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Connecting Theories of Emotional Intelligence and Emotion Regulation with Positive Psychology

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increased scientific interest in the area of emotional intelligence, specifically emotion regulation, as well as the field of positive psychology. Because of the vital role emotion regulation plays in enhancing individuals' overall well-being, I suggest that it is crucial to connect the two disciplines. This paper conducts a literature review, introduces an overview of positive psychology, the science of well-being, and summarizes existing emotional intelligence and emotion regulation models. It then finds how theories and applications in positive psychology interrelate with research in emotion regulation—suggesting strategies on how to best respond to external and internal stimuli in a manner that maintains one's overall well-being. I conclude this paper by comparing psychological findings around emotion regulation to parallel religious principles in Islam.

Keywords

Emotion Regulation, Positive Psychology, Emotional Intelligence, Well-being

Disciplines

Other Social and Behavioral Sciences | Psychology

Connecting Theories of Emotional Intelligence and Emotion Regulation with Positive Psychology

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Master of Applied Positive Psychology Program, University of Pennsylvania

MAPP 800: Capstone Project

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August 1, 2021

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In recent years, there has been an increased scientific interest in the area of emotional intelligence, specifically emotion regulation, as well as the field of positive psychology. Because of the vital role emotion regulation plays in enhancing individuals' overall well-being, I suggest that it is crucial to connect the two disciplines. This paper conducts a literature review, introduces an overview of positive psychology, the science of well-being, and summarizes existing emotional intelligence and emotion regulation models. It then finds how theories and applications in positive psychology interrelate with research in emotion regulation—suggesting strategies on how to best respond to external and internal stimuli in a manner that maintains one's overall well-being. I conclude this paper by comparing psychological findings around emotion regulation to parallel religious principles in Islam.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my gratitude to my advisor, Faisal Khan, for his constant guidance and support and for challenging me to go the extra mile, as well as helping me come up with new insights throughout the Capstone writing process. I would also like to thank my fellow MAPPsters for their encouragement, support, and special MAPP 16 jokes. My thanks to Cohort 9 for their continuous emotional (and technical) support, humor, and never-ending cheering. Thanks and gratitude to the MAPP faculty and staff for creating a unique program. My love and gratitude to my husband and kids for their endless support throughout this learning journey. I could never have done this without their support and understanding.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Introduction to Positive Psychology	7
Definition of Well-being.....	8
Theory of Well-being, PERMA.....	9
Emotions	11
Emotional Intelligence (EQ):.....	12
Six Seconds EQ Model	13
Perspectives on Emotions – Functions:	22
Perspectives on Emotions - Impact on well-being:.....	24
Positive Emotions:	26
Negative Emotions:.....	27
The Second Wave of Positive Psychology – The Benefits of Negative Emotions.	28
Do negative emotions really have benefits?.....	29
What is Emotion Regulation?	32
Significance of Emotion Regulation:	34
Emotions Regulation Strategies:.....	36
The Process Model:.....	37
Other Strategies for Regulating the Emotions	42
The ABC Model.....	42
Physical Exercise	43
Controlled or Mindful Breathing	43
Progressive Muscle Relaxation.....	44
Positive Imagery	45
Representations in Islam	45
Conclusions and Avenues of Future Research.....	47
References.....	49

Introduction

The following are a selection of real-world, albeit extreme, stories illustrating why emotion regulation is important. In these cases, the actors let their emotions overcome their rational thinking, leading to disastrous consequences.

- In 2009 one news headline spoke of a wife from Kuwait crashing a wedding ceremony between her husband and his to-be second wife (both were followers of Islam, which allows multiple wives). The event quickly turned deadly, as the wife burned down the wedding tent and killed 44 people, including children (Alhosni, & Alsultani, 2009). This event was caused by her allowing her intense jealousy to dominate her life and blind her decisions; regulating extreme emotions, therefore, can literally save lives.
- A former TV reporter who's been fired from his work has opened fire at two of his ex-colleagues, killing them on the spot. The gunman posted a video of the shooting on his Twitter account and wrote, "my anger has been building steadily... I've been a human powder keg for a while just waiting to go Boom!" (Cox Media Group, 2019). This man has let his negative emotions culminate into a massive fury that made him act irrationally and commit a terrible crime. Thus, regulating intense negative emotions can prevent tragedies from happening.
- "A young man, fueled by hatred of the government, parks a truck full of explosives alongside a federal building. In the ensuing blast, the building is destroyed; so too are almost 200 lives." (Plutchik, 2000, p. 11). Another tragedy caused by strong negative emotion, could emotion regulation help in such cases?

Aside from these extreme cases, on a daily basis, we experience smaller-scale challenging situations and are faced with opportunities to deal with the emotions that are

triggered as a result. Emotion regulation is crucial for successfully navigating these tricky scenarios, and this paper will present both the theory behind and strategies for developing effective emotion regulation skills and techniques.

Gross (1999) defines emotion regulation as the ability to increase, maintain, or decrease an emotional response. An emotional response could be a feeling, behavior, or physiological response (Gross, 1999). It is also defined as a process through which individuals manage their emotions to respond to environmental triggers appropriately. Individuals encounter internal and external triggers constantly throughout their everyday lives. According to the American Psychology Association's (APA) dictionary of psychology, a trigger is defined as a "stimulus that elicits a reaction. For example, an event could be a trigger for a memory of a past experience and an accompanying state of emotional arousal" (APA dictionary of psychology). Other examples of triggers could include hearing bad news on TV, a child throwing a tantrum, or the smell of particular food or perfume. Emotion regulation, moreover, is an essential way in which we perform emotional intelligence, which is a broader designation that refers to the capacity to recognize and manage one's emotions and those of others around them (Goleman, 1995)

This paper will explore emotion regulation, i.e., how we react to triggers and various techniques to manage them, such that our emotional reactions are more likely to increase our well-being. To illustrate these concepts, the paper will first provide an introduction to the science of well-being, positive psychology. I will then provide a deeper understanding of a key element of well-being, our emotions, the theory behind emotional intelligence, and various types of emotions, positive and negative. The paper will then illustrate how we can be more emotionally intelligent and increase our well-being by regulating our emotions. The paper will describe

various emotion regulation strategies and conclude with the importance of emotion regulation stressed in Islam.

Given the role of emotions in our well-being, demonstrated by the research discussed, this paper suggests an important connection needs to be made between emotion regulation and the field of Positive Psychology.

Introduction to Positive Psychology

Over the last several decades, a new branch of psychology has emerged. Dr. Martin Seligman has led the positive psychology movement, which uses the science of psychology to study human flourishing and what makes life worth living. Positive psychology's primary purpose is for individuals to live more fulfilled or *flourishing* lives (Seligman, 2011), or simply put, to increase their well-being. Flourishing, or well-being, includes a broad range of states and outcomes. It encompasses, among other things, happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, close social relationships, and overall mental and physical health (VanderWeele, 2017). When he first introduced positive psychology, Seligman's (1998) main message was to recoup balance with mainstream psychology. To bring about a new outlook to psychology's mission; to make people's lives better and communities thrive instead of only focusing on pathology and healing the damage (Seligman, 1998).

The concept of positive psychology might be new, but man's search for happiness is not. Centuries ago, both Plato and Aristotle claimed that a virtuous person is a happy person (Melchert, 2002). More recently, positive psychology researchers have come up with many

models and frameworks of well-being that contribute to the thriving of individuals and communities.

Definition of Well-being

In positive psychology, definitions of well-being vary depending on which constructs are used to gauge it. Constructs are utilized to understand, analyze and measure well-being. A construct is a cluster of psychological concepts that could be measured separately but function as a whole. Seligman (2011) provides an analogy of the weather to explain what a construct means. The weather is a collection of various elements; temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind speed, etc. These elements can be observed and measured individually, but together they make up the weather. Likewise, there are numerous constructs related to well-being. Depending on one's approach, there are many different constructs that could fit well-being. For example, well-being may be defined as a positive state of affairs and balanced fulfillment of personal, relational, and collective aspirations in which the needs of individuals and communities are fulfilled (Prilleltensky, & Nelson, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi (1975) contended that people are more inclined to be happy when they experience flow, or a state of mind resulting when one's thoughts, feelings, and senses focus on doing something they care about where their skill matches the challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Another well-being construct is subjective well-being which refers to how individuals evaluate cognitive and affective aspects of their lives. These evaluations include emotional responses to different situations, as well as cognitive assessments of satisfaction and fulfillment with life as a whole (Diener et al., 2005). One of the well-known models of well-being is Dr. Seligman's theory of well-being, PERMA, described in detail below.

Theory of Well-being, PERMA

PERMA attempts to answer the question of what enables human flourishing. It identifies five elements that can contribute to increasing flourishing in peoples' lives: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievements. PERMA is the acronym for the five elements (Seligman, 2011). Below is a description of each of these elements.

