

## Emotion Goals: How Their Content, Structure, and Operation Shape Emotion Regulation

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Much of human behavior is purposeful, or goal directed (Bandura, 1986; Carver & Scheier, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007; Gollwitzer, 1990; Mischel, Cantor, & Feldman, 1996). Goals can target our appearance (e.g., to be thin), our mind (e.g., to be smart), and our behavior (e.g., to spend more time with family or to work harder). As we argue in this chapter, some of our most important goals target emotions (e.g., to be happy). A *goal* is a “cognitive representation of a desired endpoint” (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007, p. 491). Therefore, we define an *emotion goal* as the cognitive representation of a particular emotional state that is the desired endpoint. Although any goal may indirectly involve desired emotional endpoints (e.g., “I want to buy a car in order to feel happy as a result”), we focus on goals that directly target emotions as the desired endpoint (e.g., “I want to feel happy”). Emotion goals are a specific type of affect goal. Whereas affect goals target states of pleasure or pain, more generally (e.g., “I want to feel pleasant”), emotion goals target specific emotional states (e.g., “I want to feel joyful, proud, or amused”). Therefore, in this chapter, we distinguish *nonaffect goals* (i.e., goals that do not involve affective states as the direct desired endpoint), *affect goals* (i.e., goals that involve pleasure or pain as the direct desired endpoint), and *emotion*

*goals* (i.e., goals that involve specific emotional states as the direct desired endpoint), and focus mainly on the latter.

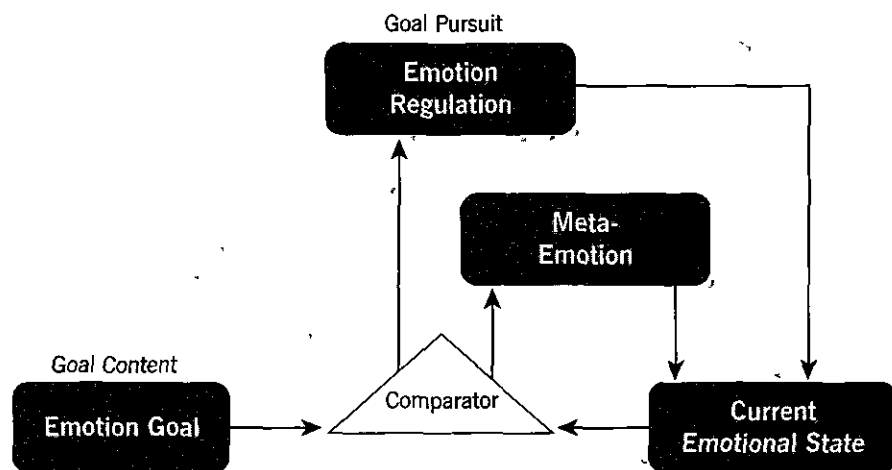
It follows from this definition that people’s emotion goals are foundational to emotion regulation. In fact, the activation of an emotion goal is necessary for emotion regulation (Gross, this volume; Mauss, Bunge, & Gross, 2007). Emotion goals determine whether people engage in emotion regulation, which emotions they attempt to regulate, when they cease their emotion regulatory efforts, and people’s satisfaction with their emotion regulation attempts. Thus, understanding emotion goals has crucial implications for understanding emotion regulation and its effects on well-being.

To date, research on emotion regulation has focused on understanding different emotion regulation strategies and their outcomes (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012). As a function of this focus, research to date has examined the “how” (e.g., What strategies do people use to regulate their emotions?) more than the “why” and “what” of emotion regulation (e.g., When do people decide to regulate an emotion? What emotional states do people want to attain?). The goal framework we outline here emphasizes the importance of understanding not only the “how” but also the “why” and “what” of emotion regulation.

## A Goal Framework for Emotion Regulation

Although relatively little research has directly examined emotions as goals, there is ample research on goals and self-regulation in general (e.g., Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 2000; Custers & Aarts, 2010). Applying this body of knowledge to the emotion domain could greatly advance the understanding of emotion regulation (cf. Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Gable, 2011; Koole, van Dillen, & Sheppes, 2011; Webb, Schweiger Gallo, Miles, Gollwitzer, & Sheeran, 2012). People's goals determine their actions as they attempt to decrease perceived discrepancies between current and desired states. As Figure 22.1 illustrates, when applied to emotions, this idea can help us understand what determines the initiation and course of emotion regulation. More specifically, perceived discrepancies between current emotional states (e.g., "I feel sad") and emotion goals ("I want to feel less sad") initiate emotion regulation, which is set in motion to bring current emotional states closer to desired emotion states. Thus, the emotion goals people hold determine whether or not they engage in emotion

