Understanding and improving emotion regulation: Lessons from psychological science and the humanities

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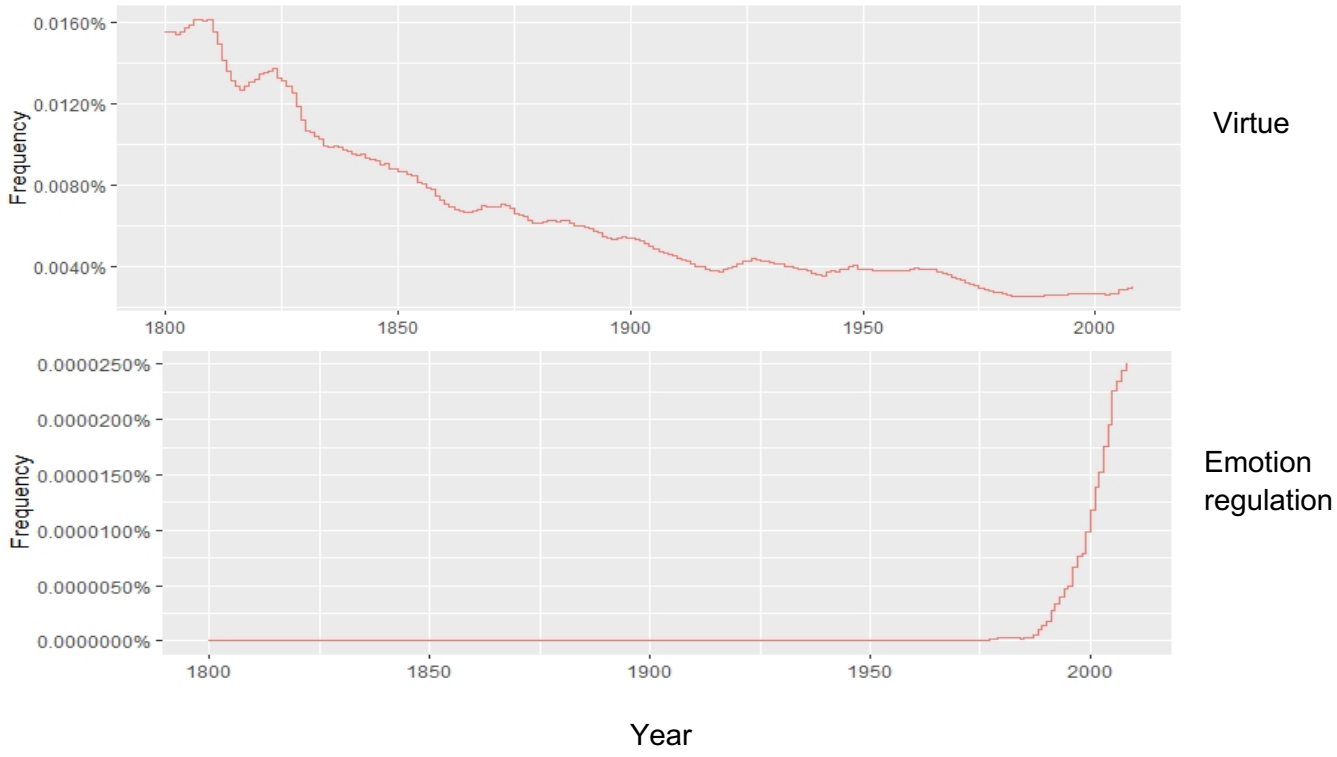
Emotion regulation is one of the most important topics in psychology. Many, if not all clinical interventions seek to improve emotion regulation. Their outcomes typically involve reduction in distressing emotional symptoms (depression, anxiety, stress). Similarly, every social and emotional learning program implemented in any school has an element of teaching young people how to respond effectively to their emotions.

Despite its importance, the scientific study of emotion regulation is recent. The term “emotion regulation” does not appear in books until approximately 1980 (Figure 1 below). This can be contrasted with the word “virtue”which has appeared steadily in that time, though has been in decline. This leads to some interesting questions? Where was emotion regulation before 1980? Was it undiscovered, like some lost dinosaur hiding deep in the Amazon jungle? Or perhaps people did not do it or talk about it? What would it mean to be “good” at emotion regulation? Does this differ at different historical time points, or across different philosophical perspectives (e.g., stoicism versus hedonism)? These kinds of questions are best answered by setting emotion regulation within a humanities framework, the goal of the present chapter.

