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Approach-Avoidance Goals and Well-Being:

One Size Does Not Fit All

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One Size Does Not Fit All

April and Avalon are equally committed to their goals and work equally hard to achieve them. Their goals, however, are quite distinct. April wants to become a regional manager and works hard to climb up the promotion ladder. Avalon wants to keep her job and works hard not to lose her position as a regional manager. Whereas April is driven by an approach goal (i.e., get promoted), Avalon is driven by an avoidance goal (i.e., not get demoted). Do these distinct goals carry any implications for well-being? Are certain goals more conducive to well-being than others? Are some goals more conducive to the well-being of one person than another? These and related questions are explored in the present chapter.

Since the early philosophical discussions of well-being, it has been conceptualized from two distinct perspectives -- one emphasizing hedonic pleasure and one emphasizing meaning in life. Aristippus, for instance, argued that the purpose of life is to maximize pleasure. Indeed, the hedonic perspective assumes that well-being is enhanced by experiences of pleasure and impaired by experiences of pain. Current hedonic approaches emphasize pleasures of the mind and the body, as indicated primarily by momentary experiences of pleasant (vs. unpleasant) affect (e.g., Kahneman, 1999).

Aristotle, on the other hand, argued that true happiness is a function of virtue. Thus, an alternative perspective to well-being assumes that it is dependent upon the experience of meaning and value in life (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989). That is, meaning involves a unified purpose in life that is consistent with one's values. According

to this approach, well-being is enhanced by the experience of meaning in life and impaired when life experiences are not personally meaningful or valuable to the individual.

These two approaches to well-being highlight pleasure and meaning in life as two, conceptually distinct, sources of well-being. Pleasure and meaning, however, are often related to one another. Experiences of pleasure and pain can make events meaningful. For instance, a student may feel more drawn and personally committed to a topic taught in class, if she enjoys the lectures. In addition, the extent to which an event is personally meaningful can determine the hedonic consequences of the event. For instance, doing well on an exam is likely more pleasant and rewarding, if the exam covers a topic the student views as personally meaningful (see Emmons, 1996).

Pleasure and meaning in life are, nevertheless, conceptually distinct sources of well-being that can have different underpinnings and different implications. In exploring well-being, therefore, it is important to acknowledge both pleasure and meaning in life as critical determinants. Accordingly, in the present context, we define well-being as involving frequent experiences of pleasant affect, infrequent experiences of unpleasant affect and a sense of meaning in life. This approach to well-being is reflected, to some extent, in research on subjective well-being, where meaning in life is an important contributor to life satisfaction (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003).

The present chapter reviews the potential implications of approach and avoidance goals for well-being. In the first part of the chapter, we review the general implications of approach and avoidance goals for well-being. We begin by explaining why motivation features so prominently in accounts of well-being. We then review the implications of

approach and avoidance goals for affective experiences and meaning in life, focusing on the potential contributions of the process and the outcome of goal pursuit. In the second part of the chapter, we argue that the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being can be fully understood only when examined from an individual difference perspective. In particular, we propose that the extent to which approach and avoidance goals are beneficial for well-being may depend on the desirability and feasibility of such goals for the individual.

Motivation is Central to Well-Being

Motivation is arguably one of the most important building blocks of well-being (Diener, 1984). In part, this is because motivation is linked to pleasure and pain as well as to meaning in life. As noted earlier, affect-based approaches view momentary pleasant and unpleasant affective experiences as critical determinants of well-being (Kubovy, 1999; Kahneman, 1999). Momentary affective experiences, in turn, arise in response to events that are motivationally relevant (Frijda, 1988).

Pleasant feelings signal an event that promotes the individual's goals. For instance, when an individual aspires to be a good student, doing well on an exam is likely to result in pleasant affect. Unpleasant feelings signal an event that hinders the individual's goals. For instance, if an individual is motivated to be a good student, doing poorly on an exam is likely to lead to unpleasant affect. If, however, the individual is not motivated to be a good student, doing poorly on an exam is less likely to lead to unpleasant affect.

Whereas pleasure-based theories of well-being highlight the role of motivation in determining affective experiences, meaning-based theories highlight the role of

motivation in creating meaning in life. A personally-meaningful life, according to such approaches, is one that is characterized by the pursuit of self-defining goals that are consistent with the person's core beliefs and values (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waterman, 1993). For example, graduating from medical school would contribute to the well-being of an individual who has always dreamt of becoming a doctor, but it would not necessarily contribute to the well-being of an individual who has always dreamt of becoming a movie star.

The Impact of Motivation: Activity and Telic Theories of Well-Being

Motivation can influence well-being by underlying both affective experiences and meaning in life. According to Diener (1984), such effects may depend on either the process or the outcome of motivational pursuits. The roles of the process and the outcome of goal pursuits are highlighted in activity and telic theories of well-being, respectively.

