggression can cause psychological and/or physical injury to the victim (Martin, 2014). Other consequences of workplace aggression include low morale, lack of productivity, and increased absenteeism (Martin, 2014).

To reduce workplace aggression, Martin (2014) investigated the relationship between EI and workplace aggression by utilizing methodological designs and standardized tools from existing studies. Additionally, Martin identified the EI skills that facilitate aggressive behavior and those EI skills that reduce workplace aggression while finding the direction of correlation between these two variables and the effect size variations. Martin concluded that negative emotions and low levels of self-control experienced by employees can occur as a consequence of having a low level of EI. Along with that, he noted that employees with low levels of EI may have a high level of counterproductive work behavior (CWB), meaning that these employees harm the sustainability and productivity of the business by being intimidating, rude, tyrannical, and so forth (Dupré & Barling, 2006). People with a high level of CWB--and low level of EI--are consequently more likely to perform acts of microaggressions, which are defined as, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative slights and insults” (Levine, 2019, as cited in Turaga 2020, p. 42). It stands to reason that emotion regulation might help workplace communication and help buffer acts of microaggression. For example, Lopes et al. (2005, p. 113) stated that, “One inappropriate outburst of anger can destroy a relationship forever.” Everyone feels angry sometimes, but the key to good workplace communication is being able to regulate the emotion so that one can keep the communication open.

Another prominent workplace component that helps promote a sustainable work environment is employee career adaptability. In a world that is categorized by uncertainty and ambiguity, employers want to see employees be able to endure these workplace challenges (Ismail et al., 2016). Career adaptability is defined as, “the flexibility or desire to accomplish career tasks, to pursue career change and to deal with career disturbances with the appropriate steps” (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662), and it refers to the psychological resources that individuals use when experiencing career or occupational transitions (Savickas, 1997). Career adaptability has received recent attention because it is found in university students and related to self-esteem, self-efficacy, personality, EI, and meaningful life (Celik & Storme, 2017; Ismail, 2017; Schmitz et al., 2001). Among the factors that reinforce an individual’s career adaptability is EI. Also, there are individual differences in career adaptability, indicating that it might be tied to personality traits (Teixeira et al., 2012). The one contention with career adaptability, however, is that graduating students do not contain the appropriate career adaptability skills and competencies needed by employers. Therefore, Vashisht et al. (2021) performed a systematic review and meta-analysis that examined the effect that EI and personality traits have on a graduating student’s career adaptability. Vashisht et al. (2021) noted that career adaptability is positively correlated with the following: EI, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, optimism, self-esteem, proactive personality, and self-efficacy. This led them to conclude that students who are emotionally controlled and exhibit the personality traits positively correlated with career adaptability are better equipped to improve their career adaptability and prepared to be employed and stay employed. It stands to reason that those who have higher EI and better emotion regulation will have better career adaptability.

**Hypothesis**

I believe that I can illustrate a substantial quantitative gain of Emotional Intelligence in college (Malone) students as a resource to recognize workplace aggression in hope of reducing it.

**Methods**

The timeline for completing the list of steps for this Honors thesis project is listed in Appendix K. The research design for this study involves a within-subjects, pre- and post-test design. As is described below, a pre-survey will be used to establish a baseline measure of emotion regulation for Malone University students. From the pre-survey, 20 students will be sought to take part in an emotion-regulation, workplace-aggression focus “intervention” group activity. This focus group activity will be audio recorded. Following the activity, students will take a post-survey so that I can compare their pre-survey and post-survey emotion regulation and discern whether the intervention influenced their emotion regulation and perceptions of workplace aggression. The independent variable (IV) is focus group participation (described below), which involves watching two videos and discussing them. The dependent variable is emotion regulation (as measured by the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire [ERQ]; Gross & John, 2003).

**Participants**

I am going to use a convenience sample reaching out to all Malone University traditional undergraduates (via email) to take part in an anonymous Pre-Survey. In the Pre-Survey, students will be invited to take part in a focus group intervention related to EI, recognizing microaggressions, and emotion regulation. Students of all majors and years in undergraduate study will be eligible to participate.

**Materials and Procedures**

A survey will be used to evaluate participants’ emotion regulation before and after a focus group intervention (described below). Among the items in my survey were those from The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & Johns, 2003). The ERQ is publicly available and has 10 items that have good psychometric properties (cognitive reappraisal: *α =* .89-.90; expressive suppression *α =* .76-.80; Preece et al., 2020). The two sub-scales within the ERQ will assist me in evaluating a generally constructive aspect of emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal) and a typically maladaptive aspect (expressive suppression).

The Pre-Survey will help me to collect baseline data about emotion and emotion regulation among Malone students, and it will provide an invitation for students to volunteer for the intervention focus groups. See Appendix A for the Pre-Survey; participants can be entered into a $25 Amazon gift card drawing for participating in the Pre-Survey, and will offer their names and email addresses if they are willing to be contacted for focus group participation. Each focus group respondent will receive a $10 Amazon gift card as thanks.

