



Why chatting with your best friend about how much fun you had at the party is good for you and your community's health



Figure 1 Photo by mohamed_hassan Used under CCo

It is intuitive that social support and positive interactions within communities are linked to better physical and emotional health for individual community members. However, we have not been able to say, from a research standpoint, how or why this is the case. In *Sharing Positive Experiences Boosts Resilient Thinking: Everyday Benefits of Social Connection and Positive Emotion in a Community Sample*, Arewasikporn, Sturgeon, and Zautra begin to untangle the answer and the path runs through the concept of resilience.

“Our results highlight the importance of sharing positive experiences in one’s daily life, which may have implications for the enhancement of immediate positive emotional states and resilient cognitions, which in turn may have long-term benefits in mental health, well-being, physical function, and resilient outcomes.”

Resilience is a response to psychological stress. The goal of resilience is adaptation, a quick and full recovery, and the ability to turn stressor into an opportunity for psychological growth. People who are resilient are better able to cope with overall stress in life.

We can probably all think of friends and colleagues who are “draining” and who rush to tell us the latest updates in the sad tales of their lives.

Highlights

Shared enjoyment and positive interactions are linked to resiliency through positive affect.

How much people experienced and shared positive experiences varies more day-to-day.

Feeling good about the shared experiences and translating these to resilient cognition differs more person-to-person.

More rare are those friends who relish in the happy moments and who share good news amidst a balanced life portfolio of joy and hardship. Arewasikporn et. al argue that this tendency to share positive experiences may tell us something about someone's resilience. People who are more likely to share good news may have more emotional resources and greater mental flexibility to compensate for stressful life events. This tendency may be self-fulfilling if sharing experiences can facilitate psychological growth provide additional ways to seek out meaning. That is to say that people with a greater capability to recognize and share good news, may reap more benefit from sharing the good news.

Arewasikporn et. al. investigate whether sharing positive experiences together, and modelling the sharing of those experiences, facilitates adaptive coping and promotes resilience. The question remains: how can we harness this "power of positive sharing?" Can we intentionally encourage the sharing of positive experiences to promote greater emotional and physical health in communities?

Methods

Arewasikporn et. al. used data from a sample of 809 middle age adults ages 40-65 years old residing in Maricopa County, Arizona. Study participants completed nightly diary entries for 30 days. As part of the diary entries, participants were asked to think about the most positive event in their day and where then asked to rate the question "How much did others share your enjoyment of the experience".

The researchers also included measures of resiliency, depression, anxiety, well-being, and vitality. Participants were invited to complete a follow-up phone interview with investigators at least 6 months after completing their diary. Response rates were high. There was an 87% completion rate of the daily diaries and 79% of participants completed the follow up interview.

Results

- Study participants recalled more examples of their own resilient thinking on days they shared their enjoyment about a positive event with others.
- Study participants who reported more sharing of positive events on average tended to have a more resilient mindset than participants who reported less shared enjoyment.
- The positive affect experienced after sharing the positive event mediated the relationship between shared enjoyment and resilient cognitions.
- Having a resilient mindset can promote future mental and physical well-being by negating risks of negative events. The compensatory model sees resilience as a factor that neutralizes exposures to risk. This is referred to as a compensatory model of risk and resilience¹.
- There is preliminary evidence that how sharing positive experiences varies less person-to-person and more day-to-day. However, feeling good about the shared experiences and translating these to resilient cognition differs more person-to-person.

¹ Luthar SS. Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In: Cicchetti D, Cohen DJ, editors. *Developmental Psychopathology: Risk, Disorder, and Adaptation*. New York: Wiley; 2006. pp. 740–795.

What Does This Mean For?

Practice: You got this! This work suggest that all people can reap the benefits of sharing positive events, if we can learn to interpret the experiences positively and understand how these happy events can help counteract negative ones. The tendency to have positive cognitions about one's own resilience may make you more resilient!

Community Organizers: Community events provide health and welfare benefits that have been underestimated. Providing more opportunities for engagement and opportunities to reflect on positive engagement will likely increase mental and physical health for individuals and communities.

Original Citation: [Arewasikporn, A., Sturgeon, J. A., & Zautra, A. J. \(2016\). Sharing positive experiences boosts resilient thinking: Everyday benefits of social connection and positive emotion in a community sample. American journal of community psychology.](#)

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