Activity theories of well-being focus on the process of goal pursuit. According to such theories, it is the active pursuit of goals, rather than their fulfillment, that contributes to well-being (Cantor, 1990; Palys & Little, 1983). The impact of goal pursuits on well-being, primarily goals that involve conscious objectives that are pursued in daily life, has been demonstrated in research on current concerns (Klinger, 1975), personal projects (Palys & Little, 1983), and personal strivings (Emmons, 1986). Such research demonstrates that the active pursuit of goals is an important determinant of well-being.

Unlike activity theories, telic theories of well-being focus on the outcome of goal pursuits. Telic theories maintain that well-being is enhanced when a person successfully attains a goal, and impaired when a person fails to attain a goal (see Diener, 1984). Successful pursuits may be defined in terms of adequate progress towards the target end-

state (Carver & Scheier, 1990) or in terms of final goal implementation (Gollwitzer, 1999). In other words, the successful pursuit of goals is an important determinant of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In summary, both the pursuit and the fulfillment of goal pursuits can promote well-being. Consistent with affect-based theories, motivational pursuits underlie the experience of positive and negative affect. Consistent with meaning-based theories, motivational pursuits give meaning to life. But are some motivational pursuits more conducive to well-being than others? In other words, do specific goals differ in their affective or meaning-related consequences? The answer lies in the distinction between approach and avoidance goals.

Approach and Avoidance Goals Are Central to Well-Being

In the beginning of the chapter, we introduced two co-workers, April and Avalon. Although both work equally hard to attain their goals, April pursues an approach goal (i.e., is motivated to attain desirable outcomes) whereas Avalon pursues an avoidance goal (i.e., is motivated to avoid undesirable outcomes). This distinction between approach and avoidance is one of the most critical and influential distinctions in the study of motivation (see Elliot, this volume).

From a functional point of view, both approach and avoidance goals are necessary for successful adaptation. Whereas approach motivation facilitates growth and flourishing, avoidance motivation facilitates protection and survival. Avoidance goals, for example, help individuals avoid taking unnecessary risks (e.g., Lauriola & Levin, 2001) or consuming harmful substances (e.g., Worth, Sullivan, Hertel, Rothman, & Jeffery,

2005). Approach and avoidance motivation promote distinct types of affective, cognitive, and behavioral processes, both of which are relevant to adaptive functioning.

Although it is beneficial to pursue at least some degree of both approach and avoidance goals, pursuing such goals may carry different implications for well-being. What balance, therefore, of approach to avoidance goals should an individual pursue to optimize well-being? The answer, of course, depends on the differential implications of approach and avoidance goals for affective and meaningful experiences in life. In the sections that follow, we review such implications focusing on the process and the outcome of goal pursuits.

Approach-Avoidance Goals and Well-being: An Activity Theory Perspective

What are the affective consequences of approach and avoidance goals and how do these consequences impact well-being? We begin to address these questions by focusing on the process of goal pursuit (i.e., adopting an activity perspective). In the following sections, we first explore conceptual differences in the process of approach and avoidance goal pursuits and then review some empirical evidence.

Conceptual Distinctions

According to activity theories, well-being is determined by the process of goal pursuit. From this perspective, approach and avoidance goals are likely to carry different implications for well-being, only to the extent that there are substantive differences in the process of pursuing these goals. As we describe below, there are reasons to believe that the process of pursuing approach goals is qualitatively distinct from that of pursuing avoidance goals.

The pursuit of approach goals should be more manageable than that of avoidance goals. According to cybernetic control models (Carver & Scheier, 1998), the pursuit of approach goals involves diminishing the discrepancy between a current state and a desired state. On the other hand, the pursuit of avoidance goals involves enlarging the discrepancy between a current state and an undesired state. From this conceptual viewpoint, the pursuit of approach goals should be more manageable than the pursuit of avoidance goals, because progress is more tangible and easier to monitor (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997; Higgins, 1997).

To demonstrate this point, let's return to our two co-workers. April can monitor progress in her goal pursuit as she climbs up the promotion ladder. If she fails to get promoted to assistant regional manager, she knows that she is not making sufficient progress toward her desired position. If, however, she gets the promotion, she knows that she is getting closer to obtaining her goal. April, therefore, can easily monitor success and failure in her goal pursuit and experience pleasant or unpleasant affect as a result.

Avalon, on the other hand, may have a harder time monitoring her progress. If she is demoted to assistant regional manager, she knows that she is failing in obtaining her goal of keeping her position. But what would indicate to her that she is succeeding in her goal pursuit? Finding indications of success in pursuing avoidance goals can often be challenging. Thus, Avalon may be more likely to detect failures than successes in her goal pursuit, making it more likely for her to experience unpleasant affect.

In addition, the pursuits of approach and avoidance goals likely differ in the cognitions they give rise to. If goal pursuits involve constant comparisons of a current state to an end-state (Carver & Scheier, 1998), the pursuit of approach goals involves

constantly monitoring positive outcomes, making them more accessible during goal pursuit. On the other hand, the pursuit of avoidance goals involves constantly monitoring negative outcomes, making them more accessible during goal pursuit. Thus, the pursuit of approach goals can maintain positive cognitions, whereas the pursuit of avoidance goals can maintain negative cognitions (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994).

