

How do emotions factor into daily well-being judgments: The role of avoidance and approach orientations

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ABSTRACT

A two-week online diary study (N = 135) examined how chronic avoidance and approach motivations moderate the degree to which daily well-being judgments are based on positive and negative emotions. Results showed that **high-approach people reported higher levels of well-being regardless of the emotions they experienced**. Also, **a stronger approach orientation was associated with an increased reactivity of well-being judgments to negative emotions** such that increased levels of approach orientation were associated with increased reductions in well-being in response to negative emotions ($p = .03$). An avoidance approach has not been found to moderate the relationship between negative emotions and daily well-being. The relationship between positive emotions and well-being was not moderated by avoidance and approach orientations. Results suggest that a high approach orientation makes well-being particularly vulnerable to negative emotions. We failed to replicate the previous finding that high-approach people base well-being judgments more strongly on positive emotions.

BACKGROUND

- There are individual differences in how people factor daily emotions into their well-being judgments. One such difference concerns chronic approach and avoidance motivations, or the Behavioral Activation System (BAS) and the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) (Carver & White, 1994). Importantly, BIS and BAS are orthogonal systems, i.e. they function independently.
- On average, high-approach people report more positive affect and high-avoidance people report more negative affect. Moreover, it has been found that high-avoidance people base their life satisfaction ratings more strongly on positive affect (Updegraff, Gable, & Taylor; 2004)
- We sought to further explore how BIS and BAS sensitivity moderates the relationship between emotions and daily satisfaction.

THE STUDY

Participants:

- 135 University of Virginia undergrads (100 f, 35 m)

Design:

- At the beginning of the study, individual difference measures were obtained. Over the next 14 days, participants completed an online diary every night.

Measures:

- Dispositional approach (**BAS**) and avoidance (**BIS**) orientations were measured with the BIS-BAS scale (Carver & White, 1994).

Sample items:

- If I see a chance to get something I want I move on it right away. (**approach**)
- I worry about making mistakes. (**avoidance**)
- I feel pretty worried or upset when I think or know somebody is angry at me. (**avoidance**)

- Daily satisfaction (**DS**) was calculated as the average of the answers to these two questions:

- How was today?
- How satisfied are you with your life today?

- Daily emotions were measured with the question:
- Please indicate how much you experienced these emotions today

followed by emotion names in random order:

Negative emotions (NE): anger, jealousy, shame, embarrassment, agitation, tension, disappointment, discouragement, fear, guilt, sadness, worry
Positive emotions (PE): sense of superiority, pride, sense of connectedness, calmness, relief, cheerfulness, satisfaction, happiness

RESULTS

We explored the relationship between daily emotions, daily well-being judgments, and BIS-BAS scores in an HLM model with the following equations.

Level-1 Model:

$$DS = \beta_0 + \beta_1*(NE) + \beta_2*(PE) + \epsilon$$

Level-2 Model:

$$\beta_0 = Y_{00} + Y_{01}*(BIS) + Y_{02}*(BAS) + \eta_0$$

$$\beta_1 = Y_{10} + Y_{11}*(BIS) + Y_{12}*(BAS) + \eta_1$$

$$\beta_2 = Y_{20} + Y_{21}*(BIS) + Y_{22}*(BAS) + \eta_2$$

RESULTS (cont'd)

Summary of HLM Analysis Predicting Daily Satisfaction from BIS, BAS, Daily Negative Affect, Daily Positive Affect and Interaction Terms

Parameter	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Intercept (γ_{00})	4.82	0.06	80.59 ^a	<.01
BIS main effect (γ_{01})	-0.15	0.12	-1.30 ^a	0.20
BAS main effect (γ_{02})	0.47	0.16	2.96^a	<.01
NE main effect (γ_{10})	-0.44	0.04	-11.10 ^a	<.01
BIS moderation (γ_{11})	0.11	0.08	1.44 ^a	0.15
BAS moderation (γ_{12})	-0.22	0.10	-2.17^a	0.03
PE main effect (γ_{20})	0.80	0.03	24.70 ^a	<.01
BIS moderation (γ_{21})	-0.07	0.06	-1.10 ^a	0.28
BAS moderation (γ_{22})	-0.05	0.09	-0.58 ^a	0.56

^a approximate $df = 132$

DISCUSSION

- The positive BAS main effect indicates that a high approach orientation is characterized by higher levels of well-being regardless of the daily emotions.
- The negative BAS moderation coefficient suggests that a high approach orientation makes well-being judgments particularly vulnerable to negative emotions.
- Given that high-approach people have on average lower levels of negative emotions, one interpretation of the results is that those emotions may be more disruptive to them
- Our results do not replicate the previous finding that high-approach people base well-being judgments more strongly on positive emotions (Updegraff, Gable, & Taylor; 2004). However, we have used a different set of emotions. We believe that these differences will be resolved by attending to individual emotions, rather than collapsing them across valence.

REFERENCES

- Carver, C. S., & White, T. L. (1994). Behavioral inhibition, behavioral activation, and affective responses to impending reward and punishment: The BIS/BAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 319-333.
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