

Yoga and Positive Psychology for Managing Career and Life
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Positive Psychology: First and Second Wave
Lecture - 13
Positive-Negative Dialectics of Well-being

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Positive-Negative Dialectics of Wellbeing



1. Principle of Appraisal: Difficulty of categorizing phenomenon as either positive or negative
 - a. Optimism and Pessimism: Ex. NASA's endless simulations of 'bad news scenario
 - b. Self Esteem and Humility: Ex. Inflated self esteem and vulnerability to depression
 - c. Freedom and restriction: Ex. Importance of routines and rigid patterns and excessive choices leading to lower subsequent satisfaction
 - d. Forgiveness and Anger: Ex. Ex. Anger as a moral emotions and directed towards others
 - e. Happiness and Sadness: Ex. Social desirability of being happy
2. Principle of co valence: Many experiences involve a blend of so called positive and negative experiences
 - a. Post Traumatic Growth
 - b. Love
3. Principle of Complementarity: Flourishing depend upon a complex balance and harmonization of light and dark side of life

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Based on these caveats, what we are seeing is emergence of the second wave of positive psychology and that second wave is riding on the recognition of the dialectics of the positive and negative of the human psyche. This is explained by Lomas and colleagues in large number of papers. We can summarize this aspect in the three principles, principle of appraisal, principle of co-valence and principle of complementarity.

Principle of appraisal is about difficulty of categorizing phenomena as either positive or negative. Is optimism always positive and pessimism always negative? It is a questionable thing. So, this principle is about that. Principle of co-valence is about those experiences which involve blend of so-called positive and so-called negative experiences. This is explained by Lomas through post-traumatic growth and love.

These two examples explain the principles of co-valence. Based on these two principles, they arrive at the third principle, that is principle of complementarity. That says that flourishing depend on a complex balance and harmonizing of the light and dark side of life.

Let us look at these principles in more detail. So, principle of appraisal, this can be understood by so many examples. We will look at these 4 or 5 examples. Optimism and pessimism so, optimism is good. It is good for well-being, for the normal population as well it is good for the serious patients of the different diseases. Medicine works probably more strongly in the people who are having the optimistic attitude about their cure. But it is not that pessimism is always negative and always pathological.

We can take example of NASA's endless simulation of the bad news scenario. About any project, there is a very active, sincere thinking about what may go wrong and based on that large number of simulations are played. So, pessimism over here is resulting into positive outcome of this in terms of the success of the project. It is contributing to the success of the project.

Whereas many a time optimism may play as detrimental and there is a study being quoted in this paper which says that in the game of gambling more optimistic people actually lose more money they suffer more. There are large number of studies suggesting that self esteem is very important for personal growth. It is positively related with the well-being.

But it is also found and in one of the Seligman's work itself it is reported that inflated self esteem because of the teachers and the parents extra effort to build the self esteem. Child or people can develop inflated self esteem and when these people come across when the reality hit reality of the world hits them they are more likely to go into depression.

So, high self-esteem which otherwise in general is considered to be good for well-being was found to be not good in many such cases. Similarly, humility which is considered to be opposite of self esteem was found to be very very useful, more functional resulting into long term well-being in many studies.

The third example is freedom and restriction. A state forward simplistic understanding will say freedom is good and restrictions are bad. But if we look at the health literature, if we look at the

sports people, if we look at the scholarly academic pursuits we can quickly understand that freedom can be detrimental.

And if we consider routines, the tough routines, rigid pattern as opposite to freedom they are actually good for academic excellence. They are a very important part of the training of any athlete. There are another study, there are other sets of study about freedom and restriction in the field of marketing. In marketing they have found that when customers are presented larger number of choices their subsequent satisfaction is likely to be lower because there is a sense of I might have missed out something.

So, actually more freedom result into lesser satisfaction and that probably result into more consumerism and more rush towards. In all the ancient cultures there is a recognition and appreciation for following the restraint. Brahmacharya is very important part of yoga. Aparigraha not holding more than what you require is part of the personal growth. So, freedom and restriction might be positive in the specific context.

Third example, our next example is forgiveness and anger. Large number of studies are suggesting that forgiveness is very important for attaining well-being and retaining well-being. And anger is generally understood to be a detrimental feeling. It is and there are large number of books written about anger management, but they are not always positive or negative.

Excessive forgiveness can be negative and being angry can sometime be very useful. Famous statement of Aristotle is there which goes like a right amount of anger at the right situation with the right people for the right time is a wise thing. Anger is also understand anger can also be understood as moral emotion, particularly when it is directed towards others, when someone when we see some injustice happening to someone else if we do not feel angry we may not feel urged to act against it.

Many of such situations are studied in the context of married life as well. So, in the same paper you can look at the reference of McNulty's work with many other colleagues. They have adopted they have followed interesting research design to understand what extent these so-called positive emotions are useful and actually contribute to well-being.

So, they studied these variables in the context of married life and they tracked the married couples newly married couples, they tracked some of the couples looked at and got the assessment done about their well-being satisfaction with life etcetera for 3, 4 years and they have found that optimism, self-esteem, freedom, forgiveness may not be helpful in the long run in particular type of relationships. What are those type of relationships?

In the for example, abusive relationships or when one partner has a tendency to show anger and being abusive. When this problem is mild optimism may work, forgiveness may work, but when a partner has issue in terms of his or her anger or being abusive more seriously in the long run actually optimism works negatively for the life satisfaction.

Forgiveness actually works negatively in the long run with a partner who has excessive tendencies serious tendency of being abusive or being angry. Actually in the being restrictive being tough being more affront about these negatives of the partner is good and it prevents the long term problems in the married life.

So, McNulty work is very interesting to understand the dialectical nature of the positive negative well-being and it invites us to look at all these things in the particular context in the in a particular situation certain things can be positive and negative and we need to understand these things in the right context.

Another example in the principle of appraisal is about showing happiness in sadness. Because of over emphasis on importance of being happy, importance of being positive people might be feeling and some people actually feel burdened to look positive and look happy which eventually contribute to sadness.

Sometimes it is important to express sadness to get things resolved, to give the signal to your loved ones, to give signal to the system to respond to. So, the positive negative is not so straight forward and we need to understand in the right context and we are going to dwell deeper what it means to manage our self and manage our career. Then there is a principle of covalence which says that many experiences actually involve blend of positive and negative experiences.

And one example is post traumatic growth, after trauma which is actually a intensely negative experience people, large number of people result into more personal growth, they become more

responsible, they become more sensitive, many time they become better problem solver, their sincerity, their commitment for a positive cause all that that is found to be to have increased after the trauma.

Similarly, love; love is understood in its many sheets, in the Indian tradition we call shringar ras and we looked at shringar not only the not only a pleasant experience, not only the union of the unison union of the lovers, if it is romantic love, it is also the separation of the lovers which gives shringar which is called viyog sangraha.

The sanyog which is union and viyog which is separation both are part of the love and to experience love fully experience of both the aspects are important. So, there is also no distinction between positive and negative emotion. Based on the principle of appraisal and principle of covalence we can say that flourishing depend on complex balance and it is somewhere experience in harmonizing of the light and dark side of life.

So, positive psychology is not just about positive, positive, positive, positive psychology is about harmonizing all shades of life.