



Individual differences in forecast effectiveness of 5 negative affect repair strategies



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ABSTRACT

The current study examined individual differences in forecast effectiveness of 5 affect repair strategies. At T1 participants ($N = 227$) completed measures of personality, emotional intelligence and dispositional strategy usage. At T2 (2 months later) participants made strategy effectiveness forecasts and completed a measure of psychological well-being. Results revealed that emotional intelligence and extraversion were positively, and neuroticism negatively, associated with the forecast efficacy of generally effective strategies (e.g., reappraisal), with the reverse pattern for ineffective strategies (e.g., suppression). Dispositional strategy usage was also positively associated with efficacy forecasts and wide links emerged between efficacy forecasts and well-being. Implications and future directions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

“Despite the breadth and depth of the literature on affective forecasting and affect regulation... almost no research has addressed the intersection of these two topics (i.e., examined the content or accuracy of people’s intuition about the effectiveness of different affect regulation strategies).” (Loewenstein, 2007, p. 181).

Loewenstein’s (2007) point is as true in 2017 as it was a decade ago: to date only a small handful of studies have focused on this intersection. This neglected but important area of study, which we term affect regulation forecasting (ARF), involves examining forecasts of future affect regulation processes including expected effectiveness and usage of regulation strategies, as well as the accuracy of those forecasts. Several studies have examined perceived effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies with most work exploring evaluated effectiveness of strategies *already* applied. In these studies participants reflect on a recent episode of affect regulation, recall the strategies they used and rate their effectiveness (e.g., Heiy & Cheavens, 2014). These studies are best characterized as post-hoc evaluations of strategy effectiveness and are different from ARF work, which would involve a priori forecasts of strategy effectiveness for a *future* emotion or forecasts without a specific time referent (e.g., in general how well does strategy X work to reduce sadness?).

The lack of ARF work is surprising as one of the explanations in the affective forecasting literature for the impact bias – the tendency for people to overestimate the intensity and duration of future emotional

reactions – is immune neglect. Immune neglect involves the failure of forecasters to take into account emotion regulation processes, also referred to as the psychological immune system, which tend to naturally repair negative affect (Wilson & Gilbert, 2013). In one of the few ARF studies to date Van Dijk, Van Dillen, Seip, and Rotteveel (2012) found that forecasting (vs. experiencing) participants underestimated how much reappraisal would be used following laboratory manipulated social rejection, and how effective reappraisal would be in repairing anger. These findings underscore a more basic point: people will only use strategies that they believe are effective. Thus forecast effectiveness ought to impact strategy choice and affect regulation success, and have adaptational implications (e.g., Appleton & Kubzansky, 2014). Despite the wide availability of affect regulation strategy taxonomies and the large extant literature on actual strategy effectiveness (Augustine & Hemenover, 2009; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012), little is currently known about their *expected* effectiveness.

1.1. Predictors of forecast effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies

Trait emotional intelligence (EIQ) is a likely predictor of ARF. Central to emotional intelligence and effective emotion regulation is emotion knowledge, which involves understanding the causes and consequences of emotion as well as effective regulatory strategies (Robinson, Moeller, Buchholz, Boyd, & Troop-Gordon, 2012). Over time successful repair of negative affect using one or more strategies ought to be articulated in emotion knowledge (Lewis, 2000), which later likely drives strategy efficacy forecasts. Supporting this possibility are findings linking trait and performance based measures of EIQ with more effective repair of negative affect (e.g., Hemenover, Augustine, Shulman, Tran, & Barlett, 2008; Robinson et al., 2012) and with more

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accurate affective forecasts (Hoerger, Chapman, Epstein, & Duberstein, 2012).

A second likely predictor of ARF, are the emotional traits of neuroticism and extraversion. Emotion knowledge likely reflects one's emotional life (Lewis, 2000) and affective forecasting work has demonstrated that these personality traits predict forecasts of future emotional reactions. For instance, Hoerger and Quirk (2010) found that neuroticism negatively predicted, and extraversion positively predicted forecast pleasant emotion following Valentine's day; and Zelenski et al. (2013) found that introverts (vs. extraverts) forecast more negative and less positive affect during social interactions. Moreover, neuroticism has been positively and extraversion negatively, linked with emotional intelligence and affect repair ability (see Hemenover, 2003). These findings suggest that these emotional traits may also play a role in ARF.

A final likely predictor of strategy efficacy forecasts is dispositional use. Consistent use of a given repair strategy implies believed effectiveness and ought to favorably drive effectiveness forecasts. Supporting this possibility are findings showing positive relationships between the use of a variety of emotion regulation strategies and their (post-hoc) rated effectiveness (Totterdell & Parkinson, 1999), as well as between forecasts of future use of strategies for coping with stress and effectiveness (Friedman-Wheeler, Haaga, Gunthert, Ahrens, & McIntosh, 2008).