Focus groups will be arranged with those who are willing to take part (from their responses on the Pre-Survey). I plan to hold 5 different focus groups, with 5 people in each one (*N* = 25, overall). [The informed consent form for the focus group activity is in Appendix B]. The main purpose of the focus group intervention is to help students explore their emotions, emotion regulation, and alternative responses to workplace microaggressions. I will begin the intervention by giving the participants an overview describing our time together. This overview will discuss the duration of the intervention, the purpose of the intervention, my expectations for the participants, and the other intricate details that shape the intervention experience. Each focus group will be presented with two videos that are workplace scenarios related to workplace aggression (Appendices D and E). In order to make the videos, I will enlist the help of several Malone alumni/ae and/or current students who will not be eligible to take part in focus groups (see Appendix J). The videos characterize relatively common workplace microaggressions that might have the capacity to lead to conflicts between workers. The goal of each video is to learn about focus group participants’ perceptions of the scenarios and to help them think about how cognitive reappraisal can be used to help reframe events, regulate emotions, and prevent workplace conflicts. During each video, there will be a focus group discussion, which I will lead, as I help the participants explore emotions and emotion regulation within the scenarios. The focus groups are designed to help participants explore emotion, emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal, emotion’s role in creating a more sustainable workplace, and the role of emotions in helping people adapt to the workforce. Within focus group sessions, there will be brief stops as videos are shown and participants are asked to respond to specific questions about scenarios in each video (Appendices F and G). To conclude my time with the focus groups, I will give a brief explanation about EI and my study’s rationale and goal (Appendix H).

When participants leave the focus group, they will be instructed to log in to their Malone email address and complete the Post-Survey (Appendix I), at which time they will receive a link to their $10 Amazon gift card from my research supervisor. There will be an extra incentive for those who complete the Post-Survey within 2 hours of leaving their focus group (i.e., an additional $5 Amazon gift card). To receive the $10 incentive, the student must take the Post-Survey within 24 hours of their focus group.

***Focus “Intervention” Groups***

Student persons will help me create two workplace scenariovideos while subjects in focus groups consisting of 3-5 people will observe the filmed videos. The videos will be stopped multiple times; these stopping points will serve as checkpoints for focus group participants to critically think about and answer questions regarding the scenario occurring in the videos (Appendices F and G). At each stopping point, the focus group subjects will have three options to select from (one that probably wouldn’t lead to further microaggressions, one that might /might not, and one that probably would and which is represented in upcoming portions of the video). As mentioned, the goal is to help focus group participants explore emotion regulation and ways to prevent any further workplace aggression. The best scenario option should lead the scenario’s characters to demonstrate better emotion regulation and better communication. As a result, potential hard feelings are stopped between the characters, and any potential short-term or long-term animosity issues are prevented.

A Microsoft Excel sheet will be tracked and password-protected by me that lists what times the focus groups come in to watch the two intervention videos. I will randomize how student participants are selected to one of the many focus groups. In other words, students will not be able to ask me if they can be in the same focus group with students who they are familiar with. I want the focus group participants to work with students who they are not as familiar with so that they will better engage with the intervention. After a focus group watches the two videos and completes the intervention, I will walk that group out and have them sign a disclaimer to not talk about the intervention with other Malone students for the next 24 hours.

**Data Analysis**

A Mann-Whitney U test was used to evaluate whether those who took part in the focus group were different than those who did not, with respect to their Cognitive Reappraisal scores and their Expressive Suppression scores. The aim is to find that the Mann-Whitney calculation is not significant, as this indicates that those who volunteered to take part in a focus group were not significantly different than those who did not *prior to the focus group intervention.*

In addition, a Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was used to evaluate whether focus group participants improved on Cognitive Reappraisal (indicative of better emotion regulation) and/or decreased their Expressive Suppressions (also a bellwether of better emotion regulation) after participating in the focus group intervention.

**Results**

Mann-Whitney U analysis of Cognitive Reappraisal scores at the Pre-Survey indicated that there was no significant difference between those who elected to take part in the focus group intervention and those who did not, *U* = 724, *p* = 0.219. Furthermore, Mann-Whitney *U* = 597.5, *p* = 0.589, for Expressive Suppression at the Pre-Survey, indicated no significant difference between the groups on that ability prior to the intervention. This is to be expected, as there is no reason to expect that those who opted into the focus group were different than those who did not.

For those who took part in the focus group intervention, I calculated Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks in order to evaluate whether their Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression changed from the Pre-Survey to the Post-Survey. For Cognitive Reappraisal, *W* = 103, *p* = 0.4721, *N* = 20, and for Expressive Suppression, *W* = 74.5, *p* = 0.206, *N* = 20. This indicates that participants in the focus group did not evidence improvement in either EI indicator, overall, from Pre-Survey to Post-Survey.

**Discussion**

Results indicate that participants who took part in the focus group intervention were not significantly different than those who did not, prior to focus groups. Analysis of Pre- and Post-Survey data from those who did take part in the focus groups indicated that, in general, there was no improvement on the two EI indicators. The Cognitive Reappraisal scores did not increase enough to illustrate improvement in EI emotion regulation, and the Expressive Suppression scores did not decrease enough to illustrate improvement in EI emotion regulation.

**Limitations and Areas for Improvement**

There are some conjectures that can be formed from these results. A methodological aspect that can be improved in future research is to boost the number of subjects in the focus groups. A larger sample size would increase the power to detect an effect of the intervention. Another conjecture I developed was discerning whether all these twenty students took the proper time and effort to complete the Pre-Survey and Post-Survey. Potentially, students might have dashed through the Pre-Survey or Post-Survey without taking the proper time to think over the questions. Finally, having one focus group session for each subject may not have been enough time to increase their Cognitive Reappraisal scores and decrease their Expressive Suppression scores. If I added more time to develop their emotion regulation skills--whether with more focus group sessions or other activities--this might have improved the overall emotion regulation skills of the subjects.

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**Appendix A: Workplace Emotions and Experiences Pre-Survey**

Hi, my name is Steven Hennis and I am working with Dr. Lauren Seifert, Professor Ann Lawson, and Dr. Laura Foote to complete an individual research project as part of my completion of an Honors Thesis.

I am interested in people’s perceptions and behaviors in the workplace, and I am wondering whether you would be willing to take this brief, anonymous survey?

At the end of this survey, you will have the chance to email Dr. Seifert in order to be entered into a drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card.

