

**Giving in to desires: Examining the relation between trait hedonic capacity
and happiness and the mediating role of regulatory focus**

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Abstract

It has become commonly known that self-control is needed to act in line with long-term goals and to shield ourselves from conflicting hedonic goals. Most research on self-regulation strategies focuses on long-term goal pursuit as the successful outcome, while engaging in hedonic goal pursuit is seen as self-control failure. Recent research showed that hedonic goal pursuit, as well as long-term goal pursuit, predicted higher levels of well-being. The aim of the present research is to broaden the consequences of hedonic goal pursuit and to look for possible underlying mechanisms. This study predicts an association between trait hedonic capacity (THC) and happiness and proposes regulatory focus as a possible mediator. A cross-sectional study was conducted, using an online questionnaire which covered (1) regulatory focus, (2) happiness, (3) trait hedonic capacity, (4) demographic statistics (gender, age and level of education). The results showed that THC is positively associated with happiness and the relationship between trait hedonic capacity and happiness was positively mediated by promotion focus and negatively mediated by prevention focus. The present research support a new view on self-regulation, as it showed that hedonic goal pursuit is also associated with higher levels of happiness. Moreover, the results imply that a regulatory focus plays a significant role in the relationship between THC and happiness.

Keywords: trait hedonic capacity, happiness, promotion focus, prevention focus, self-regulation

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction	4
<i>Trait hedonic capacity and happiness</i>	4
<i>The mediating role of regulatory focus</i>	6
<i>The present research</i>	7
Methods	8
<i>Participants and Design</i>	8
<i>Measures</i>	8
Regulatory focus	8
Happiness	9
Trait hedonic capacity	9
Demographics	9
<i>Procedure</i>	9
<i>Data-analysis</i>	9
Results	10
<i>Descriptive analysis</i>	10
<i>Main analysis</i>	11
Discussion	13
<i>Theoretical contribution</i>	13
<i>Practical implications</i>	15
<i>Future directions</i>	15
<i>Limitations</i>	16
<i>Conclusion</i>	16
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	17
References	18
Appendix A: Information letter	21
Appendix B: Informed Consent	22
Appendix C: Questionnaire	23

Giving in to desires: Examining the relation between trait hedonic capacity and happiness and the mediating role of regulatory focus

It has become commonly known that self-control is needed to act in line with long-term goals and to shield ourselves from conflicting hedonic (short-term) goals (Hofmann & Van Dillen, 2012). For example, self-control can prevent us from eating a piece of chocolate to align with our long-term goal of losing weight. Most self-regulation literature to date is focused on self-control, the capacity to alter and regulate predominant response tendencies in order to align with a certain long-term goal (De Ridder et al., 2012), while engaging in hedonic goal pursuit was seen as a self-control failure. This is not surprising, as having a high level of self-control was shown to have positive effects on several outcomes, such as relationships, academic performance, well-being, health, and happiness (De Ridder et al., 2012; Tangney et al., 2004). Hedonic goals (e.g. going out with friends instead of studying) are mostly seen as counterparts of long-term goal achievement. However, this negative view on hedonic goal pursuit is surprising, as solely striving for long-term goals at the expense of momentary pleasures is undesirable (Koole et al., 2014), and experiencing pleasure is part of adaptive self-regulation (Frieze & Hofmann, 2016; Huta & Waterman, 2014). In fact, recent findings suggest that hedonic goal pursuit, as well as long-term goal pursuit, predict higher levels of well-being (Bernecker & Becker, 2021). Although research on hedonic goal pursuit is scarce, it seems that engagement in this hedonic goal pursuit is also highly favourable for well-being, contrary to popular belief.

As hedonic goal pursuit was seen as self-control failure, there is still not much known about the consequences of engaging in these hedonic goals. Bernecker and Becker (2021) have shown that pursuing hedonic goals could lead to higher levels of well-being, but little is known about the relationship to happiness. As hedonic goals are about engaging in a desire or momentary pleasure at the expense of a long-term goal, it is interesting to know what this trade-off implies for one's happiness. Given the evidence that happiness has a protective role in health maintenance (Stephoe et al., 2015), enhancing our understanding of the mechanisms in play is of importance. Therefore, the present research examines the association between hedonic goal pursuit and happiness and proposes regulatory focus as a possible mediator in this relationship. The aim of this study is to contribute to the limited knowledge on the consequences of hedonic goal pursuit and the possible underlying mechanisms.

