

Normative Influences on Secondary Disturbance: The Role of Social Expectancies

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A “new wave” within psychotherapy has introduced the concept of acceptance into people’s emotional repertoires. Accepting unpleasant emotional states has been demonstrated as an important pathway towards reducing secondary disturbances and improving emotional and psychological functioning. What is often overlooked, however, is whether this move towards acceptance is reinforced within the social and cultural contexts in which people experience their emotional states. Our research has begun to explore the contribution that normative influences make to secondary disturbance, specifically the perception that feeling happy is a desired state, and that experiencing and expressing negative emotions is undesirable and unacceptable to others. We review evidence here that these perceived “social expectancies” are associated with increased negative emotionality and depression, and reduce well-being. Furthermore, we highlight that the effects of social expectancies are more apparent in Australia than Japan, consistent with the view that a higher premium is placed on happiness within Australia. We also review experimental evidence that social messages that reinforce these social expectancies serve to increase secondary disturbances. The implications of taking a social perspective on emotion regulation and dysfunction, and specifically implications for promoting happiness and acceptance in the field, are discussed.

Key words: culture; emotion norms; ruminative self-focus; secondary disturbance; social appraisal; social expectancies.

The concept of acceptance is increasingly utilised within psychological therapy. A central principle in acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999), this approach to managing psychological disturbances is part of a “third wave” of cognitive therapy (see also Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2001), which focuses on how people relate to their cognitive and emotional states. Psychologists who use this approach aim to teach clients, among other things, to accept their negative thoughts and feelings. The message that feeling sad is a normal part of life is powerful. This is because when sadness is normalised, people are less likely to experience secondary disturbances (i.e., the process of getting upset about being upset), and therefore experience less sadness overall. The effectiveness of this message is evidenced by the success of the therapeutic approach.

What is easily overlooked is whether this message is reinforced in the social and cultural contexts within which people experience their emotional states. It is a well-established fact that people are easily swayed by these normative influences. As Sherif (1936) argued, frames of reference (e.g., cultural values, customs, or conventions) are important determinants of an individual’s experience. This suggests that secondary disturbances may be as much determined by these social and cultural contexts as they are by a person’s own orientation to their emotional experiences. To put it differently, accepting one’s own

sadness may be less effective if that sadness is viewed as unacceptable and inappropriate by those around us.

So what is the dominant message about the acceptability and appropriateness of sadness in Western society today? Does this message align with psychologists’ own evidence-based practice in reducing secondary disturbances and helping people overcome depression? The answer is perhaps evident in the title of a recent book published by Barbara Ehrenreich (2009) simply titled *Smile or Die*. Western culture has become obsessed with happiness. Salient cultural norms clearly communicate that people are expected to strive for happiness. Daily people are reminded of the value of happiness. Television advertising is a persistent reminder that happiness is just another purchase away. National campaigns and a range of organisational interventions promote happiness as important for personal well-being, success, and a meaningful life. Indeed, this emotional state has even become a measure of national prosperity (White, 2007).

This is in stark contrast to the ways in which common emotional experiences, such as sadness, depression, or anxiety, are portrayed. These emotional states are commonly pathologised and medicalised, viewed as deviant from the desired norm (Haslam, 2005). Even common malaise is often diagnosed as an illness (Wakefield & First, 2003). Negative emotions are touted as bad for our health (Ehrenreich, 2009), have been shown to impact negatively on those around us (Parkinson & Simons, 2009), and can be “cured” with a wide array of drugs and interventions designed to quickly and efficiently return us to “normality.” On the other hand, the many benefits of negative emotions, such as their creative potential (Wilson, 2008), importance for interpersonal relations (Averill, 1983; Fischer & Manstead, 2008), and role in achieving a rich and meaningful life (Hayes et al., 1999), are rarely prominent in current social discourse.

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One does not need to look far to see which emotions are socially valued and more normative than others. It is possible that these salient social messages, which place a premium on feeling happy and focus on the costs associated with sadness, may have the potential to make people feel more negative emotions more of the time. That is, rather than promoting happiness, these messages may serve to trigger secondary disturbances, causing people to feel more upset when they experience sadness.

