

Candidate: 10037

# Reacting or Proacting: Savoring as a moderator in the relation between Emotion Crafting and Well-Being

PSY2900  
Bachelorassignment Psychology

Bachelor's thesis in PSY2900  
Supervisor: Jolene Van der Kaap-Deeder  
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Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences

Department of Psychology



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Science and Technology



Bachelor Thesis – Candidate 10037 – Reacting or Proacting

# Reacting or Proacting: Savoring as a moderator in the relation between Emotion Crafting and Well-Being

Candidate number: **10037**

Bachelor Thesis in psychology: Emotion Crafting: How to Increase ones Daily Positive  
Feelings

PSY2900

May 2023, Trondheim

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Supervisor: Jolene Van der Kap-Deeder

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## **PREFACE**

This bachelor thesis is the culmination of my three-year psychology program at NTNU. I was drawn to this project due to my strong interest in positive psychology and its effects on well-being. The study of emotion crafting as a means of increasing positive emotions in daily life was one that I could not pass up. As a fan of the works of Victor Frankel and Mihály Csíkszentmihály, I found the idea of comparing two different emotion regulation strategies fascinating. While I conducted the literature review, data analysis, and writing of this thesis independently, I received valuable guidance from my Bachelor supervisor, Jolene Van der Kaap-Deeder. She gave clear instructions, allowed me to choose the specifics of my project, and assisted our group with data recovery and setup. I am grateful for the support and contributions of my fellow group members, as well as the motivation and thought-provoking questions from my mother. I hope that this thesis is well-received and rewarding. The topic, further motivating me. I hope this thesis is appreciated and rewarding.



## **ABSTRACT**

The interactions between reactive and proactive emotion regulation has received little attention in the literature, despite the importance of emotion regulation on well-being. This study examines the effect of emotion crafting as a form of proactive regulation and its relation with well-being, while moderated by savoring. It was predicted that high levels of emotion crafting would result in high levels of well-being, even when moderated by savoring. The results supported both predictions. When levels of emotion crafting rose, so did levels of well-being. This result was still true after moderating for savoring. Results are discussed later.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Research's shows that mental distress, low levels of well-being, and mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety is on the rise. These growing levels of emotional negativity are having a negative effect on well-being on a societal level (Marcus et al., 2012). Several studies have shown that high levels of well-being are associated with a range of positive outcomes, including effective learning, productivity and creativity, good relationships, pro-social behavior, and good health and life expectancy (Chida & Steptoe, 2008) (Deiner et al., 2019). Because of this, positive psychology has become a steadily growing area of study, to help improve wellness amongst people. One of the main contributors to wellness, and one of the counteragents towards depression and anxiety is positive emotion (Vanderlind et al., 2020).

Savoring is a well-established construct in positive psychology referring to one's capacity to recognize and appreciate enjoyable life experiences and those able to do this have

healthier and happier mind (Carl et al., 2014). Because of this the skill of Emotional Regulation (ER) is strongly connected to well-being and positive emotions (Quoidbach et al., 2010). Emotional regulation can occur either prior (proactive ER) or after (reactive ER) the onset of an emotional stimulus (Martins-Klein et al., 2020), with Savoring taking the role of reactive Emotional Regulation. Through Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and the effect of proactive ER (Martins-Klein et al., 2020), Emotion Crafting (EC) was designed as a way of practicing control over emotions prior to a stimulus, and thereby mental well-being. The question is if Emotion Crafting has all the qualities to replace savoring as a means of improving well-being. This study aims to examine whether emotion crafting uniquely relates to well-being even after accounting for savoring beliefs.

*Keywords: Well-being, Savoring, Negativity-bias, Self determination theory, Emotional Crafting.*

### **Defining Well-being:**

Emotional Wellbeing (EWB) is a multi-dimensional composite that encompasses how positive an individual feels generally (Diener et al., 2002). Well-being can be well-being or positive mental health as requiring both hedonic and eudaimonic components. In other words a combination of feeling good and functioning well. Seligman proposed five essential elements of well-being as pleasure, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and relations (Seligman, 2002). Another approach was done by Diener who argued that subjective well-being comprises the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative emotions and life satisfaction (Deiner et al., 1999). This was further developed by adding the concept of “flourishing” that consists off purpose in life, positive relationships, engagement, competence, self-esteem, optimism, and contribution towards the well-being of others (Deiner et al., 2010).

This approach to well-being is the one used in this study as the “flourishing scale” was our measurement of wellbeing in the questionnaire.

