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Why Might People Want to Feel Bad?

Motives in Contrahedonic Emotion Regulation

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Unlike thoughts, motives, and other mental states, emotions feel good or bad. Indeed, the phenomenology of emotions is one of their identifying features. The powerful hedonic implications of emotions make them a common target of self-regulation. People often engage in hedonic emotion regulation. That is, they often want to rid themselves of unpleasant emotions and amplify pleasant ones. Often, but not always. There are times when people want to maintain or even increase unpleasant emotions and decrease pleasant ones. In such cases, people engage in contrahedonic emotion regulation. Although such cases are less frequent, they are important because they expose a latent range of motives in emotion regulation that is otherwise difficult to detect. Identifying the range of motives that underlie emotion regulation is critical because such motives determine the direction and the course of emotion regulation.

This chapter, therefore, focuses on cases of contrahedonic emotion regulation. Integrating existing theoretical and empirical advances, we try to offer a taxonomy of motives for experiencing unpleasant emotions and

decreasing pleasant ones. In what follows, we first examine what people want in general, and then discuss whether people ever want to feel unpleasant. We then present a taxonomy of motives in contrahedonic emotion regulation. We provide examples for each proposed motive and review related empirical evidence. We conclude by highlighting some theoretical implications and remaining challenges.

WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT?

Human beings have evolved a unique capacity for self-regulation. Rather than merely responding to the environment, we can anticipate possible futures and exert control in an attempt to shape our own. These efforts are directed toward the achievement of desired end states, which are hierarchically organized, from the specific to the more abstract. As discussed by Thrash and Elliot (2001), goals reflect specific desired end states and refer to *what* people want to achieve as they engage in self-regulation (e.g., losing weight). Motives, on the other hand, reflect an orientation toward a type of desired outcome and refer to *why* people engage in self-regulation (e.g., gaining social acceptance or being healthy). Because a particular goal can serve more than one motive, goals point to the specific direction of regulation but do not necessarily explain why it is pursued. Because a particular motive can be served by multiple goals, motives point to a general rather than a specific direction of regulation but identify the reason for pursuing it (McClelland, 1987).

At any given moment, people are driven by multiple motives. Motives can complement each other (e.g., as when a person wants to do well at work and get along with work colleagues) or conflict with each other (e.g., as when a person wants to work harder and spend more time with her romantic partner). The relative importance of specific motives depends on the superordinate motives that they serve.

Perhaps the strongest superordinate motive that shapes animal behavior is the desire to experience pleasure and avoid pain. According to Epicurus, people naturally strive to optimize hedonic experience, especially by reducing pain (Rist, 1972). According to this approach, self-regulation is geared toward maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. According to Aristotle, on the other hand, people strive to maximize moral and intellectual excellence, which are not always commensurate with pleasure (Ross, 1995). According to this approach, self-regulation is geared toward maximizing excellence. These approaches differ in the importance they attribute to pleasure, but they converge in highlighting the desirability of virtue. For Epicurus virtue leads to pleasure, but pleasure is the desired end state. For Plato and Aristotle, virtue may or may not lead to pleasure, but virtue is the desired end state.

There seems to be an agreement, therefore, that humans want more than to maximize immediate hedonic pleasure. Instead, they are motivated to optimize future benefits (hedonic or otherwise) as well. Indeed, the desire to attain future benefits is what triggers the process of self-regulation—a process designed to modify current experiences in order to alter the likelihood of future events (see Barkley, 2004). In an attempt to maximize future benefits, self-regulation can even lead people to forego immediate pleasure (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989).

DO PEOPLE EVER WANT TO FEEL BAD?

All forms of self-regulation involve moving from a current state to a desired end state. Whereas the regulation of behavior is directed toward desired behaviors (i.e., behavioral goals), the regulation of emotion is directed toward desired emotions (i.e., emotional goals). Behavioral and emotional goals are incorporated in a larger goal hierarchy, in which they operate together to serve various motives.

Unlike behaviors, emotions are inherently hedonic states (i.e., they are either pleasant or unpleasant to experience). Given their hedonic nature, emotional goals contribute to pleasure or pain (e.g., Spinoza, 1677/1982). Increasing pleasant emotions promotes greater pleasure, and decreasing unpleasant emotions promotes less pain. Understandably, therefore, research on emotion regulation was initially guided by the assumption that emotional goals operate exclusively in the service of the hedonic motive (e.g., Larsen, 2000). It quickly became clear, however, that seeking pleasure and avoiding pain cannot account for all instances of emotion regulation.