regulation, which emotions they attempt to regulate, and in which direction (i.e., increase or decrease). In this chapter we discuss emotion goals, building on available knowledge about goal pursuit. We organize this chapter around three features of goals that have been highlighted in research on goal pursuit (Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007): their content, their hierarchical structure, and their operation. First, we consider the content of emotion goals. We examine what emotion goals people adopt and highlight two factors that determine these goals: hedonic benefits (i.e., greater pleasure and less pain) and nonhedonic benefits (e.g., to prepare an organism for fight) of particular emotions. Second, we consider the structure of emotion goals. Multiple goals, including emotion and nonemotion ones, coexist at any given point in time and are hierarchically organized. We consider possible features of this organization and their implications. Third, we consider the operation of emotion goals that unfolds as people regulate their emotions, distinguishing relatively automatic from deliberate types of emotion regulation. Finally, we highlight the goal framework's implications for understanding the links between emotion regulation and well-being.<sup>1</sup>



**FIGURE 22.1.** Hypothesized operation of emotion goals. Perceived discrepancy between current emotional states and emotion goals initiates and directs emotion regulation, which influences current emotional states. The evaluation of the difference between current emotional states and emotion goals is emotional in nature (e.g., contentment when discrepancy decreases, distress when discrepancy increases). We therefore refer to the output of this evaluation as meta-emotion.

## The Content of Emotion Goals: Emotions as Desired States

What emotion goals do people have and what determines these goals? Because all creatures strive to attain pleasure and avoid pain, and because emotions are pleasant or painful subjective states, emotion goals are often determined by the immediate hedonic benefits of emotions. For example, people may be motivated to increase happiness because it is pleasant, and they may be motivated to decrease fear because it is unpleasant. Pleasant emotions generally are preferred to unpleasant emotions by people from different cultures (Diener, 2000; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006) and with different personality dispositions (Rusting & Larsen, 1995).

The immediate hedonic benefits of emotions are a powerful determinant of emotion goals. However, they are not the sole determinant. Functional theories of emotions hold that emotions serve to promote a broad array of nonhedonic benefits (Frijda, 1986; Nesse & Ellsworth, 2009). According to the *instrumental approach to emotion regulation* (Bonanno, 2001; Parrott, 1993; Tamir, 2009), people may be motivated to experience emotions to attain either hedonic or nonhedonic benefits. When hedonic benefits are prioritized, people are motivated to experience pleasant emotions and avoid unpleasant ones. However, when nonhedonic benefits are prioritized, people may be motivated to experience either pleasant or unpleasant emotions, depending on their instrumental implications (Tamir, 2009).

Emotions can offer at least three types of nonhedonic benefits. First, emotions can offer performance benefits. By engaging various physiological, cognitive, and motivational processes, emotions can change how effectively we deal with situational demands (Frijda, 1986). Second, emotions can have epistemic benefits. They provide us with important information regarding our state in the world (Clore, Gasper, & Garvin, 2001). Third, emotions can carry cultural benefits. In group contexts, emotions signal group membership and support of cultural values (Keltner & Haidt, 1999).

We believe that people may be motivated to experience emotions to attain any one of these benefits. First, emotions can orient

behavior to deal with situational demands as effectively as possible (Frijda, 1986). For instance, joy may promote creativity (Fredrickson, 2001). Therefore, when performance is likely to benefit from increased creativity, joy might be useful for performance. People may be motivated to experience an emotion to attain its performance-related benefits. In support of this hypothesis, we have recently shown that people want to experience emotions they believe would promote their performance (Tamir, Salerno, Rhodes, & Schreier, 2012). In a series of studies, we led participants to expect anger to be either useful, irrelevant, or harmful for performance on an upcoming task. Participants were motivated to increase the experience of anger when they expected it be useful for performance, even though it was unpleasant to experience. This effect was obtained even when beliefs about usefulness were manipulated outside of conscious awareness. These findings demonstrate that emotion goals can be determined by the expected benefits of emotions for performance.

Second, emotions provide people with important information about themselves and their state in the world (Clore et al., 2001). Such information can support or conflict with core assumptions about who we are and what the world is like. People are generally motivated to preserve these core assumptions (Swann & Schroeder, 1995). Just as people seek feedback that maintains their self-image (Swann & Schroeder, 1995), people may be motivated to experience emotions that maintain their self-image (i.e., that have epistemic benefits). In support of this proposition, Wood and her colleagues showed that people with low self esteem are motivated to maintain sad feelings, because such feelings are familiar to them and because they reinforce their low sense of personal value (Wood, Heimpel, Manwell, & Whittington, 2009).

