

# 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., Epstude & Roese, 2008; Zeelenberg, 1999).

## 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

### ◆ 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).

### ◆ Questionnaire

◆ For both useful and useless regret, respondents answered below.

#### ➤ Most Regret-Provoking Experience (free description)

The following items assessed the intensity participants felt immediately after the regret experience

#### ➤ Immediate Emotion Aftermath (7-point scale)

Regret (2 items): "I wouldn't have felt regret if I had/hadn't done the behavior."  
Guilt, shame, emotional shock, etc. was measured in the same way.

#### ➤ Behavioral Copings

Support (3 items): "I had a talk about the bad event and I sought comfort."  
Nothing (2 items), etc.

#### ➤ 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."

Self-justification (7 items): "My behavior was correct at that time."

Escape (2 items), etc.

The following items assessed the present intensity participants feel about the regret experience.

#### ➤ Current Emotion

Regret (2 items): "I regret the experience currently."

#### ➤ Adaptive Behaviors (6 items):

"The experience improved my behaviors."

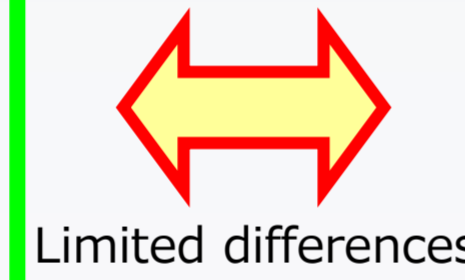
#### ➤ Appreciation for Regret (4 items):

"The regret made me grow."

"The event became a good experience for me."

## Results

Useful regret		Useless regret	
The Contents	Respondents	The Contents	Respondents
Human Relationship (discord, trouble)	31	Human Relationship (discord, trouble)	23
Sports, Circle, or Lesson (I should have continued, I shouldn't have become a member)	22	Sports, Circle, or Lesson (I should have continued, I shouldn't have become a member)	20
Choosing a school (I should have chosen other options)	21	Study (I should have studied more)	16
Study (I should have studied more)	16	Choosing a school (I should have chosen other options)	12
Love (broken heart, I shouldn't have confessed)	12	Love (broken heart, I shouldn't have confessed)	7
Others (mistakes, illness or injury, shopping, etc.)	21	Others (mistakes, shopping, etc.)	9