Building on functional approaches to emotion, researchers highlighted the fact that emotions are not just hedonic states. Because they can influence behavior in a desirable or undesirable manner, emotions can be pursued not only for how they feel but for what they do (e.g., Bonanno, 2001; Fischer, Rodriguez Mosquera, van Vianen, & Manstead, 2004). Within this theoretical approach, it seems likely that pleasant emotions serve the hedonic motive, yet they may serve other motives as well. In contrast, it seems unlikely that unpleasant emotions serve the hedonic motive, yet they may serve other motives instead. To support this idea, researchers have suggested possible motives other than the hedonic one in emotion regulation (e.g., Augustine, Hemenover, Larsen, & Shulman, 2010; Parrott, 1993; Vastfäll & Garling, 2006). To empirically test whether emotion regulation can indeed be driven by motives other than the hedonic one, it was essential to demonstrate that people do sometimes want to feel bad (or avoid feeling good).

Gradually, evidence for cases of emotion regulation that do not adhere

to a simple hedonic motive began to accumulate. Riediger, Schmiedek, Wagner, and Lindenberger (2009) demonstrated that in daily life people can regulate their emotions in ways that impair rather than promote hedonic benefits. In a week-long experience sampling study, participants reported on their emotional goals six times a day. On 15% of the measurements, participants reported contrahedonic emotional goals (i.e., trying to maintain or increase unpleasant emotions and decrease pleasant emotions). Other studies provided evidence for cases that reflect contrahedonic emotion regulation, showing that people did not want to increase happiness (Wood, Heimpel, Manwell, & Whiting, 2009) and that people wanted to increase anger (Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008), fear (Tamir & Ford, 2009), or sadness (Hackenbracht & Tamir, 2010).

Such research demonstrated that there are motives other than increasing pleasure that drive emotion regulation. But what might they be? People can be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions or to avoid pleasant ones for various reasons. In the next section, we describe what we see as the main categories of motives that underlie such cases of emotion regulation. The categories are organized in a taxonomy that is depicted in Figure 9.1. Although they differ from each other, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Also, our proposed taxonomy refers to motives that underlie the regulation of emotion experience rather than expression. The reason is that the regulation of emotion expression targets behavior, whereas the regulation of emotion experience targets subjective experiences, which is the focus of our chapter.

A TAXONOMY OF MOTIVES

Epicurus distinguished between two types of value (Rist, 1972). Activities that have *intrinsic value* are those that are inherently pleasant (e.g., a person may order a salad because he or she enjoys the taste of fresh salad greens). Activities that have *instrumental value* are those that serve as means to attain future intrinsic value (e.g., a person may order a salad not because it is inherently pleasant to eat but because it is healthy and feeling healthy is pleasant). An experience or an activity, therefore, can be pursued either for its intrinsic or for its instrumental value. Building on this distinction, we propose that, similarly, emotions can be pursued for their intrinsic or for their instrumental value. When emotions are pursued for their intrinsic value, people are motivated to experience an emotion for its immediate hedonic implications, whereas its nonhedonic implications (e.g., cognitive or behavioral) are something they either benefit or suffer from in the process. In contrast, when emotions are pursued for their instrumental value, people are motivated to experience them to attain some future