Figure 1: Frequency of the occurrence of ‘Virtue” and “Emotion Regulation” in sources printed between 1800 and 2008 (Source: Google Ngram)



What is emotion regulation?

Most essays start with defining the topic under consideration. We cannot do that with emotion regulation. Right from the beginning, we need to justify our definition and make our assumptions explicit. Let's start with the "accepted" definition, the notion of emotion regulation that has dominated psychological discourse in the last 40 years.

(1) The ability of an individual to modulate an emotion or set of emotions (American Psychological Association, 2019)); or
(2) Manipulation of quality, duration, or intensity of emotion (Torre & Lieberman, 2018)

These definitions imply that we need to somehow control emotions, e.g., reduce the intensity of negative emotions. This element of emotion regulation is present in almost all modern definitions of emotion regulation (Braunstein, Gross, & Ochsner, 2017; Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, & Parker, 2016; Gross, 2013). Most psychological research proceeds from this definition.

Let's now take a step back from this definition and put our humanities hats on. What does this definition imply about the ultimate goal of being humans? It implies that the effective human is one who tries to directly maximize positive and minimize negative emotions. These definitions point to hedonism, or the idea that pleasure is the natural end or motive of human action (Pradhan, 2015).

There are many critiques of hedonism and counter-critiques of the critiques (Atkins, 2015). Our purpose here is not to argue for or against hedonism, but to point out the relevance of philosophy for understanding emotion regulation. How we define emotion regulation depends on the philosophical assumptions about the good life. In this chapter, we will declare our assumptions and then describe how through these assumptions guide our attempts to understand and improve emotion regulation. In order to meet this aim we will begin with our definition of emotion regulation.

Emotion regulation is the ability to respond adaptively to emotions. Someone good at emotion regulation can respond to their emotions in a way that promotes growth, meaning, and satisfaction of basic needs for competence, connection, and relatedness (Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015). Someone weak at emotion regulation will respond to emotions by acting impulsively (e.g, lashing out), engaging in destructive forms of avoidance (e.g.,drinking, procrastination), failing to persist at valued goals (e.g., giving up because something is emotionally difficult), or clinging to positive emotions (e.g., holding on to pride and refusing to acknowledge setbacks; Sahdra, Ciarrochi, & Parker, 2016; Sahdra, Ciarrochi, Parker, Marshall, & Heaven, 2015). In this definition, one might rename the construct "emotional behavior regulation," but we will stick to the traditional name in this essay.

Thus, our definition focuses on doing good, rather than feeling good. We choose this definition for one particularly important reason, what philosophers call the "paradox of hedonism" (Timmermann, 2005): If we directly seek to feel good, we often paradoxically miss it. There is now clear evidence in the psychological literature that direct attempts to reduce negative affect often fail (Hayes, Wilson, & Follette, 1996; Kashdan et al., 2014; Kohl, Rief, & Glombiewski, 2012). Further, most psychological disorders stem from an attempt to control or minimize negative affect. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder often involves an attempt to minimize anxiety around past trauma, social anxiety often involves an attempt to minimize the fear of negative evaluation, and obsessive compulsive disorder often involves an attempt to minimize fear of contamination (Hayes et al., 1996). Direct attempts to

control negative feelings can cause a paradoxical rebound effect in which negative feelings become stronger (Hooper, Sandoz, Ashton, Clarke, & Mchugh, 2012; Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). In addition, attempting to control feelings can lead one to avoid or give up valued activities (Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015). One can only avoid feelings of failure or rejection by not striving for success or relationships.

Attempting to control positive emotions can also be problematic. For example, placing a high value on feeling happy is associated with lower emotional well-being, higher depression, and greater loneliness (Ford & Mauss, 2014; Mauss et al., 2012). Being attached to positive states and clinging to them leads to worse well-being (Ciarrochi, Sahdra, Yap, & Dicke, 2019).

How does emotion regulation work?

To address this question, we must again turn to the humanities, and in particular philosophy. How we view the nature of humans will have a rather large impact on how we talk about emotion regulation. We will contrast two major worldviews here: Elemental realism/mechanistic worldviews, versus functional contextualist worldviews (Hayes, Hayes, & Reese, 1988). It is important to note that world views are pre-analytic assumptions and do not refute each other. One can only state ones preferences, rather than argue for the superiority of one over the other.

