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Beyond Pleasure and Pain? Emotion Regulation and Positive Psychology

Maya Tamir and James J. Gross

Emotion regulation and positive psychology are inextricably linked. Both fields seek to promote optimal human functioning, and because emotions play a pivotal role in optimal functioning, both fields seek to promote optimal emotional responding. Emotion regulation does this by studying the processes by which people influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions (Gross, 1998). Positive psychology does this by examining positive emotions, traits, and institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Research in both fields, therefore, is predicated on assumptions about the nature of optimal human functioning.

In this chapter, we argue that the fields of emotion regulation and positive psychology have been dominated by a hedonic view of optimal functioning. We first discuss the contributions of the hedonic view to both fields, and then consider its critical limitations. We then point to a broader conception of optimal functioning, which is based on a motivated view of human nature. We describe a new approach to emotion regulation that is based on this broader conception of optimal functioning and review related empirical evidence. We conclude with the hope that the instrumental approach to emotion regulation might stimulate a similar shift in positive psychology, toward a broader view of optimal functioning that acknowledges—but moves beyond—pleasure and pain.

The Hedonic View of Optimal Human Functioning

Since the dawn of human history, optimal functioning has been equated with the experience of pleasure and the absence of pain (e.g., Kahneman, 1999). Emotions are predominantly states of pleasure or pain involving both body and mind (e.g., Izard, 1977). Therefore, according to a hedonic view, the experience of pleasant emotions and the absence of unpleasant emotions are core components of optimal human functioning.

The Short-Term Hedonic Approach to Emotion Regulation

The hedonic conception of optimal functioning has had a tremendous impact in the field of

emotion regulation. The hedonic properties of emotions are their unique and most prominent defining feature (e.g., Averill, 1994; Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, & Gross, 2007). Such hedonic properties are relatively fixed across people and contexts (e.g., disgust usually feels bad), and they can be reliably measured and identified. Coupled with the powerful motivation to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (Freud, 1926/1959), the view of emotions as primarily hedonic states has led researchers to adopt a short-term hedonic approach to emotion regulation.

According to the short-term hedonic approach, when emotions are regulated, they are regulated primarily for short-term hedonic reasons. This has resulted in an explicit focus on emotion regulation as the process by which people decrease unpleasant emotions and increase pleasant emotions (e.g., Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). Guided by this approach, research in emotion regulation in the past few decades has made substantial contributions to our understanding of mental health and well-being, identifying adaptive ways in which people can influence their own emotional experiences (for reviews, see Denollet, Nyklicek, & Vingerhoets, 2008; Gross, 2007).

The Hedonic Approach to Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology has given rise to diverse definitions and operationalizations of well-being. Considerable attention has been given to two traditions—namely, the hedonic and the eudaimonic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both of these traditions have sprung from early philosophical conceptions of well-being in an attempt to translate them into empirical research. Although each tradition represents a simplified view of well-being, they are nonetheless highly important conceptual approaches that, to a large extent, have guided research in the field. In this chapter, we will describe both approaches and evaluate them critically. We begin in this section by briefly describing the hedonic view of well-being and some of the research it has given rise to.

The idea that optimal functioning involves the presence of pleasant emotions and absence of unpleasant emotions has dominated the field of positive psychology. In a seminal article that signaled the formation of positive psychology, the study of positive emotions was identified as one of the three target domains within the field (Seligman, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The emphasis on pleasant emotions was soon linked to the hedonic philosophical tradition. In fact, some of the leading figures in positive psychology went as far as labeling the study of well-being as "hedonic psychology" (Kahenman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). The role of pleasant feelings in hedonic conceptions of well-being has since been constantly reinforced by positive psychologists who use the terms "well-being," which typically refers to psychological welfare, and "happiness," which typically refers to a pleasant emotional state, interchangeably.

The emphasis on subjective hedonic experiences has given rise to the study of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 2000). Subjective well-being assumes that well-being involves three distinct subjective experiences: satisfaction with life, the presence of pleasant feelings, and the absence of unpleasant feelings. Because of its emphasis on hedonic outcomes and its relative inattention to underlying processes, subjective well-being research has typically been viewed as reflecting the hedonic tradition, which argues that pleasure is a defining feature of the "good life" (Kahneman et al., 1999). Research on subjective well-being has made immense contributions to positive psychology, promoting our understanding of both the causes and consequences of happiness in individuals, cultures, and nations (for recent reviews, see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Eid & Larsen, 2008).