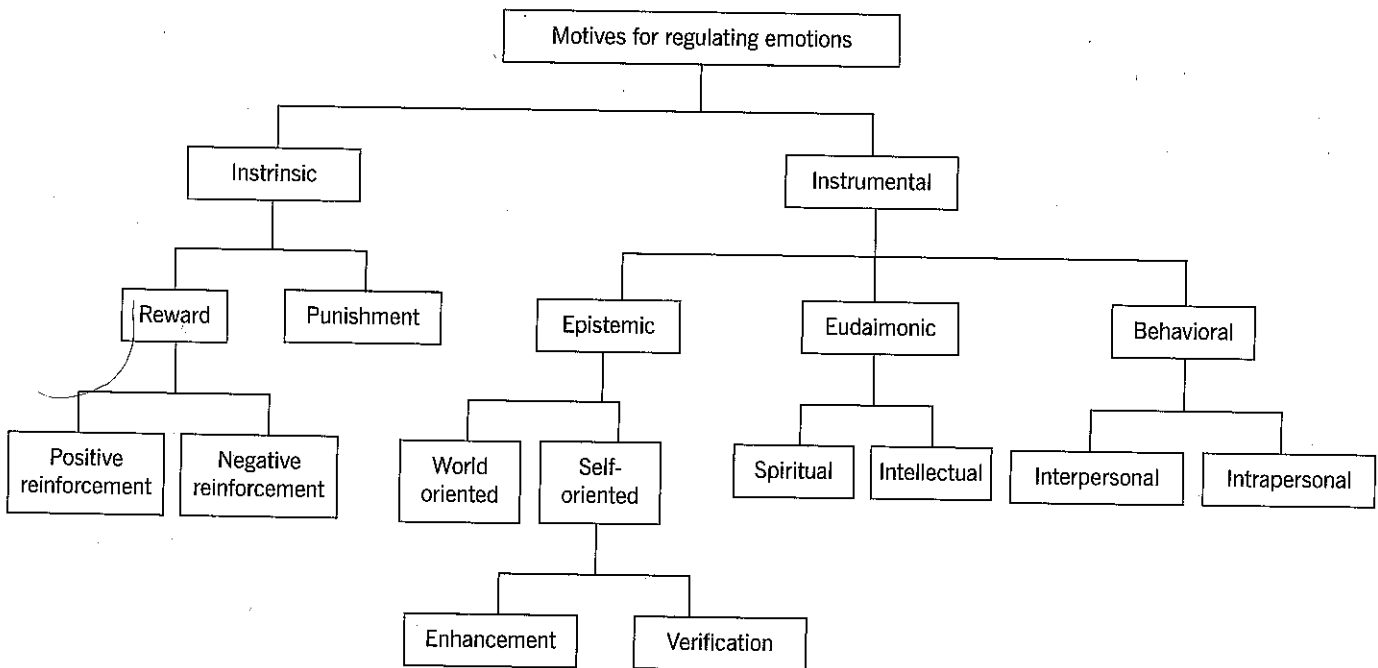


FIGURE 9.1. A taxonomy of motives for increasing unpleasant emotions or decreasing pleasant emotions.

benefit, whereas their immediate hedonic implications are something that they either benefit or suffer from in the process.

Our first distinction, therefore, is between intrinsic and instrumental motives in contrahedonic emotion regulation. Because people are generally guided by the hedonic principle (Freud, 1920/1952), it seems less likely that people can be motivated to increase unpleasant emotions for their immediate hedonic implications. Because people are sometimes willing to forego immediate pleasure to maximize future benefits, it seems more likely that people can be motivated to increase unpleasant emotions for their subsequent instrumental benefits. We begin, therefore, by discussing instrumental motives and follow with a discussion of intrinsic motives.

Instrumental Motives

People may choose to engage in an activity that carries an immediate hedonic cost if it is expected to yield future benefits (Mischel et al., 1989). To the extent that unpleasant emotional states can yield future benefits, people may be motivated to experience them for instrumental reasons. Emotion regulation is driven by *instrumental motives* when people are motivated to experience an emotion in order to maximize future benefits. Different motives can target different types of benefits. We distinguish between three types of instrumental motives: behavioral, epistemic, and eudaimonic. We describe each of these next.

Behavioral Motives

According to functional approaches to emotion, emotions shape behavior in a goal-consistent manner (e.g., Frijda, 1986). That is, emotions can lead people to behave in desirable ways (e.g., as when worrying about lung cancer leads a person to stop smoking; McCaul, Mullens, Romanek, Erickson, & Gatheridge, 2007). Therefore, emotions can be recruited to promote the successful pursuit of behavioral goals. Fear, for example, bolsters avoidance, whereas anger bolsters confrontation. Therefore, fear can be recruited to promote successful avoidance, and anger can be recruited to promote successful confrontation. Emotion regulation is driven by *instrumental behavioral goals* when people are motivated to experience an emotion to increase the likelihood of desirable behaviors.

There is considerable evidence in support of instrumental behavioral motives in emotion regulation. Our own work demonstrates that emotional goals (i.e., what people want to feel) can be shaped by higher order behavioral goals (e.g., Tamir et al., 2008; Tamir & Ford, 2009; Tamir & Ford, 2012). People actively tried to increase fear when they needed to avoid threats (Tamir & Ford, 2009), anger when they needed to confront others

(e.g., Tamir et al., 2008; Tamir & Ford, 2012), and sadness when they wanted to elicit help from others (Hackenbrach & Tamir, 2010). Importantly, such motives appear to influence behavior only when people expect the immediate hedonic cost to lead to future benefits (Tamir, Ford, & Gilham, 2013).

Behavioral motives can be further divided into *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* motives, depending on the source of the behavior the emotions are intended to modulate. Emotions can modulate the behavior of the person experiencing them by shaping the person's cognition, motivation, physiology, or behavior. Therefore, people may be motivated to experience emotions to change the likelihood of their own states. In such cases, emotion regulation is motivated by *intrapersonal behavioral motives*. For instance, if sadness promotes analytical thinking (see Martin & Clore, 2001), people may try to increase sadness when facing an important analytical task. In support of this hypothesis, participants were more motivated to feel sad when instructed to perform an analytical (vs. a creative) task (Cohen & Andrade, 2004). Similarly, if empathy and compassion motivate people to help others (e.g., Batson, 1991), people may try to decrease empathy or compassion when helping others necessitates personal sacrifice. In support of this hypothesis, when helping others was costly to the self, participants were motivated to decrease their empathy or compassion to avoid their motivational implications (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Shaw, Batson, & Todd, 1994). These examples demonstrate that people want to increase emotional experiences that are likely to lead to desirable behaviors and decrease emotional experiences that are likely to lead to undesirable ones.

