

Module 1.4: Positive emotions

- Seligman (2002) in his book Authentic Happiness classifies positive emotions into three categories:

1. Those associated with the **past** such as satisfaction, contentment etc.
2. Those associated with **present** such as momentary pleasures and more enduring gratifications. Gratifications involve states of absorption that result from engagement in activities in which the unique signature strengths are utilized.
3. Those associated with **future** such as optimism, and hope.



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Fredrickson's The Broaden-and-Build theory of Positive emotions

- Positive emotion *broaden* momentary thought-action repertoires that is widen the array of the thoughts & actions that come to mind & *build* their enduring personal resources.

Broadening of Thought-Action Repertoires

- **Joy** creates urge to play, push limits & be creative behaviourally, artistically as well as intellectually
- **Interest** creates urge to explore, take in new information & experiences & expand the self in the process
- **Contentment** creates urge to seat back & savour (enjoy fully) current life circumstances & integrate them into new views of self & of the world
- **Love** (as blend of joy, interest, contentment experienced within context of safe-close relationships) creates recurring cycles of urges to play with, explore, & savour our loved ones.

These various thought-action tendencies -to play, to explore, or to savour & integrate-each represents ways that positive emotions broaden habitual modes of thinking or acting



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Building enduring personal resources.

- **Broadening of thought-action repertoire leads to building enduring personal resources.**
 - **Play** (prompted by Joy) in childhood build enduring physical resources (physical stamina) & social (team work) & intellectual resources.
 - **Exploration** (prompted by interest) creates knowledge & intellectual complexity.
 - **Savouring** (prompted by contentment) produces self-insight & alters world views.
- **Thus, each of these phenomenologically distinct positive emotions shares the features of augmenting an individual's personal resources, ranging from physical & social resources, to intellectual & psychological resources.**



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- The personal resources accrued during states of positive emotions are durable, though the emotional states that led to their acquisition were transient.
- Thus, incidental effects of experiencing positive emotion leads to an increase in one's personal resources helping people transform themselves-making them more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially interested & healthy individuals.
- Positive emotions broaden the scope of attention, cognition, & action, & that they build physical, intellectual, & social resources.

Studies Supporting Broden & Build Theory:

1. Positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires:

- In contrast to negative emotions, positive emotions open up people's thinking to a wider array of possible actions. Because we are not so self-focused, more options & ways of thinking about a situation come to mind when we are content or happy than when we are upset.
- People experiencing positive affect show patterns of thought that are notably unusual, flexible, integrative, open to information & efficient.
- They also show increased preference for variety & accept broader array of behavioural options.
- Positive affect produces a 'broad, flexible cognitive organization & ability to integrate diverse material.
- Positive emotions widen the attention in contrast to negative emotions that narrows the attention.



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Experiment:

- Participants watched emotionally charged film clips. The clips induced one of four emotions: joy, contentment, anger, or fear (experimental condition)
- A neutral, non-emotional clip served as a control condition.
- After watching the film clip, participants were asked to think of a situation that created feelings similar to those aroused by the film clip. And were asked to list all the things they would like to do right now (i.e. actions came to their mind).

Results:

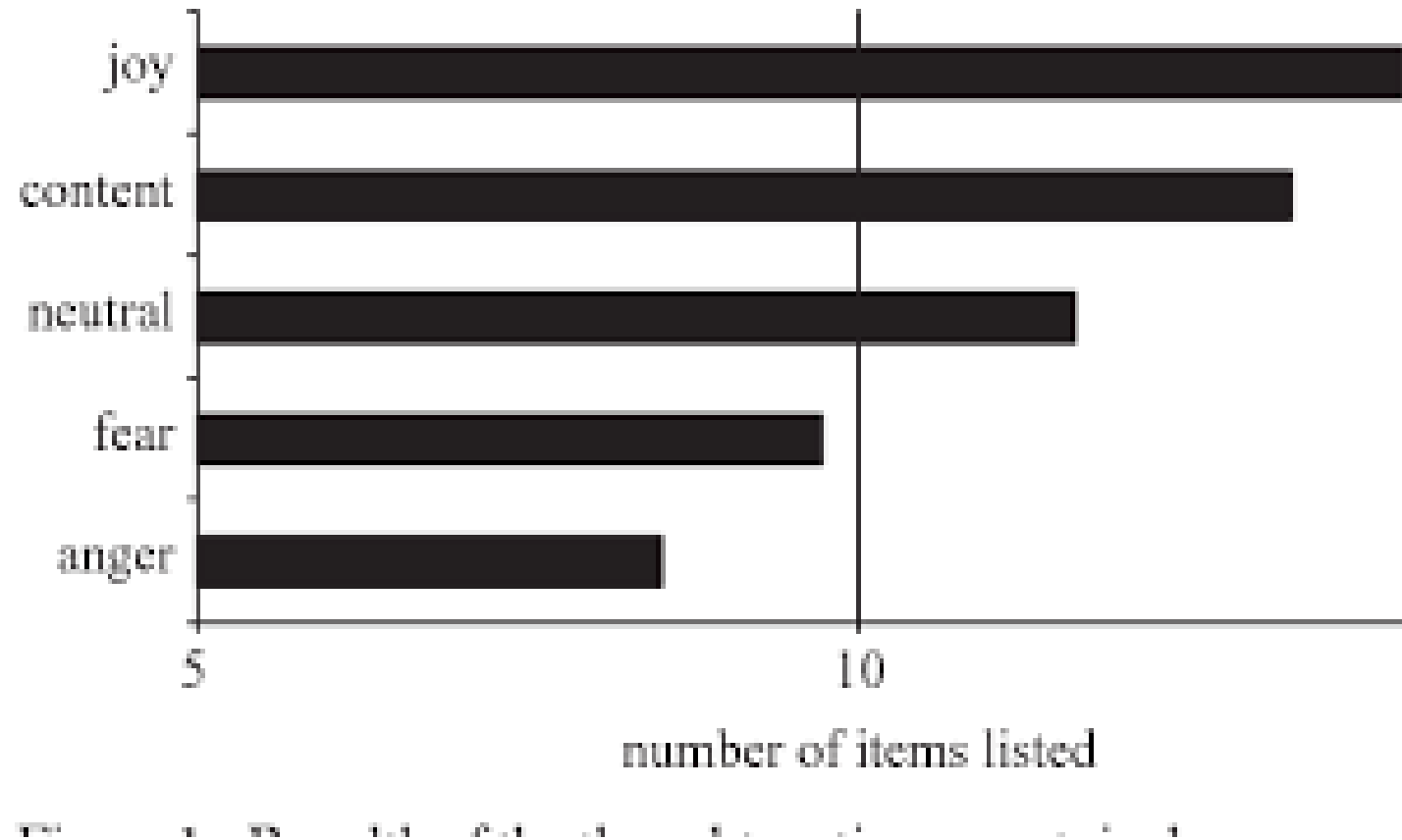
- (a) Participants in **Joy & Contentment** conditions described **more** things they would like to do right then, than people in anger or fear conditions.
- (b) Participants in **Anger & Fear** conditions experienced fewer desirable actions than participants in neutral (control) condition.



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2. Positive emotions undo lingering Negative emotions:

- Positive emotions can function as efficient antidotes for lingering effect of negative emotions. That is positive emotions can '*undo*' effect of negative emotions.
- Positive & negative emotions seem incompatible with each other (if one is there, other is not). For e.g. being anxious & relaxed not possible at the same time.
- By broadening a person's momentary thought-action repertoire, a positive emotion may loosen the hold that a negative emotion has gained on that person's mind & body by dismantling/undoing the preparation for a specific action (e.g. undoing 'running away' action by replacing fear with relaxation)



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Study: Fredrickson examined the cardiovascular consequences of negative & positive emotions. Study was designed to know whether positive emotions reduce increased cardiovascular activity (more blood flow, palpitations, etc.) caused by negative emotions.

- Participants in study were asked to prepare a speech on describing **‘why you are a good friend’** in a minute. The speech is to be given in front of a live audience & will be videotaped, they were told. This made participants anxious & nervous (verified by measuring of heart rate & BP).
- After preparing for speech, they were assigned to one of four film conditions:



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- (1) One group watched short film that was emotionally neutral,
- (2) a second group saw a film selected to induce mild joy,
- (3) a third group saw film selected to produce mild contentment, and
- (4) a fourth group saw a film to evoke sadness.

Then, researchers measured how much time it took students to return to baseline levels of cardiovascular activity.

Results: as predicted students in the JOY & CONTENTMENT film conditions returned to baseline significantly faster than those in neutral or sad conditions. Participants in ‘Sad condition’ took longest time.

3. Positive emotions fuel psychological Resiliency:

- Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stressful events quickly & efficiently.
- Positive emotions may increase our resilience & ability to cope by offsetting the effects of negative emotions caused by stressful experience.

➤ **Study:** Fredrickson examined relationship between resilience & positive emotions.

(1) She measured students self-reported resilience using a scale to assess 'how strong & confident people feel when facing challenge & stress.'

(2) 'Time pressured speech preparation task' (discussed earlier) was used to create 'anxiety & stress' in participants.



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Results:

- Students showing high levels of resilience tended to report more positive emotions.
- They also returned to base level cardiovascular functioning faster.
- Resilient students seem (knowingly or unknowingly) to use positive emotions to offset negative emotions. Along side their high anxiety they also experienced levels of happiness & interest.
- Cultivating positive emotions in times of stress may be one source of their resilience & effective coping.
- **Thus, positive emotions may fuel psychological resilience.**



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4. Positive emotions build personal resources & fuel psychological & physical wellbeing:

- Fredrickson proposes that positive emotions may create an upward spiral of wellbeing. That is positive emotions increase optimistic/positive thinking.
- Positive emotions cause more optimism & more optimism intensifies positive emotions & wellbeing.
- Research has shown that positive emotions broaden our outlook, offset negative emotions, enhance our resilience, & improve our emotional well-being.
- A broadened outlook & increased resilience may, in turn, increase the experience of positive emotions.
- Positive emotions may help build our physical resources for fighting diseases, our individual psychological resources for coping with stress, & our social resources (support from others) that are important in dealing with nearly all life challenges.



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