

Results of a Study to Increase Savoring the Moment: Differential Impact on Positive and Negative Outcomes

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Abstract Positive psychology has been increasingly moving towards testing interventions to increase positive outcomes and decrease negative outcomes. One of these possible interventions involves increasing savoring the moment. During savoring the moment, one focuses on positive events while they occur to increase, intensify, or prolong positive emotions in the present. This study tested a group savoring the moment intervention to increase positive outcomes and decrease negative outcomes over 2 weeks. The sample consisted of 193 undergraduate students who completed both sessions (94 intervention and 99 control condition). The intervention group experienced significant decreases in self-reported depressive symptoms and negative affect when compared to the control group. However, positive affect did not differ between the groups. Clinical and research implications are explored.

Keywords Savoring · Savoring the moment · Depression · Negative affect · Positive affect · Intervention

1 Introduction

Since the emergence of positive psychology, the field has quickly gained momentum by exploring specific constructs such as virtues and character strengths (Peterson and Seligman 2004) and resilience (Fredrickson et al. 2003). In addition, it has begun to explore means of increasing positive outcomes and decreasing distress. Examples include writing about past positive events (Marlo and Wagner 1999), expressing gratitude (Emmons and McCullough 2003), using signature strengths in new ways (Seligman et al. 2005), and counting kind behaviors (Otake et al. 2006). Another of these constructs related to positive outcomes, and the focus of this study, was labeled “savoring” by Bryant (1989, 2003). This study takes an initial step towards examining the effectiveness of an intervention

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designed to increase a component of savoring (savoring the moment) in order to increase positive outcomes and decrease distress.

Savoring has been defined as a propensity to focus on and enjoy past, current, and future positive events. This trait, which varies from person to person (Bryant 1989), is seen as a type of perceived control over positive emotions, where one generates, intensifies, or prolongs enjoyment of events by one's own volition. Bryant explored three components of savoring: savoring through anticipation, savoring through reminiscing, and savoring the moment (the focus of this study) (Bryant 2003).

Savoring through anticipation is seen as looking forward to future positive events so that positive feelings are generated in the present. Savoring through reminiscing occurs after a positive event has taken place and a person looks back on it in order to generate positive emotions. Finally, savoring the moment occurs during a positive event, where one intensifies or prolongs the positive feelings associated with the event through specific thoughts or behaviors (Bryant 2003).

Bryant and Veroff (2007) further elaborated on this topic by discussing 10 possible ways of facilitating or enhancing savoring. They include behavioral (e.g., expressing positive emotions through behaviors such as laughing and smiling), interpersonal (e.g., sharing the experience with others), and cognitive strategies (e.g., memory building by actively storing portions of the experience for future recall). Different ways of savoring were found to have differential effects on positive outcomes (Quoidbach et al. 2010). For example, focusing attention on the present moment and engaging in positive rumination were associated with higher levels of positive affect, while telling others about positive events was associated with higher levels of satisfaction with life.

Savoring and savoring the moment are potentially valuable constructs within positive psychology because of their theoretical similarities with other well-studied constructs in the field that have been associated with positive outcomes, including mindfulness and emotional intelligence. Mindfulness has been defined as consciously attending to one's moment to moment experiences (Shapiro et al. 2006) and attending to and awareness of current experience or present reality (Brown and Ryan 2003). Mindfulness has been related to emotional well-being (Brown and Ryan 2003; Chang et al. 2004) and decreased depressive symptoms (Specia et al. 2000). Thus, both mindfulness and savoring the moment focus on current experiences. However, one important distinction is that, in savoring the moment, attention is restricted to positive emotions, while in mindfulness the focus can be on any experience, emotion, or thought, be them positive, negative, or neutral. Also, the goal of savoring the moment is to enhance or prolong positive emotions, while in mindfulness the focus is on generally attending and experiencing and not on intensifying affect.

Emotional intelligence has been defined as "the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer et al. 2004). This definition evidences significant overlap with the concept of savoring the moment, as they both entail emotional awareness as well as generation and regulation of emotions. Savoring can be best conceptualized as a specific ability and trait that falls within the broader spectrum of emotional intelligence. Savoring the moment deals with positive emotions, whereas emotional intelligence deals with one's awareness of both negative and positive emotions. Of note, emotional intelligence has been positively associated with happiness (Chamorro-Premuzic et al. 2007) as well as positive affect and satisfaction with life (Landa et al. 2006).