In addition to influencing the self, emotions influence others. Emotions influence others by influencing their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Because one's social environment is a prominent contributor to one's well-being, a person may be motivated to experience emotions that are likely to lead others to behave in a way that benefits him or her. In such cases, emotion regulation is motivated by *interpersonal behavioral motives*. For example, happiness can make others more likely to collaborate, whereas anger can make others more likely to concede (Van Kleef, Van Dijk, Steinel, Harinck, & Van Beest, 2008; see Van Kleef & Côté, Chapter 6, this volume). We found that participants were motivated to increase happiness when their goal was to collaborate with others but increase anger when their goal was to confront others (Tamir & Ford, 2012). Similarly, Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, and Yeung (2007) found that when people wanted others to follow their lead, they were more motivated to experience high- (vs. low-) arousal pleasant emotions but that these preferences reversed when people wanted others to lead them.

Interpersonal behavioral motives can also lead people to increase an emotional state that is likely to promote affiliation or other social functions.

For instance, if emotional congruence promotes affiliation, people who want to affiliate with their partners may be motivated to assimilate their emotional states into their partners'. In support of this hypothesis, participants who expected to interact with a stranger whose emotional state was unknown tended to neutralize their emotional experiences before the interaction (Erber, Wegner, & Therrault, 1996). Participants who expected to interact with strangers whose emotional states were known tended to match their emotional states to those of their partners (Hunsinger, Lun, Sinclair, & Clore, 2009). Participants who expected to interact with less happy partners reported less positive emotional experiences than those who expected to interact with happier partners. In the latter case, these patterns of regulation were evident only among participants who wanted to affiliate with their partners (i.e., those for whom emotional matching was instrumental).

Interpersonal motives in emotion regulation can also operate at the group level. According to intergroup emotion theory (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Smith, 1993), group-level emotions play an important role in group cohesion and collective action. Just as congruent emotions among two partners can promote successful dyadic interaction, there is evidence that congruent emotions among group members (i.e., emotion convergence; Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007) promote group cohesion and facilitate political action. Therefore, people may be motivated to experience normative group emotions, pleasant or unpleasant, to signal group membership and promote successful interactions at the group level (Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009).

Regulating group-based emotions can serve both interpersonal and intrapersonal instrumental motives. With respect to intrapersonal benefits, increasing group-based emotions can increase the likelihood of the person experiencing those emotions behaving in accordance with his or her values by taking collective action. For instance, anger about unfair treatment of women was associated with female participants' willingness to take action to promote women's rights (Leonard, Moons, Mackie, & Smith, 2011). With respect to interpersonal benefits, to the extent to which they promote collective action, group-based emotions can promote the achievement of group goals. Increasing group-based emotions can also promote group cohesion by influencing other members of the group. This occurs because group-based emotions highlight group concerns and signal the individuals' commitment to those concerns.

In summary, behavioral motives in emotion regulation involve attempts to modify one's emotions in ways that promote desired behaviors in oneself, in others, or in both. Because instrumental motives depend on the anticipated behavioral implications of emotions, they are shaped by people's expectations regarding such effects. People want to feel sadder when performing analytical tasks, but that is likely because they expect

sadness to lead to more analytical thinking (Cohen & Andrade, 2004). People are motivated to increase their anger before a confrontation, but only to the extent to which they expect anger to promote successful confrontation (Tamir & Ford, 2012). Similarly, runners who expect to run faster when angry or anxious try to amplify these emotions before a run, whereas runners who expect to run faster when they don't feel angry or anxious try to decrease these emotions before a run (Lane, Beedie, Devonport, & Stanley, 2011). Such findings show that people are motivated to experience unpleasant emotions that they expect to promote desirable behaviors (in themselves or in others).

Epistemic Motives

Emotions can influence behavior, but they have other implications, as well. One important function of emotion is to provide information (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Such information is valuable, in part, because it can affect subsequent behavior. Such information, however, is also valuable in its own right. Emotion regulation is driven by *epistemic motives* when people are motivated to experience emotions to attain certain information. Emotions provide information about oneself and about the world. Therefore, people may be motivated to regulate their emotions to attain certain information about themselves or about the world around them, as detailed in this section.

To function adaptively in the world, individuals need a coherent sense of self (Festinger, 1957). Because individuals constantly construct, monitor, and evaluate their sense of self, information about the self is valuable. Emotion regulation is driven by *self-epistemic motives* when people are motivated to experience emotions to attain certain information about themselves. In particular, people are motivated to attain two different types of information about themselves (for a recent review, see Alicke & Sedikides, 2011). First, given the need for positive self-regard, people seek out information that enhances their self-images (Rogers, 1951). Second, given the need for consistency and predictability, people seek out information that verifies their self-images (Swann, 1987). As we discuss, emotions can provide information that can enhance as well as verify self-perceptions.

