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Short Communication

The roles of hedonic and eudaimonic motives in emotion regulation☆

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ABSTRACT

The pursuit of hedonic and eudaimonic activities is related to well-being. The current study examined whether hedonic and eudaimonic motives are associated with the strategies people choose to regulate their positive and negative emotions, which, in turn, predict well-being. Participants completed measures assessing hedonic and eudaimonic motives, down-regulation of positive emotions and up-regulation of negative emotions, and well-being. Eudaimonic motives correlated positively with down-regulation of negative emotions whereas hedonic motives correlated positively, but weakly, with up-regulation of positive emotions. Both types of motives and emotion regulation were associated with well-being, but eudaimonic motives and down-regulation of negative emotions were more strongly predictive of well-being than hedonic motives and up-regulation of positive emotions were. In addition, these associations appeared to be driven by people's choices for dysfunctional, rather than functional, strategies. In sum, the findings suggest that hedonic and eudaimonic motives may support different pathways to well-being, with eudaimonic motives and down-regulation of negative emotions playing a stronger role in well-being.

1. Introduction

Emotion regulation—changing or maintaining one's emotions—is crucial for well-being (DeSteno, Gross, & Kubzansky, 2013). Motives underlying emotion regulation can be hedonic (to feel pleasure and avoid pain) or instrumental (e.g., to promote social relationships or facilitate task performance) and people sometimes choose to experience negative affective states in order to achieve instrumental outcomes (Tamir, 2015). Emotion regulation motives might also determine the strategies we use to regulate our emotions because the use of certain strategies might lead more readily to the achievement of hedonic or instrumental goals. For example, shifting attention away from an unpleasant event to neutral or positive thoughts or activities provides rapid relief of negative affective states and therefore should satisfy hedonic motives (Sheppes & Meiran, 2007). Reappraisal (changing one's thoughts about a situation) reduces negative feelings, provided it is initiated relatively early (Sheppes & Gross, 2011), and it can facilitate performance when directly targeting performance-related stress (Jamieson, Peters, Greenwood, & Altose, 2016). In contrast, rumination (repetitively thinking about one's negative feelings and their origins) does not confer hedonic benefits (Denson, Moulds, & Grisham, 2012) and can interfere with the achievement of problem-solving and cognitive performance goals (Lyubomirsky, Tucker, Caldwell, & Berg, 1999).

Recent research found that people preferred using reappraisal and distraction to achieve hedonic goals and suppression to achieve instrumental goals (English, Lee, John, & Gross, 2016). However, the study assessed the use of only three strategies for regulation of negative emotions.

In the current study, we assessed whether individual differences in people's motives predict strategy preferences for up-regulating positive emotions and down-regulating negative emotions. Because there is, as yet, no established measure for assessing hedonic and instrumental motives, we used the Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities (HEMA) scale (Huta & Ryan, 2010). According to Tamir (2015), eudaimonic motives are one form of instrumental motive. Tamir has focused on the roles of motives in emotion regulation, but notes that the kinds of motives that influence emotion regulation may also motivate any other behaviours. Huta's work on hedonia and eudaimonia is broader in perspective, and sees hedonia and eudaimonia as motives to engage in activities with hedonic outcomes (e.g., experience pleasant feelings) or eudaimonic outcomes (e.g., develop oneself to the fullest potential), in pursuit of the "good life" (Huta, 2014). Just as people may be drawn to certain types of activities because of their hedonic and eudaimonic motives, they may also favour certain emotion regulation strategies in the service of those motives.

We assessed emotion regulation preferences with the Emotion

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Regulation Profile-Revised (ERP-R; Nelis, Quoidbach, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2011) because it includes the assessment of functional and dysfunctional strategies for the regulation of positive and negative emotions. Thus, its scope is broader than other measures that focus primarily on a few strategies (e.g., Gross & John, 2003; Spaapen, Waters, Brummer, Stopa, & Bucks, 2014) or solely on the down-regulation of negative emotions (e.g., Garnefski & Kraaij, 2007).

Our approach was primarily exploratory. The goal was to examine how individual differences in hedonic and eudaimonic motives predict up-regulation of positive emotions and down-regulation of negative emotions. In addition, we sought to replicate previous findings of an association between motives and well-being (Huta & Ryan, 2010) and emotion regulation and well-being (Nelis et al., 2011).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Two hundred and eighty-three undergraduate students were recruited from introductory psychology courses at a small university. The study received ethical approval from the university's Research Ethics Board. Participants gave informed consent and received 2% bonus credit towards their course.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Emotion Regulation Profile Revised (ERP-R; Nelis et al., 2011)

In the ERP-R participants choose their most likely response(s) to six positive and nine negative vignettes, choosing from functional responses for up-regulating positive emotions (behavioral display, savoring the moment, capitalizing, and positive mental time travel) and dysfunctional responses for up-regulating positive emotions (inhibition of emotion expression, fault finding, inattention, and negative mental time travel); and functional responses for down-regulating negative emotions (situation modification, attention reorientation, positive reappraisal, and emotion expression) and dysfunctional responses for down-regulating negative emotions (learned helplessness, rumination, substance abuse, and acting out).