Given that savoring the moment shares much in common with established positive psychology constructs, it is no surprise that savoring and savoring the moment have been

associated with positive outcomes. For example, the general construct of savoring has been positively associated with present happiness, percent of time happy, extraversion, optimism, and self-esteem and has been negatively associated with depression, neuroticism, and hopelessness (Bryant 2003). Related research found that individuals generally try to savor positive events and that the action of savoring is associated with extraversion, which, in turn, is associated with subjective well-being and positive affect (Wood et al. 2003).

When specifically examining savoring the moment, it was found to be positively associated with satisfaction with life, subjective happiness, and positive affect (Hurley and Kwon 2007). Further, when compared to savoring through anticipation or reminiscing, savoring the moment was found to be more strongly related to positive outcomes such as higher levels of present happiness, self-esteem, and percent of time happy, as well as lower levels of depression (Bryant 2003). Similar results were found in an unpublished thesis examining differential outcomes between savoring the moment, reminiscing, and anticipation (Hurley 2007). Thus, savoring the moment in isolation is an important factor associated with positive outcomes and reduced distress and merits further research into enhancing this construct. Further, given that savoring is a more specific construct compared to mindfulness and emotional intelligence, it lends itself well to a brief intervention that teaches individuals specific strategies for enhancing their ability to savor the moment.

There have been attempts to move beyond generally exploring savoring the moment to testing specific savoring the moment interventions. Kurtz (2008) influenced the temporal awareness of undergraduate students' graduation date, to either highlight its nearness or how long of a time it was until graduation. Individuals who were primed to recognize the scarcity of time prior to graduation experienced increases in subjective happiness. The author posited that by highlighting the scarcity of an event, one can enhance enjoyment of it in the present. Giuliani et al. (2008) encouraged use of a cognitive reappraisal technique to attempt to enhance current levels of amusement while watching funny videos. When participants used this technique, they had higher levels of subjective amusement, higher levels of objective amusement (i.e., more smiles and laughs), and more physiological arousal when compared to individuals that were told to either decrease their amusement or to watch the videos passively.

While the previous two studies attempted to enhance one single way of savoring the moment (i.e., temporal awareness and cognitive reappraisal), another attempted to enhance savoring the moment more generally. Seligman et al. (2006) explored the effects of a combination of various structured positive psychology interventions, one of which involved increasing savoring the moment. To enhance savoring the moment, they encouraged participants to take the time to enjoy something that they would usually hurry through, once a day for a week (allowing for many possible ways of savoring). Individuals who received the amalgamation of positive psychology interventions experienced decreases in depressive symptoms and increases in satisfaction with life and happiness. This suggests that savoring the moment may not only enhance positive emotions, but also decreases negative emotions. A goal of the current study is to examine whether savoring the moment, in isolation, is related to increases in positive outcomes and decreases in negative outcomes, as Seligman et al. (2006) did not examine the unique contributions of the savoring the moment component separate from the other positive psychology interventions that were included.

Taken as a whole, the research exploring the construct of savoring the moment has gained momentum, but it is still in its early stages. An important research need in this area is to further develop ways of enhancing individuals' general ability to savor the moment, without imposing restrictions about using particular ways of savoring. While two studies have increased specific ways of savoring the moment and explored their impact on positive outcomes (Giuliani et al. 2008; Kurtz 2008), neither of them determined how savoring the

moment may also decrease negative outcomes. Assessment of decreases in negative outcomes is an area ripe for exploration, given savoring the moment's similarity to mindfulness, which has been associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms and distress (Shapiro et al. 2005; Speca et al. 2000).

To attempt to address these limitations, the current short-term longitudinal study used suggestions and interventions by Bryant and Veroff (2007) and Seligman et al. (2006) to create a group intervention to attempt to increase multiple ways of savoring the moment. The intervention incorporated components of psychoeducation, descriptions of the 10 ways of savoring as described by Bryant and Veroff (2007), and activities to better understand how savoring the moment could relate to the participants' lives as well as creation of a plan to savor the moment for 2 weeks. It was hypothesized that the participants in the intervention condition would experience increases in positive affect as well as decreases in negative affect and depressive symptoms when compared to a control group.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were recruited from psychology courses at a large northwestern university. Data were collected at two time periods. The final sample included 315 participants (151 intervention and 164 control) at Time 1 and 193 participants (94 intervention and 99 control) at Time 2. The majority of the participants were female (69%) with the mean age being 19.48 ($SD = 2.06$). Most of the participants self-identified as Caucasian (78.1%), 9.8% as Asian, 5.4% as Latino/a, 2.2% as African American, 1.6% as Native American, 2.2% as Other, and .6% did not indicate their ethnicity.