When emotional experiences reflect negatively on themselves, people may be motivated to avoid these experiences, and when emotional experiences reflect positively on themselves, people may be motivated to approach these experiences to enhance their sense of self. The implications of our emotional experiences for our self-images are the focus of research on meta-emotion and emotional acceptance. Because emotions reflect aspects of the self, people can react emotionally to their emotions (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997). For instance, people can feel ashamed for having certain

emotional experiences (Mayer & Stevens, 1994). Negative self-evaluations on account of emotional experiences are common among individuals who suffer from depression or anxiety and may contribute to maintaining the disorder (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006).

More generally, people judge themselves for experiencing any emotion that is deemed inappropriate or undesirable in a particular context. Unpleasant emotions can be inappropriate in some contexts, but appropriate in others. Therefore, people may be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions when they reflect positively on themselves. For example, feeling angry in the face of moral injustice reflects a moral self. To the extent that morality is a desirable attribute of themselves, people may be motivated to feel angry in the face of injustice (see Hess, Chapter 3, this volume). In support of this hypothesis, Greene, Sedikides, Barbera, and Van Tongeren (2013) found that participants were motivated to maintain anger in the face of moral injustice and that such feelings directly contributed to the perception of the self as moral. Similarly, Stearns and Parrott (2012) found that people were evaluated more positively if they expressed guilt and shame following their misconduct. Such favorable evaluations can arise from external or internal sources and may motivate people to experience shame and guilt in some contexts.

Of course, what is desirable is determined by one's cultural context (see Chentsova-Dutton, Senft, & Ryder, Chapter 7, this volume). People are motivated to experience those emotions that are deemed appropriate by their culture (e.g., Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). Although pleasant emotions are universally more desirable than unpleasant emotions, the desirability of specific pleasant and unpleasant emotions differs dramatically across cultures (e.g., Eid & Diener, 2001). Seeking to experience emotions that are normative in one's culture could be driven by behavioral motives when doing so is designed to achieve specific goals (e.g., promoting the pursuit of culturally meaningful goals or gaining social approval), but it can be motivated by epistemic motives when doing so is designed to enhance one's evaluation of the self in accordance with cultural standards. Doing so, in turn, is likely to enhance one's evaluation of oneself.

Self-enhancement is a powerful motive but not the only motive for seeking information regarding the self. People can also be motivated to self-verify (e.g., Swann, 1987). That is, people seek information that confirms their existing self-perceptions. This applies to both positive and negative aspects of the self. For instance, people with low self-esteem preferred to receive more negative feedback about themselves from others (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Similarly, people may be motivated to experience emotions that provide information that is consistent with their sense of self.

Emotional experiences inform people about their emotional selves (see

Robinson & Clore, 2002). Indeed, emotional experiences lie at the core of nearly all theories of personality. People rely, in part, on their emotional experiences to construct their self-images (e.g., "I often feel anxious, therefore I am an anxious person"). If emotional experiences inform people about their emotional selves, it may be that people are motivated, at least to some extent, to experience those emotions that they view as most typical of them, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant to experience. There are now several sources of evidence that support this hypothesis. People are inclined to maintain emotional experiences that they view as typical for them or more familiar (e.g., Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Wood et al., 2009). Individuals higher in extraversion report stronger preferences for pleasant emotions (e.g., Augustine et al., 2010; Rusting & Larsen, 1995), whereas individuals higher in neuroticism tend to report stronger preferences for unpleasant emotions (Kampfe & Mitte, 2009). We recently found that people who reported more (vs. less) frequent experiences of happiness were more motivated to experience happiness, that people who reported more (vs. less) frequent experiences of anger were more motivated to experience anger, and that people who reported more (vs. less) frequent experiences of fear were more motivated to experience fear (Ford & Tamir, 2012). These patterns are consistent with self-verifying motives in emotion regulation.

Emotional experiences can also inform people about nonemotional aspects of their personalities. For instance, experiencing anger or compassion in the face of injustice informs people about their moral nature. People who view themselves as moral may be motivated to experience anger or compassion in the face of injustice because it confirms their moral sense of self (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Greene et al., 2012). However, this may not be true for people who do not view themselves as moral. Similar patterns with regard to other emotions remain to be tested. For instance, people who view themselves as intellectual may be motivated to experience interest and excitement rather than boredom in certain contexts, people who see themselves as low in agreeableness may be motivated to feel less empathy for others, and so forth.

One type of epistemic motive in emotion regulation, therefore, concerns knowledge about the self. Another type of epistemic motive concerns knowledge about the social world. People tend to seek out information that supports their goals, values, and beliefs (Kruglanski, 1996). Given that emotions provide information, it is possible that people seek emotional experiences that support their views of the social world. Emotion regulation is driven by *world epistemic motives* when people are motivated to experience emotions to attain certain information about the social world or things external to themselves.

