Chapter 4
Sadness, the Architect of Cognitive Change

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Emotions guide action in ways that are frequently adaptive. Fear, disgust, and anger motivate people to act to avoid danger, shun contamination, and overcome obstacles to their goals. But what good does feeling sad do? This seemingly passive state is often characterized by behavioral withdrawal and rumination. This chapter reviews theory and research concerning the types of situations that elicit sadness and the effects of sadness on expression, behavior, and cognition. Evidence suggests that, far from being passive, sadness is an architect of cognitive change, directing the challenging but essential work of reconstructing goals and beliefs when people face irrevocable loss.

Keywords: sadness, negative emotion, affect, loss, grief, adaptive, function, goals, cognition

In the Pixar film, Inside Out, eleven-year-old Riley’s emotions are depicted as cartoon characters living in her brain who help her respond to challenges. Riley’s life is disrupted when her family moves to a new city, forcing her to leave behind everything familiar. The other emotions, Joy, Fear, Anger, and Disgust, all have clear functions. They urge Riley to celebrate the good things in her life, avoid danger, overcome obstacles, and shun contamination. But it is unclear to them, and to Sadness herself, what the function of Sadness might be. In the end, though, Sadness proves to be the hero of the tale. Only with Sadness’ help does Riley come to terms with all she had to leave behind, allowing her to appreciate the inviting possibilities of her new life.

Researchers too have struggled to identify the functions of sadness. After all, sadness is often characterized by passivity and behavioral inhibition (e.g., Frijda, 1986). Sad people prefer activities framed as inactive to those framed as active (Rucker & Petty, 2004), and people report feeling fatigued when recalling experiences that made them sad (Keller & Nesse, 2005). Sadness is also a frequent companion to pessimism and rumination and a component of debilitating disorders such as depression (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993; Mouchet-Mages & Baylé, 2008). This chapter reviews theories and evidence that sadness is nonetheless adaptive. Following Lench, Tibbett, and Bench (2016), an emotion is defined as adaptive if it promotes changes that result in better outcomes for individuals in the types of situations that typically evoke the emotion. This chapter first examines the types of situations that evoke sadness. It then reviews evidence that sadness is associated with specific changes in expressions, behavior, and cognition, some of which have been shown to promote successful resolution of the types of problems that evoke sadness. Research suggests that sadness is an architect of cognitive change, facilitating adaptation to irrevocable loss by soliciting aid and restructuring expectations and
goals. Finally, the chapter discusses unresolved questions about the functions of sadness and directions for future research.

What Makes People Sad?

According to functionalist accounts of emotion, people are attuned to changes in the environment that are relevant to their goals and wellbeing. Emotions are evoked when people perceive that a goal has been attained or obstructed, making it necessary for them to revise their behavior or their goals and beliefs. Specific emotions are elicited by the perception of specific types of changes in the status of goals. For instance, people feel happy when they attain their goals. They feel afraid when they perceive a threat to their ability to attain a desired outcome or avoid an aversive one. They feel angry when they perceive an obstacle to goal attainment that might yet be overcome or removed. Once evoked, emotions facilitate behavioral and cognitive changes that help people respond adaptively to these changes (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Stein & Levine, 1987).

Sadness too is evoked by the perception of change in the status of a goal. People feel sad when they perceive that they are unable to maintain or attain a goal or valued state. In several studies, adults have been instructed to keep detailed diaries over days or weeks, recording events that evoked emotions and reporting how they appraised those events. Sadness was the most common emotional response to events perceived as the loss of a valued state (e.g., Nezlek, Vansteelandt, Van Mechelen, & Kuppens, 2008; Oatley & Duncan, 1994). Feelings of sadness often follow bereavement, separation from caregivers or significant others, dissolution of romantic relationships, job loss, social exclusion, and damage to valued possessions, as well as loss of anticipated valued states such as missed opportunities to engage in pleasurable activities (Carnelley, Wortman, Bolger, & Burke, 2006; Nesse, 1990; Sbarra, 2006).

