POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Barbara J. Cherry
Psychology; Gerontology Academic Program

2015 OLLI-CSUF Retirement Boot Camp
Positive Psychology: What is it?

- Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000

- The Science of Happiness

- The study of
  - Positive emotions
  - Positive character traits
  - Enabling institutions
In other words....

- Create a practice of making people lastingly happier
Background
The Nun Study

Aging with GRACE
What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Leading Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives

DAVID SNOWDON, PH.D.
Eichstaedt et al., 2014

Can tweets (short messages of up to 140 characters) provide insight into heart-disease mortality risk?

Greater use of positive-emotion words was associated with a reduced risk for HD mortality.
Background (con’t)

- Socio-emotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen)

![The U-bend graph](image)

*Source: PNAS paper: “A snapshot of the age distribution of psychological well-being in the United States” by Arthur Stone*
Six Virtues

- Wisdom
- Courage
- Humanity
- Justice
- Temperance
- Transcendence
Twenty-Four Character Strengths
(Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

- **Wisdom/Knowledge**
  - Creativity
  - Curiosity
  - Open-mindedness
  - Love of learning
  - Perspective

- **Courage**
  - Authenticity
  - Bravery
  - Persistence
  - Zest
Character Strengths

- Humanity
  - Kindness
  - Love
  - Social Intelligence

- Justice
  - Fairness
  - Leadership
  - Teamwork
Character Strengths (con’t.)

- **Temperance**
  - Forgiveness
  - Modesty
  - Prudence
  - Self-regulation

- **Transcendence**
  - Appreciation of beauty and excellence
  - Gratitude
  - Hope
  - Humor
  - Religiousness
Strengths of the heart versus the brain

zest
gratitude
hope
love
curiosity
love of learning
Dissemination

www.positivepsychology.org

www.bus.umich.edu/Positive/
The Research

- Happiness defined (Seligman, 2002; Peterson et al., 2005)
  - Positive emotion and pleasure (the pleasant life)
  - Engagement (the engaged life)
  - Meaning (the meaningful life)

- “Happy people are healthier, more successful, and more socially engaged.”
  (Seligman et al., 2005, p.414)
Measuring Happiness

- Steen Happiness Index

- Adapted from Beck Depression Inventory
  - 20 questions
  - Three kinds of happy life: pleasant, engaged, meaningful
  - Range of scores for each statement:
    - 1 Bored
    - 5 Fascinated
Psychometrics of Happiness Index

- Sensitive to change over time
- Consistent with other measures of “Happiness”
The Study

- Randomized controlled trial
- Internet study
- Five happiness exercises
- One placebo exercise
Participants

- 577 adults
- 42% male; 58% female
- 64% between 35 and 54 years of age
- 39% college degree, 27% graduate degree
- 77% white
Happiness Exercises

- **Gratitude visit**
  - Write and deliver a letter of gratitude

- **Three good things in life**
  - Write down 3 things each day that went well and why

- **You at your best**
  - Write about when you were at your best and reflect on personal strengths in the story. Review story each day.
Happiness Exercises (con’t.)

- Identifying **signature strengths** (top five)
  - [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org)
  - [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)
  - Use one of these each day in a new and different way.

- **Using signature strengths**
  - Use five highest strengths more often during the next week.
Early memories

- Write about your early memories every night for one week.
Procedures

- Informed consent
- Demographic questionnaire

- Randomly assigned exercise—do one week

- Happiness and Depression Indices
  - Pretest, posttest, one week, 1, 3 and 6 months
Results
Gratitude

- Pre-test
- Post-test
- One week
- One month

Gratitude
Placebo
Results
Three good things

One week
One month
3 months
6 months
Results

Using signature strengths

One week | One month | 3 months | 6 months
---|---|---|---
Strengths | Placebo

56.5 | 57 | 57.5 | 58 | 58.5 | 59 | 59.5 | 60 | 60.5
Conclusions

- **Gratitude** -- highest increase in happiness

- “Lasting” happiness
  - Three good things
  - Using signature strengths

- Those who persisted with exercises showed highest gain
Fibromyalgia & Chronic Pain Center Study

- Jessie Jones, Health Sciences
- Dana Rutledge, Nursing
- Laura Zettel-Watson, Psychology; Gerontology
- Debbie Rose, Kinesiology
- Jennifer Piazza, Health Sciences
- Phyllis Talarico, FM support group leader

http://fmcp.fullerton.edu/
Longitudinal Study Overview

- **Participants**
  - 2008: 70 FM, 76 non-FM
  - 2010: 64 FM, 51 non-FM
  - 2012: 46 FM, 57 non-FM
  - 2014: 49 FM, 45 non-FM

- **Measures**
  - Medical history, medications, BMI, physical activity level (RAPA), MOS social support survey
  - 19 symptoms (NFMAQ), Composite Physical Function, Beck Depression Inventory
  - Cognitive, physical performance
Cognitive Assessments

- BLUE
- GREEN
- YELLOW
- PINK
- RED
- ORANGE
- GREY
- BLACK
- PURPLE
- TAN
- WHITE
- BROWN

Numbers:
71504
284936
8351609
25736184
940627135
2753180649

Diagram:

1 2 3 4

Sample:
21 37 24 8 21 32

15 42 76 35 72 8

Test Making Tool, Part II
CERAD 10-item word list

- Immediate recall
  - Trials 1, 2, 3

- Delayed recall

- Recognition
Physical Performance
Cognitive and Physical Questions

- Describe your experience with **concentration problems** over the past week.

- Describe your experience with **forgetfulness** over the past week.

- **Functional limitations:**
  - How well can you perform tasks such as dressing, bathing, going up and down stairs, light housekeeping, walking two blocks....
Current Research Q

- Positive psychology assessment added (2014)

- Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)
  - First 10 statements ask different dimensions of positive mood
  - Rate statements from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely)

- Q: Does positive affect predict better cognition physical function?
Results and Conclusions

Happy helps

- Caveats: small sample size, exploratory

- Control individuals \( (n = 42; \text{Mage} = 72) \)
  - Fewer concentration problems, forgetfulness
  - Better chair stand performance
  - Fewer functional limitations

- Individuals with FM \( (n = 49; \text{Mage} = 64) \)
  - Fewer concentration problems
  - Better memory
How do we apply positive psychology to our lives/lifestyles?

Speaking of lifestyle...

- Be social
- Keep moving
- Keep learning
- Eat well
- Go green
- Be happy
Social Engagement
Social Support

Empathy
“Sitting is the new smoking”
Keep learning

Learning something new causes the brain to grow more connections among the neurons.

With more connections, the neurons can send and receive more messages.

These connections help to stretch a part of your brain and make it more elastic, so that it can hold more information and ideas.
Eat Well
Go Green
Be Happy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6SxvsUYtM