April and Avalon, therefore, may have different thoughts accessible to them in their daily lives. April may think of what it would be like to be the regional manager in her company and such thoughts might engender pleasant affect. Avalon, on the other hand, may think of what it would be like to lose her job and such thoughts may engender unpleasant affect.

Overall, the process of pursuing approach goals is different from the process of pursuing avoidance goals. Approach goals appear to be easier to monitor and more manageable than avoidance goals. In addition, whereas approach goals elicit positive cognitions, avoidance goals elicit negative cognitions. According to activity theories, therefore, the pursuit of approach goals should be more likely than the pursuit of avoidance goals to promote well-being.

Empirical Evidence

According to activity theories of well-being, the process of pursuing approach goals should be more conducive to well-being than that of avoidance goals. Indeed, there are now several lines of research supporting this prediction. For example, Elliot and his collaborators (for a recent review, see Elliot & Friedman, in press) asked participants to list goals that best describe what they are trying to achieve in life. After categorizing

these goals as either approach or avoidance-oriented, they created an avoidance (relative to approach) index for each participant.

Using this procedure, the authors found that pursuing more approach than avoidance goals was associated with higher levels of well-being. In particular, pursuing more approach than avoidance goals was associated with higher levels of well-being in retrospective ratings (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997) and with less physical symptoms, such as headaches, sore throat, and dizziness (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998).

The beneficial role of approach (vs. avoidance) goals has been demonstrated with respect to general goals and with respect to goals in specific life domains. In the achievement domain, pursuing approach achievement goals were associated with higher levels of subjective well-being (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). Similarly, in the social domain, pursuing approach friendship goals was associated with higher levels of subjective well-being (Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006).

Consistent with core assumptions of activity theories, the relationships between approach-avoidance goals and well-being were fully mediated by perceptions of progress and competence in goal pursuit. Approach goals predicted higher perceptions of personal progress and competence in goal pursuit, which in turn, predicted higher levels of subjective well-being (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot et al., 1997).

There is also reason to believe that the pursuit of approach vs. avoidance goals exerts a causal influence on well-being. For instance, Coats, Janoff-Bulman, and Alpert (1996) presented participants with tasks, framed in terms of either approach or avoidance goals. Pursuing approach (vs. avoidance) goals was associated with higher perceptions of success in the task and with higher levels of task satisfaction. Consistent with the

predictions of activity theories, such research suggests that pursuing approach (vs. avoidance) goals leads to greater perceived progress, which in turn, promotes satisfaction with the experience as a whole.

Taken together, according to activity theories of well-being, the pursuit of approach goals is more conducive to well-being than the pursuit of avoidance goals. This is primarily because it is easier to monitor and assess progress when pursuing approach compared to avoidance goals. Approach goals are more manageable than avoidance goals and they elicit positive (vs. negative) cognitions. The available evidence is consistent with these predictions, suggesting that pursuing more approach than avoidance goals leads to greater perceived progress and efficacy, which in turn, promote well-being.

Approach-Avoidance Goals and Well-being: A Telic Theory Perspective

In the previous section, we examined the differential implications of approach and avoidance goals, focusing on the process of goal pursuit. However, as mentioned earlier, both the process and the outcome of goal pursuit can influence well-being. In this section, therefore, we review the implications of success or failure in approach and avoidance goal pursuits and their anticipated impact on well-being.

According to telic theories, well-being is determined by the outcome of goal pursuit. Contrary to the account of activity theories, from the telic perspective, approach and avoidance goals are likely to carry different implications for well-being, only to the extent that success or failure in pursuing approach goals has different consequences than success or failure in pursuing avoidance goals. As we describe below, the outcome of approach and avoidance goal pursuits indeed results in distinct affective experiences.

Affective experiences are assumed to be driven by the appetitive and defensive motivational systems (i.e., approach and avoidance, respectively) (Davidson, 1993; Gray, 1990; Lang, 1995). An active approach system is linked to feelings such as excitement and elation whereas an active avoidance system is linked to feelings such as anxiety and fear (see Carver; this volume; Harmon-Jones, this volume). Such affective experiences are most likely to arise as a function of success or failure in goal pursuit.

According to cybernetic control models (Carver & Scheier, 1998), affective reactions reflect the speed of progress in goal pursuit. Pleasant feelings arise when the rate of progress toward a goal is faster than anticipated, whereas unpleasant feelings arise when the rate of progress toward a goal is slower than anticipated (Carver, 2004; this volume). Thus, both approach and avoidance goals should have the potential of inducing pleasant as well as unpleasant feelings as a function of progress in goal pursuit. When pursuing approach goals, desirable outcomes elicit excitement whereas undesirable outcomes elicit sadness. When pursuing avoidance goals, desirable outcomes elicit calmness whereas undesirable outcomes elicit anxiety.

For example, April may feel pleasant affect (i.e., excitement) when she is promoted and she may feel unpleasant affect (i.e., sadness) when she fails to get that promotion. Similarly, Avalon may feel pleasant affect (i.e., relief or calmness) when she discovers that the board decided to keep her on the job and she may feel unpleasant affect (i.e., anxiety) when she hears that the board decided to give her job to another employee.

