Regular Practice Of Relaxation, With Regard To Positive Feelings And Cognitive Functioning

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According to Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions can broaden the individual thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, Branigan, 2005). This cognitive widening promotes the building of individual psychological resources which can be employed in the future. Moreover, it seems that people who experience positive feelings recover faster from negative states. In previous studies we showed that relaxation is a technique that elicits positive emotions which lead to a temporary broadening of the thought-action repertoire. The aim of this study was to evaluate whether intense positive emotions induced by means of relaxation cause a momentary widening of thought-action repertoires and whether those who frequently experience positive emotions as a result of practicing relaxation recover faster from negative states caused by the induction feelings of anger. In total, 58 participants took part in the study. Some participants regularly practised relaxation (Group 1, N=19 people; Group 2, N=20 people) and some never practised (Group 3, N=19). Before inducing two different emotions (relaxation vs anger), we assessed the intensity of 16 emotions (5 positive and 11 negative). After this assessment, group 1 relaxed thus eliciting positive emotions while we asked groups 2 and 3 to remember an event in which they experienced intense feelings of anger thus inducing a negative state. Then, the 16 emotions (in a different order) and the thought-action repertoires were assessed. The results of this last assessment showed the expected emotional intensities, according to the type of induction. After relaxing, Group 1 reported a more broadened cognitive state in comparison to the other two groups who were tested after the induction of feelings of anger. Specifically, group 2 listed a lower number of thought-actions in the thought-action repertoire task than group 1 but a higher number than group 3. Moreover, regression analyses revealed that the intensity of the positive feelings experienced was the best predictor of performance in the thought-action repertoire task. These results support the hypothesis that positive emotions affect cognitive functioning and suggest that the positive feelings elicited by the practice of relaxation can lead to better cognitive performance.