In addition, you will have the chance to enroll in and take part in a focus group. Each focus group participant will receive a $10 Amazon gift card, with an additional $5 available under certain conditions.

This is an anonymous survey, and it should take only about 10 minutes for you to complete.

It is voluntary, and you may stop at any time without penalty. This survey is only for people 18 and over; so do not take it if you are under 18.

If you have questions, contact my supervisor at LSEIFERT@malone.edu

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Committee/IRB at Malone U. If you have questions about that, please, contact IRB member Dr. Jason Courter at jcourter@malone.edu

\* Required

What is your age in years? \*

What is your major (if you have more than one, please, list them all)? \*

Do you have any minors? Please, list them. \*

What is your year in college/university? \*

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Fourth Year

Fifth Year

Other (please specify)

With what gender do you most closely identify? \*

Female

Male

Other (please specify)

What is the race with which you most closely identify with? \*

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black, African American, or African

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

Other (please specify)

Do you identify as Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx? \*

Yes

No

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire \*

Instructions and Items:

I would like to ask you some questions about your emotional life -- in particular, how you control (that is, regulate and manage) your emotions. The questions involve two distinct aspects of your emotional life. One is your emotional experience, or what you feel like inside. The other is your emotional expression, or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture, or behave. Although some of the following questions may seem similar to one another, they differ in important ways. For each item, please answer using the following scale:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** |
| **strongly**  **disagree** |  |  | **neutral** |  |  | **strongly**  **agree** |

1. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel more positive emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I’m thinking about.

2. \_\_\_\_ I keep my emotions to myself.

3. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I’m thinking about.

4. \_\_\_\_When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.

5. \_\_\_\_When I’m faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.

6. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by not expressing them.

7. \_\_\_\_When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I’m thinking about the situation.

8. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I’m in.

9. \_\_\_\_When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them.

10. \_\_\_\_When I want to feel less negative emotion, I change the way I’m thinking about the situation.

**Scoring:**

Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10 make up the Cognitive Reappraisal facet.

Items 2, 4, 6, 9 make up the Expressive Suppression facet.

Scoring is kept continuous.

Each facet’s scoring is kept separate.

Thank you for taking part in this survey. In order to enter the survey drawing for a $25 Amazon gift card, please, email my supervisor at LSEIFERT@malone.edu with the subject line: "Took emotion survey: enter drawing". My supervisor will keep your identity confidential, and it will not be paired with your survey responses.

You can also RECEIVE a $10 Amazon gift card for taking part in a 50-60 minute study about people’s emotions (with a possibility for an additional $5). If you are interested in taking part and receiving the $10 gift card, please, type your name and email address below. By giving your name, your responses to this survey will no longer be anonymous, but my supervisor and I will keep them confidential. Your name and email:

**Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

**Informed Consent Form:** Malone University

**Title of Project:** **Emotion Regulation in the Workplace: A Focus Group Exploration**

**Principal Investigator:** Steven Hennis

**Supervisor:** Lauren Seifert

**Address:** Malone University

2600 Cleveland Ave NW

Canton, OH 44709

**Email:** [sehennis1@malone.edu](mailto:sehennis1@malone.edu)

[LSEIFERT@malone.edu](mailto:LSEIFERT@malone.edu)

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this focus group is to explore your perceptions of emotions and workplace interactions, especially those that seem to involve one or more microaggressions. We will watch two videos and discuss them, and you will have opportunities to express your views about the situations involved.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You took a survey about emotion regulation and expressed willingness to be part of a focus group. Many thanks. This form describes the focus group. Within the focus group session, you will watch two videos and discuss them with the researcher and other focus group members. There are no right or wrong answers; instead, our goal is to communicate and think about whether the scenarios in the videos might be modified.

**After the focus group, you will be asked to login to Malone Xpress and take a post-survey within 24 hours. Completion of the survey within 24 hours after the focus group will lead you to receive a $10 Amazon gift card from my supervisor. If you complete the survey within 2 hours after leaving the focus group, then your gift card reward will be even higher: $15.**

1. **Duration:** Completion of the focus group session will take approximately 1 hour.
2. **Statements about Audio Recording and Confidentiality**: Your participation in this focus group is confidential. A random number and pseudonym will be used in place of your name and any identifying information will be masked. If this research is published or presented, no personally identifying information will be used. The focus group will be audio recorded. The principal investigator and his supervisor will be the only ones to have access to the data.

The audio recordings will be stored on a secure, password-protected device.

Your informed consent form will be kept on file for at least 3 years in a locked file at Malone University.

Audio files will be destroyed after data analyses have been completed (i.e., within 1 year).

Initial below:

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I agree to audio recording of this focus group.

\_\_\_\_ No, I do not agree to audio recording of this focus group.

In order to help maintain confidentiality of participant identities, we are asking you, the focus group participant, to keep focus group member identities and responses confidential. Please, initial here regarding your willingness to do so.

\_\_\_\_ YES, I agree to keep focus group member identities and responses confidential.

\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not agree to keep focus group member identities and responses confidential.

1. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact Steven Hennis at [sehennis1@malone.edu](mailto:sehennis1@malone.edu) or Dr. Lauren Seifert at [LSEIFERT@malone.edu](mailto:LSEIFERT@malone.edu) if you have questions or concerns about this focus group study.

**This study has been reviewed and approved by the RPPP/IRB (research ethics committee) at Malone University. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, please, contact Dr. Lora Wyss at lwyss@malone.edu**

1. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this focus group research is voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no foreseen risk to participating in this research. However, it is important to note that if you find you are experiencing harm in any way, you may stop participating at any time without penalty. And you should notify my supervisor immediately at LSEIFERT@malone.edu

**Additional information:** You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Participant's Statement: I have read the information on the two pages that make up this Informed Consent Form and agree to take part in the study described on these pages.