Taking Stock

Despite its important contributions to the study of emotion regulation and to positive psychology, there is reason to believe that a purely hedonic view of human nature is too narrow to account for all aspects of optimal human functioning. In this section, we review the limitations of the hedonic approach for the study of emotion regulation as well as positive psychology.

The Limitations of the Short-Term Hedonic Approach to Emotion Regulation

Although the short-term hedonic approach to emotion regulation has greatly contributed to our understanding of the role of emotion regulation in well-being, it suffers from several serious limitations. First, it views emotions as exclusively hedonic states. For example, excitement is pleasant whereas fear is unpleasant; therefore, people should be motivated to increase excitement and decrease fear at all times. Emotions, however, are more than states of pleasure or pain.

They influence physiology, cognition, and behavior and predispose people to act in goal-directed ways (e.g., Frijda, 1986). For example, excitement may predispose people to approach possible rewards (e.g., a potential mate), whereas fear may predispose people to avoid possible threats (e.g., a potential predator) (e.g., Gray, 1981).

By viewing emotions as exclusively hedonic states, the short-term hedonic approach to emotion regulation ignores the possibility that people may seek to regulate their emotions for reasons other than maximizing pleasure or minimizing pain. For instance, a person may try to increase her level of excitement not necessarily because it feels good, but because it might help her obtain a reward. The short-term hedonic approach is unable to account for such instrumental motives in emotion regulation.

Second, the short-term hedonic approach fails to account for all possible forms of emotion regulation. As mentioned above, emotions can be pleasant or unpleasant. Independent of their hedonic quality, emotions can also be useful by helping us respond to environmental challenges (Frijda, 1986; Levenson, 1994; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). Emotions, however, can be harmful as well. The utility of emotions depends on an individual's goals as well as the characteristics of the context at hand. For instance, fear may be useful when it leads a person walking home at night to select a safe route over a dark alley. Fear may be harmful the next day, however, when it leads the person to freeze when giving an important presentation at work.

Both pleasant and unpleasant emotions, therefore, can be either useful or harmful, and there may be important benefits to accepting both types of emotional experiences in certain contexts (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999). To the extent that people seek to maximize both pleasure and utility, emotion regulation may be said to include four types of activities, ones that (1) increase pleasant emotions, (2) increase unpleasant emotions, (3) decrease pleasant emotions, or (4) decrease unpleasant emotions (Gross, 1998, 1999). Unfortunately, by focusing exclusively on hedonic considerations, the short-term hedonic approach to emotion regulation has led to a nearly exclusive focus on increasing pleasant and decreasing unpleasant emotions, neglecting to examine cases in which people seek to increase unpleasant or decrease pleasant emotions. This means that only two of these four possible types of emotion regulation have received substantive research attention (Parrott, 1993).

The short-term hedonic approach to emotion regulation, therefore, provides a relatively narrow and limited view of emotion regulation. In order to address its limitations, what is needed is an alternative approach that can explain different motives for experiencing emotions and account for all types of emotion regulation.

The Limitations of the Hedonic Approach to Positive Psychology

Despite its broad impact in the field of positive psychology, the hedonic view has been extensively criticized almost since its inception (McMahon, 2006). In particular, many have argued that the hedonic approach fails to account for aspects of human functioning, such as self-fulfillment, virtue, and moral justice, that go beyond momentary subjective experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993).

Building on a eudaimonic philosophical tradition, a different view of optimal functioning has distinguished well-being from subjective happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this view, optimal functioning depends on self-fulfillment, which involves a sense of autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, mastery, competence, and connection to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998). According to the eudaimonic view, such processes are often associated with pleasant feelings, when successfully engaged in. Nonetheless, successful achievement of meaningful goals is viewed as conceptually independent of pleasure per se (Ryan & Huta, 2009).

Both the hedonic and the eudaimonic views of optimal functioning have merit. They complement each other and reflect non-overlapping aspects of optimal functioning (Compton, Smith, Cornish, & Qualls, 1996; King & Napa, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000). By emphasizing measurable hedonic outcomes, the hedonic view often neglects the conceptual processes that shape well-being. At the same time, by focusing on abstract philosophical constructs, the eudaimonic view underestimates the role of hedonic outcomes as indexing diverse aspects of well-being (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008).

