What causes humans to behave as they do? Although the attempt to formulate a comprehensive understanding of human behavior is far from complete, empirical evidence strongly supports motivation as a central constituent and causal agent for behavior. To integrate and simplify the myriad of motivational theories, Elliot (2008) offers a comprehensive collection of motivation research in *Handbook of Approach and Avoidance Motivation*.

Theoretical conceptualizations of motivation have been formulated and utilized for centuries, but motivational literature became somewhat scattered and inconsistent as the foci of investigation shifted in scope and discipline. However, one commonality across the majority of motivational theories is the distinction between approach and avoidance, which Elliot uses as the basis for his work. Elliot’s stated goals are to demonstrate the importance and value of differentiating approach from avoidance motivation, identify conceptual and empirical similarities and contrasts across disciplines to foster the integrative study of motivation, and provide a thorough resource for researchers interested in motivation. He accomplishes these goals through contributions from leading researchers in specialty areas including neurophysiology and neurobiology, dispositions and goals, evaluative processes, emotion and well-being, cognition, understanding the self, and social contexts.

The central aim of Elliot’s work is to delineate the functional distinction between approach and avoidance motivation. Approach motivation is defined as “the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior toward, positive stimuli” (p. 8) and is conceptualized as an overarching construct that includes hedonism’s pleasure principle and appetitive or consummatory terminology. Avoidance motivation is “the energization of behavior by, or the direction of behavior away from, negative stimuli” (p. 8) and includes hedonism’s pain principle, withdrawal, and aversion or defensive terminology. Elliot makes a convincing argument that these constructs are not merely ends of a continuum but are actually distinct systems that promote survival. Therefore, a given behavior may be a product of either of these systems or of the systems working in tandem. The approach-avoidance distinction is well supported by differential interspecies frontal lobe activation patterns and dopamine and acetylcholine circuitry activation. Similarly, a large breadth of research examining emotions, dispositional tendencies, goals, evaluative processes, cognition, self-awareness, and social contexts buttresses the distinction.
Elliot exceeds expectations in identifying how various approaches and conceptualizations of motivation are congruent and disparate. Early hypotheses about motivation have been substantially modified as later research supported or disconfirmed their principles. Contributing authors often describe this process in a nonjudgmental and developmental manner to demonstrate and explicate the progression to the current state of knowledge. This aspect is helpful for the reader to construct his or her own impressions about how various theories interconnect. In addition, although chapters focus on specific aspects of motivation, the authors often refer to each other throughout the work to help the reader integrate the material.

Elliot's attempt to offer a resource for researchers interested in motivation and associated constructs is successful. This work offers basic foundations for motivational constructs, describes specific research areas where motivation is an underlying feature, and provides an abundance of research questions that are left to be empirically tested. Despite Elliot's focus for the researcher, this work also lends itself to valuable clinical applications. The approach–avoidance motivational distinction can clearly be integrated into various theories of psychopathology and treatment conceptualizations.

Overall, Elliot meets his stated goals by providing an extensive and inclusive work that is appropriate for graduate and professional-level readers. He provides persuasive and credible research across disciplines and research specialty areas that demonstrates the importance and usefulness of distinguishing between approach and avoidance motivation. Handbook of Approach and Avoidance Motivation would be a valuable and appropriate publication for anyone interested in the study of motivation and its associated constructs.

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