Third, emotions can reinforce one's commitment to and investment in particular cultural values. For instance, pride is tied to the value of personal achievement, whereas shame is tied to the value of social harmony (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). Because cultures generally seek to preserve specific values, they prescribe certain emotions as more normative than others (Eid & Diener, 2001). In support of this notion,

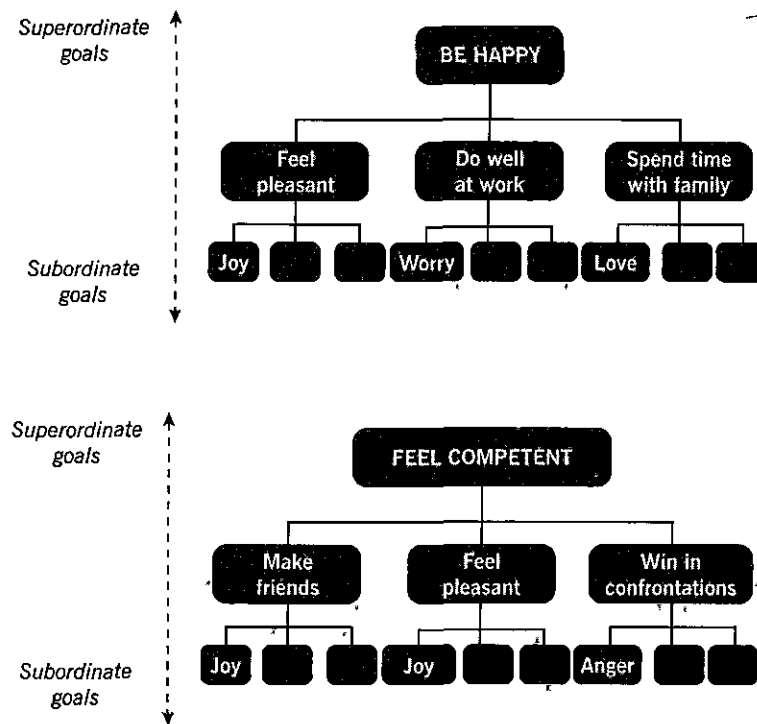
Tsai and her colleagues (2006) have shown that cultures vary in the extent to which they value different emotional states. Whereas pleasant high-arousal states are more highly valued in individualistic cultures, pleasant low-arousal states are more highly valued in collectivistic cultures. Thus, beyond emotions' hedonic benefits, emotion goals may be determined by values that are prevalent in people's cultural context.

As the research reviewed here demonstrates, people are often motivated to experience emotions for their immediate hedonic benefits, but they can also be motivated to experience emotions for their performance-related benefits, epistemic benefits, or cultural benefits. This list of determinants of emotion goals is not exhaustive (for a more complete list, see Tamir & Bigman, in press).

But it demonstrates that people can be motivated to experience almost any emotion. Thus, and perhaps surprisingly, emotion goals are not limited to pleasant emotions.

### The Structure of Emotion Goals

Up to this point, we have treated emotion goals as though they are singular, isolated entities. However, people pursue many different goals at any given moment. As Figure 22.2 illustrates, goals can be ordered hierarchically according to their importance, centrality, and abstraction, with some goals assuming superordinate and others assuming subordinate positions (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007). To fully understand emotion goals, it is important to



**FIGURE 22.2.** Hypothesized organization of emotion goals. Multiple goals are hierarchically organized, with some goals assuming superordinate and others assuming subordinate positions. Goals can be emotional or nonaffective in nature, and they can be compatible or in conflict with one another. As the examples illustrate, goal structure can be characterized by multifinality and equifinality. The goal of "joy" may serve the superordinate goal to be happy or to feel competent (multifinality). The superordinate goal to feel competent can be subserved by either joy or anger (equifinality). Conflict can arise when one goal (e.g., feel anger) subserves one superordinate goal (feel competent) but not another (be happy).

examine them within the hierarchical structure of a broader goal system.

Goal systems can be characterized by multifinality and equifinality (Kruglanski et al., 2002). *Multifinality* refers to the idea that a given subordinate goal may serve multiple superordinate goals (see Figure 22.2). In the context of emotion goals, this implies that a subordinate emotion goal (e.g., to feel joy) may serve superordinate affect goals (e.g., to feel pleasant) as well as superordinate non-affect goals (e.g., to make friends). *Equifinality* refers to the idea that a given superordinate goal may be subserved by multiple subordinate goals (see Figure 22.2). In the context of emotion goals, this implies that a superordinate goal (e.g., to be happy) may be served by various affect (e.g., to feel good, to feel less bad) and nonaffect (e.g., to do well at work, to spend time with family) goals.