Participant Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Statement: I witnessed the signature of the above-named participant.

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C: Introductory Instructions to Focus Group Participants**

Hello all, my name is Steven Hennis. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group. This focus group is designed to help you think about and prepare for some emotional situations in life and the workplace. After we are all done with our session here, you will be asked to take a brief post-survey about emotions, and your completion of that survey is required before we will send you your gift card. If you complete the post-survey within two hours, you will receive a $15 Amazon gift card instead of a $10 Amazon gift card.

In our time together, I am going to play two videos that will illustrate how people can effectively regulate (i.e., appropriately/maturely control) their emotions in different contexts. Throughout these two videos, there will be different stopping points where I will ask multiple-choice questions and for your feedback on how some of the events in the video unravel. These multiple-choice questions will have three options containing these reactions-- one that probably wouldn’t lead to further microaggressions, one that might or/might not, and one that probably would. The videos will portray instances of miscommunication and microaggression. One challenge will be for you to consider how emotions can be regulated within the video scenario so that further aggression doesn’t happen.

I provided you all with a piece of paper listing some of the stopping point questions that I will ask you. After seeing some of the themes found in the first video. you should be able to better identify the role of emotions in the conversations and the actions that take place in the second video. I will provide a second piece of paper to each of you that contains some questions corresponding to the second video.

With this all being said, I ask you all in our short time together to have openness to everything being presented to you. Also, please communicate any thoughts or questions that you have that will contribute to our conversation. There are no dumb or wrong questions or answers.

Lastly, there is not a single correct answer to the questions I ask you! What I mean by that is there are many effective ways to respond to instances involving microaggressions. Of the three options presented, the correct option selected should be obvious to agree with, although there are other options outside of the three presented that could be excellent in responding to instances of microaggression. The goal in this focus group is not necessarily to come to some agreement as a group, but to be able to express your individual opinions and discuss them. Feel free to express your views.

One goal of the focus group is for us all to become more aware of the emotions that are present in the videos. Emotions can be helpful or hurtful; they can improve communication and relationships or harm them. The two videos that we will watch involve common situations that might happen, and we’ll discuss how they might be resolved or changed.

To review, the goal of this focus group is to become more aware of the verbal and nonverbal actions that occur between people in situations and to become more self-aware about emotion regulation. We must not let microaggressions negatively alter the relationships we have with others. We can monitor and regulate our emotions to not let microaggressions occur, intensify, and jeopardize the relationships we have with people. I will now play Video One. [*Plays Video One*]

**Appendix D: EI Video 1 Script**

The purpose of this first video is to challenge focus group students to eliminate their temptation to display a workplace aggression cue or action as an effort to illustrate maturity and calmness in emotionally frustrating situations that are commonly seen in the workplace.

I find it imperative that everyone in the focus group is involved. If I do not encourage every participant to add to the discussion, then I fear that some participants will zone out and not fully take away the purpose of this intervention

This first video will feature many moments where Person 3 displays a microaggression towards Person 1 and/or Person 2.

**Beginning of Script**

*Context: The scene of this first video takes place at a concession stand table that is selling candy. Person 1 is managing the cash register while Person 2 is in charge of controlling the three candy options available for purchase at the concession stand. There are price signs listed behind the concession stand table for the candy. The candy bars available for purchase are Skittles ($1.10), 3 Musketeers ($1.50), and M&M’s ($1.25). Person 3 enters the scene as a customer with the desire to purchase a candy bar for themself.*

[Person 1 and Person 2 are in inaudible conversation with each other. Person 3 walks into the scene]

**Person 1**: Hi. What can we get for you?

**Person 3**: Can I get a 3 Muske...Skittles, please?

**Person 2**: [Grabs the 3 Musketeers candy bar. Hands the 3 Musketeers bag to Person 1]

**Person 1**: Okay, that will be $1.50.

**Person 3**: [With the raising of their voice and a subtle tone of anger] This isn’t what I wanted. I wanted a bag of Skittles. [Display irritation in their facial expression] **SP#1**

**Person 2**: Oh, I apologize for that. I misheard what you said. [Goes over to grab a bag of Skittles. Swaps the bag of Skittles for the 3 Musketeers with Person 1. Person 2 places the 3 Musketeers back in the 3 Musketeers tray]

**Person 1**: [Confuses the price of a bag of Skittles with the price of a bag of M&M’s] Okay, the Skittles will be $1.25. **SP#2**

**Person 3**:[Closes eyes for a quick second with a face displaying irritation. Looks at Person 1] I think you’re mistaken. It says that the price of the Skittles is $1.10. I think you are confusing it with the price of the M&M’s. [With a slight tone of aggression towards Person 1] Are you confused? **SP#3**

**Person 1**:{Realizes they said the wrong price] No, no, I’m sorry about that. We just recently changed the prices of the Skittles. So, yes, they are $1.10.

**Person 3**:[Hands over $2.00] [Takes a deep sigh]

**Person 1**: Thank you! [Opens the cash register, stores the two dollars in the appropriate location in the cash register. Hands over the bag of Skittles without issuing the extra 90 cents back] [With a genuine tone of politeness and kindness] Alright, and there are your Skittles! Have a great day!

**Person 3**: [With an expression of shock and disappointment] Where’s my change? The price is $1.10. Give me my 90 cents! **SP#4**

**Person 1**:Just one second. I’m sorry about that. [Hands back 90 cents] Okay, there you are -- 90 cents.

**Person 3**:[Receives 90 cents back. Starts to walk away in disgust but turns around and walks back to the concession stand table. Focuses their eyes on Person 1and Person 2 in a state of hostility] You know I just want to let you two know that your service was unacceptable. I hope the next customer you have doesn’t have a similarly horrible experience like I just did.

