

Has LEGO® Therapy Got Any Role as a Positive Psychological Intervention Against Loneliness?

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ABSTRACT

Loneliness is not only a risk factor for serious acute and chronic diseases, but it is also considered a disturbing psychological process by itself. A great variety of psychological interventions have been postulated to release loneliness, but none of them were primarily mental health focused. The role of positive psychological interventions to reduce loneliness have been also considered, often not in a primarily manner, but addressed to mental health disorders and chronic comorbidities linked to loneliness. At the clinical level, one of the objectives of positive psychology is to change the framework of intervention developing therapeutic strategies that provide a positive emotional experience. Narrative approaches can enrich the field of positive psychology and propection by emphasizing and exploring the stories we create to tell the others what works well in our lives. Storytelling can be facilitated by means of LEGO® therapy, a highly structured process of telling stories, expressing emotions, and enhancing the interpersonal communication by using LEGO® bricks. The application of LEGO® therapy in clinical practice is already scarce. Loneliness should also be a proper target for this innovative manner of positive psychological intervention, but further research is needed to elucidate whether LEGO® therapy can be used to reduce loneliness.

Keywords: Loneliness; Positive Psychology; Psychological Intervention; Lego® Bricks

Why Should We Intervene Loneliness?

Loneliness has become a global problem in current societies, linked to the process of modernity, urban development, and the increase of individualism. Actually, loneliness is considered as a national epidemic in The United States. The United Kingdom and Japan have prioritized the problem by creating their separated Ministry of Loneliness. Loneliness, defined as a subjective and unwanted feeling of lack or loss of company [1], is often related to social isolation, retirement, widowhood, low incomes, and chronic comorbidities [2]. Recent studies set the risk of mortality due to loneliness equally at the risk of dying from obesity and smoking.

Loneliness also affects well-being, and it is associated with worse cognitive performance [3]. People who feel lonely tend to have a more pessimistic character and a greater perception of insecurity in their environment, which negatively affect their relationships. When targeting on working population, loneliness has a negative impact on the economy too: if loneliness becomes chronic, it may result into impaired health conditions which determine to be on long sick leaves. Finally, loneliness is not only a risk factor for serious acute and chronic diseases, but it is also considered a disturbing psychological process by itself, so an intervention addressed to loneliness should be mandatory.

What Is Known About Loneliness Interventions?

Psychological interventions to reduce loneliness are supposed to be successful because of the essence of loneliness, subjectively defined. A great variety of interventions have been postulated to release loneliness, but none of them were primarily mental health focused. However, when comparing four types of interventions based on

- (a) Improving Social Skills
- (b) Enhancing Social Support
- (c) Ameliorating Social Interactions and
- (d) Restoring Cognitive and Attentional Biases Towards Negative Appreciation of the Social Context

it was suggested that the last ones had the greatest average effectiveness [4]. When analysing different interventions within children and adolescents, psychological interventions and social and emotional abilities training seemed to be the most promising strategies [5]. Further systematic review on psychological interventions to alleviate chronic loneliness, considering different groups of age and lifespan have been performed. Overall, these interventions seem to be effectiveness, but some key points need to be still discussed, such as which is the most effective psychological intervention depending on demographic and clinical profile, and what about long-term effects of this intervention [6].

Positive Psychological Interventions

The role of positive psychological interventions to reduce loneliness have been also considered, often not in a primarily manner, but addressed to mental health disorders and chronic comorbidities linked to loneliness. However, these types of interventions, even if they are not directly address to alleviate loneliness, may help to improve it [7]. Positive psychology was defined by Seligman as the scientific study of positive experiences, positive individual characteristics, institutions that facilitate their development and programs that help to improve the quality of life of individuals, while preventing or reducing the incidence of psychopathology. It was also defined as the scientific study of human strengths and virtues, which are mandatory for a more open perspective on human potential, motivations, and capabilities [8]. The purpose of positive psychology has been to contribute to the study of the conditions and processes related to the optimal development of individuals, groups, and institutions. Therefore, its contributions have had an impact on different fields of psychology intervention, mainly in the clinical, health and educational areas, where a greater emphasis is observed. At the clinical level, one of the objectives of positive psychology is to change the framework of intervention developing therapeutic strategies that provide a positive emotional experience. Such an experience is addressed

to prevention and treatment of problems related to the presence of negative emotions: anxiety, depression, aggression, and stress, among others.

LEGO® Therapy

As it is already said, research in positive psychology has produced a large body of scientific understanding about factors that contribute to our well-being and tools to help us to thrive. Narrative approaches can enrich the field of positive psychology and prospection by emphasizing and exploring the stories we create and by talking about what works well in our lives. Storytelling can be facilitated by means of LEGO® therapy, a highly structured process of telling stories, expressing emotions, and enhancing the interpersonal communication by using LEGO® bricks. These stories are presented by means of symbolic and metaphoric LEGO® brick models. The LEGO® bricks act as a catalyst for the deepest thoughts and ideas of the participants, who must respond to the challenges that the therapist or facilitator sets for them by creating models and figures. Challenges can be performed individually or collectively. There are different approaches using LEGO® brick. The most standardized ones are the LEGO® Serious Play® and LEGO® Six-Bricks®, coming respectively from the enterprise area [9] and the educational field [10]. Both approaches induce the positive psychological effects that lead to promote emotional regulation and cognitive restructuration.

Further Directions

The application of LEGO® therapy in clinical practice is already scarce. There is some evidence within autistic children needing extra support with social skills [11] and among hospitalized children in order to reduce anxiety [12]. Even if the use of LEGO® therapy is supposed to be promising as an intervention of adult mental diseases, such as depression or anxiety, no properly structured studies have been carried out. Loneliness should also be a target for this innovative manner of positive psychological intervention.

Conclusion

Psychological interventions addressed to alleviate loneliness seem to be effectiveness. Positive psychology has effects on prevention and treatment of problems related to the presence of negative emotions: anxiety, depression, aggression, and stress, among others. All these emotions are related to loneliness. LEGO® therapy is based on positive psychology, but its clinical application has been reduced mainly to autistic children and to paediatric areas. Further research is needed to elucidate whether LEGO® therapy can be effectiveness as a positive psychological intervention to reduce loneliness.

Acknowledges

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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