Trait Hedonic Capacity and Happiness

In accordance with previous research, hedonic goals are defined as cognitive representations of desired affective states that are associated with immediate pleasure or relief

from displeasure that motivate specific behaviours toward their attainment (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000; Hofmann & Van Dillen, 2012). The relevance of hedonic goals for subjective well-being has been emphasized by various subdisciplines of psychology. Positive psychology proposes that both engaging in activities that provide immediate pleasure (hedonia) and working toward self-realization in the long run (eudaimonia) lead to higher levels of well-being (Huta & Waterman, 2014). The highest levels of well-being are achieved by people who engage in both types of goals (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Bernecker and Becker (2021) suggested that not only successful long-term goal pursuit is adaptive for well-being, but also successful hedonic goal pursuit has positive outcomes. They developed a self-report scale to assess people's trait hedonic capacity (THC); the degree to which people experience pleasure and success in hedonic goal pursuit, and the degree of intrusive thoughts about conflicting long-term goals. They concluded that trait hedonic capacity has many positive outcomes. Those high in trait hedonic capacity experienced higher life satisfaction and fewer physical symptoms of somatization, depression, and anxiety. Most important in the scope of this research, they concluded that higher trait hedonic capacity predicted higher levels of well-being.

Related to well-being is happiness or subjective well-being, and it is defined as a composite of life satisfaction, coping resources, and positive emotions (Cohn et al., 2009). It is associated with many good life outcomes, such as financial success and mental health (Cohn et al., 2009). Longitudinal studies show that happiness often precedes and predicts these positive outcomes, rather than simply resulting from them (Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005). As subjective wellbeing and health are closely related (Stephoe et al., 2015), it is valuable to know the relation between hedonic goal and happiness.

An important part of the definition of trait hedonic capacity involves the degree of intrusive thoughts about conflicting long-term goals (Bernecker & Becker, 2021). Bernecker and Becker (2021) suggested that intrusive thoughts, in particular the absence of intrusive thoughts, play a significant role in the relationship between THC and well-being. Intrusive thoughts are negative thoughts that may arise, when a person is pursuing a hedonic goal and therefore undermining a long-term goal. Thus, intrusive thoughts seem to occur when conflicting goals are prevalent; someone is engaging in a behaviour which is not in line with their long-term goal. For example, if someone chose to go out with friends, instead of studying, thoughts of regret may arise. In addition, Bernecker and Becker (2021) have shown that those high in THC experience less intrusive thoughts, while engaging in hedonic goals. Exploratory results suggested that THC is about the spontaneous experience of intrusive thoughts rather than their successful inhibition (Bernecker and Becker, 2021). It seems

plausible that giving in to a desire could be pleasurable and that not experiencing interfering thoughts, may result in the experience of higher levels of happiness. People high in THC might be able to more fully enjoy their engagement in desires without being disturbed by thoughts of regret. Therefore, this study suggests a positive association between THC and happiness. However, to this date, there is still not much known about the underlying mechanisms causing people high in THC to experience less conflicting thoughts.

The mediating role of regulatory focus

In the present study, regulatory focus is presented as a potential mediator. According to Higgins' (1997) regulatory focus theory, individuals have two motivational orientations that direct their goal pursuit behaviours: promotion and prevention. Promotion focus is concerned with growth, advancement, and accomplishment (Cheung et al., 2014). Accordingly, goals are framed as gains and non-gains, and approach goal pursuit strategies that strive toward positive outcomes are favoured (Cheung et al., 2014). Meanwhile, a prevention focus is preoccupied with vigilance, responsibilities, and what one ought to do (Cheung et al., 2014). Goals are therefore framed in losses and non-losses, and avoidance goal pursuit strategies that deter from making mistakes are preferred. It seems imaginable that, when individuals have a prevention-focused goal, for example, aimed at not eating unhealthy foods and they give in to their desire to eat a chocolate bar, this could cause goal conflict, which may not be affectively pleasant. Instead, an individual with a promotion focus could be more liberated to pursue hedonic goals as they focus on growth and are less concerned with losses. It seems possible that having a promotion-focused instead of a prevention-focused goal pursuit could be a mechanism through which people high in THC experience higher levels of happiness.

In previous self-regulatory research, it has already been proposed that regulatory focus could play a role in the less frequent experience of conflict (Cheung et al., 2014). Cheung et al. (2014) suggested that people high in trait self-control (TSC) are happier, possibly because they are more promotion-focused and less prevention-focused. Cheung et al. (2014) showed that individuals with high trait self-control orient their goal pursuit strategies tactfully according to promotion and prevention regulatory focus. They revealed two distinct patterns of mediation through a promotion focus and a prevention focus. On one hand, TSC positively relates to promotion focus, and greater promotion focus is associated with more happiness. On the other hand, TSC negatively relates to prevention focus, and less prevention focus is associated with more happiness (Cheung et al., 2014). In the present study, we assume that THC is positively associated with promotion focus, and promotion focus is positively associated with happiness.

