

Broadening Attentional Scope by Seeing Happy Faces

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Abstract : Broaden and build theory of emotion describes how experiencing positive emotions, such as happiness, broadens our 'thought-action repertoire' leading us to be more likely to go out and act on our positive emotions. This results in the building of new relationships, resources and skills, which we can draw on in times of need throughout life. In contrast, the experience of negative emotion is thought to narrow our 'thought-action repertoire', leading to specific actions to aid in survival. Three experiments aimed to explore the effect of briefly presented schematic faces (happy, sad, and neutral) on attentional scope using the flanker task. Based on the broaden and build theory it was hypothesised that there would be an increase in reaction time in trials primed with a happy face due to a broadening of attention, leading to increased flanker interference. A decrease in reaction time was predicted for trials primed with a sad face, due to a narrowing of attention leading to less flanker interference. Results lended partial support to the broaden and build hypothesis, with reaction times being slower following happy primes in incongruent flanker trials. Recent research is discussed in regards to potential mediators of the relationship between emotion and attention.

Keywords : emotion, attention, broaden and build, flanker task

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