1.2. Overview of the current study

In sum, few studies have focused on affect regulation forecasting and as such little is currently known about the nature or correlates of these forecasts. In the current study we addressed these issues by examining relationships between trait EIQ, neuroticism, and extraversion, and the forecast effectiveness of 5 negative affect repair strategies: reappraisal, rationalization, social support, confrontation/resolution, and suppression. We also examined links between efficacy forecasts and their dispositional use and psychological well-being. We predicted that trait EIQ and extraversion would be negatively related to forecast effectiveness for suppression and positively related to forecasts for all other strategies, with neuroticism demonstrating the opposite pattern. We also predicted positive relationships between efficacy forecasts and dispositional use, and between efficacy forecasts and well-being for all strategies but suppression, which was expected to show negative relationships.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants ($N = 227$) were students in a college psychology course at a Midwestern University, with an average age of 18.54 ($SD = 1.21$) years, and 73% male and 93% Caucasian. All participants received course credit.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Demographics

Several items assessed age, gender, year in school, and ethnicity.

2.2.2. Repair strategy questionnaire (RSQ)

To measure dispositional use of negative affect repair strategies we drew from the taxonomy outlined by Parkinson and Totterdell (1999). This taxonomy was generated through a cluster analysis of 162 repair acts and includes cognitive and behavioral strategies, all measured with varying numbers of items. Our focus was on reappraisal, rationalization, social support, and suppression. Rationalization (9 items, $\alpha = 0.86$) involves thinking about the causes of and solutions to the feelings. Reappraisal (26 items, $\alpha = 0.91$) involves reinterpreting the feelings or

eliciting event optimistically. Social support (14 items, $\alpha = 0.90$) involves family and friends in recovery from the unpleasant affect. Suppression (19 items, $\alpha = 0.72$) involves turning away from or shutting down feelings. To measure dispositional use of these 4 strategies, we randomly ordered the items for these 4 strategies and presented them in an 'Affect Strategy' questionnaire with the following instructions:

Please read each item below and report the extent to which you USUALLY do that to try and feel better during bad moods or negative emotions.

Participants rated items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never or rarely*) to 7 (*always or usually*).

2.2.3. Strategy effectiveness forecasts

To measure expected effectiveness for each of the 4 strategies measured by the RSQ, participants (two months after completing the RSQ) read a brief description of each strategy (see RSQ section) after reading the following instructions:

Below we describe several ways one might go about trying to feel better during a bad mood or emotion. We would like you to read these carefully and then rate the extent to which you think each would be effective in helping the AVERAGE person feel better when experiencing an unpleasant mood or emotion.

Participants used a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all effective*) to 7 (*extremely effective*). Based on prior work we added an additional problem-focused strategy called confrontation/resolution, which involves talking with the person that upset you, and trying to resolve the situation with the other person.

2.2.4. Anger vignette and mood

To measure strategy efficacy forecasts in an alternative format, participants read a vignette designed to evoke anger emphasizing an unfair teaching assistant that had given the student an undeservedly poor grade on a paper. Participants read the vignette and imagined the experience happening to them, then reported how it would make them feel on a 6-item adjective checklist including: angry, hostile, sad, afraid, happy, and excited. Responses were made on a scale from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Finally participants rated how effective each of the 5 repair strategies would be in making them feel better during that event (using the same 5-point scale).

2.3. Personality and health variables

2.3.1. Trait emotional intelligence

Two scales were used to measure three trait emotional intelligence dimensions: Perception, understanding, and regulation ability. The scale used to measure perception was the monitoring subscale of the Mood Awareness Scale (MAS: Swinkels & Giuliano, 1995), respectively ($\alpha = 0.83$). The 5-item Monitoring subscale of the MAS measures the ability to focus on, scrutinize, or evaluate one's feelings (e.g., "I often evaluate my mood"). The scale used to measure understanding was the Labeling subscales of the MAS ($\alpha = 0.80$) which measures the ability to categorize and identify one's feelings (e.g., "I have a hard time labeling my feelings."). The scale used to measure regulation ability was the 30-item Negative mood regulation scale (NMR: Catanzaro & Mearns, 1990) ($\alpha = 0.87$). The NMR measures participants' beliefs that they can change their negative moods (e.g., "I can usually find a way to cheer myself up"). On the MAS and NMR participants rated their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*).

2.3.2. Neuroticism and extraversion

These two emotional traits were measured with the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992), a 60-item reliable and valid measure ($\alpha s > 0.71$). Twelve (statement) items measured each neuroticism and extraversion

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