Due to a lot of research focusing on different aspects of wellbeing, it is important to have a clear characterization for EWB. While EWB stands as an umbrella over different measurements, such as *subjective wellbeing* (SWB) and *psychological wellbeing* (PWB). The national institute of health has set up three key components to EWB: (1) eudaimonia, characterized by having a sense of meaning and purpose in life; (2) evaluative well-being (or life satisfaction), involving reflective, general judgments (or perceptions) of life satisfaction; and (3) hedonic (or experiential) well-being, referring to momentary emotional states, and external positive stimulation. (National Institutes of Health, 2018).

Emotional well-being is an important factor in health and longevity (Cross et al., 2018; Zaninotto & Steptoe, 2019), but there are signs that people with low life satisfaction show tendencies of a bias of preferring negative emotions and restricting positive ones (Vanderlind et al., 2020). The negativity bias that is being observed has different potential origins. Studies indicate the effect of a downwards spiral, where negative emotions gain momentum and grow (Garland., et al 2010), lower emotional intelligence as it factors into well-being (Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2016), or lacking the skill to savor positive emotions, and rather focusing on the negative ones (Bryant, 1989).

There is however empirical evidence that suggests wellbeing can be increased by specific actions, with an example being to use humor (Crawford & Caltabiano, 2011). Further studies indicate that ER can be learned and developed as a measure for increasing positive feelings and EWB (Martins-Klein et al.,2020; Benita, 2020). In accordance with the evidence that there could be a bias towards negative emotions, and the ability to develop better

emotional well-being, focus on savoring positive feelings and developing a proactive emotional response in a way that limits negative emotions is indicative towards increasing well-being (Larsen, & Prizmic, 2008).

### **Defining Savoring:**

Savoring is a measurement to assess individuals' perceptions of their ability to derive pleasure through anticipating upcoming positive events, savoring positive moments, and reminiscing about past positive experiences (Bryant, 2003). During savoring the moment, one focuses on positive events while they occur to increase, intensify, or prolong positive emotions in the present (Hurley & Kwon, 2012). People with strong beliefs regarding their ability to be present with or maintain positive emotions display more adaptive positive emotion regulation (Carl et al., 2014). People who score lower on savoring positive emotions may not be aware that they can consciously affect it. However, as it is possible to learn emotional regulation and develop strategies to increase savoring, it is possible to help people get a sense of control over their positive feelings (Bryant, 1989). As people with low well-being, or “negative” mental conditions could tend to focus on the negative emotions (Vanderlind et al., 2020), savoring positive emotions might not come naturally to them. Therefore, their reactive emotional regulation needs to be developed or replaced by proactive emotional regulation.

“Happy minds” have learned, whether consciously or unconsciously, to use savoring to promote well-being. Naturally it follows that people with “unhappy minds” show patterns of maladaptive emotional reactions and emotional regulation. Savoring, or upregulation of positive affect, show an increase of well-being and a decrease of negative emotions (Irvin et al., 2020; Carl et al., 2014). Not only mental health, but also physical health and function

relates to an ability to regulate positive emotions (Cloitre et al., 2019) and people who score higher on savoring show tendencies to upregulate emotions that work as a counter force on the dysphoric, fearful, or anhedonic states characteristic of emotional dysfunctions (Garland et al., 2010) As savoring is an important element when it comes to well-being, it is comforting that actively practicing savoring and practicing emotional regulation helps to decrease negative emotions.

### **Defining Emotion Crafting:**

Emotion Crafting (EC) is a proactive emotional response measured in people's awareness of positive emotion inducing context, and to what degree they act upon this awareness. EC reflects individuals' ability to apprehend positive emotion-inducing contexts, a prerequisite for proactively pursuing positive emotions through their actions. An example would be being aware of what people one feels good around, and actively engaging with those people.

Emotion Crafting is based on Self-Determination-Theory (SDT) and Broaden-and-Build theory (BBT). SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2012) is a broad theory on what fosters and thwarts individuals' flourishing through motivation and personality. SDT differentiates motivation in terms of being autonomous and controlled, as well as a focus on intrinsic motivation. BBT describes the form and function of a subset of positive emotions and that these positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary thought–action repertoire. The mindsets arising from these positive emotions are contrasted to the narrowed mindsets sparked by many negative emotions, and the positive emotions experienced build that individual's personal resources through action (Fredrickson, 2004).

