

2

FOUNDATIONS

Emotion, Motivation, and the Nature of Well-Being

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Describe three ways our genetic inheritance may influence our general level of well-being.
- 2.2 Discuss why our thoughts and cognitions are important to well-being.
- 2.3 Explain the concept of “strengths” and why it is important to well-being.
- 2.4 Summarize the types of goals that are associated with increases in happiness.
- 2.5 Paraphrase the “broaden-and-build” model of positive emotion.
- 2.6 Explain the concept of “emotional intelligence.”
- 2.7 Compare and contrast the following perspectives on happiness: hedonic, eudaimonia, and the psychologically rich life.

It may come as no surprise that this book focuses significantly on our emotional responses to life. Our emotional reactions can range from simple impulsive reactions toward unexpected events, such as the fight-or-flight reaction, to complex combinations of experiences that create our feelings of love, devotion, gratitude, and sense of meaningfulness. In addition, emotions can be temporary, or they can extend over time. In the latter case, we generally refer to them as moods.

It may be surprising, however, to learn that the first question to be considered concerns the nature of emotion, for just what is an emotion? Although many people feel it is all too obvious what constitutes an emotion, researchers take a more complex view. In fact, our emotions result from a complex interplay of behavioral, biological, cognitive, and sociocultural processes (Frijda, 2008). This chapter therefore explores how all these components contribute to our experience of emotions, particularly of positive emotions. We also discuss theories of motivation and new perspectives on positive emotion. Finally, we examine how well-being has been defined by various researchers in positive psychology and other disciplines.

BASIC EMOTIONS

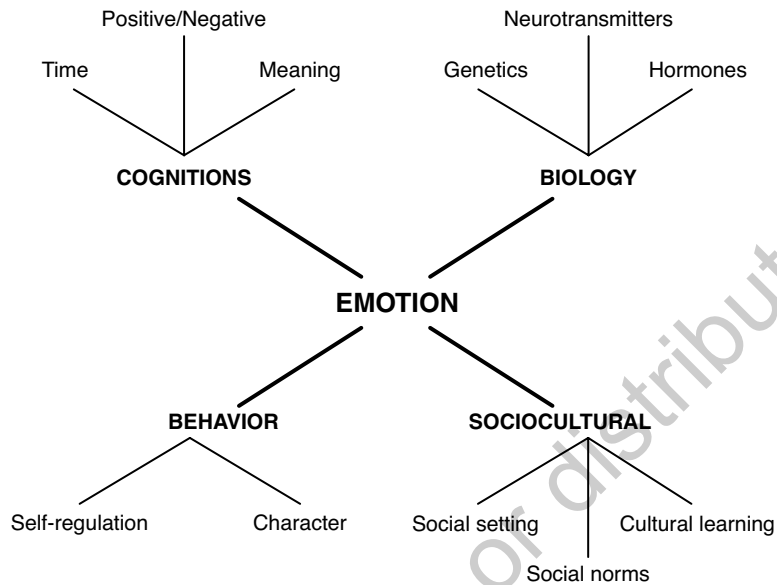
Throughout the history of psychology, investigators have searched for our basic emotions, the innate emotions that provide the foundation for all other emotions. In the original research studies, the exact number of basic emotions varied from four to 10, depending on the theory. For example, Paul Ekman (1993) listed seven basic emotions: sadness, fear, anger, disgust, contempt, surprise, and happiness. Other lists were similar, and there was a fair amount of agreement among the lists (see Weitan, 2005). More recent research calls into question the older ideas about the number of basic emotions and the universality of emotional expression. Lisa Barrett and her graduate students found significant cross-cultural differences in the number of basic emotions and how facial expressions are interpreted (Gendron et al., 2014). However, newer research has not yet altered the conclusion that the total number of basic positive emotions (e.g., happiness) tends to be less than the number of other basic emotions. This observation is important for a theory of emotion to be discussed later in this chapter.

A newer study of emotions found 27 categories of emotions (Cowen & Keltner, 2017). A few of the categories, along with representative feelings, are admiration (feeling impressed, pride, amazement), adoration (love, happiness), joy (happiness, love), and interest (amazement, feeling intrigued). You may have noticed in these examples that “happiness” and “amazement” are listed in two categories. This overlap is due to the complex ways in which people experience emotions. That is, the word *happiness* can be used to describe the feelings associated with both adoration and joy. Unlike earlier studies of basic emotions, the categories found in this study have a more even balance between positive and negative emotions. Of relevance for positive psychology is the fact all researchers seem to agree that enjoyment, or happiness, or joy, may be a basic emotion.

The basic emotions can also be combined in many ways to create more subtle variations in emotional experience. For example, in Robert Plutchik’s (1980) emotion wheel, the emotion of awe is a combination of surprise and fear. That is, he suggested a positive emotion that is often related to religious experiences is created from a specific combination of the somewhat positive emotion of surprise with the basic negative emotion of fear. Note that if our emotional experiences really do combine in ways similar to his notion, this would suggest that any attempt to totally eliminate negative emotions from our life would have the unintended consequence of eliminating the variety and subtlety of our most profound emotional experiences.

Interestingly, considerable research has supported the idea that positive emotions and negative emotions are relatively independent (e.g., Ryff et al., 2006). That is, how often a person feels positive emotions may have little to do with how often that person feels negative emotions (Schimmack, 2008). Note this means that efforts to increase positive emotions will not automatically result in decreased negative emotions and vice versa. This finding is relevant to positive psychology interventions.

It is also possible to classify emotions by how central they are to our daily experience. James Russell and Feldman Barrett (1999) described emotional reactions they called *core affect*. For them, core affect is a relatively elemental and primitive emotional reaction that is fairly consistently experienced but often not consciously acknowledged; it comprises our unique blend

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Components of Emotion

Source: Courtesy of Richard Tillman, Ph.D. & George Oeser.

of the pleasant/unpleasant and the activated/deactivated dimensions that we carry with us at almost an unconscious level. Variations in core affect among persons can lead to identical situations being evaluated differently because different core affects can push people toward either negative or positive interpretations (E. Smith & Mackie, 2008). Indeed, there are now a variety of studies that support the idea that many of our emotional responses operate at an unconscious level (Bargh & Williams, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, our emotions are a complex combination of aspects from biological, cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural influences. The next section discusses the components of emotion and how they impact our reactions and feelings. Figure 2.1 illustrates how these factors influence our emotional state and reactions.

COMPONENTS OF EMOTION

Biology of Emotions

Our affective or emotional reactions are generally controlled by one of two biobehavioral systems. The first is the *behavioral inhibition system* that limits our response to stress, pain, and other distressing stimuli (see Naragon-Gainey & Watson, 2021). The second is related to positive emotion and is called the *behavioral facilitation system*. This system is responsible for our reactions to situations that may produce rewards or pleasure. The positive affective system can be subdivided into specific types. However, so far there has been no general agreement on what

those types should be. Among the most frequently seen in the research are the following three types: joviality, self-assurance, and attentiveness, along with another set of four types: geniality, experience seeking, vigor, and attentiveness (see Naragon-Gainey & Watson, 2021). However, these are very broad systems and to understand positive emotion, it is necessary to explore further.

The “Happy” Brain

John Davidson of the University of Wisconsin has conducted significant research to determine which parts of the brain are involved in positive emotions. Specifically, the left prefrontal cortex of the brain is more activated when we are happy (see Lutz et al., 2007). This area of the brain has also been associated with greater ability to recover from negative emotions, as well as enhanced ability to suppress negative emotions (see Urry et al., 2004). In a unique series of studies involving long-term Buddhist meditators, Davidson found that people can train themselves to increase activation in this area of their brains (also see Kringlebach & Berridge, 2009). A more recent study of the brain found that happiness and satisfaction with life are tied to a region of the brain found a bit farther back from the frontal lobe (Sato et al., 2015), specifically, the precuneus of the medial parietal lobe. Indeed, people who scored higher on measures of both happiness and life satisfaction showed more gray matter in that region of the brain. The fact that two areas of the brain have been linked to happiness may be related to the complex reward system in the brain.

The brain has a complex and dynamic system that creates a sense of rewards and pleasure. Recent work suggests that the neural mechanisms responsible for desire or craving are different from the mechanisms responsible for pleasure (Smith & Aguilera-Hellweg, 2017). Craving is related to the neurotransmitter dopamine that is created in the brain stem. Pleasure is related to regions of the brain known as “pleasure hot spots” that are associated with the neural pathways of craving. Interestingly, research has shown that addiction is partly associated with the prefrontal cortex, the same region that Davidson found is associated with happiness. However, it is not simply the physical regions of the brain that are associated with feelings of well-being.

Neurotransmitters, Hormones, and the Chemicals of Pleasure

Considerable empirical evidence indicates that many of our pleasurable responses are caused by the release of hormones and certain chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters, which are the chemical messengers that relay information between nerve cells. While many chemicals are responsible for our emotions, the ones most often cited are dopamine, serotonin, oxycontin, anandamide, the enkephalins, and gamma-aminobutyric acid or GABA. Increased levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine (the “reward molecule”) have been implicated in the feelings of desire and happiness (Ashby et al., 1999). In the mid-1970s, a Scottish team of researchers discovered a variety of neurotransmitters that seem to act like the brain’s natural opiate system. These enkephalins or endorphins appear to increase pleasure and decrease the experience of pain. Increased levels of endorphins are partially involved in the “runner’s high” that can accompany physical exercise (Farrell et al., 1987). Levels of the endorphins also increase as much as 200% during sexual intercourse (Pert, 1997).

Recently, a considerable amount of attention has been given to the effects of the hormone oxytocin (the “love hormone” or “cuddle hormone”). Studies have found that oxytocin is associated with social bonding, trust, and emotional support within couples and is also released during breastfeeding (Dickerson & Zoccola, 2009). Oxytocin is also associated with interactions between dogs and their owners (Petersson et al., 2017). Recent work has also suggested that the brain makes its own version of tetrahydro-cannabinols or THC, which is the active ingredient in marijuana (Fackelmann, 1993). Related to this pathway is the neurotransmitter anandamide (the “bliss molecule”) that produces a calming effect when binding to cannabinoid receptors (Freidman, 2015). A genetic variation exists that helps some lucky people to produce more of it. Interestingly, the genetic variation is not equally distributed among ethnic groups, for whereas about 21% of Americans and Europeans have the advantageous genetic variation, it is found in about 45% of Yoruban Nigerians. Finally, the neurotransmitter GABA slows down the activity of nerve cells and helps produce a feeling of calmness. Practicing yoga or meditation can increase levels of GABA (Streeter et al., 2010).

Does this mean that positive emotions such as joy or love are simply patterns of neurotransmitter and hormonal activity? A recent bumper sticker humorously expressed this position as “I’m not really happy, it’s just a chemical imbalance!” Although our biological processes are certainly part of the equation, science has just begun to explore the various components of our emotional experiences.

Neuroplasticity

Until recently, scientists assumed that once our brains are formed in childhood, little change takes place for the remainder of our lives. Several fascinating studies in recent years have challenged this assumption, and in fact, it now appears that our brains can change throughout our lives as a result of our experiences. The term for this new idea is **neuroplasticity**. Neurologist Oliver Sacks (2010) said:

While it is often true that learning is easier in childhood, neuroscientists now know that the brain does not stop growing, even in our later years. Every time we practice an old skill or learn a new one, existing neural connections are strengthened and, over time, neurons create more connections to other neurons.

Remarkably when compared to past viewpoints, scientists now know that as we learn new skills and develop new capacities, the number of neural connections in our brains may also change. For instance, studies have found that the gray matter of the brain may slightly increase in size as a result of learning music (see Chapter 7) and practicing meditation (see Chapter 10).

