

# The Role of Emotion in Health Communication

## *Foundational Research and Future Directions*

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# Overview: Emotion & Health Communication Research in Cancer Control

## Media Effects Research

- Emotion as a mechanism for media effects
  - Framing, persuasion

## Selective Exposure

- Emotion as a motivation for selective exposure to media
  - Uses and gratifications, mood management theory, social comparison
  - Information seeking, recovery gratifications, coping

# Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Foundational Research

## Framing

- News media coverage of health topics heightens salience of health-related issues and influences the public's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Use of frames and angles in reporting
- Commonly used frames/angles
  - Public impact, economic impact, controversy, human interest, personal behavior change

# Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Current and Future Research

## Framing

- Framing health disparities in cancer mortality data
  - disparity or progress frame → emotional reaction → individual-level screening intentions versus policy implications
- Related concept: gain-frames and loss-frames

# Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Foundational Research

## Persuasion

- Discrete emotional appeals
  - Fear appeals: Messages include threat component, which motivates protection/escape behavior; message also provides response information
  - Theory to predict/explain effectiveness of fear appeals, guide message design
- Limited work on other negative emotional appeals
  - Guilt, disgust, anger, regret

# Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Current and Future Research

## Persuasion

- Investigate content or design features that evoke a broader range of emotions
  - Design elements
  - Effects on health-related KAB
- Positive emotional appeals
- Greater recognition of emotional barriers to health behaviors

# Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Current and Future Research

## Persuasion

- Understand why emotional appeals boomerang or have unintended effects (Dillard & Nabi, 2006)
  - Arousal of multiple/blended emotional responses
  - Mismatch between message content and core-relational theme of target emotion
  - Message intensity
  - Individual differences influence message reception and response (e.g., coping styles, sensation seeking)

# Emotion as a Mechanism for Media Effects: Current and Future Research

## Persuasion

- Is social media changing the game?
  - Enthusiasm over the ability of social media to widely disseminate health messages cheaply and easily
  - But, audience can enhance or impede effectiveness
  - Social sharing of emotional media content
    - Greater intensity of emotion enhances likelihood of sharing (Rime, 2009)
    - Role of emotion in “viral” videos?



# Emotion as a Motivation for Selective Exposure: Foundational Research

- Uses and gratifications paradigm (Katz et al., 1974)
  - Social support, escapism
- Mood management theory (Zillmann, 2000)
  - Stress relief
- Social comparison to media characters (Mares & Cantor, 1992)
  - Self-improvement, self-enhancement, emotional experiences

# Emotion as a Motivation for Selective Exposure: Current and Future Research

- Mood management theory
  - Alternative affective needs (e.g., eudaimonia Oliver, 2008)
  - Discrete emotions (e.g., Nabi et al., 2006)
  - Measure post-viewing emotion
- Role of emotion in social comparison to media characters?
- Role of emotion in social cognitive processes?
- Emotion and online information seeking
  - Anxiety and info seeking, retention (Turner et al., 2006)
  - Dissatisfaction (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009)

# Emotion as a Motivation for Selective Exposure: Current and Future Research

- Recovery (Reinecke, 2009; Reinecke et al., 2011)
- Coping
  - Connecting via social media
    - Sharing personal illness narratives (Chou et al., 2009)
    - Social support, emotion regulation (Chung & Kim, 2008)
    - Patient social networking (e.g., PatientsLikeMe)
    - Sharing/broadcasting emotion states (3GT, Aurora)
  - Media-generated positive emotions to sustain coping
  - Problem-focused coping and modeling

# Conclusions

- Need for systematic inclusion of emotion-related constructs in health communication research
- Need a better understanding of the conditions under which emotion-based messages influence health-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors
  - Moderators of effect of emotion-based strategies
- Need to think about how people use media to manage emotions, cope with stress and implications for health
- Greater inclusion of emotion or affective constructs into health behavior change and media effects theories