Positive emotions are not epiphenomenal. They can be developed and increased through conscious effort. Importantly, they have lasting effects and develop in an upwards spiral. Since the same is true for negative emotions, positive emotions may hinder downwards spirals, or counter them (Garland et al., 2010). As SDT suggests psychological growth occurs as an integrative process in which people assimilate and integrate experiences (Benita, 2020). As emotion crafting is a form of proactive emotional regulation, it may play a key role within a dynamic integrative process in which people have (or not) the psychological freedom to become themselves. As proactive emotional regulation can be implemented both towards stimulus and globally (Martins-Klein et al., 2020), EC is a tool for both responding to experiences in a healthy way and maintaining a positively regulated emotional system.

### **The present study**

With the current increase of mental issues and low well-being (Marcus et al., 2012) the focus on finding ways to increase happiness and well-being has become an important factor in modern psychology. As opposed to the traditional study of negative emotions, this study aims to help provide the current research of emotional regulation and well-being with more data and understanding. Emotion crafting offers a way to re-train the mind and regulate the negative emotional spirals that often occur. Because of this this study will further explore the benefits of EC and understanding proactive emotional regulation as opposed to reactive emotional regulation.

Based on the current literature regarding the topic of wellness and emotion, the idea that practicing proactive emotional regulation as a way to increase well-being seems likely. The overall aim of this study was to examine the role of emotion crafting in well-being while accounting for the effects of savoring beliefs. The hypotheses are: 1. Emotion crafting is

positively related to well-being. 2. Even after controlling for savoring beliefs, emotion crafting was expected to positively relate to well-being.

## **METHODS**

### **Participant sample**

A questionnaire survey consisting of eight different psychological analyses was created. In total 164 participants answered. The survey used forced responding, so that all surveys were completed fully. The sample consisted of 116 (70.7%) women, 42 (25.6%) men, 4 (2.4) non-binary, and 2 (1.2%) who chose not to tell. The age requirement was 18-25 and average age was 22.2 (SD=1.9 Mage=3.6). Out of the participants 13 (7.9%) had a master's degree, 37 (22,6%) had a bachelor's degree, 11 (6.7) had vocational education, 92 (56.1%) had completed high school, 7 (4.3) had not completed high school, and 4 (2,4%) had "other" as an answer. In civil status 94 (57.3%) were single, 69 (42.1%) were in a relationship, and 1 (0.6%) were married.

### **Procedure**

The participants were gathered mostly through personal network of the students in our research group. However, many suggested that the questionnaire got spread further, resulting in a higher number of participants. The questionnaire was an online survey and thus the questionnaire was sent out through social media. Because of this it is difficult to tell how many specifically did not do the questionnaire and leaves the likelihood of snowball-sampling. The participants only criteria were being comfortable in the Norwegian language and being between the ages of 18 and 25. Despite this, we had participants who were born in Afghanistan, Iran, Kina, Sweden, Poland.

As the questionnaire was accessible online, it was possible for the participants to choose when and where to complete it, but the details of each part of the questionnaire was not informed to them. The participants only knowledge of the survey is that it would be used in a study on improving positive emotions in people.

The questionnaire was designed by our guide and was sent to SIKT where it received an approval for distribution.

### **Measuring Emotion Crafting**

For measuring the ability of emotion crafting one questionnaire was used: Emotion Crafting Scale (ECS) (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2021). The scale consisted of 18 items divided into 2 subscales (Action and Awareness) to measure different emotion regulation strategies to increase and maintain positive emotions. The awareness subscale (4 items) measures a person's knowledge of activities and behaviors that give them positive emotions (e.g., "I know what activities make me feel good."). The ECS subscale of action (8 items) measure if the participant partakes in actions that increase their positive feelings (e.g., "I deliberately think about things that make me feel good."). The participants stated their level of agreement on a 5-step Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), to 5 (Strongly agree). The score was divided into 3 groups: "awareness", "action", and "total". In this study I will only focus on the "total" result as a measurement.

### **Measuring Well-being**

Well-being was measured with the Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener et al., 2009) which measures different aspects of the participants life that are connected to wellbeing and flourishing. The scale consists of 8 items, with 3 subscales (Social relationships, view on life, activities). The "social relationships" subscale measures the quality of relationships and how



the participants treat others and are treated by others (e.g., “My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.”). The “view on life” subscale measures the level of positive attitudes the participant has towards their life, future, and themselves (e.g., “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.”). The “activities” subscale measures capability and interest in activities the participant partakes in often (e.g., “I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me.”). The questions were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale with options between 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

