

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Emotion Regulation in Distress and Fear Liabilities: Maladaptive Evaluation of Regulatory Strategies.

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PAGES: 66

The use of specific emotion regulation strategies in different disorders has been well studied in previous research. However, how individuals reach a decision as to what regulatory strategy to employ and how this decision relates to internalizing psychopathology has scarcely been studied. Additionally, most of the current research studying emotion regulation in the context of psychopathology is based on the DSM categorical system, the ability of which to fully explain psychopathology has been disputed. The goal of this study was to examine the role of the higher-order distress and fear liabilities (dimensions predisposing to internalizing symptomatology) in the evaluation process of available emotion regulation strategies in response to contextual factors. Participants were randomly assigned to a short- or long-term goal condition and were asked to select between two regulatory strategies, distraction and reappraisal, in response to pictures of differing emotional intensity. To assess whether the two liabilities modify the effect of emotional intensity and goal proximity on strategy selection, their moderating effects were explored. The results showed a larger effect of emotional intensity on the odds of choosing distraction as standing on the fear liability increased. The other moderating effects of the liabilities on the relationship between contextual factors and strategy selection were nonsignificant. Scientific and clinical implications are discussed.