

Washington University in St. Louis

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Volume 13

Washington University
Undergraduate Research Digest

Spring 2018

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Recommended Citation

Birg, Jessica, "Emotion Regulation and Authenticity" (2018). *Volume 13*. 18.
https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/wuurd_vol13/18

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EMOTION REGULATION AND AUTHENTICITY

Jessica Birg

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Research has shown that suppressing emotions can have negative social and psychological consequences. Subjective inauthenticity (the feeling of being “fake”) has been found to mediate the link between frequent use of suppression and poor social functioning; however, it is still unknown if suppression influences others’ impressions of one’s authenticity. In the present study, we aimed to test if suppression influences both subjective feelings and impressions of authenticity. We hypothesized that people who suppress during a conversation with a stranger will rate themselves as being more inauthentic than those who do not suppress, because they will be unable to show their true emotions. Partners of suppressors will also rate the suppressor as being more inauthentic, because they will be able to sense that their partner is trying not to be expressive. We recruited 142 undergraduate students from Washington University in St. Louis to form a set of 71 zero-acquaintance dyads. Students were instructed to share a personal negative event with their interaction partner; one participant sometimes received additional instructions to either suppress or exaggerate their emotions during the conversation. Exaggeration was used as a contrasting condition, in which we instructed students to express their emotions visibly to their interaction partner. After the conversation, participants answered questions regarding their authenticity as well as their impressions of their partner’s authenticity. Results from APIM analyses indicated that those who suppressed during the conversation felt less authentic than those who did not, which is consistent with the prior literature. However, there were no significant results for exaggeration or impressions of partner authenticity. By looking at how unacquainted students rate themselves and each other on authenticity, we hoped to gain an understanding of the social consequences of suppression at more than one level.