The elemental realist view is exemplified by the Gross process model of emotion regulation, illustrated below (Gross, 1998, 2013). This type of model is common in psychology and assumes that stimuli is “inputted” into a “processing system”, that then transforms it in various ways. Thus, the mechanistic worldview sees humans as made up of different interacting parts, with the goal being to understand how the parts work and interrelate.

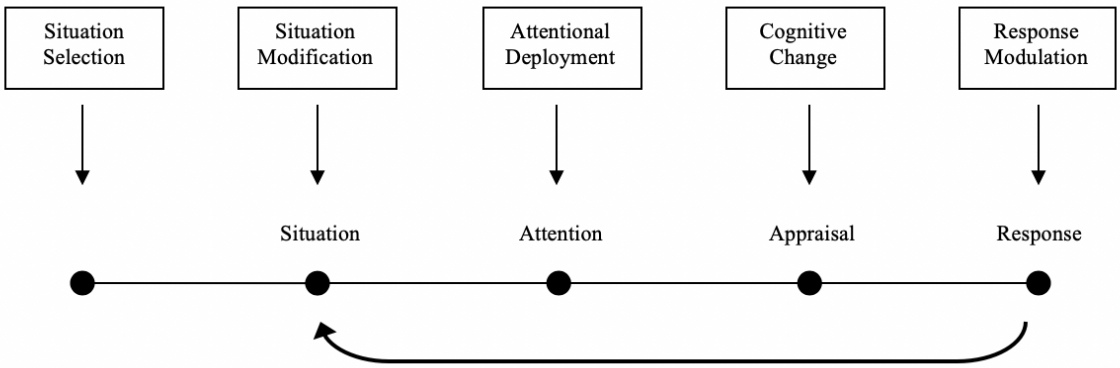


Figure 2. Gross emotion regulation model (Gross, 1998).

In this model, emotions may be upregulated or downregulated at any of five stages. To illustrate, imagine you are seeking to manage your emotions around a difficult male co-worker. You could avoid him all together (situation selection), or modify the situation, for example by getting a new job. You could avoid looking at him (attentional deployment), or try to think differently about him (cognitive change), perhaps convincing yourself that he is “not

that bad.” Finally, you could fully feel your anger towards the person, but act nice towards him (response modulation).

We can contrast the mechanistic world-view with the functional contextualist worldview used in the present essay and in emotion regulation approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2016). This worldview is pragmatic and focuses on the "act in context", whereby we interpret any event as an ongoing act inseparable from its current and historical context. The goal is prediction-and-influence, in contrast to the mechanistic worldviews where prediction is often sufficient. Thus, within a mechanistic worldview it would be adequate to examine how the different emotion regulation components relate to each other. The functional contextualist, in contrast, seeks to know how to predict-and-influence emotion regulation, in a way that helps the person adapt to a context. Functional contextualists could use a mechanistic model, so long as it helps one to influence outcomes.

The two world-views can complement each other, and do not refute each other. In what follows, we provide a functional contextual based description of emotion regulation. The goal of such a description is to provide clear guidance about how to improve emotion regulation for particular individuals in particular contexts. We describe five modifiable components of emotion regulation. We then return to the role of the humanities in supporting each aspect of emotion regulation.

The five emotion regulation skills

1. Skill at identifying and affirming values.

Emotion regulation involves behaving adaptively, in the presence of difficult emotions. We define adaptive as the ability to persist in behavior, or change behavior, in the service of values and needs. What is adaptive will depend on the individual context and on what the individual values. For example, imagine two people in the same workplace. One of them values close relationships, whereas the other values challenge and getting ahead. What is adaptive for each of them will be different. Similarly, imagine two people who both value connection in the workplace, but work in different workplaces (one hostile, the other friendly). Again, whether or not the behavior is adaptive will differ in these two contexts.

We can improve adaptation in two ways. First, we can alter the environment to make it meet needs or be more value satisfying (Williams & Ciarrochi, in press; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Second, we can improve people's ability to regulate their emotions by helping them identify and affirm values. Values give people a sense of meaning, purpose, and energy, and help them grow. Most people value connecting with others, giving, being active, challenging oneself, learning, and caring for oneself (Basarkod, 2019; Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015). Values are like a compass: They help people make good choices when experiencing difficult emotions.

