

IMPACT OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS ON ANXIETY AND PERSONALITY: A WAY TOWARDS WELL BEING

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Abstract

The concept of emotion was an early topic within psychology. Yet emotional phenomena were not studied because the proponents of behaviorism considered them as irrelevant and misleading phenomena. It was only in 1984 with the formation of the International Society for Research on Emotions (ISRE), the first multi-disciplinary professional association for scholars specializing in this area, that emotions science emerged as an organized subspecialty. Since then research on emotions has expanded. Yet even decades after emotions became an accepted topic of scientific inquiry, psychologists focused only on negative emotions, namely fear, anger, sadness, and the like. Likewise, Applied Psychology and Psychiatry focused on human weakness rather than strengths. But the emergence of Positive Psychology movement has seen a redirection towards the scientific exploration of human strengths and virtues. It offers a balanced perspective of studying psychological assets and deficits.

Like all emotions, positive emotions are brief, multi-system responses to some change in the way people interpret or appraise their current circumstances. They are also short lived experiences that produce changes in physiology, thoughts, and behaviours. Positive emotions are more than the absence of negative emotions. For example, feeling happy or excited is more than not feeling sad or bored. While negative emotions often lead to withdrawal and behaviour restriction, experiencing positive emotions are believed to lead to an individual engaging with their environment in an adaptive manner. Evidence suggests that people who experience frequent positive emotions tend to be successful and proficient across many spheres of life. Positive emotions lead people to think, feel, and act in ways that promote both resource building and involvement with approach goals. This paper has majorly tried to focus the impact of positive emotions on anxiety and personality, which further leads to well being.

Key Words: Emotions, Positive emotions, Anxiety, Personality, Well being

Introduction:

Individuals have both basic emotions and some complex emotions. While happiness, surprise, disgust, sadness, anger, humiliation, and fear are basic emotions, emotions such as love, enthusiasm, jealousy and guilt are complex emotions. While basic emotions tend to act, this is not the case with complex emotions. All emotions are different and each has a separate function. For example, positive emotions reflect the level of commitment to life, individuality and awareness (Spindler et al., 2009). Sometimes emotions can be harmful when they are in an inappropriate intensity, duration or frequency for some situations (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). There are many unhelpful emotions such as anger that causes the person to harm himself/herself or others and anxiety that disrupts the functioning of life. These are examples of unhelpful emotions that have given rise to the concept of emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is generally defined as the effort to regulate negative emotions in

order to reduce the experiential and behavioural aspects of anger, sadness, and anxiety (Gross, 2013). However, in recent years, it has been understood that emotion regulation is not only limited to reducing negative emotions (McRae & Gross, 2020). This concept also includes the efforts of individuals to regulate their positive emotions by focusing on their feelings such as love, interest and joy (Quoidbach et al., 2010). Reducing negative emotions is accepted as the most common emotional regulation strategy, followed by increasing positive emotions. Emotional regulation strategies that used by individuals can take surprising and varied forms such as focusing on breathing, going for a run, drinking alcohol, reading a book, quitting job, and biting lips. The important thing here is to find ways to organize the numerous strategies that individuals use to regulate their emotions, and then assess whether different strategies are associated with different outcomes (Ford & Gross, 2018). There are different ways to deal with negative emotions. For example, individuals may suppress the behavioural symptoms that their emotions will reveal, or rethink and try to restructure the situation that reveals the emotion through cognitive reassessment (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014).

Theories explaining components of positive emotions:

The theory which is an exploration of the evolved function of positive emotions is known as the Broaden-and-Build theory. It was developed by Barbara Fredrickson starting around 1998 and is commonly associated with Positive Psychology. Fredrickson's (2001) theory is based on two separate but related components referred to as *broaden* and *build*. The fundamental assumption of the ***broaden hypothesis*** is that positive emotions widen attention and focus. Fredrickson proposes that negative emotions (e.g., fear, anger, sadness) are experienced in situations perceived as threatening. Therefore, attention is restricted or narrowed and individuals engage in specific-action tendencies such as escaping, repelling, or attacking. In contrast, positive emotions widen focus and lead to broad, creative, and flexible thinking. Fredrickson has argued that whereas negative emotions heighten people's autonomic activity and narrow their attention to support specific action tendencies (e.g., attack, escape), positive emotions suppress autonomic arousal because they extend people's attention, thinking, and behavioral repertoires (e.g., play, explore).

The second component i.e., the ***build hypothesis*** assumes that broadened attention leads to increased engagement with the environment. This increased engagement with the environment leads to building of *psychological resources*, such as self-efficacy and coping skills; *cognitive resources*, such as reasoning skills and domain-specific knowledge; *physical resources*, such as effective immune functioning and proper stress regulation; and *relational resources*, such as intimate relationships and wide social networks. People with these resources are more likely to effectively meet life's challenges and take advantage of its opportunities, becoming successful, healthy, and happy. Thus, the personal resources accumulated, often unintentionally, through frequent experiences of positive emotions are suggested to be keys to later increases in well-being.