Furthermore, we assume that THC is negatively associated with prevention focus and prevention focus is negatively associated with happiness.

The present research

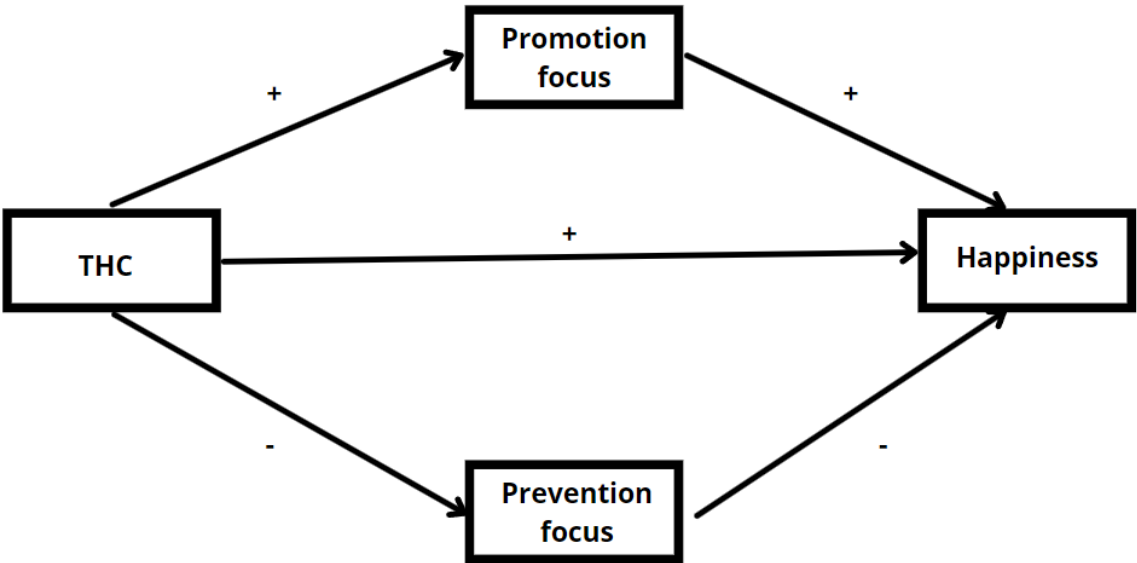
The aim of the present study is to show the importance of hedonic goal pursuit in self-regulatory research. This study focuses on the relationships between trait hedonic capacity, regulatory focus (promotion and prevention), and happiness. It examines whether regulatory focus mediates the association between trait hedonic capacity and happiness(see Figure 1).

The following hypotheses are formulated:

- 1. Trait hedonic capacity is positively associated with happiness.
- 2. Trait hedonic capacity is negatively associated with prevention focus.
- 3. Prevention focus is negatively associated with happiness.
- 4. The effect of trait hedonic capacity on happiness is mediated by prevention focus.
- 5. Trait hedonic capacity is positively associated with promotion focus.
- 6. Promotion focus is positively associated with happiness.
- 7. The effect of trait hedonic capacity on happiness is mediated by promotion focus.

Figure 1

Mediation model using promotion focus and prevention focus as mediators of the effect of THC on happiness.



Methods

Participants and Design

Participants were recruited through network and snowball sampling using personal networks (e.g. Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp) and professional networks (e.g. LinkedIn). The population of interest consisted of Dutch adults (aged 18 years or older) and a cross-sectional survey was conducted.

According to Fritz and MacKinnon (2007), the sample size to detect the mediation effect for a small to medium effect size required 400 participants ($N=400$). Due to the feasibility of this study, it was decided that the time-frame of data collection was set at three weeks (Lakens, 2022). The sample consisted of 269 participants. If participants had not filled in all questionnaires (trait hedonic capacity, happiness, and regulatory focus) or if they missed more than two items on a scale they were removed from the sample ($N=127$). Accounting for missing data, the final sample consisted of 142 participants. A sensitivity analysis revealed that a sample of 142 could detect small to medium effect sizes ($f^2=.06$; Cohen, 1992). The mean age of the participants was 29.55 ($SD=13.79$), and males made up 53.2% of the sample. Moreover, 32.6% was in HBO, 26.2% was WO-bachelors, and 29.8% was in WO-masters. Participants completed measures on THC, regulatory focus, and happiness.

Measures

The data was collected using a questionnaire on the online platform Qualtrics. The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions including sociodemographic information (age, gender and education level), and the key constructs (regulatory focus, happiness, and trait hedonic capacity). Age, gender and education level were chosen as sociodemographic variables, as these variables were used in previous studies on similar topics and were used to describe the sample.

