

# Positive psychology

## Handout for the lecture 2016/2017

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# Positive psychology a science of human flourishing



# Positive psychology

## Lecture 1: Introduction





# Positive psychology - Introduction

Positive Psychology is a scientific study of optimal human functioning and flourishing. Instead of drawing on a “disease model”, it focuses on factors that enable individuals and communities to thrive and build the best in life.

Seligman, M.E., Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14.

- „At this juncture, the social and behavioral sciences can play an enormously important role. They can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities. Psychology should be able to help document what kinds of families result in children who flourish, what work settings support the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic engagement, and how people’s lives can be most worth living.”

# Criticisms of 'traditional' psychology

- Assumes that human beings are largely motivated by negative emotions
- Operates within a disease model researching everything, which could go wrong with the human brain and personality
- Studys negative emotions rather than positive
- Emphasizes on the negative side of life, does not adequately look at the whole range of human experience
- Focuses on identifying and fixing weaknesses rather than identifying and building on people's strengths
- Renders individuals passive victims of things, which happen to them in life



# Key elements of positive psychology

- It is interested in ‘the science of optimal human functioning’.
- It wants to learn what works from studying human success rather than human failure or weaknesses.
- It focuses attention on positive subjective experiences as well as positive human characteristics.
- It is not just interested in individuals but in how group structures can induce positive emotion and encourage the use of strengths.

# Differences between Positive Psychology and „Positive Thinking”

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## Positive Psychology:

- is a development within academic psychology
- has a strong intellectual base and intellectual credibility
- does not tell people how to live their lives
- does not make out that it is easy to be positive
- is not simply interested in developing the individual but in helping to create positive institutions

## Positive Thinking:

- is a branch of popular psychology
- is rarely supported by evidence other than stories of individuals
- if you try these techniques and they don't work you might be left feeling even worse about yourself
- often lacks intellectual coherence and credibility
- premises that you can use your mind to get anything you want in life
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# Check yourself

- Who are the key representatives of positive psychology?
- What are the key elements of positive psychology?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 2: Optimism





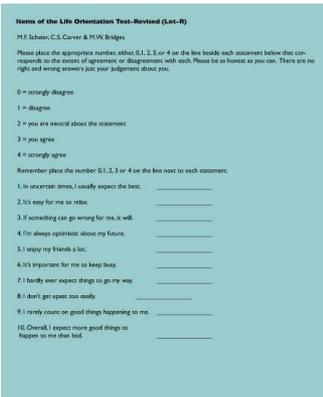
# Theoretical conceptions

- Optimism has had at least two theoretical conceptions in psychology
- Scheier & Carver (1985) - optimism as a general expectancy of positive events in the future.
  - Seligman (1990) - optimism as the interpretation of causes of past successes and failures.



## Scheier's & Carver's conception

- Optimism as a general expectancy of positive events in the future
- Define optimism as 'the global generalized tendency to believe that one will generally experience good versus bad outcomes in life.'
- Pessimism is the tendency to believe 'if something will go wrong for me, it will'.
- The Life Orientation Test LOT-R as a measure of dispositional optimism.



# The Life Orientation Test LOT-R

Scheier, M.F., Carver, Ch.S. & Bridges, M.W. (1994).

Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): a reevaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67 (6), 1063-1078.

- 10 items self-report measure (plus 4 filler items)
- reliability Cronbach's *alfa* = .76

The Polish adaptation: Juczyński, Z. (2001). *Narzędzia pomiaru w promocji i psychologii zdrowia*. Warszawa: Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.



# Research findings

- Optimists continue action, which enables them to succeed more often (Scheier & Carver, 1985)
- Setting high standards and aspirations, success in problem solving (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002)
- More adaptive strategies of handling difficult situations (Schweizer & Koch, 2001)
- Smaller stress and depression and greater perceived social support (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002)
- A sense of pessimism enhances a women's risk for adverse psychological reactions to the diagnosis of, and treatment for, breast cancer (Carver et al., 2005)
- Optimism predicts a lower rate of rehospitalization following coronary artery bypass graft surgery (Scheier et al., 1999)
- Optimists motivate co-workers better and induce an orientation toward the future and commitment in them (Jensen & Luthans, 2006)
- Optimism favored a higher assessment of chances of success in starting one's own venture (Łaguna, 2006)



## Martin Seligman's conception

*„The basis of optimism does not lie in positive phrases or images of victory, but in the way you think about causes.”*

- Each of us has our own ‘explanatory style’, a way of thinking about the causes of things that happen in our lives.
- Influential books translated into many languages (e.g. in Polish: *Optymizmu można się nauczyć*. Poznań: Media Rodzina, 1993).



# Optimism as the explanatory style

Three central dimensions which we use to interpret events in our lives:

- Permanence versus temporary
  - pessimistic: *when something goes wrong, then it will always go wrong*
  - optimistic: *it will go better next time*
- Pervasiveness – specific versus global
  - pessimists: see their failures as all-pervasive, or global; see successes as highly specific
  - optimists: see it as a specific setback rather than all-pervasive; see successes as global
- Personalisation - internal versus external
  - pessimists blame themselves, thus internalising the problem
  - optimists tend to blame others, or external events that were beyond their control, thus externalising the blame



# Research findings

People who have a pessimistic explanatory style are:

- more susceptible to depression when things go wrong
- more likely to underachieve
- prone to passivity or helplessness when confronted with a stressful situation
- liable to under-perform at sport
- more likely to die from a heart attack following an initial coronary event.

