

## Gender Differences in Positive Emotion

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### Abstract

Positive Emotions are vital in bringing about many positive outcomes in the life of an individual (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). They bring about cognitive, social and behavioural change in people (Fredrickson, 2001). Therefore the gender experiencing more positive emotion will be benefited more from the positive outcomes they produce. The study is aimed at finding out the differences in the experience of Positive emotions across gender. Cross sectional research design was used to study 200 Pakistani men and women. Positive Emotions Scale (PES) was presented to the participants to see differences in the experience of Positive Emotions. Results indicated that men and women both experience Positive Emotions at different times of their lives but the style of their experience is different. Women's Positive Emotions were more related to their social interactions, friends and family moreover women were more likely to experience Compassion than men. Positive Emotions like Pride was more frequently found among men as compared to women. Findings suggest that there are significant differences among men and women in the perception, understanding and experience of positive emotions. Overall men were found to be happier than women.

*Keywords:* Positive Emotions, Gender, social interaction, compassion

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## **Introduction**

In order to deal with our daily life problem we need to understand our own feelings. It has been observed that people find it difficult to identify their own feelings most of the time (Whitbourne, 2012). It becomes difficult for us to connect with our feelings if we cannot understand what we are going through. People who are better able to identify their feelings are more able to handle their life situations (Shrivastava, 2012). For the last many years Psychology has only been linked to negative emotions and psychologist have only talked about negativity. The importance of positive emotions has been minimized, traditionally. The focus of psychology was dysfunction and psychological problems like anxiety, depression and stress. The sole focus on pathology overlooks the thriving community and the fulfilled individual. Instead of focusing on the negative events, illness, pathologies and their cure after the incidence, psychologists today focus more on positive events, traits, emotions and experiences to enhance the quality of life, produce flourishing and wellbeing and further prevent the pathologies.

Positive emotions create a lasting effect on individual's health, life longevity, and improve life satisfaction and quality of life in the long run (Brownwell, 2014). This is a recent development in the field of psychology that emphasis the importance of positive emotions and leads to the study of Positive emotions at present.

## **Positive Emotions**

Positive Emotions are experiences that are short lived. They create orderly changes in the perceptions, cognition, behaviour and physical health of the people (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005)

Fredrickson (2001) discovered that the experience of positive emotions may increase and widen people's thinking and enhance their quality of being able to cope with a difficult situation commonly known as resourcefulness. By experiencing positive emotions one can become more aware of their own potential, get knowledge about new possibilities, and become more social. Therefore it brings about cognitive, social and behavioural change in people. This concept was given in her broaden and built theory of emotion (Fredrickson, 2001).

According to her when one experiences positive emotions he/she gets positive outcomes. Research has proved that people who experience more positive emotions are excellent in all fields of their lives. It increases their life expectancy, reduces threats and calms the body down.

As a result it increases the person's life satisfaction (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Bringing a change in the way we experience our emotions can lead to success instead of applying the other channel that success leads to positive emotion. One should lead oneself towards success by developing positive emotion (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek & Finkel, 2008).

Research has suggested that positive emotions increase wellbeing (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002) and enhance coping behaviour (Fredrickson, 2001), (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). It is also found to produce more enduring power in people (Fredrickson, 1998). Positive Emotions also broaden the scope of attention and thought (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Positive Emotions have also been found to undo the effect of negative emotions and events in our lives (Fredrickson, Mancuso, & Branigan, 2000).

Positive emotions produce a good feeling which may last in future as well. When one feels good about something, he has a good feeling that calms his body produces a relaxing effect and as a result the individual is able to perform better socially, behaviourally and cognitively. This phenomenon may trigger the upward spiral of positivity. Whereas longitudinal studies have proved that depression has an opposite effect on individual. Negative feeling gives rise to ill feeling which may last in future as well. This may trigger a negative downward spiral. On the other hand one positive outcome may lead to another positive outcome. In this way Positive emotions broaden the cognition and optimize the functioning of the individual. (Garland, Fredrickson, Kring, Meyer & Penn, 2010).

### **Positive Emotions experienced most often**

The ten most commonly experienced Positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2013) are outlined in the theory of Positive Emotions Broaden and Built. Here we are discussing only seven most commonly experienced positive emotions in Pakistani population.