The questionnaires on regulatory focus, happiness, and trait hedonic capacity were translated from English to Dutch using the guidelines provided by Beaton et al. (2000). Both the researcher and a native English speaker translated the questionnaire from English to Dutch individually, then discussed and combined both translations into one. This final translation was then translated back to English by a second native English speaker. Lastly, the researcher checked whether the final translation matched the original one.

Regulatory focus was assessed using the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Lockwood et al., 2002), which consisted of two subscales to measure both promotion and prevention focus. Participants indicated their response to 18 items (9 items on prevention focus and 9 items on promotion focus) on a 9-point scale from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 9 (*very true of me*). Sample items included statements such as “In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in

my life”, and “I often think about the person I would ideally like to be in the future”. Separate measures of promotion focus and prevention focus were created by averaging the scores belonging to each subscale, where a higher score reflected greater focus strength. Both subscales demonstrated good internal consistency (promotion focus: $\alpha = 0.80$; prevention focus: $\alpha = 0.83$).

Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed to each of the four statements, such as “In general, I consider myself:” (1 = *not a very happy person*; 5 = *a very happy person*), and “Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?” (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *a great deal*). A final happiness score was calculated by averaging the scores of the four statements, where a higher score represented greater happiness. This questionnaire indicated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.80$).

Trait hedonic capacity was measured using the Trait Hedonic Capacity Scale created by Bernecker and Becker (2021). The scale consisted of 10 items. Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed to each of the 10 statements. For example, “I am good at pursuing my desires.” The items were rated on a scale from 1 (*totally not applicable*) to 5 (*totally applicable*). The scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .84$).

Demographics. Gender, age and educational level were examined in order to demonstrate the characteristics of the sample.

Procedure

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University. The questionnaire was distributed among the researcher’s personal and professional relations.

To inform participants about the purpose of this study the questionnaire started with an information letter (Appendix A). Secondly, participants had to accept terms to join in this study in the informed consent (Appendix B). The questionnaire followed by examining regulatory focus, happiness and trait hedonic capacity. The questionnaire ended with a question on gender, age and educational level. In the end, participants were thanked for their participation and had the opportunity to leave a comment or question (see Appendix C for complete questionnaire).

Data-analysis

Firstly, descriptive statistics were examined for the variables: age, educational level, regulatory focus, happiness and THC, and internal consistency, assumptions and correlations were checked.

With the aid of the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) the research question was tested, using the PROCESS macro to test for parallel mediation (Hayes, 2017). The number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals used was 5000, at the confidence interval level of 95 and model 4 was used, as recommended by Hayes (2017). Trait hedonic capacity was entered as the independent variable, while happiness was entered as the dependent variable, and promotion and prevention focus were entered as mediators.

Results

Descriptive analysis

On average, participants reported relatively greater promotion focus compared to prevention focus (see Table 1). All means, standard deviations, intercorrelations and internal consistency for all variables of the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations and internal consistency

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Age (1)	29.55	13.79	-	-	-	-	-
THC (2)	3.29	.68	.112	.84	-	-	-
Promotion focus (3)	6.19	1.22	-.526**	.101	.80	-	-
Prevention focus (4)	4.07	1.40	-.375**	-.494**	.148	.83	-
Happiness (5)	5.15	1.03	.094	.413**	.218*	-.469**	.80

Note. N = 141. Internal consistency (i.e., Cronbach's coefficient α) is displayed in the diagonal (if applicable).

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Main analyses

A mediation model was built to test whether the effect of THC on happiness was mediated by regulatory focus. A series of regression equations relating THC (the independent variable), promotion focus and prevention focus (the mediators), and happiness (the dependent variable) were performed using bootstrapping analyses (based on 5,000 bootstrap samples) in the SPSS macro (PROCESS; model 4) recommended by Hayes (2017). Age was included as a covariate in the model, as it explained part of the variance. The results of the analyses are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Mediation model using THC, happiness and promotion and prevention focus

Variables	Promotion focus		Prevention focus		Happiness			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
THC	.31*	.13	-.91**	.14	.64**	.12	.30*	.12
Promotion focus							.25**	.07
Prevention focus							-.29**	.06
Age	-.05***	.01	-.03**	.01	.00	.01	.01	.01
F	30.39**		34.38**		15.61**		17.82**	
R ²	.31		.33		.17		.34	
Δ R ²							.17*	

Note. N=141.