According to telic theories, therefore, the outcomes of approach and avoidance goal pursuits lead to distinct affective experiences, yet both have the potential of eliciting pleasant (e.g., excitement and relief) as well as unpleasant (e.g., sadness and anxiety)

affective experiences. Well-being, in turn, likely reflects the frequency rather than the intensity of affective experiences (Diener & Lucas, 2000).

According to telic theories, the extent to which approach or avoidance goals promote well-being depends on the frequency of success or failure when pursuing such goals. This, of course, is assuming that all pleasant emotions contribute to well-being and all unpleasant emotions impair well-being. In other words, according to telic theories, if success is always more likely when pursuing approach (vs. avoidance) goals, approach goals should be more likely to contribute to well-being compared to avoidance goals. However, if there are cases in which success is more likely when pursuing avoidance (vs. approach) goals, in such cases, avoidance goals should theoretically be more likely to contribute to well-being than approach goals.

Approach-Avoidance Goals and Meaning in Life

In the previous sections, we suggested that the process and the outcome of pursuing approach and avoidance goals can have different implications for well-being. In daily life, however, individuals likely pursue multiple goals, some of which are more important or meaningful than others. The impact of approach and avoidance goals on well-being, therefore, may vary as a function of how important or meaningful the goal is for the individual (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Maier, 1999; Emmons, 1986).

According to both activity and telic theories, goals that are personally meaningful are likely to have a greater impact on well-being (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Palys & Little, 1983). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that only progress toward personally meaningful goals predict increases in well-being (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grassman,

1998). The perceived importance of goals also determines the time spent on goal-relevant activities in daily life (Cantor et al. 1991; Emmons, 1991).

Personal meaning determines the extent to which well-being is influenced by the outcome of goal pursuits. In a daily diary study, Oishi, Diener, Suh, and Lucas (1999) found that within-person changes in life satisfaction were strongly linked to success in domains that individuals valued. Similarly, Sheldon and Elliot (1999) found that goal fulfillment was associated with greater well-being, but only if the goals were consistent with the individual's core values.

April and Avalon can help demonstrate the importance of personally meaningful goals. Both of them want to get in shape and learn how to play the piano. For April, however, getting in shape is far more meaningful than playing the piano whereas the opposite is true for Avalon. Exercising, therefore, is more likely to promote the well-being of April compared to Avalon, whereas playing the piano is more likely to promote the well-being of Avalon compared to April.

Are approach goals more meaningful to individuals than avoidance goals? There is currently no evidence to suggest that approach and avoidance goals differ in how meaningful or important they are to individuals, nor is there a reason to expect them to differ (see Elliot & Church, 2002). To the extent that any goal can be personally meaningful, individuals may be able to experience meaning in life as they pursue approach or avoidance goals, as long as the goals they pursue are meaningful to them.

It is theoretically possible, therefore, that some individuals view approach goals as more meaningful than avoidance goals. As an example, for April, winning the \$100 prize in the pumpkin pie festival may be more meaningful than selling enough pies to

cover her \$100 investment. It is also theoretically possible, however, that some individuals view avoidance goals as more meaningful than approach goals. For Avalon, for example, selling enough pies to cover her investment is more important than winning the monetary prize. To the extent that both April and Avalon can fill their life with meaning by pursuing goals that are important to them, April is more likely to find meaning in life by pursuing approach goals, whereas Avalon is more likely to find meaning in life by pursuing avoidance goals.

In summary, both approach and avoidance goals have the potential of promoting well-being by filling life with meaning. What is it, however, that leads individuals to view some goals as more meaningful than others? Clearly, individuals vary dramatically in the goals that they find personally meaningful. In the remainder of the chapter, we explore the role of individual differences in moderating the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being.

Individual Differences Moderate the Link between Approach-Avoidance Goals and Well-Being

The importance of individual differences has been highlighted in research on motivation as well as in research on well-being. Individual differences are critical in determining the propensity to pursue approach or avoidance goals (see Larsen, this volume). Individual differences are also critical in predicting overall levels of well-being (for a review, see Diener & Lucas, 1999). In fact, individuals who typically pursue approach goals tend to have higher levels of well-being, whereas those who typically pursue avoidance goals tend to have lower levels of well-being (Carver et al., 2000; Urry et al., 2004).

Prior research on individual differences assumed that the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being is relatively fixed. In other words, there is a fixed balance between approach and avoidance goals that is optimal for well-being. From this perspective, individual differences cannot change the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being, but they can determine which goals are more likely to be pursued and what level of well-being the individual is predisposed to experience.

In this chapter, however, we propose a novel approach. We argue that the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being is relatively dynamic. In other words, the balance between approach and avoidance goals that is optimal for well-being varies as a function of individual differences. For some individuals, increasing the pursuits of approach (vs. avoidance) goals may be beneficial for well-being, whereas for others this may carry little benefit. In other words, individual differences can change the nature of the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being.

