

## **The Effects of Emotion Regulation Strategies on Emotion Recognition in Depression** **Grace Wheeler, 2019**

My project aimed to investigate the connection between depression, emotion regulation strategies, and emotion recognition. Firstly, depression is a serious mood disorder that affects many individuals worldwide. In America, millions of individuals will suffer from at least one depressive episode a year. Additionally, with depression, if an individual suffers from one depressive episode, they are more likely to suffer from another episode. This underlines the importance of research into the disorder in order to create and better treatment options. Depression influences and is influenced by emotion regulation and emotion recognition. My project studied two emotion maladaptive regulation strategies and one healthy strategy: expressive suppression, rumination, and cognitive reappraisal. Expressive suppression refers to subduing one's outward expression of a negative emotion in order to stop feeling it. Rumination involves repetitively thinking about a negative experience. Cognitive reappraisal is a healthy strategy and involves reframing a negative experience into a productive one. This study assessed how each regulation strategy influenced the accuracy of identifying happy, sad, fearful, angry, and neutral faces.

Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk completed a depression questionnaire, measures of emotion regulation, and an emotion recognition task. It was predicted that rumination would be associated with higher accuracy for assessing angry, fearful, and sad faces, but would be associated with poorer recognition for happy and neutral faces. It was also predicted that individuals who use expressive suppression would be associated with increased recognition of angry, fearful, happy, sad faces, and neutral faces, but decreased recognition of happy faces.

Instead, the maladaptive strategies were associated with decreased accuracy of the emotional faces. It was found that rumination significantly mediated the relationship between depression and decreased accuracy in fearful, neutral, and emotion faces overall. Additionally, suppression was found to significantly mediate the relationship between depression and decreased accuracy in fearful, neutral, and overall emotional faces. These results support a negative interpretation bias in which individuals interpret neutral faces as negative faces. This ensures individuals would have frequent negative emotional experiences as they perceive what would be neutral social scenarios as negative, which could maintain depression. Furthermore, neutral faces and fearful faces were most misidentified as sad faces. This supports a mood-congruent hypothesis established in previous literature in which individuals interpret the emotions of others as matching their own emotion. In the current study, it appears that the individuals with depressive symptoms might have been feeling sad during the duration of the study and thus misinterpreting faces as sad faces. Additionally, it was observed that rumination and suppression are highly correlated, leading to a multiple maladaptive strategy hypothesis underlying depression. This refers to the idea that individuals with depression do not use simply one maladaptive regulation strategy, but rather a combination of strategies that work to maintain their depressive symptoms. Results from this study suggest that depression involves multiple maladaptive emotion regulation strategies that appear to maintain the disorder through a negative interpretation bias and a mood-congruent bias.

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