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

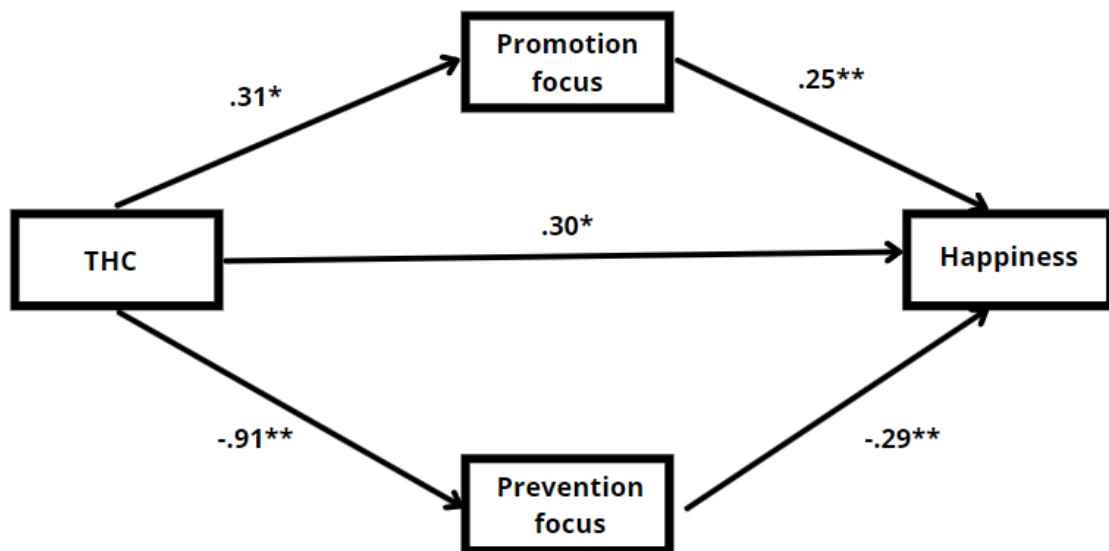
** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

First of all, trait hedonic capacity was found to have a significant positive association with happiness (see Table 2, Model 3), which supports the first hypothesis. Secondly, THC positively predicted promotion focus and negatively predicted prevention focus (see Table 2,

Model 1 and 2), which was in support of the second and fifth hypothesis. Promotion focus was positively associated with happiness and prevention focus was negatively associated with happiness (see Table 2, Model 4). Furthermore, the mediation analyses revealed that the indirect effect of THC on happiness through promotion focus was statistically significant (effect = .07, SE = .04, bootstrapped 95% CI [.010, .17]). Also, the indirect effect of THC on happiness through prevention focus was found significant (effect = .26, SE = .08, bootstrapped 95% CI [.13, .45]). Thus, a mediation effect of regulatory focus was found. Lastly, prevention focus was found to have a significantly bigger effect in this mediation bootstrapped 95% CI [.02, .39]), than promotion focus. All current findings are in support of the study’s hypotheses.

Figure 2

Results of mediation analyses testing promotion focus and prevention focus as mediators of the effect of THC on happiness while controlling for age as a covariate.



Note. N=141.

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The present paper has highlighted the importance of hedonic goal pursuit in self-regulation research. It was argued that trait hedonic capacity contributes to one's happiness. Bernecker and Becker (2021) were the first to argue that not only long-term but also successful hedonic goal pursuit is adaptive for well-being and suggested intrusive thoughts as an important factor in this relationship. Nevertheless, there was still little known about the consequence of THC on happiness, as well as, its underlying mechanisms.

The aim of the present research was to address this gap in literature, and to broaden the consequences of THC while shedding light on the underlying mechanisms. Results of the present study provided evidence for the hypothesis that regulatory focus mediates the relation between THC and happiness. Specifically, the results indicated that trait hedonic capacity positively predicts happiness. This emphasizes the relevance of hedonic goal pursuit as an important part of adaptive self-regulation. Regarding the mechanisms underlying trait hedonic capacity, results suggested that THC was positively associated with a promotion focus, which had a positive association with happiness, and THC was negatively associated with prevention focus, which had a negative association with happiness. People high in trait hedonic capacity seem to experience higher levels of happiness by using more promotion focus and less prevention focus as motivational orientations to direct their goal pursuit behaviours.

Theoretical contribution

First of all, the present research has extended the positive outcomes of trait hedonic capacity by showing that THC not only predicts well-being, but is also associated with happiness. However, the contribution of the present work is not limited to broadening the consequences of trait hedonic capacity with the effect on happiness, but has also added to a scarce pool of research on the importance of hedonic goal pursuits. The results are in agreement with findings by Huta & Ryan (2010), suggesting positive effects of hedonia on mental well-being. Furthermore, the results are in line with the idea that eudaimonia (seeking to use and develop the best in oneself) is not the only thing, but a combination of hedonia (seeking pleasure and comfort) and eudaimonia is associated with even greater well-being (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Therefore, the findings add to the idea that hedonic goal pursuit is an important part of self-regulation (Bernecker & Becker, 2021).