People who have an optimistic explanatory style:

- pay more attention to information that will help them reduce health risks
- reduce the risk of health problems and help recover after experiencing a serious life-changing event
- boosts sporting performance at team and individual levels



# Check yourself

- What are the key conceptions of optimism in psychology?
- How can we measure optimism?
- How does optimism affect our functioning?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 3: Hope





# Hope in a religious context

- In Christian tradition - one of the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), which are spiritual gifts of God.
  - The word "hope" appears over 180 times in the Bible
  - „(Because the law made nothing complete), and in its place there is a better hope, through which we come near to God” (Hebrews 7:19 )
  - „For now we see in a mirror darkly, but then face to face... So faith, hope, love abide, these three” (1 Corinthians 13)
- In some faiths and religions of the world, hope plays a very important role. Buddhists and Muslims, believe strongly in the concepts of free will and hope

# Snyder's conception

Snyder defines hope as a thinking process in which the person perceives that s/he can:

- (1) conceptualize goals,
- (2) produce the routes to these goals (pathways thinking),
- (3) initiate and sustain movement along those pathways (agency thinking).



Snyder, C.R. (2002). Hope theory: rainbows in the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13, 249-275.



# The Adult Dispositional (Trait) Hope Scale

Snyder, CR., Harris, C., Anderson, AR., Holleran, SA., Irving, LM., Sigmon, ST., Yoshinobu, L., Gibb. J., Langelle, C., Harney, P. (1991). The will and the ways: development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(4): 570-585.

- 12 items: 4 items reflect the agency, 4 items reflect the pathways, 4 items are fillers
- reliability Cronbach's *alfa* = .74 - .84

The Polish adaptation: Łaguna M., Trzebiński J., Zięba M. (2005). *KNS - Kwestionariusz Nadziei na Sukces. Podręcznik*. Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.



# Research findings

Individuals with a high level of hope:

- approach goals as challenge,
- concentrate on the possibilities of success rather than failure,
- assess highly the probability of goal attainment
- generate more goals, are capable of turning to a new goal more easily when the initial one proves to be unattainable

Hope is linked to higher academic and athletic performance, better adjustment, and better coping with health issues

# Trzebiński & Zięba's conception of the basic hope

- According to Erik Erikson (1964) a hope is an ego competence, the first one in individual development, and a ground-work for a personality growth.
- It consists of beliefs in two characteristics of the world:
  - its higher order and meaningfulness
  - its general positivity towards a human being

# Development and activation of the Basic Hope beliefs

- Unconsciously learned by a child experiencing family interactions
- It may change its strength, as a consequence of serious events during an individual's life-span
- It becomes activated primarily in two cases:
  - Personal order threatened or broken-up: *the death of a close person, the loss of job, serious illness, breaking up a friendships.*
  - Opportunities for new experiences & new relations that might change a person's life trajectory: *emigration, marriage, a first child born, a new job.*

# Basic Hope Inventory – BHI 12

Trzebiński, J., Zięba, M.(2003). *Kwestionariusz Nadziei Podstawowej – BHI-12*. Warszawa: Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.

- 12 items: 9 diagnostic and 3 distracter statements.
- reliability Cronbach's *alfa* = .82 in several studies on Polish population

# Consequences of the Basic Hope

Strong believe in meaningfulness and a positive character of the world provides a framework for constructive coping with irreversible losses and with a novelty in life situations.

- After irreversible personal losses stronger BH results in ability to steadily withdraw attention and direct activity away from the lost object to other objects
- In case of a failure, stronger BH enforces higher task involvement, aimed at overcoming difficulty
- Increases the constructive character of thoughts and emotions after a serious life difficulty.
- Secures against somatic and emotional disorders after a life trauma
- Allows accepting the irreversible losses, buffers against post-traumatic symptoms
- Facilitates positive attitudes toward new situations, people & experiences. Facilitates self-identity transformations in response to critical life changes

(Trzebiński & Zięba, 2004)



# Check yourself

- What are the three components of hope in Snyder's conception?
- How can we define basic hope?
- How can we measure hope and basic hope?
- How do hope and basic hope affect our functioning?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 4: Self-efficacy





## Perceived self-efficacy

- Defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.
- „*I can do this*”
- Determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave.
- Produce these diverse effects through cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes.

# Self-efficacy beliefs affect human agency in diverse ways:

- Choice behavior - People tend to avoid engaging in a task where their efficacy is low, and generally undertake tasks where their efficacy is high
- Effort expenditure and persistence - The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more vigorous and persistent are people's at their efforts
- Thought patterns and emotional reactions - Perceived self-efficacy shapes causal thinking  
*"Perceived self-efficacy contributes to the development of subskills, as well as draws upon them in fashioning new behavior patterns" (1986, p. 395)*

# People with a strong sense of self-efficacy

- approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats
- set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them
- heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure
- attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which are acquirable
- approach threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them

## People with a low sense of self-efficacy

- shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats
- have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue
- faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter
- slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties
- slow to recover their sense of efficacy following failure or setbacks



## Sources of self-efficacy

- 1. Mastery experience (enactive attainment)
- 2. Vicarious experience
- 3. Social persuasion (including verbal persuasions)
- 4. Physiological states



# Measures

- Microanalytic research strategy
- "Individuals are presented with self-efficacy scales representing **tasks** varying in difficulty, complexity, stressfulness, or in some other dimension, depending on the **particular domain** of functioning being explored. They designate the tasks they judge **they can do** and their **degree of certainty** that they can execute them" (Bandura, 1986, p. 422).



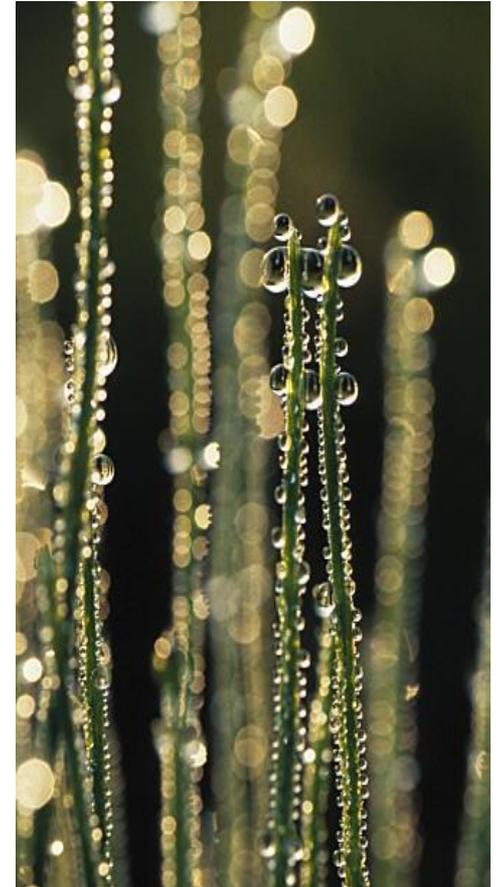
## Ralf Schwarzer's Generalized self-efficacy

- Global confidence in one's coping ability across a wide range of demanding or novel situations.
- Broad and stable sense of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful situations.

# Generalized perceived self-efficacy:

- facilitates goal-setting,
- effort investment,
- persistence in face of barriers
- recovery from setbacks.

It can be regarded as a positive resistance resource factor.





# General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

- Originally developed in German by Matthias Jerusalem and Ralf Schwarzer in 1981; now available in 30 languages
  - 10-item unidimensional scale
  - For the general adult population, including adolescents
  - Cronbach's *alphas* ranged from .76 to .90;  $M = .80$
- The Polish adaptation: Juczyński, Z. (2001). *Narzędzia pomiaru w promocji i psychologii zdrowia*. Warszawa: Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.



# Check yourself

- How can we define self-efficacy?
- What are the sources of self-efficacy?
- How can we measure self-efficacy according to Bandura and Schwarzer?
- How does self-efficacy affect our functioning?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 5: Self-esteem



- **Global or specific?**

- Self-evaluations *versus* global self-esteem, self-worth (Crocker & Major, 1989; Dutton & Brown, 1997; Marsh, 1996)

- **Belief or emotion?**

- Evaluations *versus* feelings
- Self-competence *versus* self-liking (Tafarodi & Milne, 2002; Tafarodi & Swann, 2001)
- Attitude (Rosenberg, 1965)



- **State or trait?**

- Instability *versus* stability (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; Kernis et al., 1993; Trzesniewski et al., 2003)

- **Explicit or implicit?**

- Conscious *versus* unconscious
- “nonconscious components to self-esteem” (Bosson, 2006) (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald & Farnham, 2000; Gregg, 2003)



# Criticism of self-esteem as a panacea

- Pervading importance given to self-esteem in popular culture and in modern psychology as misleading and dogmatic
- **Baumeister** - psychologists "were a little too eager in promoting the program before the data were in."
- **Seligman** - teaching children to feel good about themselves and not first teach them how to do well
- **Twenge** - by the mid 1990s, the average *Generation Me* college man had higher self-esteem than 86% of college men in 1968; children were systematically subjected to self-esteem building exercises in school

# Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale

- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- The most widely-used self-esteem measure, translated into many languages
- **Definition:** Self-esteem is a positive or negative orientation toward oneself, "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object"
  - 10 items
  - Cronbach's *alphas* ranged from .77 to .88
- **The Polish adaptation:** Łaguna M., Lachowicz-Tabaczek K., Dzwonkowska I. (2007). Skala samooceny SES Morrisa Rosenberga – polska adaptacja metody. *Psychologia Społeczna* 2(02), 164-176.
- Dzwonkowska I., Lachowicz-Tabaczek K., Łaguna M. (2008). *Samoocena oraz jej pomiar. Skala samooceny SES M. Rosenberga - Podręcznik*. Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych PTP.



# Research findings

- Academic performance - a very weak link;
  - Good results enhance self-esteem rather than vice versa;
  - Any attempt to artificially boost self-esteem for young people may backfire
- Relationships
  - People who record high self-esteem often say they have better social and inter-personal skills life than people with low self-esteem but others often contradict this view;
  - People with high self-esteem were more likely to initiate new relationships and interactions
- Sexual behaviour - low self-esteem is linked to teenage pregnancy



# Research findings

- **Eating disorders** - low self-esteem is a risk factor for anorexia and bulimia in young girls
- **Anti-social behaviour** - low self-esteem does not lead people into violence
- **Performance at work or on specific tasks**
  - weak positive relationships
  - high self-esteem people persisting longer in the face of failure
  - in performance contexts use better self-regulation strategies
- **Happiness** - close correlation
- **Coping and depression** - low self-esteem leads to poorer outcomes, including depression and possibly physical illness, increase vulnerability to depression
- **Health** - high self-esteem people cope better with stress, are more healthy



# Check yourself

- How can we define self-esteem?
- Why there is criticism of self-esteem?
- How can we measure self-esteem?
- How does self-esteem affect our functioning?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 6: Positive emotions



# Measuring emotions - PANAS

## Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

- Positive and negative affect as two dominant and relatively independent dimensions
- Consists of 10 positive affects and 10 negative affects
- Watson D, Clark LA, Tellegen A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: the PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063-70.
- The Polish adaptation: Brzozowski, P. (1995). *Adaptacja Skali Uczuć Pozytywnych i Negatywnych (PANAS) autorstwa Davida Watsona*. Raport z badań. Lublin: UMCS (maszynopis).
- Other scales



# The negative brain „positive psychology paradox”

- Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi – argue that the brain tends to be negative. Unless we are occupied with other thoughts, worrying is the brain’s ‘default position’.
- We must constantly strive to escape such ‘psychic entropy’ by learning to control our consciousness and direct our attention to activities which provide ‘flow’.
- A paradox: the brain finds it very easy to be negative but it is very important for human beings to experience positive emotions.
- Gregg Easterbrook: most people living in western society have never had it so good in terms of income and life-style yet happiness levels have hardly budged and there is an epidemic of depression.



# The role of positive emotions

- Until the advent of Positive Psychology, empirical psychologists had little interest in positive emotion.
- „Positive affect may be the single most important active ingredient in the recipe for human flourishing” (Fredrickson, 2005).
- While negative emotions narrow people’s perspective and keep them focused on the specific problem in hand; positive emotions ‘broaden’ people’s likely thoughts and actions as well as their behavior.
- When we are experiencing positive emotions we have more ‘behavioral flexibility’ and this allows us to build ‘intellectual and psychological resources’.



# Barbara Fredrickson

## The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions

- All emotions lead to specific action tendencies
- Positive emotions
  - expand cognition and behavioral tendencies
  - increase the number of potential behavioral options
  - results in resource building
  - the benefits last in the form of traits, social bonds, and abilities that endure into the future



# The build hypothesis

- Unlike negative emotions during which the body becomes prepared physically and mentally for immediate action, the adaptive value of positive emotions lies not in the moment, but over the long-term.
- From an evolutionary standpoint, the resources accrued through repeated experiences of positive emotions enhance the odds of survival and of living long enough to reproduce.



# The flourishing hypothesis

- Positive affect is an active ingredient within human flourishing
- Positive emotions
  - Broaden attention and thinking
  - Undo lingering negative emotions
  - Fuel psychological resilience
  - Build consequential personal resources
  - Seed human flourishing



# The undoing hypothesis

- Past research has shown that anger, fear and sadness each elicit distinct responses in the autonomic nervous system
- Positive emotions do not themselves generate cardiovascular reactivity, but instead quell any existing cardiovascular reactivity caused by negative emotions.
- Positive emotions can speed recovery from — or undo — this cardiovascular reactivity and return the body to mid-range levels of activation suitable for pursuing a wider range of behavioral options.



## When we are experiencing positive emotions...

- we have more ‘behavioural flexibility’ and this allows us to build ‘intellectual and psychological resources’
- we are more likely to be curious, to learn, to explore and be creative
- we are able to build personal resources which have lasting benefit to us and hence help us cope better with adversity
- we are more likely to build relationships with others



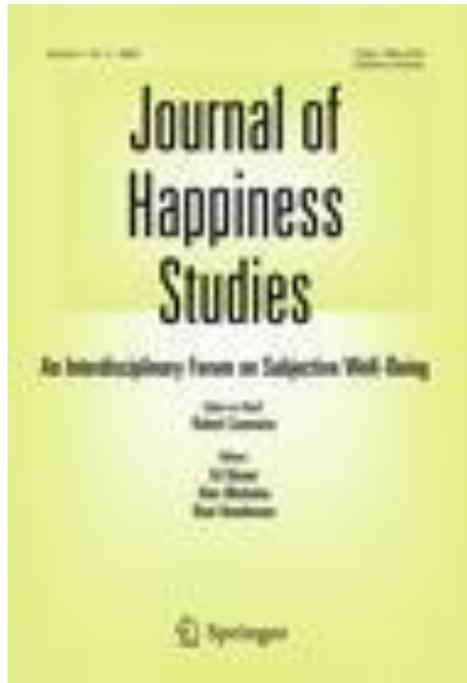
## Check yourself

- How can we measure emotions?
- How does positive emotions operate?
- How does positive emotions affect our functioning?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 7: Happiness





# Happiness in psychology

- Broader term - Subjective well-being SWB
- Subjective well-being components:
  - Happiness,
  - Life satisfaction,
  - Hedonic balance,
  - Fulfillment,
  - Stress (-).

(Kim-Preto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon & Diener, 2005)



# Three main approaches to Subjective well-being

## 1. Global assessment of life and its facets

Methods: self-reports, large surveys (e.g. Eurobarometer questions)

## 2. Recollection of past emotional experiences

Methods: asking participants about emotions over the last week, month; recall whether they experience a number of relevant feelings (e.g. depressed, joyful)

## 3. Aggregation of multiple emotional reactions across time

Methods: experience sampling method, reporting current emotions several times a day, over a set period of time; aggregating the participants' reports

# Global assessment of life satisfaction

- **Satisfaction with Life Scale**

- designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one's lives by using the person's own criteria
- a short, 5-item

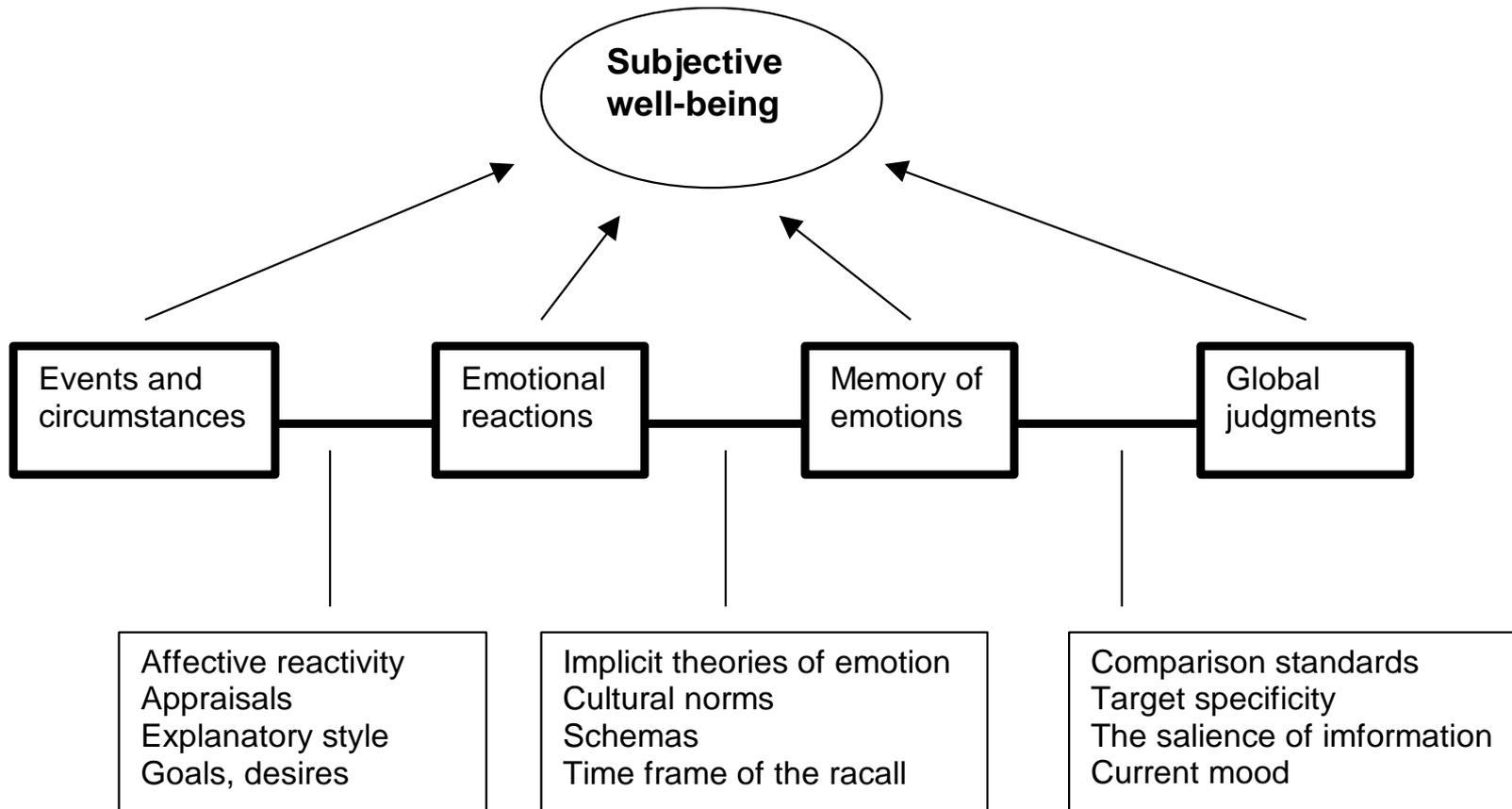
Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J., Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment* 49 (1).

Pavot, W., Diener, E. (1993). Review of the Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 5 (2), 164-172.

- **Subjective Happiness Scale** (Lyubomirsky, Lepper, 1999)

# A sequential framework of subjective well-being

(Kim-Preto, Diener, Tamir, Scollon & Diener, 2005)





# Happy people

- are healthier
- cope better with illness
- live longer
- are more productive
- are much more positive
- are more persistent in attempting to solve problems
- are more altruistic



# Check yourself

- Happiness – what are the related constructs in psychology?
- How can we measure happiness?
- What makes us happy?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 8: Mindfulness & Flow





## Mindfulness in a daily life

- An activity that can be done at any time
- Done by bringing the mind to focus on what is happening in the present moment, while simply noticing the mind's usual "commentary,"
- Once we have noticed the mind's running commentary, we have the freedom to release those judgments:  
"washing dishes: boring" --> "washing dishes: washing dishes"
- Any activity done mindfully is a form of meditation, and mindfulness is possible practically all the time.



# Mindfulness

Being aware of and paying attention to the moment in which we find ourselves. Our past is gone, our future is not yet here. So what exist between them is the **present moment**. If I can observe and not get caught up in my thoughts, it is all that I have. The **here and now**, the present is the link which holds what was and what will be.

Mindfulness or being mindful is being aware of your present moment. You are simply **observing the moment** in which you find yourself. Moments are like a breath. Each breath is replaced by the next breath.

You're there with **no other purpose** than being awake and aware of that moment.

You are not your thoughts. Our thoughts take us away from being here now. When I take a moment **to observe myself having thoughts**, I am no longer the thoughts. I get to be and observe at the same time.

That's why if I continue **to come back to my breath** which always occurs in the here and now, it draws me into the present. And from that vantage point I can observe as past and future attempt to draw me away from the moment.

This paying attention to the here and now, to the breath, to the observing one's thoughts without being critical or judgmental is what many people call Mindfulness.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

# Mindful Attention Awareness Scale

## MAAS

- Mindfulness has been operationalized in dispositional terms by the MAAS.
- 15-item self-report instrument with a single factor.
- Reliability Cronbach's alpha = .82-.87
- A description of the scale and its validation can be found in Brown and Ryan (2003).



# Research findings

## MAAS scores correlated with:

- lower neuroticism
- lower anxiety
- lower depression
- lower unpleasant affect
- lower negative affectivity
- higher pleasant affect
- higher positive affectivity
- higher vitality
- life satisfaction
- higher self-esteem
- higher optimism
- higher self-actualisation

(Brown and Ryan, 2003)



# Experimental studies

- The MAAS has shown to moderate the relation between implicit and explicit affect valence. The individuals scoring higher on the scale were more concordant with respect to their implicit and explicit affective experience.
- The MAAS predict more autonomous activity in day-to-day life and lower levels of unpleasant affect, measured both in intensity and frequency.
- State mindfulness was associated with positive experiences: higher level of autonomy, more intense and frequent pleasant affect, and less intense and less frequent unpleasant affect.
- Higher levels of mindfulness were related to lower levels of mood disturbance and stress before and after MBSR intervention programme in women with breast cancer and men with prostate cancer.



## Mindfulness-based approaches

The two main approaches that have been developed in recent years:

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction MBSR
- Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy MBCT
  - Both are taught over eight two hour long sessions (8 weeks), plus a day long session after week six
  - Taught in a group of up to 25 people.
  - Daily mindfulness practice that participants do at home with the support of CD's.



# Flow

- Flow happens when we become so absorbed in an activity that we lose ourselves and our sense of time is altered.
- It is intrinsically rewarding and so motivating.
- To achieve a flow state, a balance must be struck between the challenge of the task and the skill of the performer. If the task is too easy or too difficult, flow cannot occur.

Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. NY: Harper & Row.

# The eight ingredients of flow

1. **Clear goals** - attainable and align appropriately with one's skills and abilities
2. **Concentrating and focusing**, a high degree of concentration on a limited field of attention (a person engaged in the activity will have the opportunity to focus and to delve deeply into it)
3. A **loss of the feeling of self-consciousness**, the merging of action and awareness
4. **Distorted sense of time**, altered experience of time.
5. Direct and immediate **feedback**, successes and failures are apparent, so that behavior can be adjusted as needed
6. **Balance between ability level and challenge**, the activity is neither too easy nor too difficult
7. A sense of personal *control* over the situation or activity
8. The activity is **intrinsically rewarding**, so there is an effortlessness of action



# Check yourself

- Mindfulness - what does it mean?
- How can we measure mindfulness?
- How can we develop mindfulness?
- What are the ingredients of flow?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 9: Gratitude and forgiveness





# Distinguishing between gratefulness and indebtedness

- **Gratitude** - appreciation, or thankfulness
- **Indebtedness** - the state of being obligated;  
a negative reaction to a favor

The experience of indebtedness is less likely to lead to a desire to approach or make contact with others. Indebtedness tends to be an aversive psychological state that is distinct from gratitude.



# Experience of gratitude

Individuals are more likely to experience gratitude when they receive a favor that is perceived to be:

- *valued* by the recipient,
- *costly* to the benefactor,
- given by the benefactor with *benevolent intentions*,
- given *gratuitously* (rather than out of role-based obligations)

(Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977; Graham, 1988; Lane & Anderson, 1976; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968).



## Gratitude according to McCollough and Emmons

- *Gratitude – the grateful disposition – disposition toward gratitude*
- A generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the role of other people's benevolence in the positive experience and outcomes that one obtains

(McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002)



# Facets of the grateful disposition

- Intensity (how intensive)
- Frequency (how often)
- Span (number of life circumstances)
- Density (number of persons)

# The Gratitude Questionnaire GQ-6

- Devoted to examining the disposition to experience gratitude as a relatively stable affective trait
- One-factor scale
- Consists of six short self-report items, answers on 7-point Likert scale
- Allows to determine where a person's score on the GQ-6 falls relative to a large sample of adults
- Reliability Cronbach's *alphas* ranged from .78 to .84

Emmons, R.A., McCullough, M.E., & Tsang, J. (2003). The assessment of gratitude. In S.Lopez & C.R. Snyder (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology assessment* (pp. 327-342). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.



# Research findings

- **Well-Being:** Grateful people report higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels of depression and stress (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Watkins et al., 2003 ).
- **Prosociality:** People with a strong disposition toward gratitude have the capacity to be empathic and to take the perspective of others. They are rated as more generous and more helpful by people in their social networks (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).
- **Spirituality:** Those who regularly attend religious services and engage in religious activities are more likely to be grateful. Grateful people are more likely to acknowledge a belief in the interconnectedness of all life and a commitment to and responsibility to others (McCullough et. al., 2002).
- **Materialism:** Grateful individuals place less importance on material goods; they are less likely to judge their own and others success in terms of possessions accumulated; they are less envious of wealthy persons; and are more likely to share their possessions with others relative to less grateful persons (Polak, McCullough, 2006).



# Forgiveness

- Forgive - to grant free pardon and to give up all claim on account of an offence or debt
- Forgiveness may be considered in terms of:
  - the person who forgives including forgiving themselves,
  - the person forgiven,
  - the relationship between the forgiver and the person forgiven.

Forgiveness is defined as a process. Robert Enright developed a 20-Step Process Model of Forgiveness.



## Forgiveness in psychology

- Another 'forgotten factor' in psychology - Prior to the 1980s, forgiveness was a practice primarily left to matters of faith.
- A longitudinal study showed that people who were generally more neurotic, angry and hostile in life were less likely to forgive another person even after a long time had passed. They were more likely to still avoid their transgressor and want to enact revenge upon them four and a half years after the transgression.

(Enright, 2001)



## Forgiveness can be learned

- People who are taught how to forgive become less angry, feel less hurt, are more optimistic, become more forgiving in a variety of situations, and become more compassionate and self-confident.
- Studies show also a reduction in experience of stress, physical manifestations of stress, and an increase in vitality.

(Luskin, 2002)



## Forgiveness and health

- People who forgive are happier and healthier than those who hold resentments.
- When people think about forgiving an offender it leads to improved functioning in their cardiovascular and nervous systems.
- The more forgiving people were, the less they suffered from a wide range of illnesses. The less forgiving people reported a greater number of health problems.  
(Enright, 2001; Van Oyen, Witvilet, Ludwig, K. L. Vander Lann, 2001)
- „The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.” Gandhi



# Check yourself

- Gratitude - what does it mean?
- When are we more likely to experience gratitude?
- How can we measure gratitude?
- How does gratitude affect our functioning?
- Why forgiveness is important for our live?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 10: Goals





# Goals as personal projects

- Based on the assumption that purposive behaviour provides a unique window onto integrated cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of personality
- Emerged out of Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory in which the project is the focus of analysis
- Projects - analytic units for examining personality in the context of person-environment interaction, "extended sets of personally relevant action" (Little, 1988)



# Personal Projects Analysis (PPA) method

- Flexible methodology
- Primarily designed for single case studies
- Comparable data across individuals
- Consisted of 5 modules



# Personal Projects Analysis

## Module 1: Project Elicitation - Some examples of projects:

- Pass my psychology course
- Play with my cat
- Clean my apartment
- Try not to make my parents mad

## Module 2: Project Rating Matrices, Dimension Definitions

- PPA Rating Matrix: What do you think about what you are doing?
- PPA Rating Matrix: How do you feel about what you are doing?

## Modules 3 and 4: Cross Impact Matrix

- Now for each project separately, starting with project 1 on the left, decide whether the project will have a positive (+) very positive (++) , negative (-) very negative (- -) or neutral impact (0) on the remaining projects.

## Module 5: Project Nesting Module (Laddering Technique)

- Exploring project networks



# Goal Setting Theory

- People are driven to achieve goals.
- People behave the way that they do, because they are focused on achieving goals they have, consciously or unconsciously, set for themselves.
- For goals to increase performance, one must define them as difficult to achieve and as specific.

(Locke, 1996, 2001; Latham & Locke, 2002)



## People work towards goals that are:

- **Clear:** people have to know what they want in order to get it.
- **Challenging:** people set goals for themselves that are challenging.
- **Achievable:** people must also be aware that a goal is something they can achieve.



# SMART goals

- **S – Specific** - Significant, Stretching, Simple
- **M – Measurable** - Meaningful, Motivational, Manageable
- **A – Attainable** - Appropriate, Achievable, Agreed, Assignable, Actionable, Action-oriented, Ambitious
- **R – Relevant** - Realistic, Results-focused Results-oriented, Resourced, Rewarding
- **T - Time-bound** - Time-oriented, Time framed, Timed, Time-based, Timeboxed, Timely, Time-Specific, Timetabled, Time limited, Trackable, Tangible

# Goal - performance relationship

Goals can affect performance in three ways:

- narrow attention and direct efforts to goal-relevant activities,
- can lead to more effort,
- influence persistence.





# Moderators

Various moderators can affect the relationship between goals and performance:

- **Goal-commitment:** In order to become committed to a goal, one must believe in its importance or significance.
- **Attainability:** Individuals must also believe that they can attain a defined goal.
- **Self-efficacy:** The higher someone's self-efficacy regarding a certain task, the more likely they will set higher goals and the more persistence they will show in achieving them.



# Feedback

- Part of the goal setting theory is feedback.
- People need feedback in order to continue pursuing a certain goal.
- People have to know whether they are making any progress towards achieving that goal.
- They can determine the desirability of working harder or of changing their methods.



# Theory of action phases

- ‘Forming good intentions and effective ways to implement them can be suggested to people who are motivated to change their behaviour.’

(Gollwitzer, Fujita & Oettingen, 2004;  
Gollwitzer, Heckhausen & Steller, 1990)

# The model of action phases

Predecisional phase		Preactional phase		Actional phase		Postactional phase
Expectancy-value considerations	Goal intention	Implementation intentions	Action initiation	→	Goal achievement	
Deliberative mindset		Implemental mindset				Deliberative mindset



## Two intentions

- **Goal intentions** specify a certain end point  
*(I intend to reach x!)*
- **Implementation intentions** are **plans** that specify the when, where, and how of goal striving in advance, and have been shown to enhance rates of goal attainment compared to merely forming respective goal intentions.  
*(If situation x is encountered, I will perform behavior y!)*



# Gollwitzer's Research

How do goals and plans affect cognition and behavior?

Different theoretical concepts stimulate this research:

- Mind-sets
- Implementation Intentions - Plans
- Nonconscious Goal Pursuits



# Deliberative and implemental mind-sets

- Deliberating which goals to pursue versus planning the implementation of set goals leads to different cognitive orientations (i.e., deliberative and implemental mind-sets, respectively).
- The deliberative mind-set leads to an accurate and impartial analysis of information that speaks to the feasibility and desirability of possible goals.
- The implemental mind-set promotes an optimistic and partial analysis of such information.



# Disengagement and reengagement

- People's differ in capacities to manage unattainable goals.
- If people no longer have the opportunity to realize important life goals, they should be able to withdraw **effort** and **commitment** toward these goals and to pursue new meaningful goals, **reengage with alternative goals** .
- Individual differences in the capacities of adjusting unattainable goals facilitate purpose in life, reduce depression and stress, and improve people's health'.

(Wrosch, Dunne, Scheier, & Schulz, 2006)



# Check yourself

- How can we assess goals as personal projects?
- When are we more likely to work towards our goals?
- Implementation intentions – what does it mean?
- How can we benefit from goal disengagement?

# Positive psychology

## Lecture 11: Summary





# Strengths and Virtues

A strength is a pre-existing capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance (Linley)

- The strength already exists within us, whether to a greater or lesser extent
- When people are using their strengths, they feel like they are being the “real me,” not the person that someone else wants them to be, but the person who they really are
- When people use their strengths, they feel as if they have more energy available to them



# Character Strengths and Virtues (CSV)

Peterson, Ch. & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Oxford University Press.

- A systematic classification and measurement of universal strengths and virtues
- To identify and classify the positive psychological traits of human beings
- ‘Much like the DSM, the CSV provides a theoretical framework to assist in developing practical applications for positive psychology.’
- This manual identifies six classes of virtue, made up of twenty-four measurable character strengths.



# Character Strengths and Virtues

- 6 classes of virtue - "core virtues", made up of 24 character strengths (Peterson, Seligman, 2004)
- **Wisdom and Knowledge:** creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective
- **Courage:** bravery, persistence, integrity, vitality
- **Humanity:** love, kindness, social intelligence
- **Justice:** citizenship, fairness, leadership
- **Temperance:** forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, self-regulation
- **Transcendence:** appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality



# Positive diagnosis

- Short unidimensional scales, with open access. The scales are not copyrighted, and can be used without charge and without permission by all professionals (researchers and practitioners).
- More complex instruments – free but restricted

Linley: ‘You can take part in one of our ongoing research programmes at <http://www.personalitystrengths.com/>’



# Critique of the positive psychology

## Separatistic message

- Trying to establish separate and distinct science, “declaration of independence” from the pathology model
- The tyranny of the positive attitude in America:
  - we must think positive thoughts,
  - we must cultivate positive emotions and attitudes,
  - we must play to our strengths to be happy, healthy, and wise;
  - people could feel guilty or defective for not having the right (positive) attitude

(Held, 2004, 2005)



# Critique of the positive psychology

## Negative reactions of some of the spokespersons for the positive psychology movement

- Ideological declarations
- The way the movement is advertised, rewarded, and promoted
- Sometimes small attention paid to the research findings that contradict positive psychology findings

(Held, 2004, 2005)



# The “second-wave” of the positive psychology movement

Integrative, more dialogical perspective present in new positive psychology books

- “central task for a psychology of human strengths is to understand whether and how positive and negative experiences depend on each other and work together. Thus, a call for scientific study of ... positive states... should not be misunderstood as a call to ignore negative aspects of human experience”
- “It will be a major mistake to assume that all that is positive is good. ... Instead, efforts to understand when positive beliefs are linked to good outcomes, when they may not be, and why will yield a more realistic and balanced view.”

(Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003)



# Shall we wish positive psychology pass away?

- “The future of positive psychology (is) just plain psychology”

(Gable & Held)

- “Its success should result in its demise: Psychology in good balance would not need advocates for positive psychology”

(Smith, 2003)



# Check yourself

- How long is the history of positive psychology?
- Character Strengths and Virtues - what does it mean?
- What are the key characteristics of positive diagnosis?

# Always Look on the Bright Side of Life

Some things in life are bad  
They can really make you mad  
Other things just make you swear and curse.  
When you're chewing on life's gristle  
Don't grumble, give a whistle  
And this'll help things turn out for the best...

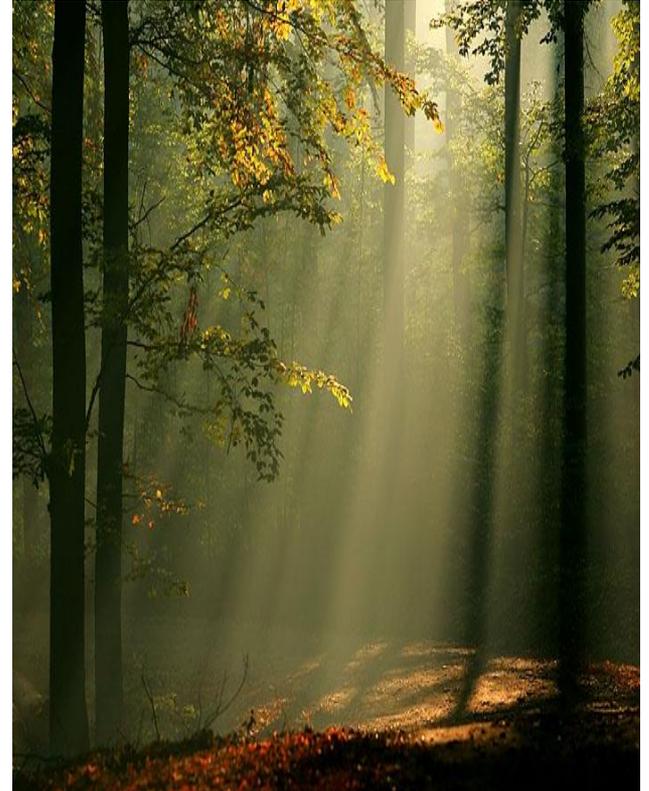
And...always look on the bright side of life...

Always look on the light side of life...

If life seems jolly rotten  
There's something you've forgotten  
And that's to laugh and smile and dance and sing.  
When you're feeling in the dumps  
Don't be silly chumps  
Just purse your lips and whistle - that's the thing.

And...always look on the bright side of life...

Always look on the light side of life...



*words and music by Eric Idle*