



Advanced International Seminar

The Role of Positive Emotions and Cognitions in Psychology: New Frontiers and Challenges



Facultad de Psicología
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

17-18th October 2016

Monday, 17th October

11:30 AM

Taking Positive Emotions and Cognitions seriously in Psychology: Emerging Promises and Translational Challenges

Carmelo Vázquez

Facultad de Psicología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. (Spain)

Abstract

This talk describes some selected findings from basic research on positive emotions and positive cognitions that are providing unexpected new insights on several clinical phenomena like trauma and depression. It will be proposed that, following the well-known classical model of translational science, Psychology, and Clinical Psychology in particular, must make a continuous effort to translate basic research on positive functioning to the field of intervention and prevention.

Although most of the extant research and applications within this emerging field has been focused on non-pathological individuals and institutions, clinical conditions pose an ultimate challenge to the field. There are several factors that justify the relevance of the study of positivity in the clinical field. First of all, research consistently shows that positive and negative cognitions and emotions must be understood as relatively separate entities. This basic notion has profound consequences to understand and assess mental disorders and psychologists, and clinical psychologists in particular, should be fully aware of it. Secondly, a positive view on functioning is expanding our understanding of how human beings react to adversity and life difficulties. Thirdly, there is promising research showing that positive interventions can be appropriately used to treat a variety of clinical problems. Opportunities and challenges of these new approaches will be discussed.

12:30 PM

Cognition and Emotion Regulation in Depression: the Role of Positive Affect

Jutta Joormann

Yale University, Department of Psychology (USA)

Abstract

Sustained negative affect and difficulties experiencing positive affect are hallmark features of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). Recent research suggests that difficulties in emotion regulation (ER) are at the core of these cardinal symptoms of MDD with depressed patients exhibiting more frequent use of maladaptive ER and difficulties effectively implementing adaptive strategies. It remains unclear, however, what underlies these difficulties in ER. Cognitive theories of depression have a long tradition of focusing on cognitive factors that increase depression risk and maintain depressive episodes but the link between cognitive and affective aspects of MDD remains to be explored. It is proposed that cognitive biases and deficits in cognitive control putatively associated with depression affect emotion regulation in critical ways thereby setting the stage for maintained negative affect and diminished levels of positive affect. Implications for treatment will be discussed.

3:00 PM

Improving the Capacity to Treat Anhedonia by Identifying which Mechanisms blunt Pleasure Experience in Depression

Barney Dunn

Mood Disorders Centre, University of Exeter (UK)

Abstract

A loss of interest and pleasure (anhedonia) is a cardinal symptom of many mood disorders, particularly depression. To improve the capacity to repair anhedonia, a useful first step is to identify which psychological mechanisms drive reduced positive emotion experience. These mechanisms can then be systematically targeted in psychological treatments like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). This talk will review recent studies from my research group examining how well CBT repairs anhedonia and whether the tendency to utilise dampening appraisals (e.g., think “this is too good to last”), allow the mind to wander, and to fail to engage experientially in part drive symptoms of anhedonia in depression. A range of different methods will be used to explore these questions, including laboratory manipulations, experience sampling designs, and treatment trial evaluations. Implications for adapting existing psychological therapies like CBT to better repair anhedonia will be discussed.

4:00 PM

Positive Technologies, Tools to Explore Positive Emotions

Rosa M. Baños

Facultad de Psicología de la Universidad de Valencia (Spain)

Abstract

“Positive Technology” (PT) is a term proposed to define a scientific and applied approach to the use of technology for improving the quality of our personal experience. This field combines the objectives of Positive Psychology with enhancements of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by focusing on three key variables—emotional quality, engagement/actualization, and connectedness. This presentation will focus on how PTs can help us to induce, promote and study positive emotions, presenting several examples of PTs and offering data about their potentialities.

Tuesday, 18th October

10:00 AM

Positive Mental Imagery: from Depression to Optimism

Simon E. Blackwell

Mental Health Research and Treatment Center, Department of Psychology. Ruhr University (Germany)

Abstract

Mental imagery can have a powerful impact on emotion, yet positive mental imagery, its potential benefits, and how to enhance it, have been relatively neglected in research. People who are depressed struggle to generate positive mental imagery and may particularly benefit from positive imagery interventions; conversely, when people who are optimistic think about their future they are able to generate very vivid positive imagery. This talk explores the links between positive imagery, depression, and optimism, and how capitalising on the link between positive imagery and positive emotion may provide routes to alleviating psychopathology and enhancing wellbeing

11:00 AM

The Influence of Positive Emotions versus Rumination on Attentional Breadth: Implications for a Neurocognitive Approach to Resilience

Rudi de Raedt

*Ghent University, Department of Experimental Clinical and Health Psychology.
(Belgium)*

Abstract

It has been proposed that positive emotions are related to attentional broadening and resilience. Despite several failures to find evidence for a mood induced widening of attention, using a straightforward methodology to measure attentional breadth we could find evidence for the effects of positive mood on the broadening of visuospatial attention. Attention broadens when self-related information is presented in a positive mood context, and when personally relevant ambiguous stimuli are perceived as positive based on automatic stimulus evaluation. Moreover, the effect is influenced by resilience. On the other hand, we observed that rumination induction leads to attentional narrowing for self-related information, in line with a narrowed self-focus. Based on these findings and electrophysiological data on early spatial encoding of peripheral information, we propose that positive mood might tip the balance in favor of external attention (exploration) versus internal attention, but only under low load conditions. During negative mood, attention might be more internally oriented (rumination). The role of the prefrontal cortex in these processes will be illustrated by neurostimulation studies combining schema activation manipulations, fMRI, and implicit measures.

12:30 PM

Positive Clinical Psychology: from Distress to Happiness

Alex Wood

*Behavioural Science Centre, University of Stirling
Honorary Professor in Psychology at the University of Manchester
Director of Worldwide Initiative in Mental Health*

Abstract

This talk introduces and presents evidence for the need for a Positive Clinical Psychology (PCP), an approach developed by the speaker through editing a special issue of *Clinical Psychology Review* and the *Wiley Handbook of Positive Clinical Psychology* (2016). PCP is characterized by the integrative study of well-being, where both the positive and negative are given equal weighting in the understanding and improvement of well-being. Theory and research is used to show; (a) few characteristics are uniformly positive or negative; (b) prediction of important outcomes can be maximised by focusing on both positive and negative characteristics; (c) positive characteristics interact with negative events to buffer and reduce the impact on well-being and health; (d) many characteristics (such as happiness and depression) may exist on the same continuum, and thus cannot be studied separately; (e) interventions that build strengths may be as effective as those that simply aim to alleviate distress.