The Concept of Social Expectancies

In an attempt to better understand these normative influences on people's emotional functioning, my colleagues and I have begun to explore the role of social expectancies in predicting the frequency and intensity with which people experience negative emotion, their satisfaction with life, their symptoms of depression, and whether social expectancies may play a causal role in producing secondary disturbances.

We define social expectancies as those beliefs that a person holds about how others in general expect he or she should feel. In this way, our work is designed to explore the link between social norms for emotional experience and people's own emotional functioning. To measure social expectancies, my colleagues and I constructed a number of questions, such as "other people expect me not to feel negative emotions" (e.g., feeling sad, depressed, anxious, or stressed), "people like me less when I feel negative emotions," and "I think society accepts people who feel negative emotions" (this item is reversed: for a full list of measures, see Bastian et al., 2012). We compared these beliefs with more personal ones, such as "I would try to avoid feeling negative emotions," "I shouldn't feel negative emotions," and "Feeling negative emotions is normal" (this item is reversed). These personal expectations are those that are successfully targeted, and reduced, within forms of psychotherapy that promote acceptance.

Our approach to understanding social expectancies highlights that emotions are not simply a personal experience but are fundamentally social phenomena (see also Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Manstead & Fischer, 2001). That is, people most often experience and express their emotions within social situations, and their consequences are understood within social and cultural contexts. From this perspective, the opinions expressed by others within the social environment are likely to play an important role in the production of one's own emotional experiences. This possibility is articulated within social appraisal theory (Manstead & Fischer, 2001). The ways in which people appraise (i.e., frame or understand) a particular situation is known to determine their emotional response to it. However, people regularly rely on the responses of others within their social environment in forming those appraisals (Fischer, Rotteveel, Evers, & Manstead, 2004), and as such people's own emotional responses are significantly determined by the social context.

Most work on social appraisal theory has focused on the ways in which other's appraisal of an emotion-eliciting event may determine one's own emotional response to that event. For example, when others respond to a news story on television with great sadness, this is likely to increase the level of sadness

that we experience in response to that same story. Likewise, when other's laugh heartily at a joke, we are likely to find that joke funnier than if they had not laughed at all. In these cases, we rely on the emotional responses of others in order to determine our own emotional response. Importantly, however, it is not only emotion-eliciting events that may be the focus of social appraisals. Emotions themselves may also be a focus (Mayer & Stevens, 1994), and the ways in which we think others might respond to our emotions play an important role in our own emotional expression (Evers, Fischer, Mosquera, & Manstead, 2005).

Our approach to understanding social expectancies is consistent with the view that people's experience and expression of emotional states may be determined by the ways in which those states are evaluated by others. Whereas this previous research has focused on specific contexts, however, our approach explores general beliefs that people may hold about how normative and socially valued certain emotion states are. That is, we are interested in whether people hold general beliefs about how others evaluate the experience of certain kinds of emotion (e.g., negative vs positive) and how acceptable it is to experience those emotions. This is consistent with research on social norms (Eid & Diener, 2001), display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Izard, 1980), or feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983), which makes it very clear that people are aware of—and hold beliefs about—how socially appropriate or desirable it is to experience or express certain kinds of emotion (e.g., Stearns, 1994). Our work takes a different approach to this previous research, however, in that we are focused on people's perceptions of what is expected of them within a particular social context. In this way, we measure the perceived social pressure to experience particular emotion states.

Cultural Differences in Social Expectancies

If people hold general beliefs about how acceptable it is to experience and express different kinds of emotion, then these beliefs are likely to vary across cultural contexts. Previous research has demonstrated that personally endorsed norms for emotional states vary across cultures (Eid & Diener, 2001). Just so, people's perceptions of what others expect them to feel may also vary in these same ways. As such, people's beliefs about what others expect them to feel, and which emotions are considered socially valuable and appropriate, are likely to reflect the normative context. Where norms for happiness are especially salient, people may perceive this emotional state as more acceptable and desirable, and sadness as unacceptable and undesirable. In these contexts, people may feel more social pressure not to feel sad.