The pursuit of superordinate goals can automatically activate related subordinate goals (e.g., Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007). Adapting this principle to the study of emotion goals; we have recently shown that emotion goals can be activated by priming related superordinate goals (Tamir, Ford, & Ryan, 2013). Building on the idea that anger can impair collaboration, we showed that participants who were nonconsciously primed with the goal of collaboration became less motivated to experience anger before a social interaction. These findings could not be explained by concurrent emotional experiences and demonstrate that emotion goals can operate in the service of superordinate nonaffect goals.

Multifinality and equifinality of goals can thus facilitate goal pursuit because they offer multiple ways to achieve goals. However, as Figure 22.2 illustrates, the multifinality of goals can also give rise to goal conflict when subordinate goals simultaneously promote the pursuit of some superordinate goals and impair the pursuit of others. This may be particularly salient in the context of emotion goals, because emotions have both hedonic and nonhedonic implications. Pleasant emotions can either promote or impair the attainment of superordinate nonaffect goals (e.g., joy might help people make friends but also lead them to spend less time studying for an exam). However, pleasant emotions generally promote the attainment of superordinate affect goals (i.e., they feel good).

Thus, goal conflict may be less likely when a pleasant emotion promotes both affect and nonaffect superordinate goals, and more likely when a pleasant emotion promotes an affect goal but impairs a nonaffect goal.

Goal conflict may be particularly likely when pursuing unpleasant emotions: Like pleasant emotions, unpleasant emotions can either promote or impair the attainment of superordinate nonaffect goals (e.g., anger might help people win a fight but it might also impair friendships). However, unlike pleasant emotions, unpleasant emotions often impair the attainment of superordinate affect goals (i.e., they feel bad). Therefore, the pursuit of unpleasant emotions depends on the relative strength of competing superordinate nonaffect and affect goals. People may be more likely to pursue subordinate unpleasant emotion goals when superordinate nonaffect goals become salient, and such pursuits likely involve some degree of goal conflict.

These ideas lie at the heart of the instrumental approach to emotion regulation (Tamir, 2009). According to this approach, people can pursue either pleasant or unpleasant emotion goals, to the extent that such goals serve salient superordinate goals. For instance, to the extent that anger promotes successful confrontation (e.g., Frijda, 1986), people may be motivated to feel angry when it is important for them to win a fight. In such cases, people would be motivated to experience unpleasant emotions, despite the immediate hedonic cost of doing so.

There is now a body of empirical evidence in support of these ideas. For instance, Tamir, Mitchell, and Gross (2008) tested whether people wanted to increase their anger when preparing for confrontation. Participants were given salient confrontational or non-confrontational goals (e.g., kill enemies or build an empire in a virtual computer game). To assess emotion goals, participants indicated the extent to which they preferred to engage in various emotion-inducing activities, including those that were neutral, exciting, and anger-inducing. Although participants acknowledged that the anger-inducing activities would be unpleasant, they nonetheless preferred to engage in them when pursuing the confrontational, but not the nonconfrontational, goals. A similar pattern was found in an examination of people's prefer-

ences for anger before a face-to-face negotiation task (Tamir & Ford, 2012b). Participants who thought they were preparing for a confrontational negotiation showed stronger preferences for anger before the negotiation. In contrast, participants who thought they were preparing for a collaborative negotiation showed weaker preferences for anger and stronger preferences for happiness. Such preferences, in turn, were fully mediated by the belief that anger would promote or impair successful performance. These studies suggest that emotion goals can subserve nonaffect goals, and that people pursue unpleasant emotions when they expect them to subserve salient superordinate goals.

Interestingly, the relative importance of affect and nonaffect goals may shift systematically across the lifespan. Specifically, the importance of affect goals seems to change with age, with affect goals gaining in relative importance over nonaffect goals (Charles & Carstensen, this volume; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). If people are likely to pursue unpleasant emotions when they subserve superordinate nonaffect goals, unpleasant emotion goals should be more prevalent in younger than in older adults. Indeed, wanting to maintain or increase unpleasant emotions and decrease pleasant emotions is more prevalent in younger than in older adults (Riediger, Schmiedek, Wagner, & Lindenberger, 2009).

In this section, we have discussed the structure of emotion goals, highlighting the fact that emotion goals operate within a broader goal system, which includes both affect and nonaffect goals that are hierarchically organized. The features of this organization have important implications for understanding how emotion goals interact with one another and with other types of goals. In the next section, we focus on the operation of emotion goals.