The Genetics of Emotions

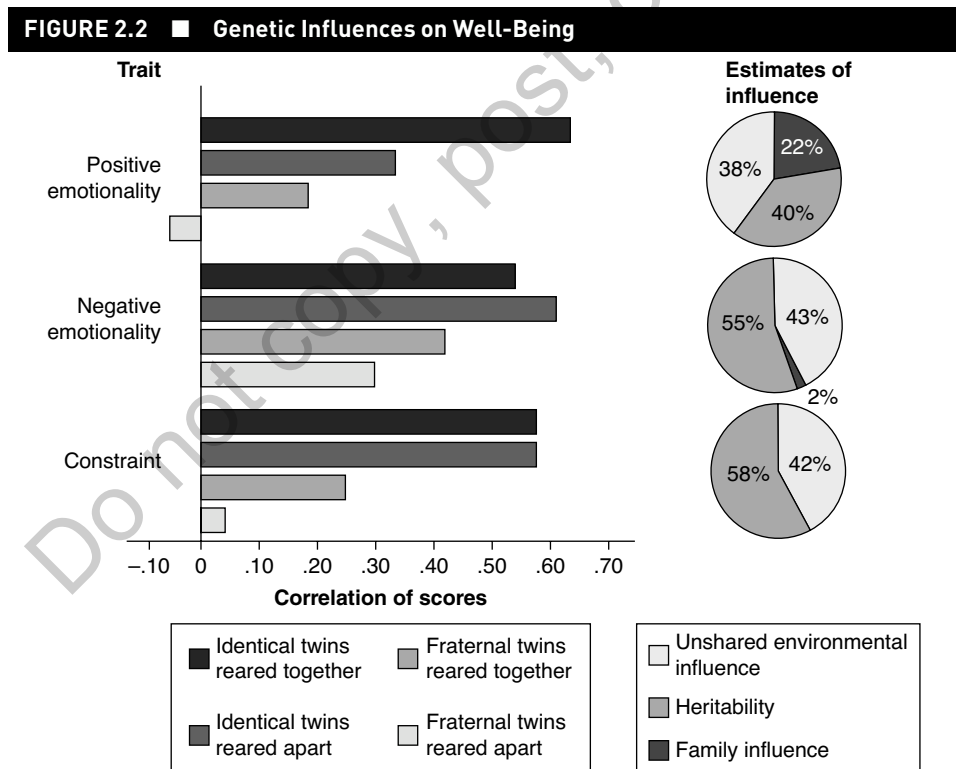
Another biologically based perspective on emotion concerns whether heredity impacts our emotional responses. It is obvious that some people are typically cheerful and easygoing whereas others seem more prone to anxiety and worry. Could it be that being a cheerful person, an anxious person, or someone who always seems to take things in stride is a product of our genes and not necessarily of any coping skills we have learned over the years? Michael Eid and Randy

Larsen (2008) argued that reactions such as happiness and satisfaction have been shaped by our evolutionary history.

David Lykken and Auke Tellegen (1996) suggested that up to 80% of a long-term sense of well-being is due to heredity. Specifically, they have found in their studies of twins, that 40% of the variability among people in positive emotionality, 55% of the variability in negative emotionality, and 48% of the variability in overall well-being stem from genetics (Tellegen et al., 1988). They also found that shared family environment or learning accounted for only 22% of positive emotionality and an extremely small 2% of negative emotionality. Figure 2.2 shows their classic findings on the heritability of emotionality.

In other words, they suggested that our families are important to our eventual emotional lives as adults because they provide us with genetic material that largely determines our base emotional responsiveness to the world. Therefore, concluded Lykken and Tellegen, genetic makeup is important to the long-term quality of our emotional lives maybe more than learned behavior or the quality of our early childhood environment.

Meike Bartels studies the genetics of happiness and joy. She conducted a meta-analysis of well-being studies. Often researchers seek to resolve a scientific question by analyzing a large number of research studies on the same topic. One way to do this is with a review that



Source: From Tellegen et al., "Personality similarity in twins reared apart and together," *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 54(6), pp. 1031-1039. Copyright © 1988 by the American Psychological Association.

summarizes what was found in many separate research articles. A statistical method of combining the results of many separate studies is called a *meta-analysis*. Bartels’s meta-analysis looked at the heritability of well-being (i.e., happiness, satisfaction with life, quality of life) and life satisfaction by combining the results of 30 studies that included a total of 55,974 individuals (Bartels, 2015). The results indicated that the average heritability of life satisfaction was 32% and for well-being was 36%. That is, her analysis suggested that about a third of the variability in overall well-being was genetic. Therefore, she concluded that family environment and learning can have a major impact well-being (see also Bartels et al. in the *World Happiness Report*, 2022).

The Happiness Set Point

Based on results from a variety of empirical studies, Lykken and Tellegen proposed the measure of a **happiness set point**. That is, heritability indicates that most people have an average level of happiness—or a set point—after temporary highs and lows in emotionality (see also Lucas, 2008). So even though intense feelings of joy or sadness keep people off their set points for varying periods of time, eventually everyone returns to an average or baseline level of well-being—a level set by genetics. People whose set points lean toward positive emotionality tend to be cheerful most of the time. By contrast, those whose set points direct them toward more negative emotionality tend to gravitate toward pessimism and anxiety. For example, one study looked at changes in the well-being of college students during the global COVID-19 pandemic (Warrier et al., 2021). Results suggested that while levels of well-being changed, they returned to baseline levels over a period of time. Another study found that even after a dramatic event such as the death of a loved one, people return to previous baseline levels of well-being (Asselmann & Specht, 2022). However, it could take up to 5 years to return to baseline after a dramatic loss. Although the theory of a happiness set point appeared to answer several questions about the observed stability of individual well-being over time, other research has called into question the existence of an unchanging set point for well-being (e.g., Sheldon & Lucas, 2016).

Do Genes Rule Our Emotional Lives?

Scientific evidence for a genetic contribution to long-term well-being is compelling. However, this research can be misinterpreted. Note that it does not state that long-term well-being is completely determined by genetic inheritance. Second, research conclusions are often based on group averages compiled over several years. Contained within these group averages can be significant individual variations that occur over time. Third, the studies are based on well-being scores from relatively global assessment measures that do not specify how people uniquely define their own happiness or life satisfaction. Fourth, Meike Bartels and her research team have discovered 304 “happy” genes, and they suspect there may be more than a thousand (Harrar, 2020). Therefore, genetic variation should be substantial, even among people who are genetically prone to well-being. Even David Lykken, one of the major proponents of the heritability and set point theory, pointed out that we can influence our level of well-being by creating environments that are more conducive to feelings of happiness and by working with our genetic makeup. Lykken (2000) contended:

The basic point one must remember is that genes affect the mind largely indirectly, by influencing the kinds of experiences people have and the kinds of environments they seek out. . . . If your happiness set point is below average, that means that your genetic steersman is guiding you into situations that detract from your well-being and is tempting you to behave in ways that are counterproductive. If you let your genetic steersman have his way, then you will end up where he wants to go. But it is *your* life and, within wide limits, you can choose your own destinations instead of having them all chosen for you. (p. 60, original italics)

In addition, studies show that genes can express themselves differently in different environments. This is called *differential susceptibility*. These moderating effects of environment demonstrate that our genetic makeup does not always directly determine our behavior or emotional responses. In fact, more recent research has not supported an extreme or “strong” interpretation of set point theory, that is, an interpretation in which genes are considered the major determining factor in overall well-being.

In their book *Stability of Happiness: Theories and Evidence on Whether Happiness Can Change*, Kennon Sheldon and Richard Lucas (2016) invited several researchers to address questions relevant to set point theory. Their general conclusion was that our typical level of well-being can change over time (e.g., Haworth et al., 2016). Ed Diener (2009b), one of the major researchers of subjective well-being, has criticized extreme set point theory as being overly deterministic. For example, Frank Fujita and Diener (2005) examined longitudinal data on life satisfaction collected over 17 years in Germany. They found that 24% of people changed significantly between the first 5 years of the study and the last 5 years. That is, although their genetic makeup obviously did not alter over time, almost one in four people showed changes in their well-being over the years; indeed, sometimes those changes were dramatic.

Bruce Headey (2008) used the same data set and also found clear evidence that life satisfaction can change considerably over time. In particular, from 5% to 6% of people dramatically increased their life satisfaction over a 15- to 20-year period. Headey also found that the goals people pursued had a major impact on their life satisfaction. How so? Goals associated with greater life satisfaction consisted of commitments to family and friends, social or political involvement, and altruism. He called these *non-zero sum goals* because the person involved as well as others can benefit. In contrast, *zero-sum goals*, or those in which one person gains advantage at the expense of others, did not promote life satisfaction.

Felicia Huppert (2007) argued that because interventions to increase well-being can be successful, genes do not completely determine happiness. After analyzing data from a 26-year longitudinal study, Headey et al. (2010) concluded that contrary to the implications of set point theory, human beings can increase their happiness over time. A recent analysis that examined both the stability and change of personality over time found some personality traits to be remarkably stable over time; however, factors associated with well-being could show change (Anusic & Schimmack, 2016).

Therefore, research does not support the strong version of set point theory. Although genetic makeup is not destiny, the genetic influence on long-term dispositional positive and

negative emotionality is fairly well established. A more positive interpretation of these studies suggests that viewing well-being as genetically determined or as changeable can both contribute to how we develop strategies to enhance well-being (Nes & Røysamb, 2016). None of the research on genetics changes the fact that interventions to increase well-being can be successful, and large-scale surveys have found that sizable percentages of persons change their well-being fairly dramatically over time.

Cognition: How We Think Impacts How We Feel

One of the more significant contributions of psychology in the 20th century was the revival of the ancient Greek notion that our thoughts in large part determine our emotional state. In cognitive therapy, the goal is to help people change negative styles of thinking as a way to change how they feel. This approach to our emotional lives has been remarkably successful, and changing how we think about self and future is partially responsible for this success (Caprara et al., 2010). Over 2,500 years ago, Gautama Buddha said, “We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world” (Byrom, 1993).

The thinking processes that impact our emotional state vary considerably. Under the right circumstances, changing one simple thought from “I’m lonely” to “I am loved by someone” can make all the difference in our emotional lives. Similarly, if we are faced with a challenging event and can find a way to interpret the event in positive terms, we can change a potential crisis into an opportunity. Having some dexterity at cognitive control of emotions can be a useful skill (Kryla-Lighthall, 2009). Martin Seligman (1990) has done considerable work in this area by working with what he calls *learned optimism*. He has found that people can unlearn negative styles of thinking and learn how to interpret events with more realistic optimism (Carver et al., 2010). Taking this idea a bit further, we can say that a more complex yet positive interpretation of events can help create a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Steger et al., 2009; Wong, 2014).

Our thinking can also impact our well-being through an unusual avenue, namely, our perspective on time (Boniwell, 2009). Seligman et al. (2013) proposed that the defining feature of human beings is their ability to anticipate and evaluate future possibilities: the ability to look forward in time. Research studies that examine our sense of time have found that how people think about time can have an impact on well-being (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2009), physical health (Roche & Frankl, 1986), coping with negative events, volunteerism (Maki et al., 2016), decision-making (Strough et al., 2016), and work satisfaction (Henry et al., 2017). Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd (2009) have written extensively on how our ideas about time can influence our happiness or life satisfaction. They created five approaches to time. If you are the “past-negative type,” you tend to focus on negative past experiences that still upset you. In contrast, the “past-positive type” adopts a pleasant, nostalgic view of the past. The “present-hedonistic type” is dominated by pleasure-seeking impulses. The “present-fatalistic type” feels powerless to change the present or the future. Finally, the “future-oriented type” is ambitious but feels a nagging sense of urgency that can impact close relationships.