While it is true that striving for happiness and avoiding sadness is a salient norm in many modern societies, it is also true that cultural differences exist. Previous work has demonstrated that experiencing positive emotions, and avoiding negative emotions, may be particularly emphasised in Western individualistic cultures (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008). In these cultures, feeling happy is considered a basic value, and positive feelings about the self are a primary determinant of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). However, the importance placed on happiness and the devaluation of sadness is not as

apparent in Asian cultures. In Japan, acceptance, emotional balance, and even hardship are highly valued, and the pursuit of happiness often has “immoral” connotations (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). East Asians are quite hesitant to dwell on positive feelings and tend to report lower scores on subjective well-being and happiness compared with their Western counterparts (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995).

The evidence suggests that feeling and expressing positive affect is less desirable within East Asian cultures than it is in Western cultures. As such, people from East Asian cultures may be less likely to experience the effects associated with social expectations to feel happy and not to feel sad. That is, whereas these social expectancies may create pressure on people within Western cultures, this pressure may be less apparent within East Asian cultures. People from these cultures may, therefore, be less likely to hold generalised beliefs that others expect them to feel happy, and not to feel sad, and the effects of these beliefs may be less pronounced in terms of their implications for individual-level emotional functioning. Consistent with this reasoning, and as I discuss below, the effects of social expectancies appear to be less apparent in Japan compared with Australia.

The Effects of Social Expectancies

Social expectancies are of interest to the extent that they may be implicated in individual emotional dysfunction, and specifically to the extent that they may be an important cause of secondary emotional disturbances. This suggests that social expectancies may have implications for a range of dysfunctional orientations to one’s own emotional experiences.

We argue that a common maladaptive response, which arises in response to social expectancies, is the extent to which people respond to their own negative moods with negative thoughts about the self. Previous research has highlighted the fact that people often ruminate over their experience of negative emotion, focusing on thoughts such as “why do I always feel this way,” or perhaps “why can’t I handle things better.” This work has shown that reacting to negative moods with self-focused rumination has negative outcomes for well-being (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Watkins, 2008). These approaches to understanding ruminative self-focus have concentrated on people’s tendency to become concerned about their experience of negative moods. That is, people focus on how they are feeling and ruminate on the implications of these feelings or perhaps how much they do not like feeling that way. However, from a social appraisal point of view, our work on social expectancies is interested in how people think about themselves as the objects of social evaluation (Manstead & Fischer, 2001). From this perspective, people become sensitive to how others value and evaluate their own emotional experiences. This raises thoughts such as “others must wonder why I can’t handle things better” and “others must dislike that fact that I always feel this way.” In these cases, we argue that people reflect on themselves negatively (e.g., feel bad, dislike the self) when experiencing emotions that are considered socially undesirable (e.g., feeling sad, anxious, etc.).

This reasoning suggests that social expectancies may produce emotional dysfunction and secondary disturbance by increasing

ruminative self-reflection in response to negative emotional events (such as sadness and anxiety). If people believe that these emotions are considered to be inappropriate and unacceptable by others in their social environment, then it is likely that they may have a sense of failure and reflect negatively on themselves for experiencing these emotional states. According to a control theory account of negative self-focused thinking (Carver & Scheier, 1982, 1990), people tend to reflect negatively on the self when they perceive a discrepancy between how they actually are and salient reference values for important and meaningful goals. These reference values may be based on what people themselves think they should feel (i.e., personal expectancies); however, social expectancies may also provide salient reference values for how people think they should feel. If true, then a particularly insidious element of social expectancies is that they set up emotion goals that are hard to abandon. Salient reminders of the value of happiness and costs of sadness ensure that people are either explicitly or implicitly driven to achieve these goals, and yet constantly avoiding sadness is a particularly difficult goal to attain. As noted by Watkins (2008), when people experience discrepancies in the context of hard-to-attain and hard-to-abandon goals, they become stuck in unconstructive, negative, self-focused thinking. That is to say that other’s expectations set up hard-to-abandon reference values for one’s own emotional states, and when people fail to meet those expectations, they feel that they have failed, leading to negative self-focused reflection.

