Factors Influencing Differences Between Useful and Useless Regret

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Background

Previous Research
- Action regret generates more regret in the short term, but inaction regret produces more regret in the long run (e.g., Gilovich & Medvec, 1995).
- Individuals who make decisions deliberately, considerately or thoughtfully feel less regret than individuals that make decisions intuitively, inconsiderately, or thoughtlessly (e.g., Ueichi & Kusumi, 2004).

Previous researches treat regret as negative emotion that should be eliminated, or treated. However, regret occasionally has positive functions that prompt individuals to adaptive behaviors (e.g., Epstein & Rose, 1999).

Participants
- The questionnaire, conducted in 2011 and 2012, was completed by 184 Japanese undergraduate students (117 men, 59 women, 8 individuals who did not identify their gender).

Purpose

What kinds of factors differs between useful and useless regret?

Definitions
- Useful regret is emotion with positive effects that makes oneself grow, improve, or develop by learning from the regret, in other word, promoting adaptive behaviors and improving appreciation for regret. (e.g., “The event became a good experience for me.”, “The experience made me grow.”, etc.)
- Useless regret is emotion without positive effects.

Methods

Psychological Copings
- Self-searching (8 items): “I reflected on the behavior.” “I thought about the cause of the bad event.”
- Rationalization (3 items): “I thought that the bad event would be a wonderful experience.” “My behavior was correct at that time.”
- Escape (2 items), etc.

Adaptive Behaviors (6 items):
- “The experience improved my behaviors.”
- Appreciation for Regret (4 items): “The regret made me grow.” “The event became a good experience for me.”

Results

Useful regret
- The Contents
  - Human Relationship
    - (discord, trouble)
    - (I should have continued, I shouldn’t have become a member)
    - (choosing a school)
    - (I should have chosen other options)
    - Study
      - (I should have studied more)
    - Love
      - (broken heart, I shouldn’t have confessed)
    - Others
      - (mistakes, illness or injury, shopping, etc.)

Useless regret
- The Contents
  - Human Relationship
    - (discord, trouble)
    - (I should have continued, I shouldn’t have become a member)
    - (choosing a school)
    - (I should have chosen other options)
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    - Others
      - (mistakes, shopping, etc.)

The contents, degree, and patterns of regret have few differences between useful and useless regret.

Conclusions

Useful regret is significantly higher in psychological coping, adaptive behaviors, and appreciation for regret than useless regret.

References