Neither the hedonic nor the eudaimonic views can independently account for the broad range of variables involved in well-being. This has even led some to question whether the distinction between these approaches is useful for advancing our understanding of well-being (Kashdan et al., 2008). As in the field of emotion regulation, what

is needed in the field of positive psychology is a broad approach that can account for both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of human functioning and tie them together.

A Motivated View of Optimal Functioning

The hedonic and the eudaimonic views of optimal functioning highlight different aspects of human nature. But how do these aspects work together to account for the full range of optimal human functioning? A motivated view of human nature could potentially account for both approaches to well-being and highlight the potential links between them.

According to a motivated approach, optimal functioning is driven by the active pursuit of personal goals (e.g., Cantor & Sanderson, 1999). Such pursuit highlights two complementary elements: the process of goal pursuit and the outcomes of goal pursuit. From this perspective, eudaimonic approaches focus on the process of goal pursuit—namely, what people try to achieve as they pursue their goals. From this perspective, optimal functioning involves the pursuit of personally meaningful goals (Emmons, 2003) that satisfy intrinsic needs (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) and conform to people's values (Waterman, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The hedonic approach, on the other hand, focuses on how well people achieve their goals. From this perspective, optimal functioning involves success in goal pursuit, with pleasure reflecting success or progress toward goals and pain reflecting failure (Carver & Scheier, 1998).

According to a motivated view of optimal functioning, what has been viewed as two distinct approaches to well-being actually reflect different and complementary sides of the same coin. Research in the eudaimonic tradition typically focuses on the type of goals people pursue and how they pursue such goals, whereas research in the hedonic tradition typically focuses on subjective indices of progress in goal pursuit. It is not surprising, therefore, that eudaimonic and hedonic indices of well-being are often closely linked (e.g., King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006). A motivated approach to optimal functioning could explain when and why such overlap is likely and when it is not.

Such a motivated approach to optimal functioning has already informed the study of emotion regulation, by giving rise to a novel, instrumental approach (Tamir, 2009a). In the section below, we review the assumptions of the instrumental approach, highlight some of its main predictions, and review evidence in their support.

An Instrumental Approach to Emotion Regulation

According to a motivated approach, optimal emotional experiences should be examined with respect to what people are trying to achieve when pursuing goals as well as how well they do so. When focusing on doing well, emotions can serve as desired end-states, or goals. Optimal experiences, in this respect, involve the presence of pleasant emotions and relatively low levels of unpleasant emotions. Such experiences can reflect progress or success in the pursuit of both hedonic goals (i.e., I want to feel good) and instrumental goals (e.g., I want to finish the assignment on time).

When focusing on what people try to achieve, however, emotions can serve either as ends or as means in goal pursuit. When the goal is to feel good, emotions serve as the desired end-state. When the goal is to finish the assignment on time, emotions may serve as means (e.g., by motivating the person to work harder). People may be motivated to experience an emotion, therefore, not in order to feel a certain way, but in order to attain a certain goal. Optimal experiences, in this respect, involve the presence of useful emotions (i.e., emotions that promote goal attainment) and the absence of harmful emotions, regardless of whether they are pleasant or unpleasant to experience.

According to the instrumental approach to emotion regulation, people regulate their emotions to optimize goal pursuit. People may be motivated to experience emotions for hedonic benefits (e.g., decreasing my level of worry would make me feel better) or for instrumental benefits (e.g., maintaining my level of worry would motivate me to work harder on my work assignment).

The idea that people regulate emotions for reasons other than immediate hedonic benefits is not novel (Parrott, 1993). For instance, it has long been acknowledged that people regulate the expression of their emotions to conform to social or cultural norms (Hochschild, 1979). They control their emotional expressions for strategic reasons in the workplace (e.g., Sutton, 1991),

to convey strategic information in social interactions (e.g., Andrade & Ho, 2008; Barry, 1999), and to influence close relationships (Bell & Clarkins, 2000).

However, people can regulate the expression of emotion with little impact on the experience of emotion (Ekman, 1993). In contrast, a unique assumption of the instrumental approach to emotion regulation is that people regulate their emotional *experience* for instrumental reasons. The instrumental approach, therefore, contradicts the assumption that emotions are regulated primarily to satisfy short-term hedonic goals (e.g., Larsen, 2000; Thayer, 2000). It builds, instead, on the idea that emotions are regulated to satisfy any short- or long-term goal (Bonanno, 2001; Clore & Robinson, 2000; Erber & Erber, 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1995; Parrott, 1993).