Limited differences

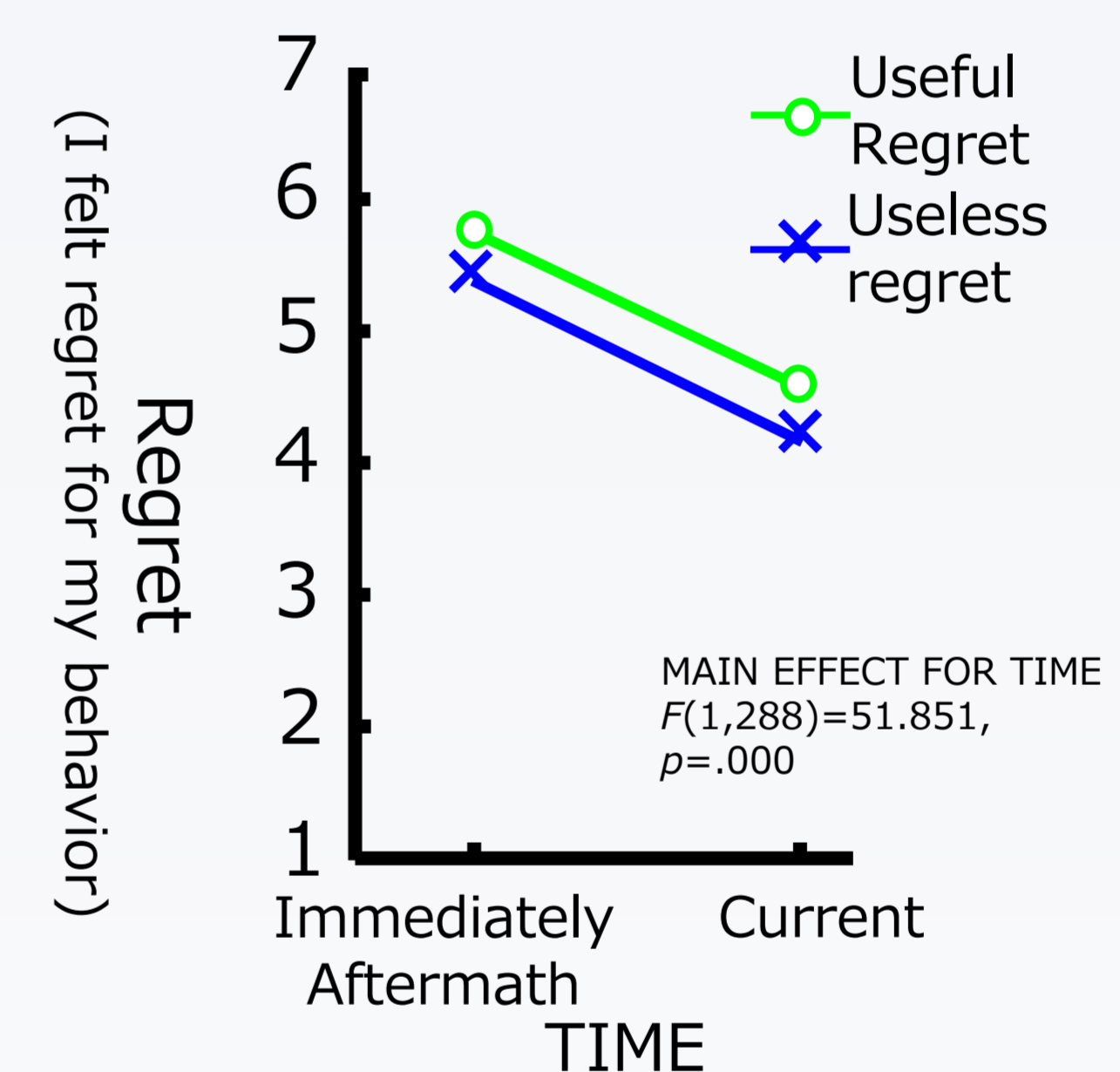


Figure 2 Results of Two-Way ANOVA Using Regret and Time

Figure 1 The Contents and the Number of Respondents for Useful and Useless Regret

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

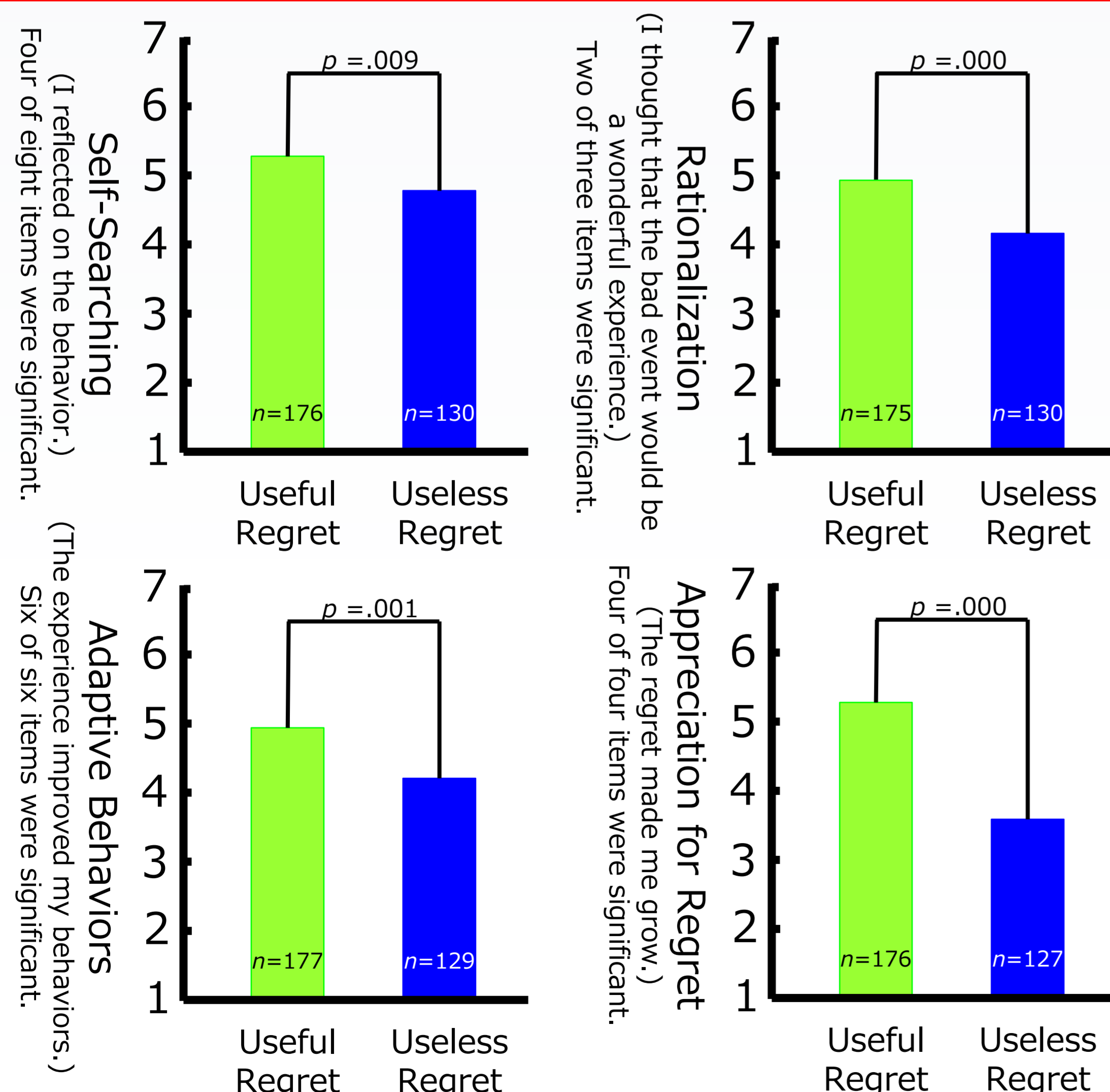


Figure 3 T-test Results for Coping, Adaptive Behaviors, and Appreciation for Regret