What kind of individual differences might moderate the link between approach-avoidance goals and well-being? Building on activity and telic theories, two types of individual differences may be critical. Activity theories emphasize the importance of goal desirability. From this perspective, individual differences in the desirability of goals should moderate the link between goals and well-being. Second, telic theories emphasize the importance of goal feasibility (i.e., the likelihood of successful goal pursuits). From this perspective, individual differences in the feasibility of goals should moderate the link between goals and well-being.

The desirability and feasibility of goals also feature prominently in theories of self-regulation as determinants of the personal value of goals (Ajzen, 1985; Gollwitzer,

1990; Heckhausen & Leppmann, 1991). In the following sections, therefore, we discuss the importance of individual differences in the desirability and feasibility of approach-avoidance goals and the potential implications of such differences for well-being. We begin by reviewing individual differences in the desirability of goals and proceed to review individual differences in the feasibility of goals. In each case, we review the role of individual differences from a theoretical perspective and then discuss one empirical example.

The Desirability of Approach and Avoidance Goals:

An Activity Theory Perspective

Individuals prefer to pursue goals that are desirable to them. The desirability of goals, in turn, is determined by the perceived attractiveness of goal attainment. Focusing on pleasure as the determinant of well-being, goal desirability should be determined by the degree of pleasant affect that is expected to result from goal attainment. The pursuit of goals that are expected to yield pleasant affect when attained (i.e., desirable goals) should promote well-being.

Focusing on meaning as the determinant of well-being, goal desirability should be determined by the extent to which the goal is consistent with a person's daimon, or true self (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waterman, 1993). The pursuit of authentic (i.e., desirable) goals should promote well-being (Harter, 2002). For example, the self-concordance model (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) maintains that the pursuit of self-concordant goals (i.e., goals that are consistent with the core values of the individual) moderates the link between goal attainment and well-being. Such moderation was found to be independent

of self-efficacy, indicating that the desirability of goals can be separable from their feasibility.

Individual differences in the desirability of approach-avoidance goals, therefore, may moderate their impact on well-being. For instance, if April perceives approach goals as more desirable than Avalon, she may find working for a promotion more rewarding and meaningful. The process of pursuing approach goals, therefore, may be more conducive to the well-being of April than Avalon.

Indeed, we argue that individuals who view approach goals as more desirable than avoidance goals should be more likely to benefit from pursuing approach goals. However, individuals who view avoidance goals as more desirable than approach goals may not benefit as much from pursuing approach goals. To support this argument, in the next section we review cultural differences as reflecting individual differences in the desirability of approach and avoidance goals.

The Desirability of Approach-Avoidance Goals: Cultural Differences as an Example

In this section, we focus on the role of culture in determining the desirability of approach and avoidance goals and the implications of such differences for well-being (for reviews on cultural differences in well-being, see Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Diener & Suh, 2000; Diener & Tov, in press). We have emphasized the role of goal desirability as moderating the impact of goals on well-being. Indeed, many agree that the implications of a goal for well-being depend on the extent to which it is considered desirable in a given culture (Cantor & Sanderson, 1999).

The role of culture in determining the desirability of goals has been explored primarily in the context of individualistic vs. collectivistic cultures, focusing on the

comparison between European-Americans and Asians, respectively (e.g., Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998). In this context, there is evidence that culture determines the desirability of goals. For instance, individualistic goals are perceived as more desirable in individualistic cultures whereas collectivistic goals are perceived as more desirable in collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1995). Furthermore, the pursuits of goals that are desirable according to cultural norms are more likely to promote well-being. For instance, pursuing goals that are consistent with individualistic values promoted well-being among European Americans but not Asian Americans. On the other hand, pursuing goals that are consistent with collectivistic values promoted well-being among Asian Americans, but not European Americans (Oishi & Diener, 2001).

Individualistic and collectivistic cultures also differ in the extent to which approach and avoidance goals are considered desirable. In particular, compared to collectivistic cultures, individualistic cultures view approach goals as more desirable (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). If well-being is enhanced by the pursuit of desirable goals, pursuing more approach than avoidance goals should promote the well-being of members of individualistic cultures (e.g., European Americans) but not the well-being of members of collectivistic cultures (e.g., Asians). This indeed seems to be the case. Although pursuing more approach than avoidance goals was conducive to the well-being of European Americans, this was not the case for Asian Americans, Koreans, and Russians (Elliot et al., 2001).

It appears, therefore, that pursuing more approach than avoidance goals is conducive to well-being particularly in cultures that view approach goals as more desirable than avoidance goals. The pursuit of more approach than avoidance goals,

however, does not promote well-being in cultures that consider approach and avoidance goals as equally desirable. This may be because the desirability of approach-avoidance goals influences how meaningful they are to the individual. More meaningful pursuits are more likely to promote well-being.

Can the desirability of approach-avoidance goals also carry affective implications? In general, approach goals are associated with excitement or sadness whereas avoidance goals are associated with calmness or anxiety. Although the affective implications of approach and avoidance goals are likely consistent across individuals, their impact on well-being may differ across cultures. For instance, if approach and avoidance goals differ in their desirability across cultures, the affective experiences that are linked to approach and avoidance may also differ in their desirability across cultures.

Based on an instrumental approach to emotion (Tamir, Chiu, & Gross, 2006; Tamir, 2005), individuals seek out either emotions that are pleasant or emotions that are instrumental for important goal pursuits. For instance, although it is unpleasant to experience, an individual may view anger as desirable when her goal is to confront a wrongdoer. Applying these assumptions to the present context, one could argue that cultures value affective experiences that are associated with the pursuit of culturally-desirable goals.

The idea that some cultures may value excitement, for example, more highly than other cultures may sound surprising to some. However, consistent with the predictions of the instrumental approach to emotion, there is now evidence that cultures differ in the affective experiences that they value. In a large cross-cultural study, Eid and Diener

(2001) found that pride, which reflects approach goals, was viewed as more desirable by members of individualistic cultures.

More recently, Tsai and her colleagues (Tsai, Knutsen, & Fung, 2006) found that even after controlling for actual affect, European Americans valued feelings such as excitement that reflect approach goals. On the other hand, Asian Americans and Chinese valued feelings such as calmness and relief that reflect avoidance goals. In other words, members of individualistic (vs. collectivistic) cultures view approach-related affect as more desirable, whereas members of collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultures view avoidance-related affect as more desirable.

What are the implications of cross-cultural differences in affect valuation for well-being? One compelling question for future research is whether approach-related emotions are stronger predictors of well-being among individualistic cultures, whereas avoidance-related emotions are stronger predictors of well-being among collectivistic cultures. Although this hypothesis has not been tested directly, it is consistent with the idea that the impact of emotional experiences on well-being depends upon the desirability of such experiences in a given culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Shimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzikoto, & Ahadi, 2002). Another important question involves the specific cultural beliefs that underlie such differences. Given that the studies reviewed above involved mainly Asian samples, it may be useful to explore whether the obtained cultural differences are associated with collectivism, broadly construed, or with the Confucian system, more specifically.

In summary, the research reviewed in this section demonstrates that cultures differ in the desirability of approach and avoidance goals. Whereas individualistic (vs.

collectivistic) cultures view approach goals as more desirable, collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultures view avoidance goals as more desirable. As a result, the pursuit of approach goals is more meaningful to members of individualistic cultures and the emotions they give rise to are considered more desirable.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the pursuit of approach (vs. avoidance) goals promotes well-being in individualistic, but not collectivistic, cultures. What about the pursuit of avoidance goals? Such pursuits do not necessarily impair well-being in members of collectivistic cultures. Whether or not the pursuit of avoidance (vs. approach) goals can promote well-being in collectivistic cultures remains to be seen.

The Feasibility of Approach and Avoidance Goals:

A Telic Theory Perspective

As outlined earlier, both the process and the outcome of goal pursuit has implications for well-being. Indeed, individuals differ not only in how desirable a goal is for them but also in how feasible it is. Feasibility is determined by individuals' judgments of their capabilities to perform relevant goal-directed behaviors (i.e., self-efficacy, Bandura, 1977) and the beliefs that these behaviors will be successful (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2004). Individuals prefer to pursue goals that are feasible to them (Brunstein, 1993) and the pursuit of feasible goals, in turn, promotes well-being (Brunstein, Shultheiss, & Maier, 1999). Feasibility or self-efficacy might be based on inherent skills and prior experience in pursuing the goal (Bandura, 1977).

Individual differences in the feasibility of approach-avoidance goals, therefore, may moderate their impact on well-being. For instance, if successfully pursuing approach

goals is more feasible for April than for Avalon, winning the first prize in the country fair may be more conducive to the well-being of April than Avalon.

Indeed, we argue that individuals for whom approach goals are more feasible than avoidance goals should be more likely to benefit from pursuing approach goals. What about individuals for whom avoidance goals as more feasible than approach goals. Might it be possible that for these individuals, the pursuit of avoidance goals may be beneficial in some respect? To explore these questions in the next section, we review evidence for regulatory fit as reflecting individual differences in the feasibility of approach and avoidance goals.

The Feasibility of Approach-Avoidance Goals: Regulatory Fit as an Example

Might the pursuit of approach or avoidance goals be more feasible to some individuals compared to others? Research on regulatory fit suggests that the answer is yes. Regulatory fit is the sense of value that arises when people act in a way that sustains their motivational orientation (Higgins, 2000). For example, if an individual is primarily motivated to approach, framing a goal in terms of a desired end-state increases the value of pursuing the goal. Similarly, if an individual is primarily motivated to avoid, framing a goal in terms of avoiding an undesired end-state increases the value of pursuing that goal.

When individuals pursue goals in a way that fits their motivational orientation, they are more engaged in goal pursuit, view the pursuit as more valuable, and are more likely to be successful (Forster, Higgins, & Idson, 1998; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003; Higgins et al., 1994; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). Individuals also experience greater enjoyment during goal pursuit when they pursue the goal in a manner that fits their dispositional orientation (Freitas & Higgins, 2002).