The perception that goal failure is irrevocable is also an important component of sadness. Roseman (1984) argued that people feel sad when they are certain that they were unsuccessful at obtaining a reward and perceive themselves as having little power in the situation. When adults failed to attain social goals, the more they appraised themselves as having low control, the more intense sadness they experienced (Siemer, Mauss, & Gross, 2007). Young children also associate sadness with irrevocable loss. When presented with stories in which a protagonist failed to attain a goal, children were most likely to attribute sadness to the protagonist if they viewed failure as permanent (e.g., permanent damage to a prized possession). When children viewed the protagonist as able to reinstate his or her goal, they were more likely to attribute anger (Levine, 1995).

Evolutionary accounts posit that sadness results from significant changes in people’s physical or social environment, such as the loss of an important resource, mate, or child, that negatively impact adaptive fitness or the prospect of passing genetic information to new generations. Loss of a child likely to pass on one’s genes would be expected to elicit the most intense sadness (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). Consistent with this view, one study assessed the intensity of grief that participants expected parents to experience following the death of a child. The child’s age in these hypothetical scenarios ranged from 1 day to 50 years. Participants expected parents to feel more intense grief if a child was close to reproductive age at the time of death rather than younger or older (Crawford, Salter, & Jang, 1989). Among relatives who actually experienced a child’s death, those with greater certainty of their genetic relatedness to the child (e.g., maternal rather than paternal grandmothers) reported more grief than those with less certainty (Littlefield & Rushton, 1986). Overall, then, people feel sad when they perceive
loss or goal failure to be irrevocable, given their current resources. The intensity and duration of
sadness increase with the importance of the loss (Carver, 2015; Lench et al., 2016; Verduyn,
Delvaux, Van Coillie, Tuerlinckx, & Van Mechelen, 2009).

**What Good Does It Do to Feel Sad?**

Emotion theorists have proposed that sadness, like other emotions, was conserved
throughout human evolution because it helped solve problems that ancestral humans often
encountered (Gross & Barrett, 2011; Tooby, Cosmides, Sell, Lieberman, & Sznyyer, 2008;
Sznyyer, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2017). When goal failure is irrevocable given a person’s available
resources, sadness is thought to serve two key functions. First, sad expressions and behaviors
elicit aid by signaling to others that an individual needs assistance (Reed & DeScioli, 2017).
Second, when assistance is unavailable or ineffective, sadness promotes cognitive changes that
facilitate adaptation to irrevocable loss. If people are to pursue alternative goals, they must first
understand the implications of loss, dismantle unrealistic beliefs and expectations, and withdraw
investment from unattainable goals (Andrews & Thomson, 2009; Klinger, 1975; Nesse, 1991;
Sznyer et al., 2017; Wrosch, Scheier, Carver, & Shulz, 2003).

Far from being passive, the cognitive restructuring instigated by sadness is effortful and
challenging. Beliefs and goals are closely intertwined, and goals are hierarchically organized
with lower-order goals serving as necessary conditions for achieving explicit and implicit higher
order goals (e.g., Cooper & Shallice, 2006; Simon, 1967). For example, a student may believe
she is capable of passing an academic course. Passing may also be necessary for attaining her
explicit goals of getting a letter of recommendation and pursuing a particular career path, and for
maintaining her implicit goals of thinking well of her own abilities and pleasing her parents.
Thus, sadness after failing the course prompts revision of an extensive network of beliefs and
goals. Research indicates that sad people dwell, not just on their immediate loss, but on its
implications for their beliefs and goals (Lyubomirsky, Caldwell, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998;
Reynolds & Brewin, 1999). Restructuring beliefs following irrevocable failure allows people to
maintain representations that accurately reflect real world constraints. Disengaging from
unattainable goals sets the stage for adopting more realistic goals (Carver & Scheier, 1990;
Levine & Edelstein, 2009; Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Mendola, Tennen, Affleck,

If sadness is adaptive, it should be accompanied by changes that generally serve to solicit
aid or to facilitate adaptation to loss. Below, we review evidence that sadness is associated with
distinctive changes in facial and vocal expressions, behavior, and cognition that may promote
these outcomes.