Additionally, the “transcendental-future type” tends to focus on how present life will impact life after death. They developed the *Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory* (ZTPI) to measure these time perspectives (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). They also developed the *Transcendental-Future Time Perspective Inventory* (TFTPI) to measure attitudes surrounding life after death (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

They have found that future-oriented people can better delay gratification and work toward long-term goals. The former can be satisfied in a stressful situation if they see how it will lead to a better future. In contrast, present-oriented people tend to live for the moment. They find satisfaction in enjoying current pleasures but are less inclined to work hard toward goals. However, there is an important caveat to this conclusion: An ability to pull our attention away from the chronic inner chatter of our thoughts may also be advantageous to well-being (see Chapter 4). Zimbardo and Boyd therefore suggest that a *balanced time perspective* may be the most advantageous for well-being. That is, we should learn from the past but maintain the ability to look toward goals. Similarly, we need to delay gratification in order to reach our hoped-for future while giving ourselves time to have fun and enjoy present pleasures.

A different perspective on time comes from a study by Layous et al. (2017). They found that imagining time as a scarce quantity led people to experience increased well-being. Specifically, they asked people to live the next month as if it were their last. They said that “imagining time as scarce prompted people to seize the moment and extract greater well-being from their lives” (p. 1). A study by Kim and Maglio (2018) found that the pursuit of happiness resulted in feeling that there was less time available in one’s life or a sense of time scarcity. For a variety of reasons, a change in our perception of time may have a dramatic impact on how we think about the nature of happiness.

Behavior: How We Act Influences How We Feel

It might seem that our behavior has little to do with our sense of well-being. You might say that well-being is an emotion, not a behavior. However, consider a situation in which you are reluctant to confront a friend about her insensitive behavior. Because of your hesitation, you keep your feelings to yourself. Soon your emotions may fester and change into resentment and eventually explode in anger, thereby make the situation even worse. However, if you draw on your assertiveness and you speak to your friend, then you may significantly change your emotions. Your behavior can, in fact, provide a major influence on your emotions. One of the more significant contributions of positive psychology is its focus on positive behaviors, often viewed in terms of strengths, virtues, or character.

Strengths, Virtues, Character, and Our Emotions

In Chapter 1 we saw that Aristotle proposed a theory of well-being based on the cultivation of certain virtues. Most of the virtues involve how we behave in social relationships. For instance,

the degree of our truthfulness, magnificence, and sense of justice are all determined by how we relate to other people. How we conduct ourselves as members of a society is referred to as our **character**. Blaine Fowers (2005) argued that the development of character is essential because how we treat each other is the foundation of ethics, morality, civil society, and well-being. Robert Emmons and Cheryl Crumpler (2000) defined virtues as follows: “Virtues are acquired excellences in character traits, the possession of which contributes to a person’s completeness or wholeness. Virtues represent ideal states that facilitate adaptation to life” (p. 57). Therefore, strengths and virtues are more than just useful tools for adaptation to stress or difficult situations. They may serve those functions, of course, but they are important because they help a person to grow psychologically toward optimal character development. They are also operative in many situations throughout life.

Another perspective on virtues comes from Sandage and Hill (2001), who argued that virtues “(a) integrate ethics and health; (b) are embodied traits of character; (c) are sources of human strengths and resilience; (d) are embedded within a cultural context and community; (e) contribute to a sense of meaningful life purpose; and (f) are grounded in the cognitive capacity for wisdom” (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 387). The reference to wisdom implies that virtues should also envelop a larger perspective on life that takes into consideration how current actions might impact the welfare of self, others, and the community. Although virtues and core values are extremely important to many facets of life, they usually produce effects through automatic cognition. That is, if we are honest, then we usually don’t spend considerable time contemplating if we should be honest in each situation—we just behave as an honest person would behave. It is only when our honesty is challenged or we face an unusual situation that we think about our values (see Miles, 2015).

The study of character in positive psychology evolved out of work done by the Gallup Institute examining what makes top achievers in business different from their peers. They found that top achievers tended to use their **strengths**. These are the unique positive qualities that we each have, the qualities we bring to our encounters both with other people and with ourselves. Gallup found that organizations work better when people are allowed to develop their strengths rather than constantly focusing on fixing their weaknesses (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). This significant line of research was captured by the phrase *Focus on your strengths*. A corollary is *Manage your weaknesses*. That is, manage those areas in which a lack of knowledge, skills, or talent has a negative impact on you or others. However, the lion’s share of effort should be placed on your strengths.

Donald Clifton and colleagues developed the *Clifton StrengthsFinder* as a way to measure strengths (see Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). Clifton StrengthsFinder evaluates 34 themes, such as adaptability, self-assurance, and responsibility; these are classified under four domains: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking. Positive psychology emphasizes personal strengths as a way to make changes in our lives by focusing on what we already know how to do well.

Various psychologists have brought an emphasis on personal strengths into schools and universities as the *StrengthsQuest* program. The notion is to “enable students to identify the talents they bring into the learning environment that they can capitalize upon in order to achieve

academic success and personal growth” (Schreiner et al., 2013). The program was updated as the *CliftonStrengths for Students*. They ask students to take the CliftonStrengths assessment and focus their attention on signature (most salient) strengths. Although all strengths are important and work together, these psychologists believe that a focus on a small number of strengths—even one at a time—is the best strategy to work toward excellence. They advise students to follow a few basic principles as they work on using their strengths: (1) value your talents and assume responsibility for developing them; (2) place your talents in the context of a personal mission; (3) healthy relationships facilitate strengths; (4) reflect on your success with strengths; (5) practice over and over again; and (6) teach others what you are learning. Studies have found that students who participate in the program felt more hopeful and confident, reported higher well-being, acted more altruistically, and had higher grade point averages (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Hodges & Harter, 2005).

Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman along with Katherine Dahlsgaard also developed a classification system and assessment tool for strengths and virtues (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). They formed the *VIA (Values in Action) Institute on Character* to bring their research to professionals and the general public (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; see viacharacter.org). Using the *VIA Survey of Character Strengths*, or the VIA Survey, Peterson and Seligman assessed 24 strengths that define six core virtues. Their list appears in Table 2.1.

As can be seen in the table, this list includes aspects of how people relate to their inner psychological world, how they relate to others in their world, how they relate to the future, and how they view their responsibilities to community (see Park, 2021). The most important strengths for each individual are his or her **signature strengths**, or those “positive traits that a person owns, celebrates,

TABLE 2.1 ■ Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues

<p>Wisdom & Knowledge Curiosity, interest in world Love of learning, knowledge Open-mindedness Creativity, novel solutions Perspective: provide wise counsel</p> <p>Courage Authenticity, honesty, integrity Bravery Perseverance: finishing what one starts Zest: excitement, energy</p> <p>Humanity Kindness, generosity Love: capacity to love, be loved Social intelligence: aware of motives & feelings of others</p>	<p>Justice Teamwork: working well as member of a group or team Fairness Leadership</p> <p>Temperance Forgiveness Prudence, caution, discretion Modesty Self-regulation</p> <p>Transcendence Appreciation of beauty & excellence Gratitude Hope Humor Religiousness</p>
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Adapted from Peterson, C. & Park, N, “Classifying and Measuring Strengths and Character,” In C. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 2nd edition [page 28]. Copyright © 2009 Oxford University Press. Used with permission.

and frequently exercises” (Peterson & Park, 2009, p. 29). In a factor analysis of the strengths, the researchers found two correlated continuous dimensions, one from *focus on self* to *focus on others* and the other from *heart* (emotion) to *mind* (thinking) (Peterson & Park, 2009). Most of the strengths related to happiness tended to be in the realm of heart, with either a focus on self or focus on others. Peterson and Seligman (2004) noted that their list is certainly not comprehensive or exhaustive, for other virtues may be useful in specific social contexts. For instance, in certain religious or spiritual contexts, the virtue of selflessness may be prized and fostered.



Chris Peterson

Source: Courtesy of Carl Peterson.

Nansook Park et al. (2004) investigated the relationships between life satisfaction and VIA scores and found the strengths of love, hope, curiosity, zest, and gratitude were the most significantly related to life satisfaction. Later, in a survey of almost 13,000 people from the United States and Switzerland, the most significant predictors of life satisfaction were again love, hope, curiosity, and zest (Peterson et al., 2007). Gratitude was also a strong predictor in the U.S. sample, and perseverance was an additional predictor in the Swiss sample. A study by Brdar and Kashdan (2010) found hope, zest, curiosity, and sense of humor to be the strongest predictors of well-being. Peterson and Park (2009) found that the most frequently reported virtues among 54 nations are kindness, fairness, authenticity, gratitude, and open-mindedness. However, McGrath (2014) used larger sample sizes for people in 75 nations and found that honesty, fairness, kindness, curiosity, and judgment were the most frequently endorsed values.

Some people might find all 24 strengths a bit too hard to remember and wish they could be reduced to a smaller number. In fact, a few studies have investigated the underlying core factors of the VIA survey. For example, Ng et al. (2017) found that the VIA survey indeed had the six original dimensions, but an overarching general factor was also present, one they labeled “dispositional positivity.” In contrast, McGrath et al. (2017) used a sample of over one million people and found the VIA survey could be adequately represented by three factors, which he called caring, self-control, and inquisitiveness. In a reference to the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, they humorously labeled these three factors the Tin Woodman, the Cowardly Lion, and the Scarecrow. They also argued that virtue needs to be treated not simply as a characteristic of individuals but as a social construct. In other words, how we express virtues or core values often depends on the social context in which we find ourselves. Another study of the VIA survey also used a sample of over one million people and found four factors: discernment, interpersonal, responsibility, and learning (Diez et al., 2022). They found that the one strength most connected to the other strengths was gratitude.

Can interventions based on using your strengths change your life in positive ways? Seligman et al. (2005) tested the impact of strengths interventions on happiness using an Internet sample. Among the five interventions tested were two devoted to signature strengths. After completing the VIA character survey, participants were asked to note their top five strengths and either “use one of these top strengths in a new and different way every day for a week” or to use the top five strengths “more often during the week.” The researchers found that using a single strength in a new and different way increased happiness one week after the posttest and continued to show increases for 6 months. In contrast, using strengths more often increased happiness at posttest but not in follow-up tests. It appears that how we use our signature strengths may be important in the subsequent impact on our well-being.

Other studies have confirmed the efficacy of focusing on our strengths for enhancing well-being (e.g., Proyer et al., 2013). Because research studies in psychology predominantly use university students as participants, it is comforting to know that strength-based interventions are also helpful for people over the age of 50 (Proyer et al., 2014). Martínez-Martí and Ruch (2016) found that higher scores on all strength factors, except theological strengths, helped to increase resilience beyond the impact of well-being variables, such as life satisfaction and positive emotions. It appears that “using your strengths in new ways” may also help alleviate depression and impact health as well (Proyer et al., 2015). This impact may be due to how strengths beneficially aid health behaviors and healthy lifestyles. A review of studies that looked at strengths interventions found positive outcomes for well-being, work engagement, personal growth, and class cohesion (Ghielen et al., 2018). A meta-analysis found that strengths interventions do impact strengths as they are intended and help increase self-reported personal growth (Schutte & Malouff, 2019). One interesting study found that the balance between strengths was important for increased meaning in life (Allan, 2015). Results indicated that when the following pairs of strengths were approximately the same strength (i.e., balanced), then a sense of meaning in life was enhanced: honesty and kindness, love and social intelligence, hope and gratitude. In general, research supports the idea that using your strengths or virtues can lead to a number of positive outcomes in life.

