The Impact of Perceived Self-Efficacy on Regret

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Background

Regret

- Negative emotion stemming from a self-focused upward counterfactual (CF) (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Zeelenberg, 1999)
  - "If only" alternatives to past events (Epstude & Roese, 2008)
- Affective & cognitive components (Buchanan et al., 2016)
  - Affective: negative emotions from consequences
  - Cognitive: intellectual understanding of wrongdoing

Opportunity Principles of Regret

- Lost opportunity principle
  - Focus on short-term outcomes of what one just did
  - Immediately after an event (Summerville, 2011)
- Future opportunity principle
  - Focus on long-term consequences on ongoing goals
  - Over longer time

Opportunity and Behavior Regulation

- Opportunity as the "master moderator" linking CFs and behavior (Roese & Epstude, 2017, pp. 13)
- Focus on meeting ongoing goals if opportunity is present

General Perceived Self Efficacy (GPSE)

- Belief in own capabilities & ability to enact change
- Lower GPSE increases rumination over negative thoughts and personal failings (Bandura, 1994)

GPSE and Regret Elements

- Low GPSE should be related to more affective regret
  - More negative affect & tendency to ruminate
- High GPSE should be related to more cognitive regret
  - Recognize more opportunities to meet goals

Hypotheses

As GPSE increases:

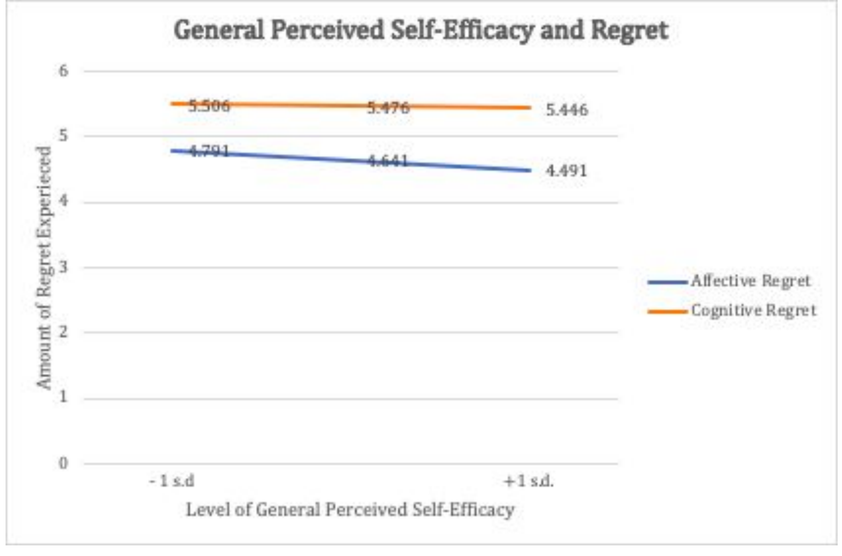
1. Cognitive regret will increase
2. Affective regret will decrease

Method

1. General Perceived Self Efficacy Scale (GPSE; Schwarzer, Mueller, & Greenglass, 1999).
2. Two-minute regret elicitation task (modified from Buchanan, Summerville, Lehmann & Reb, 2016; Roese & Summerville, 2005)
   "...Think about a time when you felt your situation would have been better, if only you had behaved differently. Picture this situation in your mind. Try and remember as vividly as you can what this past situation was like. Think of what happened to make you feel this way, and how you felt in this particular situation."
3. Regret Elements Scale (RES; Buchanan et al., 2016).

Results

- As self-efficacy increased, cognitive regret did not increase, $\beta = -0.02$, $t(230) = -0.30$, $p = 0.76$
  - Higher GPSE was not associated with an increased cognitive understanding of regret
- As self-efficacy decreased, affective regret did not increase, $\beta = -0.098$, $t(230) = -1.49$, $p = 0.14$
  - Lower GPSE was not associated with increased distress from regret



Discussion

Conclusions

- Is regret always functional? (Epstude & Roese, 2008)
  - Extrapolated function of cognitive regret to be correcting for past mistakes
    - Given high GPSE and perceived opportunity
  - Some say regret is dysfunctional (Beike, Markman, & Karadogan, 2009)
    - Lost opportunity principle: most regret when opportunity to meet goal is permanently lost
- Opportunity principles of regret lead to different conclusions about cognitive regret
  - At first, regret follows lost opportunity principle
    - Consistent with hypothesis
  - Later, regret follows future opportunity principle
    - Inconsistent with hypothesis
- Regret may be functional, but more nuanced

Limitations & Future Directions

- If participants considered more recent regrets, would follow lost opportunity principle
  - Recent events are more salient in memory
  - Could explain lack of association in results
  - Follow-up study should control for recency of regret
- Experimental design to test impact of domain-specific PSE on experience of regret
- PSE is associated with lower depression, anxiety, and rumination (Bandura, 1994)
  - Goal: increase PSE to encourage a more constructive response to regret

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