### **Measuring Savoring**

Savoring Beliefs Inventory (SBI) (Bryant, 2003) was used to measure levels of reactive emotional regulation in the participants. The scale had 24 items, with 3 subscales (expectations, recollection, presence). The subscale “expectations” (4 positive items, 4 negative items) measure if the participants has positive emotions when waiting for a positive event (e.g., “Before a good thing happens, I look forward to it in ways that give me pleasure in the present”) or negative emotions when thinking about a future event (e.g., “When I think about a pleasant event before it happens, I often start to feel uneasy or uncomfortable”). The subscale “recollection” (4 positive items, 4 negative items) measures the participants ability to store experiences and memories that they can bring up later to give them positive emotions (e.g., “I enjoy looking back on happy times from my past”) or give them negative emotions (e.g., “When I reminisce about pleasant memories, I often start to feel sad or disappointed”). The subscale “presence” (4 positive items, 4 negative items) measures if the participant can enjoy experiences and make the most out of them (e.g., “I know how to make the most of a good time”) or if they struggle to enjoy the moment (e.g., “When it comes to enjoying myself, I'm my own "worst enemy.""). All the questions were answered on a 7-step Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Because of these questions, savoring

does not measure level of reactive emotional regulation, but rather levels of positive reactive emotional regulation.

## STATISTICS

### Correlation

The data was put into IBM SPSS. The participants score on flourishing ( $M = 5.69$ ,  $SD = .83$ ), savoring ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) and emotion crafting ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = .50$ ). A Pearson's correlation test used to discover if there is a relationship between two variables/datasets, and how strong that relationship may be. All the beforementioned variables in the study were compared with well-being, with  $p = .05$  for significance. As the correlation efficient goes on a scale between -1 and +1, a score far away from 0 is considered a strong correlation and between .5 and .7 being a moderate correlation.

As shown in table 1 there was significant correlation ( $p < .000$ ) with all the main variables of the study. All the main variables also showed moderate correlation. Emotion crafting ( $r = .57$ ,  $p < .000$ ) had a significant correlation with flourishing of moderate strength. Savoring ( $r = .69$ ,  $p < .000$ ) had a significant correlation with flourishing with high strength. emotion crafting and savoring also had a significant correlation ( $r = .64$ ,  $p < .000$ ) with each other.

After running a one-way MANOVA there was no significant correlation between the intercept and the background variables. Two intercepts were run (flourishing and emotion crafting, and flourishing, emotion crafting, and savoring) and the background variables were education ( $p = .17$ ), gender ( $p = .21$ ), and age ( $p = .56$ ).

### Table 1

*Descriptives and Correlation between the study variables*

<i>Measures</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	1	2	3
1. Flourish	.83	5.69	-		
2. Savoring	.89	5.25	.69***	-	
3. EC	.50	4.13	.57***	.64***	-

*Note:* EC=Emotional crafting, \*\*\*  $p < .000$

**Regression**

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was run to determine if the addition of savoring and the interaction between savoring and emotion crafting increased well-being more than emotion crafting alone. Three blocks were created to analyze emotion crafting, emotional crafting and savoring, and their interaction as possible effects on well-being.

As shown in Table 2, all the blocks were significant, with a 54% increase in R-square with the addition of savoring in block 2 and 3. In Block 1 it was found that emotional crafting significantly predicted well-being ( $B = .94, \beta = .57, p < .001$ ). In block 2 emotion crafting ( $B = .37, \beta = .12, p = .002$ ) and savoring ( $B = .51, \beta = .55, p < .001$ ) significantly predicted well-being, although less than emotion crafting alone. In the last block emotion crafting and savoring had very little change and their interaction INT ( $B = -.02, \beta = -.03, p = .643$ ) had an insignificant effect on prediction. This shows that the presence of savoring doesn't affect the effectiveness of emotion crafting on well-being.

**Table 2**

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis with Emotional crafting and Savoring*

*predicting Flourishing, moderating for the interaction of EC and Savoring*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	$\beta$	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Block 1</b>	77.7***				.57***	.33***	.32***
EC		.94***	.11***	.57***			
<b>Block 2</b>	81.1***				.711***	.51***	.50***
EC		.37**	.12**	.23**			
Savoring		.51***	.07***	.55***			
<b>Block 3</b>	53.8***				.711***	.51***	.50***
EC		.35**	.12**	.22**			
Savoring		.51***	.07***	.55***			
Interact		-.02	.04	-.03			

*Note:* ER=Emotional Crafting, \*\*\* p <.000, \*\*p <.005

## DISCUSSION

### Summary and interpretation of results

The aim of the study was to further understand the relation between savoring, emotion crafting, and flourishing. The results showed positive relations between emotion crafting and well-being ( $r=.57, p<.000$ ). The strongest correlation was however between savoring and well-being ( $r=.69, p<.000$ ). Following a one-way MANOVA, none of the background variables “age”, “education”, or “gender” had a significant relation to the main variables. The participants had a similar score between emotion crafting (82%) and flourishing (81%). This

supports the hypothesis that there is a correlation between them. Using a regression analysis with savoring as a moderator on emotion crafting found no significant results in its effect on well-being, meaning that savoring does not play any interaction on the variables in question.