Of course, our troublesome qualities should not be ignored. Indeed, making the effort to remedy our weaknesses can also be beneficial to well-being (Rust et al., 2009). Veronika Huta and Lance Hawley (2010) found that VIA strengths were only moderately correlated with dysfunctional attitudes, suggesting that working on increasing strengths and decreasing vulnerabilities may both be advantageous to well-being. Somewhat tongue in cheek, Jonathan Haidt (2002) has remarked that “it’s more fun to work on strengths than weaknesses (but it may not be better for you).” Fortunately, it seems that all efforts made in a positive direction can be helpful. But too often in the past, the focus has been on fixing weaknesses—an emphasis that can lead to a preoccupation or even a reinforcement of personal difficulties.

However, others have also noted that even positive virtues can be overused (Freidlin et al., 2017). McNulty and Fincham (2012) demonstrated how even virtues like kindness or gratitude can have either positive or negative consequences. For instance, the overuse of humility, zest, or almost any virtue can have a negative impact on well-being. In some cases, the social context in which the strength is used determines whether the strength has an advantageous effect (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011). Another study suggested that the effectiveness of strengths interventions may depend on where a person begins in terms of her or his strengths. Proyer et al. (2015) found that people who began with higher levels of strengths benefited more from strengths

interventions that focused on improving their lower scoring or lesser strengths. Conversely, people who began with lower levels of strengths benefited more from strengths interventions that focused on improving their signature strengths. As Aristotle wisely said over 2,000 years ago, the key to using the virtues wisely is balance and the appropriate use for the social context.

Other systems also classify strengths and virtues. Schwartz's (1994) model of 10 basic values appears to have universal applicability. The Temperament and Character Inventory by C. Robert Cloninger measures three core character traits (cooperativeness, self-directedness, and self-transcendence) rather than the six used in the VIA survey (Cloninger, 2006). The Search Institute's Developmental Assets scale measures 40 areas of potential strength and support in the lives of children and youth (see Benson & Scales, 2009). Undoubtedly, the most influential system in positive psychology has been the VIA survey.

Pelin Kesebir and Ed Diener (2014) conducted a literature review examining the research on virtue and happiness. They found that virtuous behavior and good character are more important to well-being than many people realize. One of their conclusions was: "Our review points to a clear association between happiness and virtue, which seems particularly strong when it comes to self-transcendent virtues such as hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity. While experimental and longitudinal studies suggest that virtue leads to happiness, there is also support for the notion that happiness leads to virtuous behavior." It would seem that virtues and character really do have an important impact on our well-being.

Social and Cultural Influences on Emotions

How we experience our emotional lives is also influenced by the social situation we are in at the time. Research on emotions supports a *social constraints model* of mood regulation, which asserts that people regulate their moods based on their understanding of the particular social situation (Erber & Erber, 2000; Tamir & Gross, 2011). In addition, researchers studying the sociology of emotion (Stets & Turner, 2008) look at how social status and class structures, as well as culture, can influence our sense of self, our identity, and our understanding of both emotions and emotional expression.

How we experience emotions is also partially determined by the broader culture we live in (Delle Fave et al., 2016; Matsumoto, 1994). Although it is true that some aspects of positive emotionality are innate, at the same time, there is considerable variation in how people express, label, and promulgate positive emotions around the world (see Chapter 11). In addition, people in different cultures also use positive and negative emotions differently when they calculate their level of well-being. Cultures also differ in the words they use to express happiness or well-being. Tim Lomas (2016b) examined this issue and completed an interesting cross-cultural analysis of words related to well-being. As you might expect, he found that most languages have multiple words for *happiness*, in order to capture the differing nuances of the emotional experience. Interestingly, he also found 216 words for positive emotions that were untranslatable into English. For example, in Spanish the word *sobremesa* refers to one's positive feeling after a meal when the conversation is still flowing among friends. Words related to merrymaking included *mbuki-mvuki* in Bantu that means "to shuck off one's clothes in order to dance" and *Schmupsidee* in German that means "an ingenious plan one hatches while drunk" (p. 549). While speakers of English will recognize the unique emotions these words refer to, the language does not allow for a specific word to denote these feelings.

Even within a specific culture, changes over time can affect how we experience emotion. In the Western world during the Victorian era, it was considered highly erotic for women to expose their legs in public. For men, a minor insult might require a deadly duel in order to protect one's "honor." Today, these emotional reactions seem quaint and silly. Nevertheless, society at the time dictated these emotional reactions to particular events, and most people complied with the social mores. The impact of culture on our emotions and well-being will be explored further in Chapter 11.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND MOTIVATION

Early Theories of Motivation

If part of positive psychology involves the promotion of human flourishing, then somehow people must be motivated to pursue that goal. Indeed, motivation and emotion are so intertwined that it is often difficult to separate their individual effects. This section examines how psychology has explained the forces that propel people toward their goals.

As might be expected, there is no simple answer to questions about what causes us to pursue certain goals. Many decades ago, Robert W. White (1959) argued that people can be motivated by more than just drives to fulfill physiological needs, or "tissue needs." White urged psychologists to consider motivations that propelled people toward a sense of competence—or *effectance motivations*. In his view, people are driven to engage the world in ways that will give them a sense of competence and accomplishment that goes beyond the meeting of physiological needs.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

One of the more interesting lines of research in motivation has concerned the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Intrinsic motivation* is operating when we are compelled to engage in some activity for its own sake, regardless of any external reward. *Extrinsic motivation* comes into play when we act to obtain some external reward, be it status, praise, an excellent grade, money, or another incentive that comes from outside ourselves. Richard Ryan and Edward Deci (2008) have favored the terms **autonomous motivation** over intrinsic motivation and **controlled motivation** over extrinsic motivation. Autonomous motivation is self-chosen and is congruent with one's true self, whereas controlled motivation is driven by external rewards or guilt and is not congruent with a person's core values. They view the difference between autonomous and controlled motivation as extremely important for an understanding of mental health, achievement, and well-being.

In fact, Ryan and Deci (2000) earlier went even further and said, "Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation, [or] the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 70). Though at first glance, Ryan and Deci's statement seems a bit overly enthusiastic, when the research literature is examined, there is justification for their energetic endorsement of autonomous motivation. A positive relationship has been found between being autonomously motivated and achieving positive outcomes in numerous areas such as health, work, romantic relationships, parenting, education, religious participation, political activism, persistence, creativity, self-esteem, vitality, and general well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). It seems that the more a person's behavior is autonomously motivated, the greater the increase in well-being (Ryan et al., 2008).

It should be mentioned that activities that are controlled or extrinsically motivated can also be of value (Ingrid et al., 2009). Doing something in order to get an external reward can eventually lead to acquiring desirable skills and competencies. Studies have found that it may be the relative weights given by a person to her or his autonomous and controlled activities that is crucial for well-being (see Ryan et al., 2008). In the context of multiple goals, the more importance given to autonomous goals, the more likely well-being will be fostered and nurtured.

Motivation and the Pursuit of Goals

Although some researchers have investigated motivation by looking at innate drive states, others have focused more on our expectations or hopes for the future. For instance, when we discuss our hopes and dreams for the future, then we are talking about our goals. The unique goals we have for our life determine where we place our efforts and commitments. In addition, the specific character of our goals and our relationships to them at any moment in time may also determine our emotional well-being. This is especially true the more important those goals are to us.



Source: iStock/ajr_images.

Satisfied young man

Researchers who have studied goals and their relationships to well-being have found that certain types of goals are more effective in producing happiness and satisfaction than are other types (see Lyubomirsky, 2001). In general, goals that are the result of *intrinsic or autonomous motivation, personally valued, realistic, and freely chosen* seem to be better at raising well-being. The pursuit of goals that are *meaningful* to us is more fulfilling than chasing after goals that are imposed by others or that we don't value. For example, Niemiec et al. (2009) found that the attainment of intrinsic goals led to greater well-being, whereas attaining extrinsic goals resulted in lower well-being. Similarly, Oishi et al. (1999) obtained ratings on how much satisfaction college students gained from engaging in a

variety of activities. They found differences among activities such that higher well-being was related to those involving both interpersonal relationships and community contributions.

Our values may also be important to our goals because even higher well-being was found when the activity reflected a person's individual values. For instance, students who valued benevolence experienced higher well-being when they were involved in helpful social activities or when showing other people they cared for them. High congruence between one's personality and goals is referred to as **self-concordance** by Kennon Sheldon (2009) and as "regulatory fit" by E. Tory Higgins (2000). Studies have found that when there is a better fit between a person's values and her or his goals, then a more positive evaluation of the goal, greater motivation, greater commitment to the goal, and higher well-being ensue (Wehmeyer et al., 2009).

In general, it also appears that well-being is enhanced by seeking goals associated with *positive relationships* and *helping others*, whereas relatively self-centered goals decrease well-being. One example is a study by Kasser and Ryan (1993), who found that subjective well-being was enhanced when people pursued goals that facilitated affiliation, intimacy, self-acceptance, and community involvement. Conversely, Cantor and Sanderson (1999) reported that well-being was lowered when people sought relatively self-centered goals related to physical attractiveness, fame, and wealth. Goals that are *valued by one's society or culture* may also be more effective in raising well-being (Cantor & Sanderson, 1999). Obviously, pursuing goals admired in one's culture can lead to greater social rewards.

The next issue concerns approach versus avoidance goals. *Approach goals* motivate us to move toward something (e.g., "I want to get a PhD in psychology"). *Avoidance goals* motivate us to avoid difficulties, dangers, or fears (e.g., "I try to avoid speaking in public because it makes me nervous"). Studies have found that *approach goals* are more likely to be associated with well-being than are avoidance goals. This appears to be true cross-culturally (Elliot et al., 2001). Well-being is higher when people see themselves as moving toward something they value rather than trying to avoid something difficult or painful. However, motivations are complex, and both approach and avoidance can feel good depending on the situation.

What may also be important is the rate at which people approach their valued goals. Making *adequate or better than expected progress* toward important goals translates into higher well-being (Lent et al., 2005). That is, the rate of progress a person has made or expects to make toward goals may even be more important than actual achievement. Acceptable rates of progress are associated with more positive emotions. For instance, a goal such as "learn to play the piano well" is one that is never reached because you can always play better than you do now. For most people, satisfaction comes, in part, from learning to play better with an adequate or better than expected rate of progress.

The impact our goals have on our sense of happiness or life satisfaction may also depend on how specific these are. In terms of specificity, Emmons (1992) found that highly *abstract goals* may decrease immediate well-being because their abstractness makes it hard to know when they have been achieved. For instance, if your goal is to be a caring and compassionate person, it is hard to know when you have treated people with enough compassion. In contrast, with *concrete goals*, you know almost immediately if you have achieved these. An example of a concrete goal would be to treat at least one person every day with deliberate kindness and compassion. At the end of the day, you know immediately if you have met your goal. However, not having any abstract or high-level long-term goals that serve to orient one's life direction is associated with lower well-being. Little (1989) poetically termed this dilemma the conflict between "magnificent obsessions and trivial pursuits."

Emmons (1999) suggested that it is best to find a *balance between concrete and abstract goals* by setting concrete, short-term goals that are directly linked to more abstract and meaningful longer-term goals. For example, it may be that we can work toward the goal of ending world hunger as long as we do it step by step.

Another important quality of our goals concerns the relationships among them. The first issue here concerns their levels of congruence versus conflict. In particular, greater well-being is associated with *more congruence* among different goals and *less internal conflict* among competing goals. For instance, people who have eight or 10 major goals in life that are all “very important” may end up creating conflicts between those goals due to lack of time to fully accomplish them all. Note that the contemporary wish to “have it all” in terms of career, family, self-development, community involvement, and leisure may actually aggravate internal conflicts among goals and thus lower happiness.