## Conclusions

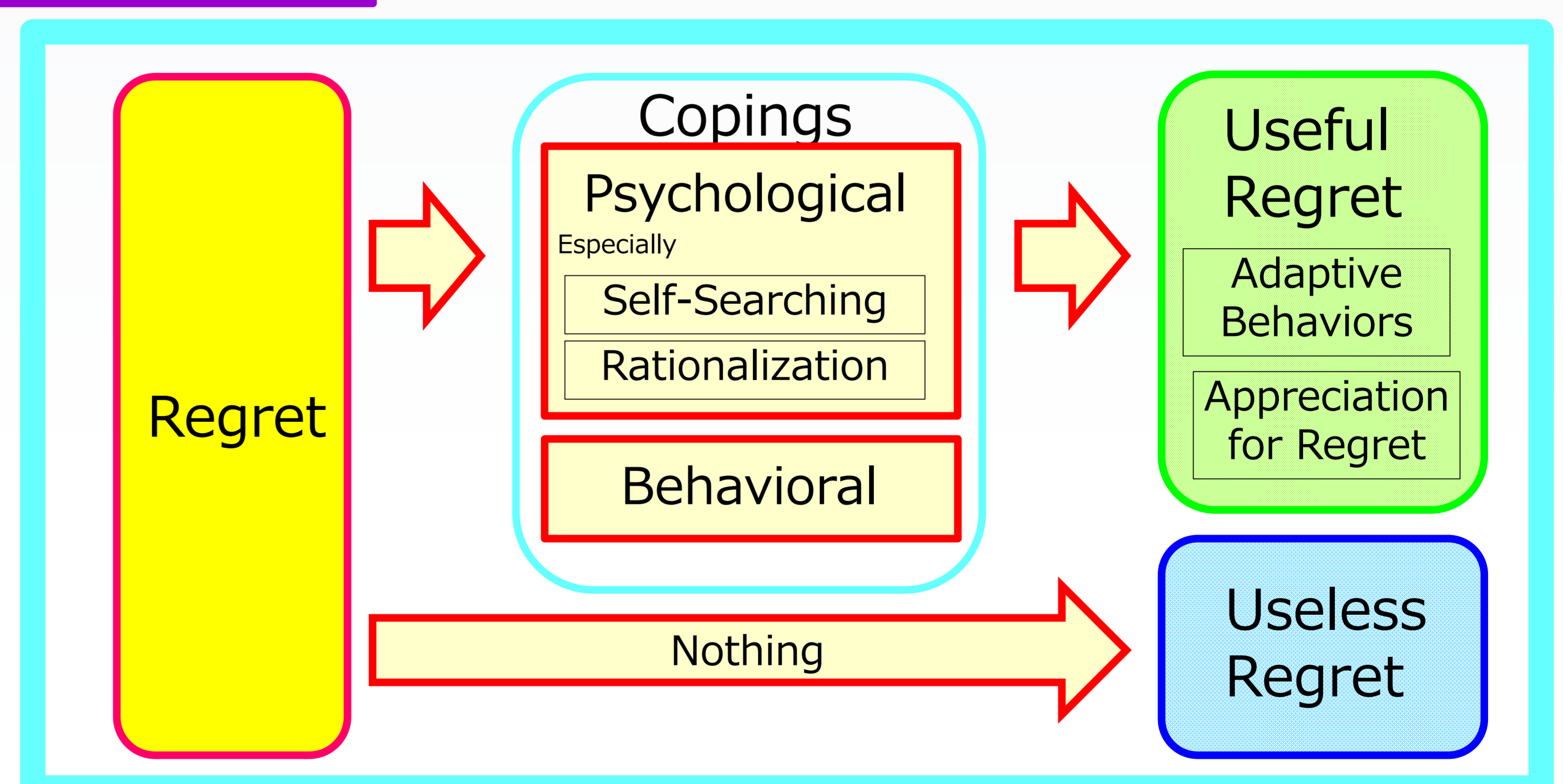


Figure 4 Conceptual Diagram for Processes of Learning from Regret

Psychological copings, especially self-searching and rationalization, is different between useful and useless regret.

To learn from regret, it is necessary to use psychological copings. Then, our behaviors improve in positive directions.

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

## REFERENCES

- Ueichi & Kusumi (2004). Change in feelings of regret over time, *The Japanese Journal of Psychology*, 74, 487-495.  
Epstude & Roese(2008). The functional theory of counterfactual thinking. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 12, 168-192.