Because it is based on a motivated approach to optimal functioning, the instrumental approach grounds emotion regulation in the broader realm of self-regulation. In doing so, emotion regulation is subjected to the same set of principles that guide self-regulation, more broadly construed. Building on such broader principles, the instrumental approach to emotion regulation gives rise to three general hypotheses. First, to the extent that unpleasant emotions can be useful in particular contexts, people may be motivated to feel unpleasant emotions to promote their goal pursuit. Second, because the utility of emotions depends on the goals people pursue, people may be motivated to feel different emotions in different contexts. Third, because people differ in the goals they pursue, different people may be motivated to experience different emotions. Below, we review recent empirical research that addresses each of these predictions.

People Are Sometimes Motivated to Feel Bad

Short-term goals are not always consistent with long-term goals. In the realm of self-regulation, for example, the goal to maximize pleasure by eating a slice of chocolate cake may be inconsistent with the goal of losing weight. Because people are often willing to forego immediate pleasure to maximize long-term benefits (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989), a person who wants to lose weight may eat a salad instead of cake, despite the hedonic cost. Similarly, in the realm of emotion regulation, the goal to maximize immediate pleasure is not always consistent with long-term goals. For example, the goal to maximize pleasure by feeling happy is inconsistent with the goal to reprimand a child for wrongdoing. In such cases, the instrumental approach predicts that people would be motivated to experience even unpleasant emotions if they promote long-term benefits. For example, a parent who wants to teach a child right from wrong by reprimanding her for wrongdoing may be motivated to increase his level of anger, despite the hedonic cost of doing so.

There is now empirical evidence to support this prediction. Specifically, we found that as people were preparing for a confrontational task, they tried to increase their experience of anger by engaging in anger-inducing activities (Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). Such attempts to increase anger were found even when controlling for concurrent anger experiences, indicating that the effect was not driven by the feelings people were already experiencing (i.e., emotion-congruent effects). Furthermore, such attempts were found despite the fact that people found the anger-inducing activities to be significantly less pleasant than other potential activities. Finally, supporting the instrumental underpinnings of such regulatory behavior, increasing the level of anger people experienced led them to be more successful in the confrontational task. Thus, people were motivated to increase their level of anger when doing so was instrumental. Such findings are in stark contrast to the basic assumption of the short-term hedonic approach that people should *always* be motivated to feel good.

People May Be Motivated to Feel Different Emotions in Different Contexts

As mentioned earlier, the instrumental nature of emotions is context-dependent. Therefore, according to the instrumental approach to emotion regulation, the emotions people want to feel should vary by context, as a function of the goals they pursue. A parent may be motivated to increase his anger when he wants to reprimand a child for wrongdoing, but decrease his anger when he wants to console a child hurt by another's wrongdoing.

There is now substantial evidence to demonstrate that what people want to feel varies by context. Initial evidence for this prediction was provided by Erber, Wegner, and Therriault (1996), who found that people try to neutralize their feelings when they expect to interact with a stranger, but not when they expect to work alone. Such findings led these authors to propose a contextual model of affect regulation and advocate

the abandonment of simple hedonic assumptions (Erber & Erber, 2000). The instrumental approach to emotion regulation extends this contextual model by identifying the features of the situation that determine what people want to feel. According to the instrumental approach, what people want to feel in a particular context and how they subsequently regulate their emotions depend on the goals they pursue in that context.

In support of this argument, we have been able to predict what people want to feel by manipulating the goals they pursue. For instance, anger should facilitate successful confrontation (Frijda, 1986; Parrott, 2001). Consistent with this theoretical assumption, we found that people were more likely to try to increase their level of anger when pursuing a confrontational goal, compared to a non-confrontational goal (Tamir et al., 2008). Similarly, from a theoretical perspective, emotions such as fear and worry should facilitate successful avoidance of threats, whereas emotions such as excitement and happiness should facilitate successful approach of rewards (e.g., Carver, 2001). Consistent with these assumptions, we found that people were motivated to increase their level of fear when preparing to pursue avoidance goals, but they were motivated to increase their level of excitement when preparing to pursue approach goals (Tamir & Ford, 2009).

In a recent study, we demonstrated that what people want to feel is determined by goal accessibility, even when all other features of the situation remain constant (Tamir & Ford, 2010). Participants were told that they will complete a social interaction where they will play a landlord and another participant will play a tenant who hasn't paid rent. Before the interaction, some participants were told that their goal was to get the tenant to pay the debt quickly (i.e., a confrontational goal), while others were told their goal was to maintain a long-term relationship with the tenant (i.e., a collaboration goal).