Sheldon et al. (2002) developed a program to foster goal attainment. They taught students four strategies: (1) *own your goal* (i.e., reinforce personal reasons for pursuing the goal); (2) *make it fun* (i.e., enhance intrinsic motivation); (3) *remember the big picture* (i.e., remember how small goals fit into long-term goals); and (4) *keep a balance* (i.e., balance goals and other aspects of life). They found that participants who were already prepared to benefit showed the greatest satisfaction with the program and increased well-being and vitality. Another way to think about goals is to create SMART goals. These goals are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound (have a set time for completion; Grenville-Cleave, 2012).

Strivings and Well-Being

Robert Emmons (1986, 1999; Emmons & King, 1988) has suggested that it is possible to group several smaller goals around common themes. Personal **strivings** are groupings of smaller goals that may help to facilitate larger, more abstract goals. As an example of a personal striving, Emmons lists *Find that special someone*. Note that many smaller goals such as *Be open with other people*, *Take an interest in other people*, and *Get out and socialize more* may all be part of this personal striving, that is, related to the higher-level goal of *Find a lasting and satisfying intimate relationship*. Emmons found that personal strivings are related to subjective well-being in ways similar to goals. For instance, people with high life satisfaction believed that their personal strivings are “important, valued, not likely to produce conflict, and [they expected] to be successful at them” (Emmons, 1986, p. 1064).

Emmons (1999) related four styles of strivings to types of motivation. *Extrinsic strivings* are done for the sake of someone else or only for extrinsic rewards. *Introjected strivings* are pursued not necessarily for personally relevant reasons but because if you didn’t, then you’d feel guilty or that you let someone down. Similarly, *identified strivings* relate to pursuing a goal that someone else says is important. However, in this case, the individual has adopted the goal as her or his own. *Intrinsic strivings* are engaged in because they are personally meaningful and have been freely chosen by the individual. Once again, strivings that are freely chosen and meaningful seem to be better at increasing well-being than extrinsic strivings, at least in Western cultures.

Hope Theory

A crucial element in whether people are motivated to pursue their goals is their expectation or hope that they will eventually attain them. In most cases, it is hard to bring much enthusiasm to the

pursuit of an important goal that you know you will never reach. Thus, many older theories of hope and motivation are based on the idea of expectation for success in attaining goals. However, is that all there is to our hopes for the future? Is it simply the expectation that we will reach our goals?

Hope theory says that hope is actually the result of two processes: (1) *pathways*, or believing that one can find ways to reach desired goals, and (2) *agency*, or believing that one can become motivated enough to pursue those goals (Snyder et al., 2002). Therefore, this theory holds that hope for the future is the result of believing we can create both realistic plans and enough drive to reach important goals. People who are hopeful also tend to feel more positive emotions. Besides several other positive benefits, people who are high in hope tend to anticipate greater well-being in the future, are more confident, may be able to deal with stress more successfully, are flexible enough to find alternative pathways to their goals, and tend to have higher social support (Rand & Cheavens, 2009).

Affective Forecasting

Daniel Gilbert (2007) developed an intriguing twist to the literature on goal pursuit. In his studies, he found that people are not very good at **affective forecasting**, that is, predicting how they will feel when they reach their goals. For example, when we finally attain the job we have wished for or marry our dream lover, do we actually feel the way we imagined we would feel? Gilbert's research suggests that we are often disappointed when we achieve our major goals. He suggests this is because we do not imagine those future events accurately.

How so? Our predictions are poor simply because we skip over the specific details in our broad imagining. Gilbert advised that we could obtain more accurate assessments of how we will feel by finding other people who experienced what we want and asking them how *they* felt (Gilbert et al., 2009). He observed that most people do not use this "surrogation strategy" because they falsely believe their own experiences will be too unique, and therefore, reports from others will not be useful. Gilbert's research suggests that we should put more effort into realistic appraisals of how we may feel when we reach important goals rather than holding on to unrealistic expectations about goal attainment and emotional transformation. Equally important, we should also try to enjoy the journey toward our goals, because reaching our goals may not be exactly what we expected.

Activity Theory

Another perspective on well-being and happiness tends to focus less on emotion and more on how we use our attention and our level of involvement in activities. This idea views well-being as a function of how absorbed we are in the activities of life. Because of this emphasis on activities, this perspective has occasionally been identified as *activity theory*. From its vantage point, a sense of happiness comes from being captivated, wrapped up, or absorbed in what we are doing in the moment.

Nancy Cantor and Catherine Sanderson (1999) associated well-being with goal pursuit insofar as this latter implies an *active participant in life*. The pursuit of goals is simply an indication that people are taking part in life; they are involved, interested, and active participants in living fully. Cantor and Sanderson contended that greater well-being is found through participation in activities that are intrinsically motivating, freely chosen, and

desired and involve realistic, feasible goals. Of course, the types of activities people choose to be involved with will certainly change over the life span. Therefore, it is not necessarily *which* activities people choose; rather, it is the *process* of being fully involved in an active life that really matters.

WELL-BEING AND POSITIVE EMOTION

For many years in psychology, the positive emotions have been studied far less than negative emotions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the barriers to the development of positive psychology was the assumption that positive and negative emotions were simply opposite and balanced ends of an emotional continuum. Therefore, if one studied the predictors of negative emotions, then one automatically knew something about the predictors of positive emotions. We have learned that this assumption proved to be false.

Another barrier to the study of positive emotions is that there seem to be fewer basic positive ones than negative ones by a ratio of one positive to every three or four negative emotions (Fredrickson, 1998). It may be that because negative emotions are used to alert us to possible dangers and threats, we need a variety of them to warn us against numerous potential threats. Also, positive emotions seem fairly diffuse and tend to have nonspecific markers in terms of autonomic activation. For instance, there are relatively specific biological and neurological processes associated with certain negative emotional responses triggered by the *fight-or-flight* response to unexpected danger. Indeed, many negative emotions are associated with urges to act in certain ways that are called *specific action tendencies*. For example, the response to unexpected fear can be immediate behavioral responses designed to protect us by either fighting off an attack or fleeing from the danger. Unexpectedly, however, this direct linkage between emotion and action does not appear to be found among the positive emotions.

So by an interesting twist in our biology, the negative emotions are simply easier to study in scientific laboratories. Roy Baumeister and his colleagues have also postulated that negative emotions are stronger than positive emotions because the former are more likely to influence our behavior than the latter. In their words, “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Anyone who has tried to resist a strong unwanted impulse can recognize this point.

But what about positive emotions? Is their function simply to make us feel good after all of the dangers have been taken care of and the “important” negative emotions have done their job? In fact, in the past many scientists believed this to be the only function of positive emotions. Yet a recent theory has begun to change that assumption decisively.



Source: iStock/DeanDrobot.

Woman smiling

The Broaden-and-Build Model

Barbara Fredrickson (2001) formulated what she called the **broaden-and-build model** of positive emotions. In her model, the purpose of positive emotions is markedly different from the purpose of negative emotions. For Fredrickson, positive emotions help preserve the organism by providing *nonspecific action tendencies* that can lead to new adaptive behavior. How would these processes work? One of the examples Fredrickson (1998) provides is the emotion of joy. She cites Frijda's (1986) point that joy "is in part aimless, unasked-for I readiness to engage in whatever interaction presents itself and [it is also] in part readiness to engage in enjoyments" (p. 304). In children, for example, the feeling of joy is associated with urges to play, explore, investigate, or create. When adults feel positive emotions they are more likely to interact with others, seek out new experiences, take up creative challenges, or help others in need. In your own life, think of how much more open and curious you are about the world when you feel good.



Source: Courtesy of Barbara Fredrickson.

Barbara Fredrickson

Second, positive emotions also provide the spark for changes in cognitive activity that can lead to newer and more adaptive *thought-action tendencies*. The idea of thought-action tendencies is that people behave in specific ways because they have learned to associate certain cognitive activities or ways of thinking with certain actions. Returning to our example of children's play, when children allow themselves to be motivated by joy and happily engage in playful activities they are simultaneously learning about their environment and about themselves. Therefore, Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model posits that positive emotions *broaden* our awareness and then *build* on the resultant learning to create future emotional and intellectual resources (Garland et al., 2010). In Fredrickson's (1998) words:

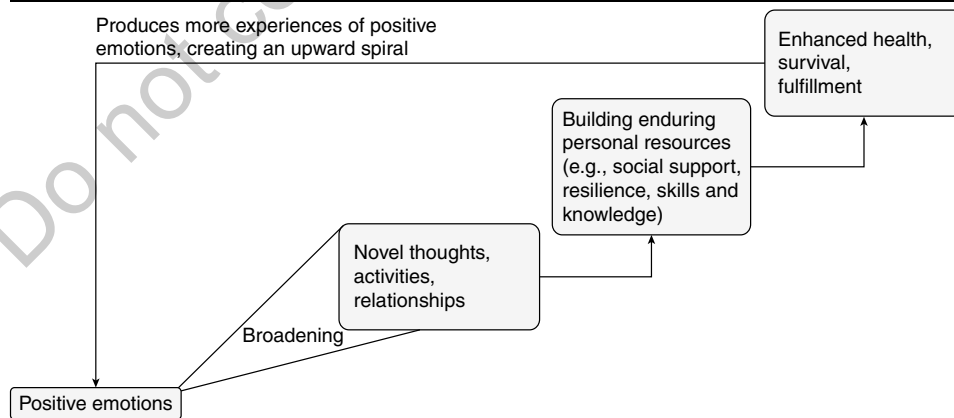
Not only do the positive emotions . . . share the feature of broadening an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, but they also appear to share the feature of building the individual's personal resources. . . . Importantly these resources are more durable than the transient emotional states that led to their acquisition. By consequence, then, the often incidental effect of experiencing a positive emotion is an increment in durable personal resources that can be drawn on later in other contexts and in other emotional states. (p. 307)

The reference to broadening response repertoires has another meaning in addition to increasing awareness of potential options; it also changes how people process information. Fredrickson found that increased positive emotionality resulted in greater cognitive flexibility, openness to experiences, and the creation of a sense of meaning (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). Positive emotions can also enhance an attention bias for positive information, so they help us notice more

positive emotions in the future (Strauss & Allen, 2006). In fact, there are numerous examples of how positive emotion can broaden our perspective and abilities. The list includes better attention to visual stimuli, more cognitive engagement in tasks, creativity, more interpersonal trust, greater tendency to break down intergroup bias, and more empathy. In addition, positive emotions are more likely to co-occur with one another, so feeling one positive emotion means it is more likely you will feel other positive emotions (Tugade, Devlin, & Fredrickson 2021).

Positive emotions help us to build options to maximize our future resources. For instance, the emotion of love leads not just to thoughts about how to immediately express that love; it also leads to thoughts about how to express love in the future, how to share love with others, how to maximize the potential for love, and how to help other people feel love. Consider for just a moment the numerous advantages this social support can provide for people throughout their lives. Those bonds of closeness, caring, compassion, and love are forged by allowing ourselves to act on positive emotions that compel us toward interactions with others. Those bonds in a reciprocal fashion increase the likelihood that we will experience more positive emotions in the form of supportive feedback from others. That situation, in turn, leads to more positive interactions that, once again, foster the creation and deepening of those relationships and other social attachments. This sharing helps create bonds that can last a lifetime. Positive emotions can build resources in many other ways. For example, positive emotions help people feel their lives are more satisfying and more fulfilling, they may help create better coping strategies, and they can have a positive impact on physiological resources. Specifically, studies have found that positive emotions can increase vagal tone (VT), which is a marker of parasympathetic nervous system activity (this is the system that relaxes you after stress). So not only can positive emotions broaden our awareness and build up resources, but also those resources are more enduring than the positive emotions that initiated them (Tugade et al., 2021). See Figure 2.3 for a representation of the broaden-and-build model of positive emotions.