2.2 Procedure

Similar to past research examining changes in positive outcomes over a short time period (16 and 14 days separation, respectively in Emmons and McCullough 2003; Hurley and Kwon 2007), the two testing sessions were separated by 14 days to examine the efficacy of the intervention on dependent variables from Time 1 to Time 2. During the Time 1 session, each group of participants was randomly assigned to either the intervention or control conditions. In both conditions, participants first completed questionnaires examining demographics, positive affect (PANAS-X Positive Affect scale), negative affect (PANAS-X Negative Affect scale), and depressive symptoms (Beck Depression Inventory II). After completion of the questionnaires, all participants were informed that they were participating in research examining changes in positive outcomes and distress over time and that they would be returning in 2 weeks to complete more questionnaires.

At this point, the control participants were thanked and dismissed. The intervention participants listened to a 20 min audio recording created by one of the authors and followed along with provided written materials that described savoring the moment. The recording and written information initially provided psychoeducation about the positive psychology movement and savoring the moment along with descriptions of the ways of savoring (Bryant and Veroff 2007). Each of these ways of savoring was also accompanied by an example that was relevant to university students (e.g., congratulating themselves after receiving a good grade on a test, expressing positive emotions through laughter and smiling while enjoying time well spent with friends, etc.).

The intervention participants were then asked to recall three positive events that happened to them during the past week, to briefly write down these events, and to list possible ways they could have savored these events while they occurred. The purpose of this component of the intervention was to enable the participants to recognize some of the positive events that happen to them and to explore ways that they could savor similar events in the future. They were told to use any of the savoring the moment strategies discussed or their own personalized savoring the moment strategies to savor naturally occurring positive events over the next 2 weeks.

Finally, the intervention participants were given a savoring log to keep track of the number of times they savored events during each day of the 2 weeks. The purpose of this log was to remind participants to savor positive events. It also included a list of the ways of savoring as a prompt for these strategies. To further facilitate the use of the savoring techniques, intervention participants were sent daily e-mails that included both reminders to savor the moment and tips regarding ways of savoring.

During the Time 2 session, all participants completed questionnaires reassessing positive outcomes (PANAS-X Positive Affect scale) and negative outcomes (Beck Depression Inventory II and PANAS-X Negative Affect scale).

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule—Expanded Form*

The PANAS-X consists of 60 adjectives, 30 for positive affect and 30 for negative affect (Watson and Clark 1999). Of particular interest were the 10 adjectives that comprise each of the general Positive and Negative Affect scales. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed each adjective described how they felt over the past 2 weeks on a five point scale, with one being *very slightly* and five being *extremely*. For this study, the PANAS-X had a coefficient alpha of .90 for Time 1 and .89 for Time 2 for the Positive Affect scale and .87 for Time 1 and .88 for Time 2 for the Negative Affect scale.

2.3.2 *Beck Depression Inventory II*

The BDI-II is a 21 item inventory that assesses depressive symptoms over the past 2 weeks (Beck et al. 1996). Items are rated on a four point scale with higher scores being associated with more depressive features. The BDI-II has been shown to be reliable and valid (Dozois et al. 1998). The internal consistency of participants' answers for this study was .87 at Time 1 and .91 at Time 2. In this study, item number 9, which assessed suicidality, was omitted. This was due to the fact that if a participant endorsed significant suicidal ideation, a prompt and thorough suicide assessment could not take place. However, all researchers had contact information for on-campus counseling services and participants were informed that they could access this counseling resource if they believed it was necessary.

