

Preface

The purpose of this book is to translate insights from emotion research into clinical applications. Emotions are key determinants of mental health. The ability to deal successfully with emotions is an important human characteristic that facilitates social adjustment and overall well-being. Pursuing important life goals requires tolerance and management of a wide range of affective states, including uncomfortable and distressing feelings. Ineffective strategies for dealing with emotions are the central source of many psychological problems. In fact, the vast majority of psychological problems are emotional problems. Some of these problems can be effectively treated with psychological interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Although many people improve after these treatments, they are often far from being healthy and happy human beings free of emotional distress. Treatments that move beyond the level of illness symptoms can significantly improve their personal emotional health and quality of life. In this book, I present several approaches not only to reducing suffering but also to achieving improved well-being by translating findings from emotion and motivation research, affective science, and social psychology into clinical practice.

Despite how central emotions are to mental health, there are few concrete clinical recommendations for dealing with emotions specifi-

cally. To illustrate how the research can be translated into specific clinical techniques, in each chapter I present sections labeled as “In Practice,” together with case illustrations and closing summaries to highlight some of the clinically relevant information discussed in the chapter.

Recent studies suggest that specific strategies to enhance emotional health can, in fact, enhance existing treatments for mental disorders. It has further been shown that individuals differ in their habitual ways of managing their emotions and that those individual differences are meaningfully associated with psychosocial functioning. For example, it has been found that individuals who habitually use reappraisal to regulate emotions experience more positive emotion and less negative emotion overall, have better interpersonal functioning, and report greater well-being. In contrast, individuals who habitually use suppression experience less positive emotion and greater negative emotion, have worse interpersonal functioning, and report lower well-being. Moreover, it appears that any specific emotion regulation strategy, in itself, is neither adaptive nor maladaptive. Rather, it is the context and situational demands that determine whether a particular strategy is adaptive. Therefore, ideally we should develop the ability to flexibly apply any particular strategy in order to achieve the desirable goals and avoid undesirable outcomes.

It is important to note, however, that this book is not merely focused on emotion regulation. The term *emotion regulation* has become a relatively narrow research topic in social psychology with (in my view) relatively limited relevance to clinical practice. The term *emotion*, on the other hand, is broad and complicated. My primary objective, as I have noted, is to translate the knowledge acquired from various disciplines examining emotions into formulating concrete clinical strategies, with the goal of enhancing psychotherapy for a variety of psychological problems. The disciplines I review include affective neuroscience, laboratory-based emotion research, biology, anthropology, social and personality research, psychiatry, and even Buddhist and other religious practices.

The strategies that I describe are *transdiagnostic*. Although the empirical evidence aligns them most closely to CBT, they are not confined to any particular psychotherapy model. They offer clinicians concrete recommendations for incorporating emotions into

traditional psychosocial treatments. The book contains eight chapters, briefly summarized as follows. Chapter 1 discusses the nature of emotions and reviews the most influential and relevant emotion theories. Chapter 2 identifies individual differences as they relate to the experience, expression, and regulation of emotions. Emotions are directly associated with approach and avoidance tendencies and goal attainment. Therefore, Chapter 3 discusses the relationship between motivation and emotion. Chapter 4 reviews the self and self-regulation as applied to emotions, and Chapter 5 examines in detail one such self-regulation strategy: emotion regulation. Chapter 6 is dedicated to appraisal and reappraisal, important aspects of CBT. Chapter 7 discusses mindfulness and meditation strategies, including loving-kindness meditation, for enhancing positive affect, a generally neglected but important aspect of emotional health. Finally, Chapter 8 provides a brief overview of the neurobiological correlates of emotions and emotion regulation.

The readership I had in mind when writing this book consists of clinicians and health care professionals interested in the newest and cutting-edge psychological treatment approaches. I learned a lot when researching this fascinating field and enjoyed summarizing and translating it to derive concrete treatment strategies. I hope I have succeeded.