If people are motivated to see the world in particular ways, they may be motivated to experience emotions that are consistent with these views.

For instance, some people distrust close relationships. The experience of love and attachment may be inconsistent with this basic view. It is possible that to maintain their basic assumptions about close relationships, such people may be motivated to decrease feelings of trust and love, particularly when relationships go awry. Similar ideas have been proposed within the framework of attachment theory. For example, people who are avoidantly attached believe that significant others are unreliable and cannot be trusted. Suppressing feelings of love and attachment confirms the belief that others have relatively low value and should be kept at a distance (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007).

The motivation to experience emotions that help maintain particular worldviews may also contribute to the experience of group emotions. We recently examined whether people are motivated to experience emotions that reflect appraisals consistent with their political ideology (Halperin, Wayne, Porat, & Tamir, 2012). We found that ideology was significantly linked to the motivation to experience anger in political contexts and that such motives mediated emotional experiences and behavior in response to a politically relevant event. Such findings demonstrate that people are motivated to experience emotions that reinforce a particular interpretation of the world that is consistent with their goals and values.

In summary, emotions can be pursued to attain desirable information about the self or the social world. Obviously, epistemic and behavioral motives are not independent of each other. It is likely that access to particular information about the self or the world propels certain behaviors that help people attain their goals. For instance, decreasing feelings of love and attachment confirms the view of avoidantly attached individuals that others are untrustworthy, and this, in turn, can lead them to maintain their distance and protect themselves from possible pain (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). Similarly, decreasing the experience of anger toward outgroup members can help confirm the political worldviews of doves, and this, in turn, can increase support for humanitarian action (e.g., Halperin, Porat, Tamir, & Gross, 2013). As these examples demonstrate, epistemic motives for contrahedonic emotion regulation can (but do not necessarily) subserve behavioral motives.

Eudaimonic Motives

According to Aristotle, people strive to actualize their *daimon*, or "true self," through moral, spiritual, and intellectual excellence (Acrill, 1973). Such motives are referred to as *eudaimonic* (e.g., Waterman, 1993). Eudaimonic approaches to happiness have broadened the definition of eudaimonic motives to include various forms of self-actualization, including successful goal pursuit and authenticity (see Ryan & Deci, 2001). In the

present context, however, we use the term in its narrower original meaning, as reflecting the motivation to excel spiritually or intellectually. Within this narrower conceptualization, eudaimonic motives are distinct from behavioral motives because they do not target desirable behaviors, and they are distinct from epistemic motives because they do not target desirable information. Instead, eudaimonic motives target spiritual and intellectual improvement. Emotion regulation is driven by *eudaimonic motives* when people are motivated to experience emotions to attain spiritual or intellectual growth.

Emotions can have spiritual value. Indeed, religious traditions prescribe specific pleasant as well as unpleasant, emotional experiences (Davies, 2011). Empirical support for this claim was recently provided by Kim-Prieto and Diener (2009), who asked members of different religions from around the world to rate the desirability of different emotional states. They found that the desirability of various emotions differed substantially as a function of religious affiliation. For instance, pride was very desirable to Jews ($M = 7.44$ on a scale ranging from 1–9) but somewhat undesirable to Christians ($M = 4.26$); shame was desirable to Muslims ($M = 6.50$) but undesirable to Hindus ($M = 3.77$); sadness was desirable to Muslims ($M = 6.60$) but undesirable to Buddhists ($M = 4.09$). It is possible that religions cultivate emotional experiences that reinforce religious values (Vishkin, Bigman, & Tamir, in press). Thus emotions carry spiritual value to the extent that certain emotional experiences can bring people closer to their faith.

Emotions can also have intellectual value. Outside the domain of emotion, people are motivated to do things out of interest or curiosity. There is an intellectual benefit in exposure to the novel or the unknown. Just as curiosity leads people to seek out certain behaviors, perhaps it could also lead people to seek out certain emotions. Curiosity or interest might explain why people are often drawn to works of art or entertainment that elicit unpleasant emotions (e.g., Oliver & Raney, 2011; Eskine, Kacelnik, & Prinz, 2012). These ideas are theoretically compelling, and there is some evidence consistent with them. However, to date there is no direct evidence confirming that people are motivated to experience unpleasant emotions for purely intellectual reasons.

Intrinsic Motives

Emotions can be pursued as means of attaining a higher order goal (behavioral, epistemic, or eudaimonic), in which case emotion regulation is motivated by instrumental motives. However, emotions are often sought as an end in themselves. We refer to emotion regulation as driven by *intrinsic motives* when people are motivated to experience an emotion for its

immediate subjective hedonic consequences. Hedonic motives typically refer to the motivation to feel pleasure and avoid pain and, by inference, the motivation to increase pleasant and decrease unpleasant emotions. The focus on preferences for pleasure is based on the assumption that people always want to feel pleasure and avoid pain. The focus on the desire to minimize unpleasant emotions to attain pleasure is based on the assumption that unpleasant emotions are inherently unpleasant. In the discussion that follows, we probe both of these assumptions.