3 Results

See Table 1 for intercorrelations among the dependent variables at Time 1 and Time 2. No significant differences existed between the individuals who completed only the first session and those who completed both sessions on two of the three dependent measures (negative

Table 1 Intercorrelations between dependent variables for participants who completed both sessions

Variable	2. Positive affect T2	3. Negative affect T1	4. Negative affect T2	5. BDI T1	6. BDI T2
1. Positive affect T1	.62*	-.22*	-.19*	-.47*	-.36*
2. Positive affect T2		-.20*	-.39*	-.30*	-.55*
3. Negative affect T1			.66*	.74*	.49*
4. Negative affect T2				.57*	.73*
5. BDI T1					.63*

Positive affect T1 and T2 = PANAS-X positive affect scale at time 1 and time 2, negative affect T1 and T2 = PANAS-X negative affect scale at time 1 and time 2, BDI T1 and T2 = Beck depression inventory-II at time 1 and time 2

* $p < .01$

affect [$t(313) = -.74$, ns] and depressive symptoms [$t(313) = -.35$, ns]. There was a significant difference on positive affect [$t(313) = 2.24$, $p < .05$], whereby those who finished only one session had a significantly higher score on positive affect ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .78$) than those who finished both sessions ($M = 3.24$, $SD = .74$). No significant differences at Time 1 existed between the control and intervention participants on any of the dependent measures of positive affect [$t(313) = .93$, ns], negative affect [$t(313) = .29$, ns], or depressive symptoms [$t(313) = 1.31$, ns].

Three ANCOVA models were used to investigate the effects of the savoring the moment intervention on the dependent variables of positive affect (PANAS-X Positive Affect scale), negative affect (PANAS-X Negative Affect scale), and depressive symptoms (BDI-II). Assumption testing for the ANCOVAs was completed and there were no violations, other than non-normal distributions for the dependent measures. However, given that ANOCVA is robust to this violation with moderate numbers of participants (Cohen et al. 2003), the non-normal distributions did not prohibit use of these analyses.

In each of the ANCOVAs the dependent measure was Time 2 levels of the measure, the condition of the participants was the fixed factor, and the Time 1 levels of the measure was entered as the covariate. As predicted, the results indicate (see Table 2) that those individuals in the intervention group had significantly lower scores on negative affect [$F(1,190) = 4.290$, $p < .05$, $d = .29$] and depressive symptoms [$F(1,190) = 3.891$, $p < .05$, $d = .41$] when compared to the participants in the control condition. Contrary to the hypothesis of the intervention increasing positive affect, there was no significant difference between the groups on positive affect [$F(1,190) = 2.322$, ns, $d = .14$].

It should be noted that mean values of the BDI-II for both the intervention group and control group were similar to values found in non-clinical samples of university students (i.e., $M = 8.5$, $SD = 8.3$ from Aldea et al. 2009 and $M = 11.03$, $SD = 8.17$ from Storch et al. 2004). Similarly, affect scores from the PANAS-X for this study were similar to other undergraduate samples with a similar time frame of reference (i.e., positive affect $M = 32.6$, $SD = 7.1$ and negative affect $M = 20.2$, $SD = 7.2$ from Watson and Clark 1999).

4 Discussion

Overall, the hypotheses regarding the intervention to increase savoring the moment were partially supported. It was predicted that those individuals in the intervention condition

Table 2 Time 2 dependent measure scores for intervention and control groups and ANCOVA results

Group and measure	Time 1		Time 2		Analyses		Effect size between groups at time 2 <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	
Positive affect							
Intervention	32.18	7.10	33.20	6.60	2.32	1,190	.14
Control	32.52	7.69	32.19	7.56			
Negative affect							
Intervention	20.25	7.18	17.33	6.49	4.29*	1,190	.29
Control	21.06	8.09	19.40	7.58			
BDI							
Intervention	8.77	6.92	6.47	6.73	3.89*	1,190	.41
Control	10.66	6.11	9.17	6.56			

Positive affect T1 and T2 = PANAS-X positive affect scale at time 1 and 2, negative affect T1 and T2 = PANAS-X negative affect scale at time 1 and time 2, BDI T1 and T2 = Beck depression inventory-II at time 1 and time 2

* $p < .05$

would have significantly higher levels of positive affect and significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms and negative affect when compared to individuals in the control group. While the intervention group did have significantly lower levels of negative affect and depressive symptoms, there was no significant difference between the two groups on positive affect.