Consistent with the idea that anger promotes confrontation, whereas happiness promotes collaboration (e.g., Barry, Fulmer, & Van Kleef, 2004), participants who were given the confrontational goal were more likely to try to increase their level of anger, whereas participants who were given a collaboration goal were more likely to try to increase their level of happiness before the interaction. Such findings demonstrate that what people want to feel depends on the goals they pursue in the given context. Such evidence is also at odds with the assumption of the short-term hedonic approach that what people want to feel is fixed (i.e., high pleasure and low pain) across contexts.

Different People May Be Motivated to Feel Different Emotions

Because people vary in the goals they pursue, the instrumental approach to emotion regulation predicts that people should vary in what they want to feel. The instrumental approach to emotion regulation expects people to differ in what they want to feel, as a function of the goals they pursue. In support of this prediction, we found consistent differences in what people want to feel as a function of two basic motivational dispositions: neuroticism and extraversion.

In a counterintuitive set of studies, we've shown that individuals who are highly motivated to avoid threats (i.e., high neurotics) were more likely to try to increase their level of worry before engaging in potentially threatening tasks (Tamir, 2005). Doing so, in turn, facilitated their performance. Individuals who prioritize the avoidance of threats, therefore, may be more likely to recruit emotions that help them do so successfully (e.g., worry). Similarly, we found that individuals who are highly motivated to approach rewards (i.e., high extraverts) were more likely to try to increase their level of happiness before potentially rewarding tasks (Tamir, 2009b). Taken together, such findings suggest that emotional preferences depend on the goals people are inclined to pursue.

Other laboratories have also found similar evidence in other domains of individual differences. For instance, people differ in their motivation to repair unpleasant affect as a function of self-esteem (Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002; Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003). Specifically, people with low self-esteem are less motivated than their high self-esteem counterparts to decrease unpleasant feelings. Consistent with the instrumental approach to emotion regulation, such differences appear to be driven by self-verification goals (Wood, Stager, & Whittington, 2008).

People also differ in what they want to feel as a function of culture. Tsai, Knutsen, and Fung (2006) have shown that Americans value high-arousal pleasant emotions (e.g., excitement) more than Chinese, whereas Chinese value low-arousal pleasant emotions (e.g., calmness) more than Americans. When given the opportunity to regulate their feelings, Americans are more

likely than Chinese to try to increase their excitement, as compared to calmness. Consistent with the predictions of the instrumental approach to emotion regulation, such cultural variation may be driven by differences in the propensity to pursue influence and adjustment goals (Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007).

Individual differences in what people want to feel depend not only on the goals people pursue. As highlighted in expectancy-value models of self-regulation, what people want depends on the outcomes they expect (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In the case of emotion regulation, this implies that people might vary in what they want to feel, depending on their beliefs about the likely outcomes of their emotions. Consistent with this proposition, we found that the extent to which people wanted to feel an emotion depended on whether they believed it would be useful to them. For example, people who believed fear would be useful for a task were more likely to increase their level of fear before completing the task, whereas those who believed excitement would be useful were more likely to increase their level of excitement (Tamir & Ford, 2009). Interestingly, such beliefs about the instrumental nature of emotions may or may not be accessible to conscious awareness (Tamir, Chiu, & Gross, 2007).

Similar to the instrumental approach to emotion regulation, the short-term hedonic approach also predicts that people should vary in what they want to feel, but for different reasons. Whereas the instrumental approach attributes individual differences to differences in the goals people pursue or to differences in their beliefs about the utility of emotions, the short-term hedonic approach attributes such differences to variation in hedonic preferences.

According to the short-term hedonic approach, people vary in the level and type of emotional experiences they find most pleasurable (Larsen, 2000). For instance, individuals high in extraversion may find excitement more pleasant than calmness, whereas the opposite may be true for individuals low in extraversion (Rusting & Larsen, 1995). Such differences, in turn, would lead extraverts to prefer excitement and introverts to prefer calmness. Individual differences in hedonic preferences may explain some of the variance in what people want to feel. However, as indicated by the findings above, individual differences in what people want to feel also depend on the goals they pursue and their beliefs about the utility of emotions.