**Person 2**: **[**With voice slightly raised] There’s no reason to be so harsh. It’s not like you’re the one running the concession stand, so don’t complain until you know what actually goes on around here. **SP#5**

**Person 3**: [With a face displaying a smirk] I don’t think it would be too hard to do a better job than you two. **SP#6**

**Person 1**: [With glare focused on Person 3] You’re confident you could do better than us?

**Person 3**: Of course I am! I just said that? [Walks away shaking their head side-to-side with a grin on their face] **SP#7**

**Person 2**: [Talking to **Person 1**] They were rude. They should have been more respectful, but they let their emotions get the better of them. I’ll remember them though. We should refuse them service next time and remind them of how rude they just were.

**[END OF SCRIPT]**

**Appendix E: EI Video 2 Script**

The purpose of this second video is to challenge focus group students to eliminate their temptation to display a workplace aggression cue or action as an effort to illustrate maturity and calmness in emotionally frustrating situations that are commonly seen in the workplace. The video will feature a couple of moments where one person (“Customer Service Representative”) displays microaggression towards another person (“Business Manager”).

**Beginning of Script**

*Context: The scene of this second video takes place over the phone. A business manager calls a customer service representative to explain how there were errors in the office supplies order they made. The customer service representative works at the office supplies company and interacts with the business manager about the business manager’s order conundrum. The business manager is focused on getting this order sorted out and refunded. I will refer to the business manager as “Business Manager” and the customer sales representative as “Customer Service Representative”.*

**Business Manager**:[calls Customer Service Representative] [with a professional tone] Hi, I recently made a large order of 300 manilla envelopes, 100 boxes of staples, and 50 computer mice. Unfortunately, I only received about 10% of what I purchased. Who do I need to talk to about getting a refund on this order?

**Customer Sales Representative**: [with a hostile tone] How could your order have gotten so drastically shortened? Are you sure there isn’t something wrong with the box that it came in? **SP#1**

**Business Manager:** [with a frank and calm tone] No, I looked at the invoice and I’m missing almost everything. I don’t know what happened. I ordered the office supplies from your website, and when it was delivered to our office, I noticed the missing supplies. The packaging that did make it seemed strong and secure, so I’m sure it was just a mistake or a miscommunication during packaging. **SP#2**

**Customer Sales Representative:** [with an ignorant tone] I’m confused. I have had a bunch of complaints about quality of items and about hidden fees, but I’ve never heard anybody complain about the number of items in their order. We have a really reliable packaging team; they always double-check their orders. Are you sure it’s not because of something that you did? **SP#3**

**Business Manager:** [with a professional tone] I looked in the packaging, noticed all the supplies that were missing, and then I checked the invoice. I looked all over our office building trying to find the missing supplies. But the fact of the matter is, I have about 30 manilla envelopes, 10 boxes of staples, and 5 computer mice. Could I get a shipping and return label or something? I saw on your website that there was a policy about mispackaged orders.

**Customer Sales Representative**: We do have a return policy. [with a professional yet subtly aggressive tone] But, I really do not see how this explanation adds up. You have to go back on our website and reorder. I think that’s the best for you to do. **SP#4**

**Business Manager: [**with a raised voice and startled tone]Excuse me? I have the invoice right here in front of me. [The invoice] totals $600. There is no way what we received totals to $600. **SP#5**

**Customer Sales Representative**: [with a disingenuous tone] I’m sorry. I really just am not able to help with this. Listen, if you want to get what you need for the rest of your supplies, you’re going to have to place an order.

**Business Manager:** [with a tone of alertness] It doesn’t sound like you’re actually handling this issue.

**Customer Sales Representative**: [starts whistling loud enough that it is audible] **SP#6**

**Business Manager**: [slightly raises their voice] Alright, can I talk to your manager or something about this? It seems like it would be best if I talked to someone else.

**Customer Sales Representative**: Here you go. [Without hesitation, unexpectedly hangs up the phone]

**Business Manager**: [Hears the phone hang up from the customer service representative. Soaks in what just happened. Sighs deeply. Walks out of the scene] **SP#7**

**[END OF SCRIPT]**

**Appendix F: Video One Stopping Point Questions**

**SP#1)** How might the persons in this scenario best defuse the tense situation? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: The cashier slightly raises their voice to tell the customer to relax and not be so harsh. Person 2 rolls their eyes.

OPTION 2: Person 2 sincerely and politely apologizes to the customer. The candy controller wants to mellow down the situation, so they keep a straight and more focused face by simply swapping the wrong candy bar for the right candy bar with the cashier. Then, Person 1 sincerely and politely apologizes as well to the customer. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT AND THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 3: Person 2 informs the customer that it sounded like they were saying M&M’s. Person 1 supports Person 2 by saying, “I heard you say M&M’s also”.

**SP#2)** Notice that the Skittles are $1.10, not $1.25. How might the customer (Person 3) politely correct the cashier (Person 1)? Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: The customer winces for a quick moment, confronts the cashier, and says an intense microaggression towards the cashier. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: The customer says, “No, it says that Skittles cost $1.10.” [Uncomfortable pause]

OPTION 3: The customer respectfully corrects the cashier’s mistake, makes a lighthearted chuckle, and pays for the Skittles without any trouble or sign of irritation. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

**SP#3)** How might the cashier best regulate their emotions effectively to prevent this situation from worsening? Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: The cashier gives a valid explanation as to why they mistakenly said the wrong price. This response seems sincere, and the cashier is seen to be remaining calm and collected. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT AND DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 2: The cashier says, “I am feeling as good as ever, thanks. What’s your problem?”

