

Abstract

This study investigated the defensiveness in emotion processing in association with three emotion regulation strategies: 1) emotion integration, 2) expressive suppression, and 3) cognitive reappraisal. One hundred and eight undergraduate participants wrote about a sad experience from the past, and linguistic analyses were performed to examine the relationship between emotion regulatory styles and the defensiveness in their response to traumatic experience. Psychological and cognitive processes were coded in their written expressions and defensiveness was manifested in three categories of linguistic indicators: self-referencing words, cognitive process words, and negative emotion words. The word categories represented the subject of focus, complex cognitive process, and negative emotions. Results indicated that participants who integrated emotions used less self-referencing words. Expressive suppression was positively associated with the use of negative words when the experience elicited high levels of sadness, and a reversed association was found when sadness level was low. Expressive suppression was also related to more cognitive words, indicating complex cognitive mechanism was involved. Cognitive reappraisal was associated with less negative emotion words, indicating lower emotion arousal. Implications of these findings and the underlying psychological processes were discussed.

*Keywords:* emotion regulation, integration, suppression, reappraisal, self-determination theory, motivation, defensiveness