

Candidate: 10009

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

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Supervisor: Jolene Van der Kaap-Deeder
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Department of Psychology



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

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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

Despite the studies indicating the importance of emotional regulation when it comes to wellbeing, the literature comparing reactive and proactive emotional regulation is limited. This study aims to fill these gaps by using Emotion Crafting as a form of proactive emotional regulation and compare its effect on wellness with reactive emotion regulation. It was predicted that high levels of emotion crafting would result in high levels of well-being, even when moderated by savoring. The study was completed in the form of a questionnaire and used word of mouth and snowball sampling to gather participants. The results were analyzed through a pearsons correlation analysis, and a hierarchical regression analysis to see if emotion crafting maintained its positive result when accounting for 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. The results are discussed, both on how the new knowledge can be utilized, and on how future research can fill the remaining gaps of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (2023) mental health conditions are increasing worldwide. These growing levels of emotional negativity are influencing 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, creativity, good relationships, pro-social behavior, and good health and life expectancy (Chida & Steptoe, 2008) (Deiner et al., 2019). Because of this the genre of psychology dedicated to improving mental wellbeing, “positive psychology” has become a steadily growing area of study. The study of Vanderlind et al., (2020) shows that one of the

main contributors to wellness, and one of the counteragents towards depression and anxiety is positive emotion. In line with this knowledge this thesis will be following a study to compare two different approaches to emotions, and their effect on wellbeing.

Savoring is a well-established construct in positive psychology that refers to one's capacity to recognize and appreciate enjoyable life experiences. Those able to do this have been shown to have healthier and happier minds (Carl et al., 2014). Because of this Emotional Regulation (ER) skills are strongly connected to well-being and positive emotions (Quoidbach et al., 2010). ER can be proactive or reactive based on it happening before or during the emotional stimulus (Martins-Klein et al., 2020). Savoring is an important part of healthy reactive ER, as instinctually finding the positives during an emotional stimulus is important for a happy mind (Carl et al., 2014).

Through Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and the effect of proactive ER (Martins-Klein et al., 2020) Emotion Crafting (EC) was created as a way of practicing control over emotions before a stimulus, and thereby promoting mental well-being. As savoring, or lack thereof, can be an unconscious action it is necessary to study approaches to proactive forms of ER. It is also an important question if proactive ER has any benefits compared to reactive ER. The objective of this study is to examine if EC can uniquely contribute to well-being, even when 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, and how positive their mental state is (Diener et al., 2002). Well-being requires both hedonic and eudaimonic components, meaning it includes feeling pleasure

and functioning properly. Seligman (2002) proposed five essential elements of well-being as: “pleasure, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and positive relationships”. Another perspective, introduced by Diener et al., (1999) argued that subjective well-being is consist of positive emotions, the absence of negative emotions and overall life satisfaction. This was further developed by adding the concept of “flourishing” that consists of 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” and was our measurement of EWB.

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 well-being* (SWB) and *psychological well-being* (PWB). The national institute of health has set up three key components to EWB: (1) having a sense of meaning and purpose in life; (2) evaluative well-being, involving reflective, general judgments or perceptions of life satisfaction; and (3) hedonic 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). Unfortunately, there are signs that people with low life satisfaction show tendency towards 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 intensify (Garland., et al 2010). Additionally, Sánchez-Álvarez et al., (2016) show that lower emotional intelligence is a factor in low well-being, and potentially adds to this bias. Furthermore, lacking the skill to savor positive emotions, and rather focusing on the negative ones may also have an effect on this “downward spiral” (Bryant, 1989).

There is however empirical evidence that suggests wellbeing can be increased by specific actions (Crawford & Caltabiano, 2011). Further studies indicate that ER can be learned and developed as a measure for increasing positive emotions 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). By introducing these practices, it is possible to learn to manage emotions and develop a more positive outlook on life.

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). When “savoring” the moment, one focuses on positive events while they occur to increase, intensify, or prolong positive emotions (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). Research suggests that people with low well-being, or “negative” mental conditions could tend to focus more on their negative emotions (Vanderlind et al., 2020). As such, savoring positive emotions might not come naturally to them. Because of this it's important that individuals learn how they can develop their reactive

emotional regulation so that they can improve their well-being and cultivate a more positive mindset.

“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. People high in savoring show an increase of well-being and a decrease of negative emotions (Irvin et al., 2020; Carl et al., 2014). Cloitre et al., (2019) show that physical health and function is related to the ability to regulate positive emotions. People who score higher on savoring show tendencies to upregulate positive emotions that work as a counter force on the dysphoric, fearful, or anhedonic states that are characteristic of emotional dysfunctions (Garland et al., 2010).