Earlier studies by Vanderlind et al, and Quoidbach et al, support these findings, by showing that ways to increase positive emotion is related to well-being (2020;2010). Van der Kaap-Deeder et al also supports this by showing that emotion crafting had a positive effect predicting life satisfaction, eudaemonic well-being, and a lower level of internalizing symptoms (2021).

According to Martins-Klein et al, the empirical investigations of the role of proactive and reactive control in emotion regulation have been limited. This study's focus was to create more empirical evidence for this area of research by studying the two. With emotion crafting as a measurement of proactive emotion regulation and savoring as a measurement of reactive emotion regulation.

The first hypothesis was confirmed by the relation between emotion crafting and flourishing. The reasoning behind this hypothesis was the fact that positive emotions increase well-being, and that proactive emotional regulation would continue to do so. The second hypothesis was based on the idea that one could increase well-being proactively, despite not regulating emotions well enough reactively. The possibility that emotion crafting exerts its effects on its own, without being moderated by reactive emotion regulation hold promise for greater understanding of emotion regulation as a whole, and helping people improve their well-being. There could be many reasons for this lack of moderation. One is that emotional regulation done proactively may hinder unwanted reactive responses. Another might be the change in emotional mindset coming from proactive emotional regulation

changes the ways people respond to their reactive emotions (Schroder, 2021). Lastly, a reason could be that there are other factors involved that were not measure for.

It has been suggested by Benita, M that SDTs focus on autonomy as a motivational factor is beneficial for emotional regulation as the infrastructure for emotion regulation strategies, which can be enacted by an accompanying sense of autonomy or control. According to the process of emotional regulation (Gross, 2015) the three stages of emotional regulation are identification, selection of strategy, and implementation. Through the two subsections of emotion crafting (awareness and action) and the nature of EC being proactive, supports this view and is in line with the results.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

After considering the strengths and limitations of the present study, it is important to note that there are some unavoidable problems related to research based on surveys and self-reporting. As Stephens-Davidowitz found in “Everybody lies” (2017), most people do not do what they say they do, which is a weakness that cannot be ignored in a survey-based study. The survey was given out through “word-of-mouth” (convenience bias) and had a “snowball sampling” which means that the chances of volunteer bias are high. Another concern is whether the hypothesis can be concluded based on the limited age group of the participants, many of whom were psychology students with uncertain emotional maturity. (Subbarayan & Visvanathan, 2011).

However, the study also had some strengths, such as the accessibility of online surveys and the willingness of many participants to help with the study. The anonymity of the survey may have increased the likelihood of honest feedback due to a feeling of safety through identity protection. Additionally, the validity of the different questionnaires was a strength in

collecting correct data. Overall, while further research is required to explore more detailed differences between emotional regulation and factors that contribute to lower levels of well-being, this study provides important insights into the positive correlation between emotional crafting and well-being.

### **Implications for practice and future research**

The findings of this study can have potential applications for both practice and therapy. The knowledge that emotional regulation done through a more proactive manner to increase well-being can be a good tool for therapists and coaches that help people that struggle with negative emotions. As it was shown that emotion crafting has a strong correlation with well-being and is something that can be learned through practical application, it holds great promise for individuals who desire to improve their well-being independently.

The results of this study have important implications for both practice and therapy. It raises questions about the specific differences in well-being results based on reactive and proactive emotional regulation when savoring is used as a moderator. Further research with proactive ER as a moderator for reactive ER could provide more insight into this question. In addition, future studies should consider the effect of participants with different mental states and a broader and more diverse group of participants. Furthermore, studying potential moderators and mediators towards emotion crafting would be recommended. It is also important to analyze factors that contribute to lower levels of well-being along with emotional crafting and test factors that have positive correlations with well-being.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that emotional crafting is positively correlated with well-being. The presence of savoring as a moderator did not have a significant

impact on this correlation. It indicates that emotional regulation, whether reactive or proactive, is associated with higher levels of well-being. However, further research is required to explore more detailed differences between the two types of emotional regulation, as savoring had a stronger correlation with well-being. Additionally, future studies should consider the mental states and diversity of participants and analyze factors that contribute to lower levels of well-being along with emotional crafting, along with testing factors that have positive correlations with well-being. Identifying potential moderators and mediators towards emotion crafting would also be beneficial for future research.

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