Taken together, the findings reviewed in this section provide direct empirical support for the three main predictions of the instrumental approach to emotion regulation—namely, that people can be motivated to feel bad, that people are motivated to feel different emotions in different contexts, and that different people may be motivated to feel different emotions. Whereas the instrumental approach can also account for cases of emotion regulation that are driven by short-term hedonic considerations (i.e., the increase of pleasant and decrease of unpleasant emotions), the short-term hedonic approach fails to account for cases of emotion regulation that are driven by instrumental considerations (e.g., the increase of unpleasant and decrease of pleasant emotions). Thus, the instrumental account of emotion regulation subsumes the short-term hedonic account and serves as a broader and more comprehensive approach to emotion regulation.

Moving Forward

To date, both the hedonic and the eudaimonic views of optimal human functioning have made substantial contributions to the fields of emotion regulation and positive psychology. However, each approach has weaknesses that limit its potential to serve as a single framework for either emotion regulation or positive psychology. What is needed at this point is an overarching approach that subsumes the hedonic conception but moves us beyond a strictly pleasure-and-pain calculus.

In the domain of emotion regulation, the instrumental approach suggests how a single framework can account for both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of optimal functioning. It also demonstrates how using such a framework can give rise to novel and testable predictions that shed light on new phenomena. We believe that by offering a broad and flexible view of optimal emotional functioning, the instrumental approach has the potential of making important contributions to the study of emotion and emotion regulation. Furthermore, the instrumental approach sets a new and exciting path for positive psychology. These possible contributions are detailed below.

Moving the Study of Emotion Forward

By highlighting the expected implications of emotions for goal pursuit, the instrumental

approach to emotion regulation revives the interest in the function of emotions. To describe healthy emotion regulation, it becomes crucial to identify not only which emotions are pleasant or unpleasant to experience, but also which emotions are adaptive for the pursuit of particular goals in a given context. For instance, if anger promotes confrontational behavior, it may be more adaptive to increase anger than to decrease it before a fight. The instrumental approach to emotion regulation highlights the importance of identifying which emotions are functional and at what level of intensity.

Perhaps even more importantly, the instrumental approach to emotion regulation highlights the idea that both pleasant and unpleasant emotions can be useful at times. Since the early days of our discipline, psychologists have studied the maladaptive nature of unpleasant emotions. With the rise of positive psychology, psychologists have begun to study the adaptive nature of pleasant emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001; Lyubomirksy, King, & Diener, 2005). What remains to be studied in depth, however, is the adaptive nature of unpleasant emotions (e.g., de Hooge, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2008), as well as the maladaptive nature of pleasant emotions. The instrumental approach to emotion regulation propels emotion researchers to tackle this unchartered frontier and examine emotions not only as end-states but also as potentially useful means in goal pursuit.

Moving the Study of Emotion Regulation Forward

The instrumental approach has the potential to advance the science of emotion regulation. First, the instrumental approach brings novel and important questions to the forefront. For example, because the short-term hedonic approach assumes that people want to feel good at any given moment, very few studies have examined what people actually want to feel. As reviewed above, however, people prefer different emotions in different contexts. Such preferences, in turn, set the course for the entire process of emotion regulation. Exploring the nature of such emotional preferences, what causes them, how they develop, and how they can be modified is an important avenue for future research.

Second, by placing emotion regulation in the broader realm of self-regulation, the instrumental approach renders theories of self-regulation applicable to the study of emotion regulation. For instance, self-regulation research has shown that goals can guide behavior even when they operate outside of conscious awareness (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trotschel, 2001). By applying this principle to the emotion domain, the instrumental approach raises the possibility that emotion regulation can be propelled by goals operating outside of conscious awareness. Although it remains to be tested, support for this idea would have important pragmatic implications.

Third, whereas the short-term hedonic approach views emotion regulation as driven exclusively by hedonic goals, the instrumental approach accommodates the possibility of both hedonic and instrumental motives in emotion regulation. This implies that a person may be motivated to feel a particular emotion for either hedonic or instrumental reasons (or both). An interesting question, in this respect, is whether emotion regulation differs as a function of the motives that underlie it. For instance, is an attempt to increase happiness in order to feel good different from an attempt to increase happiness in order to obtain a reward? Future research could help clarify such matters.

Finally, the short-term hedonic approach fosters a relatively deterministic view of emotion regulation, where emotional preferences are nearly impossible to change. In contrast, the instrumental approach fosters a much more flexible and dynamic view of emotion regulation, where emotional preferences are malleable and context-dependent. What people try to feel, according to this perspective, depends not only on innate predispositions, but also on knowledge about emotions, values, and prior learning. This approach, we believe, is not only more promising scientifically, it is also more hopeful.