FIGURE 2.3 ■ The Broaden-and-Build Model of Positive Emotion



Source: From "The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotion," Cohn, M., & Fredrickson, B. (2009). Positive Emotions. In C. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology* (2nd edition). Oxford University Press, p. 16. Used with permission.

Positive Emotions as Antidotes to Stress

Another advantage of positive emotions, according to Fredrickson (1998, 2001), is that these may act as antidotes to the unfortunate effects of negative emotions. Her **undoing hypothesis** states that positive emotions help both the body and the mind regain a sense of balance, flexibility, and equilibrium after the impact of negative emotions. Several empirical studies by Fredrickson and colleagues found that positive emotions helped shorten the aftereffects of stress reactions in a shorter period of time. For example, when you are able to laugh at yourself following a particularly stressful mistake, then you relieve psychological tension and help cleanse your body of stress hormones. In Fredrickson's view, the same response can help to restore flexibility and openness to thinking after we experience the narrowing of attention associated with the negative emotion of panic. A variety of studies support the restore and cleanse functions of positive emotions (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009; Suzuki, 2005). Recently, researchers discussed how the model might apply to interpersonal neurobiology, compassion, and positivity resonance (Fredrickson & Siegel, 2017).

However, not all studies offer comprehensive support for the broaden-and-build model. Sung and Yih (2015) found that certain traits associated with increased interest, such as trait curiosity, actually narrowed attention. You can get a sense of what they mean by thinking of a time you were intensely interested in something. At those times, you probably focused or narrowed your attention on the topic of interest rather than broadened it. Similarly, Jäger and Rüsseler (2016) found that positive emotions could broaden attention and build resources, but only for resources associated with social interactions and social behavior. Schutte (2014) found general support for the broaden-and-build model but also found that incorporating levels of self-efficacy helped increase the model's predictions.

A Critical Positivity Ratio

In Fredrickson's later research, she examined how much positive emotion might be optimal for well-being. Because it is unreasonable to expect a person will experience only positive emotions, she speculated whether there might be an optimal balance between positive and negative emotions. In an interesting analysis based on nonlinear dynamic systems, Fredrickson and Marcial Losada (2005) found that when the mean ratio of positive to negative emotions was at or above 2.9, then people tended to flourish in life. That is, those who had high well-being and were flourishing experienced at least 2.9 times more positive emotions than negative emotions. However, a later analysis found that the mathematics behind the calculation of the ratio were flawed and the results of the paper were withdrawn (see Lane, 2014). Nonetheless, Fredrickson (2013) argued that even though the initial ratio proved to be erroneous, some type of positivity ratio (yet to be calculated) should still be predictive of greater flourishing. A recent study suggests that Fredrickson's optimism may be justified. Robert Schwartz and James Grice (2022) ran an experiment based on Fredrickson and Losada's original model, but they used different mathematics. Their results suggested a positivity ratio may be possible to calculate.

At this juncture, one might well ask if positive emotion is always beneficial. For example, other studies have shown that happiness makes novelty seem attractive, as Fredrickson suggested, but also that a negative mood helps the familiar feel more comfortable (de Vries et al., 2010), which can help relieve stress. Think of the last time you felt a little sad. Didn't you feel

more comfortable surrounded by things that were familiar, like a well-worn blanket or listening to an old song that brought back pleasant memories? Feeling happier may also make people feel overly secure, a situation that can result in carelessness, selfishness, and a lesser valuation of trust (Forgas, 2010; Lount, 2010). Therefore, although a positive mood seems to be a powerful predictor of well-being and numerous positive outcomes in life, emotions should be used wisely. We investigate this topic in the next section.

Emotional Intelligence

At this point, it should be clear that emotions can serve a very useful function if used properly. A person might even consider the ability to use emotions wisely as a type of intelligence. Indeed, some researchers believe that there is such a thing as emotional intelligence. Mayer et al. (2000) define **emotional intelligence (EI)** as “an ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them. Emotional intelligence is involved in the capacity to perceive emotions, assimilate emotion-related feelings, understand the information of those emotions, and manage them” (p. 267).

People who are high in EI have the ability to use their emotions wisely, and they appear to have a deeper understanding of their emotional lives. In addition, EI is associated with the ability to accurately read the emotions of other people, the practical knowledge of how to manage one’s own feelings and impulses, as well as a deeper sensitivity to the emotional undercurrents that lie behind many social interactions. An allied notion similar to emotional intelligence can be found in the research on *social intelligence*, which consists of the ability to handle social interactions well.

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence

Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) presented the original model for emotional intelligence. They proposed that five characteristics aptly defined emotional intelligence (see Salovey et al., 2009 for a four-branch model):

1. The first is *knowing one’s emotions*, or the ability to recognize an emotion as it occurs. People high in EI are able to accurately recognize what they are feeling and can accurately express the emotion.
2. Second, it includes the ability to *handle interpersonal relationships* well. People high in emotional intelligence are socially competent and good at creating and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships.
3. Third, EI includes the ability to use emotions to *motivate oneself*. This means that people high in EI are able to marshal their emotions to reach goals and remain focused.
4. Fourth, EI is related to the ability to *recognize emotions in others*. This refers to the skills of reading what other people are feeling and being empathetic.
5. Fifth, EI involves the ability to *manage one’s emotions*. This can include abilities to regulate one’s moods, handle stress, and rebound after an emotional setback.

Interestingly, high EI may be found most often with moderate ability to regulate one's own emotions rather than with high emotional control (Salovey et al., 2002). Too little control of emotions leads to impassivity; however, too much control leads to repression and the inability to use information from our emotions to learn about our world and ourselves.

Mayer et al. (2000) presented the necessary skills for the development of EI as a hierarchy of increasingly complex abilities. For a person with high EI, the (1) ability to perceive and express emotions leads to (2) skills at assimilating emotions into cognitive representations of emotion and cognitive processing of feelings, which leads to (3) deeper understanding of the complexities of emotions as they relate to the social world, which leads to (4) being able to regulate emotions more effectively.

In recent years, research on emotional intelligence has grown considerably. At the moment, however, a few different perspectives on emotional intelligence have sparked debate in the literature (Lopes, 2021). Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) explained EI as an *ability*. Some studies suggest this model should be seen as a type of intelligence. However, it's not that people high in EI are smarter, but rather that EI is a set of skills that can be learned, cultivated, and is also related to other cognitive skills. However, Petrides and Furnham (2001) presented a model that defines emotional intelligence as a personality *trait*: specifically, a trait related to a person's self-perceived competencies at understanding emotions. A modification of this perspective views EI in terms of three qualities: knowledge, abilities, and traits (Mikolajczak et al., 2009). In addition, there are mixed models that conceptualize EI as an ability, a trait, a type of motivation, along with other factors. It is important to note, however, that all perspectives assume that EI can be cultivated and developed.

Does having high emotional intelligence enhance well-being? Research seems to suggest that it does. Salovey et al. (2009) reviewed a variety of studies and concluded that higher emotional intelligence was related to better social relationships in children, adolescents, and adults; better family and intimate relationships; better social relationships at work; better academic achievement as reported by teachers (but not necessarily higher GPA); and greater psychological well-being. For example, Salovey et al. (2009) found that people higher in EI had better relationships with friends and family and more satisfying romantic relationships, as measured by lower levels of conflict, more emotional support, more intimacy, and more affection. Those higher in EI also reported higher life satisfaction and psychological well-being (also see Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2015). One interesting study found that collective EI, or the sum of individual EI scores, in a college residence hall predicted increases in individual EI and increased well-being (Schutte, 2014). A unique study found a greater frequency of orgasm in women who were higher in EI (Burri et al., 2009).

Mayer et al. (2000) suggested that a large component of EI is the degree of empathy one has developed over the years; therefore, women might tend to score higher on this measure of EI than men. However, recent results have been mixed (e.g., Lanciano & Curci, 2015; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2015). In summary, EI seems to comprise self-insight into the richness of one's emotional life, a moderate degree of self-control, higher empathy, and good social skills.

The next step for many people would be to ask if a person could learn to increase emotional intelligence. The answer appears to be yes (Salovey et al., 2002). For example, for many years the training of psychotherapists has been predicated on the assumption that it is possible to teach people to be more sensitive to their own emotions and to the emotional lives of others. One well-designed study found that EI could be increased with a 4-week training program (Nelis et al., 2009). In the study, they taught the four-branch ability model of EI: (1) emotional perception and expression, (2) emotional facilitation of thinking, (3) understanding and analyzing emotions, and (4) reflective regulation of emotion. Results indicated that there were significant increases in emotional identification and emotional management at posttest and at the 6-month follow-up.

Another promising area involves EI training in the workplace (Robertson, 2016). Some interesting programs have found that training managers in EI is associated with higher business growth rate (see Salovey et al., 2009). People who showed higher EI at work tended to contribute to a positive workplace environment and have both higher merit pay and higher rank within the company (also see Higgs & Dulewicz, 2014). One study compared EI training programs at work and found that adding instruction in basic emotional abilities, such as self-awareness or empathy, to a standard EI training course increased work performance (Geßler et al., 2021). Efforts using contemporary models of EI have been implemented in many school systems (e.g., Torrente et al., 2016). Sometimes these are referred to as *social emotional learning*. In general, these interventions teach skills such as being aware of one's feelings, accurately labeling one's emotions, enhancing communication, appropriately disclosing one's feelings, managing one's emotions and conflict, and enhancing empathy and validation of others (Salovey et al., 2002). The RULER program offered by Yale University gives teachers the tools they need to foster greater EI among their students (see ei.yale.edu). The acronym RULER stands for recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions.

There may be other ways of using our emotions to help find more meaning and fulfillment in life. James Averill (2002) proposed a theory of *emotional creativity*. His idea is that people can also use their emotions in creative ways that foster a greater sense of meaning, vitality, and connectedness in life. Although the research in this area is relatively new, there is little doubt that the ability to understand and use our emotions wisely and creatively is related to personal well-being.

RESEARCH MODELS OF HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING

As we have indicated, definitions of what should constitute happiness, well-being, or the good life are many and interrelated, with a large variety of emotional and behavioral outcomes (see Delle Fave et al., 2016). Even the word *positive* in positive psychology can have multiple meanings (Pawelski, 2016a, 2016b). To bring some order to this complexity, Eranda Jayawickreme, Marie Forgeard, and Martin Seligman (2012) developed the *engine model of well-being*, which involves the following: inputs → process → outcome. In this model, *inputs* are variables that are preexisting or endogenous to the person. These might be genetics, income, or one's basic personality traits. *Process* refers to internal states that influence the choices people make that

influence their well-being. These might be self-regulation abilities or core values. *Outcome* refers to voluntary behavior that people choose in their search for well-being, for example, the quality of relationships a person chooses, the balance of work and play, or how a person chooses to think about her or his future. Therefore, their model brings some order to the many ways people have studied well-being by classifying various research studies into specific portions of the three-stage model. Of course, the dynamic and complex systems that create our emotional and behavioral experiences are more complicated than the model suggests. Nevertheless, models such as the engine model are helpful tools in the investigation of well-being.