### **The Operation of Emotion Goals: Automatic and Deliberate Emotion Regulation**

As illustrated in Figure 22.1, according to feedback, or cybernetic, models of self-regulation, people initiate self-regulatory attempts when they perceive discrepancies between their current state and their goal

(Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 2000). When applied to emotion goals, these models direct our attention to an important element of emotion regulation. Goals can be represented outside of conscious awareness, as well as consciously (Custers & Aarts, 2010; Fishbach & Ferguson, 2007). People pursue conscious goals deliberately, whereas they pursue nonconscious goals relatively effortlessly and with little or no conscious awareness (automatically). It follows that emotion goals can set in motion relatively automatic as well as deliberate emotion regulation attempts. Research shows that nonemotion goals, such as achievement and cooperation, can be pursued automatically (e.g., Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001). Might emotion goals also be pursued in an automatic manner, with little effort and outside of conscious awareness?

While it has long been hypothesized that people can engage in emotion regulation unconsciously (Freud, 1936), only recently has empirical research begun to explore this possibility (see Gyurak & Etkin, this volume; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2004; Gyurak, Gross, & Etkin, 2011; Mauss, Bunge, et al., 2007). To examine individual differences in automatic emotion regulation, we developed a variant of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) that estimates implicit evaluation of emotion control versus expression, the Emotion Regulation IAT (ER-IAT; Mauss, Evers, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2006, Study 1). We reasoned that people who implicitly evaluate emotion control positively would tend to engage in automatic emotion regulation (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Custers & Aarts, 2005).

To examine how automatic emotion regulation predicts emotional responding we assessed whether ER-IAT scores were associated with responses to a laboratory anger provocation (Mauss et al., 2006, Study 2). While most participants became angry during the provocation, those with greater ER-IAT scores (i.e., those who implicitly evaluated emotion control more positively) reported relatively less anger experience. In addition, and in line with the notion that regulation attempts had taken place, they exhibited a challenge cardiovascular activation pattern, characterized by greater

cardiac output and lower total peripheral resistance (cf. Tomaka, Blascovich, Kelsey, & Leitten, 1993). The relative reduction of anger experience appeared to have happened without conscious effort, because associations between ER-IAT scores and anger responding held when researchers controlled for self-reported effortful emotion control. In summary, these findings are consistent with the idea that people who implicitly valued emotion control tended to regulate their emotion automatically and experienced less anger.

To examine the possible causal role of automatic emotion regulation, we (Mauss, Cook, & Gross, 2007) manipulated nonconscious emotion regulation goals by priming emotion control versus emotion expression with a sentence-unscrambling task (Srull & Wyer, 1979). Participants primed with emotion control in the laboratory responded with less anger to a subsequent anger provocation than did participants primed with emotion expression. The fact that participants were not aware of the purpose of the priming task suggests that these effects were not conscious. These conclusions were confirmed in a study in which participants were either explicitly instructed or primed outside of awareness to engage in emotion regulation. Participants in the priming condition achieved the same decrease in physiological reactivity to an anxiety induction as those explicitly instructed to regulate their emotion (Williams, Bargh, Nocera, & Gray, 2009).

Work on implementation intentions also suggests that emotion regulation can unfold automatically. An *implementation intention* is a plan that links situations to specific goal-directed behaviors (Gollwitzer, 1999), such as "After I get up in the morning, I will run 2 miles." By putting goal-directed behavior under the control of the situation in this way, the execution of the goal is removed from effortful and conscious control and rendered relatively automatic (Webb & Sheeran, 2007). Recent research suggests that implementation intentions can be used in the service of emotion regulation (for a review, see Webb, Schweiger Gallo, et al., 2012). For example, Schweiger-Gallo, Keil, McCulloch, Rockstroh, and Gollwitzer (2009) showed spider phobics images that included spiders. Participants were given

no instructions, were asked to form a goal intention ("I will not get frightened!"), or were asked to form an implementation intention ("If I see a spider, then I will remain calm and relaxed!"). Afterward, when viewing spider pictures, participants who formed implementation intentions reported less negative affect and exhibited less physiological arousal compared to both other groups. This research further supports the idea that emotion regulation can take place without conscious awareness.

It appears, then, that the nonconscious pursuit of emotion goals may be just as effective as the conscious pursuit of emotion goals. Unlike conscious goal pursuit, however, nonconscious goal pursuit "eats up" less cognitive resources and is less effortful (Custers & Aarts, 2010; Fishbach, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2003). Automatic emotion regulation, therefore, could help people cope with powerful negative situations without conscious effort. Given how important emotion regulation is to psychological health (Rottenberg & Johnson, 2007), the intriguing possibility arises that the automatic pursuit of emotion goals might play a beneficial role in psychological health. A recent study tested whether this might be the case (DeWall et al., 2011). It showed that after social exclusion, participants low in depressive symptoms or high in self-esteem automatically (without conscious intent) initiated the up-regulation of positive emotion. Similar findings have been obtained for individuals with healthy traits such as high action orientation or secure attachment (for review, see Koole & Rothermund, 2011). These findings suggest that automatic emotion regulation may be part of the *psychological immune system*: in healthy individuals a threat sets in motion an automatic emotion regulation process that leads to increased positive and decreased negative emotions.