#### **Joy**

When an unexpected good fortune occurs in one's life, joy is created. A pleasant astonishing surprise or getting good news can be a good reason for someone to feel joy. Joy involves the urge to play and get involved (Fredrickson, 2003). Frijda (1986) explained this play as free activation and an aimless willingness to connect in an interaction or act. This free play helps in acquiring some durable resources which may prompt the learning process (Fredrickson, 2003).

## **Hope**

Hope is an opportunity based emotion (Tugade, Shiota, & Kirby, 2014). The construct of hope is thought to have two components: the ability to design goals and passageways regardless of the obstacles, and motivation or action to use these passageways to achieve the desired goal (Rand & Cheavens, 2009) ;(Synder, 2000). Hope is actually the combination of these two components (Carr, 2011). Unlike all other positive emotions hope occurs in terrible situations in which people expect the worst but desire for better (Lazarus, 1991). The durable resources that are created by hope are optimism and resilience (Fredrickson, 2013).

## **Compassion/Love**

Compassion can be defined as an emotion that emerges as a result of seeing someone in plight or miserable condition. It is the need to help and pity on the misfortunate individual (Tugade, Shiota, & Kirby, 2014). Social bond and community are the special durable resources that are created as a result of love and compassion (Fredrickson, 2013).

## **Serenity/Contentment**

Serenity or contentment occurs when one finds ones circumstances satisfying, comforting and pleasing. The durable and enduring resource created by this positive emotion is a sophisticated and composite sense of one's own self and one's priorities (Fredrickson, 2013).

## **Pride**

One feels pride when one has accomplished a desired goal (Tracy & Robins, 2007). It is a benefit related emotion. It is a feeling that is created by attaining a socially valued standing. Research on Pride has shown that the feeling of Pride is associated with the experience of achievement. For both men and women increased pride was associated with increased achievement (Nakamura, 2015). Pride acts as a booster for personal growth (Tugade, Shiota, & Kirby, 2014) and creates the urge to aspire even higher goals that in return leads to the development of achievement motive which is a durable resource (Fredrickson, 2013).

## **Gratitude**

Gratitude can have two components. The most commonly explained by different researches and psychologists is the gratitude towards people around us as a result of their unexpected help or good fortune (Fredrickson, 2013). The second less commonly explained is the gratitude towards god the creator. Gratitude takes the place of joy and creates the same fruitful results produced by

joy when one comes to know that the good fortunes he/she is enjoying is because of someone's out of the way favour or a blessing of the Creator (Algoe, 2012). The durable resources created by gratitude are kindness and care for others (Fredrickson, 2013).

### **Amusement/humour**

Humour is a positive state of mind produced when someone says or does something incongruous, unexpected or absurd, or this occurs for some other reason, and people laugh. Finding things funny is a special kind of joy, and therefore important for happiness (Argyle, 2012). It generates a desire to share a joyful hoot and find imaginative methods to carry on the cheerfulness. The enduring recourse that is built is the social bond (Fredrickson, 2013).

Positive Emotion is a vital ingredient in bringing about many positive outcomes in the life of individual in this way it highlights its importance in the field of research. Instead of focusing on disease and pathologies the main concern today is to change behaviour and thought to avoid negativity, stress and disease. Therefore it has become the need of an hour to study positive emotions, how they are produced, what are their effects on the body, how people experience positive emotions and how they vary across gender. It is important to understand that the gender experiencing more positive emotion will be benefited more from the positive outcomes and changes produced by them.

### **Rationale**

The present study is designed to study how people experience Positive Emotions and how Positive Emotions differ across gender. The emphasis is to find out the differences between men and women in terms of the subjective experience of positive Emotions.

### **Literature Review**

Positive Emotions create positive outcomes in individual's cognition and physical health and increase the likelihood of a good health related outcome. Positive Emotions have been linked to increased levels of vigorous activity and good mental health (Achat, Kawachi, Spiro, Demolles, & Sparrow, 2000). Positive emotions are also linked with low levels of depression and better coping in worse situations (Taylor, 1983).