Secondly, this paper has addressed the gap in knowledge when it comes to the underlying mechanisms of THC, by showing the role of regulatory focus as a mediator in the effect of THC on happiness. The results have shown that people high in trait hedonic capacity make more use of promotion focus and less of prevention focus. This suggests that THC is not

preoccupied with vigilance characterized by a prevention focus but that THC highly involves eagerness that is facilitated by a promotion focus. Thereby, greater promotion focus is associated with more happiness, as greater prevention focus is associated with less happiness. This present finding offers insights and possible explanations for this low- or non-occurrence of intrusive thoughts and the higher levels of happiness experienced by people high in THC. In a broader scope, the findings are in line with earlier self-control research, suggesting regulatory focus as a mechanism to steer away from goal conflict (Cheung et al., 2014). Cheung et al. (2014) showed that people high in trait self-control make more use of promotion focus through which they possibly experience less motivational conflict.

People high in THC make more use of a promotion focus (e.g. initiating healthy behaviour) which could possibly leave more space for engagement in hedonic goals than the harsh and dismissive way of prevention focus (e.g. restraining oneself from unhealthy behaviours), which is than associated with more happiness. Furthermore, results showed that prevention focus was found to have a significantly bigger effect in this mediation, than promotion focus. This could have several explanations, but one explanation might be found in the role of intrusive thoughts. It is imaginable that eating a chocolate bar causes more intrusive thoughts when having a prevention focus, as this regulatory focus involves restraining oneself from such desires. It was suggested that the absence of intrusive thoughts plays a role in the relationship between hedonic goal pursuit and well-being, and that those high in trait hedonic capacity seemed to experience less spontaneous intrusive thoughts (Bernecker & Becker, 2021). It could be plausible that not having a prevention focus is an important facet in why people high in THC experience less intrusive thoughts while engaging in hedonic goals and thus experience more happiness.

Lastly the present research contributed to the role of hedonic goal pursuit in self-regulation research. In previous self-regulation research, the focus was mainly on self-control. Trait self-control was associated with several important health outcomes and engaging in a hedonic goal, which is in conflict with a long-term goal, was seen as self-control failure (De Ridder et al., 2012). The present research shows that self-control is not the only way to happiness and the importance of hedonic goal pursuit has been presented. However, what happens if one solely engages in hedonic goal pursuit and forgets about long-term goals which also are important for health? These findings do not argue against the focus on self-control, as self-control is widely important. For this reason, I believe that self-regulation research should shift from a view in which self-control is the only important aspect in attaining desired health outcomes, to focus on the importance of the balance between long-term and hedonic goal

pursuit. Both working on a long-term goal and engaging in hedonic pleasures can add to our happiness. Future research should focus on the balance between long-term and hedonic goals and trait hedonic capacity and trait self-control.

Practical implications

Before concrete practical implications can be suggested, more future research has to be done. Nevertheless, the current study showed the importance of giving in to desires and pursuing hedonic goals. Not only restraining oneself and keeping perfectly on track with long-term goals, will bring happiness. In the future, hedonic goal pursuit can be kept in mind when, for example, building dieting and work-out plans.

The role of regulatory focus has been emphasized as well. Future research has to be conducted to see the causality between regulatory focus and THC, but there seem to be possibilities in focussing on framing goals in a promotion-focused way.

Future directions

It is not proposed that trait hedonic capacity is superior to trait self-control, nor to solely strive for hedonic goals. Instead, the aim of this research was to show that having the capacity to say no to desires is not the only way to happiness, and that giving in to desires has positive outcomes as well. Finding the right balance between both pursuits is key in becoming the happiest version of oneself. Future research should focus on finding this balance by learning more about the interrelatedness of trait hedonic capacity and trait self-control. The open-minded characteristic of promotion focus could play a key role in this balance. When framing a goal in terms of growth, it is possible to both strive for a long-term goal without having to strictly refrain oneself from a hedonic goal, and thus it might be easier to engage in both. Therefore, I propose future research to focus on the role of regulatory focus in the balance between trait hedonic capacity and trait self-control.

A second direction for future research is establishing the causality in this model. It was assumed that trait hedonic capacity affected regulatory focus and happiness, based on literature, but causal conclusions cannot be made. It could be possible that regulatory focus predicts THC instead. Therefore, future research should focus on building an experimental design to establish this causality.

Lastly, a key direction for future research should be to test the consequences of trait hedonic capacity for other relevant outcomes. Bernecker and Becker (2021) have already shown that THC is positively related to lower levels of depression and anxiety, which could initiate positive outcomes in other areas, such as physical health, relationship quality, stress, or

engagement in risk behaviours. Trait hedonic capacity might be related to more positive health consequences.

