

Instrumental Motives in Negative Emotion Regulation in Daily Life: Frequency, Consistency, and Predictors

Elise K. Kalokerinos
KU Leuven

Maya Tamir
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Peter Kuppens
KU Leuven

People regulate their emotions not only for hedonic reasons but also for instrumental reasons, to attain the potential benefits of emotions beyond pleasure and pain. However, such instrumental motives have rarely been examined outside the laboratory as they naturally unfold in daily life. To assess whether and how instrumental motives operate outside the laboratory, it is necessary to examine them in response to real and personally relevant stimuli in ecologically valid contexts. In this research, we assessed the frequency, consistency, and predictors of instrumental motives in negative emotion regulation in daily life. Participants ($N = 114$) recalled the most negative event of their day each evening for 7 days and reported their instrumental motives and negative emotion goals in that event. Participants endorsed performance motives in approximately 1 in 3 events and social, eudaimonic, and epistemic motives in approximately 1 in 10 events. Instrumental motives had substantially higher within- than between-person variance, indicating that they were context-dependent. Indeed, although we found few associations between instrumental motives and personality traits, relationships between instrumental motives and contextual variables were more extensive. Performance, social, and epistemic motives were each predicted by a unique pattern of contextual appraisals. Our data demonstrate that instrumental motives play a role in daily negative emotion regulation as people encounter situations that pose unique regulatory demands.

Keywords: emotion regulation, motives, goals, negative emotion

I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890

People often regulate their emotions for instrumental reasons in order to attain their expected benefits (Tamir, 2016). To date, research investigating these instrumental motives in emotion regulation has been conducted primarily in the laboratory (e.g., Tamir, Bigman, Rhodes, Salerno, & Schreier, 2015; Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). Therefore, it is still largely unknown how often, when, and who spontaneously pursues these motives in daily life.

In this investigation, we begin to address these important questions, testing Tamir's (2016) taxonomy of motives in emotion regulation. We examine instrumental motives in negative emotion regulation in daily life and assess their frequency, consistency, and possible personality and contextual predictors.

Goals and Motives in Emotion Regulation

We distinguish between goals and motives in emotion regulation (see Mauss & Tamir, 2014; Tamir, 2016). Emotion goals refer to specific desired emotional states (e.g., I want to feel more anger). Emotion regulation motives refer to the broader, higher order goals that the desired emotion can help attain (e.g., I want to feel more anger to help me win an argument). Emotion regulation motives reflect the reasons why people pursue certain emotion goals and, therefore, are not necessarily emotional themselves. According to Tamir (2016), each instance of emotion regulation involves an emotion goal (i.e., it is directed toward achieving a desired emotional end-state) in the service of one (or more) motives.

To date, emotion goals have been studied more extensively than have emotion regulation motives, particularly in daily life. Some key studies have described the fluctuation of emotion goals in daily life. For example, experience sampling research has demonstrated that people often, but not always, want to decrease negative emotions and maintain or increase positive emotions (Gross, Richards, & John, 2006; Kämpfe & Mitte, 2009; Riediger, Schmiedek,

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Elise K. Kalokerinos, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven; Maya Tamir, Department of Psychology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Peter Kuppens, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Elise K. Kalokerinos, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven, Tiensestraat 102, Leuven 3000, Belgium. E-mail: elise.kalokerinos@kuleuven.be

Wagner, & Lindenberg, 2009). However, emotion regulation motives have rarely been examined outside the laboratory.

Understanding whether and how people implement emotion regulation motives, especially those pertaining to the regulation of negative emotions, has both theoretical and applied implications. From a theoretical perspective, motives reflect the reasons for seeking out specific goals (see Elliot & Niesta, 2009). Motives in emotion regulation, therefore, may determine which emotion goals people select. Furthermore, because different emotions can serve a given motive, motives cannot be directly inferred from goals. For example, a woman might want to increase her anger. But she may want to do so in order to win an argument, to bond with an angry friend, or to play a better game of soccer, among many other possibilities. Each of these potential motives has different implications. For example, if this woman's goal to feel angry were motivated by a desire to win an argument, she might no longer hold an anger up-regulation goal once the argument is won. Therefore, to understand emotion regulation, one must identify both the emotion goals people pursue and the motives they serve.

Instrumental Emotion Regulation Motives

Tamir (2016) recently proposed a taxonomy of motives in emotion regulation. The taxonomy first distinguishes between hedonic and instrumental motives. Hedonic motives target the immediate phenomenology of emotions and often refer to the desire for immediate pleasure over pain. Instrumental motives target the potential benefits of emotions other than their immediate phenomenology.