Positive Emotions. Here, individuals prioritize cultivating positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, hope, and love. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) postulate that experiencing particular positive emotions have a direct connection to valued subjective experiences; “contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). This element is about intentionally internalizing lessons learned from past adverse events. This centers on understanding what brings positive emotions into one's everyday life. Then create and enjoy those emotions, which, in turn, will positively reflect on psychological and physical well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). For example, a person might feel remorse because they did not spend enough time with their relative who has passed away. Instead of feeling guilty constantly when recalling this event, they choose to allocate time to visit their living family members, spend quality time with them, and experience love, connection, and contentment. Generally, positive emotions can be generated by activities such as playing with children, experiencing physical activity in nature, providing service to less advantaged individuals, etc. More on positive emotions will be discussed in the positive emotions section.

Engagement. This element means immersing oneself in activities where one loses a sense of time in one's work or hobbies. Alternatively, this is reflected in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow,' or the sweet spot of performance between boredom and

anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). For instance, physical activities such as ice-skating or rock-climbing; or artistic activities such as painting or knitting usually bring people to a state of flow.

Relationships. And specifically positive relationships. This element is about enhancing connection, love, and joy among relatives and friends who provide support and encouragement to one another. Relationships may include bonds with spouses, children, other family members, friends, or community members. Cultivating traits such as forgiveness, perseverance, courage, tolerance, and work ethics move individuals toward better relationships (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

Meaning. Meaning is about serving a purpose beyond one's interests and larger than the self. Living a life full of meaning is to work for the greater good of others and to fulfill one's broader idea of life's purpose. For instance, one may seek meaning by identifying and pursuing a purpose through which they can improve others' lives in whatever possible way available, be it their chosen careers like teaching or medicine or improve the world through other means.

Accomplishments. Accomplishment is part of what people do to thrive, set long-term goals, initiate plans with clear and realistic timelines, and enjoy executing them. Accomplishments may include achieving a degree, completing a marathon, writing a book, or completing other target goals.

It is worth mentioning that even though positive emotions are a part of the PERMA model and are considered a significant element to increasing individuals' well-being, emotions play a broader role that can impact the other components of PERMA. Emotions, negative and positive, must thus be studied more broadly to understand their role in influencing the quality of

people's lives and well-being. To understand emotion regulation, one needs to understand what emotions are.

Emotions

Two thousand years ago, Plato recognized the importance of emotions in our lives when he wrote, "All learning has an emotional base." Also, Socrates, the great philosopher, has said, "Know thyself." Part of that knowledge is how people conceive and appreciate their emotions. It is, after all, "much of what makes life worth living" (Solomon, 1993, p. 14). However, many years later, actors ranging from academics to business professionals continue to debate whether emotions are an integral part of our sound decision-making and functioning or if they are a nuisance that we should disregard and work to minimize. Now, through scientific research, we know the importance of emotions in our lives (i.e., Fredrickson, 2009). For example, fear urges us to escape for our safety; love enhances connection, anger propels us to address injustice (Solomon, 1990; Fredrickson, 2009).

Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotions as organized reactions typically arising in response to either external or internal "triggers" or events with positive or negative personal connotations. Salovey and Mayer differentiate emotions from "moods" in that moods are generally more prolonged and less intense (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) while emotions are focused on an event and usually elicit an action (or a reaction) to that event (Parkinson et al., 1996). For example, peaceful, optimistic, melancholy (mood) versus joy, disappointment, irritation (emotion)

Table 1

<i>Distinctions Between Mood and Emotion</i>		
	Mood	Emotion
Duration	Relatively long-term	Relatively short-term
Time pattern	Gradual onset, continuous, tonic	Rapid onset, episodic, phasic
Intensity	Relatively weak	Relatively strong
Causation	Not caused by a specific event	Caused by a specific event
Function	Provides information about current state of self	Provides information about current state of situation
Directedness	Unfocused	Take specific object

Note. From “Changing moods: The psychology of mood and mood regulation,” by B. Parkinson, P. Totterdell, R. B. Briner, and S. Reynolds, 1996, p.8, Longman. Copyright 1996 by Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Emotions play a substantial and critical role in the decision-making process (Brackett, 2019). It is imperative that people deeply understand their emotions: what they feel and why, how emotions physically influence their bodies and their ability to reason, and how their moods and emotions affect others around them.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ):

In the past three decades, people became more aware of the importance of emotional intelligence in their lives as it is very relevant to a life well-lived. Individuals higher in EQ are

less likely to engage in aggressive behavior such as harassment and are less likely to consume cigarettes, excess alcohol, or drugs (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2004; Trinidad & Johnson, 2002). People high in EQ report more positive social interactions with others (Côté, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010). Furthermore, studies have shown that teaching emotional intelligence to students results in more warmth, less bullying, and a sense of agency (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2013).

Emotional intelligence is blending feelings with logic to come up with the best possible decisions. Daniel Goleman (1995) defines EQ as the capacity to recognize and manage one's emotions and those of others around them (Goleman, 1995). Goleman popularized the topic of emotional intelligence (alternatively, EI) when he published a book on the subject in 1995. However, the concept of emotional intelligence was touched upon by several psychologists during the twentieth century. In 1990, researchers Salovey & Mayer brought the concept of emotional intelligence to the scientific community. Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, express, and regulate emotions in oneself and others and use this information to motivate oneself and others and guide one's thinking and actions. They later expanded and clarified this definition to a multi-branch model characterizing emotional intelligence as a set of four distinct yet related abilities, and they called it the ability model, which consists of; (1) perceiving emotions, (2) using emotions to facilitate thought, (3) understanding emotions, and (4) managing emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Six Seconds EQ Model

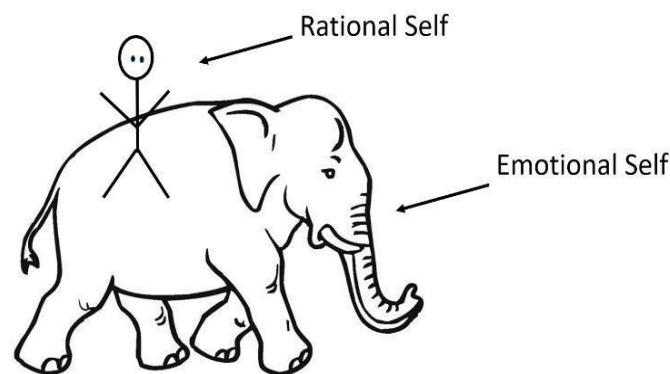
Another model of emotional intelligence is the Six Seconds EQ Model (D'Souza, 2011, Freedman & Roitman, 2019). Six Seconds is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting people worldwide in their practice of emotional intelligence skills. They developed a three-part

model, EQ-in-Action, to facilitate applying emotional intelligence in everyday life. The model's phases are Know Yourself, Choose Yourself and Give Yourself or KCG, and a summary of the tracks follows:

- 1) *Know Yourself*: To become more aware of one's emotions, pay careful attention to and notice what one feels and how those feelings manifest physiologically and influence one's actions and behavior. Usually, internal and external triggers cause individuals to form their own interpretations of them. Consequently, certain emotions are formed, influencing individuals' behaviors and attitudes (Lam, & Gale, 2000). A person with high skills in this stage would be aware of their activating events, the emotions they trigger, and the ensuing behavior.

Figure 1

The Elephant and the Rider



Note. Adapted from <https://lifeclub.org/p/habits>. Copyright 2019 by LifeClub.

This pathway is observed in Jonathan Haidt's (2006) analogy of the elephant and the rider, presented in his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Haidt (2006) explains that the human brain has two types of cognitive processing systems: the controlled or the rational side of the brain (the rider), which attends logical thinking and decision-making. The other is the brain's automatic or emotional side, which relates to emotions, intuitions, and desires. Haidt (2006) argues that as long as both the elephant and the rider want the same things, goals could be achieved, and objectives could be met. However, when there is a conflict between the rider and the elephant, the elephant frequently wins, resulting in a failure in self-regulation and losing control over many aspects of one's life. That is why, the first step to taming their elephant, one must recognize what makes them tick, what motivates them, what depletes their energy, and what makes them happy, sad, or angry.

Typically, the *Know Yourself* approach can be experienced in many of the everyday life situations one encounters. For example, an employee who's been admonished by his boss at work may first notice his thought; "my boss is a bully, and I'm angry at him." Next, they would note their bodily reactions; their heart beats faster, and they feel constricted. Then, they recognize their behavior; they might pound on the desk or snap at their colleagues. The more a person is aware of their emotions, physiological reactions, and subsequent behavior to triggers, the more they would be able to regulate their emotions later on.

