

Predicting the Willingness to Disclose Childhood Sexual Abuse From Measures of Repressive Coping and Dissociative Tendencies

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Although it is generally agreed that the verbal disclosure of past childhood sexual abuse (CSA) experiences can be beneficial, CSA survivors are often reluctant to reveal such experiences. Bonanno et al. found that women with documented CSA histories who did not disclose abuse when provided an opportunity to do so were more likely to show nonverbal expressions of shame and polite smiling, relative to disclosing CSA survivors or nonabused controls. Disclosing CSA survivors, in contrast, showed greater facial expressions of disgust. The current study extended this paradigm by showing that among the same participants, CSA disclosure was associated with chronic dissociative experiences, whereas nondisclosure was associated with repressive coping. Further, repressive coping and dissociative experiences were inversely related and showed opposite patterns of facial expressions and adjustment. Repressors expressed greater negative and positive emotion and were relatively better adjusted, whereas dissociators expressed little emotion and had relatively poorer adjustment.