Limitations

Several limitations of the present study have to be noted. First of all, the sample consisted of mostly students (HBO, WO-bachelors, WO-masters). Furthermore, the mean age was 29.55 years old and most participants were found in the age-group 20 till 26 years old. The high educational level in the sample might not affect the generalisability as there is no literature on differences in trait hedonic capacity due to educational level. Nevertheless, the educational level might have affected happiness, as previous literature has shown that higher education has a positive (and direct) impact on happiness (Cuñado & De Gracia, 2012). Regarding age, previous literature has shown that a higher age within the sample predicted lower levels of happiness (Vera-Villarroel et al., 2012). As our sample was found to be relatively young, this could have predicted higher levels of happiness. Thereby, Lockwood et al. (2005) showed that both old and young people preferred a more promotion focus, but older adults did report higher levels of prevention orientations than the younger adults did. These characteristics of the sample may possibly limit the generalisability of the present findings.

Secondly, this study relies on self-report measures only, which may limit the reliability of our measurements. With self-reported measures there may be a possibility that social desirability could have biased the responses regarding THC, regulatory focus and happiness (Van de Mortel, 2008). It could be possible that participants over-report their levels of THC and happiness as these are considered to be desirable constructs. Similarly, promotion focus is more open-minded and could be associated with positive affectivity while prevention focus could be associated with negative affectivity (Summerville and Roese, 2008). This could have biased participants to ascribe themselves with higher levels of promotion focus and lower levels of prevention focus. In the end, the self-report bias could have potentially contributed to our outcomes and thus should be considered a limitation.

Third, the present data is correlational and cross-sectional and therefore does not allow for strict causal conclusions. Although our findings suggest a causal chain of events with higher trait hedonic capacity leading to higher levels of happiness, this hypothesis needs to be further confirmed in an experimental and/or longitudinal study design.

Conclusion

A balance between hedonic goal pursuit and long-term goal pursuit could be key in reaching higher levels of happiness. Nevertheless, self-regulation research is mainly focused on self-control and research on engaging in hedonic goals is scarce. The first aim of the study was to

expand the knowledge on the consequences of hedonic goal pursuit. The present study has shown that having higher levels of trait hedonic capacity is associated with higher levels of happiness. The second aim of this research was to expand our knowledge on the underlying mechanisms. Regulatory focus was presented as a possible mechanism explaining the relationship between THC and happiness. Promotion focus was found to positively mediate between THC and happiness, while prevention focus was found to negatively mediate between THC and happiness. In the end, hedonic goal pursuit should be taken into account when studying adaptive self-regulation.

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Appendix A: Information letter

Beste deelnemer,

Bedankt dat je wilt deelnemen aan deze vragenlijst. Het doel van deze studie is om meer inzicht te krijgen in hoe goed mensen bepaalde genotsdoelen nastreven en hoe dit zich verhoudt tegenover hoe gelukkig mensen zijn. In deze vragenlijst zullen verschillende stellingen over hoe gelukkig je bent en hoe je doelen stelt of nastreeft aan je worden voorgelegd. Ook zal de vragenlijst eindigen met de vraag om leeftijd, geslacht en opleidingsniveau aan te geven. Deze gegevens worden verzameld om zo het effect van leeftijd, geslacht of opleidingsniveau uit te kunnen sluiten.

Er wordt je gevraagd om zo eerlijk en accuraat mogelijk te antwoorden. Er zullen verschillende antwoordschalen voorkomen, waarbij het van belang is dat je de vraag goed leest zodat je niet per ongeluk een antwoord geeft dat niet de bedoeling was. Je kunt niet terug naar de vorige vraag wanneer je eenmaal naar de volgende vraag hebt doorgedrukt. Er bestaan geen foute antwoorden, het gaat om jouw eigen beleving.

Jouw gegevens zullen anoniem worden verzameld en verwerkt en deze zullen niet tot jou te herleiden zijn. Deze vragenlijst zal ongeveer 10 minuten in beslag nemen. De deelname aan deze vragenlijst is geheel vrijwillig. Wanneer je op een bepaald moment besluit niet meer mee te willen doen, ben je vrij om te stoppen op elk gewenst moment. Je hoeft hier geen reden voor te geven. Wanneer je besluit te stoppen zullen hier geen gevolgen aan zitten. Wel zullen de tot dan toe verzamelde gegevens worden gebruikt voor de onderzoeksdoeleinden. Er zijn geen gezondheidsrisico's verbonden aan deelname van deze vragenlijst.

Wanneer je na het lezen van deze tekst nog vragen hebt, kan je de onderzoeker bereiken op het volgende emailadres: j.l.dano@students.uu.nl.

Alvast bedankt voor het invullen van deze vragenlijst!