Reflecting negatively on the self in response to negative emotional experiences has been shown to have implications for well-being. One pathway through which this type of rumination may impact on well-being is by aggravating the very emotions that people feel bad about (see Moberly & Watkins, 2008; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). So when people engage in negative self-focused rumination over their experience of sadness, they tend to feel more sad more of the time. This aggravation of unwanted emotion is consistent with the concept of secondary disturbance. We argue that social expectancies are directly implicated in the aggravation of unwanted emotion, and therefore play an important role in producing secondary disturbances.

Social Expectancies, Culture, and Emotional Functioning: The Evidence

In order to directly explore the role of social expectancies in emotion dysfunction, my colleagues and I conducted a number of studies both within Australia and Japan. Our primary research question was whether social expectancies may be associated with increased frequency and intensity of negative emotionality, whether this might extend to measures of well-being, and whether this effect may vary across cultures, specifically, and in line with our reasoning reviewed earlier, whether it is more evident in Australia than Japan.

In our first study, we recruited 123 undergraduates from an Australian university, approximately half who identified as East Asian and approximately half who identified as Anglo-European Australian. They were asked to complete a questionnaire that included a number of measures relating to their emotional experiences, overall well-being, and our own

measures of social expectancies, personal expectancies, and negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotions, such as sadness, depression, stress, or anxiety. What we found was that, on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*), European Australians reported higher mean levels of personal expectancies (5.53), social expectancies (5.49), and negative self-evaluation when feeling negative emotions (4.81) than their Asian counterparts (5.28, 5.09, 4.52, respectively). Importantly, however, only the difference in social expectancies was significant across groups, suggesting that Australians and Asians differed primarily in their endorsement of social expectancies rather than personal expectancies.

We found that both social ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and personal ($\beta = .21, p = .014$) expectancies increased negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotions, although social expectancies were the stronger predictor. We also found that, for Anglo-Australians, there was a very strong relationship between social expectancies and negative self-evaluation ($\beta = .72, p < .001$), but this was only moderate for East Asians ($\beta = .30, p = .005$). That is, although social expectancies increased negative self-evaluation in response to negative emotional states in both groups, the effects were stronger in the Anglo-Australian sample.

In our next study, we aimed to replicate these findings, but this time testing them within Australia as well as Japan. We recruited 122 Australian university students and 100 Japanese university students. In addition to responding to the same measures from our first study, we also measured the frequency and intensity of negative emotional states that people experienced on a daily basis over the past month. We also included measures of how satisfied people felt with their lives (Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and a measure of depressive symptomatology (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale; Radloff, 1977). This allowed us to determine whether social expectancies have any implications for global well-being.

What we found was that Australian students reported higher mean levels of personal (5.39) and social expectancies (5.51) compared with the Japanese students (5.04 and 5.06, respectively), and also a greater tendency to evaluate themselves negatively when experiencing negative emotions (Australian: 5.15; Japanese: 4.40). All of these differences were significant across cultures. There were no significant differences across culture in the frequency (Australian: 4.50; Japanese: 4.56) and intensity (Australian: 4.72; Japanese: 4.57) of negative emotions. There were also no significant differences in reported levels of depression (Australian: 4.72; Japanese: 4.57). However, consistent with previous research (Diener et al., 1995), Japanese reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction with life (Australian: 4.96; Japanese: 4.62). Social expectancies ($\beta = .61, p < .001$) were associated with increased negative self-evaluation across both the Australian and Japanese samples (this time, there was no relationship between personal expectancies and negative self-evaluation; $\beta = .11, p = .229$), and this relationship was stronger in Australia ($\beta = .79, p < .001$) compared with Japan ($\beta = .50, p < .001$). That is, social expectancies predicted more negative self-evaluation in response to feeling negative emotional states in Australian students than it did in Japanese students.