**Expressive and Behavioral Change**

Across cultures, people express sadness in the face, often with raised inner corners of the
eyebrows and depressed corners of the mouth (Keltner, Ekman, Gonzaga, & Beer, 2003). The
sad expression shows low overlap with expressions of other emotions (Smith, Cottrell, Gosselin,
& Schyns, 2005) and people recognize sad expressions in others at higher-than-chance levels
(Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). People show expressions of sadness in real world settings when
failing to obtain a desired goal, such as failing to win a gold medal at the Olympics (Matsumoto
&Willingham, 2006). More pronounced expressions are correlated with reports of more intense
sadness. For instance, when study participants watched a film clip depicting a child grieving over
his father’s death, the more intense sadness participants reported, the more they exhibited a sad
facial expression (Mauss, Levenson, McCarter, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2005). Sadness is also frequently accompanied by crying, which includes vocal expression and tears (Vingerhoets & Bysma, 2016).

Sadness also motivates behavior, some adaptive and some less so. When feeling sad, people tend to behave politely and generously. In one study, participants watched a video that induced sadness, happiness, or neutral affect, and were then instructed to request a file from someone in a nearby office. Sad participants made more polite requests than those who felt happy or neutral affect (Forgas, 1999). When reading about an individual in need of material support, the more pronounced facial sadness and the more sympathy participants expressed, the more hours they anonymously committed to helping the individual in need (Eisenberg et al., 1989). After recalling a sad experience, rather than an anger-inducing or neutral experience, participants recommended providing more monetary assistance to an individual receiving welfare (Small & Lerner, 2008). This politeness and generosity may serve to elicit reciprocal support and generosity from others or alleviate sadness indirectly by contributing to the well-being of others (Cialdini et al., 1987).

Sadness also motivates behavior that, though potentially maladaptive in the long run, may make people feel better in the short run. People led to feel sad (versus disgust or neutral affect), were likely to accept an immediate monetary reward rather than choosing to wait three months to obtain a higher reward (Lerner, Li, & Weber, 2013). In another study, participants were induced to feel happy or sad and then asked to test snack foods for an unrelated study (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001). Before the taste test, some participants were informed that research suggests eating would not make them feel better. This information did not affect the amount of snack food that happy participants ate. But among sad participants, those who had been informed that eating would not improve their mood ate less snack food than those who were not given this information. These findings suggest that sad people increased consumption of snack foods with the aim of improving their mood. Thus, when people feel sad, they show susceptibility to immediate rewards that may improve their mood.

**Cognitive Change**

Sadness influences people’s thoughts about the situation that evoked their negative feelings, referred to as integral cognition. People in a sad mood often ruminate about the causes and consequences of losses and defeats (e.g., Lyubomirsky et al., 1998; Reynolds & Brewin, 1999; Watkins & Teasdale, 2001). Rumination has been associated with mental health disorders such as depression (Nolen-Hoeksema & Schweizer, 2010). However, in individuals without a mental health disorder, rumination is not necessarily problematic. Researchers had two groups of U.S. veterans complete daily diaries for two weeks. One group had been diagnosed with combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the other group did not have a diagnosis of PTSD. Overall, same-day rumination was positively associated with same-day negative affect. But for veterans without PTSD, the more they ruminated on a given day, the less intense negative affect they reported the following day (Kashdan, Young, & McKnight, 2012). In a laboratory study, participants who ruminated about how they could improve on a laboratory task performed better on a similar task in the future (Ciarocco, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2010). Thus, in non-clinical populations, thinking through the implications of loss when sad may be a precursor to mood repair and future goal attainment.

In another study, researchers elicited sadness or happiness by giving people negative or positive feedback on their leadership potential. When choosing a leadership mentor afterwards,
sad people were more likely than happy people to select the mentor who encouraged both imagining goal attainment and realistically assessing obstacles to goal attainment rather than a mentor who focused solely on goal attainment or solely on obstacles (Oettingen, Park, & Schnetter, 2001). A focus on goals, combined with realistic evaluation of obstacles to goals, was also found to characterize sadness across a series of studies using different mood induction techniques. This dual focus should promote future goal attainment when expectations of success are high and goal disengagement when expectations of success are low (Kappes, Oettingen, Mayer, & Maglio, 2011).

Sadness also influences cognitions about events that are incidental or unrelated to the source of sadness, serving to generally lower expectations. Chong and Park (2017) had undergraduates rate their feelings each week before taking a quiz. After each quiz students reviewed their scores and set a goal for the following week’s quiz. The sadder students felt prior to the quizzes, the lower goals they set for subsequent quizzes, even accounting for grade point average and differences between students’ goals and their actual quiz scores (Chong & Park, 2017, study 1). In summary, when feeling sad, people tend to dwell on the causes and consequences of goal failure and on obstacles to success. Bringing unrealistic beliefs and goals into line with external constraints may promote attainment of goals in the future.