Positive thinking has been linked with better management of many diseases like cancer and cardiovascular health. Research has proved that the experiences of positive emotions is linked with controlled blood pressure, and reduce other heart related problems (Affleck, Tennen, & Croog, 1987).

In a study it was demonstrated that Positive Emotions are associated with life satisfaction. The study was conducted on 1,400 people living in United States. Data was collected on self-reported experiences of positive and negative emotions. The results suggested that increased experience of positive emotions and decreased level of depression were linked to more life satisfaction (Schütz, Sailer, Al Nima, Rosenberg, Andersson Arntén et al., 2013).

In a study I, 900 participants were asked to report Positive and Negative affect on a scale. The results showed that people who had a positive affect tried to increase their happiness and used more strategies to cope. They were less depressed and more satisfied with their life. Self-destructive and negative affect was related to less satisfaction and more depressed states (Schütz, Sailer, Al Nima, Rosenberg, Andersson & Arntén et al., 2013).

Studies have shown differences in the experience of Positive Emotions across gender. Women have been reported to show more negative affect as compared to men who were found to be showing more positive affect (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991). This has also been seen, that generally women are more expressive in terms of emotions than men. They express more intense emotions than men (Fischer & Manstead, 2000). Another study has shown that women are more expressive than men in verbal as well as non-verbal bodily expressions (Biehl, et al., 1997).

Research on Pride has shown that men experience more pride than women. Pride is related to achievement and men as being more achievement oriented experience more pride and have scored more on pride as compared to women (Nakamura, 2015).

Humour is related to many positive outcomes. Psychologically it has been found that humour broadens attention (Fredrickson 2001) and it is also found to improve cognition (Isen, Daubman & Nowicki, 1987). Humour also produces positive effect on the body of individual physiologically (Cogan, Cogan, Waltz & McCue, 1987). It has also been linked to good quality of life (Martin, 2001, 2002). As humour is linked to so many positive outcomes the gender experiencing more humour would be exhibiting more positive outcomes. In a study it was demonstrated that men were preferred by both men and women to be more humorous than women (Force, 2011). In another study comparing men and women it was found that women laugh more than men whereas men and women were found equally funny in the production of humour (Provine, 2000).

## **Objective**

The study is aimed at exploring how individuals experience positive emotions and finding out the differences in positive emotions across gender.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Cross sectional research design was used to measure differences in the way men and women experience positive emotions.

### **Sample**

Non probability purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 200 Pakistani men (n=80) and women (n=120) on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

The participants were selected who were able to read and write with minimum qualification of middle school. This minimum education was selected so the participants can fill their questionnaire themselves to prevent researcher's subjectivity. The maximum qualification was PhD. The sample age range was 17 to 69 year with (M=27.42 and SD=7.77).

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Adult and normally functioning individuals were selected. Individuals who were less than 17 years were excluded from the sample. Further individuals suffering from any psychological disorder were also exclude from the sample in order to control variable confounding.

## **Tools**

Positive Emotions are temporary experiences that create orderly changes in people's cognitions, behaviour, and physiological health. Experiencing positive emotions increases the individual's ability to think and open more opportunities (Fredrickson, 2001).

Positive Emotion Scale (PES) developed by (Shamim & Muazzum, 2016) with cronbach ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) was used to measure Positive Emotions in both genders. The Convergent validity of the scale with Positive Affect Schedule was 0.82 and the Discreminant Validity with Negative Affect Schedule was 0.45. It is a Likert-type 5 point scale measuring the frequency of subjective positive emotions. It has statements for respondents to agree or disagree. The scale consisted

of seven subscales measuring positive emotions, including Joy ( $\alpha=90$ ), Hope ( $\alpha=83$ ), Gratitude ( $\alpha=92$ ), Pride ( $\alpha=95$ ), Compassion ( $\alpha=89$ ), Serenity ( $\alpha=92$ ) and Humour ( $\alpha=86$ ). Each subscale represents a separate type of positive emotion and the scores of all the subscales calculated can also give a total raw score for positive emotions.

## Results

The data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics to find the sample characteristics. T-test analysis was conducted to find the significant differences in Positive Emotion across gender.