This does not imply that automatic emotion regulation is *always* associated with beneficial outcomes. After all, defensiveness and repression are based on implicitly represented goals, yet they are associated with negative outcomes (Freud, 1936; Vaillant, 1977; Weinberger, 1995). The goal framework may help explain when automatic emotion regulation is beneficial versus harmful. As we discuss in the next section, automatic

emotion regulation may be beneficial to the extent that people (1) use effective regulation strategies and (2) pursue adaptive emotion goals (Hopp, Troy, & Mauss, 2011).

### **Implications for Well-Being**

The goal framework leads to several novel predictions regarding when and why emotion regulation is associated with healthy versus unhealthy outcomes. Next, we examine two particularly important sets of predictions and empirical evidence to support them.

#### ***Emotion Goals and Emotion Regulation Strategies***

People can use a multitude of emotion regulation strategies to attain emotion goals. For example, to feel less angry, Person A might think of something else whereas Person B may vent. The study of emotion regulation strategies and their relative adaptiveness (i.e., to what extent different types of emotion regulation strategies are associated with greater well-being) has paid relatively little attention to the emotion goals people pursue. We argue that it is fruitful to examine emotion regulation strategies in the context of emotion goals. The goal framework offers three specific hypotheses. First, the adaptiveness of emotion regulation strategies should depend on the extent to which they help a person achieve their emotion goals (i.e., to the extent that they are effective). Second, the adaptiveness of emotion regulation strategies should depend on not only their inherent features but also the extent to which they are used in a goal-sensitive, flexible manner. Third, the adaptiveness of emotion regulation strategies should depend on the extent to which they are used in the service of adaptive emotion goals.

Much research has focused on classifying the various emotion regulation strategies that exist (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Koole, 2009; Totterdell & Parkinson, 1999). One of the most prominent models distinguishes different emotion regulation strategies based on the stage in the emotion process in which they intervene (Gross & Thompson, 2007). According to this model, emotion regulation strategies can be characterized depending

on whether they target the emotional situation, a person's attention to it, or appraisal of it (antecedent-focused) versus a later component of the emotional response, such as emotion-expressive behaviors (response-focused).

Which emotion regulation strategies are most effective for attaining emotion goals (e.g., decrease anger)? Antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies should be relatively more effective at altering emotional responses because they have the advantage of a preventive strategy: they take place before the emotional response fully unfolds and thus should be more effective than response-focused emotion regulation strategies. A recent meta-analysis of 190 studies is broadly consistent with this hypothesis (Webb, Miles, et al., 2012). Are the most effective emotion regulation strategies also the most adaptive? Research comparing antecedent-focused emotion regulation (i.e., cognitive appraisal) to response-focused emotion regulation (i.e., expressive suppression) suggests that, indeed, on average reappraisal is associated with better psychological health (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006; Gross & John, 2003; Troy, Wilhelm, Shallcross, & Mauss, 2010). Thus, there is some evidence that some of the most effective emotion regulation strategies are also relatively adaptive.

Importantly, from a goal perspective, the adaptiveness of an emotion regulation strategy should be determined by its inherent properties, but also by how flexibly it is used to support an individual's changing emotion goals (Bonanno & Burton, in press; Brandtstaedter & Rothermund, 2002; Cheng, 2001; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Findings in support of this notion have been obtained from daily diary studies in which participants reported on stressful life events and how many different coping strategies they used (Cheng, 2001). Flexibility was operationalized as participants' ability to vary coping strategies with the demand of the stressful event. Participants demonstrating greater flexibility exhibited greater well-being compared to participants who adhered more rigidly to particular coping strategies, regardless of the particular type of coping strategy.

Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Westphal, and Coifman (2004) tested a related idea by deriving a laboratory measure of how well



participants were able to match their emotion regulation efforts to changing goals (either increase or decrease emotional expression). Participants who were better able to regulate their emotions in pursuit of their concurrent goals reported greater psychological health after the September 11, 2001 attacks (Bonanno et al., 2004) and greater well-being after high life stress (Westphal, Seivert, & Bonanno, 2010).