Based on research demonstrating the benefits of emotions, the taxonomy lists four classes of instrumental motives, including performance, epistemic, social, and eudaimonic motives. Performance motives reflect the motivation to facilitate successful performance of an activity (e.g., get a good grade on an exam). For example, when performing a threat-avoidance task, participants who perceived fear and worry as useful for task performance were motivated to increase these emotions (Tamir, Chiu, & Gross, 2007). Epistemic motives reflect the motivation to attain certain information. For example, people want to experience emotions that are consistent with how they see themselves (e.g., Wood, Heimpel, Manwell, & Whittington, 2009). Social motives reflect the motivation to influence social relationships. For example, people who want to belong to their group want to feel more sadness on a national mourning day (Porat, Halperin, Mannheim, & Tamir, 2016). Finally, eudaimonic motives reflect the motivation to find meaning and foster personal growth. For example, people want to listen to sad music or read sad literature because they find them meaningful (Oliver & Raney, 2011).

This taxonomy is theoretically grounded, and there is empirical evidence for the existence of these proposed motives, but no research to date has tested whether and how often each of these motives guide emotion regulation in daily life. The current investigation was designed to address these issues. First, we investigated the naturally occurring frequency and consistency of such motives. This is particularly important for assessing the potential applied value of the taxonomy. Second, little is known about the correlates of such motives in daily life. We investigated which people are more likely than others to endorse certain motives and

whether certain situations are more likely than others to give rise to certain motives.

Instrumental Motives in Negative Emotion Regulation in Daily Life

Building on Tamir's (2016) taxonomy, this study examined, for the first time, instrumental motives in emotion regulation as they occur in daily life. In particular, we focused on regulation of emotions in response to negative emotional events. Our focus on negative events was driven by two key considerations. First, in daily life, people target negative emotions for regulation much more frequently than they do positive emotions. For example, in two experience-sampling studies, negative emotion predicted an increase in the use of almost all of the emotion regulation strategies studied, but positive emotion was not associated with any of the emotion regulation strategies (Brans, Koval, Verduyn, Lim, & Kuppens, 2013). Second, negative emotion regulation is much more frequently studied (Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012) and is thus much better understood than is positive emotion regulation. For these reasons, our investigation focused on the regulation of negative emotions, and our predictions throughout are specific to negative emotion. Because we focused on negative events, in addition to instrumental motives, we assessed negative emotion goals. In particular, we sought to address three groups of complementary questions, which we describe in the following sections.

How Often Do People Report Instrumental Motives in Daily Life, and How Distinct Are These Motives?

Collecting data in daily life allows one to determine whether instrumental motives are indeed present outside of lab contexts as well as to establish the frequency with which they occur. We expected to find at least some evidence for the four proposed motives in daily life.

In this investigation, we also sought to determine whether and how different instrumental motives in emotion regulation are interrelated. To test whether instrumental motives are empirically distinct from each other or whether they overlap, we examined two types of correlations—namely, correlations within events (“state”) and correlations across people (“trait”). High correlations between motives would suggest that they are not empirically distinguishable, and low correlations would suggest that the motives are separate yet related. Following Tamir (2016), we did not expect to find high correlations between the motives, because they are theoretically distinct.

In addition to testing the potential associations between motives, we also sought to test the potential associations between motives and emotion goals. Given that the same motive can be served by different emotion goals, we did not expect to find one-to-one associations between motives and negative emotion goals. Instead, we predicted that within events, goals and motives would not be strongly related to each other.

How Consistent Are People in Their Instrumental Motives?

We tested whether motives vary more within-person or between-person. Within-person variation indicates change between situations, suggesting that the motives are more context-

dependent. Between-person variation indicates stability across situations, suggesting that the motives are more dispositional.

Predictors of Instrumental Motives

Finally, we explored some possible predictors of instrumental motives in emotion regulation. Given our discussion so far, we examined both contextual and dispositional predictors. These analyses were partly exploratory in nature and were intended to offer preliminary insight into potential correlates of various instrumental motives. To examine possible contextual predictors, we explored the relationship between motives and situational appraisals. To examine possible dispositional predictors, we explored the relationship between motives and the Big Five personality traits.

When are specific motives most likely to occur? Cognitive appraisals. Appraisal processes reflect an individual's interpretation of their context and are central to emotion processes (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003), including emotion regulation (Gross, 2015). We chose to assess cognitive appraisals of context because both theory and data have suggested that it is one's appraisal of the context, rather than the context itself, that precedes the experience of emotion (Siemer, Mauss, & Gross, 2007).

We assessed 11 different appraisals, taken from several different models of the appraisal process (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1999; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Eight of these appraisals assessed four dimensions that theorists generally agree are central to the appraisal process (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003): Novelty (assessed using appraisals of unexpectedness), valence or pleasantness (assessed using appraisals of importance), goals or needs (assessed using appraisals of goal congruence), and agency (assessed using appraisals of self- and other-responsibility, controllability, and problem- and emotion-focused coping). We included, in addition to the appraisals assessing broader dimensions, three other appraisals that we thought would be important to the emotion regulation process: anticipated effort (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), whether the event was ongoing, and whether others were present during the event.