Punishment Motives

People reward themselves when they wish to increase the likelihood of things they attribute to themselves. For instance, to reward themselves people buy themselves gifts or treat themselves to pampering massages. However, people are also willing to punish themselves when they wish to decrease the likelihood of things they attribute to themselves. In a decision-making task, for instance, participants who felt guilty for past behavior chose to punish themselves financially (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). There are even extreme cases in which, to punish themselves, people go so far as to inflict physical harm on themselves. At least one motivation for causing physical self-injury is the desire to punish oneself (for a review, see Klonsky, 2007). Such evidence suggests that people do not always seek to increase pleasure and minimize pain. There are times when people are, in fact, motivated to experience pain as such.

Unpleasant emotions are painful, and so, at least theoretically, people may be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions as a form of self-punishment. In these cases, emotion regulation is driven by *hedonic punishment motives*. Preliminary support for this hypothesis comes from research by Joanne Wood and her colleagues. They found that individuals low in self-esteem failed to repair their unpleasant emotional experiences specifically because they believed they deserved to suffer (Wood et al., 2009). Although more empirical research is needed, such evidence suggests that at least some people may be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions as a form of self-punishment. In these cases, people use unpleasant emotions to decrease their overall hedonic balance.

Reward Motives

Because unpleasant emotions are painful and pain is a form of punishment, it seems plausible that people can be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions as a form of punishment. It seems less plausible, however, that people can be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions as a form of reward. Nonetheless, we argue that there might be cases in which, perhaps

ironically, unpleasant emotions may increase overall hedonic balance. We offer two possible cases in which people may be motivated to increase unpleasant emotions as a form of reward, either as negative reinforcers or as positive reinforcers, as detailed next.

Pleasure and pain are relative. They are always experienced in reference to another state. This is reflected in the process of habituation, in which experiences of pleasure or pain lose their hedonic impact as their frequency increases (Groves & Thompson, 1970). Because pleasure and pain are relative, less intense pain can be considered pleasant in comparison with more intense pain. This has been shown empirically in research on the temporal dynamics of pleasure. Kahneman, Frederickson, Schreiber, and Redelmeier (1993), for example, have shown that people prefer to endure longer periods of pain when the intensity of pain at the end of the period was low than to endure a shorter period of pain when the pain at the end of the period was high, even though the total amount of pain was lower. Therefore, it appears that people seek relatively less intense pain when it eliminates worse pain (see also Frederickson, 2000). Indeed, this idea originated with Epicurus himself, who argued that people may choose to avoid pleasure when, by doing so, they avoid greater pain and to accept pain when, by doing so, they attain greater pleasure (Rist, 1972).

People prefer less intense to more intense pain of the same quality. However, different types of pain may be painful to a different degree. In such cases, people may prefer one type of pain when it diminishes the likelihood of another, more subjectively intense type of pain. For instance, some have argued that individuals engage in physical self-harm partly because this allows them to escape from even less desirable emotional experiences (Chapman, Gratz, & Brown, 2006; Franklin et al., 2010; Klonsky, 2007). For example, Pip, the main character in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1869/1861), is described hitting the wall and pulling his hair after realizing that Estella saw him cry. He says: "I got rid of my injured feelings for a time by kicking them into the brewery wall, and twisting them out of my hair" (p. 70).

If people are sometimes motivated to endure physical pain to avoid worse emotional pain, perhaps there are times when people are motivated to endure one type of emotional pain to avoid worse emotional pain. In this case, unpleasant emotions may serve as *negative reinforcement*, because the experience of the unpleasant emotion diminishes a relatively more aversive emotional experience. These ideas are incorporated in the avoidance theory of worry and generalized anxiety disorder (Borkovec, Alcaine, & Bahar, 2004). According to this theory, individuals who suffer from generalized anxiety disorder are often motivated to experience worry because it helps them avoid the far worse experience of fear.

Although there is little empirical research that directly tests this idea, it

could potentially be extended to other emotional contexts. For instance, to the extent that jealousy is less painful for a person than rejection, a person who believes that the likelihood of rejection is high may be motivated to experience jealousy. Similarly, to the extent that fear is less painful than despair, a person who believes that the likelihood of despair is high may be motivated to experience fear.