DEFINING EMOTION CRAFTING:

Emotion Crafting (EC) is a proactive approach to emotional responses that is measured in people’s awareness of contexts that trigger positive emotions, and to what degree they act upon this awareness (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2021). EC reflects an individuals’ ability to apprehend positive emotion-inducing contexts, which is a prerequisite for proactively pursuing positive emotions through their actions. An example would be being aware of the people one feels good around, and actively engaging with those them.

Emotion Crafting is based on Self-Determination-Theory (SDT) and Broaden-and-Build theory (BBT). SDT, developed by Deci and Ryan (2012) is a broad theory on what fosters and limits individuals' flourishing through the lens of motivation and personality. SDT distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation, as well as focusing on intrinsic motivation in driving one’s actions towards flourishing. BBT describes the form and function of a subset of positive emotions, and study how these positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary thought–action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2004). The mindsets arising

from these positive emotions are contrasted to the narrowed mindsets created by many negative emotions and show that the positive emotions experienced by an individual builds that individual's personal resources and foster further action.

Positive emotions are not epiphenomenal. They can be developed and increased through conscious effort. Importantly, they have lasting effects and build upon themselves in an upwards spiral. Since negative emotions also tend to build upon itself in a negative spiral, positive emotions may work as a hindrance towards downwards spirals, or as a counter to them (Garland et al., 2010). 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 the psychological freedom to become themselves. As proactive emotional regulation can be implemented both towards a 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. This study aims to help provide the current psychological research of ER and well-being with more data and understanding. EC offers a way to re-train the mind and regulate negative emotions. This study will further explore the benefits of EC and more understanding towards 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 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. As EC is a relatively new concept the literature around EC specifically is lacking, even though there are decent amounts of studies related to ER. The hypothesizes aim to extend the understanding of EC as a tool for well-being, and to help fill the gaps in literature regarding learned proactive ER vs instinctual reactive ER. The hypothesizes are: 1. Emotion crafting is positively related to well-being. 2. After controlling for savoring beliefs, emotion crafting is expected to positively relate to well-being.

METHODS

PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

For this study we used a questionnaire survey consisting of eight different psychological measurements. 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 the personal network of the students in our research group. However, many suggested that the participants share the questionnaire further, which resulted in a snowball-sampling. This is likely a factor in the resulting higher

number of participants. The questionnaire was an online survey that was sent over social media. This removes our ability to see how many people received it, compared to how many completed it. This does leave a likelihood of volunteer-bias having occurred. As there was a snowball-sampling the likelihood of limited variety in participants, as it might only have been sent onwards to people with similar attitudes as the first participants. The participants only had two criteria: 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, China, 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 in a psychology bachelor thesis.

The questionnaire was designed by our group-guide and was sent to SIKT where it was approved for distribution.

MEASURING EMOTION CRAFTING

Emotion Crafting Scale (ECS) (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2021) was used to measure the skill of EC of the participants. The scale consisted of 12 items divided into 2 subscales (Action and Awareness) to measure different ER 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) measures 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. The scale shows high reliability, both the awareness ($\alpha = .83$) and the action ($\alpha = .85$) subscales of the general ECS were reliable with items of both subscales also showing strong corrected item-total correlations (Van der Kaap-Deeder, et al., 2021).

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. This was done by reversing the scores on the negatively charged questions, so a high score on them would give a low score in the statistics.

STATISTICS

CORRELATION

The statistical analysis was done through IBM SPSS. The participants were measured on flourishing, savoring, and emotion crafting. A Pearson’s correlation test measures if there is any relationship between two variables, and how significant the relationship might be. This was done twice, by measuring savoring and EC’s relation to flourishing, with a measure of $p = .05$ for significance. As the correlation coefficient 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 positive correlation ($p < .000$) between all the variables. All the main variables also showed a minimum of moderate strength in their correlation. Emotion crafting ($r = .57, p < .000$) had a significant, moderately strong correlation

with flourishing. Savoring ($r=.69, p<.000$) had a significant, high strength correlation with flourishing. EC and savoring also had a significant and strong correlation ($r=.64, p<.000$) with each other.

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

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis is a tool used to measure and analyze the relationship between a single dependent variable and multiple independent variables. To measure if EC had a positive effect on flourishing on its own, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was run to determine if the addition of savoring as a variable influenced the relation between EC and flourishing. Three “blocks” were created to analyze EC, EC 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 EC significantly predicted well-being ($B =.94, \beta =.57, p <.001$). In block 2 EC ($B =.37, \beta =.23, p =.002$) and savoring ($B =.51, \beta =.55, p <.001$) significantly predicted well-being, although less than emotion crafting alone. In the last block EC 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 alter the effectiveness of emotion crafting on

well-being to a high degree. The slight variance in EC in block 3 could be tied to the fact that EC and savoring aren't exclusive, and their ability to exist simultaneously could cloud the results slightly.