Social expectancies also predicted increased frequency of negative emotion ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) as well as increased intensity of negative emotion ($\beta = .47, p < .001$). This relationship between social expectancies and greater intensity of negative emotion was stronger in the Australian sample ($\beta = .57, p < .001$) compared with the Japanese sample ($\beta = .30, p < .001$). Personal expectancies did not predict either frequency ($\beta = -.16, p = .141$) or intensity ($\beta = -.04, p = .723$). We also found that social expectancies were associated with lower levels of life satisfaction ($\beta = -.28, p = .003$) and increased depression ($\beta = .56, p < .001$). Personal expectancies were not associated with depression ($\beta = -.10, p = .294$) but appeared to be associated with increased, rather than decreased, life satisfaction ($\beta = .31, p = .005$). We did not find any cultural differences in these relationships, suggesting that student's endorsement of social expectancies was associated with reduced satisfaction with life and increased depression in both Australia and Japan. Finally, using mediation analyses, we found that negative self-evaluation could help explain the effects of social expectancies on various dependent variables, suggesting that social expectancies increase negative emotionality and reduce well-being, in part due to their association with increased negative self-reflection when feeling sad.

The evidence from these two studies provided an important insight into the role of social expectancies in emotional functioning. First, we found that social expectancies appear to be a more important determinant of emotional dysfunction and reduce well-being to a greater extent than personal expectancies. This is an especially important finding, as it suggests that even when people change their personal expectations and achieve a greater acceptance of their negative emotions, secondary disturbances may still be evident due to social expectancies salient within the social and cultural context. Second, the findings provided us with some insight into one possible process by which social expectancies are translated into emotional dysfunction—through negative self-focused thinking. That is, when people experience negative emotions in the context of cultural cues suggesting that these emotional experiences are inappropriate and unacceptable, they are more likely to feel like they have failed. This, in turn, leads to experiencing more negative emotion and reduced levels of well-being. Finally, we also found that this effect of social expectancies is evident both within Australia as well as Japan; however, we found that it is especially apparent within Australia, where a higher premium is placed on feeling happy.

Do Social Expectancies Trigger Secondary Disturbances?

These findings provide good evidence for an association among social expectancies, negative self-focused thinking, and emotional dysfunction. What cannot be determined from these correlational data is whether social expectancies may play a causal role in triggering secondary disturbances. In order to provide greater insight into these causal pathways, we conducted two additional experiments.

In our first study, we provided 55 students at an Australian university with a mock newspaper story about whether negative emotions are likely to have a negative impact on those

around us. We developed two versions of the article. The high expectancy version (“Negative Emotions are Contagious in Harvard Study”) described research showing that one’s own negative emotions spread to others in one’s social network and have deleterious effects (c.f. Fowler & Christakis, 2008). The low expectancy version (“Negative Emotions are Fine in Harvard Study”) described research showing that, although negative emotions are unpleasant, they do not spread to those around us. Our reasoning was that if people feel that others are going to be adversely affected by their own experience of negative emotions, this will communicate a message that these emotions are socially unacceptable and undesirable. Participants then wrote an essay about a time when they experienced particularly strong negative emotions.

We found that students who read about the social costs of negative emotions experienced a significant increase in negative affect (as measured on the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule [PANAS]; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) after writing an essay about a time they experienced negative emotions compared with how they were feeling at the beginning of the study (mean change = 0.48). The increase in negative affect in this group was compared with no such increase for those who read that negative emotions have few social costs (mean change = 0.08).

In a second study, we used a slightly different approach to manipulating social expectancies. Rather than highlighting the social costs for others of one’s own negative emotional states, we highlighted the social costs for the individual themselves. One news article was titled “Society accepts sadness in Melbourne Study.” The other news article was titled “Society doesn’t accept sadness in Melbourne Study.” In this study, we also used a control condition where participants read about an unrelated topic. This allowed us to compare the effects of high and low social expectancies to a baseline condition. Again, people wrote about a time they had experienced particularly strong negative emotions after reading the news article.

