

Positive Emotions and Positive Thinking: A Bridge to Positive Psychology

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Abstract

Psychology—the scientific study of the mind and behavior—is intrinsically tied to how individuals think and feel. Emotions and thoughts form the very foundation of psychological processes, just as air, water, and food are vital for sustaining physical health. In the same way, emotional experiences are essential for cultivating a balanced and healthy personality. The experience of positive emotions—such as joy, love, and contentment—leads to a sense of well-being and happiness. These feelings naturally foster positive thinking, and the relationship is reciprocal: optimistic thoughts also give rise to uplifting emotions. Over time, this dynamic interplay significantly influences an individual's mental framework, or psyche. In essence, the dominant emotional experiences a person undergoes shape the nature of their psychological outlook. At the heart of positive psychology lies a focus on human strengths, fulfillment, well-being, and the potential for flourishing. It seeks to understand and enhance the factors that allow individuals to thrive. Positive psychology is deeply rooted in the cultivation of affirmative emotional states, as these emotions lay the groundwork for mental resilience, inner satisfaction, and personal growth. Emotions, particularly positive ones, are powerful drivers of thought. Together, emotions and thoughts influence not only behavior but the overall functioning of the mind. When individuals experience positive emotions, they enter a state of psychological wellness that transcends mere mood. This mental state has tangible benefits—it enhances cognitive flexibility, strengthens the immune system, and improves cardiovascular and other bodily functions. Consequently, positive emotions contribute not just to emotional and mental health but to physical well-being and life success. This discussion aims to illuminate the strong interconnection between positive emotions, positive thinking, and the broader framework of positive psychology. It highlights how our emotional and cognitive experiences serve as a bridge to psychological flourishing, emphasizing the transformative power of positivity in shaping both mind and life.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Emotions, Positive Thinking.

Introduction

In contemporary society, amidst rapid technological progress and innovation, the study of human psychology assumes paramount importance. Our mental well-being serves as the foundation for a happy and fulfilling life, and positive psychology emerges as a vital discipline in this pursuit. Unlike traditional psychology, which often focuses on pathologies and weaknesses, positive psychology directs attention to strengths, life satisfaction, well-being, and the flourishing of individuals. At its core, positive psychology embraces a scientific approach to understanding human emotions and behavior, emphasizing positivity over negativity. It

strives to uplift and enrich lives by exploring what is fulfilling and empowering rather than depleting and consuming. By accentuating themes such as gratitude, joy, resilience, compassion, and love, positive psychology fosters a holistic view of well-being.

Central to this field is the PERMA model, articulated by Martin Seligman, which delineates the essential components of happiness and well-being: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This framework underscores that true well-being encompasses not only the presence of positive emotions but also meaningful engagement, satisfying relationships, a sense of purpose, and personal accomplishments. Moreover, positive psychology acknowledges the significance of all emotions in human experience, valuing both positive and negative feelings as integral to our growth and understanding. It does not seek to disregard or diminish the validity of negative emotions but rather aims to balance our perspective, ensuring that we appreciate the richness and complexity of human emotions.

In essence, positive psychology represents a transformative approach to enhancing individual happiness and overall life satisfaction. By promoting a mindset that embraces strengths and positivity, it empowers individuals to cultivate lives that are not only happier but also more meaningful and fulfilling. This paradigm shift underscores the profound impact that our psychological well-being has on every aspect of our lives in today's technologically advanced world.

Emotions

Emotions are complex psychological phenomena that involve physiological, behavioural, and cognitive components. Psychologically, emotions are complex psychological and physiological responses to internal and external stimuli that influence our subjective experiences, thoughts, behaviors, and physiological arousal.