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>	<i>β</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>ΔR²</i>
Block 1	77.7***				.57***	.33***	.32***
EC		.94***	.11***	.57***			
Block 2	81.1***				.711***	.51***	.50***
EC		.37**	.12**	.23**			
Savoring		.51***	.07***	.55***			
Block 3	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, but the strongest correlation was however between savoring and well-being. This supports the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between EC and well-being, but shows us that the relationship between savoring and well-being is stronger. Using a hierarchical regression analysis with savoring as a moderator on EC's relation to flourishing

showed no significant results in its effect. This supports the second hypothesis that EC can induce well-being on its own, and that savoring isn't required.

These findings are in line with earlier research. Vanderlind et al., (2020) and Quoidbach et al., (2010) both support these findings by showing that practices that increase positive emotion are related to well-being. Van der Kaap-Deeder, et al., (2021) also supports this by showing that EC had a positive effect in predicting life satisfaction, eudaemonic well-being, and a lower level of internalizing symptoms.

According to Martins-Klein et al., (2020) the empirical investigations of the role of proactive and reactive control in ER have been limited. This study aimed to create more empirical evidence for this area of research to fill in gaps in the research by using EC as a measurement of proactive ER and savoring as a measurement of reactive ER.

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 EC exerts its effects on its own, without being moderated by reactive ER holds promise for greater understanding of ER. 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 ER that changes the ways people respond to their reactive emotions (Schroder, 2021). Lastly, a reason for the discrepancy could be that there are other factors involved that were not measure for.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations in this study that are important to bring up, in order to make sure that the results aren't viewed with too high of a standard. The study contains methodological flaws that should not be forgotten when reading.

The accumulation of participants was not done in a strict or ideal way to guarantee a balanced measure of the whole population. This is not only related to the standard required for the participants, but in the way they were sought out. The questionnaire was spread organically through snowball sampling. Due to this the participants were chosen through convenience and volunteer bias. The personalities of those who partook in the test is likely similar, as they all connected to the same social networks, and as they were “the type of people” who would participate.

As all the members of the bachelor group are psychology students, the questionnaire was likely also sent to other people who are psychology students. While it is reasonable to assume “those willing to help a classmate” is a larger part of the population than “those willing to do a random questionnaire”, having a large portion likely be psychology students makes the results less reliable globally. Despite getting some participants who weren't of Norwegian descent, having “being able to speak Norwegian” as a standard puts most of the participants in the “WEIRD” category.

There are also systematic flaws that arise from questionnaires. Particularly the issue that what people answer may not be accurate. 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. This fact may have higher implication in this study, as opposed to others as the participants were of a limited young age group, and many of whom were psychology students with uncertain emotional maturity. (Subbarayan & Visvanathan, 2011).

The study also had some strengths that are important to acknowledge. The accessibility of online surveys made it easier for more people to have the option of participating, and the simplicity of being able to complete it anywhere may have inspired more people to be interested. As mentioned before, while having many of the participants be friends or acquaintances with the bachelor group limited the variety of participants, it may also have inspired more to be willing to participate. The anonymity of the survey likely helped, as it may have increased the likelihood of honest feedback due to a feeling of safety through identity protection.

The validity and strength of the different sections of the questionnaire is also an important strength factor. While the results might not be universal, they are likely correct for the specific group we measured.

Overall, while further research is required to explore more detailed differences between ER and factors that contribute to lower levels of well-being, this study provides important insights into the positive correlation between EC as a form of proactive ER, and well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study have potential applications for both practice and further studies. As EC seems to be a functional practice of proactive ER, it can be used by coaches/therapists to help people struggling. As the positive emotions connected with healthy ER can work as a counter to “downwards spirals” (Garland et al., 2010), using EC as a strategy to help people master ER before the negative emotions build on each other can be beneficial. Childhood bullying is connected to negative ER (Mahady Wilton et al., 2000), so implications of EC strategies from a teacher or parent could be beneficial towards the child.

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, or who lack the social situations to learn better ER from others.

For future studies, this thesis opens several questions and specifics that need to be answered to fully understand the relation between EC and well-being. Studies on an international level, with a wider range of participants is an important future step based on the promise that this study shows on EC's potential for well-being. Studies testing out effectiveness of approaches to practices of EC, especially with varying emotional backgrounds will also be an important step to fully understand the helpfulness and potential of EC.

While EC was the focus of this study, the results implied that healthy reactive ER was superior to EC/proactive ER. To make sure we gain all the benefits we can from EC, it is also important to study its shortcomings, and to see if there are other factors that caused this difference.

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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