Positive psychologists have used other classification systems in seeking to bring order to the complexity of well-being. Because people use an enormous variety of behavior to enhance their well-being, the overall notion is usually to distill this variety into the fewest manageable dimensions needed to adequately capture the nature of well-being. Several general themes have emerged to help researchers understand the complexity of well-being. These themes draw upon multiple perspectives from philosophical, personality research, existential, humanistic, and evolutionary models (Lambert et al., 2015). The most frequently seen classification used in describing differences in well-being divides the ways people pursue positive emotion and flourishing into two perspectives called the hedonic and eudaimonia. We turn next to these two perspectives, as well as a third perspective that is central to studies of well-being.

Hedonic Perspectives

One of the oldest approaches to the good life is hedonism. The perspective of **hedonism** focuses on pleasure as the basic component of the good life. Hedonism in its most basic form is the belief that the pursuit of well-being is fundamentally the pursuit of individual sensual pleasures. Although the single-minded pursuit of pleasure is one of the oldest ideas on the good life, this form of hedonism has been seen as self-defeating and unworkable by most societies throughout history. Nearly everyone realizes that sensual pleasures are short-lived, that they result in a constant struggle to repeat them, and that when they are focused on exclusively, they produce no lasting changes in personality and no personal growth. The hedonic approach, however, does not have to be simple self-indulgence or a “me first” attitude toward life.

A socially responsible form of hedonism, although regarding pleasure as the basic motivating force behind most human behavior, affirms that certain pleasures require positive social relationships with those close to us and with society at large. For instance, some variations of the hedonic approach view family life or civic involvement as ways to maximize pleasure and contentment for all people involved. According to this more socially responsible hedonic approach to the good life, the goal is to create a high level of happiness for oneself and others. This form of hedonism has been a basic assumption behind many conceptualizations of the good life throughout history and is very much alive today (see Kahneman et al., 1999). Given this caveat, the main goal of a hedonic perspective is to increase happiness in a variety of ways. The good life is defined in terms of positive emotions, such as happiness, contentment, satisfaction, or joy. The focus of this approach is on finding and fostering positive emotionality (see Chapter 3).

Eudaimonic Perspectives

A eudaimonic approach to well-being generally focuses on fulfilling one's potential or developing to the fullest extent one's skills, talents, or personality. It is also associated with fulfilling one's "true nature" and finding one's "true self" (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Schlegel et al., 2009; Waterman, 2008). In this case, well-being may or may not necessarily be associated with the maximization of positive emotions at all times. For the ancient Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, **eudaimonia** (also spelled eudaemonia) was associated with living one's life in accord with the values and virtues that are the most desirable and most indicative of the *highest good*. Richard Ryan et al. (2008) viewed eudaimonia as involving the processes that result in a person *living well*, which they defined as actively pursuing virtues and strengths, using both reflectiveness and reason, and voluntarily pursuing goals that enhance our real self. Outcomes of living well include a sense of inner peace, a deep appreciation of life, a sense of connection to other people, a wider perspective, and a sense that life "feels right." In contrast, these psychologists view the outcome of hedonic approaches as a life that "feels good."

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, the hedonic and the eudaimonic approaches to well-being have exerted a major impact in how people think about the nature of the good life. In addition, empirical research supports these two conceptualizations as central to how psychology thinks about and measures well-being even today (Compton et al., 1996; McGregor & Little, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

One of the difficulties with the eudaimonic perspective is that it encompasses a relatively broad collection of approaches to well-being. For the ancient Greeks, it referred to *wisdom*; for the 20th-century existentialists, to *authenticity*; for humanistic psychologists, it tends to mean *self-actualization*; and for many positive psychologists, it connotes *flourishing*. Although all these approaches share some qualities, they are certainly not identical conceptualizations of well-being.

Veronika Huta and Alan Waterman (2014) reviewed the multiple meanings of eudaimonia that appear in positive psychology research. They found there can be significant overlap among the different theories, a situation that makes it difficult to specify unique definitions of eudaimonia. Hedonic and eudaimonic measurement scales are often closely linked so that clear distinctions may be tricky to make in real life (Compton et al., 1996; Tamir & Gross, 2011). A few examples of theories might be helpful to illustrate the variety of constructs associated with eudaimonia. Alan Waterman (e.g., 2008, 2015) has tended to describe eudaimonia as "personal expressiveness." In the development of a scale to measure eudaimonia—*The Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being*—he and his colleagues used six constructs to build the questionnaire (Waterman et al., 2010): self-discovery, development of one's potentials, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, applying significant effort in the pursuit of excellence, focused and intense involvement in activities, and seeing what one does in life as being an expression of who one truly is. For Waterman, self-realization is the "core defining element of eudaimonia" (Huta & Waterman, 2014, p. 1434). Veronika Huta defines eudaimonia as a "striving to use and develop the best in oneself" (Huta & Waterman, 2014, p. 1446). She developed a questionnaire called the *Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities-Revised* (HEMA-R) that views eudaimonia as a combination of authenticity, excellence, personal growth, and a sense of meaning.

Interestingly, there are differences in brain activity for eudaimonic and hedonic approaches. Studies have found that activation of hedonic and eudaimonic motives are associated with both common brain areas as well as distinct areas (Costa et al., 2019; Luo et al., 2017). For example, Heather Urry and her colleagues found that both were associated with left prefrontal activity and positive emotionality. However, eudaimonic well-being was also associated with a unique pattern of brain activation not found with hedonic well-being (Urry et al., 2004). Other studies have found a number of biological differences, such as gene expression and cardiovascular risk factors associated with hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Fredrickson et al., 2013; Ryff et al., 2021). One study looked at the genes that are associated with hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Baselmans & Bartels, 2018). They found a large overlap between genes for hedonism and eudaimonia, but environments also impacted the expression of those genes.

Conclusions drawn from research are also impacted by these differences. For instance, most studies on genetics and well-being use hedonic measures, but the impact of hedonic activity fades with time. Eudaimonic activity, which is associated with greater meaningfulness and personal expressiveness, though seldom measured in genetic studies, may lead to a more stable type of well-being (Huta, 2017). This hypothesis was given a boost in a study that looked at how people regulate both positive and negative emotions to enhance well-being (Ortner et al., 2018). Both hedonic and eudaimonic motives were correlated with well-being. However, hedonic strategies tended to focus only on fostering positive emotions, while eudaimonia was also related to decreasing the impact of negative emotions. Interestingly, while both increased well-being, the effects of decreasing negative emotions had a larger impact on well-being than trying to only increase positive emotions. The lesson learned from this study seems to be that well-being is enhanced by using strategies that work with both positive and negative emotions. Another study looked at a variable called the “focus of concern” (Pearce et al., 2020). Someone with a narrow focus of concern thinks about the self, the present, and the tangible (“me, now, tangible”). People with a broad focus of concern tend to think about others, the future, and broader implications of their actions (“we, future, broad implications”). The study found that both hedonic and eudaimonic orientations were associated with a narrow focus of concern. However, a eudaimonic orientation also showed strong correlations with a broad focus of concern, while the hedonic did not. Therefore, the eudaimonic orientation was related to a balance of the narrow and broad focus of concerns. Clearly, the idea of eudaimonia is complex, and the specific definition often depends on the measurement scale used in a particular study. Nevertheless, eudaimonia has been a useful perspective both in positive psychology and in earlier theories of optimal personality development.

The Psychologically Rich Life

In 2021 a pair of researchers proposed there is a third major way to think about well-being. In a research paper, Shigehiro Oishi and Erin Westgate presented their findings on what they called the *psychologically rich life*. They found that for some people, their quest for well-being is not primarily motivated by either a search for happiness (i.e., hedonism) or a search for meaning (i.e., eudaimonia). Rather, these people are motivated by a search for a life that is “characterized by a variety of interesting and perspective-changing experiences” (Oishi & Westgate, 2021, p. 1).

A psychologically rich life is centered on variety, interest, and perspective changes. People who lead a psychologically rich life also tend to have a wide range of interests, which results in a tendency to search for novel and interesting experiences. Therefore, “a psychologically rich life consists of interesting experiences in which novelty and/or complexity are accompanied by profound changes in perspective” (p. 5). Oishi and colleagues developed *The Psychologically Rich Life Scale* to measure the construct (Oishi et al., 2019).

Oishi and Westgate’s research found a number of personality traits and experiences are associated with a psychologically rich life. Not surprisingly, these people are very curious about the world around them. People who desire a psychologically rich life also lean toward intense emotions, both positive and negative. They are also open to experiences and allow these experiences to change the way they look at the world and at themselves. The types of experiences that fuel a change in perspective will be novel, complex, and challenging. Allowing the interesting experiences to change their perspective requires accommodation rather than simple assimilation into an already existing sense of self and worldview. What tends to occur is that a person’s life story or life narrative becomes more complex and unique.

All of this novelty, complexity, and changes in perspective tends to create a few recognizable outcomes. One of these outcomes is wisdom. As we will see later in the book (Chapter 9), openness to experiences, dealing with challenging ideas, and complex thinking styles are all qualities related to wisdom. Therefore, holistic thinking styles are common in those who live psychologically rich lives as well as people who are seen as wise. An interesting aspect of living a psychologically rich life is a tendency to embrace system-defying political attitudes that support social change and often result in liberal political attitudes. Oishi and Westgate also suggested that one important function of living a psychologically rich life is a greater ability to deal with adversity, tragedy, and conflict. This is due to the greater use of complex thinking styles and the tolerance of strong negative emotions. That is, living a psychologically rich life should be positively related to resilience. One caveat is that complex experiences can stimulate a change in perspective, but only if people have the capacity to understand and make sense of the novel experiences. Beyond a certain point, the person can’t process the experience, and the result is often just anxiety and confusion.

Interestingly, Oishi and Westgate looked at how people thought about the good life or the ideal life in a variety of countries. They found that people all around the world thought the ideal life would have elements of all three orientations to happiness. It seems that people everywhere would like their lives to include happiness, a sense of meaning and purpose, and an interesting variety of experiences. However, the percentages of people who valued each dimension of well-being varied quite a bit among countries. When asked which of the three types of well-being they would prefer if they could only have one, the answer might not be surprising. If they had to choose only one, most people would choose happiness (roughly 57%), with meaningfulness coming in second (roughly 26%). However, a percentage of people (roughly 14%) voted for a psychologically rich life, even if it meant a life with less happiness or less meaning. These figures varied by the type of test used to measure the different dimensions of well-being, but with some measures, the psychologically rich life was preferred by as high as a third of the people.

Oishi and Westgate compared the psychologically rich life with both a happy life (hedonism) and a meaningful life (eudaimonia). They said the happy life was a search for joy, comfort, pleasantness,

safety, stability, and security, while the meaningful life looked for significance, purpose, and a sense of coherence or understanding. They observed that both the happy life and the meaningful life could be fairly repetitive and monotonous. Particularly the happy life can be somewhat conventional. As we saw above, the psychologically rich life was one of variety, interest, and perspective change. The outcome of a happy life was personal satisfaction, the outcome of a meaningful life was making a societal contribution, and the outcome of a psychologically rich life was wisdom. In a clever little comparison, Oishi and Westgate imagined three people on their deathbeds and how each would summarize their life. People who lived a happy life (hedonism) might summarize their life by saying “I had fun.” People who pursued a meaningful life (eudaimonia) would say, “I made a difference.” People who sought a psychologically rich life would say, “What a journey!” We are reminded of the famous line from a Grateful Dead song: “What a long strange trip it’s been.”