They are often triggered by events or situations, and they can have a significant impact on our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. There are many different theories about the nature of emotions. One of the most influential theories is the *James-Lange theory (1885-85)*, which states that emotions are caused by physiological changes in the body. For example, when we feel fear, our heart rate and breathing increase, and our muscles tense up. These physiological changes then lead to the subjective experience of fear. Emotions are what make us stay connected with our humane side. Emotions are the state of mind and/or the reactions resulting from one or other stimuli. Emotions are subjective and differ from person to person; every person experiences them differently and uniquely. From the reason for triggering a particular

emotion to the extent of the emotion being felt and the reaction to the emotion displayed, it is all highly individualistic. Emotions are complex. They are a complex response to stimuli with a tendency to lean towards the positive or the negative. For instance, rage is conceived to be the more intense type of anger, whereas annoyance is conceived to be a milder type of anger; in a similar way, when happiness and trust interplay, it leads to the creation of an emotion called love. Emotions cannot be universally classified in terms of being merely negative and positive because their classification is individualistic; it depends upon who is experiencing them and under what circumstances. For example, a person can get overwhelmed by the emotion of anxiety while appearing for a simple doctor visit and body test. In contrast, another person might be calm and hopeful for the same. Variations based on an individual's experiences, the emotions have been divided into three major subtypes: negative, positive, and neutral. However, it is important to understand that the types of emotions are different for every individual; meaning that anger might not be perceived as simply a negative emotion by certain people, but rather is conceived as the driving force for motivation, hence making it a healthy emotion. However, it is also essential to understand that all emotions are important to experience a healthy functioning life.

Gale Researcher Guide, Klineburger (2018) suggested that an individual's emotions are driven by a group of structures inside the brain called the Limbic System. Our emotional state is stimulated by certain specific chemicals called hormones that are released by the Limbic System.

The emotions we experience are heavily influenced by the types of chemicals or hormones our bodies release. For example, oxytocin—often referred to as the "love hormone"—plays a vital role in generating feelings of attachment, affection, and romantic love. Emotions are not only indicators of our mental and emotional state but also exert significant influence on various bodily functions. Take fear as an example. When a person feels afraid, the sympathetic nervous system is activated as part of the body's fight-or-flight response. This leads to physiological changes such as dilated pupils, a rapid heartbeat, palpitations, and sudden sweating. These responses prepare the body to react quickly to perceived threats. However, the connection between the body and emotions is bidirectional—just as emotions can alter the body, physical states can also shape how we feel.

For instance, if a person is experiencing a racing heart and profuse sweating—common symptoms of anxiety or panic—they can consciously regulate their breathing and focus on calming thoughts. This intentional act can stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system,

which counteracts the stress response by slowing the heart rate and promoting relaxation. Cross-cultural research suggests that emotions manifest uniquely in the body and that each emotion is associated with specific physiological patterns. This means that our bodies may serve as expressive maps for our emotional states. Studies have shown that hormones like oxytocin not only foster emotional connections but also enhance trust, empathy, and ethical behavior. Physical gestures such as hugging or affectionate touch can significantly elevate emotional well-being, both for the person giving and the one receiving (*Barraza & Zak, 2009*). Psychologists have even proposed that each emotion leaves a distinct "blueprint" or imprint on the body. These physical-emotional associations reveal that the relationship between emotions and bodily sensations is highly intricate and deeply interconnected, making it a rich and evolving area of exploration within psychological science.

Emotions are not just abstract mental states; they are intimately connected to bodily responses and sensations. When we experience different emotions, our bodies react in distinct ways, giving rise to a range of physiological sensations. The connection between emotions and body sensations is bidirectional. Just as emotions can give rise to bodily responses, the reverse is also true. By deliberately changing our bodily state, such as adopting a relaxed posture, engaging in deep breathing exercises, or engaging in physical activities, we can influence our emotional state. It's important to note that while there are general patterns of bodily responses associated with different emotions, individuals may experience variations in how emotions manifest in their bodies. Additionally, cultural and individual differences can influence the way emotions and body sensations are perceived and expressed. For instance, happiness or joy is often accompanied by a set of bodily sensations. It can manifest as lightness or warmth in the chest, a feeling of relaxation and ease, and even a smile or laughter. The experience of love may be associated with a fluttering sensation in the heart, a warmth spreading through the body, or a sense of connection and openness. Whereas, when confronted with a threat, the body undergoes various changes in response to the emotion of fear. The heart rate increases, breathing becomes rapid and shallow, muscles tense up, and there may be a heightened sense of alertness or readiness to flee. These bodily sensations are part of the fight-or-flight response, an evolutionary mechanism that prepares the body to respond to potential danger.

Types of Emotions

- **The Positive Emotions:** Positive emotions refer to a range of pleasant and uplifting emotional experiences that contribute to overall well-being and life satisfaction. These emotions are generally associated with positive thoughts, behaviours, and physiological

responses. Positive emotions have numerous benefits for individuals. They contribute to improved mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. They enhance resilience, helping individuals cope with adversity and bounce back from challenging situations. Positive emotions also foster better relationships and social connections, as they promote empathy, kindness, and positive interactions with others. Furthermore, positive emotions have a profound impact on physical health. They can boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases. Research suggests that positive emotions can promote longevity and overall physical well-being. Positive emotions also play a crucial role in cognitive functioning. They enhance creativity, problem-solving abilities, and cognitive flexibility. When we experience positive emotions, our thinking becomes more flexible, open, and optimistic. This positive mindset helps us approach tasks with greater motivation and perseverance, leading to improved performance and achievement. Some of the most common examples of positive emotions are Joy, Pride, Motivation, Hope, Love, Gratitude, Resilience, Humility, Amusement, Inspiration, etc.

- **The Negative emotions:** Negative emotions refer to a range of unpleasant and distressing emotional experiences that can have a detrimental impact on an individual's well-being. These emotions are generally associated with negative thoughts, behaviours, and physiological responses. Amongst multiple reasons for the negative emotions, some are the unmet needs of an individual, insufficient coping abilities, etc. Commonly felt negative emotions are fear, anger, sadness, annoyance, loneliness, disgust, rage, melancholy, shame, anxiety, etc. Negative emotions can lead to a detrimental effect on physical health in addition to psychological distress, impaired cognitive functioning, strained relationships, and reduced well-being.
- **The Neutral emotions:** Neutral emotions are called the “adukkhamasukha”, translating into something that is neither painful nor pleasant; neither positive nor negative in nature. The term "adukkhamasukha" is derived from the Pali language, which is used in Buddhist teachings. It refers to neutral feelings or emotions. In Pali, "adukkha" means neither painful nor unpleasant, while "asukha" means neither joyful nor pleasant. Therefore, "adukkhamasukha" signifies a state of neutrality or being neither happy nor unhappy, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. It represents a middle ground where there is neither a strong positive nor negative emotional experience. These are the emotions that have a neutral reaction and are often characterized by a lack of intensity or strong affective valence. Feeling indifferent (neither happy nor sad), neutrality, apathy, and equanimity are

some examples of having a neutral state of mind. In Buddhism, *adukkhamasukha* is considered to be the ideal state of mind, as it is free from suffering. It refers to the middle part of the spectrum of felt experience. The term *adukkhamasukha* refers to an area between pain and pleasure, an area in the affective neutral tonality which appears to be relatively bland.

There are many ways to cultivate *adukkhamasukha*. One way is to practice mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment. When we practice mindfulness meditation, we learn to let go of our attachments to both positive and negative emotions. This allows us to experience a state of neutrality and peace. Another way to cultivate *adukkhamasukha* is to practice compassion. Compassion is the ability to understand and share the suffering of others. When we practice compassion, we open our hearts to the world and let go of our own pain. This allows us to experience a sense of connection and belonging. *Adukkhamasukha* is not a state of mind that we can always achieve. However, by practising mindfulness meditation and compassion, we can learn to cultivate this state of peace and equanimity more and more in our lives.

Blending of Emotions: Though categorized, emotions still hold the tendency to be combined to form very different emotions, similar to how we combine and mix colours in a colour palette and form completely new and different shades of the colours. The basic emotions of happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, and surprise are known to act as the building blocks. When these basic emotions are experienced together, it is known as emotional blending, they form complex, different, and sometimes even mixed emotions. For example, when anger and disgust come together, they may form rage while when happiness and trust come together, they can form the emotion of love, a person may feel happy and sad at the same time (e.g. graduating from college, leaving home for joining a job, joining a different organization etc), feeling sad and relieved at the same time (e.g. ending a difficult relationship or a job). Emotional blending can be a complex and nuanced experience. It can be difficult to predict how two or more emotions will blend together. However, emotional blending can be a valuable tool for understanding and expressing our emotions. It can also help us to cope with difficult emotions.

Thinking

Thinking, the conscious deed of our brains, is an approach to understanding and making sense of the world around us. As an individual develops, the ability to think rationally and logically

develops naturally. Especially when we interact with society and the people around us, we learn to polish and refine our thoughts, along with providing shape to them. Thinking aids in acknowledging the world and its existence, and attaching a reason to everything that happens around us, helping us eventually to comprehend the difference between good and bad.

Thinking is the exercise of human reason as a means of strengthening the relationship between stimulus and response. Hence, it can be said that thinking is an advanced intellectual process through which we operate and analyze the acquired or existing information. Such operations and analysis occur via abstracting, reasoning, imagining, problem solving, judging, and decision making.

Positive Thinking: The process of thinking is very individualistic in nature. Thoughts influence the psyche of an individual and, in turn, their behaviour. Positive thoughts intend to nourish a healthier psyche and hence aid in a progressive lifestyle.

Fredrickson (1998) in 'The broaden and build Theory of Positive Emotions' provides insight into positive thinking and its impact on an individual. Positive thinking, also referred to as positive cognition, is not merely being happy all the time but upholding an optimistic attitude. The ability to focus on the good in a particular situation without shutting the eyes to reality and the problems of one's life is the ability to have a positive attitude. Embracing positive thinking is not merely limited to always displaying an upbeat attitude, a happy-tension-free face, and a constant stress-free attitude; on the contrary, positive thoughts instill real values and skills in one's life that eventually help one to have a happier and satisfying life. To leave an imprint, the thoughts need not be bigger; even smaller, simpler, positive thoughts provide one with enough power to build and develop skills that aid in developing resources for a better life experience. From an increase in creativity and problem-solving capacity to better mood and coping skills resulting in less or no depression, the benefits are endless. The impact that positive thoughts and positive emotions have on the human mind and brain is truly remarkable. The kind and quality of life a person leads totally depends on his/her thinking.

Negative Thinking: Negative thoughts are linked with negative feelings such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and hopelessness. Every so often, we are not conscious of our negative thoughts as they arise automatically, appear rational, and realistic. The worse we feel, the more expected we are to think negatively and consider these thoughts to be true, even though they are irrational and unrealistic. Negative thoughts are experienced and encountered by all of us at some point in time, but are more dominant and extreme whenever we feel stressed, anxious, irritable, or depressed.

There are various types of common negative thought patterns known as *Thought Traps* that arise whenever we think negatively. The type of thought traps may differ depending on our mood and the particular state that we are in at any given point in time, Some examples are given below.

Mind reading: Sometimes, when we are facing some hard times in our lives, we are likely to be certain of and believe that we know what another is thinking. And instead of communicating our feelings to others and vice versa, we form a negative perception and keep facing the consequences of our entire life, and blaming it on destiny.

Labelling: (Calling yourself or others names in an overly negative manner). This is when someone believes that nothing good can happen to his/ her life and starts calling him/her self as sinister, ominous, or malevolent to others.

Fortune telling: Based on negative perception and thought, he/she creates negative prophecies about the future.

Catastrophising: This is like predicting the utter worst case scenario, ‘making a mountain out of a molehill’.

Overgeneralising: Besides hard work, if something didn’t work out once, presuming it will never be done, and keep cursing your destiny.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Considering things as being “either-or”.

Ignoring the Positives: This is focusing on the negative in a situation in lieu of considering the whole picture. The whole focus is made upon the negative aspect, and the positive aspect is always being ignored.

Emotional Reasoning: Using your emotions or mood as a source of inferring what’s happening around you.

Personalising: Taking things personally, assuming responsibility like if something negative has happened he/she is him/ herself is responsible and useless.

Shoulds and Musts: Presumptuous that things have to be in a certain way, that we have to put up with certain rules, and if it doesn’t happen, they declare themselves as a failure.