Met vriendelijk groeten,

Jonas Dano
Universiteit Utrecht

Appendix B: Informed consent

- Ik ben 18 jaar of ouder en wilsbekwaam.
 - Ik heb de informatie over het onderzoek gelezen en begrepen.
 - Ik had genoeg tijd om te beslissen of ik meedoe en de mogelijkheid gehad om vragen te stellen.
 - Ik geef toestemming voor het anoniem verzamelen, bewaren en gebruiken van mijn gegevens in dit onderzoek.
 - Ik weet dat meedoen vrijwillig is en dat ik op elk moment kan stoppen tijdens het onderzoek.
 - Ik weet dat reeds verzamelde gegevens zullen worden gebruikt in het onderzoek.
- Ja, de bovenstaande informatie is op mij van toepassing en ik wil meedoen met het onderzoek. (1)
- Nee, ik wil niet mee doen met het onderzoek (2)

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Description

Er volgen nu 35 stellingen over doelen, het streven naar doelen en geluk. Het onderzoek zal afsluiten met vragen over leeftijd, geslacht en opleidingsniveau. Kijk altijd goed naar de aangegeven schaal en geef aan in hoeverre dit op u van toepassing is. Probeer de vragen zo waarheidsgetrouw mogelijk te beantwoorden. Mocht er een vraag echt niet op uw situatie aansluiten, kunt u deze overslaan.

Regulatory focus Lees het statement en geef in hoeverre dit op jou van toepassing is.	Helemaal niet waar voor mij 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	8 (8)	Heel erg waar voor mij 9 (9)
1. In het algemeen ben ik gefocust op het voorkomen van negatieve gebeurtenissen in mijn leven. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Ik vrees dat ik tekort zal schieten in mijn verantwoordelijkheden en verplichtingen. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Ik beeld mij vaak in op welke manier ik mijn wensen en ambities zal verwezenlijken (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Ik denk vaak aan de persoon die ik vrees te kunnen worden in de toekomst. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Ik denk vaak na over de persoon die ik in de toekomst het liefst zou willen zijn. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Ik concentreer me meestal op het succes dat ik in de toekomst hoop te bereiken. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Ik maak mij vaak zorgen dat ik mijn academische doelen niet zal bereiken. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Ik zie mijzelf als iemand die er in de eerste plaats naar streeft de ik te worden die ik "zou moeten" zijn - om mijn plichten, verantwoordelijkheden en verplichtingen na te komen. (15)

16. In het algemeen ben ik gericht op het bereiken van positieve resultaten in mijn leven. (16)

17. Ik stel mezelf vaak goede dingen voor waarvan ik hoop dat ze me zullen overkomen. (17)

18. Over het algemeen ben ik meer gericht op het bereiken van succes dan op het voorkomen van mislukking. (18)

Happiness

Q1 Over het algemeen beschouw ik mezelf als:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Een niet erg blij persoon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Een erg blij persoon



THC Geef aan in welke mate de volgende beweringen over het algemeen op u van toepassing zijn.	Totaal niet van toepassing 1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	Helemaal van toepassing 5 (5)
1. Ik ben goed in het nastreven van mijn verlangens. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Ik kan mijn verlangens in het hier en nu volgen. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Ik doe vaak waar ik zin in heb. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. In mijn vrije tijd kan ik goed ontspannen. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. In mijn vrije tijd kan ik goed “uitschakelen”. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Achteraf denk ik vaak dat ik meer van het moment had moeten genieten. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. In mijn vrije tijd vind ik het moeilijk om niet de hele tijd te denken aan wat ik zou moeten doen. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Gedachten over mijn werk weerhouden me er soms van om te genieten van prettige activiteiten en momenten. (8)

9. Soms kan ik mezelf er niet van weerhouden na te denken over de dingen die ik nog moet doen. (9)

10. Ik denk vaak aan mijn plichten, zelfs terwijl ik geniet van een fijn/goed moment. (10)

Gender Wat is je geslacht?

Man (1)

Vrouw (2)

Anders, namelijk (3) _____

Wil ik niet zeggen (4)

Age Wat is je leeftijd?

Education level Wat is je hoogst genoten opleiding?

- VMBO (1)
- Havo (2)
- VWO (3)
- MBO (4)
- HBO (5)
- WO-bachelor (6)
- WO-master (7)
- Anders, namelijk (8) _____

Q15

Dank voor het meewerken aan dit onderzoek! Mocht u nog vragen hebben kunt u de onderzoeker bereiken op het volgende mailadres: j.l.dano@students.uu.nl.

Wilt u nog wat kwijt of heeft u op- of aanmerking kunt u deze hieronder achterlaten. Nogmaals dank voor de medewerking.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Jonas Dano
Universiteit Utrecht

Opmerkingen:
