



FOLLOW UP NOTES

Thanks for an engaging class. I know, I know. The Positive Self can be a complex and confusing topic. You hunger to have me say, "Here is clearly what research proves about the positive self....." or "Here are the top three approaches to dealing with the positive self....." but no such luck. I won't do it because I think the self is too complicated and delicious to reduce to formulas. Instead, I offer a variety of ways to think about the self so that when you come to coach your clients, this is a topic that you have considered in mature and nuanced ways.

Here are some notes:

1. The influence of psychology on popular thinking. I think this is a fascinating topic, and I hope you also do. All people have some intuition about human psychology, and over the years, a few psychological theories have really made it into mainstream thinking. I am going to highlight a few here because they shed light on a person's assumptions and worldview:

A) Social comparison as a mechanism for determining whether we are happy. Social comparison is a widely misunderstood concept. Social comparison happens to be sure. And it can influence happiness (both positively and negatively). If you want to get a better grasp on this topic, check out the Noba module:

<https://nobaproject.com/modules/social-comparison>

B) There is a biological you who is different from the "you" who is you. If you start paying attention, you will be amazed to see how common this "two selves" idea is. It is so entrenched most folks don't even notice it. Here are some examples of it:

-- "Did you know that when interacting positively with others, your brain rewires to create new positive pathways that reinforce this positive behavior!" Well, isn't your brain you? Is there a "you" that is separate from your brain and doesn't include your brain? This is a classic levels of analysis problem-- the phenomenological versus biological you. For a brief explanation of this, read the section entitled "Social psychology as a science" in this



Noba module I wrote: <https://nobaproject.com/modules/an-introduction-to-the-science-of-socialpsychology>

-- "I can't quit eating junk food?" Really? We all recognize that as fundamentally not true. Here we see a sense of self-alienation. On the one hand, there is this thing called me; on the other hand, this thing called me is weak and vulnerable to all sorts of insidious influences and temptations.

Part of "positive self" coaching (to the extent that there is such a thing) is to help clients gain a greater sense of coherence between these senses of self. Here, let me re-write the above examples with a more coherent sense of self in mind (see if you can spot the difference in coherency):

-- When I think, feel, and act, these experiences are associated with biological processes that are occurring within me.

-- I often choose to eat junk food because I prioritize short-term energy and taste over long-term health.

C) Pain and sadness are "real," while happiness is superficial. You hear this sentiment expressed all the time. "I grew up in hardship, and therefore I am somehow connected to a deeper truth or insight about the world" or "My most defining moments have been traumas." I in no way mean to minimize hardship, but these are just interpretations. Why does it make sense to say your divorce is more real than your marriage? Or that your child dying is more formative than your child living? In the end, we want positivity that is realistic, and we want to acknowledge suffering without getting trapped there.

Your Clients have Narratives: These are filters and interpretations.

At the heart of attending to the positive self in coaching is the idea that each of us has a running narrative in which we are (mostly) the protagonist). As a coach, you are listening carefully to this story and helping empower your client to see herself as the author of this story, with the power to edit, create new chapters, etc. I believe that this is essentially about deep listening. Specifically:



1. Hearing who the client is, who she wants to be, and who she thinks she could potentially be
2. Hearing themes behind what the client is saying.
3. Hearing how your client sees herself as multiple selves, often at odds with one another.
To what extent is your client just friends with herself? Accepting of herself?
Compassionate toward herself?

I hope these comments are helpful to consider.