Given that motives in emotion regulation vary as a function of contextual manipulations (e.g., Tamir, Ford, & Gilliam, 2013), we expected to find associations between appraisals and motives. First, performance motives involve active engagement with an activity, and this engagement requires resources. Thus, we hypothesized that individuals would be more likely to pursue performance motives when they were in situations where they were better able to direct their resources toward their performance. Therefore, we expected performance motives to be associated with appraisals of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Higher levels of these two appraisals indicate that participants believe that they have coping resources (both emotional and situational) to deal with the negative event (Lazarus, 1991) and thus provide a signal that their cognitive and emotional resources can be directed elsewhere. In addition, we expected performance motives to be positively associated with appraisals of controllability: When a situation is perceived as controllable, it suggests that participants perceive that they have the resources at their disposal to change the situation to their will. Finally, we hypothesized that because performing well requires effort, performance motives would be positively associated with appraisals of anticipated effort.

Second, we hypothesized that individuals would be more likely to pursue social motives when other people were present and when

they considered others to be responsible for the situation. Therefore, we expected social motives to be positively associated with social appraisals such as responsibility. Finally, given that people often use important negative events as a catalyst for personal growth (cf. Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008), we hypothesized that individuals would be more likely to pursue eudaimonic motives the more the situation was considered of personal importance.

Are some people more likely to pursue certain instrumental motives? The Big Five traits. We targeted the Big Five personality traits (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) as our dispositional predictors. We chose the Big Five traits because they are considered broad and comprehensive representations of key traits (John & Srivastava, 1999) and have also been associated to differences in emotion goals (e.g., Ford & Tamir, 2014; Kämpfe & Mitte, 2009; Tamir, 2005). First, we hypothesized that performance motives would be positively associated with conscientiousness, because conscientiousness involves planning ahead, working hard, and meeting achievement expectations (John & Srivastava, 1999). Second, we hypothesized that both agreeableness and extraversion would be positively associated with social motives, because agreeable individuals are particularly attuned to social harmony (Graziano & Tobin, 2009) and extraverts spend more time in social settings (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998). Third, we hypothesized that openness to experience and extraversion would be positively associated with eudaimonic motives, because both traits have been linked to personal growth (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Finally, we hypothesized that openness to experience would be positively associated with epistemic motives, because those high in openness are particularly receptive and oriented to new information (John et al., 2008).

Method

Participants

Participants were 114 individuals recruited through Mechanical Turk ($M_{\text{age}} = 35.23$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.87$, 50% male) who completed 771 daily diaries.¹ Approximately two weeks before study commencement, 403 individuals completed the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). From this initial sample, we used a stratified sampling approach to select a sample of 147 individuals maximizing variation on neuroticism, dividing the neuroticism subscale into six equal groups based on scores (1–1.99, 2–2.99, 3–3.99, 4–4.99, 5–5.99, and 6–7), and contacting approximately equal numbers of participants from these six groups (for a similar approach, see Koval et al., 2015).² Neuroticism is implicated in negative emotional functioning (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003), responding to emotional events (Suls & Martin, 2005), and emotion regulation (Gross & John, 2003). Hence, a sample variable on neuroticism allowed us to investigate the frequency, consistency, and predictors of motives across a sample with a wide range of negative emotional response styles. Of these participants, 121 elected to participate. One of these was excluded

¹ There were initially 784 diaries, but 13 were excluded because participants could not recall a negative event.

² The number of participants in each of these six groups was not exactly equal in the final sample, because not all participants responded to this study invitation. In the final sample, the numbers in each group were as follows: Group 1 (lowest level of neuroticism) $n = 23$, Group 2 $n = 21$, Group 3 $n = 19$, Group 4 $n = 20$, Group 5 $n = 19$, and Group 6 $n = 12$.

for missing more than 50% of the five attention checks distributed throughout the study, as described in the next section. Among the remaining participants, compliance with the daily protocol was high, with a mean completion of 6.63 of seven diaries: 106 participants (88%) completed all 7 days, four participants completed 6 days, two participants completed 5 days, and two participants completed 4 days. Six participants completed less than 4 days, and we excluded these participants because they were missing more than 50% of the daily data,³ leaving a final sample of 114 participants.

Materials and Procedure

Data were collected as part of a larger project. In the next section, we address only the parts of the protocol that are relevant to the current research questions.⁴ The study involved a recruitment survey, a baseline survey, and seven consecutive daily surveys. In all surveys, if participants missed answering an item, they received a reminder to answer that item before they progressed to the next page (although they were not obligated to do so). All participants complied with these prompts, and thus, none of the scales or diaries reported have partial missing data. This study received ethical approval from the KU Leuven Social and Societal Ethics Committee.

Recruitment survey.

Big Five Inventory. Participants completed 44 items assessing the five-factor model of personality on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Disagree Strongly*) to 7 (*Agree Strongly*; John et al., 1991, 2008). There was a subscale for each of the five factors: extraversion ($\alpha = .91$; e.g., “I am someone who is talkative”), agreeableness ($\alpha = .87$; e.g., “I am someone who is helpful and unselfish with others”), conscientiousness ($\alpha = .92$; e.g., “I am someone who does a thorough job”), neuroticism ($\alpha = .95$; e.g., “I am someone who worries a lot”), and openness to experience ($\alpha = .90$; e.g., “I am someone who is inventive”). Where necessary, items were reverse-scored, such that higher scores on each scale indicated higher levels of that trait.

Daily surveys. Participants were e-mailed the link to the daily survey at 7 p.m. and asked to complete the survey before they went to sleep that evening. If they did not complete the survey by 7 a.m. the next day, they received a reminder e-mail. They were allowed until 11 a.m. to complete the survey, at which point the link was closed. The mean time between the survey link’s being sent and the participant’s starting the survey was 3.12 hr ($SD = 4.29$), indicating that the average time at which participants started the survey was 10:07 p.m.

The daily survey took approximately 5 min to complete. None of the participants who began a survey quit before completing it. At the beginning of the daily survey, participants were given the following instructions: *First, we’d like you to recall the most negative event you experienced today. That is, the event that led to the most negative emotions. Please write a sentence or two describing this event in the space provided below.* Participants were then told they would be asked a series of questions about the event they recalled and asked to keep the event strongly in mind when answering the rest of the survey.

Event appraisals. Participants completed 11 appraisals of the event taken from several different appraisal models (Frijda et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1999; Smith & Ellsworth,

1985; for a review of appraisal models, see Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Ten of these appraisals were assessed on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*), including: importance (“How important was this event to you?”), goal congruence (“How disadvantageous was this event for you? [reverse-scored]”), controllability (“How much control do you think you had over this event?”), other-responsibility (“To what extent was someone else responsible for the occurrence of this event?”), self-responsibility (“To what extent were you responsible for the occurrence of this event?”), unexpectedness (“How unexpected was this event?”), problem-focused coping (“To what extent could you do something to change this situation?”), emotion-focused coping (“To what extent could you cope with the emotions elicited by the event?”), anticipated effort (“To what extent did you feel you needed to exert yourself to deal with this situation?”), and ongoing situation (“Is this situation likely to be ongoing?”). Participants responded to one appraisal, other-presence (“Were other people present?”), by selecting *yes* or *no*.

Emotion regulation goals and motives. Participants were asked to indicate their emotion goals and emotion regulation motives during the event they described. Participants responded to the goals and motives items in a single block of questions. They were asked: “What were your goals in trying to influence your emotions? Please select all that apply.” Thus, all items were dichotomous (0 = not selected, 1 = selected), and participants could select multiple items. We opted to use a dichotomous question because this allowed us to assess goals and motives in a parsimonious manner, keeping the daily surveys short and decreasing the burden on participants (cf. Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). To assess emotion goals, we asked participants to indicate whether they wanted to *reduce my negative emotions* or to *maintain or increase my negative emotions*. To assess instrumental motives, participants indicated whether they wanted to influence their emotions to *help me do something* (i.e., performance motives), to *help with my social relationships* (i.e., social motives), to *help me learn something* (i.e., epistemic motives), and to *help me grow as a person* (i.e., eudaimonic motives). Participants could also select *none of the above*, if they did not try to influence their emotions during the event or if they did not pursue any of the specified motives or goals.

Attention checks. To ensure that participants were paying attention throughout the study, we included five attention checks: two in the baseline survey (at the beginning and end of the survey), one in Day 1, one in Day 4, and one in Day 7. Each attention check said: “This is a control item. Please select . . .” and then either 1 or 7. Participants who selected the number specified in the item passed the attention check, and those who selected any other number failed.

³ The results outlined here do not substantively change if these excluded participants are included.

⁴ The full protocol is available from the authors on request. A subset of these data was used to test a different research question in Kalokerinos, Résibois, Verduyn, and Kuppens (2016).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Emotion Goal and Emotion Regulation Motive Usage at the Event and Person Levels

Goal or motive	Event level		Person level				
	<i>n</i> events with this motive or goal	% events with this motive or goal	<i>M</i> % (<i>SD</i>) of events in which each participant reported this motive or goal	Range (%) of events in which participants reported this motive or goal	% of participants who reported this motive or goal at least once	% of participants who did not report this motive or goal at all	% of participants who reported this goal in every diary
Negative emotion goals							
Decrease negative	505	65.5	64.81 (29.42)	0–100	94.7	5.3	21.1
Maintain or increase negative	12	1.6	1.50 (5.16)	0–28.6	9.8	91.2	0
Instrumental motives							
Performance	271	35.1	34.62 (26.86)	0–100	78.1	21.9	1.8
Social	95	12.3	12.04 (15.39)	0–85.71	52.6	47.4	0
Eudaimonic	76	9.9	8.22 (15.36)	0–85.71	33.3	66.7	.9
Epistemic	65	8.4	9.67 (15.72)	0–100	36.8	63.2	0
None of the above	126	16.3	15.79 (25.67)	0–100	45.6	54.4	3.5

Results

Frequency and Co-Occurrence of Instrumental Motives

To determine how often participants reported instrumental motives in daily life and how distinct these motives were, we assessed their frequency and co-occurrence at both the event level and the person level.

Frequency.

Event level. Overall, instrumental motives were present in just under half of the events (48.8%). In 36.7% of events, participants reported one instrumental motive, in 8.4% of events they reported two motives, in 2.3% of events they reported three motives, and in 1.3% of events they reported all four instrumental motives. Thus, overall, multiple motives were endorsed in 12% of events. As demonstrated in Table 1, participants pursued each of the four instrumental motives in their daily lives. Performance motives were most prevalent, occurring in about a third of the events. Social, eudaimonic, and epistemic motives occurred in around one

in 10 events. Participants typically wanted to decrease negative emotions (in about two thirds of events) and rarely wanted to maintain or increase negative emotions (in less than 2% of events).

Person level. Three quarters of participants reported pursuing performance motives at least once over the course of the study, and just over half of the participants reported pursuing a social goal at least once over the course of the study (see Table 1). Eudaimonic and epistemic goals were reported at least once by just over a third of participants. Almost no participants reported having the same motive on every measurement occasion. With respect to the goals, most participants reported seeking to decrease their negative emotion at least once, and most participants reported never seeking to increase their negative emotion.

Co-occurrence.

Event-level correlations. Because variables were dichotomous, we computed correlations across events ($N = 771$) using the phi coefficient (see Table 2). We could not examine these associations using multilevel methods, because many participants had zero variance on some of the variables across the study. That is, across the 7 days of the study, they either never selected a partic-

Table 2
Event-Level and Between-Person Correlations, Frequencies, and Intraclass Correlations of Instrumental Motives and Negative Emotion Goals

Goal or motive	1	2	3	4	5	6	ICC	Between-person variance (%)	Within-person variance (%)
Negative emotion goals									
1. Decrease negative	—	-.13***	-.04	.06	.04	.03	.30	30	70
2. Maintain or increase negative	.07	—	-.05	.02	-.04	-.04	.27	27	73
Instrumental motives									
3. Performance	.30**	.04	—	-.03	.11**	.12**	.23	23	77
4. Social	.22*	.00	.28**	—	.25***	.14***	.15	15	85
5. Eudaimonic	.22*	-.05	.23**	.22*	—	.35***	.27	27	73
6. Epistemic	.13	.00	.26**	.26**	.50***	—	.29	29	71

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are nonparametric between-person correlations using Spearman's Rho ($N = 108$) excluding participants who were univariate outliers on one or more variables ($N = 6$; including these participants does not substantively change these results). Correlations above the diagonal are event-level correlations using the phi coefficient ($N = 771$). ICC = intraclass correlation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Results From Binary Logistic Multilevel Analyses Using Big Five Personality Traits to Predict Instrumental Motive Use

Big Five trait	Performance					Social					Eudaimonic					Epistemic				
	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	OR	95% CI	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	OR	95% CI	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	OR	95% CI	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	OR	95% CI
Extraversion	.18	1.79	.077	1.19	[.98, 1.46]	.19	1.78	.078	1.20	[.98, 1.48]	.25	2.21	.029	1.29	[1.03, 1.62]	.01	.10	.924	1.01	[.80, 1.29]
Agreeableness	.12	1.00	.321	1.13	[.89, 1.43]	.27	2.13	.035	1.31	[1.02, 1.69]	.02	.18	.859	1.02	[.81, 1.28]	.20	1.32	.190	1.22	[.91, 1.64]
Conscientiousness	-.01	-.14	.891	.99	[.82, 1.19]	-.24	2.60	.011	.79	[.66, .95]	-.18	1.60	.113	.84	[.67, 1.04]	-.19	1.91	.059	.83	[.68, 1.01]
Neuroticism	.13	1.50	.135	1.14	[.96, 1.37]	.25	2.79	.006	1.29	[1.08, 1.54]	.04	.33	.745	1.04	[.80, 1.36]	.06	.51	.612	1.06	[.85, 1.33]
Openness to experience	.09	.95	.346	1.09	[.91, 1.32]	.16	1.67	.098	1.17	[.97, 1.42]	.27	2.27	.025	1.31	[1.03, 1.65]	.26	1.66	.100	1.29	[.95, 1.76]

Note. Significant effects after a Bonferroni correction for the five significance tests conducted in each model ($p < .01$) are in bold. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval of the odds ratio.

ular goal or motive (e.g., they never reported having a performance motive) or they selected a particular goal or motive on every measurement occasion (e.g., they reported having a performance motive on every day of the study; see Table 1). A within-person correlation cannot be calculated for a person if one variable is invariant, and thus, when within-person correlations were calculated, there was a large amount of missing data. As a result, calculating correlations across events provided a fuller picture of the data. The event-level correlations demonstrated that all instrumental motives were significantly and positively correlated with each other, with the exception of performance and social motives. Goals to increase and decrease negative emotion were negatively correlated with each other but uncorrelated with motives.

Between-person correlations. We aggregated the event-level data for each person by calculating the mean usage of each goal and motive across the study. Because the resulting means were not normally distributed, we used nonparametric Spearman’s rho correlations to examine these associations. We removed six participants who were univariate outliers on one or more variables.⁵ All four instrumental motives were positively but weakly correlated with each other (see Table 2). Goals to decrease negative emotion were positively associated with all instrumental motives except for epistemic motives.

Consistency in Instrumental Motives

To determine how consistent people were in their instrumental motives, we calculated the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) using the method recommended by Snijders and Bosker (2012) for logistic models. For all motives, there was considerably more within-person than between-person variance (see Table 2). The average ICC for the four motives was .24, suggesting that 76% of the variance in motives was within-person, and only 24% of the variance was between-person.

Predictors of Instrumental Motives

Person-level predictors: Big Five. Because of the nested data structure (events within persons), we conducted multilevel analyses using HLM 7 (Raudenbush et al., 2011). Because the dependent variables were dichotomous, we estimated two-level logistic population-average models with robust standard errors. We ran a series of models in which we simultaneously entered the grand-mean-centered personality traits at Level 2 to predict each of the goals and motives. To reduce the familywise error rate, we used an alpha Bonferroni-corrected for the number of significance tests within each model (five significance tests; $p < .01$). Table 3 depicts the results of the analyses with motives: Using the corrected p value, we found that none of the personality traits were significant predictors of goals, performance motives, eudaimonic motives, or epistemic motives. Neuroticism was a significant positive predictor of social motives.

Contextual predictors: Cognitive appraisals. We ran a series of models in which we simultaneously entered the appraisals

⁵ Results do not change substantively with these participants included.

at Level 1 to predict each of the goals and motives.⁶ All Level 1 predictors were entered group-mean-centered except for other-presence, which was dichotomous and therefore entered uncentered. To reduce the familywise error rate, we used an alpha Bonferroni-corrected for the number of significance tests within each model (11 significance tests; $p < .005$). Goals to decrease negative emotion were significantly and positively predicted by other-responsibility ($\gamma = 0.12$), $t(113) = 2.91$, $p = .004$, $OR = 1.13$. There were no significant predictors of goals to increase negative emotion. Table 4 depicts the results of the analyses with instrumental motives. After correction for multiple testing, there were six significant predictors of instrumental motives, and these relationships were small to moderate in size. Only eudaimonic motives did not have any significant predictors. Performance motives were positively associated with problem-focused coping and anticipated effort and negatively associated with other-responsibility. Social motives were positively associated with other-responsibility and other-presence. Epistemic motives were positively associated with importance.

Discussion

Our data provide the first demonstration that instrumental emotion regulation motives are pursued in daily life, and enabled us to address three groups of fundamental questions. In the next sections, we revisit each of these questions in turn and discuss the answers provided by our data.

How Often Do People Report Instrumental Motives in Daily Life, and How Distinct Are These Motives?

Participants endorsed all four instrumental motives that appear in Tamir's (2016) taxonomy, indicating that instrumental concerns motivate emotion regulation as it occurs in daily life. Overall, instrumental motives were endorsed in just under half of the events. Performance motives were endorsed in approximately one third of the events, whereas social, eudaimonic, and epistemic motives were endorsed in around one in 10 events. At the person level, the majority of participants reported having a performance motive and a social motive at least once. However, eudaimonic and epistemic motives were used by fewer people, with just above a third of participants reporting these motives at least once. We should note that in these data, we examined only up to seven events for each participant. As a result, these numbers should not be taken as evidence of whether these motives are *ever* endorsed by participants but rather as a reflection of how commonly these motives are pursued in negative events across 1 week.

In just under 17% of events, people reported pursuing no instrumental motive or negative emotion goal. Theoretically, each instance of emotion regulation should be accompanied by an emotion goal, operating in the service of a higher order motive (Tamir, 2016). At first blush, our results are inconsistent with this idea. However, there are two reasons why these data do not provide a clear test of this assertion. First and foremost, we did not assess hedonic motives or positive emotion goals, which are particularly common (e.g., Gross et al., 2006). Thus, it is not necessarily the case that participants who did not list any of the specified goals or motives did not pursue any goals or motives. Rather, the goals and motives relevant to that particular participant in that

particular event may not have been assessed in our study. Second, we assessed conscious goals and motives using self-report, but goals can also operate outside of conscious awareness (Custers & Aarts, 2010), and thus we may not have assessed the full spectrum of possibilities using the self-report methodology.

At the person and the event level, all instrumental motives were significantly and positively correlated with each other, with the single exception of event-level social and performance motives. These correlations were generally small at the event level and moderate at the person level. In line with our expectations, the pursuit of one motive tended to co-occur with the pursuit of other motives, but the motives were also distinct from one another. In addition, in about 12% of events people simultaneously pursued multiple instrumental motives. Probing how and when motives co-occur, and what this co-occurrence might mean for goal fulfillment, is an important unexplored direction for future research.

At the event level, negative emotion goals were not associated with any of the instrumental motives. This suggests that motives may not necessarily be linked to specific goals. Rather, people aim to up- or downregulate their negative emotion, depending on which they believe will better facilitate the pursuit of each instrumental motive in a given situation. This is in line with research suggesting that the same motive can be pursued using different goals. For example, in one study, some runners reported *upregulating* anxiety or anger to facilitate their performance, but other runners reported *downregulating* the same emotions to facilitate their performance (Lane, Beedie, Devonport, & Stanley, 2011). Here, the runners are using different emotion goals in the service of the same performance motive. Thus, the relationship between goals and motives is likely to vary depending on both the situation and the person's beliefs about emotional utility. Such complex relationships are ripe for further investigation.

At the person level, goals to increase negative emotion were not significantly correlated with any other variables, but given their low frequency in this sample, this is unsurprising. Goals to decrease negative emotion were positively associated with performance, social, and eudaimonic motives. This suggests that certain types of people tend to both regulate their emotions instrumentally and to downregulate their negative emotion.

How Consistent Are People in Their Motives?

All motives had substantially higher within- than between-persons variance, suggesting that motives are more context-dependent than dispositional. This is in line with lab research demonstrating the role of contextual factors in shaping instrumental motives (e.g., Tamir et al., 2013). These findings suggest that the operation of instrumental motives may be dictated primarily by contextual demands rather than stable personality dispositions.

Are Some People More Likely to Pursue Certain Instrumental Motives?

Given the small between-person variance in motives, it is not surprising that after correction for multiple testing, there was only

⁶ Given our research question, we modeled Level 2 coefficients as fixed, although including the random error terms for slopes of variables that approached significance ($p < .20$) did not change the outcomes.

Table 4
Results From Binary Logistic Multilevel Analyses Using Appraisals to Predict Instrumental Motive Use

Appraisal	Performance				Social				Eudaimonic				Epistemic			
	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	95% CI	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	95% CI	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	95% CI	γ	$t(113)$	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Importance	.07	1.37	.172	1.07 [97, 1.18]	.06	.94	.348	1.07 [93, 1.22]	.12	1.70	.091	1.13 [98, 1.30]	.23	3.33	.001	1.26 [1.10, 1.44]
Goal congruence	.08	1.42	.157	1.08 [97, 1.21]	-.20	2.58	.010	.82 [70, .95]	-.08	1.09	.275	.92 [79, 1.07]	-.05	.59	.556	.96 [82, 1.11]
Controllability	.04	.73	.468	1.04 [92, 1.16]	.12	1.61	.107	1.13 [97, 1.31]	.18	2.04	.042	1.20 [1.01, 1.43]	.21	2.47	.014	1.23 [1.04, 1.45]
Other-responsibility	-.13	3.48	.001	.87 [.81, .94]	.26	4.80	<.001	1.30 [1.17, 1.45]	.14	2.38	.018	1.15 [1.03, 1.30]	-.01	.15	.879	.99 [89, 1.10]
Self-responsibility	-.09	1.81	.072	.91 [.83, 1.01]	.16	2.25	.025	1.17 [1.02, 1.35]	.14	2.16	.031	1.15 [1.01, 1.31]	.05	.82	.411	1.05 [93, 1.19]
Unexpectedness	.09	1.91	.056	1.09 [1.00, 1.19]	-.02	.38	.705	.98 [.87, 1.10]	.04	.68	.499	1.03 [93, 1.16]	-.12	2.20	.028	.89 [.80, .99]
Problem-focused coping	.14	3.09	.002	1.15 [1.05, 1.26]	-.20	2.40	.017	.82 [.70, .97]	-.11	1.68	.093	.90 [.79, 1.02]	-.11	1.58	.114	.89 [.78, 1.03]
Emotion-focused coping	.17	2.59	.010	1.19 [1.04, 1.35]	-.08	1.00	.316	.92 [.78, 1.08]	.11	1.21	.226	1.12 [93, 1.34]	.23	2.03	.043	1.25 [1.01, 1.56]
Anticipated effort	.20	3.89	<.001	1.22 [1.11, 1.36]	-.02	.26	.792	.98 [.85, 1.13]	.01	.17	.866	1.01 [91, 1.13]	.07	1.11	.266	1.08 [95, 1.23]
Ongoing situation	-.07	1.55	.123	.93 [.86, 1.02]	.01	.16	.873	1.01 [.89, 1.14]	.09	1.41	.158	1.10 [96, 1.25]	-.19	1.46	.144	.91 [.81, 1.03]
Other-presence	.03	.19	.853	1.03 [.74, 1.45]	1.15	4.20	<.001	3.15 [1.84, 5.39]	.43	2.04	.042	1.54 [1.02, 2.35]	.05	.19	.851	.95 [.59, 1.56]