From a goal framework, emotion regulation strategies are therefore adaptive to the extent that they help people attain their concurrent emotion goals. However, the adaptiveness of emotion regulation more generally depends on which emotion goals people are trying to achieve. If people hold maladaptive emotion goals, even the most effective and flexible emotion regulation strategies should not be adaptive. Which emotion goals are adaptive? Perhaps those that are sensitive to situational demands and are consistent with superordinate goals and basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Troy, Shallcross, & Mauss, in press) (e.g., increase joy in the service of successfully collaborating with others, and increase anger in the service of successfully confronting others). Consistent with these ideas, we found that the more people wanted to feel angry and the less they wanted to feel happy in confrontational situations, the higher their psychological well-being. The converse pattern was found the more angry and the less happy people wanted to feel in collaborative situations (Tamir & Ford, 2012a).

In summary, the goal framework can help us understand when and why emotion regulation strategies are adaptive or maladaptive. Emotion regulation strategies are adaptive to the extent that they help individuals attain their emotion goals, are used in a goal-sensitive and flexible manner, and are used in the context of adaptive emotion goals.

### **Feedback Processing: Emotion Goals, Evaluation, and Meta-Emotion**

Emotion regulation does not operate in a linear, one-directional fashion. Rather, as Figure 22.1 illustrates, it involves recursive feedback loops. Feedback models of self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 2000) propose that people monitor the discrepancy between their current state and the desired end state,

as well as the progress of their efforts to decrease discrepancies between the two. Importantly, the output of this monitoring process is emotional in nature. When people progress faster than expected toward their goal, they feel positively (e.g., contentment); when people progress more slowly than expected they feel negatively (e.g., distress). Because these emotional states are about an emotional state, they can be referred to as meta-emotion. Considering emotion regulation in the context of this feedback loop leads to two interesting predictions. First, decreasing the discrepancy between current and desired state should yield better well-being, whether the discrepancy reduction occurs by changing one's current emotional state or by changing one's desired emotional state. Conversely, an increased discrepancy between current and desired state should yield negative outcomes, whether it is due to one's current or desired emotional state. Second, meta-emotion may play an important role in the effects of emotion regulation on well-being.

The hypothesis that adjusting one's goals (in addition to or instead of one's current state) plays an important role in well-being has been supported in the context of coping with stressors (e.g., Brandtstaedter & Rothermund, 2002; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). This research suggests that goal adjustment (e.g., failing to disengage from impossible goals) is at least as important to well-being as the effective pursuit of goals. This principle also appears to apply to emotion goals. In one experimental study, researchers manipulated participants' emotion goals by instructing them to make themselves feel as happy as possible while they listened to emotionally ambiguous music (i.e., their desired emotional end state was set to a highly positive state). In line with the idea that unrealistic emotion goals can lead to negative emotional outcomes, participants in this condition were less happy compared to participants who were not given an emotion goal (Schooler, Ariely, & Loewenstein, 2003). In another study, researchers manipulated emotion goals more subtly by presenting to participants a sham newspaper article discussing the advantages of happiness. Participants induced in this way to assume a happiness goal were less happy than control participants after subse-

quently watching a happy film clip (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011, Study 2). This research converges to support the hypothesis that holding unrealistic emotion goals (e.g., high levels of happiness) can lead to decreased positive emotion.

Do people who chronically hold unrealistic emotion goals experience more negative well-being outcomes? We examined this question by measuring the extent to which participants held the goal to be happy, with items such as "Feeling happy is extremely important to me." On average, the more participants valued happiness, the lower their emotional well-being (Mauss et al., 2011, Study 1), and the higher their likelihood of being diagnosed with major depressive disorder (Ford, Shallcross, Mauss, Floerke, & Gruber, under review). These studies make the point that one's emotion goals play an important role in well-being and psychological health.

The perspective that adjusting one's emotion goals is one important avenue to well-being brings insight to a puzzling area of research: that of emotional acceptance. *Acceptance* is defined as the process of non-judgmentally engaging with negative emotions (Teasdale et al., 2000). Correlational and experimental research on acceptance has consistently found it to be negatively correlated with negative emotion and mood disorder (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006; Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006; Roemer, Salters, Raffa, & Orsillo, 2005; Shallcross, Troy, Boland, & Mauss, 2010). The inverse relationship between acceptance and negative affect may appear paradoxical at first: How can *engaging with* negative emotions be associated with *less* negative emotion? The goal perspective suggests one solution to this apparent paradox: Acceptance may involve more realistic emotion goals, which in turn lead to greater well-being. Well-being, therefore, is a function of not only effective emotion regulation but also having attainable emotion goals. Or, in the words of the adage, "Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have."