OPTION 3: The cashier says, “Well, I have been working at this concession stand for the last couple of hours straight. I feel exhausted. Would you like to work this concession stand for me while I lounge around in the stands and watch the game?

**SP#4)** Do you think this outburst was justified, or is there a better option to keep your emotions regulated? Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: The customer could have let the concession stand worker keep the change. It is merely 90 cents. That way, the customer would have kept his composure, been the bigger person, and avoided any more trouble with the concession stand. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT - TRICK QUESTION because multiple answers are acceptable. Who is to say Option 1 or Option 2 is clearly the better option to choose in terms of its effective emotion regulation?]**

OPTION 2: The customer asks politely, “May I please receive my change back? **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT - TRICK QUESTION because multiple answers are acceptable. Who is to say Option 1 or Option 2 is clearly the better option to choose in terms of its effective emotion regulation?]**

OPTION 3: Yes, this outburst was the right thing to do. That will teach the two concession stand workers! **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

**SP#5)** Do you think Person #2’s response was adequate, or was there a better way for them to regulate their emotions to close out the scene? Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Yes, everything in their response supports the fact that the customer does not need to be so critical of the concession stand service. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: No, Person 2 should have simply said, “We are sorry. We will do better next time”. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 3: No, Person 2 should have specifically cited the many microaggressions that Person 3 exhibited and should have complained about them loudly. This will teach Person 3 to be more aware of who they are talking to next time.

**SP#6)** How might the persons in this scenario best defuse the tense situation? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Person 1 or Person 2 says the following: “I am sorry to hear that. We will do better next time. I promise you that.” **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 2: Person 2 starts laughing inadvertently. They say, “You are taking this too seriously. Lighten up.”.

OPTION 3: Person 2 challenges Person 3’s comments by asking how confident Person 3 feels about their statement. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

**SP#7)** How might the cashier and other concession stand helper put this episode in perspective?

OPTION 1: They accept the customer’s criticism as constructive, even though the criticism created hostility. This motivates the two workers to be better in the future. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 2: They give the customer some grace and move on from this episode where nothing could go right. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 3: They hold a grudge against this customer, waiting for the day when this customer returns so that they can refuse service to them. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

**Appendix G: Video Two Stopping Point Questions**

**SP#1)** How might the two persons in this scenario best defuse the tense situation? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Exactly what just happened in the video was really good for defusing the situation. The curiosity shown by the customer service representative was the right way to act in this situation. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: The customer service worker should have tried to not sound so startled and aggressive towards the business manager. The customer service worker could have spent a couple more minutes trying to calmly figure out why so much of the order was missing, or pulled up the order’s invoice to verify that the number of office supplies ordered was correct. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 3: The customer service should have said, “A refund? Let’s not get too ahead of ourselves now. You’re missing quite a lot of your order, though. Something suspicious is going on.”

**SP#2)** Do you think the business manager regulated their emotions well in their explanation? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write the option number you choose on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Yes, exactly what just happened in the video was good emotional regulation by the business manager. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT AND THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 2: No, the business manager should have shown more positive emotion and humility. It seemed like they were rubbing it in to the customer service rep and were quick to blame the office supplies company.

OPTION 3: No, the business manager should have matched the customer service rep’s aggressive tone and tried to take a larger jab towards the customer service rep and the office supplies company. The business manager should not let anyone talk to them in that aggressive tone.

**SP#3)** Do you think the customer service rep’s response illustrated strong emotional regulation? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write the option number you choose on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Yes, they brought up many valid points. They seem to back up the fact that this office supplies order mess has to be because of something the business manager’s company did wrong. They did not let their emotions add any more trouble to things. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: No, they cited how there have been no past complaints about messing up the size of the order, which sounds like a shallow thing to say. Then they go out of their way to defend their manufacturing and shipping team. How is the customer supposed to know how reliable the manufacturing and shipping teams are? Last but not least, the customer service rep was ignorant to blatantly blame the business manager for this incident. It is unprofessional and stupid to make the customer sound like an idiot. [**THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 3: No, they should not have said that they were confused. They should have felt sad and sympathetic that this office supplies order is causing confusion and stressing out the business manager. Thus, the customer service rep should have said that they felt sad and sorry for this incident. That would have made things better.

**SP#4)** The customer service representative obscurely said a microaggression towards the business manager. Which option contains the microaggression that was said? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write the option number you choose on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: “Yes, we do have a return policy.”

OPTION 2: “I cannot figure out what could have happened to your office supplies order. I am not seeing how your explanation adds up.” [**THE MICROAGGRESSION]**

OPTION 3: “I think it is best if you order the remainder of the office supplies that you need from us.”

**SP#5)** Do you think the business manager in this scenario effectively defused the situation in the response we just watched? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write the option number you choose on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Yes, the business manager defused the situation really well by getting the customer service rep’s attention as well as by bringing up the invoice (payment receipt) of the order. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: Yes, but they should have told the customer service rep to check the invoice that their company had on hand so that both sides could identify what the invoice totaled.

OPTION 3: No, the business manager should not have raised their voice. The business manager could have been more calm (i.e., not raised their voice) and asked the customer service representative to also check the invoice that they have recorded for the office supplies order. **[Also, when you raise your voice, that usually illustrates that you feel hostile and are poised to make the other person feel bad about themself] [THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

**SP#6)** How might the customer service representative better communicate with the business manager in this scenario? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: The whistling was justified and a good way of regulating one’s emotions. The business manager confronted them about the invoice but not in the most polite way, so the whistling was to teach the business manager to be more polite. It’s the business manager’s problem, not the customer service rep’s problem. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: The whistling was not a wise thing to do. The customer service rep should have told the business manager to calm down, or perhaps the customer service rep should have hung up on the business manager. That would teach the business manager not to question whether an order was filled correctly.

