

Feeling-State Theory vs. Dysfunctional Positive Affect

Differentiating Between Two Models of Positive-Feeling-Linked Behavior

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Feeling-State Theory (FST, Miller, 2004, 2010, 2012) and Knipe's (2005, 2009) dysfunctional positive affect (DPA) are fundamentally different in their hypotheses regarding compulsive behavior that is linked with positive feelings. Both FST and DPA models postulate that the compulsive behavior is, in some way, linked with positive feelings. FST states that the positive feeling is a fixated positive feeling called a "feeling state" (FS) that is created when an intensely desired feeling that becomes linked with a behavior, person, or object. For example, a feeling of safety becomes linked with a specific person. According to FST, the person compulsively or co-dependently seeks out the other person in order to feel safe.

DPA, on the other hand, states that the positive feeling is a defense against negative feelings (Knipe, 2005). For example, a person's love for

someone or “idealization” is a defense against negative feelings about that person. For DPA, the positive feeling is an avoidance or defense against any negative feelings the person may feel about the “love” person. When considering a specific case, using either of the two viewpoints, FST or DPA, the two approaches consistently identify predictably different psychological dynamics: The FST model identifies a feeling about the self (self-referential); the DPA model identifies a feeling toward an external person (other referential). Each identifies different feelings, consistent with its focus, to be the target of treatment. In other words, FST and DPA conceive the creation, maintenance, and treatment of co-dependent or other positive-feeling-linked behaviors with fundamentally different approaches. The clinical significance of the consistent difference between the two approaches is that FST can be used to treat a much wider variety of compulsive and addictive behaviors than can the DPA approach.

The following discussion includes behaviors that Knipe does not address. Knipe (2005) focuses his discussion of DPA on behaviors such as co-dependence, avoidance, and procrastination. On the other hand, FST seeks to explain all compulsive positive-feeling-linked behaviors such as co-dependence, compulsive gambling, sex addiction, and substance addictions. Including these different behaviors in the discussion highlights the differences between the FST and DPA models of positive-feeling-linked behaviors.

Feeling-State or Psychological Defense?

The Feeling-State Theory (2010) views the positive feelings that create compulsive behavior as fixated desires. For example, a gambler had an intense

need to belong. After winning a lot of money playing poker, the camaraderie that he experienced afterwards with his friends became linked with the behavior of playing poker. Subsequently, whenever he wanted to experience the feeling of camaraderie, he played poker. This fixated memory kept him compulsively gambling, even though he had lost money, because the fixation that linked the feeling of camaraderie (or belonging) and playing poker remained intact.

In FST, the fixated state consisting of a positive feeling (belonging) linked with a behavior (playing poker) is called a feeling-state (FS). Once created, the FS is independent of its origin. Whatever the prior psychological dynamic that intensified the desire for the feeling, the FS is a separate memory that links the feeling with a person or behavior. In other words, the gambler's overly intense desire for belonging may exist because of his childhood experiences, but the feeling of belonging linked with the behavior of gambling is now an independent memory—an FS. The desire to belong is a natural human desire. Even though the gambler's desire to belong is overly intense, his basic desire to belong is a natural human desire. Therefore, the FS is not a psychological defense but a natural human desire, albeit an intensified desire, that has become fixated with the behavior of gambling. Therefore, in this example, the behavior of gambling is not a psychological defense against negative feelings but an attempt to experience the feeling linked with the behavior—the feeling of belonging.

Sally's experience illustrates FST's "fixated desire" model—the independence of negative feelings and FSs. Sally presented for therapy because she had been crying every night since breaking up with her boyfriend.