- 2) *Choose Yourself*: To intentionally manage or navigate one's emotions – act mindfully and respond to stimuli with awareness instead of reacting automatically and impulsively. This method can be thought of as an emotional red light: a time to stop and reevaluate the inflexibility of one's *trigger to emotion to action* pathway. It is a reminder that it is possible to choose one's emotional and active response to a given event, but this is a

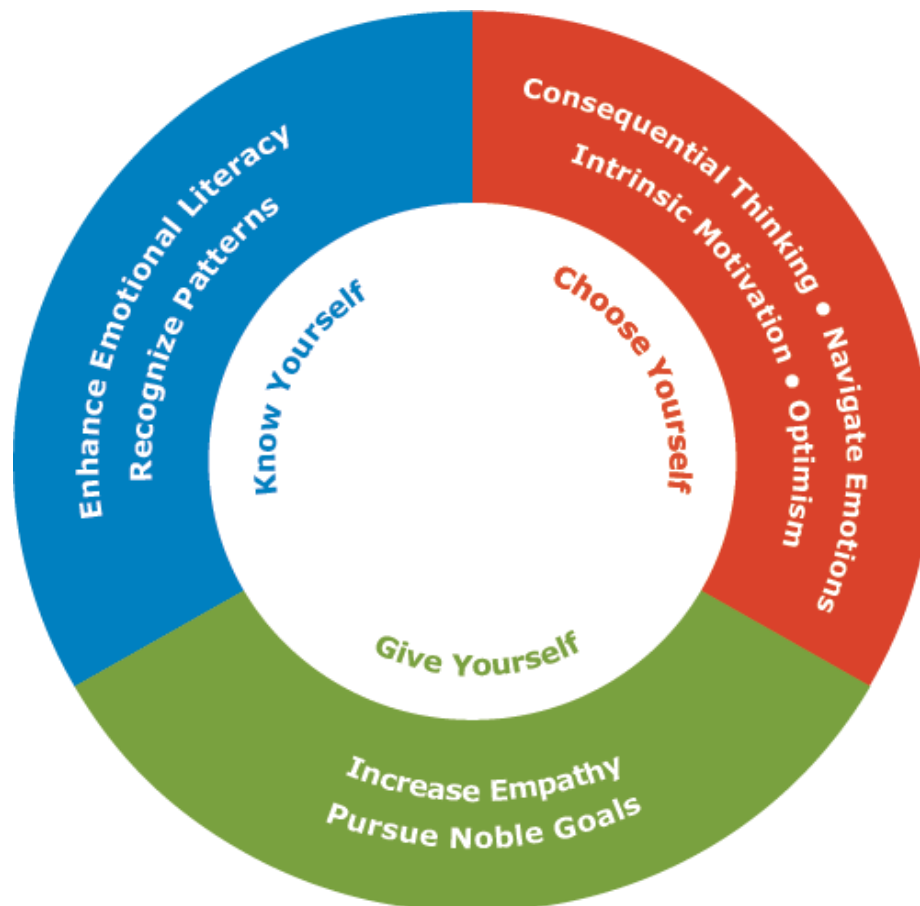
cognitive skill that needs to be trained and developed. Thus, *Choose Yourself* overlaps concepts related to well-being, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and resilience. CBT refers to a set of interventions applied to various problems, including anxiety disorders, bulimia, depression, anger control problems, anxiety disorders, general stress, and many other disorders (Hofmann et al., 2012). It is based on a cognitive model initially developed by Beck (1964). The model explores the links between thoughts, emotions, and behavior and suggests that how individuals interpret different situations affects how they feel emotionally and consequently act. Therefore, for individuals to maintain positive transformation in their lives, they need first to reexamine how they perceive and interpret events and then act accordingly (Fenn & Byrne, 2013; Hofmann et al., 2012). This is a form of emotional regulation as one balances the way one feels with how one acts in order to achieve the desired outcome and reach a state of increased well-being. Shallcross and Mauss (2015) emphasize that CBT is particularly effective for managing negative emotions, which, in turn, enhance resilience – the ability to navigate adversity and grow and thrive in the face of challenges (Reivich et al., 2011). Reivich (personal communication) posits that resilience skills are a pathway to transform from a state of languishing to flourishing and well-being.

- 3) *Give Yourself*: To be more purposeful – To act in ways that align with one’s vision and mission in life and use their emotions to inspire such actions. This pathway is reflected in the M and A of PERMA. It has a connection to meaning – finding one’s purpose and accomplishment – pursuing and accomplishing goals that align with that purpose (Seligman, 2011). A personal example of this is my decision to lead workshops *pro bono* on positive psychology and emotional intelligence in professional environments in the

United Arab Emirates. This decision was inspired by my enthusiasm for helping people change as well as the fulfillment and gratification gained from witnessing my trainees act with and reflect on their elevated well-being after training on emotional intelligence and emotion regulation. These teaching interactions inspired me and gave me hope and energy, making me even more fully commit to spreading skills and techniques from positive psychology to a wider audience.

Figure2

The Six Seconds Model of EQ



Note. From [The Six Seconds Model of Emotional Intelligence: EQ in Action \(6seconds.org\)](https://www.6seconds.org/). Copyright 2020 by Six Seconds.

Underneath the model's three pathways, there are eight competencies that help individuals better apply EQ. In *Know Yourself*, the two competencies are *Emotional Literacy* and *pattern recognition*. *Emotional Literacy* is the ability to accurately notice, understand and label feelings, providing individuals with insights into the underlying forces driving and dictating their behavior. For instance, a person arguing with a colleague in a meeting can notice that they are feeling "off" in general, then try to tune into and further specify that feeling by naming it (irritability, boredom, jealousy, etc.) With this competency, they understand what they feel and why and how their emotions uniquely dictate action. *Pattern Recognition* is the skill of identifying frequently recurring behaviors, emotional reactions, and associated triggers. For example, some people get irritable when they are hungry or sleep-deprived. Noticing this repetitive pattern would help them be mindful of their behavior and subsequently ensure that they eat and sleep well, especially before important events. Those two competencies; *Emotional Literacy* and *Pattern Recognition*, reflect self-awareness—the ability to direct attention on oneself, and thus to self-evaluate (Silvia, & O'Brien, 2004) and emotional agility – the ability to notice one's inner thoughts and emotions and interpreting current circumstances objectively, while responding in alignment with one's values and purpose. Emotional agility enables individuals to cultivate real change in their habits resulting in enhanced well-being (David & Congleton, 2013).

The second phase, *Choose Yourself*, has four competencies: *Applying Consequential Thinking*, *Navigating Emotions*, *Engaging Intrinsic Motivations*, and *Exercising Optimism*. *Applying Consequential Thinking* involves evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of a situation and weighing the available choices to come up with the best decision. However, one

needs to be careful not to overuse this competency in the sense of overthinking a situation, which may result in a severely delayed decision-making process or “analysis-paralysis.” For example, a person is thinking about buying a new car, so they research online by comparing the pros and cons of different vehicles across different metrics: electric versus gas, local-made vs. imported, etc. Then, they ask their family members and friends and visit various car showrooms. At this point, while they should be able to make a very thoroughly informed decision, a person with extremely high *Consequential Thinking* might still be unable to decide given the wealth of information.

This could be associated with Barry Schwartz’s (2004) paradox of choice. He talked about how having many options and choices can result in people deriving less satisfaction from their decisions. Schwartz (2004) distinguished two types of personalities; maximizers who seek and accept only the absolute best and satisficers, who settle for what is good enough and not worry about the possibility of finding better choices later on. Schwartz (2004) also distinguished between choosers and pickers. Choosers think actively about the options before making a particular decision and have the time to modify their goals. Pickers are passive selectors from whatever is available. They usually just follow the herd. Schwartz (2004) concluded with some advice that could help increase individuals’ well-being when making decisions such as: 1) focus time and energy only on choices that really matter, 2) be a chooser, not a picker, 3) satisfice more and maximize less, 4) regret less and practice gratitude Schwartz (2004). These suggestions, if applied, would help individuals improve their *Consequential Thinking* skill.

Next is the competency of *Navigating Emotions*, which involves changing their state and using them as a strategic resource to help move situations forward, channeling feelings into motivation. For example, instead of getting bogged down in bad feelings, like anger, frustration,

or anxiety, a person might navigate their emotions and use its power as energy to fuel their advancement toward their goals, studying for a test, working harder, speaking up for their rights, etc.

The ABC theory or model is one of the critical concepts in CBT. The ABC model helps individuals identify the thoughts triggered in their minds by activating events and notice the emotional and behavioral reactions stemming from those thoughts (Malkinson, 2010). Notably, the activating event (A) does not cause the emotional and behavioral consequence (C). It is the individual's beliefs (B) about what happened (A) that are mainly responsible for (C) the emotional and behavioral responses (Ellis, 1991; Malkinson, 2010). This is an important concept for people to master the competency of navigating emotion, the more they are aware of their interpretations of the events they encounter, the more they are able to address them suitably.

Then comes the competency of engaging intrinsic motivation – the process of deriving energy from one's personal values and principles as opposed to responding to extrinsic motivation such as money or other rewards. Engaging intrinsic motivation refers to following one's greater purpose in life and matching their actions with what brings them self-fulfillment. This competency is closely tied to Ryan and Deci's (1985) self-determination theory. Self-determination theory highlights three distinctive psychological human needs— competence, autonomy, and relatedness— which, when satisfied, engender enhanced self-motivation and well-being. When individuals are fully autonomous, they more committed and they exert more effort, and their performance is of higher quality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to self-government and the responsibility of making their own decisions and choices in life (Keller, 2016).

Exercise Optimism is about taking a proactive perspective of life. Generate choices and possibilities for challenges. Individuals exercise their optimism by looking for alternatives, thinking of adversities as temporary and specific to certain situations. They consider all aspects of a problem but believe that they will get over it one way or another. This competency is closely related to the concept of optimism in positive psychology – expecting good things to occur in one’s life (Scheier & Carver, 1985) and to Dr. Seligman’s (2006) explanatory styles theory. The theory posits that optimistic individuals attribute adverse events in their lives to external factors that are temporary, and affect few aspects of their lives. On the other hand, pessimistic people ascribe adversities to characteristics in themselves and think of adversities as permanent occurrences that would involve all domains of their lives (Gillham et al., 2001; Seligman, 2006).

According to Gillham et al. (2001), An optimistic explanatory style is linked to higher academic achievement and increased job productivity. Also, “optimistic college students report fewer physical illnesses, make fewer doctor visits, and feel more able to prevent health problems than their pessimistic peers” (Gillham et al., 2001, P. 58). In addition, optimistic explanations for adverse events were associated with greater resilience and predicted greater athletic performance following negative feedback. Moreover, explanatory style is linked to marital satisfaction. Couples with an optimistic explanatory style report higher levels of marital satisfaction than those with the pessimistic explanatory style (Gillham et al., 2001).

The third phase, *Give Yourself*, has two competencies; *Increased Empathy* and *Pursue Noble Goals*. *Increased Empathy* is about recognizing emotions in others and respond appropriately in order to connect with them. Still, it is also about having self-compassion and have kind self-talk with oneself. For example, instead of blaming oneself for not winning the account, they’ve been working hard to get, one could remind themselves that they worked hard

and there will always be more opportunities in the future. The last competency, pursuing noble goals, is about connecting one's daily actions with their overarching sense of purpose, like raising awareness about particular topics to make the world a better place (D'Souza, 2011). This competency reflects the A and M in PERMA, as one works to achieve great things aligned with their life purpose.

The EQ model competencies described in the preceding sections, such as *Enhancing Emotional Literacy*, *Navigating Emotions*, *Applying Consequential Thinking*, and *Pursuing Noble Goals*, are closely associated with individuals' subjective well-being. Subjective well-being consists of one's cognitive (satisfaction with life) and emotional (positive affect) evaluations of their life. Learning such skills and competencies of emotional intelligence would improve one's life satisfaction as it relates to health, well-being, and longer-term relationships (Caruso, Salovey, Brackett, & Mayer, 2015). Also, acquiring emotional intelligence skills would significantly influence "(a) human performance, (b) happiness, (c) well-being and (d) the quest for meaning in life, all of which are the focus of interest in positive psychology" (Bar-On, 2010, p. 57).

Perspectives on Emotions – Functions:

It is often said that one should leave their emotions at home when they enter the workplace to ensure clear and logical professional decision-making (Brackett, 2019). But this notion does not reflect reality, as there is no way one can separate their emotions from their daily functions, whether at home or work (Brackett, 2019). On a daily basis, we experience an array of emotions ranging from anxiety, fear, disappointment, or sadness to happiness, enthusiasm, and even serenity, and stifling our reactions to our feelings is detrimental (Brackett, 2019; Wilhelm et

al., 2004). Instead of repressing our emotions, it is essential to understand that we can choose our response. In Barbara Fredrickson's (2009) theory of positive emotions, which she calls "*Broaden and Build*," she posits that while negative emotions constrict one's attention and thinking patterns, positive emotions widen one's responsive "toolbox" so that one can draw more flexibly deepen connections with a vast array of different actions and ideas (Garland et al., 2010). Mild positive emotions can influence us to explore positive actions or experiences, such as pursuing relationships or meaningful activities, which further intensify and mature the initial simple positive emotion on an upward spiral (Kok et al., 2013). Emotions can also take a person into a downward spiral. For instance, sadness stemming from loss tends to be ensued by rumination followed by withdrawal and fatigue. The cycle continues leading to more intense negative emotions into a downward spiral (Garland et al., 2010).

Negative emotions have played a significant role in human survival throughout history and shine, especially in life-threatening situations. Negative emotions spark specific, decisive action. Anger, for example, generates fear and anxiety, which urges us to strike out or flee or draws our attention to a particular matter that may seem out of order. However, if extensive, recurrent, or prolonged, such negative emotions produce an intensified cardiovascular response that moves blood flow to the muscles relevant in rallying the body for the desired strenuous behavior (e.g., strike, flee). Such long-term physiological reactions often referred to generally as chronic stress syndrome, place individuals at risk of developing a heart attack or stroke and depress the immune system (Fredrickson et al., 2000). This is why understanding emotions in more detail and how to regulate them is essential to negate harmful impacts of common human behavior and increase individuals' well-being at the same time. The regulation of emotions can help offset the adverse effects of excessive negative emotions.

Perspectives on Emotions - Impact on well-being:

To what extent do emotions have an impact on individuals' well-being? Are there specific emotional experiences that need to be pursued (or avoided) to optimize one's well-being? This section will explore the influence emotions have on different domains of well-being. This topic has been studied extensively by many researchers (i.e., Fredrickson, 2000, 2003 & 2009; Ciarrochi et al., 2015; Tamir et al., 2017) who have postulated that emotions are indeed associated with individuals' well-being as will be described below:

Psychological well-being: This refers to one's awareness of their own peace and contentment. According to Burns (2016), an individual who is psychologically well is cognizant of their happiness and lack of anxiety and the fact that they have grown to master their emotions. Psychological well-being also refers to purposeful engagement in life, realization of personal potential and talents (and limitations), and how well one deals with life events (Ryff, 2014;2013;). For instance, the awareness that one is grateful for one's family leads them to a state of further gratitude for other things in their life, such as their profession or friendships. Some scholars note that traditionally, psychological well-being was defined simply as the absence of psychological maladies or illnesses (Ryff 1995). Individuals who experience more positive emotions in their lives become more optimistic, resilient, sociable, tolerant, and are more likely to pursue purposeful life goals (Fredrickson, 2003 & 2009). In addition, exposure to positive emotions can mitigate the effects of negative emotions (Peterson, 2006). For instance, having a good conversation with a spouse or a friend makes one feel loved and secure. Those feelings might overcome an earlier sense of being miserable after being snapped at by a boss at work. Similarly, a stressed-out person might feel serene and calm after a walk in nature.

Mental well-being: Mental well-being is a “dynamic state that refers to individuals’ ability to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to their community” (Beddington et al., 2008, p. 1057). Positive emotions such as joy, serenity, contentment, interest, and love widen people’s momentary thought-action repertoires, broadening the range of the thoughts and actions that come to mind. Positive emotions also form the desire to explore, absorb new information and experiences, engage in intellectual activities, and expand the self in the process (Fredrickson, 2001). Also, they enhance problem-solving skills, creativity, and ability to learn (Frederickson, 2009) and repeated experiences of positive emotions facilitate coping with stress (Garland et al., 2010). On the other hand, negative emotions such as anxiety or depression may make individuals biased toward cognitive processing of individuals, objects, and situations that they perceive as disappointing, disturbing, or alarming while neglecting what is pleasing, encouraging, or enjoyable (Garland et al., 2010).

Physical well-being: Positive emotions boost the body’s immunity and decrease inflammatory responses to stress. Positivity also regulates blood pressure, alleviates aches and pains, and contributes to fewer colds and better sleep. Overall, positive individuals have a lower risk of experiencing disease, hypertension, diabetes, and stroke (Fredrickson, 2009), contributing to longer average life spans. In a study of 180 nuns where positivity was gauged by analyzing the nun’s journals and memoirs, researchers found a strong association between longevity and positive emotions (Danner, 2001). Positive emotions accelerate cardiovascular recovery ensuing the arousal of negative emotions (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Conversely, negative emotions generate a cardiovascular reaction that may harm people’s health (Fredrickson et al., 2000).

Social well-being: Social well-being is an end state in which humans coexist peacefully in societies with opportunities for advancement and develop and sustain meaningful relationships with others (United States Institute of Peace, 2018). Positive emotions help individuals build lasting interpersonal relationships (Gonzaga et al., 2006) and allow the individuals to form profound cognitive and social resources necessary to healthy adaptation (Fredrickson, 1998; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

How, then, do we achieve these states of well-being? As we will see, positive and negative emotions impact well-being. In the following sections, we will review research specifically on positive and negative emotions and their benefits or drawbacks, ultimately to understand the importance of emotion regulation: how can we maximize the benefits of these emotions by down or up-regulating them.

Positive Emotions:

Scientific research suggests that people need to cultivate positive emotions e.g., joy, contentment, excitement, serenity, and love to achieve success and growth, improved mental, psychological, and physical health, and more sustained marital and social relationships (Quoidbach et al., 2015). Cultivating positive emotions is about intentionally nurturing love, contentment, gratitude, joy, and fulfillment in one's everyday life (Seligman, 2011). Individuals should promote positive emotions in themselves and those around them, not only because positive emotions are thought to be indicators of optimal well-being but also to attain psychological well-being and enhanced psychological and physical growth over time (Fredrickson, 2004).

For instance, parents may follow different methods to cultivate positive emotions in their children. Parents may develop interest in their children by providing them with challenge, contentment by encouraging their kids to share their recent positive experiences, and joy by taking them to the playgrounds (Fredrickson, 1998). Barbara Fredrickson's (2009) broaden-and-build theory mirrors the P in PERMA. The theory proposes that positive emotions such as love, joy, interest, and curiosity can potentially broaden people's minds, expand their awareness, make them more resourceful and experience more positive emotions as a result. Fredrickson (2004) notes that resources accumulated during states of positive emotions are permanent in that they outlast the passing emotional states that led to their attainment, thus building enduring personal resources. It may also create an upward spiral toward better health and fulfillment (Schneider & Fredrickson, n.d) and makes people's hearts and minds more receptive to others' thoughts, ideas, and differences.

Negative Emotions:

The APA defines negative emotions as disagreeable, often disruptive, emotional responses intended to communicate a negative state. Negative emotions may hinder the progress toward obtaining one's goals (American Psychological Association, 2020). Experiencing negative emotions have their usefulness at times; negative emotions such as fear, disgust, sadness, and anger usually put people in a "fight or flight" state. They make people either change their immediate environmental circumstances or alter their location to protect their lives or preserve their autonomy over injustice. Thus, in the right situations and volume, negative emotions may potentially lead to better psychological and physical well-being (Peil, 2014).

However, going through extreme stress and anxiety results in the body excessively secreting cortisol –the stress hormone, which lowers the immune system and hinders

neurogenesis – the process of generating new functioning neurons in the brain (Chapouton & Godinho, 2010), resulting in increased chances of getting Alzheimer's when one gets older (Fuster-Matanzo et al., 2013). Similarly, Mackenzie et al. (2007) argue that stress reduces cognitive abilities and negatively affects physical health. Further, when people are in extreme anger or fear, their thinking capacity is reduced as the blood flows from their brains to the larger muscles in their arms and legs to fight or flee. This physiological reaction might be harmful to people's health as cardiovascular problems may result from continuous stress. Learning emotion regulation strategies help people better navigate and deal with their emotions, making them better at maintaining their well-being.

The Second Wave of Positive Psychology – The Benefits of Negative Emotions.

One might ask if positive emotions are so beneficial to our well-being, and in many cases, negative emotions have an adverse effect, why do we still experience negative emotions? With their potential adverse physiological and psychological effects, why have our bodies not gotten rid of negative emotions through evolution? The simple answer is because positive emotions only portray half of the story. Negative emotions play an essential role in our lives and are crucial for our survival; negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, guilt, and regret, can motivate us toward positive change (Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016).

Indeed, researchers have suggested and explored various benefits of negative emotions (e.g., Forgas, 2013, 2017; Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014; Stearns, & Parrott, 2012). They suggest, for example, negative emotions alert us to hazards, keep us away from bad situations, and motivate us to pursue our goals: fear makes us run away from dangerous animals, disgust makes us avoid eating spoiled foods, and anger may make us determined to beat a competing

team. Even resentment and jealousy can motivate us to speak up for our rights. This progression from only focusing on the positive to including a focus on the negative as well was brought forward by some researchers and scientists in what's called the second wave of positive psychology (e.g., Held, 2004; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016; Wong, 2011). The second wave advocates that experiencing negative emotions is actually beneficial. They argue that "first wave" positive psychology, while recognizing the need to address the negatives, mainly portrayed the importance of positive emotions; if people focus on enhancing the positives, the negatives will go away (e.g., Fredrickson, 2009; Lyubomirsky, 2008). Held (2004) calls for the acceptance and appreciation of the negative side of human nature, a side – she criticizes – has been dismissed by the first movement of positive psychology.

Do negative emotions really have benefits?

In their book, *The Upside of Your Dark Side* (2014), Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener discuss the potential benefits of negative emotions. The authors suggest a wide variety of examples of the benefits provided by negative emotions. Anger, for instance, both shows authority and increases creativity. When an individual receives feedback that they interpret as "angry," Kashdan and Biswas-Diener argue, the originality and the quality of their ideas can increase in response (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014, p. 70-71). Meanwhile, demonstrating anger in negotiations can create sudden leverage and lead to more successful outcomes (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014, p. 72). One is advised, though, not to take these findings to heart and deliberately get themselves angry in the hope of having better outcomes in negotiations because even successful negotiations do not necessarily mean increased well-being.

The authors also suggest that there are positive benefits to the feeling of anxiety which is one of the most popular negative emotions in the modern world, where individuals and societies

spend billions of dollars on medications and therapy aimed at treating it. According to the authors, anxiety allows people to quickly react when facing dangerous situations; they call it a “human alarm system.” Anxious individuals are more cautious than more relaxed people, who are usually less attentive to signals of potential danger as anxiety stimulates mental acuity and alertness. At the same time, non-anxious people tend to ignore ambiguous and even overt signs of potential threat. They claim that anxious people are more perceptive and adept at the problem-solving and may even have a sharper vision and sense of hearing (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014, p. 89). Despite these advantages, however, research demonstrates that having anger and anxiety in excess and recurrently impact well-being in that it may damage relationships, decrease engagement, negatively affect the health or have other adverse well-being outcomes (Chapouton, & Godinho, 2010; Fredrickson et al. 2000; Fuster-Matanzo et al., 2013) therefore it may be more conducive to one’s well-being to down-regulate anger and anxiety.

Kashdan and Biswas-Diener (2014) argue that even guilt can make adults better people and socially responsible citizens as it motivates them to repair their mistakes. It also incentivizes people to learn from their previous mistakes and avoid repeating them. Guilt signals respect for certain moral boundaries and encourage people to stay away from actions that will make them feel the negative feelings associated with guilt in the future. People prone to experiencing guilt are less likely to use illegal drugs, drink alcohol and drive, commit burglary, or assault (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014, p. 82). However, these authors’ arguments about the benefits of anger, anxiety, and guilt - are a claim regarding the success of outcomes of anger but do not explore how this impacts well-being or longer-term outcomes. Also, they do not seem to address other impacts on physical and psychological well-being and effects on social relationships. In general, there is more research demonstrating the adverse effect on health and well-being resulting from

experiencing recurring negative feelings (i.e., Dube et al.1996; Frasure-Smith et al. 1995; Fredrickson, 2004). Because numerous events in our daily lives may trigger negative emotions, it is of utmost importance to explore, understand, and apply emotional intelligence and emotion regulation skills and where best to use them.

Nonetheless, Kashdan and Biswas-Diener were not the first to argue that there are benefits from experiencing negative emotions. Other scientific evidence suggests that negative emotions may yield benefits. For example, Clark & Isen (1982) posit that negative emotions elicit more effort than positive emotions and that negative affect enhances perseverance. Similarly, Forgas (2017) postulates that individuals experiencing negative emotions can feel inspired to work harder to achieve their goals. Also, feelings that come with exerting effort to achieve a particular objective through short-term unpleasantness, such as stress and worry, usually see rewards in the form of long-term success.

Moreover, some scientific research indicates that adults experiencing negative emotions tend to be more polite and considerate when requesting things from others and are more elaborate and specific in their verbal communications than those experiencing positive emotions (Forgas, 1999). This finding is curious, especially if one recalls how negative emotions restrict rational thinking (Fredrickson, 2009). Moreover, van de Ven et al. (2011) posit that benign envy, but not malicious envy, could be a stronger motivator than admiration for people to improve themselves. Benign envy motivates the person to improve themselves. Malicious envy incites the person to harm the envied person or act on making them lose their status/ power/ money, etc., leading to socially undesirable reactions (Cohen-Charash & Larson, 2017).

The discussion mentioned above indicates that some research suggests potential benefits to negative emotions in an attempt to balance out the concentration on positive emotions from

prominent positive psychology scholars. Research still, however, has shown more widely that negative emotions produce negative effects outcomes (Chapouton, & Godinho, 2010; Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson et al., 2000; Fuster-Matanzo et al., 2013). Moreover, with such findings, one wonders, should they invite negative emotions into their lives just as one encourages positive emotions, knowing that “when extreme, prolonged, or contextually inappropriate, negative emotions can trigger a wide array of problems for individuals and for society” (Fredrickson, 2000, p.1-2). The answer would be that one should be aware of their varying situations and to up or down-regulate their negative emotions accordingly. Another question comes to mind, would negative emotions always render the same results, or are they random side effects of negative emotions? While the scope of this paper may not be able to provide answers to those questions, it could provide, to a certain extent, the solution to the dilemma of why, when, and how to regulate one’s emotions to maintain a balance between negative and positive emotions. With an understanding of emotions in general and a more nuanced understanding of positive and negative emotions, below, I will describe and review the role of regulating emotions to increase our well-being.

What is Emotion Regulation?

Emotion regulation could be viewed as an integral part of emotional intelligence. Both emotion regulation and emotional intelligence are broad concepts that play an important role in individuals’ well-being (Nyklíček et al., 2011). High levels of emotional intelligence are associated with better emotion regulation outcomes, whereas different emotion regulation strategies enhance the managing aspect of emotional intelligence (Peña-Sarrionandia et al., 2015). For instance, an individual with high emotional intelligence would be aware that they feel

angry because their boss has rejected the proposal they worked hard on. Since they noticed their feelings, they would take measures not to act on those feelings by snapping at their spouse or kids. They also have different emotion regulation tools at their disposal to deal with such situations. So they might listen to calming music or go walking by the park to “cool off” before they go home.

As mentioned earlier, Gross (1999) defines emotion regulation as the ability to increase, maintain, or decrease an emotional response. An emotional response could be a feeling, behavior, or physiological response (Gross, 1999). It is also defined as a process through which individuals manage their emotions to respond to environmental triggers appropriately. For example, taking deep breaths when one feels anxious before giving a presentation may help them to calm them. When people are under intense pressure or face extreme challenges, they get in what has been called an “amygdala hijack,” and their ability to think objectively is undermined. The Amygdala hijack occurs when the emotions take over rational thinking, activating the fight, flight, or freeze response. During the hijack, a person loses their higher-level thinking and problem-solving ability and behaves reflexively (Kahnen et al., 2016). If the amygdala detects a threat (real or not), it can instantly take over the rest of the brain, making the person act in ways they later regret (Goleman, 2011). However, not all neural takeovers are negative. Positive emotions such as joy and elation can also overwhelm our brains and impede logical thinking (D’Souza, 2011). That is why people need to develop the skill of emotion regulation. Emotion regulation helps calm the amygdala and allows the data to reach the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain mainly responsible for managing higher cognitive faculties such as thinking, problem-solving, and planning (Mille & Cohen, 2001) – thus enabling individuals to think rationally and make decisions accordingly. This is why we need a portfolio of strategies to

increase the odds of successfully managing, controlling, and regulating our emotions. In addition to EQ strategies such as the Six Seconds model, we need other research-based strategies, some of which will be mentioned further below from the body of Emotion Regulation.

Significance of Emotion Regulation:

People who regulate their emotions attain higher life satisfaction, more optimism, and better self-esteem. They also have a better ability at managing and changing their surrounding context, more personal growth, and self-acceptance (Gross & John, 2003). For example, a person who always arrives to work irritated because of the traffic jam may regulate their feelings by listening to calming music, breathing deeply, or hitting the road earlier. Another example of emotion regulation would be when someone is thrilled because they got promoted would tone down their excitement when they visit a friend who's sick at the hospital. People with high emotion regulation have better relationships (Gross & John, 2003; Katana et al., 2019). It is vital then to regulate one's emotions, especially that one study found out that a thirty-minute quarrel with a spouse could slow the body's ability to heal by a day. If the couple argues regularly, the healing delay is doubled (Brackett, 2019). Reivich & Shatte (2002) posit that people who lose control over their emotions frequently feel overwhelmed by them and would most probably have their resilience compromised. They may jeopardize their personal and work relationships and be viewed as dogmatic. In addition, Brackett (2019) suggests that if negative emotions are left unresolved, they can lead to chronic illnesses like depression or anxiety. These repressed feelings are associated with unhealthy habits such as poor diet, smoking, drinking alcohol, and aversion to exercise. These factors, in turn, could contribute to serious health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, or even cancer (Brackett, 2019). Also, as mentioned above, one's

mood can influence their decision-making. For example, anxiety may make the individual extremely cautious, so they overestimate the threats or adverse outcomes, while excitement may make them overly optimistic and thus underestimate the risks (Brackett, 2019). For all these reasons, it is crucial to learn strategies that help people regulate their emotions.

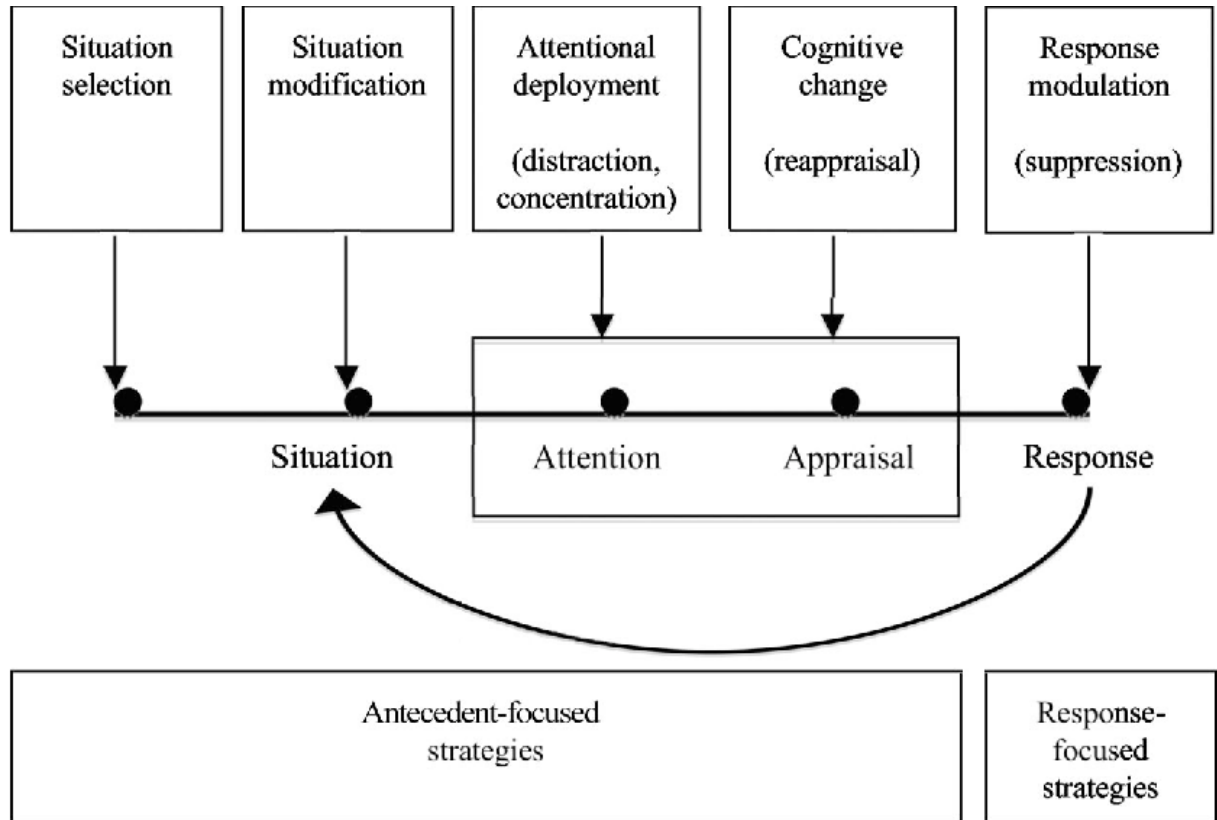
Constant failing to manage one's emotions might result in negative mental, psychological, and physical health problems as well as social challenges. While there have been a few programs to educate the public about the importance of emotions and the concept of emotion regulation like Brackett's (2019) RULER, there is still a need to institutionalize such programs and make them part of a more comprehensive educational curriculum for adults and school children to help alleviate the above-mentioned challenges. For example, while discussion of institutional racism dominates the conversation about police violence, some of the events played on TV might benefit from a neuroscientific approach. For instance, I believe that former officer Kim Potter who grabbed her gun instead of her taser accidentally, as she claims, very well may have been in a state of Amygdala-hijack and was unable to make a rational decision at that point in time. Brackett (2019) conducted a study of more than 5,000 school teachers, who stated that 70% of the emotions they experience are negative; however, when asked in public, most teachers affirmed that they feel happy most of the time. One would want to know why did the teachers, and many others, hide their true feelings? It could be because of fear or shame. That's why it's of extreme importance to teach people how to name and express their emotions and learn how to manage them in order to maintain their well-being. In other words, learning emotional intelligence skills such as *Enhancing Emotional Literacy*, *Recognizing Patterns*, and *Navigating Emotions* combined with emotion regulation strategies are crucial not only to avoid accidents such as the one mentioned above but also to flourish.

Emotions Regulation Strategies:

Regulating emotions does not necessitate repressing them but rather labeling them and learning to live with them productively. This can be done by identifying one's triggering situations and creating strategies to deal with them when they come up. Although, by nature, I'm a positive person, like many, I did not use to pay attention to my feelings or the way they affect me and those around me. I may let an argument with my husband or a colleague escalate and say something I would later regret. However, when I learned about emotion regulation, I became more aware and intentional about my emotions. When I feel something, I ask myself, what am I feeling? Why am I feeling this way? How do I want to feel? What is my goal? This awareness is parallel to *Know Yourself* phase in the Six Seconds EQ model. From there, I take conscious action to eliminate or decrease the emotion if it's uncondusive to my situation and upsurge it if it is helpful. I do that by noticing what helps me regulate my emotions. This approach reflects the choose yourself phase in the Six Seconds EQ model. There are numerous emotion regulation models and strategies described in the literature. The CBT' ABC model and James Gross's Process Model are some of the strategies.

Figure 3.

The Process Model of Emotion Regulation.



Note. From “Dealing with feeling: A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of strategies derived from the process model of emotion regulation,” by T. L. Webb, E. Miles, P., and Sheeran, 2012, *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(4), 775-808, p.776 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027600>). Copyright 2012 by American Psychological Association.

The Process Model:

James Gross’s (1998) process model differs from other emotion regulation models in that it considers where the regulatory act has its primary impact on the emotion-generative process (Gross, 2001). This approach has led to a distinction among five sets of emotion regulatory stages: situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. The first four processes are antecedent-focused emotion regulation.

Antecedent-focused strategies occur before the emotion is generated (emotion response tendencies have become fully activated and have changed our behavior and peripheral physiological responding.) The fifth and last strategy, response modulation, is a response-focused emotion regulation strategy that occurs once the emotion is generated. The response tendencies have already taken place (Gross & John, 2003). Notably, it has been observed that emotion regulation is accomplished more easily the earlier the stage in the process (Gross, 1998).

1- *Situation selection:* Situation selection is about approaching or evading some individuals, places, or experiences in order to have more or avoid certain emotions (Gross, 1998). An example would be a person taking a longer route to the grocer's to avoid running into their ex-spouse on the way. Another example is a woman sitting in the park for some quiet and reflection time on a Saturday afternoon instead of watching endless episodes of a certain show on Netflix. However, situation selection requires self-awareness, a major part of emotional intelligence. *Enhanced Emotional Literacy* and *Recognizing Recurring Patterns* are two competencies for the Six Seconds EQ models, which would be very helpful in situation selection. These skills would enable a person to know what precisely would set them off, bring them sadness or joy, and why (Bracket, 2019). They would contemplate how they would feel toward an upcoming encounter and thus choose to pursue or avoid it. Also, they would be aware of the impact of their choice in the short and long run. For example, an introvert who refuses participation in their company's presentations to get rid of anxiety may get short-term ease at the expense of longer-term benefits (Leary, 1986). Therefore, it would be more advantageous to individuals to be skilled in emotional intelligence when applying emotion regulation strategies.

- 2- *Situation modification* involves active efforts to alter a potentially emotion-eliciting environment in order to change its emotional impact (Gross, 1998). For example, one may choose to hold a virtual meeting instead of an in-person meeting to avoid traffic jams. Or they may tackle a challenging project by breaking it into manageable bite-sized milestones. Doing this will lessen the feeling of dread the person may feel and make them satisfied with the achieved progress and even eager to complete the whole project. The EQ skill of *Navigating Emotion* would come in handy here as one would use the energy of emotions to achieve their goals or avoid problematic situations. Moreover, one may modify the negative feelings they may get from an inevitable situation by planning to do something they enjoy right after it (Bracket, 2019). For instance, one may arrange to meet with close friends in a nice restaurant right after a long week of hard work.
- 3- *Attentional deployment*: Attentional deployment is about shifting attention toward or away from a situation to preserve one's emotions (Gross, 1998). Altering awareness in different situations could take many forms. It may be achieved by distraction, concentration, or rumination (Nix et al., 1995). These methods, however, generally share the same principle; one can tone down or up the effect of an emotion by redirecting the attention toward or away from it. Distraction moves attention from the current event, such as choosing to close one's eyes when there's a gruesome scene in the movie they are watching. Distraction may also involve altering internal focus, for instance, shifting attention to brighter thoughts or memories or saying "stop!" to disrupt negative self-talk that invokes undesirable emotions (Gross, 1998). Concentration involves choosing to engage in a task that absorbs cognitive resources such as drawing, rock climbing, or gardening – a flow state (Gross, 1998). Rumination is about directing attention toward feelings and their consequences, usually on

negative emotions, such as regret or shame. Although these emotion regulation methods are beneficial in many situations, they could also have potential harm and negatively impact well-being as one may choose to get distracted by eating plenty of unhealthy food, or concentrate on watching time-wasting TV drama or ruminate on past sad events. One needs to have emotional intelligence competencies such as *Increasing Empathy* (self-compassion) and *Pursuing Noble Goals* as well as a high sense of meaning and aspiration for achievement (the M and A of PERMA) to counter the negative effects of the mentioned above tendencies.

- 4- *Cognitive change*: Cognitive change or reappraisal reflects Hamlet's saying: "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". It's about interpreting a potentially emotion-eliciting event in a way that changes its emotional impact, i.e., changing the way one thinks about a situation in order to change the emotion. This strategy is somewhat similar to CBT, where individuals are encouraged to find ways to view their challenges in more positive ways (Bracket, 2019). For instance, instead of feeling sad because one did not pass the ski training to the next level, reappraising the situation as a chance to have a longer time at enjoying the ski slopes at a comfortable level. Another example would be when one greets their colleague at work and is met with a blank look instead of the usual cheerful greeting. Instead of thinking that the colleague is rude and react in rigidity, which would make the work atmosphere unpleasant, one could pause and think of possible reasons for the colleague's behavior and might remember that they have an appraisal meeting with the manager that day and they might be worried. This reframing of thoughts changed the reaction from sulkiness to empathy and understanding. The EQ competency *applied consequential thinking* would be handy in such situations.

5- *Response modulation*: Unlike the previous four emotion regulation strategies, this strategy focuses on response when the emotional event is ongoing. It is aimed at influencing physiological, experiential, or behavioral responding. It is applied after the emotional response has been generated. Techniques like exercise, relaxation, emotional suppression, and even using drugs are used for response modulation (Gross, 1998). An example would be when one is keeping a poker face while holding a winning hand during a poker game (Gross & John, 2003). Bracket (2019) calls this technique the Meta-Moment, which involves hitting the brakes and pausing before one says or acts in a way they might regret later when in an emotion-eliciting situation. For instance, taking a few breaths or walking around the block would help calm one down when they are raging with resentment at their spouse because they failed to do an agreed-upon house chore. Response modulation or taking a Meta-Moment is a beneficial emotion regulation skill to acquire. Because many times, people find themselves carried away by emotions and end up behaving in a counter-productive manner. Pausing, breathing, walking, etc., are actions that help individuals bring down their emotional ‘temperature’ and give themselves the space needed for logical thinking, which ultimately reflects positively on one’s well-being.

Individuals who master the strategies of the Process Model are in better shape to regulate their emotions and thus benefit from such a process which will result in an enhanced well-being (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003; Katana et al., 2019). The model also shows how emotional intelligence and emotion regulation are interrelated. People with higher emotional intelligence skills are in better shape to regulate their emotions. They can manage their feelings early in the emotional path and have more tools at their disposal. Further, high emotional intelligence

individuals not only can better regulate their emotion but they can also do so flexibly i.e., venting and expressing emotions appropriately and as and when needed (Peña-Sarrionandia et al, 2015).

Other Strategies for Regulating the Emotions

In addition to the process model, many other constructive emotion regulation strategies help individuals maintain personal growth, nurture positive relationships, and ultimately lead to better well-being. In fact, the number of techniques for regulating emotions is almost boundless, depending on the situation and the feelings involved. Every emotional experience is unique, depending, among other things, on environmental context and multiple factors like place, time, people involved, sleep, etc. What triggers an agreeable or unagreeable emotion one day might not register the next (Bracket, 2019). That is why it is essential to integrate the skills of emotion regulation with the broader skills of emotional intelligence, where one needs to understand what they are feeling and why before they choose which emotion regulation strategy to apply. Below is a selection of emotion regulation strategies that can help individuals maintain their balance and keep from being overwhelmed by one fierce emotion or another (Brackett, 2019).

The ABC Model

This model helps individuals identify thoughts triggered by stimuli and recognize reactions that stem from those thoughts. A person learns to identify the stimulus or trigger (A), their beliefs (B) about this trigger, and the ensuing emotional and behavioral consequences (C) of those thoughts. People work through those triggers to separate the stimulus from what they say to themselves in the heat of the moment and the emotions/behaviors their thoughts generate. This activity helps people understand the thought patterns driving recurring outcomes and

practices that are driving counter-productive results. After distinguishing the triggers, thoughts, and consequences, people can better look at things more objectively and thus better manage unconstructive thoughts and actions (Ellis, 1991; Reivich et al., 2011). For example, when I find myself overreacting over something that wasn't worth an argument in the first place, I follow another technique by asking myself; what my ultimate goal is, then think of the goal. After that, I ask myself, is this action (speaking loudly or throwing something) helps me achieve my goal? If the answer is no, I choose another course of action, taking time off or rethinking the situation from the other person's view. This awareness has tremendously helped me improve the quality of my relationships and my overall life satisfaction

Physical Exercise

Physical movement reduces stress and strengthens people's immune systems. Exercise releases hormones such as endorphin and serotonin in the body, thus alleviating anxiety and making people happier (Ratey, 2008). In addition, Bahmani et al. (2020) have found that maintaining regular physical activity might enhance emotion regulation. For example, my routine daily walks enhance feelings of gratitude and serenity in me. This, in turn, makes me appreciate my kids more when I get back home and which makes me more accommodating of some of their actions that might otherwise annoy me. Thereby, individuals might benefit from including a daily workout or a movement activity in their daily routine.

Controlled or Mindful Breathing

Controlled breathing is a calming technique that helps individuals control how their minds and bodies respond to negative emotions by teaching them how to bring themselves back into a state of relaxation. When people experience intense emotions, they usually take shallow,

quick breaths from their chests instead of their diaphragms, bringing in less oxygen to their lungs and the heart rate goes up as a result of the release of adrenaline and Cortisol. The sensation of decreased oxygen sends off an alarm to the brain, causing more stress hormones to be released in the bloodstream resulting in increased anxiety. The deep abdominal breathing from the diaphragm counters this process. It helps to “hit the brake” on the activation of the stress response by reducing the heart rate. The breaths get deeper, slower, and fuller and allow total oxygen intake, slowing the heartbeat, lowering or stabilizing blood pressure, and help regulate the emotions (Bracket, 2019; Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

To reap the maximum benefits of deep breathing, however, it is better to build it as a habit in small steps over time rate (Bracket, 2019) as opposed to trying to practice it in the heat of an emotional moment. One can start by spending a few minutes of deep breathing a couple of times a week and progress over time to five, ten minutes, or even more.

In addition to the attunement of emotional reactivity and thus having better relationships, mindful breathing also increases one’s focus and attention as well as enhanced memory and immune functions (Bracket, 2019).

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Another calming technique that one can use in combination with controlled breathing when one feels stressed is to relax the muscles throughout the body. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) consists of tensing individual muscle groups as one breathes in, relaxing them while breathing out. The relaxed physiology of the body helps to relieve stress and anxiety (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Positive Imagery

This is an activity where individuals close their eyes and imagine calming and relaxing scenes, places where they could feel relaxed, comfortable, and content. They then spend a few minutes relaxing in the created imaginary haven. The more the visualization is detailed and vivid, the more it would help the individual relax and benefit (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

The mentioned above strategies can help increase positive emotions and decrease negative ones, thus keeping a positively balanced positivity ratio (Fredrickson, 2004). They can also help improve the experience of broadening positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004; 2009), and as a result, increase the P (positive emotions) of PERMA in the short term and reap building resources in the long term, as mentioned in the positive emotions section (Fredrickson, 2004; 2009).

Representations in Islam

Many of the findings discussed in this paper are embedded in Islamic teachings. As mentioned above, anger is associated with increased blood pressure and other physiological changes that hinder logical thinking and decision-making. Also, when people are extremely angry, they may harm those around them verbally or physically, which could strain their relationships with friends, relatives, and co-workers. Those findings make us appreciate the Islamic teachings encouraging patience and discouraging anger. For instance, in the Holy Quran, Allah says in Surah Al Imran, 134 “They are those who donate in prosperity and adversity, control their anger, and pardon others. And Allah loves [these] good-doers,” and in Surah Al Araaf, 199 we find: “Be gracious, enjoin what is right, and turn away from those who act ignorantly.” Allah commands Muslims to treat others graciously, act in good faith, and to not

reciprocate the acts of ignorant people, and to instead either try to talk to them gently and logically or to ignore them and stay silent. This will ensure that a Muslim is acting wisely and is not swayed by strong emotions.

There are also many Hadiths, or “the collected traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, based on his sayings and actions,” urging Muslims to regulate their emotions. For example, a man came to the Prophet, and he said, “Advise me.” The Prophet said, “Do not be angry.” The man repeated his request, and the Prophet said, “Do not be angry. (Sahih al-Bukhari 6116, Book 78, Hadith 143).” This Hadith implies that anger can get the best of oneself and that it can be controlled. Also, it implies that, as much as possible, one should not engage with potentially enraging situations. In another Hadith, Prophet Mohammed said: “The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger (Sahih al-Bukhari 6114, Book 78, Hadith 141)”. We learn from this Hadith that Prophet Mohammed acknowledges the difficulty in sustaining calmness in the face of adversity, but still, it is manageable by those striving to be strong. Earlier in this paper, it was mentioned that one way to manage emotions is to change the physiological state of the individual, and in the following Hadith, the Prophet advises his followers to do just that in response to anger: “When one of you becomes angry while standing, he should sit down. If the Anger leaves him, well and good; otherwise, he should lie down. (Sunan Abi Dawud 4782, Book 43, Hadith 10)”. In my own life, in moments of being treated unjustly, I often relied on Prophet Muhammad’s command: “If...you become angry...keep silent” (Al-Musnad: Volume 1, 329). Of course, staying silent and letting the matter rest is not a permanent solution; I know it is important to eventually respond to the mistreatment. However, often in moments of pressure and stress, my responses would have been angry and frustrated, offending those around me and worsening the situation. Patience in

the face of challenging situations is the core of emotional regulation. Instead of lashing out, responding when emotions have calmed down improves not only the specific outcomes but also personal well-being and flourishing.

Conclusions and Avenues of Future Research

We see challenges in emotion regulation all around us. The promising scientific studies on the benefits of emotion regulation, whether in lessening anxiety and stress or enhancing subjective well-being, could be incorporated in many beneficial ways. They could be used to develop policies by concerned authorities to help people better deal with stress. An example of that is The US Army Master Resilience Trainer course designed and supervised by prominent professors from the University of Pennsylvania, which was successfully rolled out in the US army. The course is considered a foundational pillar of the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness program (PRP). This program yielded a high satisfaction rate among the trainees. They stated that the program provided them with valuable military and personal life skills, and some noted that the program changed their lives for the better (Reivich et al., 2011). This experience says a lot about the importance of applying similar programs across schools, hospitals, and every possible organization to enhance individuals' and societies' well-being. One of the major components of PRP includes the CBT concepts discussed in this paper. Emotion regulation concepts discussed above could be added to programs modeled after the PRP and affecting positive change in people's lives. Meanwhile, ways to learn about and begin to practice emotion regulation on the individual level may include individuals educating themselves by reading books, watching Ted Talks, or attending workshops and seminars to learn how to be aware of their triggers and recurring patterns in order to be better able to deal with them

In this capstone, I discussed the importance of well-being, the role of emotions in well-being, and how to manage our emotions by being more emotionally intelligent and by adopting strategies and techniques to regulate our emotions. The goal has been to enhance our understanding of emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, and positive psychology, establish a more direct link between these disciplines, and ultimately increase the repertoire of emotional intelligence and emotion regulation interventions and practices to increase flourishing and well-being.

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