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What does your research focus on?

In what ways can feeling good actually be bad for us? There is a fair amount of research on associated difficulties of negative emotions like fear in anxiety disorders or sadness in depression. We know almost nothing about the potential negative consequences of positive emotions. My work explores this surprising and counterintuitive possibility by delineating the nature of positive emotion disturbance along a continuum in people with normative degrees of positive emotion (college students and community samples) as well as clinical patient samples characterized by extreme degrees of positive emotion (bipolar disorder). I take a multi-method approach in my work by measuring experiential, behavioral, and biological indices of emotion response.

What drew you to this line of research? Why is it exciting to you?

Like many people, I wanted to understand happiness better. I first got involved in research as an undergraduate at UC Berkeley focusing on the ways different types of positive emotions promote well-being and health. This exposed me to a rich landscape of literature and methodological tools in affective science and positive psychology. During my subsequent graduate studies in clinical psychology, I worked intensively with patients diagnosed with bipolar disorder. My work with this population taught me that there are two sides to every story, even for positive emotion. Specifically, working with bipolar patients exposed me to periods of mania characterized by intense and exaggerated positive mood,

elevated self-esteem, and seeming invincibility to concerns of the external world. It was here that I first saw the potential negative consequences of too much positive emotion and how it could lead to risky and even life-threatening behaviors. This got me hooked, and I've continued to focus on understanding this "dark side of positive emotion" ever since.

Who were/are your mentors or psychological influences?

I was fortunate to work with a diverse group of mentors as a graduate student, who all had a common passion for science. As a result, my research interests were somewhat of an eclectic patchwork quilt. I feel fortunate to have been exposed to a broad horizon of skill sets and theoretical approaches from several great leaders in the field of emotion and psychopathology. This includes Sheri Johnson who taught me to balance curiosity with compassion when working with bipolar patients and to remain grounded in the process; Dacher Keltner who has an amazing ability to cultivate a sense of excitement and positivity and an appreciation for big-picture ideas in affective science; Ann Kring who first exposed me to research on emotion and ingrained in me the importance of methodological precision; Robert Levenson who was never afraid to challenge me and push my thinking while offering constant intellectual support; and Allison Harvey, who I was privileged to do my dissertation work under and who provided me with the unique opportunity to learn how to conduct large-scale projects in a collaborative team environment. I feel lucky to stand on the shoulder of such generous intellectual giants and equally kind human beings.

To what do you attribute your success in the science?

I think most success is a recipe that involves one part creativity, one part sheer serendipity, and 100+ parts perseverance. Getting involved in science is akin to signing up for a lifelong marathon, and perseverance is what carries most successful researchers through to the finish line. I personally think the most important thing to take care of and cultivate in yourself is a sense of curiosity; beyond all else, this is what has kept me happy doing what I do, and keeps me doing it.

What's your future research agenda?

To keep doing things that excite me. Right now, this involves conducting work that utilizes multi-method and multi-level approaches to understand the bidirectional relationship between positive emotion and mental health outcomes. I'm exploring new directions in this domain, including the addition of neuroimaging and genotyping tools to identify pathophysiological processes underlying positive emotion disturbance and conducting translational studies linking laboratory assessments of emotion functioning with longitudinal health outcomes in bipolar patients. However, I try to keep an open mind and spirit in thinking ahead. This helps me appreciate the unexpected new ideas and directions that arise through serendipitous collaborations and with bright new students I am fortunate to mentor.

Any advice for even younger psychological scientists? What would you tell someone just now entering graduate school or getting their PhD?

Be true to yourself. Spend time doing the things that you are genuinely curious about. Graduate school is a lot of hard work, so make it worth your while.

What publication you are most proud of or feel has been most important to your career?

Gruber, J., Johnson, S. L., Oveis, C., & Keltner, D. (2008). Risk for mania and positive emotional responding: Too much of a good thing? *Emotion, 8,* 23-33.

This was my first major publication as a bright-eyed and young grad student. I did not get the results I expected or wanted, and I was initially bummed. In hindsight, this was the best thing that could have happened. It changed the way I think about mania and positive emotion forever after. Counterintuitive results open up paths to viewing phenomena in an entirely new way and remind us humble scientists that we often have little control over the results we get. Even Einstein once said, “If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn’t be called research.”