Sadness narrows information processing. Research on incidental cognition has led to mixed findings concerning the information processing strategies people use when sad. According to one view, negative affect triggers narrow, detail-oriented, and systematic information processing in the service of addressing problems (e.g., Schwarz, 2012; Andrews & Thomson, 2009). Consistent with this view, sad people have been shown to rely less on top-down processing strategies such as heuristics than people in a happy or neutral mood. Following emotion induction, sad people were less likely than happy people to make the fundamental attribution error, which involves exaggerating the role of personal attributes, and underestimating the role of situational factors, in causing people’s behavior (Forgas, 1998). Inducing sadness also reduced people’s tendency to make broad judgments about other people’s traits or capabilities based on first impressions or small samples of behavior (Ambady & Gray, 2002). In a study of memory, participants viewed a series of images. Later, emotion was induced by having participants recall sad, happy, or neutral personal events. They were then tested for their memory for the images. The sadness induction improved memory by reducing the tendency to incorporate misleading information into memory reports (Forgas, Laham, & Vargas, 2005, study 1; for similar results, see Forgas et al., 2005, study 2). Thus, negative affect generally, and sadness specifically, can promote systematic, effortful, and detailed information processing. This processing style may help people figure out why things are going badly and how to change course.

Sadness motivates people to change information processing strategies. According to an alternative approach, rather than promoting the use of a particular information processing strategy, positive affect and negative affect serve to reinforce or inhibit, respectively, whatever strategy a person is currently using (Huntsinger, Isbell, & Clore, 2014). Positive affect functions like a green light, signaling that goals are met and that the current information processing strategy is working. Negative affect serves as a red light, signaling the need to discontinue the current strategy and adopt a different strategy to address unresolved challenges. In support of this view, when participants were led to adopt a systematic information processing strategy
(characterized by narrowed attention to the details of presented stimuli), inducing sadness led them to shift to using more global processing, whereas inducing happiness led to continued use of local processing (Huntsinger et al., 2014; Huntsinger & Ray, 2016). In contrast, when participants were led to adopt a global information processing strategy, inducing sadness led them to shift to using more local processing, whereas inducing happiness led to continued use of global processing. In summary, while previous research suggests that sadness promotes systematic, effortful, and detailed information processing, Huntsinger and colleagues found support for the alternative view that sadness triggers a shift from the current processing strategy to a new one that might be more successful for addressing current demands. Global processing tends to be the default strategy because it is less effortful than systematic processing. Thus, further research should assess whether previous findings linking sadness and systematic processing were due to sadness motivating a change in the default global strategy.

**Sadness broadens information processing.** Other researchers have argued that the information processing strategy conducive to well-being depends, not on whether an emotion is positive or negative, but on whether the emotion precedes or follows a change in the status of a goal. Pre-goal emotions, such as hope, fear, anger, and disgust, are experienced in the midst of goal pursuit (i.e., attempting to attain a desired state or avoid an aversive state). These emotions should narrow the scope of attention and memory to goal-relevant information. In contrast, post-goal emotions, such as happiness and sadness, signal that goal attainment or failure has already occurred. Post-goal emotions should broaden the scope of attention and memory, allowing people to think through the implications of change for related beliefs and goals (Harmon-Jones, Price, & Gable, 2012; Kaplan, Van Damme, Levine, & Loftus, 2016; Levine & Pizarro, 2004; Levine & Edelstein, 2009).

Gable and Harmon-Jones (2010) had participants view pictures that induced sadness, disgust, or neutral affect before each trial of an attentional task. In the task, participants viewed pictures that contained a large letter composed of several smaller letters, and indicated as quickly as possible which letter was in the picture. Sadness broadened attention relative to neutral affect by reducing reaction times for identifying global targets. Disgust narrowed attention relative to neutral affect by reducing reaction times for identifying local targets. Harmon-Jones, Gable, and Price (2013) suggested that, whether sadness broadens or narrows cognitive scope may depend on whether sadness occurs alone or co-occurs with pre-goal negative emotions, such as anger or fear. In other words, previous findings that sadness narrows attentional scope may have been due to researchers contrasting a blend of sadness and pre-goal negative emotions with post-goal positive emotion (e.g., happiness).