Note. Significant effects after a Bonferroni correction for the 11 significance tests conducted in each model ($p < .005$) are in bold. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval of the odds ratio.

one significant association between motives and the Big Five traits. Specifically, we found an unexpected positive association between social motives and neuroticism. Neuroticism is associated with need for belonging (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013) and loneliness (Cacioppo, Hawkey, & Thisted, 2010), suggesting that social relationships are often challenging for those high in neuroticism. Thus, those higher in neuroticism may aim to regulate their emotions in ways that help overcome their difficulties with social relationships.

Before we corrected for multiple testing, there was evidence for the hypothesized links between agreeableness and social motives, and extraversion and openness and eudaimonic motives. However, these associations no longer held following our corrections. Targeted confirmatory research will be necessary to examine whether these associations are replicable.

When Are Specific Motives Most Likely to Occur?

After correcting for multiple comparisons, we found that three of the four motives were linked to a unique and meaningful pattern of cognitive appraisals, although these relationships were generally small in size. In line with our hypotheses, performance motives were positively linked to appraisals of problem-focused coping and anticipated effort. People were more likely to hold these motives when they were better able to cope with the situation, perhaps because they were better able to direct their resources toward their performance. In line with the more effortful engagement involved in performance motives, people also reported that these situations required more effort. Unexpectedly, performance motives were also negatively linked to other-responsibility, suggesting that people may be less interested in their personal performance when others were responsible for the emotional event.

In line with our hypotheses, social motives were positively linked to the presence of others, indicating that people endorse more social motives in social situations. As hypothesized, social motives were also positively linked to other-responsibility. This may be because other-responsibility appraisals are associated with anger (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), and thus, when others are responsible for a negative event, individuals may downregulate their feelings of anger toward the other person to protect the relationship. Here, it is important to note that such an explanation is speculative, because we did not assess goals to regulate specific emotions, like anger. Such an investigation would be important moving forward.

As hypothesized, epistemic motives were positively linked to appraisals of importance. This suggests that people may be more receptive to new information when the situation is important to them or, conversely, that important situations are more likely to offer an opportunity for learning. Finally, after correction for multiple testing, there were no relationships between the appraisals and eudaimonic motives.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was the first in-depth examination of instrumental motives in daily life and, as such, provides a useful starting point in what we believe will be an important line of research. This work was exploratory in nature, and we recognize that there are several limitations in these data that we hope will be addressed in future

work. First and foremost, we tested instrumental motives in response to only negative events, and thus, we cannot draw any conclusions regarding goals and motives in response to positive events.

Second, because instrumental motives are less studied and thus less well understood, we chose to focus on instrumental motives, and we did not assess hedonic motives. In the future, assessing hedonic motives alongside instrumental motives would allow one to better map the frequency and co-occurrence of the entire range of motives in daily life, as well as help determine whether hedonic motives and emotion goals can be clearly empirically differentiated.

Third, the relationships between personality, contextual appraisals, and motives were necessarily correlational, and causality should not be inferred from these data. We constructed our models such that personality and contextual appraisals were the predictors of motives, but of course, the causal relationships could be in the opposite direction. Indeed, we suggest that these relationships are likely to be bidirectional, but the directionality of these relationships remains to be more fully disentangled using experimental designs.

Conclusion

We provided the first comprehensive test of Tamir's (2016) taxonomy of instrumental motives, demonstrating that these motives drive spontaneous emotion regulation in daily life and have meaningful associations with contextual and personality predictors. In particular, our results suggest that instrumental motives will be integral to understanding variation in emotion regulation across contexts, a topic that has received recent theoretical attention (e.g., Aldao, 2013). In sum, it is clear that people regulate their emotions to facilitate instrumental benefits, and thus, a better understanding of these motives is likely to be key in driving forward research on emotion regulation strategy choice, outcomes, and persistence.

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