Such effects may be driven by the greater feasibility of motivationally-consistent goals. Mann, Sherman, and Updegraff (2004) found that individuals were more effective in promoting health behaviors when health messages were framed in ways that matched their underlying motivational dispositions. Individuals who were approach motivated were more successful when health messages were framed as approach goals, whereas individuals who were avoidance motivated were more successful when health messages were framed as avoidance goals. Consistent with the emphasis of a telic approach on feasibility, the effects were fully mediated by perceptions of self-efficacy in goal pursuit (Sherman, Mann, & Updegraff, in press).

Thus, if April is an approach-oriented person, she might find working toward winning the first prize in the pumpkin pie festival more feasible than selling enough pies. Such pursuits would be more enjoyable to her and she might eventually be more successful at them. On the other hand, if Avalon is an avoidance-oriented person, she might find selling enough pies to cover her expenses more feasible than winning the first prize. She might be more motivated to do so, and ultimately she might be more successful in doing so.

The feasibility of approach-avoidance goals influences how meaningful they are to the individual. But what are the implications of greater goal feasibility for affective experiences? Recent evidence suggests that the feasibility of goals may determine the intensity of goal-related emotional reactions. Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000) found that compared to approach-oriented individuals, avoidance-oriented individuals were less happy following the successful pursuit of approach goals and less sad following the unsuccessful pursuit of approach goals. On the other hand, they were calmer and more

relieved following the successful pursuit of avoidance goals and more anxious following the unsuccessful pursuit of avoidance goals.

These findings are astounding because they suggest that the affective consequences of goal pursuits might vary across individuals. April, for instance, may feel better (i.e., more excited) if she wins the first prize at a competition, whereas Avalon may feel better (i.e., more relieved) if she manages to sell enough pies to cover her expenses. The intensity of affective reactions to success and failure in goal pursuit may depend on how feasible the goal is for the individual.

Furthermore, the implications of affective experience for well-being may also differ as a function of goal feasibility. In fact, individual differences in approach and avoidance motivation influence the extent to which well-being depends on pleasant and unpleasant affective experiences. Empirical evidence for this hypothesis was recently provided by Updegraff, Gable, and Taylor (2004). These authors demonstrated that the more approach-oriented individuals were, the more they tended to base their judgments of well-being on the frequency of their pleasant affect. This finding suggests that the weight of pleasant and unpleasant affect in judgments of well-being may itself vary as a function of motivational dispositions.

In summary, research on regulatory fit demonstrates that the feasibility of approach and avoidance goals varies as a function of basic motivational orientations. Pursuing approach goals may be more feasible for approach-oriented individuals, whereas pursuing avoidance goals may be more feasible for avoidance-oriented individuals. The pursuit of feasible goals, in turn, is likely to promote well-being because

it is more meaningful, the chances of success are higher, and success leads to more intense pleasant experiences.

Based on this analysis, approach-oriented individuals may be expected to experience greater well-being when pursuing more approach than avoidance goals. What about avoidance-oriented individuals? On the one hand, as discussed earlier, avoidance goals are harder to monitor and engender negative cognitions. Avoidance goals, therefore, should theoretically impair the well-being of avoidance-oriented individuals in some ways. On the other hand, as discussed in this section, avoidance goals may be more meaningful and feasible for avoidance-oriented individuals. Avoidance goals, therefore, could theoretically also contribute to the well-being of avoidance-oriented individuals in some ways. What are the implications of pursuing avoidance goals for avoidance-oriented individuals? We conclude this chapter by discussing this conflicting goal pursuit.

The Conflicting Goal Pursuits of Avoidance-Oriented Individuals

In the previous sections, we argued that individual differences in the desirability and feasibility of goals can moderate the impact of such goals on well-being. In particular, we proposed that approach goals may be more desirable and feasible for individuals who are high (vs. low) in approach motivation. On the other hand, avoidance goals may be more desirable and feasible for individuals who are high (vs. low) in avoidance motivation. As we've demonstrated above, the pursuit of desirable and feasible goals are likely to promote well-being.

Approach-oriented individuals, therefore, benefit from approach goals because of the general attributes of these goals and because of their desirability and feasibility. What about avoidance-oriented individuals? On the one hand, these individuals are likely to

suffer some negative consequences when pursuing avoidance goals because of the attributes of such goals. On the other hand, avoidance-oriented individuals may attain some benefits from pursuing avoidance goals because such goals are more feasible and perhaps more desirable to them. Avoidance-oriented individuals, therefore, are likely to experience some degree of conflict in their goal pursuits.

Avalon, for example, may find avoidance goals difficult to monitor and pursuing such goals make her focus on unpleasant future outcomes. Nevertheless, she might find such goals to be personally meaningful, she might be more successful at obtaining them, and she may experience more intense pleasant affect as a result. It is therefore possible that the pursuit of avoidance goals is not as harmful for Avalon as it is for April. However, does the pursuit of avoidance goals benefit Avalon in any way?

We have begun to explore this interesting possibility in the context of trait neuroticism, a trait that is closely related to the avoidance motivational system (Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Elliot & Thrash, 2002). We began by examining whether individuals who are high (vs. low) in neuroticism can benefit from the ability to successfully pursue avoidance goals (Tamir, Robinson, & Solberg, 2006).