The descriptive statistics revealed that sample consisted of 40% males and 60% females. Unmarried were 74%, married 25% and widowed 5% where ( $N=200$ ). The age ranged from 17 years to 69 years with ( $M=27.42$  and  $SD=7.77$ ). The minimum educational level of the sample was middle (8 years of education) and the maximum qualification was PhD. The maximum income was 200,000 with ( $M=36973$  and  $SD=6.3$ ).

The results of T-test analysis revealed that joy was significant at  $p=0.05$ . Women ( $M=59.29$  and  $SD=8.25$ ) scored higher on joy than men ( $M=56.7$  and  $SD=9.60$ ). Therefore we can say that women reported to experience more joy than men.

Hope was not found to be significant across gender. There was no significant difference between men and women in the experience of hope.

Gratitude was also found to be insignificant. There was no significant difference between both genders in the experience of gratitude.

Pride was found to be significant at  $p=0.01$ . The results revealed that there was a significant difference between both the genders in the way they experience Pride. Men reported to experience more Pride than women.

Compassion was significant at  $p=0.01$ . There was a significant difference between both men and women on compassion. Women ( $M=72.47$  and  $SD=7.46$ ) were found to be more compassionate than men ( $M=79.96$  and  $SD=7.38$ ) in terms of their subjective experiences.

Serenity was found to be insignificant. The results showed that there is no significant difference between men and women in the way they experience serenity.

Humour was significant at  $p=0.01$ . There was a significant difference between men and women in the experience of humour. Men ( $M=22.97$  and  $SD=4.70$ ) reported to experience and produce more humour than women ( $M=21.00$  and  $SD=4.98$ ).



The results of the total scores on Positive Emotions Scale reveal that there was a significant difference between men and women in positive emotions. Overall men ( $M=297.37$  and  $SD= 36.33$ ) score higher on positive emotions than women ( $M=296.04$  and  $SD=33.65$ ). Results were significant at  $p=0.01$ . Therefore we can say that men reported to experience more positive emotions than women.

## **Discussion**

The current study was designed to find out how people experience positive emotions and explore the differences in positive emotions across gender. It is a unique study as Positive emotion is a relatively new area for research all over the world and specifically no work has been done in this area in Pakistan before that.

T-test analysis was run over the data to find out significant differences between both genders in the experience of Positive Emotions. There was a significant difference between men and women in the experience of joy. The results revealed that joy was higher in women than men. These results are supported by other researches as well. Women have been reported to laugh more often than men (Provine, 2000).

There was a significant difference between men and women in the experience of pride. Men were significantly found to show more pride than women. As men are more achievement oriented and relate their achievements with pride they may be expected to show and express more pride than women. These results have also been supported by previous literature (Nakamura, 2015).

Results have also revealed that there is significant difference between both men and women on experiencing compassion, Compassion was significantly high in women than men. It has been known since long that, women express more emotion than men (Fischer & Manstead, 2000) they are also found to express non verbal emotions more often than men (Biehl, et al., 1997). Thus compassion was also experienced more in women than men.

Humour was significantly higher in men than women. Therefore it can be stated that men are more humorous than women. Previous researches have also supported the findings. It was found in a study that the groups of men and women preferred men comedian over women comedians as producing best humour . That shows that men produce better humour than women.

Overall score revealed that men experienced more positive emotions than women. There was a significant difference between men and women in the experience of positive emotions.

Previous literature has also supported this finding. In a study it was found that women were reported to show more negative affect than men (Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991).

## Conclusion

Men and tend to be good in social relations with friends family and community. Humour was also found to be higher in men; men as being better in producing and understanding humour perform better than women. From the above study it can be concluded that overall men experience more positive emotions than women and are expected to be benefited more from the positive outcomes of positive emotions than women. And women differ in terms of the experience of positive emotions. Women experience the emotion of joy more often than men. Secondly, men experience Pride more than women whereas women tend to be better in gratitude and other emotions related to love and belongingness

The difference in experience of positive emotions which have been identified thus far, are likely just the tip of the proverbial iceberg as it's an extensive research area. The positive psychology movement inspires additional research on positive emotions and even more reasons to cultivate positive emotions may be discovered.

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