OPTION 3: The whistling was unnecessary. Of course, the situation is a mess, but whistling is showing that the customer service rep has given up on the situation and/or does not care whether the business manager has their invoice and wrong order size solved. The customer service rep should have transferred the call to their manager or someone else at the office supplies company who is more helpful. This would have shown more professionalism, care, and sympathy for the business manager. [**THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

**SP#7)** How might have the two persons in this scenario best defused the tense situation? I’ll read three options to you. Choose one; secretly write it on the index card that I have given you, fold it, and hand it to me without discussing it or showing it to anyone. Then, we’ll all discuss our responses.

OPTION 1: Nothing else could have been done. The call was getting too long and going nowhere, so the customer service rep hung up. Although the business manager is discouraged by this situation, situations like these are normal. You need to let some things go. **[THE ACTUAL RESULT]**

OPTION 2: The business manager should have been polite and hung up the phone earlier in the call when things started to worsen. Emailing someone from the office supplies company could lead to finding someone who is more friendly, professional, and proactive to help solve this office supplies order mistake. **[THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

OPTION 3: When the business manager asked for the manager, they could have said “please” or expressed more gratitude for the customer service rep’s time, even if there were multiple occasions that the customer service rep was rude and unprofessional. If the customer service rep transferred the call to someone more helpful and considerate, this office supplies order could have been solved. [**THE DESIRED WAY TO ACT]**

**Appendix H: Conclusion of Focus Group and Debriefing**

Thank you for taking part in the discussion of videos today within this focus group. Now that we have come to the final portion of our focus group for today, I’d like to tell you a little bit about the purpose of the activity and my goal in my Honors Project. I am interested in something called Emotional Intelligence, or EI. It essentially consists of four related abilities, one of which involves regulating your own emotions. This can be a very important ability in your everyday life, but it can also be vital for your success in interpersonal interactions and relationships in the workplace.

Some people have trouble with emotion regulation, and you might have noticed this in the video examples and discussion that we just went through. When a person has trouble with emotion regulation, it can lead to unwanted and unproductive aggression. When this happens in the workplace, the consequences can be dire for one’s job. So, it can be really good for people to explore ways to regulate their emotions and effectively communicate when someone else has been rude or aggressive. Improving emotion regulation helps people in the workplace and life.

In today’s focus group session, my goal was to provide some examples that might help us explore emotion regulation together. The focus group discussion was geared towards providing you a chance to think about and discuss challenging situations and how they might turn out...especially with an emphasis on defusing conflicts rather than making them worse. Good emotion regulation can help you to experience emotions, but monitor them and make decisions about how to express yourself so that you do not contribute to aggression.

Some basic tips for good regulation of emotion include not worrying. Excessive worry and anxiety do not generally help situations. Another piece of advice for good emotion regulation is not to raise your voice or make snide comments--even when someone else is being rude to you. One group of EI researchers [Lopes et al. (2005, p. 113)] stated that, “One inappropriate outburst of anger can destroy a relationship forever.” Everyone feels angry sometimes, but the key to good workplace communication is being able to regulate your emotions so that you can keep the communication open with other people. In EI research, we talk about something called “prosocial behavior”. You can think of this as being like the Golden Rule in Luke 10; essentially, when you are prosocial, you are being kind to others and having regard for their feelings and what they might want. Then, you can behave in ways that show regard for the other person’s wishes and feelings. Now, does this mean that you always just give everyone else exactly what they want? No. Instead, it means that you can try to act kindly, even if you disagree with someone, and even if they are not being kind to you. You can practice kindness and good emotion regulation without being a doormat for other people to walk all over.

Do you have any questions for me about the study you have taken part in today?

…[give them time to ask questions]

I have a page with some resources that are related to stress management and handling challenging situations. These are designed to help you as you reflect on the things we have discussed today. I will email this page to each of you so that you can click the links to see the websites:

[these are the URLs that I will send to them after they have left the focus group:

https://www.usi.edu/media/5599420/coping-with-difficult-situation-guide-final.pdf

https://caps.ku.edu/dealing-with-difficult-people-difficult-situations

https://www.universalclass.com/articles/business/dealing-with-challenging-situations-in-the-workplace.htm

Once again, I am thankful for your time. I am sure that you have homework and other things to work on, so your time spent with me is greatly appreciated. Before you leave, listen closely to what I have to say. There is a Post-Survey to complete that is similar to the Pre-Survey you took. You must complete the Post-Survey within 24 hours from now to earn the $10 Amazon gift card; there are no exceptions. But, if you complete the survey within 2 hours, you will instead receive a $15 Amazon gift card. I am eager to gather your survey results regarding this intervention as soon as possible while this intervention is fresh in your mind. This is why you will be rewarded a better Amazon gift card if you complete the Post-Survey right away. The Post-Survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time.

If you are smart, you will complete this post-survey now to get the $15 Amazon gift card instead of the $10 one. I will email you the link to the Post-Survey now. Subjects/students who are nearing the end (6 hours before the 24-hour window closes) of the 24-hour window to complete the Post-Survey following their focus group will receive a blind carbon copied (BCC) email from me reminding them that the Post-Survey is available and should be completed so that they can receive their $10 Amazon gift card.

**Appendix I: Workplace Emotions and Experiences Post-Survey**

Hi, my name is Steven Hennis and I am working with Dr. Lauren Seifert, Professor Ann Lawson, and Dr. Laura Foote to complete an individual research project as part of my completion of an Honors Thesis.

I am interested in people’s perceptions and behaviors in the workplace, and I am wondering whether you would complete this Post-Survey now that you have gone through the classroom intervention?

Subjects will have 24 hours to complete this post-survey in order to receive their $10 Amazon gift card. If the subjects complete their survey within 2 hours of the ending of the focus group intervention, the subjects will earn a $15 Amazon gift card rather than the $10 Amazon gift card. Failure to complete the post-survey below will result in no awarding of the $10 Amazon gift card to subjects. It is critical for the post-survey to be completed in 24 hours to keep the subjects’ experiences and gained intervention knowledge fresh in their minds.

This is a confidential survey, and it should take only about 15 minutes for you to complete. Your name is requested so that I can link your name with your focus group participation and Pre-Survey responses.

It is voluntary, and you may stop at any time without penalty. This survey is only for people 18 and over; so do not take it if you are under 18.

If you have questions, contact my supervisor at LSEIFERT@malone.edu

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Committee/IRB at Malone U. If you have questions about that, please, contact IRB member Dr. Jason Courter at jcourter@malone.edu

**Part I of Workplace Emotions and Experiences Post-Survey**

What is your age in years? \*

What is your major (if you have more than one, please, list them all)? \*

Do you have any minors? Please, list them. \*

What is your year in college/university? \*

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Fourth Year

Fifth Year

Other (please specify)

With what gender do you most closely identify? \*

Female

Male

Other (please specify)

What is the race with which you most closely identify with? \*

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black, African American, or African

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

White

Other (please specify)

Do you identify as Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx? \*

Yes

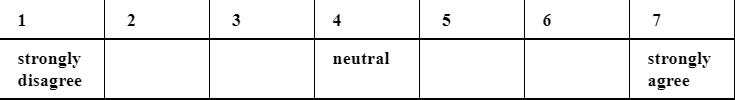
No

**Part II of Workplace Emotions and Experiences Post-Survey**

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire \*

Instructions and Items:

I would like to ask you some questions about your emotional life -- in particular, how you control (that is, regulate and manage) your emotions. The questions involve two distinct aspects of your emotional life. One is your emotional experience, or what you feel like inside. The other is your emotional expression, or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture, or behave. Although some of the following questions may seem similar to one another, they differ in important ways. For each item, please answer using the following scale:



1. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel more positive emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I’m thinking about.

2. \_\_\_\_ I keep my emotions to myself.

3. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I’m thinking about.

4. \_\_\_\_When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.

5. \_\_\_\_When I’m faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.

6. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by not expressing them.

7. \_\_\_\_When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I’m thinking about the situation.

8. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I’m in.

9. \_\_\_\_When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them.

10. \_\_\_\_When I want to feel less negative emotion, I change the way I’m thinking about the situation.

**Scoring:**

Items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10 make up the Cognitive Reappraisal facet.

Items 2, 4, 6, 9 make up the Expressive Suppression facet.

Scoring is kept continuous.

Each facet’s scoring is kept separate.

**Part III of Workplace Emotions and Experiences Post-Survey**

Emotion Regulation Reflection\*

Instructions: Please be as truthful and accurate as you can with your responses.

1. In my work experience, I believe that microaggressions commonly occur at work on a daily or weekly basis.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

1. Before this focus group study, I could regulate my emotions well such that I could consistently avoid displaying any sort of anger, rudeness, aggression, or related behavior towards others in situations similarly found in the two videos.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

1. After completing this focus group study, I feel that I will be able to better regulate my emotions such that I can avoid displaying any sort of anger, rudeness, or aggression towards others in situations similarly found in the two videos.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

1. I found the first video to be informative and helpful in identifying both subtle and obvious displays of aggression.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

1. I found the second video to be informative and helpful in identifying both subtle and obvious displays of aggression.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

1. I believe that the ability to regulate one’s emotions to prevent any acts of intimidation, rudeness, tyranny, bullying, and/or emotional abuse is significant to the success of any organization.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree

**Appendix J: Video Collaboration Agreement Form**

Thank you for helping to film a video for my Honors Project at Malone University. This should require 2-3 hours of your time to learn lines, block, stage, and film. As thanks for your participation, I am offering you a $25 Amazon gift card. In return, I ask that you help with the above mentioned tasks and keep scripts and the content of the video confidential. I also ask that you refrain from taking part in any other aspects of my study (Pre-Survey about emotions or Focus Groups).

By printing and signing your name and dating this form, you agree to what has been asked and will help keep the subject matter/scenario in the video confidential.

Video Collaborator Statement:

I have read this page and agree to the terms described on it.

PRINT NAME:

SIGNED:

DATE:

**Appendix K: Honors Thesis Project Timeline**

Week 1 of Fall-2021 (August 30, 2021) - complete IRB for focus/intervention groups

Week 2 of Fall-2021 (September 6, 2021) - send Pre-Survey out through Malone University Student Development

Week 3 of Fall-2021 (September 13, 2021) - send email reminder to Malone University undergraduate students about taking the Pre-Survey through Malone University Student Development

Week 4 of Fall-2021 (September 20, 2021) - close the Pre-Survey and start setting up the focus/intervention groups

Weeks 5-7 of Fall-2021 (September 27 through October 15, 2021) - hold focus groups and have participants take the Post-Survey within 24 hours after the focus group in order to receive their $10 Amazon gift card

Weeks 8 -9 of Fall-2021 (October 18 through October 29, 2021) - perform data analyses with t-test of the within-subjects variable (Pre-Survey Emotion Regulation v. Post-Survey Emotion Regulation)

Weeks 10 - 12 of Fall-2021 (November 1 through November 19, 2021) - write thesis document and provide it to Thesis Committee members by November 22, 2021

Weeks 13 and 14 of Fall-2021 (November 22 through December 3, 2021) - schedule and hold Honors Thesis defense. Conditioned on successful Thesis defense, schedule and hold Honors Thesis public presentation

Week 15 of Fall-2021 (December 6, 2021) - format and submit final Thesis document