Research on value clarification, or 'self-affirmation', suggests that having people complete writing tasks to affirm what they value can have benefits for wellbeing, self-control, self-efficacy, pro-sociality, and adaptive behavioural engagement (Howell, 2017; MCQueen & Klein, 2006). For example, Cohen and colleagues tested a values affirmation intervention with African American and European American 7th graders from lower-middle to middle class families (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). They presented students with a list of values and half of them (the experimental group) were instructed to choose two or three of their most important values, whereas the other half were instructed to choose unimportant values. Results indicated that the stigmatised group (African Americans) earned higher grades in the experimental than the control group, suggesting that value affirmation may provide psychological resources that protect against the emotional strain of racial stigma. This result has since been replicated many times (Bowen, Wegmann, & Webber, 2013; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Miyake et al., 2010).

2. Skill at pragmatic use of language

A core premise of most modern attempts to improve emotion regulation is that negative or dysfunctional cognitive processes interfere with emotion regulation (Ciarrochi, Robb, & Godsell, 2005). There is clear evidence for this idea. For example, longitudinal research shows that people who have hope are more likely to develop wellbeing (Ciarrochi, Parker, Kashdan, Heaven, & Barkus, 2015), and people with self-esteem are more likely to develop supportive social networks (Marshall, Parker, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2014). Positive self-views are associated with increased life satisfaction and positive affect, and decreased negative affect and depression (Dufner, Gebauer, Sedikides, & Denissen, 2019).

There is also evidence that people can be taught to use language more practically. Reappraisal interventions encourage people to cognitively change the meaning of a stimulus to reduce its emotional impact (Bettis et al., 2018). Problem-solving interventions are a core part of CBT and encourage people to accurately represent the problem and

systematically work towards a solution (Ciarrochi, Leeson, & Heaven, 2009; Nezu, 2004). A meta-analysis shows a clear link between the use of cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving and low levels of anxiety and depression (Schäfer, Naumann, Holmes, Tuschen-Caffier, & Samson, 2017). Longitudinal research suggests that having an effective problem orientation (seeing problems as a challenge rather than a threat) is linked to the development of higher levels of positive affect and lower levels of negative affect (Ciarrochi et al., 2009). Intervention research suggests that reappraisal can diminish negative affect (Nook, Vidal Bustamante, Cho, & Somerville, 2019). Research also suggests that reappraisal skill may improve with age (Brockman, Ciarrochi, Parker, & Kashdan, 2017; McRae et al., 2012). There is also some evidence that reappraisal is best used in specific situations, e.g., when a negative event or situation is uncontrollable (Koval et al., 2016).

The previous interventions in this section focused on altering the content of thinking (i.e., form or frequency). In contrast, 'function' interventions do not seek to directly alter what people think, but rather target the impact of that thinking on behaviour (Ferrari, Yap, Scott, Einstein, & Ciarrochi, 2018; Marshall et al., 2015). For example, someone might think, "I will never be able to accomplish this task on time", and this thought could have either a large impact on behavior (the person gives up) or no impact (the person persists and accomplishes the task on time). Decoupling interventions—sometimes called 'defusion interventions', involve looking at thoughts, feelings, or urges mindfully, as events that can be observed but not reacted to; and disrupting the literal power of words through repetition, song, or art, so that words are experienced as arbitrary sounds, rather than binding truths (Ciarrochi et al., 2005; Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015; Hayes et al., 2016). Levin et al.(2015) reviewed 44 studies and found that decoupling was used effectively across a broad range of problems, including substance abuse, depression, anxiety, avoidance behaviour, and self-harm.

3. Skill at identifying, describing , and not-reacting to emotions (mindfulness of emotions)

Within the functional-contextualist framework, no behavior is inherently bad or good. Rather, the behavior is defined in terms of its usefulness for a particular person in a particular context given the person's particular values. This idea is especially important in the area of mindfulness. People often characterize mindfulness as inherently good, or as some magical pill that will make all stress and hardship go away (Ciarrochi et al., 2016). However, we view "being mindful" as just another strategy and not an inherently good one. Indeed, research suggests that mindlessness can sometimes be beneficial (Smallwood & Schooler, 2015).