What we found was that participants in the high social expectancy condition experienced a significant increase in negative affect (again measured using the PANAS) after recalling a time they experienced negative emotion (mean change = 0.41). This was compared with participants in the low social expectancy condition (mean change = 0.04) who experienced no such increase, therefore replicating our findings from the first study. What was of interest, however, was that people in the control condition also experienced a significant increase in negative affect (mean change = 0.44). We had also included a measure of social expectancies, similar to that used in the first two studies described earlier, which people responded to after they had read the news article. Consistent with these effects, we found that people in the high social expectancies condition and the control condition both endorsed social expectancies to a greater extent compared with those in the low social expectancies condition. Moreover, using mediation analysis, we were able to demonstrate that it was these differences in social expectancies that explained the extent to which people experienced negative affect in response to recalling a time when they experienced negative emotions. Critically, endorsement of items relating to personal expectancies was not affected by these messages.

So what does this all mean? First, both of these studies highlight a causal role for social expectancies in secondary distur-

bance. That is, when people are told that negative emotions are undesirable and unacceptable, and have personal as well as social costs, they tend to experience more negative affect when asked to recall a negative emotional event—that is, they experienced more secondary disturbance in response to reminders of their own negative emotions. Second, this effect was evident when compared with hearing the message that negative emotions are desirable and acceptable. In fact, it was this “low social expectancy” message that appears to have disrupted the extent to which students endorsed items assessing social expectancies and in turn any secondary disturbances. The effects of social expectancies were just as evident in the control condition as the high social expectancy condition in the second study. This pattern of results is consistent with our claim that social expectancies are especially evident within Western cultures, and therefore communicating social expectancies in this context merely reinforced this assumed wisdom. It would appear that communicating the message that experiencing and expressing negative emotions is socially accepted works against this salient norm, reducing perceived social expectancies and dampening negative emotional responses to the recall of negative emotional events.

Broadly speaking, the findings highlight the potential impact of media communications on emotional functioning. Information that communicates social attitudes towards particular emotional experiences has implications for how people feel, and the less socially desirable sadness is portrayed to be, the more sad people feel. Importantly, this also provides causal evidence that social expectancies lead to secondary disturbances. Of course, the findings also suggest that communicating more accepting social norms, and thereby reducing the pressure to feel happy and not sad, serves to reduce secondary disturbances in response to negative emotional events.

Implications of Social Expectancies for Affective Disturbances

There has been little research exploring the effect of perceived norms on emotional dysfunction. Consistent with Sherif’s (1936) proposition that social norms are important determinants of individual experience, our research on social expectancies shows that perceptions of how others evaluate and find acceptable the emotions we experience appear to be an important ingredient in producing downstream emotional responses. Ironically, the effect of these social expectancies is to aggravate those same emotions that are deemed to be socially undesirable or unacceptable.

To date, our research has focused on negative self-evaluation as a pathway through which social expectancies produce secondary disturbances. There are likely many other unexplored processes associated with emotional dysfunction that may be triggered when these social norms are especially salient. Take, for example, suppression or avoidance of emotional states (e.g., Gross & John, 2003; Hayes et al., 2004). When people feel the social pressure not to feel sad, anxious, or depressed, they may try to avoid or suppress these same emotions. This response to one’s own emotional experiences tends to have a range of negative outcomes; one of which is to amplify the very emotions that the individual is trying to avoid (Dalgleish, Yiend, Schweizer, & Dunn, 2009; Moberly & Watkins, 2008).