In another study, participants watched a slideshow of an interaction between a woman and her boyfriend and were encouraged to empathize with the woman’s feelings (Van Damme, Kaplan, Levine, & Loftus, 2017). The woman was described as feeling either devastated, or happy (post-goal emotions), fearful, or hopeful (pre-goal emotions) about her goal of maintaining a long-term relationship with her boyfriend. Later, participants were tested on their recognition of information from the slides that was true (present in the slide) or false (not present), and central or peripheral to the woman’s goal. Participants who empathized with post-goal emotions were less susceptible to false memories about peripheral information than participants who empathized with pre-goal emotions, suggesting greater breadth in the scope of information attended to and remembered. Further research is clearly needed to address the mixed findings in the literature concerning the effects of sadness on information processing strategies. It
will be important to examine when and why sadness triggers detail-oriented and systematic information processing, promotes changing the current strategy, or broadens information processing to encompass the implications of failure for related beliefs and goals. Research on how sadness affects information processing has focused primarily on information that is incidental or unrelated to the cause of sadness. Further research is also needed on how sadness affects the processing of integral information, that is, the information that served to elicit sadness.

Evidence that Sadness is Adaptive

The findings reviewed above indicate that sadness is associated with expressive, behavioral, and cognitive changes that, in principle, may be adaptive. But this evidence falls short of demonstrating that, when people encounter a loss that exceeds their capabilities, being sad leads to better outcomes than not being sad. A few studies provide more direct evidence of the benefits of sadness. Crying is a universal and potent expression of sadness, loss, and powerlessness throughout the lifespan (Vingerhoets & Bylsma, 2016). In infancy and early childhood, crying serves to maintain proximity to parents and solicit care and assistance (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972; Bowlby, 1980). Laboratory studies displaying pictures of adults with tears either digitally added or digitally removed show that tears serve as an important pre-attentive visual cue of sadness and evoke in others feelings of empathy, connectedness, and willingness to provide support (for a review see Vingerhoets & Bylsma, 2016). For example, researchers presented participants with photographs of sad and neutral faces for 50 milliseconds. Recognition of sad faces was better when tears were digitally added to the photos than when no tears were added. Moreover, participants reported greater perceived need for social support in response to sad faces with tears (Balsters, Krahmer, Swerts, & Vingerhoets, 2013).

Expressing sadness without tears has also been shown to elicit help which benefits the sad individual. Participants in one study were asked to imagine a scenario in which their family needed medicine to survive but a neighboring family also needed the medicine (Dehghani, Carnevale, & Gratch, 2014). Participants gave more medicine to the neighboring family when a member of that family was depicted with a sad expression rather than a neutral or angry expression. In another study, participants engaged in a simulated fishing task with another person in order to earn money. The other person, who was actually a confederate, explained via video that she had lost all her fish. If there was uncertainty about the loss, participants donated more of their money when the confederate’s account of losing fish was accompanied by a sad rather than neutral facial expression (Reed & DeScioli, 2017). Thus, sad expressions and tears elicit empathy and aid which can result in better outcomes for individuals who have suffered a loss.

When loss is irrevocable, sadness should promote revision of unrealistic expectations and disengagement from unattainable goals. These cognitive changes should result in both measurably better outcomes and enhanced well-being. One study assessed the effects of inducing a happy or sad mood on financial trading decisions (Au, Chan, Wang, & Vertinsky, 2003). Economics and finance students received information about financial markets to help them make trades. After a round of trading, they received randomized feedback that their decisions had led to high profit (happiness induction), substantial loss (sadness induction), or breaking even (control condition). In subsequent decision rounds, participants listened to music to maintain their assigned mood. Sad participants made more accurate judgments and more conservative trading decisions than did happy participants and, as a result, profited more than happy participants, though not more than control participants.
Carver (2015) has argued that emotions are self-regulating. Sadness, for example, motivates accommodation to loss by reducing the priority of unattainable goals. When goal disengagement is successful, feelings of sadness should abate, resulting in enhanced well-being. Several studies have demonstrated a link between disengaging from unattainable goals and greater well-being. Among female breast cancer survivors, the more participants reported the ability to disengage if they had to stop pursuing an important goal in their life, the lower their daily negative affect (Wrosch & Sabiston, 2013). In women past child bearing age, those who were able to disengage from the goal of bearing a child had greater subjective well-being (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Fleeson, 2001). In a longitudinal study of older adults, functional disability and depressive symptoms increased over a six-year period. But among those who reported greater ability to disengage when they had to stop pursuing an important goal, functional impairment was less strongly related to depressive symptoms (Dunne, Wrosch & Miller, 2011).