Mindfulness of emotions has two major components: the ability to identify and describe emotions, and the ability to respond in an accepting and nonreactive way to emotions (Sahdra et al., 2016). Let's consider emotion identification first. Emotions provide people with valuable information about how they are adapting, that is, about what they value and whether the environment is supporting those values (Rowsell, Ciarrochi, & Deane, 2014). For example, sadness is a sign that something undesirable (contrary to value) has happened in the past, fear is a sign that something undesirable might happen in the future, and anger is often a sign that some agent is doing something undesirable and unfair (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). People who report being unaware of their feelings struggle to adapt (Taylor & Bagby, 2004), and are likely to engage in drug addiction to manage confusing feelings (Lindsay & Ciarrochi, 2009), and to develop poor mental health and poor

social connections(Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Supavadeeprasit, 2008; Rowsell, Ciarrochi, & Deane, 2014; Rowsell, Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Deane, 2014).

The second component of mindfulness of emotions involves the ability to accept and not react to feelings with unhelpful behaviour. Perhaps one of the most destructive ways to respond to emotions is to seek to avoid them, or engage in experiential avoidance. There is now clear evidence that experiential avoidance is associated with worse mental health and self-destructive behavior, such as addiction, withdrawing from life, phobia, obsessions, self-harm, excessive worry, rumination, and procrastination (Hayes et al., 1996; Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006). On the other side of avoidance of feelings is clinging, or attachment to feelings (Sahdra et al., 2016; Sahdra et al., 2015). People often cling to positive feelings, especially those that are attached to ego ("I'm better than you"), to having an ideal life, and to having pleasant experiences that do not end. Research indicates that psychological clinging is associated with poor mental health and lower likelihood of engaging in prosocial behavior (Ciarrochi et al., 2019; Sahdra et al., 2015).

Mindfulness of emotions appear to be modifiable in many evidence-based interventions, including those that explicitly improve mindfulness (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009; Gu, Strauss, Bond, & Cavanagh, 2015), awareness and acceptance of sensory input (Farb, Segal, & Anderson, 2013; Pollatos et al., 2008; van der Kolk, 2006), skill at describing and labeling emotions (Kehoe, Havinghiurst, & Harley, 2014; Durlak, Weissberg, & Dymnicki, 2011; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996), and skill at responding to feelings in an adaptive and non-impulsive way (Hayes et al., 2016; Neumann, van Lier, Gratz, & Koot, 2010).

4. Skill at broadening and building emotion regulation strategies

There come times in everybody's life where what has worked in a past niche no longer works in a present niche. For example, imagine a young female is being raised by an abusive, alcoholic mother. She may feel fear and as a result act in a small and withdrawing way at home to keep herself safe. This strategy may work somewhat at home, but could be problematic at school. If she responds to her fear with withdrawal, she will fail to form friendships or supportive relationships with teachers. For her to regulate her emotions, she will need to learn to experience her fear and distrust of others, and still be willing to engage in positive social interaction. That is, she will need to broaden how she typically responds to her fear.

Because both ourselves and our environment are constantly changing, we need the ability to broaden our behavioral responses to adapt to these changes. Such expansion requires us to try new things, even when our emotions are screaming "No. It's not safe." We need to be willing to take risks and make mistakes, and learn how to better adapt from our mistakes. People who cannot broaden and build can get stuck in familiar, unhelpful behavioural patterns (Hayes & Ciarrochi, 2015)

Fredrickson's Broaden and Build Theory suggests that positive affect and wellbeing broadens awareness, drives approach and exploratory behaviour, and expands social networks (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018; Kok & Fredrickson, 2010). Positive affect essentially signals that the environment is safe and it is ok to try new things and take risks. Research suggests that inducing positive affect leads to more creativity and big picture thinking and increased prosocial behavior and social support (Aknin, Van de Vondervoort, & Hamlin, 2018; Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Longitudinal research suggests that positive emotions predict an increase in valued activity (Williams, Ciarrochi, & Heaven, 2014). Concerning emotion regulation interventions, the take home

message is that creating environments that signal safety and promote positive affect are likely to help individuals expand the way they adapt to difficult emotional events.

If positive affect is so good, is negative affect bad for broadening and building repertoires of behaviour? Negative affect can narrow thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). However, we can think of this narrowing as happening in a specific moment of time, as when you hear a strange movement on the floor of your bedroom at 3am and you focus all your attention on the sound and nothing else. However, over a broader time scale, negative affect need not cause narrowing. For example, the notion of posttraumatic growth suggests people can use trauma to broaden their behavioural patterns (Schubert, Schmidt, & Rosner, 2016). Interventions that work to counter narrowing due to negative affect include exposure-based therapies such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and many Mindfulness-Based Therapies. These have been effective in treating a wide range of conditions (Gu et al., 2015; Hooper & Larsson, 2015; Howell & Passmore, 2018) .