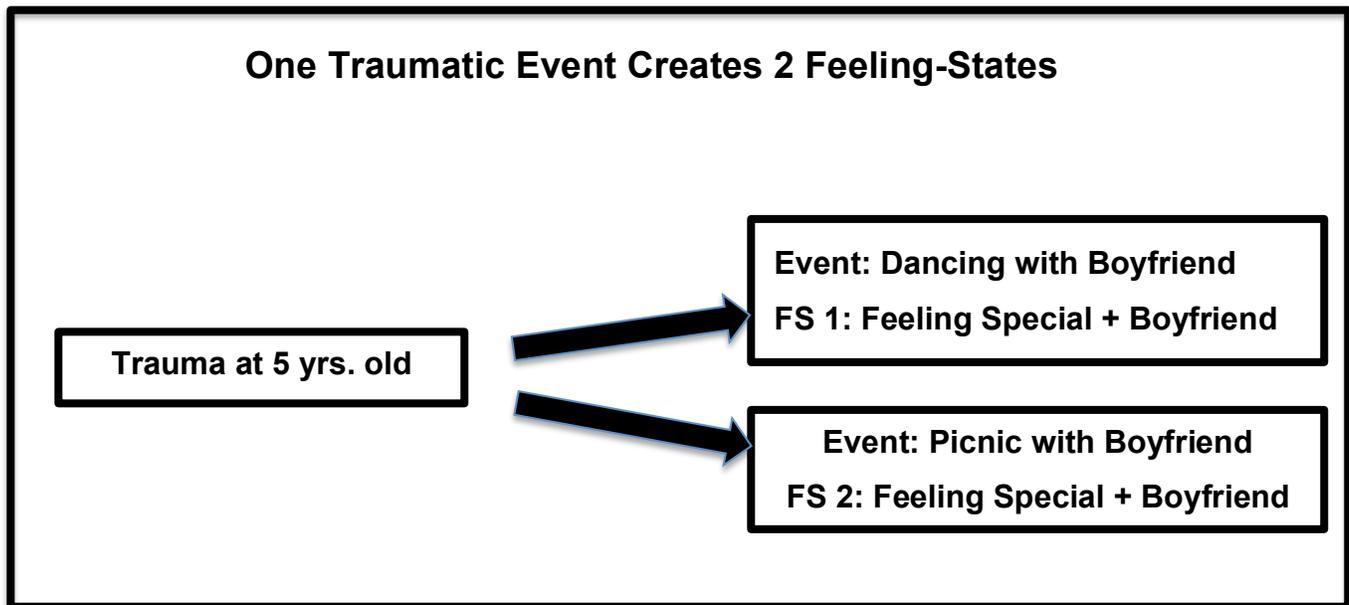
When Sally was asked the question, “What’s the most positive experience you’ve ever had with your ex-boyfriend?” Sally replied that it was an event in which he took her dancing. The feeling she experienced that night with her boyfriend was the feeling of being “special.” So the feeling of being special became fixated with her boyfriend. This FS was then processed so that the fixated link between her boyfriend and the feeling of being special was broken.

The next phase of treatment was to process the negative feelings that were intensifying Sally’s natural desire to feel special. The trauma that caused her desire to feel special occurred when Sally was 5 years old. On her birthday, her father told her that she was no good and that no one would ever really want her. That event of being the target of her father’s disparaging remarks was successfully processed in the initial session. Sally reported that the memory of her father’s words was no longer disturbing.

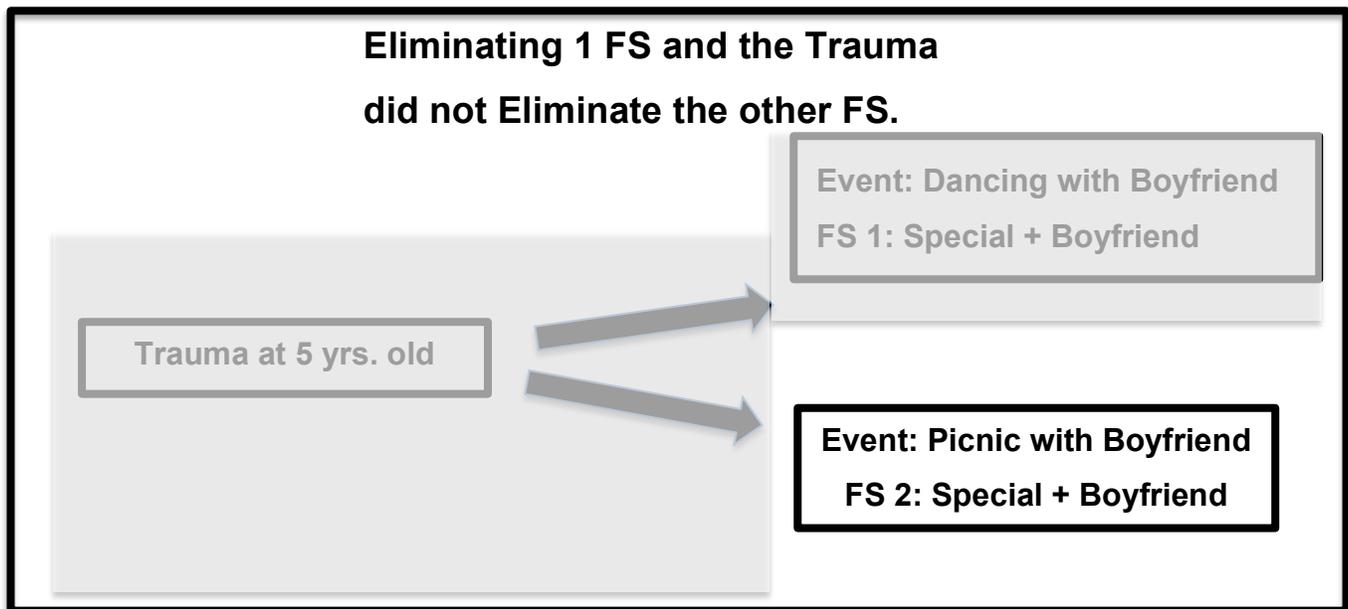
In the second session, Sally reported that she had stopped crying every night but that she still missed her ex-boyfriend a lot. Again, the question was asked, “What was the second most positive experience you ever had with your boyfriend?” This time Sally described a different event, going on a picnic with her boyfriend, that had occurred several months after the first event. Regarding this event, Sally also identified the feeling as “being special.” In other words, two separate events created two FSs with the feeling of “being special” as the feeling embedded in the FS.

The second FS was processed, releasing the fixation of the feeling of being special linked with her boyfriend, which was created during the picnic. When

identifying the underlying trauma, Sally said that it was the same trauma that had been processed during the previous session. When thinking about that traumatic event, however, Sally stated that she no longer had any reactions to that memory. No further treatment was necessary. When Sally returned for her next session, she reported that she no longer missed her ex-boyfriend and was moving on. Processing the second FS was all that was necessary to completely resolve Sally's desire to be with him.



**Eliminating 1 FS and the Trauma
did not Eliminate the other FS.**



Sally’s experience illustrates the difference between the trauma and the FS. Processing the trauma does not process the FS; processing the FS does not process the trauma. Each fixated memory, whether it is the negative memory of the trauma or the positive memory of the FS, requires separate processing.

Sally’s experience cannot be understood with the Knipe’s DPA hypothesis that positive-feeling-linked dysfunctional behaviors are psychological defenses. If the “DPA as psychological defense” hypothesis is correct, the second FS should have disappeared once the originating trauma was processed. Instead, the second FS linked with that trauma had to be processed separately in order to process the “missing” feeling that Sally still felt for her ex-boyfriend. The second FS had to be processed even though the traumatic memories did not evoke negative feelings and did not disturb Sally anymore. In the FST model, while

FSs may be created as an indirect result of a trauma, once created, the fixated feelings are now separate entities—a fixated desire that exists and persists whether or not the underlying negative feelings are present.

Sally's experience illustrates another reason why the positive feelings linked with people or behaviors are FSs and not defenses against negative memories or feelings. Sally's traumatic event occurred 20 years prior to the positive event. At the time the positive event with her boyfriend occurred, she was in a good mood and looking forward to a pleasant experience. Because of her boyfriend's behavior, the experience became intensely positive. Dancing with her boyfriend created for Sally an intense feeling of being special—a feeling that she had desired for many years. Sally, in other words, was experiencing an intensely desired feeling rather than defending against negative feelings. The intensely desired feeling of being special then became linked with her boyfriend. Sally was in a good mood and having a good time. Because of the situation in which the FS was created, the idea that Sally's feeling of being special was a defense against a traumatic event that occurred 20 years prior does not seem logical; nor is it logical that the good memory was a defense against negative feelings about her boyfriend because no negative events between them had occurred. Sally's experience supports the FST model that a feeling, intensely desired, can become fixated with a person—namely, that the motivation for the compulsive behavior is not avoidance or defense against a feeling, but a desire for a feeling.

The creation of the Sensation FS also supports the hypothesis that FSs are fixated positive memories rather than psychological defenses. In FST, a

Sensation FS is created when a person experiences a sensation of intense euphoria when using heroin or any drug for the first time. In FST, the euphoric Sensation FS is why heroin users “chase the dragon.” They are seeking the intense positive sensation that they experienced and remembered the first time they used the drug. The person is not avoiding a feeling, but seeking a feeling.

The concept of Sensation FSs directly contradicts the idea that FSs are psychological defenses. According to FST, the Sensation FS is created as a direct result of using a drug. The intensity of the person’s physiological reaction to the drug is the experience that creates the FS. No prior psychological desire is required. A Sensation FS, in other words, does not require an underlying desire such as the desire to belong or to feel special in order to be created. Rather, the person’s physiological response to the drug creates the FS. Clinical experience indicates that, after a Sensation FS is processed, unlike the processing of psychologically created FSs, no negative feelings or memories related to some prior event surface. So, again, the FS exists with nothing to defend against. Rather, the most common reaction to the elimination of a Sensation FS is a feeling that a great weight has been lifted or that a nightmare the person has been living is finally over.

In summary, the concept of DPA as a psychological defense requires a negative feeling or memory that is being defended against. However, Sally’s experience and the Sensation FS are better explained by a different hypothesis—that fixated positive memories are fixated desires linking desired feelings with behavior or a specific person—FSs—that exist whether or not there is a prior

negative feeling. If FSs are psychological defenses, then the removal of what the FSs are defending against should immediately make an FS disappear. Clinical experience indicates that processing a trauma often does nothing to diminish the addictive or compulsive behavior. Rather, the FS must be processed separately. If the FS must be processed separately, then the FS is not a psychological defense because there is no longer anything to defend against.

Targeting Self-Referential Feelings vs. Feelings Toward the Other

The following discussion of the importance of targeting “self-referential feelings” versus “feelings toward the other” might best be summed up by a question about apple pie. If John likes eating apple pie, what is important? John’s liking for apple pie (feelings for the other) or that John likes apple pie because he likes the taste (self-referential)? The question will be answered at the end of this section.

In addition to the differences of “seeking a feeling” (the FS) versus a “psychological defense,” the FST and DPA models are also differentiated by the chosen orientation of the positive feeling that is targeted for processing—self-referential (inward) or the feelings toward the other (outward). In Knipe’s (2005) script for unrequited love, he asks the question, “Right now can you get a mental image, a picture of the nicest time with _____(state his or her name)?” and “When you hold that picture in mind of that loving time, how much right at this moment do you _____(“still love” or “want to hang onto”) _____(state his or her name)... Knipe then processes the feelings (love) or urges (want to hang onto) with bilateral stimulation (BLS). Knipe processes the positive feelings *toward* the

other person. Knipe makes clear that the sought-after feeling is not self-referential: “However, I don’t typically ask for a self-referencing cognitions, since this is likely to bring up feelings of shame” (pg. 191). As shown in both Knipe’s scripts and explicit statement, the positive feeling he identifies is not self-referential. This statement also makes clear that Knipe’s concept of the positive feeling linked with the behavior must be toward the other because of his anticipation that the self-referential feeling is likely to be shame. In other words, Knipe does not conceptualize that the self-referential-positive-feelings linked compulsive behaviors are the positive, sought-after, feelings.

A person utilizing the FST model would not ask questions about how a person feels toward a person or behavior. FST focuses on the positive feeling the person has about himself. In Sally’s situation, she appeared to be crying every night because she missed and loved her boyfriend. What Sally was really missing was the way he made her feel—special. Sally may have felt that she loved her boyfriend. However, she felt that she loved him because of the way he made her feel about herself. Identifying the way her boyfriend made her feel about herself allowed for a full understanding of the psychological dynamic that made her miss him. Sally’s “loving feeling” could have been caused by a variety of other desired feelings such as belonging, safety, or power. Without identifying the specific feeling that the person feels about himself in the presence of the other person, this psychological dynamic is unidentified and unprocessed. All psychological FSs have a history; not identifying the specific feeling embedded in the FS means that the originating psychological dynamics may not be resolved.

Jason's experience illustrates another problem when the focus is on a person's feelings toward something external. Jason had a pornography compulsion. Jason's pornography compulsive behavior consisted of many different sub-behaviors such as opening the computer, typing in the Google search terms, choosing which video to watch, choosing the specific scenes in the video, etc. For Jason the most intense sub-behavior occurred when, after inputting the search terms, a list of videos would appear on his screen. Jason identified an intense feeling of freedom at the moment he could choose which video to watch. Breaking the link between the feeling of freedom and the moment of choice eliminated Jason's pornography compulsion.

Jason's pornography compulsion is not easily understood by asking what Jason felt *toward* pornography. When Jason was first asked what he experienced at the choosing moment, he replied that he felt sexual excitement. That answer did not explain *why* Jason felt sexual excitement.

Since Jason was viewing pornography, that seems like an obvious answer. However, it does not explain why the most intense sub-behavior was that moment of choosing. When Jason was asked to identify the self-referential feeling he experienced at the moment of choosing, Jason identified the feeling of "freedom." That feeling of freedom was not what he experienced toward pornography. Rather, the feeling of freedom was his feeling about himself, "I am free." In FST, the identified positive feelings have to be self-referential.

Sally and Jason's experiences illustrate the difficulty in the explanation that their psychological dynamics are defenses against negative feelings or

memories. People have natural desires to be free, feel special, to belong. When the ability to fulfill these desires is blocked and the desire to experience the feelings becomes intense, the feelings can become linked with people, objects, or behaviors if a positive experience occurs that evokes the desired feelings. Sally wanted to feel special, Jason wanted to feel free, not as defenses against negative feelings but also because they always wanted those feelings. Minimizing compulsive behaviors that are linked with intensified healthy desires by call them psychological defenses minimizes the important role the need for those healthy desires plays in a person's life. As illustrated by Sally's experience, that need for those desires will drive the compulsive behavior even when the negative feelings are eliminated. Once the desired feeling is fixated in an FS, the person will continue to do the compulsive behavior because of his intense desire for that feeling. In other words, FSs result in people seeking a feeling rather than a defense against a feeling.

From the standpoint of the FST model, Knipe's misidentification of the positive feeling that the person desires explains why he thinks that the DPA-positive feeling he has identified is a defense. That "loving feeling" is not the result of real love but a desire to be with a person who triggers the real desired feeling. Sally mistook her desire to be with her boyfriend as a "loving feeling" because he made her feel special.

Sally's wanting to feel special created her desire of wanting to be with her boyfriend. In other words, Sally's wanting to be with her boyfriend was not a defense against negative feelings but was created from her desire to feel special.

The lack of awareness of negative feelings is the result of the intense focus on the obtaining of the desired feeling, not a defense against negative feelings. A person intently focused on getting what they want will not notice painful stimuli.

The desire for the positive feeling is so intense that any negative feelings are ignored. Since Knipe misidentifies the positive feeling, he also misidentifies the psychological dynamic as a defense, instead of the seeking of a feeling such as belonging. The result is that the DPA-identified positive feeling appears to be the result of a psychological defense rather than a desire for a positive, healthy feeling.

In summary, Sally's "feeling love" for her ex-boyfriend was not a defense against negative feelings about him or anyone else. Sally's desire to be with him was the result of the creation of the FS linking her ex-boyfriend with the feeling of being special at the moment he dances with her and fulfills her desire to feel special. Sally's intense desire to feel special overrode her negative feelings. When the fixated memory (the FS) linking the ex-boyfriend with the feeling of being special that occurred when she danced with him was eliminated, the intense desire to be with her boyfriend was eliminated.

Knipe's identification of the feeling toward the other person as the positive feeling means that the psychological dynamic creating the compulsive behavior is overlooked. Identifying the self-referential positive feeling makes clear the real psychological dynamic that compels the person toward the person or object which provides the correct target for treatment. To answer the question at the beginning of this section, from the standpoint of the FST model, John eats the

apple pie because he likes the taste, not because he “likes” apple pie. In other words, John eats the apple pie because of the way it makes *him* feel—not because of how he feels *toward* the apple pie.

Conclusion

The FST and DPA models are fundamentally different approaches to compulsive behavior. While both seek to identify the most positive event the person has had with the desired person, their view of what actually constitutes the positive feeling causing the compulsive behavior is completely different. FST views the positive feeling as a feeling that a person is seeking to feel through performing a behavior or being with a person. DPA sees the positive feeling as a defense against negative feelings and memories. FST targets the feeling that the person experiences about himself; DPA targets the positive affect the person has toward another person. Thus each approach identifies a completely different feeling as the motivator of the compulsive behavior. In other words, these approaches have little in common except for targeting some form of positive feeling. The different views of what the “positive” feeling is result from totally different lines of thinking that identify completely different targets to process. Clearly, which targets are processed is likely to have a clinical significance.

The superiority of the FST model for understanding compulsive behavior over the DPA model is two-fold. First, the FST model provides an explanation that applies to all positive-feeling compulsive behavior. The positive-feeling-linked behavior of co-dependence, sex addiction, and substance addictions, for example, can be easily understood utilizing the FST model. The DPA model has

not been extended to cover all of those behaviors. Second, as described above, John likes to eat apple pie not because he “loves” apple pie but because it tastes good to him. Knipe’s misidentification of the psychological dynamic creating the compulsive behavior means that the dynamic will not be the focus of treatment. On the other hand, the FST model identifies the dynamic causing the compulsive behavior and is easily applicable to all positive-feeling-linked behaviors.

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