Positive Psychology, Positive Emotions and Positive Thinking

As per **Barbara Fredrickson’s (2001)** point of view, positive emotions are the emotions that are perceived to have a positive and elevating imprint on the mind, attuning to positivity. Positive emotions have been observed to help improve one’s life and attitude, as they are the emotions that are considered desirable to be experienced. Positive emotions are good and happy feelings and directly indicate individual flourishing. These have a higher intensity towards the

pleasurable end of the hedonic spectrum. These emotions aid in encouraging and motivating individuals to engage in their hobbies, ideas with other people, and hence resulting in individual growth. Positive emotions have a wide spectrum of benefits, but there are some main benefits in our daily lives necessary to have healthy, happy, and successful lives. These are:

- Positive emotions have mainly been seen to have increased and enhanced well-being and reduced stress. When an individual experiences positive emotion, stress-reducing hormones like serotonin are released, reducing the individual's stress levels. This helps the individual have a better life filled with laughs and fewer worries.
- Positive emotions help cultivate a stronger resilience. Resilience provides psychological strength and skills to the individual to cope with a stressful situation without getting overwhelmed. As individuals, we all experience multiple setbacks and a lot of hardships in our lives; resilience rescues people by providing them with the required strength to function appropriately in such adversity. These hardships are seen to have significant long-lasting psychological consequences. Resilient individuals use healthier coping mechanisms (Dolphin, Steinhardt, & Cance, 2015) and skills to handle and overcome difficult situations by fostering positivity. Practicing mindfulness, gratitude, and keeping oneself motivated are some ways to ensure the cultivation and proliferation of resilience in a person's life.
- Positive emotions directly impact physical and mental health, self-efficacy, performance, social relationships, work life, etc. An individual with a positive attitude towards life is seen to have a healthier psychological state of mind and, as a result, has a satisfactory life with decreased anxiety and depression.
- When a person is driven by positive emotions, s/he usually ends up making healthier choices. From deciding on the lifestyle to the work life, all decisions the individual makes are with a healthier and positive outlook and are bound to have a positive impact.

The benefits of positive emotions are not limited to the above points. A variety of emotions come under the umbrella of positive emotions. Emotions are responsible for human flourishing, prosperity, and a life worth living. Some of the positive emotions are:

- i. Gratitude
- ii. Happiness
- iii. Hope
- iv. Forgiveness
- v. Humility
- vi. Love
- vii. Resilience
- viii. Pride
- ix. Inspiration

x. Amusement

All these are desirable emotions, which make one feel happier and more fulfilled, and hence, are considered more worthy. These facilitate cognitive flexibility and scope by calming down the mind. Their direct application has an array of benefits. Each of the positive emotions induces a different type of experience and hence has different impacts on the lives of the individual. Certain essential emotions that tend to have extremely positive impacts are:

- a) **Happiness:** A state of powerful positivity. According to *Ryan and Deci (2001)*, happiness is a state that is signaled by emotions of joy, contentment, pride, satisfaction, and hope. Happiness has seemed to be experienced when the activity undertaken is pleasurable. Prosocial behaviour is directly linked to happiness; the better the prosocial behaviour displayed, the more happiness will be experienced. Humans are wired to experience this emotion since the human brain has been designed to experience happiness. Hormones like oxytocin, serotonin, dopamine and endorphins are regulated by our brains. The release of these hormones sets in motion the feeling of being satisfied and enchanted, ultimately resulting in a state of happiness. Happier individuals tend to have healthier social relationships.
- b) **Gratitude:** “the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation” (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). Gratitude is one of an individual's most powerful positive emotions, resulting in a positive state of mind. It is known by multiple names like appreciation, gratefulness, and thankfulness; it is experienced once the individual has been a recipient of an act of benevolence. Specifically derived towards a particular person/ thing/ God/ society/ social institution, it is considered to be a social emotion. Though gratitude is individualistic, it can also be at a social level. Being thankful about and for one's life can be expressed by gratitude and helps one to stay motivated and perform even better. To apologize, cure and strengthen social relationships, and form new relationships – all are accomplished by simple acts of gratitude. Gratitude enhances the well-being of an individual, increases optimism and happiness, and leads to a better and healthier lifestyle; in all, it ensures overall positivity.
- c) **Forgiveness:** DiBlasio (1998) emphasized willful decision-based forgiving. One of the most complex emotions is the emotion of forgiveness. Viewed as an emotion of character trait and virtue worth embracing for individuals seeking a greater sense of their well-being. It is the power to stop worrying and seeking revenge and is the pathway to finding peace. It is voluntarily letting go of bitterness, revenge, and anger. It ensures an individual's