Following Nelis et al. (2011), we computed separate scores for up-regulation of positive emotions ($\alpha = 0.76$) and down-regulation of negative emotions ($\alpha = 0.73$), and for functional responses to positive emotions (savoring, $\alpha = 0.82$), dysfunctional responses to positive emotions (dampening, $\alpha = 0.75$), functional responses to negative emotions (focus change, $\alpha = 0.79$), and dysfunctional responses to negative emotions (stuck negative, $\alpha = 0.81$). The ERP-R predicts emotional intelligence, emotional stability, positive affect, physical health, and mental health (Nelis et al., 2011).

2.2.2. Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities-Revised (HEMA-R; Huta & Ryan, 2010)

The HEMA-R comprises 10 items assessing hedonic (e.g., seeking relaxation, pleasure) and eudaimonic motives (e.g., doing what you believe in). Internal consistency in the current sample was good ($\alpha = 0.78$ for eudaimonic motives, $\alpha = 0.77$ for hedonic motives). Similar to Huta and Ryan (2010), we computed whether participants were leading a full life (above the 66th percentile in both eudaimonic and hedonic motives, $n = 50$), an empty life (below the 33rd percentile both eudaimonic and hedonic motives, $n = 53$), a hedonic life (above the 66th percentile in hedonic motives but below the 33rd percentile in eudaimonic motives, $n = 30$), or a eudaimonic life (above the 66th percentile in eudaimonic motives but below the 33rd percentile in hedonic motives, $n = 28$).

2.2.3. Well-being

Well-being measures comprised a battery of tests used by Huta and Ryan (2010) to assess life satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.84$), vitality ($\alpha = 0.88$), meaning in life ($\alpha = 0.88$), positive and negative affect ($\alpha = 0.81$ and $\alpha = 0.83$, respectively), elevating experiences ($\alpha = 0.88$), and carefreeness ($\alpha = 0.74$).

2.2.4. Conscientious Responders Scale (CRS) (Marjanovic, Struthers, Cribbie, & Greenglass, 2014)

The CRS comprised five instructional items embedded among other items. Participants scoring a total of 0, 1, or 2, out of a possible 5, were considered non-conscientious responders and were omitted from the analyses ($n = 18$, consistent with rates in other research, (e.g., Marjanovic et al., 2014)). Due to researcher error, the CRS and demographic information sheet were included in the questionnaires for only a subset of the participants ($n = 189$). (The 94 participants who completed questionnaires without the CRS were all retained in the final sample.)

2.2.5. Demographic information

Participants reported their age, gender, and ethnicity.

2.3. Procedures

Participants completed the measures as part of a larger study on emotion regulation. They completed the questionnaires in groups of approximately 10 to 25. Questionnaire order was counterbalanced: half the participants completed the ERP-R first, followed by the other measures, in a fixed order, and half the participants completed the ERP-R second.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analyses

Participants were female ($n = 102$), male ($n = 67$), or other ($n = 1$), with 128 participants identifying as White, 11 as Asian, two as Black, one as Brown, five as First Nations, two as Hispanic, seven as Indian, one as Middle Eastern, one as Moroccan, and 10 as mixed ethnicity. The mean age was 19.8 years (range = 16 to 63, $SD = 5.67$). One participant did not complete the ERP-R and so was excluded from analyses involving the ERP-R.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for measures of emotion regulation, motives, and well-being.

There were significant correlations between hedonic and eudaimonic motives ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$) and between regulation of positive and negative emotions ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, for all analyses including hedonic motives, we controlled for eudaimonic motives, and vice versa. For all analyses including down-regulation of negative emotions, we controlled for up-regulation of positive emotions, and vice versa.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for hedonic and eudaimonic motives, regulation of positive and negative emotions, and measures of well-being.

	M	*SD*
Hedonic motives	26.19	4.67
Eudaimonic motives	26.57	4.72
Regulation of positive emotions	5.62	5.42
Regulation of negative emotions	4.51	5.96
Life satisfaction	18.50	4.75
Vitality	24.47	6.59
Positive affect	19.57	3.63
Negative affect	15.97	5.67
Carefreeness	22.57	5.77
Elevated	51.59	12.64
Self-connected	25.33	4.79
Meaning	19.96	4.42