These ideas have struck a chord with clinicians and some researchers of emotion regulation (Campos, Frankel, & Camras, 2004). Although they are certainly plausible, we suggest that without further empirical support they should be considered cautiously. The reason is that when applied broadly, this account of contrahedonic emotion regulation may be in danger of becoming tautological. One could argue, for instance, that any time a person seeks to increase an unpleasant emotional state the goal is ultimately to prevent worse hedonic states. For instance, perhaps when soldiers amplify their anger as they prepare to go to battle, they do so because they expect the fear of death or the sadness of defeat to be more painful. Such explanations may not always be the most parsimonious or useful. To promote the understanding of emotion regulation, we encourage researchers to consider proximal goals in emotion regulation and the direct superordinate motives that they serve.

Unpleasant emotions may be pursued as negative reinforcement. However, if people can derive pleasure from unpleasant emotions, they may be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions as a form of *positive reinforcement*. At this point, this possibility is highly speculative and, if supported, could lead one to question basic assumptions in emotion research. Nonetheless, we believe it is worth exploring at least tentatively. Could pain ever be pleasant?

Masochism is generally viewed as the tendency to derive pleasure from one's own pain (e.g., Glick & Meyers, 1988). If some people derive pleasure from physical pain, might it be that some people can also derive pleasure from emotional pain? To the extent that some people find fear, sadness, or anger pleasant to some extent, they may be motivated to experience such emotions as a form of reward. Some support for these ideas comes from research on emotions derived from art and entertainment. For instance, Andrade and Cohen (2007) found that the more intense the fear participants experienced when watching horror films, the more pleasure they reported deriving from it. Similar propositions have been made in the context of preferences for sad music (e.g., Huron, 2011; Schubert, 1996). These findings suggest that fear and sadness may be pleasant in certain contexts. Therefore, at least in these contexts they may be rewarding. It remains to be tested whether, when, and for whom personally relevant, naturally occurring unpleasant emotions elicit pleasure, and, if they do, whether they are pursued for that reason.

SHOULD PEOPLE PURSUE UNPLEASANT EMOTIONS?

Our understanding of emotion regulation has advanced dramatically in the last few decades, and this has been particularly pronounced in the study of motives in emotion regulation. Whereas research initially focused only on cases in which people want to increase pleasant emotions and decrease unpleasant ones, it is now evident that there is a broad range of motives in emotion regulation that can lead people to increase unpleasant emotions or decrease pleasant ones. In this chapter, we highlighted the main categories of motives for doing so. We also reviewed the empirical literature, which is relatively extant with respect to some motives (e.g., instrumental) but scarce with respect to others (e.g., hedonic). Although there is a growing number of studies that examine contrahedonic emotion regulation, such studies are still few and far between. There are many motives that are yet to be empirically tested, and there are many questions that await empirical examination.

Perhaps the most important question that remains is whether contrahedonic emotion regulation is harmful or perhaps useful. Ultimately, the answer depends on how these motives are pursued and on the consequences of the experiences and behaviors they give rise to. From a psychological standpoint, the question can be answered by setting clear empirical standards for psychological health. On the one hand, following the principles set forth in DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), pursuing unpleasant emotions should be considered harmful when doing so leads to "significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning." Certainly, there are cases in which the motivation to maintain or increase unpleasant emotions can lead to such impairments. For instance, if maintaining worry prevents people with generalized anxiety disorder from exposing themselves to the stimuli they fear, extinction would not be possible, and the disorder would be maintained (Borkovec et al., 2004).

On the other hand, following the principles set forth by certain theories of well-being (e.g., Seligman, 2011), pursuing unpleasant emotions should be considered useful when it leads to "engagement, positive relationships, meaning and purpose, and a sense of accomplishment." Certainly, there are cases in which the motivation to maintain unpleasant emotion can lead to such benefits. Maintaining some level of worry, for instance, can propel hard work and contribute to professional success and a sense of accomplishment (Perkins & Corr, 2005; see Perkins & Corr, Chapter 2, this volume). Therefore, we believe that contrahedonic emotion regulation can be either harmful or useful, depending on the specific case in question and on the context in which it occurs (for related arguments, see Coifman & Bonanno, 2010; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

From a philosophical standpoint, however, the question is more difficult to address. It brings us back to the debate between Aristotle and Epicurus, a debate that reverberates throughout the philosophical and scientific study of well-being. From an Aristotelian perspective, the pursuit of unpleasant emotions is desirable to the extent that it leads to excellence. From this perspective, pursuing unpleasant emotions can be right or wrong depending on its objective consequences. For instance, maintaining fear to avoid making mistakes at work may be good if it results in professional excellence. On the other hand, from an Epicurean perspective, the pursuit of unpleasant emotions is desirable to the extent that it leads to future pleasure. From this perspective, pursuing unpleasant emotions can be right or wrong depending on its subjective hedonic consequences. For instance, maintaining fear to avoid making mistakes at work is good if professional excellence leads to a sense of pride and accomplishment, but it may not be good to the extent that professional excellence comes at the cost of constant stress and worry. We leave the resolution of these issues in the trusted hands of philosophers.

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