This study is a step forward for research involving the construct of savoring the moment and its utility in decreasing negative emotions. While other intervention studies have explored the impact of enhancing specific ways of savoring and their impact on positive outcomes (Giuliani et al. 2008; Kurtz 2008), they did not examine the impact of the savoring the moment on ameliorating negative emotions. In the one study that did examine the impact of savoring the moment on positive outcomes and distress, the authors incorporated a number of other interventions (Seligman et al. 2006). As a result, it was impossible to determine which interventions were beneficial. Thus, the present study is the first to indicate that a savoring the moment intervention, in isolation, can have beneficial effects on decreasing negative emotions.

Additionally of interest was that the effect size of the intervention at Time 2 for depressive symptoms approached a medium size. This is striking, given that this was a single intervention delivered in a group setting. Perhaps this intervention could be even more powerful when applied in a personalized manner in an individual setting.

More generally, what could be the reason for the differential outcomes between the measures assessing negative outcomes (negative affect and depressive symptoms) and those assessing positive outcomes (positive affect)? This is a particularly salient question given that two previous studies found that specific savoring the moment strategies enhanced positive outcomes (Kurtz 2008; Giuliani et al. 2008).

Interestingly, a similar pattern was found in a study by Seligman et al. (2005) that examined the effects of five positive psychology interventions on both levels of happiness and depressive symptoms. Two of the interventions (using signature strengths in new ways and writing about three good things each day) decreased depressive symptoms immediately after the week long intervention. These interventions seemed to have continued effects, as

the participants' depressive symptoms were significantly lower than the placebo group at 1 week, 1, 3, and 6 months after the intervention. However, these interventions did not affect levels of happiness immediately after the intervention and at 1 week post-intervention. It was not until the 1 month follow-up that the intervention group had significantly higher levels of happiness than the placebo group. These differences persisted at 3 and 6 months post-intervention.

As for possible explanations of this pattern, Seligman et al. (2005) found that many of the individuals continued to use the interventions beyond the 1 week period that was required for the study. The authors posited that it took continued practice for the skills involved in these interventions to develop and affect levels of happiness. It is possible that these interventions were similar to the present study's savoring the moment intervention in this regard. Perhaps increases in positive affect may have been found if assessments continued beyond 2 weeks.

Another possible reason for the differential positive and negative outcomes in this study when comparing the uniformly positive outcomes for Kurtz (2008) and Giuliani et al. (2008) could relate to how Kurtz and Giuliani and colleagues asked participants to enhance savoring the moment through specific ways (i.e., temporal awareness and cognitive reappraisal, respectively), while the present study allowed much more flexibility in enhancing ways of savoring the moment. As indicated Quoidbach et al. (2010), differing ways of savoring have differential impacts on outcome measures. Perhaps participants in the current study used types of savoring the moment that had a greater impact on negative affect and depressive symptoms than on positive affect. For example, avoidance of kill-joy thinking (e.g., avoiding thoughts of how a positive event could be even better) may result in more significant decreases in negative affect and depressive symptoms than increases in positive affect.

While this study provides preliminary indications that an intervention to increase savoring the moment may have a beneficial impact, it needs to be replicated and extended upon. A main drawback of the study was the differential amount of contact between the control group and intervention group during the 2 weeks (e.g., intervention, emails, and savoring log for the intervention group). A follow-up study incorporating another control group that would receive a similar amount of contact but with a neutral focus (e.g., focusing on neutral events) would be helpful in further exploring the preliminary findings from this study. Additionally, a longer time frame for multiple follow-up assessments could help establish if the effects of the intervention on depressive symptoms and negative affect are long lasting. This longer time frame could elucidate differential effects of the intervention on positive and negative outcomes over time as well.

Other areas that should be addressed with future research include exploring why this intervention, which is intended to enhance positive emotions, did not do so. It would be important to explore possible moderating factors that may impact savoring the moment, such as participants' level of motivation, the ways that they savor, the quality of savoring, and personality variables. Finally, this study only examined affectively focused outcomes (i.e., positive/negative affect and depressive symptoms). Future studies should explore not only affective but cognitive outcomes for well-being, as these cognitive components are important aspects of well-being (Pavot and Diener 2004).

In conclusion, one of the most exciting possibilities from this study is the potential for a savoring the moment intervention to aid individuals who are experiencing clinical levels of depressive symptoms. As this study used a sample of undergraduate students who were not chosen for high levels of initial depressive symptoms, replication of this study with a

clinically depressed sample could establish if this intervention may decrease depressive symptoms and distress in this population.

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