Our work also suggests that, next to social expectancies, our own personal expectancies about our emotional experiences appear to be less noxious. This is consistent with other work showing that personal expectations may guide and direct desired emotional experiences (e.g., Eid & Diener, 2001) rather than aggravate unwanted ones. Of course, personal expectations can also be harmful, leading to suppression (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006a) or avoidance (Hayes et al., 2004), and in turn psychopathology (e.g., Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown & Hofmann, 2006b). Indeed, it is because of these detrimental consequences of a personal failure to accept negative emotions that interventions, such as acceptance and commitment therapy, have become both necessary and popular. Yet it may be that challenging these personal failures to accept one's own emotions is only part of the picture.

Overall, our research on social expectancies suggests that when people believe that others expect them not to feel certain kinds of emotion, this perceived social pressure may lead them to experience those unwanted emotions more frequently and more intensely. Furthermore, these social expectancies are more powerful in predicting emotional dysfunction than a person's own expectations, and are especially evident within cultural contexts where happiness is highly valued. We believe this is important and suggest that a focus on changing personal expectations regarding our own emotional experiences may not be sufficient to reduce secondary disturbances and improve emotional functioning. Social expectancies appear to be a powerful predictor of emotional dysfunction, suggesting that a consideration of the influence of social and cultural contexts on individual-level affective disturbances, and specifically secondary disturbances, is warranted.

Implications for Promoting Happiness

The positive psychology movement was launched around a decade ago (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and has championed the importance of positive experiences and positive emotions for well-being and performance (see Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions have been shown to mitigate the impact of stress on physical health (Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004), and positive psychology interventions have proven effective both for enhancing psychological well-being and reducing depressive symptoms (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). This burgeoning body of work has provided clear evidence for the many benefits of experiencing positive emotions. Moreover, this evidence is being relied on to develop a range of applied programmes within organisations (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), schools (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, & DiGiuseppe, 2004), and medicine and healthcare contexts (Taylor & Sherman, 2004). These programmes aim to increase well-being by focusing on positive virtues, positive experiences, and positive emotion.

By focusing on the downside of valuing happiness, our work on social expectancies does not challenge the value of these approaches. What I believe it does do, however, is provide a cautionary perspective. As noted in a recent review by Grant and Schwartz (2011), there can be too much of a good thing, and too much happiness may actually be harmful. Intense positive affect comes with psychological costs (Diener, Colvin, Pavot,

& Allman, 1991); extremely cheerful people engage in riskier behaviours (Martin et al., 2002) and live shorter lives (Friedman et al., 1993), and extremely happy people earn lower salaries (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2006). It does not appear to be the case that more happiness is always better. From a social expectancies perspective, it would also appear that creating organisational cultures or social norms that place a singular focus on happiness as desirable and sadness as undesirable may increase perceived social pressures not to feel sad, with detrimental consequences for emotional functioning.

A social expectancies perspective also reveals a novel viewpoint on other work questioning the value of pursuing happiness. There are a number of scholars who have noted that at times the more people pursue happiness, the less they seem to be able to obtain it (Schooler, Ariely, & Loewenstein, 2003). The reason for this ironic effect of seeking happiness may be due to the nature of goal pursuit. When people set important goals for themselves, these goals serve as standards against which to evaluate their own achievements (Carver & Scheier, 1982). People feel disappointed when they do not achieve their own goals, and when feeling happy is the goal, this feature of human goal pursuit interferes with goal achievement. Feeling disappointment and discontent is inconsistent with feeling happy, and the more people strive for happiness, the more likely it is that they will feel disappointed about how they actually feel. Paradoxically, this process serves to decrease happiness the more it is sought after. This is especially the case in contexts where happiness appears to be within reach (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011). Importantly, however, people do not pursue their goals in isolation, and those goals shape and are shaped by the social and cultural context. From a social expectancies perspective, it is not only people's own goal pursuits that may have the ironic effect of reducing happiness, but social pressures that arise in contexts where people are collectively focused on the goal of feeling happy. This may lead to a kind of "pressure-cooker" effect where the mass pursuit of happiness serves to increase sadness. In these contexts, people will not only feel disappointed by a failure to meet their own goals, but also due to a failure to achieve what appears to be a socially desirable emotional state.

