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## Examining the Cognitive and Physiological Processes Underlying Traumatic Disclosure

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Poster Presentation P5

**EXAMINING THE COGNITIVE AND PHYSIOLOGICAL PROCESSES  
UNDERLYING TRAUMATIC DISCLOSURE**

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The aims of this research are to examine the cognitive processes and physiological reactions associated with the disclosure of a traumatic event. Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (Epstein, 1991; 1998) suggests that there are two separate modes of information processing. One is the rational mode that is based on logic and the other is the experiential mode that is based on emotions and heuristics. The way these two modes of processing may be related to disclosure was examined using undergraduate students. Participants engaged in one of four writing conditions; a trivial topic, the emotions surrounding a traumatic experience, the facts surrounding a traumatic experience, or both the facts and emotions surrounding a traumatic experience. Immediately after completing the writing task participants engaged in a modified ratio-bias task. The ratio-bias task consisted of 56 presentations of two trays with different amounts of red and white jellybeans. The amount of optimal choices on this task is thought to be related to the mode of cognitive processing the participant is in. Following this task, participants listed the thoughts they were having during the modified ratio-bias task. They then filled out a demographics questionnaire and the Rational-Experiential Inventory. Continuous cardiovascular measures obtained during all periods including a rest period prior to the writing task.

It is hypothesized that disclosure of emotions surrounding a traumatic event promotes the experiential system of information processing while both disclosure of the facts and disclosure involving a combination of facts and emotions promotes the rational system of information processing. The previous hypotheses were examined by measuring optimal choices made in the decision making task, number of trauma related thoughts in the thought-listing task, and the physiological responses of the autonomic nervous system during disclosure.