Positive emotions have a beneficial impact on health. For example, Pressman and Cohen (2005) suggest that experiencing positive emotions may encourage individuals to value life and their health and therefore engage in proactive behaviours such as exercising and eating well. Furthermore, positive emotions may link with the release of hormones and neurotransmitters that have a protective and beneficial impact on health. Similarly, there have been several studies that have associated positive emotions with increased immune functioning (Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Positive emotions may also have protective physiological consequences via the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system and the reduction of the stress response.

Consistently research has shown that people who experience and express positive emotions more frequently than others are more resilient (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003), resourceful (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), socially connected (Mausset al., 2012) and more likely to function at optimal levels (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Positive emotions temporarily broaden people's ways of thinking, which in turn can improve their ways of coping with a current stress. Over time and with repeated experiences of positive emotions, a style of such broad-minded coping might become habitual. And habitual good coping is a durable personal resource, a facet of trait resilience, that functions as a reserve that can be drawn on later to help people bounce back from a wide range of future adversities. The personal resources accumulated through positive emotions are durable—they survive the momentary emotional states that led to their acquisition. By consequence, then, the often incidental effect of experiencing a positive emotion is an increase in one's personal resources. So, through experiences of positive emotions, people may literally transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, socially integrated, healthy, and resilient individuals. These various resources function as reserves that can be drawn on throughout life to improve coping. Indeed, a study of elderly nuns found that those who expressed the most positive emotions in early adulthood lived up to 10 years longer than those who expressed the least positive emotions (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001).

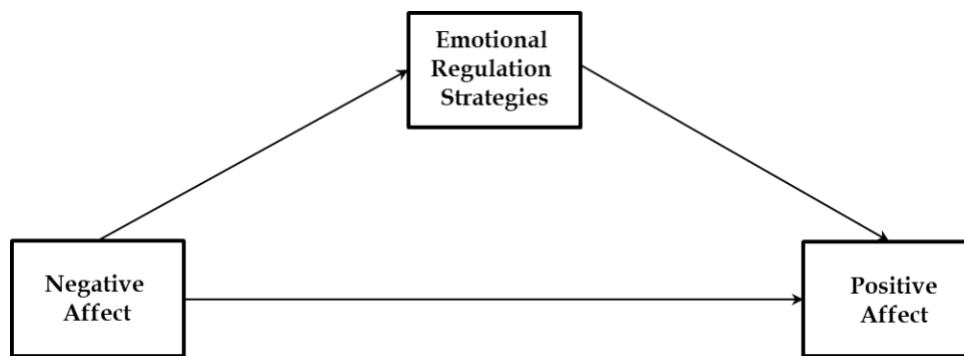
Lyubomirsky, King and Diener (2005) concluded that living a life high on positive emotions leaves individuals better equipped physically, psychologically, and socially to flourish and cope with the challenges of life. For example, the experience of interest may lead to exploration and investigation, resulting in increased knowledge and understanding (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Therefore, positive emotions may help generate resources, maintain a sense of vital energy (i.e., more positive emotions), and create even more resources.

Some theorists believe that it is the ratio of positive to negative emotions that is important for well-being. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) reviewed literature on flourishing individuals, business teams, and marriages and proposed that a ratio of positive to negative emotions of above 2.9 leads to flourishing (i.e., high well-being, resilience, functioning, and growth). Thus, the effects of positive emotions are assumed to accumulate over time. Benefits of positive emotions emerge slowly, but they endure, and help individuals thrive in both good times and bad.

Relationship between Positive Emotions and Emotional Regulation Strategies- ts impact on Anxiety and Personality:

It is obvious that positive emotions such as excitement, joy, enthusiasm and gratitude give individuals more acceptable and pleasant experiences than negative emotions such as anger, sadness, fear and anxiety (Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Positive emotions can provide a relaxing effect on individuals' mind by reducing focus on negative emotions. But this effect doesn't mean that positive emotions are just a pleasant distraction. Positive emotions reflect the level of commitment to life and sense of individuality and awareness (Spindler et al., 2009). The balance of positive and negative emotions of individuals is an important step in achieving optimal well-being (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Fredrickson, 2001). In terms of protecting individuals' mental health and improving

Figure 1. Hypothetical model



existing mental disorders (Yosefi, 2015), realizing positive emotions and using them effectively can be beneficial. This shows the effect of positive emotions on achieving effective emotional regulation (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). It is known that positive emotions expand cognition and increase attention. Cognitively oriented regulation strategies such as reappraisal and adaptive self-reflection are effective in regulating emotions and require a range of cognitive resources. An example of this is when positive emotions occur as a result of a stressful situation help regulate emotions by encouraging cognitive reappraisal and adaptive self-reflection (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Major, 2013). In a study on the effect of positive emotions on emotion regulation, it was found that individuals who were able to experience gratitude, interest, love and other positive emotions in the midst of the emotional turmoil caused by the terrorist attacks of September 11 showed less depressive symptoms than others (Fredrickson et al., 2003). In conclusion, based on the findings and explanations of the research described above, emotion regulation strategies are considered as an important variable that predicts positive affect in the current study.