Moving the Study of Positive Psychology Forward

Many positive psychologists and most emotion researchers use the terms "positive" and "pleasant" almost synonymously. But is positive psychology the psychology of pleasure? The answer is a resounding no. Both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches to well-being view optimal human functioning as going beyond pleasure per se (e.g., Kesebir & Diener, 2008). If unpleasant emotions can promote professional accomplishments, the maintenance of a supportive social network, self-fulfillment, and virtue—are these emotions truly "negative"?

Although many view unpleasant emotions as inherently negative and pleasant emotions as inherently positive, this view is slowly beginning to shift. For instance, there is now evidence showing that investment in personal goals, a crucial prerequisite of self-fulfillment, is associated with an increased level of worry (Pomerantz, Saxon, & Oishi, 2000). Self-fulfillment, therefore, may benefit from some degree of unpleasant emotions (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Similarly, recent evidence suggests that the people who report the highest level of happiness are actually not the ones who achieve the highest level of professional success, as indicated by levels of income and education (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007). Apparently, some degree of unpleasant emotions may be necessary to succeed. Even in the domain of interpersonal relationships, the expression of unpleasant emotions may carry certain benefits (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008).

Past research has shown that the experience of unpleasant emotions is strongly and negatively associated with well-being (e.g., Diener & Lucas, 2000). Yet, recent evidence demonstrates that the strength of this association varies by culture. Compared to collectivistic cultures, in individualistic cultures the experience of pleasant emotions is more strongly related to life satisfaction than the absence of unpleasant emotions (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008).

These findings resonate with an instrumental approach to emotion regulation, according to which all emotions can potentially contribute to well-being when they are experienced in the appropriate context, at the right level of intensity, and for an appropriate duration. "Positive," therefore, should not be defined as "pleasant" but as that which promotes optimal functioning. "Positive emotions," in turn, could be either pleasant or unpleasant, depending on their implications for well-being.

A motivated view of optimal functioning highlights the dual role of emotions in both the process and the outcome of well-being. In doing so, it can help bridge the hedonic and eudaimonic traditions. For instance, it can explain why indices of eudaimonic well-being are linked to pleasant emotions over time (e.g., Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006), why feeling pleasant emotions at all times may be less adaptive for well-being (e.g., Oishi et al., 2007), and why the experience of pleasant emotions can lead to perceptions of successful goal pursuit (e.g., King et al., 2006). It also points to the importance of studying the role of context in well-being (see also Ryan & Huta, 2009).

By providing a framework that integrates both the hedonic and the eudaimonic views of optimal functioning, the instrumental approach to emotion regulation offers a much more dynamic and sensitive view of optimal emotions. This view dramatically changes the role of emotion regulation in well-being. By following the path of the instrumental approach, positive psychology could be similarly transformed.

Concluding Comment

The study of emotion regulation inevitably informs and is informed by positive psychology. In this chapter, we examined the parallel trajectories of emotion regulation and positive psychology in light of different conceptions of optimal functioning. We suggested that the hedonic view of optimal functioning, which has dominated research in emotion regulation as well as positive psychology, suffers from important limitations. We then briefly described a broader, motivated view of optimal functioning and reviewed the instrumental approach to emotion regulation as an approach that builds on this broader view and applies it to the study of emotion regulation.

By offering a theoretical framework that accounts for all types of emotion regulation, the instrumental approach significantly broadens our understanding of emotion, emotion regulation, and positive psychology. Furthermore, it demonstrates the benefits of a broader approach to optimal functioning and paves the way for bridging research on pleasure, emotion, and motivation. We are hopeful that positive psychologists will follow the lead of the instrumental approach to emotion regulation and formulate a similar approach to positive psychology that encompasses both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. Such an approach, in turn, should highlight the positive nature of all emotional experiences and the role of emotion regulation in promoting emotional and psychological functioning, beyond pleasure and pain.

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Designing Positive Psychology

Taking Stock and Moving Forward

Edited by

Kennon M. Sheldon, PhD
Professor of Psychological Sciences
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Todd B. Kashdan, PhD
Associate Professor of Psychology
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Michael F. Steger, PhD
Assistant Professor of Applied Social Psychology and
Counseling Psychology
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO

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