Another study assessed adolescent girls’ depressive symptoms (a measure broader than, but encompassing, sadness) and their self-reported ability to disengage from unattainable goals over the course of a year (Wrosch & Miller, 2009). At the start of the study, goal disengagement ability was not related to depressive symptoms. But the more depressive symptoms adolescents reported at baseline, the better they became at disengaging from unattainable goals over the course of the year. Indeed, baseline depressive symptoms explained approximately 21% of the variance in improvement in adolescents’ ability to disengage from unattainable goals. In turn, controlling for levels of baseline depressive symptoms, the greater the increase over time in adolescents’ ability to let go of futile goals, the more their depressive symptoms declined in the subsequent six months. Taken together, these findings suggest depressive symptoms facilitate disengaging from unattainable goals, and that disengaging from unattainable goals enhances well-being.

Conclusions

In the film Inside Out, young Riley has difficulty adjusting to her new life when her family moves to a different city. The emotion Joy, who lives in Riley’s brain, rounds up the other emotions – Sadness, Anger, Disgust, and Fear – to help Riley cope. Sadness slows the team down and appears to worsen Riley’s situation but only when Riley expresses her grief to her parents and acknowledges the life she left behind is she able to adjust and pursue alternative goals, such as forging new friendships. The film illustrates that, when something valued is lost, sadness serves as a powerful signal to both the self and others that problems need to be addressed. External expressions of sadness recruit assistance from others. Internally, the sad individual is occupied with the challenging tasks of revising unrealistic beliefs and reprioritizing goals.

We have reviewed evidence concerning the several ways in which sadness is likely to be adaptive. However, finding that sadness motivates the difficult mental work of rethinking beliefs and reprioritizing goals does not mean that this work is always successful. If people are unable to revise their expectations and disengage from high priority goals, dwelling on the implications of loss can devolve into rumination, hopelessness, and depression (Nesse, 2000; Carver, 2015). Thus, further research is needed on when and why sadness is followed by adaptive versus maladaptive types of rumination (Ciarocco et al., 2010; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008). Further research is also needed to explicate the mixed findings concerning how sadness impacts information processing strategies. Studies should directly compare the competing views that sadness prompts detail-oriented processing, that sadness leads people to
change their current processing strategy whatever it may be, and that sadness broadens the scope of information processing in the service of understanding consequences of loss. Finally, disengaging from failed goals enhances well-being, and makes it possible to prioritize new goals. Yet goal disengagement and reengagement are separable processes and some evidence suggests that sadness promotes the former but not the latter (Wrosch et al., 2003). Thus, future work should assess whether sadness directly facilitates the pursuit of alternative goals.

In conclusion, research indicates that sadness is adaptive. When people face obstacles to their goals that outstrip their resources, their sad expressions, tears, and behaviors elicit empathy and aid from others. When goal failure is irrevocable, however, sadness serves as an architect of cognitive change, leading people to rebuild their beliefs and goals. The cognitive structures designed by sadness tend to be weather resistant, earthquake friendly, and low to the ground. Sadness prompts people to think through the implications of loss, disengage from unattainable goals, let go of unrealistic expectations, and forge more realistic ones. This restructuring is effortful and challenging, but essential for maintaining representations that accurately reflect real world constraints and for preventing people from squandering their time, effort and resources pursuing unattainable goals (e.g., Ciarocco, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2010; Chong & Park, 2017; Kappes et al., 2011). Over time, disengaging from unattainable goals predicts enhanced well-being and makes it possible for people to successfully pursue new goals (Wrosch & Miller, 2009).

References


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