An analog to exposure interventions in normal populations is expressive writing. Expressive writing interventions typically ask a person to reflect on negative experiences for about 15 to 20 minutes a day for several sessions. Expressive writing can focus people's attention on memories that they've avoided and undervalued, can elicit processes similar to exposure, and can help people build coherence and understanding around past negative events. Meta-analyses show the value of expressive writing for promoting well-being and recovery from past, negative experiences (Pavlacic, Buchanan, Maxwell, Hopke, & Schulenberg, 2019; Reinhold, Bürkner, & Holling, 2018; Travagin, Margola, & Revenson, 2015).

There are a wide variety of other interventions that might fall under the broaden and build category. Behavioural activation is an evidence-based intervention that involves using methods (e.g., activity scheduling) to encourage people to engage in pleasurable or valued activities, even if they feel unmotivated or depressed (Cuijpers, Straten, & Warmerdam, 2007; Mazzucchelli, Kane, & Rees, 2010;Dimidjian, Hollon, Dlobson, Schmaling, et al, 2006). These interventions often encourage people to 'fake it till they make it', that is, engage in valued behaviour before they have the "right" motivations and feelings. This shapes new responses in the presence of difficult emotions.

Art activities are another helpful way to help people broaden their way of responding to difficult emotional experiences by broadening their emotional experiences and ways of viewing the world. One review suggests that in-school art programs can build self-esteem, sense of belonging and relationships (Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). The activities involved in the interventions were diverse, including dance, drama, storytelling, film making, and drum circles.

5. Skill at taking perspective on oneself and others

Finally, a key emotion regulation skill involves the ability to take perspective of oneself and of others. Perspective taking involves verbal framing behavior, such as, I and YOU, HERE and THERE, and NOW and THEN (Barnes-Holmes, McHugh, & Barnes-Holmes, 2004; Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001). For example, "I see myself, now, looking at what I was like, then." Or, "I see how I made you feel." We develop perspective taking, in part, by answering questions such as, "What were you doing there?" or "What am I doing now?", and "What was she feeling then." Perspective taking is essential to being able

to regulate emotions, and emcompasses pragmatic language use (ability 2 discussed above), mindfulness (ability 3) and broadening and building (ability 4).

Perspective taking directed at the self

Consider an example of poor emotion regulation. Imagine some people incorrectly believes the statement “No-one loves me.” They experience social anxiety and depression, and engage in social withdrawal, and fail to build relationships, or seek social support. How can perspective taking help?

First, they can learn to view themselves from a distanced, ‘outsider’ perspective (Grossmann, Sahdra, & Ciarrochi, 2016; Kross, 2010), as in “I, here, see myself suffering there.” Such a distanced perspective weakens the power of unhelpful thoughts and feelings. For example, you can imagine yourself in the distant future looking at your experiences now, seeing yourself as an old person looking back on your young self-thinking, “No-one loves me”. This simple distancing intervention reduces distress in reaction to negative situations such as social rejection (Kross, 2010). Other forms of self-distancing that have proven to be effective include talking about oneself in the third person, or taking an outsiders view (Ahmed, Somerville, & Sebastian, 2018; Powers & LaBar, 2019; White et al., 2017). Self-distancing is likely to work by helping people become aware of their feelings in the moment (ability 3), diminishing the affective impact of cognitions though making the difficult situation seem more distant and abstract (similar to ability 2), and helping people to regulate their behavior (Powers & LaBar, 2019). This regulation may occur by helping people to experience unhelpful thoughts as just thoughts, and not truths that must interfere with valued action (Hayes & Melancon, 1989). Distancing interventions also create a “mindful space” between oneself and one’s emotions, giving people a moment to regulate their choices based on their values, rather than their impulses.

Perspective taking of the self can also focus on one’s ability to grow and change, in other words develop a “growth mindset (Sarrasin et al., 2018). If you believe “Nobody loves me”, then you will be especially miserable if you also believe you can’t improve and change. Growth mindset interventions can help people to see themselves as changing and capable of improvement. They involve perspective shifts such as, “I am different now then I was then; I will be different again in the future.” Through such perspective taking, one sees the self as something that is growing, not fixed. There is clear evidence that growth mindset interventions improves achievement (Sarrasin et al., 2018) and well-being (Schleider & Weisz, 2018; Zeng, Hou, & Peng, 2016).

