Research on Distinct Positive Emotions is Thriving

- In recent years, there has been a major increase in research on distinct positive emotions such as admiration, amusement, awe, compassion, empathy, gratitude, love, pride, and schadenfreude.
- Two broad issues characterize this work:
  - Most studies examine only a select few emotions, precluding comparisons among the full range of positive emotions.
  - These studies typically fail to map out the psychological content of the positive emotions they do examine, making it unclear what, exactly, these states are.
- Current Research Goals:
  - Develop a comprehensive taxonomy of distinct positive emotions, by uncovering the experiential content of all subjectively experienced positive emotions.
  - Identify which positive emotions are associated with distinct subjective experiences (e.g., thoughts, feelings, and behaviors).
  - Understand how these emotions are interrelated.

Part 2: Examining Interrelations Among All Positive Emotions

- Study 2: As in Study 1, 1,533 undergraduates wrote about a past experience of one positive emotion.
- Participants rated their feelings using all positive emotion scales developed in Part 1.
- We examined inter-correlations among emotion scales to determine which positive emotions were experienced distinctly (see Figure).

A Taxonomy of Positive Emotions

Conclusions

- Fourteen positive emotions were experienced distinctly at the self-report level: Admiration, amusement, attachment love, awe, authentic pride, empathy, gratitude, hope, hubristic pride, interest, nurturant love, romantic love, schadenfreude, and sympathy.
- In contrast, the subjective components comprising tenderness and compassion overlap substantially with components of attachment love, empathy, nurturant love, romantic love, and sympathy; tenderness and compassion are therefore best considered blends of these other emotions.
- Contentment and enthusiasm correlated .68 and .65 with pleasantness and arousal, respectively. Contentment is therefore best conceptualized as pleasant affect, and enthusiasm is best conceptualized as aroused affect, rather than each as a distinct positive emotion.
- Results allowed us to develop brief, reliable, 3-5 item scales for each of the distinct positive emotions.
- Notably, single words (e.g., “I felt awe”) correlated only .52, on average, with corresponding multi-item scales for each emotion (range: .25-.71), highlighting the need for multi-item scales that may better capture the full domain of each emotional state.

Strength of Correlations Between Emotions

- > .40
- .30 to .40
- .20 to .30
- no arrow: < .20

**Note:** Correlations involving authentic and hubristic pride are based on ratings following episodes of pride only, and therefore do not take into account ratings following episodes of the other positive emotions to which pride is linked. They should therefore be interpreted with caution.