

## Week 6 Writing Assignment

This week's readings were on emotion regulation (what this class is titled after!). I found all of the readings to be very thought provoking and applicable to my own life.

I grew up repressing a lot of my emotions. I'm not quite sure why - I wasn't culturally or socially instructed or encouraged to do so, but I found myself doing so of my own accord. I've always believed that I was more resilient to stressful situations because I wouldn't get any physiological responses or act out compared to those around me. What I've come to realize as I got older was that while I am very level-headed and calm during stressful times, I am also unable to recognize the signs of stress early on. Frequently I would feel that I don't know what I'm feeling.

What would happen during stressful events I would initially be extremely level headed, but as time went on I would hit rock bottom. In middle school and high school, this wouldn't have destructive effects, probably because I was more "malleable" then. But in college, it became more difficult to regulate that. Thankfully, throughout the past couple years, I've made some improvements with recognizing my own emotions. It's actually quite scary to think how difficult it is to recognize suppression because it becomes so automatic. I could have gone my entire life suppressing my emotions and believing that that was my norm. It's really easy to undermine how destructive the effects of suppressing emotions are. The Mauss reading worded suppression as "cognitive disengagement from emotional impulses", and I think it's an extremely accurate description of what chronic suppression and denial of emotion could lead to. I had become so removed from my emotions that I oftentimes didn't even know what I wanted or felt anymore. While it is beneficial in certain instances as the Mauss reading stated, "repressive coping can promote resilience... it may promote recovery following extremely stressful events...", it has a very negative effect on positive emotions. (Side note: in the same reading it also said that "individuals who habitually use repressive coping as compared to those who do not tend to have fewer symptoms of psychopathology, fewer health problems and somatic complaints", but I disagree with this statement. I think it's easy to look at repressive coping and view it as well-adjusted, but I believe that it is just a surface level assessment. I believe that in the long term there will be negative effects).

It was kind of interesting to see that in all three readings, it was found that while suppression resulted in a decrease in negative emotion and experience, it also decreased positive emotion (echoing my thoughts). Reading this was cathartic to me because that was only a recent realization that I've had and seeing it in the paper made me feel validated. The work and progress I've made was actually valid! My suppression and repression had become so automatic and unconscious that it inadvertently made me extremely flat-affected. The Gross reading related emotional regulation back to the

regulation of other affective processes such as hunger, mood and sexual drives. I believe that the sexual drive regulation is highly associated with attachment styles and reaction to affection. Another negative effect that I've found with chronic repression/suppression of emotions for the past decade (wow) is that I had become avoidant to any signs of affection or closeness. This caused a lot of problems with my close relationships, but especially with my romantic relationships.

Another thing I found interesting was that suppression also increases activation of the sympathetic system and has negative cardiovascular effects, which actually makes sense. With my recent improvements in recognizing emotions and (trying to) switch from suppression as my main emotion regulation to reappraisal, I can say that I have less palpitations and cardiovascular problems. Funnily enough, the readings state that suppression leads to increased blood pressure, but I was hypotensive for most of my life and only recently am I more normotensive.

I think that a lot of people in the west grow up being able to express their emotions, or as the reading says, "emotion reactivity". Because there is such a diverse range of people and personalities especially in America (as it isn't a homogenous population), seeing the range of emotion and expression does facilitate a more "safe" environment to be expressive. Although it is easy to point at someone who is reactive to emotions and call them immature or unable to regulate emotions, I think the long term effects on general emotional and mental health are positive.

One thing I do wish the readings touched on more (especially the Tice reading) was how emotional distress causes intentional self-destruction. This is probably also related to self-harm behaviors, and I'm sure there is research on this, but I want to see the emotion psychology perspective on it.