upliftment and a peaceful future, thus a prosocial process. Forgiveness is a proper process wherein the first step is to let go of the anger, followed by the generation of internal forgiveness, and finally, internal peace. Constant effort and energy can help move an individual on the path of forgiveness. It has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

d) **Resilience:** According to the APA Help Center, the process of good adaptation in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress accounts for resilience. Resilience is the ‘strength’ emotion, implying it enables people to recover from a hindrance/problem. It instills eminent skills, experiences, and competencies in the individual and aids in growth and development. Undergoing hardships and experiencing negative emotions and distressing situations, and still being able to uphold optimism, proper functioning, and motivation, requires power, and this power stems from resilience. Higher resilience paves the way to improved cognitive activity and more positivity. Ensuring better coping with stress and increased strength and resilience certifies less depression and better well-being, making life a lot easier.

While positive psychology and positive thinking are distinct concepts, they are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Positive psychology is an empirical field—the scientific study of human flourishing, well-being, and the full spectrum of emotional experience. It seeks to understand what enables individuals and communities to thrive by focusing not just on the absence of mental illness, but on the presence of strengths, resilience, and fulfillment. One of its primary aims is to nurture a constructive and growth-oriented mindset.

In contrast, positive thinking refers to the individual’s tendency to maintain optimistic expectations about the future, as defined by Scheier and Carver (1993). It involves consciously fostering hopeful, constructive thoughts even in the face of challenges. Positive thinking serves as a mental tool to navigate adversity with confidence and resilience, encouraging individuals to see opportunities rather than obstacles.

Despite their differences, positive psychology and positive thinking are interdependent. Positive thinking contributes to the development of a positive psychological state by reshaping one’s perspective and reinforcing a hopeful outlook. It acts as a catalyst for the flourishing principles promoted by positive psychology. Together, they influence a person’s mental framework, affective responses, and behavioral patterns. This dynamic relationship guides how an individual processes emotions, copes with stress, and responds to everyday situations. In essence, positive thinking fuels the engine of positive psychology, and in return, positive

psychology provides the scientific grounding and practices that sustain and deepen positive thinking.

Conclusion

Emotions that are pleasing and uplifting are classified as positive, while those that evoke anger, fear, or resentment are seen as negative. These emotional states arise directly from our thoughts and influence the brain in fundamentally different ways, like two diverging paths. Consider a scenario where someone walks alone down a dark, deserted street and realizes they're being followed. Instinctively, the brain interprets this as a threat, triggering fear, a powerful negative emotion that overrides all others. The person's focus narrows entirely to the perceived danger, compelling them to run. In such heightened emotional states, the brain dismisses alternative responses, like calling for help or confronting the follower. This mental tunnel vision is part of our evolutionary survival instinct, where negative emotions constrict our thinking to ensure immediate action. In contrast, positive emotions such as joy, love, or appreciation broaden our mental horizons. When a child is praised for a simple act, like completing homework or tidying up, the recognition sparks pride, which cascades into feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and affection. This ripple effect of positive emotions fosters an expansive mindset, encouraging creativity, resilience, and deeper emotional well-being. The interplay of positive thoughts and emotions forms the foundation of positive psychology. Like any valuable skill, cultivating a positive mindset requires deliberate practice. Engaging in activities that evoke joy, gratitude, and contentment—be it music, art, cooking, or even tidying up—helps nurture these uplifting emotions. Common techniques to reinforce positivity include smiling more, expressing gratitude, meditating, journaling, and enjoying leisure time. With patience and consistency, positivity becomes a habit. Allowing ourselves time to relax, smile, and appreciate the small joys of life leads to emotional clarity, inner peace, and a revitalized sense of energy.

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