As there are with nonemotion goals, there are likely costs for inflexibly pursuing emotion goals that are difficult to attain. However, unlike nonemotion goals, because it leads to meta-emotion, the pursuit of unat-

tainable *emotion* goals can be self-defeating. For instance, in the study discussed earlier (Mauss et al., 2011, Study 2), compared to participants in the control condition, participants who were led to pursue happiness goals ended up feeling more disappointed in their emotional state, which resulted in less happiness. Interestingly, these effects were only observed for participants who watched a happy film clip, not for those who watched a sad film clip. This may be because in relatively negative situations (e.g., when watching a sad film clip), people have a good reason *not* to feel happy, and are less likely to feel disappointed if they fail to meet their happiness goal. Conversely, in relatively positive situations (e.g., when watching a happy film clip), people have every reason to feel happy and ironically end up feeling disappointed when they do not. Whereas the pursuit of nonemotion goals influences behavior and results in emotions, the pursuit of emotion goals influences emotions and results in emotions. Thus, when pursuing emotion goals, meta-emotional experiences can interfere with successful goal pursuit.

In summary, the goal framework highlights the fact that people's well-being is determined by not only how they pursue emotion goals but the goals themselves. Setting exceedingly positive emotion goals or failing to adjust emotion goals can, ironically, lead to less positive emotion and to lower well-being. These effects are due in part to people's meta-emotion (how they feel about their feelings).

## Conclusions and Future Directions

In this chapter, we argue that it is crucial to consider emotion regulation in the context of the emotions people want to feel. Understanding the content of emotion goals helps us better understand the initiation and course of emotion regulation; understanding the structure of emotion goals helps us better understand how emotion and other goals interact with one another in goal hierarchies; and understanding the operation of emotion goals helps us better understand the emotion regulation process.

Taking a goal perspective can offer answers to questions such as the following:

When do people regulate their emotions? How do multiple, potentially conflicting goals interact with one another? What role do automatic processes play in the pursuit of emotion goals? How do emotion goals and pursuit of them affect well-being? In addition to guiding us to approach these novel questions, the proposed goal framework helps us critically examine some core assumptions in research on emotion regulation. For example, one core assumption is that people want to feel pleasant emotions and avoid unpleasant emotions. However, the goal framework challenges this assumption (Tamir, 2009; Tamir & Ford, 2009). Positioning emotion goals in a broader goal hierarchy leads us to predict that individuals will seek more unpleasant emotions in pursuit of superordinate nonaffect goals.

Another core assumption in research on emotion regulation is that there is something inherently beneficial or harmful about particular emotion regulation strategies. The goal framework suggests that emotion regulation and its implications for well-being can be fully understood only in the context of a person's broader goal hierarchy (Bonanno & Burton, in press; Thompson, 2011; Troy et al., in press).

While some research has already adopted a goal framework in emotion regulation, more work needs to be done on each of the three domains of emotion goals on which we have focused (i.e., their content, structure, and operation). In terms of the content of emotion goals, it will be important to develop a systematic approach to measuring these goals, whether they are transient or more chronically held. More work is necessary especially to measure implicitly represented emotion goals (those not readily accessible to introspection). In addition, important open questions remain about what biological, psychological, and cultural factors shape people's emotion goals.

In terms of the structure of emotion goals, it will be important to obtain a systematic and comprehensive understanding of how emotion and nonaffect goals interact with one another, and to identify the implications of different types of goal conflict. For example, how malleable are the associations between subordinate and superordinate emotion and nonaffect goals? What are the short- and long-term implications of conflict

among goals? Of particular interest here might be conflict among explicit (relatively conscious) and implicit (relatively unconscious) emotion goals. Understanding conflict among explicit and implicit goals has been fruitful in domains such as achievement motives (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grässman, 1998); it would be promising in the domain of emotion goals as well.

In terms of the operation of emotion goals, there is still much to learn about their nonconscious representation and automatic pursuit. For instance, what gives rise to individual differences in automatic emotion regulation? What are its costs and benefits? In addition, the goal framework makes several predictions about emotion goals' implications for well-being. For example, it implies that healthy functioning hinges on the selection of appropriate emotion goals, interactions among emotion regulation strategies and emotion goals, and the meta-emotions that arise as a function of emotion goal pursuit. These features and implications of emotion goals have yet to be fully explored.

#### Note

1. Our review is selective. We do not cover concepts such as emotional effects of goals and goal pursuit (e.g., feelings of disappointment when not attaining a nonemotion goal, positive evaluation of goals) or goals that are infused with a lot of emotion (e.g., a goal about which one feels passionate). While these phenomena are important, they are distinct from the focus of this chapter.

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