



The Impact of Withholding Negative Emotions on Stress, Self-Reported Health, and Depressive Symptoms

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Theoretical Background

- Withholding negative emotions is one aspect of emotion regulation. Suppressing negative emotions may lead to increased health risks, such as asthma, coronary heart disease, and suppressed immune function (Goldstein, Edleberg, Meier, & Davis, 1988; Schwartz, 1990) and cancer (Cox & Mackay, 1982; Jensen, 1987).
- However, different facets of withholding negative emotions were seldom investigated. We argue that some facets might actually be adaptive.
- In addition, emotion regulation is thought to improve with age. Older adults (a) report better emotion regulation in self-report (Gross et al., 1997; Lawton et al., 1992), (b) regulate their mood more quickly in experience-sampling studies (Carstensen et al., 2000; 2011), and (c) fluctuate less (Röcke et al., 2010). Older adults may show more adaptive strategies of withholding negative emotions.

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Self-Regulation of Withholding Negative

- Kim, Deci, & Zuckerman, 2002
- 28 questions from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7)
- **External regulation** (7 items, $\alpha = .82$)
 - Control ones behavior for approval by others
 - *I think others would be upset with me if I expressed these feelings.*
- **Introjected regulation** (8 items, $\alpha = .85$)
 - Pressure & coerce oneself to behave in a particular way
 - *I'd be ashamed of myself if I let my bad feelings come out.*
- **Identified regulation** (8 items, $\alpha = .81$)
 - Identify with a regulation and its value
 - *It is important to me not to burden others with my problems.*
- **Integrated regulation** (5 items, $\alpha = .80$)
 - Aware of emotions and regulate with a full sense of choice
 - *It is fulfilling to be able to achieve my goals even when I am upset.*

Sample: N = 1,082

- 18 to 83 years, $M_{age} = 32.0$, $SD_{age} = 11.5$
- 51.7% females
- 74.0% European Americans, 7.5% African Americans, 6.3% Hispanics, 6.1% Asians, 6.1% Other/Mix

Research Questions

- Are facets of withholding negative emotions differently associated with health and well-being outcomes?
 - H1: There will be adaptive as well as maladaptive strategies of withholding negative emotions!*
- Do emotion regulation skills improve as we age?
 - H2: Older adults will report more adaptive and less maladaptive emotion regulation strategies than younger adults!*

Outcomes

- **Depressive Symptoms**
 - CES-D (Radloff, 1977), 20 items, $\alpha = .92$
- **Stress**
 - # of stressors within the past week across 7 domains
- **Life Satisfaction**
 - *extremely unsatisfied* (1) to *extremely satisfied* (7)
- **Self-Reported Health**
 - *poor* (1) to *excellent* (7)
- **Mood**
 - *very bad / negative* (1) to *very good / positive* (7)

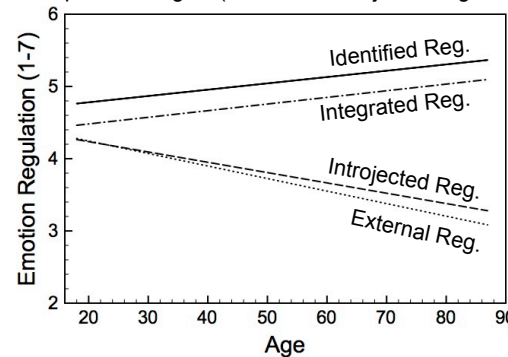
Descriptive Statistics

	Depressive Symptoms	Stress	Life Satisfaction	Mood	Self-Reported Health
Age	-.09**	-.06*	-.07*	.00	-.04
Sex	.06*	.02	.00	-.02	-.13***
R ²	3.5%	0.7%	0.0%	0.4%	1.6%
External Reg.	.25***	.14**	-.14**	-.13**	-.13**
Introjected Reg.	.26***	-.04	-.11*	-.12*	-.02
Identified Reg.	-.16***	.04	.12*	.05	.06
Integrated Reg.	-.14***	-.02	.16***	.24***	.13**
ΔR^2	17.2%	1.5%	6.4%	8.2%	3.2%

- The two adaptive emotion regulation strategies (identified and integrated regulation) were linked to positive outcomes whereas the two maladaptive strategies (external and introjected regulation) were linked to negative outcomes.
- Withholding negative emotions were specifically linked to depressive symptoms.

Age Differences

- Older adults utilized the two adaptive strategies (identified & integrated regulation) more often than the two maladaptive strategies (external & introjected regulation).



Discussion & Conclusion

- In general, the evidence suggests that there are adaptive and maladaptive strategies of withholding negative emotions.
 - Maladaptive strategies of withholding negative emotions are based on social pressure or approval by others.
 - Adaptive strategies of withholding negative emotions are based on an awareness or identification with the regulation process
- Compared with younger adults, older adults utilize more adaptive regulation strategies and less maladaptive regulation strategies. This finding is consistent with ideas that older adults are better in emotion regulation.
- Future research may investigate the developmental precursors of the different facets of withholding negative emotions.