Finally, one can take a kindly perspective on the self, or engage in self-compassion practice. One can ask, “If someone who loves you heard you say, ‘nobody loves me’, what might that person say to you? How might that person treat you?” Research suggests that self-compassion can be taught and has a positive impact on indicators of wellbeing (Ferrari et al., 2019, 2018). Self-compassion, like growth mindset, broadens one’s view of the self, as someone who needs to be psychologically “beaten” into shape to someone who struggles and deserves kindness.

Perspective taking directed at others

Humans are a social species. If we believe the thought “Nobody loves me”, we will experience it the same as physical pain (Williams & Nida, 2011). Loneliness is as a big a risk factor for death as smoking a substantial number of cigarettes every day or being significantly overweight (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015; Rico-Uribe et al., 2018). Loneliness and similar emotions can be toxic.

Empathy, or taking perspective on others, may help people to build strong supportive relationships and thereby help them manage feelings of loneliness and isolation. Empathy

promotes one's ability to engage in socially effective behavior (Hirn, Thomas, & Zoelch, 2018),increases prosocial behavior (Sahdra et al., 2015), and increases relationship satisfaction (Sened et al., 2017). In addition, a meta-analysis suggests empathy can be taught (Teding van Berkhout, 2016).

Conclusions

We have shown how our definition and view of the world influence how we work with emotions. The humanities, and especially philosophy and various art forms, have much to contribute in understanding emotion regulation, and promoting adaptive emotion regulation. We end by showing how teachers can help develop each of the five emotion regulation skills through the study of humanities.

Value identification (skill 1) relates to the study of ethics, morals, and philosophical discussions of what makes a good life. It is also relevant to philosophical, historical, and literary treatments of the conflict between individual values and group and societal values.

The wise use of language (skill 2) is most closely linked to writings about reasoning and logic often found in philosophy, but also to work on the limits of reason, as exemplified by the Pascal quote, "The heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart." Eastern practices often seek to disrupt harmful language processes. For example, Zen koans are riddles that resist logical solutions and thereby hint at the dangers of overusing reasoning.

Art may be one of the most powerful mediums to help people become aware of their feelings (skill 3) and also broaden and build their emotion regulation skill (skill 4). For example, the visual arts allow people to connect with their feelings in a way that is new and does not involve excessive verbal control. Indeed, music, dance and other forms of art have been used for this exact purpose (Zarobe and Bungay 2017; Gilroy 2006; Gold et al. 2004; Ritter and Low 1996).

The study of literature and history may be one of the best ways to develop perspective taking. We suspect one type of literary work is especially valuable for developing perspective taking, namely, the literature in which the authors do not assert their viewpoint, but rather allow characters to have different, often conflicting viewpoints (e.g., some work by Shakespear and Doestoesky). For example, two characters in the play *Hamlet*, Hamlet and Fortinbras, are princes who have completely different perspectives on life. Hamlet has a deep understanding of the problems of living, is conflicted ("to be or not to be"), and often unable to take decisive action. Fortinbras "only" understands the ordinary problems of life and can take decisive military action. Shakespeare never indicates which position he thought "better", leaving readers to explore the different perspectives themselves.

Perspective taking is also inherent in the study of history. We learn to see ourselves in relation to the past. We learn, for example, that it is easy for humans to make dangerous assumptions about people from other groups, nationalities, and genders. We learn to see our potential for cruelty or benevolence by seeing in past societies.

In conclusion, we need philosophy, history, literature and various art forms to understand the assumptions we make about emotion regulation (is it about feeling good, or doing good?) and to cultivate different skills that can help us better regulate our emotions. We need to learn how to reason well with words, but also recognize that words can only do so much, and we need to explore our feelings in the non-verbal mediums found in the arts. We need history and literature to break out of our narrow perspectives and be able to see

our emotion regulation strategies in a more honest light. For example, we can see that, throughout the ages, people have vilified other groups in order to have feelings of safety and self-importance. We can ask, is this an effective emotion regulation strategy? Does vilifying others build value for myself, my community, and my world (skill1)? Do my stereotyped beliefs about others bring joy to my life (skill 2)? Our should I recognize my fear of those who are different (skill 3), seek to understand their position in life and whether they pose a genuine threat (skill 5)? Perhaps, when we feel fear towards someone who is different, we should not engage in the default response we have seen throughout history (vilification), but rather consider new ways of responding that allows us to live with our fear and our follow humans (skill 4). We need the humanities to both understand and teach emotion regulation.

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