None of these means that we should abandon attempts to teach people the value of increasing their happiness, or focus on the notion that the happy life is the good life. It does, however, suggest that there may be good and not-so-good ways to go about this. Focusing on happiness as a goal or communicating social norms regarding the value of happiness may have paradoxical effects, leading to more sadness and reduced well-being.

Implications for Promoting Acceptance

As I noted at the beginning, interventions that help people accept their negative feelings rather than try to decrease them have been met with a good deal of therapeutic success. When people accept negative feelings, those experiences tend to draw less attention and less meta-emotional evaluation (Hayes et al., 1999), which in turn leads to greater well-being (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006a, 2006b). Research has demonstrated that this approach reduces negative affective reactions to negative emotional events (Levitt, Brown, Orsillo, & Barlow, 2004) and has

long-term benefits, such as reducing anxiety and depression (e.g., Tull, Gratz, Salters, & Roemer, 2004).

A social expectancies perspective suggests that these benefits may be greater in social environments where people do not feel pressured to achieve happiness and avoid sadness. Of course, although every practitioner would love to be able to directly change their client's environment, this is no easy feat, and such social pressures tend to persist when they are apparent. What can be done, however, is to draw attention to these sources of discontent. When people become aware that their feelings of failure may be not only the product of poor personal approaches to happiness, but also a product of their social and cultural environment, this insight may prove particularly powerful and protective.

Perhaps more challenging is how psychologists orient themselves to the issues of sadness. There has been precious ground gained in taking a medical viewpoint on affective disorders, such as anxiety and depression. This has not only achieved the necessary goal of raising the profile of these disorders, but has also combated prejudice associated with the view that people should just "pull their socks up" and "get over it." Indeed, this perspective has provided much needed relief for the clients themselves, struggling to understand their own psychological turmoil. Still, there is a downside to this perspective. When common malaise, reactive depression, or prolonged but contextually appropriate sadness are characterised in these ways, people are likely to feel that their experience is in some way abnormal. These implicit messages may lead people to seek to avoid their emotional pain and to see their feelings as indicative of an illness and as inappropriate and undesirable. Normalising these experiences as part of the range of human experience may be an important pathway towards reducing secondary disturbance.

It is also important that research and practice dealing with sadness and emotional pain remains open to a broad range of perspectives on these common human experiences. Too often, negative emotional experiences are seen as simply that—negative. There are, however, many benefits. Negative emotions are an important source of creativity (Wilson, 2008), and expressing negative emotions may often strengthen interpersonal relations (Averill, 1983; Fischer & Manstead, 2008). Even the experience of engaging with and overcoming fear may be an exhilarating experience, and may be used as a symbol of courage and personal strength (Le Breton, 2000). Social pain reminds people of the importance of interpersonal relationships with others (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007), and trauma may lead to positive outcomes, such as posttraumatic growth (e.g., Joseph & Linley, 2008). Even exposure to experiences of death may serve adaptive functions (Bluck, Dirk, McKay, & Hux, 2008). What is clear is that experiencing negative emotions is important for achieving a rich and meaningful life (Hayes et al., 1999), and these common human experiences deserve to be understood as more than simply negative, undesirable, or even bad. Such a shift in focus will no doubt also have implications for the extent to which people feel that these experiences are normative and acceptable to others.

Conclusion

The concept of acceptance represents a powerful addition to the toolbox of treating psychologists. Increasing acceptance has

been shown to reliably reduce secondary disturbances and improve emotional and psychological functioning. Our work has highlighted an important consideration that dovetails with this new focus of psychotherapy—the importance of prevailing social norms. To date, our research highlights that perceived social pressures to feel happy and not sad tend to promote more sadness and may even do so more powerfully than people's own personal expectations of happiness. This work contributes to a broader field of research that is increasingly recognising the social nature of people's emotional lives. Specifically, it highlights that social norms and expectations have the capacity to produce emotional dysfunction just as personal norms and expectations do, and that these difficulties need to be understood and treated with a clear recognition of the broader social context.

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