

Age Differences in Experience and Regulation of Affect

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd från Samhällsvetenskapliga Fakulteten vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligt försvaras fredagen den 16, maj, 2014 kl. 10.00 i sal F1, Psykologiska Institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Fabio Del Missir
Department of Life Sciences, University of Trieste, Trieste, Italien

This thesis is based on the following four studies which will be referred to by their Roman numerals:

- I. Bjälkebring, P., & Västfjäll, D. (2014). *I will be happier in the future: Investigating factors that influence the view of future and past happiness*. Manuscript submitted for publication
- II. Bjälkebring, P., Västfjäll, D., Johansson, B. (2014). *Happiness and Arousal Avoidance: How you ask about happiness influences older and younger adults differently*. Manuscript submitted for publication
- III. Bjälkebring, P., Västfjäll, D., Johansson, B. (2013) Regulation of experienced and anticipated regret for daily decisions in younger and older adults in a Swedish one-week diary study. *GeroPsych: The Journal of Gerontopsychology and Geriatric Psychiatry*, 26, 233-241. doi: 10.1024/1662-9647/a000102
- IV. Bjälkebring, P., Västfjäll, D., Dickert, S, Slovic, P. (2014). *Greater emotional gain from giving in older adults: Age-related positivity bias in charitable giving*. Manuscript submitted for publication



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Abstract

Bjälkebring, P. (2014). *Age Differences in Experience and Regulation of Affect*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

The overall aim of the thesis is to investigate differences in how younger and older adults view and control affect. Study I and Study II investigate how participants view their happiness and what factors influence their perception of happiness. In Study I we found weak negative association between age and happiness. In addition, we found a negative association between age and both positive and negative affect. Younger adults anticipated higher levels of happiness in older age compared to their current happiness, while older adults rated their past happiness as higher than their current happiness. The results indicate that people are likely to believe that happiness changes over the lifespan. In Study II an experiment was conducted to elaborate on the finding that younger adults have a more positive view of the future compared with older adults. The analyses show that a difference in wording influenced ratings of happiness differently for older and younger adults. The results suggest that older adults prefer low arousal happiness to high, which is preferred in younger ages. In Study III we investigated the occurrence of regret, as well as regret regulation in the context of everyday life decision-making. Using a web-based diary method, daily life decisions were sampled over eight days. Younger adults reported more experienced and anticipated regret than older adults. Although regret regulation strategies were used by all age groups, older adults more often used strategies to reduce the intensity of experienced as well as anticipated regret. The results suggest that lower levels of regret in older adults, can be accounted for, at least in part, by regret prevention and other regulation strategies. In Study IV we investigated the influence of charitable giving in two experiments. We found support for an age-related positivity bias in monetary donations. This is true for the motivation to make a future donation, as well as affective thinking about a previous donation. We concluded that older adults draw more positive affect from both the planning and outcome of monetary donations and hence benefit more from engaging in monetary charity than their younger counterparts. Together, these studies show that there are systematic differences in how younger and older adults perceive and regulate affect due to various uses of motivation and active emotion regulation strategies. Older adults seem to compensate for an age related decline in deliberate processes, which makes it possible to maintain well-being at old age.

Keywords: *age, decision making, emotion, emotion regulation*

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