Relationship between Negative Emotions and Emotional Regulation Strategies- its impact on Anxiety and Personality:

Negative emotions are also one of the psychological factors that affect the mental health of individuals. Negative emotions are generally accompanied by unpleasant situations such as unhappiness, discontent and unpleasantness (Ghorbani et al., 2020; Spindler et al., 2009). In the literature, there are some research results showing that negative emotions such as anger, hate, guilt and fear are associated with many mental disorders. In the review by McLean and Foa (2017), the relationships between post-traumatic stress disorder, negative emotions, and emotional regulation strategies were investigated. It has been observed that there is a significant relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder and negative emotions such as shame, guilt, anger and disgust and the problems in effective regulation of these emotions. It has been found that such negative emotions and difficulties with emotional regulation strategies are also associated with the severity of post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from various types of trauma. In another study (Heinzen et al., 2011), the relationship between the psychopathic characteristics of 104 young offenders, the degree of their self-reported emotional problems and emotional regulation strategies was investigated. It was concluded that there is a positive and significant relationship between the participants' total psychopathy scores and incompatible emotional regulation strategies. Although psychopathic characteristics are associated with negative emotions such as high levels of anger, anxiety, and sadness (Danziger et al., 2009; Garofalo et al., 2020), no significant relationship was found between total psychopathy scores and emotional symptoms. Recent research findings provide evidence that mood disorders resulting from negative emotions are related to problems with emotional regulation strategies (Casey et al., 2013; Garofalo et al., 2020; Kosson et al., 2018; Vitale et al., 2018).

Conclusion:

In the process of emotional regulation, systems such as attention, information and physiological reactions that give rise to emotions can direct the strategies to be utilized (Koole, 2009). In general, all kinds of stimulant emotion that can create a change in the mood of individuals can affect emotional regulation strategies. As such, many different emotional regulation strategies may be needed when managing emotional life (Koole et al., 2011). In a study in which a cognitive load was a stimulant, it was found that mental control of mood can have ironic effects when the mind is preoccupied with other things (Wegner et al., 1993). While the participants who tried to regulate emotions without having a cognitive load were successful, those who tried to regulate their emotions while keeping a nine-digit number in their memory could not achieve sufficient success in this regard. The participants having a cognitive load also passed into a mood opposite of what they intended to create. This situation can be regarded as an example showing that individuals' emotional regulation strategies may sometimes fail, and they can display unwanted emotions no matter how much they try to avoid them (Koole, 2009). In the study conducted by Chiu et al. (2020), the relationship between anxiety and depressive symptoms of university students and their ability to regulate negative emotions and maintain positive emotions was investigated. As a result of the study, it was found that participants who used strategies to regulate negative emotions less had higher levels of depressive symptoms than those who were more successful in using these strategies. It was observed that the participants with higher levels of depressive symptoms tended to exhibit positive and negative emotions as two separate poles. This indicates that a decrease in negative emotions is equivalent to an increase in positive emotions. In addition, according to Koole (2009), individuals try to redirect the normal flow of their emotions in the process of emotional regulation. If individuals can reasonably handle short or long-term goals with emotion regulation strategies, they can be successful in life (Gross & Jazaieri, 2014). In the process of emotional regulation, positive and negative emotions can be increased, decreased or maintained (Gross, 1999). In conclusion, based on the research findings and theoretical explanations mentioned above, it is assumed that emotion regulation strategies may have a mediator effect between negative affect and positive affect.

Emotions are related to many of our basic needs and also a communication system that allows us to express our intentions (Ekman & Friesen, 2003; Kanade et al., 2000). Emotions are thought to be an evolved and innate adaptive system to allow humans to survive and thrive. Emotions are associated with many basic needs of individuals (Frijda, 1986). Emotions provide rapid stimulation in important situations that may threaten the health of the person. The knowledge of what is good and what is bad for a person can be obtained through emotions by evaluating whether the needs are met or not. It is also their emotions that prepare people to act in order to meet their needs (Greenberg, 2002; Le Doux, 1996). In addition, emotions are the most important elements giving direction to individuals. In crisis situations that affect the majority of the society such as war, natural disaster and epidemic, positive emotions has vital importance to protect individuals' mental health and increase their well-being because individuals who experience positive emotions have a high level of commitment to life (Spindler et al., 2009). It was also found that these individuals show fewer depressive symptoms during a crisis period (Fredrickson et al., 2003).

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