Specifically, we examined neurotic individuals who varied in the extent to which they were skilled at identifying threats. Individuals who can quickly identify threats are more likely to successfully avoid them (Ohman, 2001; Robinson, 1998). Therefore, we expected individuals high in neuroticism to benefit from being skilled at threat identification. Our results supported this hypothesis. Neurotic individuals who were relatively skilled at threat identification experienced lower levels of negative affect in their daily lives over a weeklong period as well as higher levels of satisfaction in various

life domains (Tamir et al., 2006). These findings suggest that individuals high (vs. low) in neuroticism may benefit in some respects from the successful pursuit of avoidance goals.

Emotions can also promote successful goal pursuits. For instance, emotions direct attention toward potentially threatening or rewarding information (Mogg & Bradley, 1998; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987; Tamir & Robinson, 2006), instigate physiological responses that support approach or avoidance behaviors (Frijda, 1988; Panksepp, 1982) and signal the effectiveness with which people are pursuing their goals (Carver, 2001). In particular, avoidance-related emotions, such as worry or anxiety, may promote the successful pursuit of avoidance goals (Parrott, 2002).

If avoidance emotions (e.g., worry) promote the pursuit of avoidance goals, would the experience of such emotions promote the successful goal pursuits of neurotic individuals? Furthermore, assuming that successful goal pursuits promote well-being, would neurotic individuals be motivated to experience such emotions when engaged in goal pursuit? We recently tested these counterintuitive hypotheses by having neurotic individuals perform an anagram task following either a happy or a worried mood induction (Tamir, 2005). Individuals who were high in neuroticism solved more anagrams correctly following a worried (vs. happy) mood induction. Furthermore, individuals high (vs. low) in neuroticism were more motivated to increase their level of worry when they expected to perform a motivationally significant task.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that neurotic individuals may benefit, at least in some respect, from the ability to effectively pursue avoidance goals. These findings, however, do not necessarily show that pursuing avoidance goals is beneficial for the well-being of avoidance-oriented individuals. Instead, we propose that pursuing

avoidance goals may have mixed implications (i.e., harmful in some respects and beneficial in others) for avoidance-oriented individuals.

In summary, we argue that approach and avoidance goals can have both main effects as well as interactive effects on well-being. Some implications of goal pursuits are likely identical across individuals. Other implications of goal pursuits, however, likely differ among individuals. For instance, individuals differ in the extent to which approach and avoidance goals are desirable or feasible to them, leading such goals to have potentially different implications for affective experiences and meaning in life. For some individuals (e.g., approach-oriented), pursuing avoidance goals carries little benefit. For other individuals (e.g., avoidance-oriented), pursuing avoidance goals may carry at least some temporary benefits. The overall impact of avoidance goals on well-being may be influenced by the relative weight of their different implications (e.g., the cognitive content they evoke vs. how personally meaningful they are) and by the degree of conflict they evoke. Exploring the overall impact of avoidance goals on the well-being of avoidance-oriented individuals is an important endeavor for future research.

Summary

What is the source of happiness? What gives meaning to life? What makes life worth living? Greater well-being results from experiencing more frequent pleasant and less frequent unpleasant affect and from having personally meaningful experiences in life. In this chapter, we argued that the pursuits of approach and avoidance goals are inextricably linked to well-being because both the process and the outcome of their pursuits can shape affective experiences as well as provide meaning to life.

What are the differential implications of approach and avoidance goals for well-being? Some of these implications are consistent across individuals. In particular, approach goals are likely easier to monitor so that perceived progress is likely greater during their pursuit. Approach goals also elicit positive cognitions, by leading individuals to focus on desirable outcomes. Avoidance goals, on the other hand, are more difficult to monitor and they elicit negative cognitions, by leading individuals to focus on undesirable outcomes. These characteristics make the pursuit of approach goals generally beneficial for well-being.

In this chapter, however, we argued that the implications of approach and avoidance goals for well-being can also vary dramatically across individuals. Well-being, for instance, is enhanced by the pursuit of personally meaningful experiences. In particular, the pursuit of goals that are desirable and feasible is conducive to well-being. The desirability and feasibility of approach and avoidance goals vary as a function of motivationally-relevant individual differences.

Which goals are most likely to promote well-being? A combination of both approach and avoidance goals is important for adaptive functioning. We have argued that the extent to which individuals should pursue more approach than avoidance goals is influenced by the desirability and feasibility of these goals for a given individual. Individuals for whom approach goals are desirable or feasible may experience greater well-being if their goal pursuits are heavily skewed toward approach goals. This, however, is not the case for individuals for whom avoidance goals are desirable or feasible. Such individuals may not necessarily benefit from pursuing approach goals and may even benefit in certain ways from pursuing avoidance goals. As we have learned

from April and Avalon, no single mix of approach and avoidance goals is optimal for the well-being of all individuals. Instead, to maximize well-being, individuals may need to find the mix that fits them best.

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