Multidimensional Models of Well-Being

As you read about the hedonic, eudaimonic, and engagement perspectives on well-being, it perhaps occurred to you that a more complete perspective might include all three and possibly others as well. Indeed, several researchers have suggested that a thorough understanding of well-being requires more than one dimension. Often the differences among these multidimensional perspectives revolve around how many dimensions are necessary to capture the complexity of well-being without becoming overly complicated and unwieldy (Table 2.2).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985) analyzed research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and thereby developed **self-determination theory (SDT)**. It postulates that certain inherent tendencies toward psychological growth, along with a core group of innate emotional needs, are

Psychological Well-Being (C. Ryff)	Well-Being Theory (M. Seligman)	Self-Determination Theory (E. Deci & R. Ryan)
Positive relationships	Positive relationships	Relatedness
Environmental mastery	Accomplishment	Competence
Purpose in life	Meaning	
Autonomy		Autonomy
Personal growth		
Self-acceptance		
	Positive emotion	
	Engagement	

Source: Courtesy of William C. Compton, PhD.

the basis for self-motivation and personality integration. In SDT, the three basic needs are the following:

1. *Competence*: the need for mastery experiences that allow a person to deal effectively with her or his environment
2. *Relatedness*: the need for mutually supportive interpersonal relationships
3. *Autonomy*: the need to make independent decisions about areas in life that are important to the person

Ryan and Deci (2000) observed that these three needs “appear to be essential for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being” (p. 68). That is, if those needs are met, then people show better adaptive functioning and higher well-being. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these researchers have tended to speak less about intrinsic motivation, preferring to see motivation as either controlled or autonomous. Studies have found that the combination of high autonomy and a perception of a low level of coercive control from others is associated with better ego development, higher self-esteem, higher self-actualization scores, greater consistency of self, more persistence in working toward goals, more satisfaction at work, and fewer experiences of boredom (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Knee & Zuckerman, 1998). Therefore, if positive psychology is partially defined as the investigation of factors that support human flourishing, then one way to measure the success of those factors might be to examine the extent to which these foster a sense of competence, contribute toward the development of positive relationships, and enhance a sense of healthy autonomy. Lastly, a study by Yu et al. (2018) clarified a misconception about the role of autonomy in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. They found that autonomy was, in fact, a universal need associated with well-being in both types of cultures.

A more recent paper by Frank Martela and Richard Ryan (2015) found evidence for a fourth need—the need for *benevolence* or benevolence. They looked at the numerous studies in psychology that have found a positive relationship between well-being and pro-social behaviors. Study after study has found that people feel good when they help other people by being kind, considerate, generous, thoughtful, or compassionate. The older research had assumed that pro-social behavior depended on the three basic needs in order to impact well-being. In their paper, however, Martela and Ryan found that benevolence could predict well-being independent of the three basic needs. The research is still new, so at the moment, the need for benevolence is an intriguing candidate for inclusion in the list of basic needs in SDT. Nonetheless, some have classified the four basic needs into self-expression needs (autonomy & competence) and self-transcendent needs (relatedness & benevolence) (see Mackenzie & Hodge, 2020).

One study examined autonomy, relatedness, and competence as predictors of well-being both in the moment and on a daily basis (Howel et al., 2008). Feeling autonomous and connected were both associated with well-being at all times, but the findings for competence were slightly more complicated. That is, efforts to increase competence by learning a new skill were not enjoyable in the moment but increased well-being later on a daily basis. In other words, initial difficulties of learning translated into more happiness and life satisfaction later. Deci

and Ryan (1985) presented *cognitive evaluation theory* as a subset within SDT to help explain social and environmental factors that lead to greater autonomous motivation. Conditions or activities that help to meet the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence involve personal challenge as well as positive supportive feedback, freedom from demeaning and belittling evaluations, and novelty or a sense of aesthetic value. Also necessary are situations that foster an internal locus of control by giving a person choices, opportunities for self-direction, and a chance to acknowledge feelings. Further, social contexts in which a person feels somewhat secure and knows that social support is available are conducive to meeting these three needs.

A newer subtheory within SDT is called *organismic-integration theory* (Wehmeyer et al., 2018). This perspective proposes that extrinsic motivation exists along a continuum from “external regulation,” which is behavior done solely to obtain external rewards or avoid punishments, up to “introjection,” then to “identification,” and finally to “integration,” which is behavior driven by a coherent and autonomous sense of self. The research suggests “the process of organismic integration typically gets stalled at the level of introjection” (Niemic et al., 2008, p. 110). Introjection is a level where behavior is driven by desires to garner pride and esteem or to avoid guilt and shame. Clearly, the most desirable level of motivation is integration, and therefore, organismic-integration theory adds a way to measure more adaptive levels of well-being beyond notating how much of the three basic needs have been met.

Authentic Happiness and Well-Being Theory

The next two perspectives on well-being both come from Martin Seligman, whose initial ideas led to the founding of positive psychology. We begin with his earlier theory and continue by discussing his later approach to well-being. Seligman’s original ideas focused on **authentic happiness**, which involved the cultivation of three broad life domains: the *pleasant life*, the *good life or engagement*, and the *meaningful life* (Seligman, 2002a).

The *pleasant life* is focused on *positive emotions*. These can be physical pleasures, such as having a good meal, or more sophisticated pleasures, such as enjoying a complex work of art. The latter are *higher pleasures*, which are complex combinations of emotions that produce feelings such as joy or rapture.

The *good life* is found primarily through *engagement* in activities that are absorbing and promote full participation in life. Consistent with the preceding discussion of strengths and virtues, Seligman focused his description of the good life and the meaningful life on *signature strengths* (see earlier discussion of the VIA survey). When people exercise their signature strengths, they tend to feel invigorated and enthusiastic, as well as have a sense that the “real me” is being expressed. For Seligman (2002a), authentic happiness is “identifying and cultivating your most fundamental strengths and using them every day in work, love, play, and parenting” (p. xiii).

Finally, the *meaningful life* uses signature strengths in the service of something larger and more significant than the individual self. It involves going beyond individual concerns to take a wider perspective on life. People live with a greater sense of fulfillment when they believe that they matter as individuals and that their lives have some significance. Research that looks at the authentic happiness theory often refers to the three domains as “orientations to happiness.” Studies have found that higher scores on the three orientations to happiness

(i.e., pleasure, engagement, and meaning) are significantly correlated with higher well-being (Pollock et al., 2016; Proyer et al., 2015). It also seems important for people to have a balance among the three domains rather than having a single domain dominate the others (Grimm et al., 2014).

When developing his ideas about *authentic happiness*, Seligman (2011) argued that his original theory left out too many elements that are important to well-being and was disproportionately tied to mood. Seligman (2011) now advocates what he calls **well-being theory**, writing, “I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing” (p. 13). Well-being theory argues that positive emotion, engagement, and meaning are not sufficient to cover the dimensions of a life well lived. Seligman has added two more dimensions: positive relationships and positive accomplishments. The acronym for the elements of well-being theory is PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment).

In terms of *positive relationships*, Seligman observed that wherever people are around the world and in whatever period of history they live, fundamental is their need for positive, supportive relationships with others. He added *positive accomplishments* because people also seem to need goals in life and challenges for which they can strive; they also want to feel a sense of competence and mastery both of themselves and their environment.

Seligman observed that no single measure can be used to define well-being. None of the five elements of PERMA by themselves can serve as an adequate measure of well-being (see Delle Fave & Negri, 2021). Therefore, well-being is a multifaceted construct that cannot be reduced to overly simplistic ideas, such as those found in “happiology.” Note that Seligman’s theory tends to combine both the hedonic and the eudaimonic perspectives on well-being.

Julie Butler and Margaret Kern (2016) created the PERMA-Profiler as a measure of the five-dimensional PERMA model. A recent study supported the five dimensions of the PERMA model and found that higher scores on the dimensions predicted high scores on vitality, life satisfaction, physical health, and flourishing (Coffey et al., 2016). A study by Buschor et al. (2013) found that the strengths of curiosity, gratitude, hope, love, and zest played central roles in increasing life satisfaction. More to the point, these strengths also played key roles in higher ratings of the pleasurable life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life—but the engaged life was especially relevant.

Psychological Well-Being

Carol Ryff has summarized many years of research on positive mental health and created a six-dimensional structure to measure well-being. Ryff (1985) reviewed the work of the classic theories of positive mental health, such as ideas from Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, Viktor Frankl, Carl Rogers, and others, along with more recent research from developmental, clinical, and personality psychology to create her theory of *psychological well-being*. In this way, she developed six major criteria for what she called **psychological well-being**, along with associated subcategories (Ryff, 1989a, 1989b, 1995, 2018). Ryff’s six-dimensional model of psychological well-being includes the following factors:

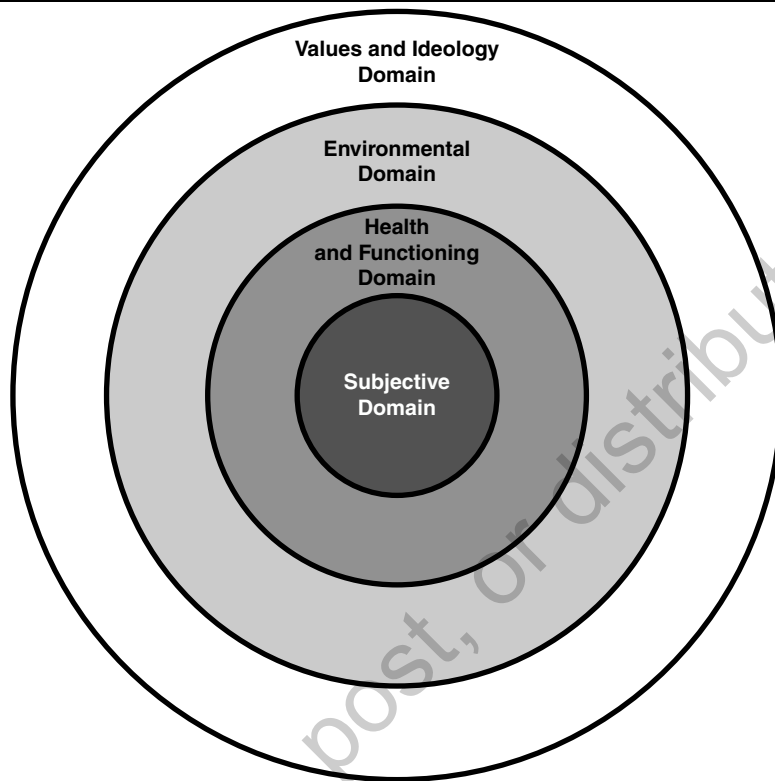
1. *Self-acceptance*: (a) positive self-evaluation, (b) the ability to acknowledge multiple aspects of self, and (c) the ability to accept both positive and negative qualities into a balanced picture of one's abilities
2. *Personal growth*: (a) capacity to grow and develop potentials, (b) growing self-knowledge and effectiveness, and (c) openness to new experiences
3. *Positive relations with other people*: (a) close, warm, and intimate relationships with others, (b) a concern about the welfare of others, and (c) empathy and affection for other people
4. *Autonomy*: (a) independence and self-determination, (b) an ability to resist social pressures, and (c) an ability to regulate behavior from within
5. *Purpose in life*: (a) a sense of purpose and meaning to life and (b) a sense of direction and goals in life
6. *Environmental mastery*: (a) a sense of mastery and competence and (b) the ability to choose situations and environments conducive to meeting goals

Ryff developed the *Psychological Well-Being Scale* to measure these six dimensions of well-being. To date, her measure of psychological well-being has been translated into over 40 languages and there are over 1,400 studies using Ryff's scales to measure well-being. (C. Ryff, personal communication, August 23, 2022). Over the years, numerous studies have found that high scores on Ryff's dimensions are useful predictors of higher well-being, especially when well-being is defined from a eudaimonic perspective (Ryff, 2013, 2018). Ryff's concept of psychological well-being can also be a useful tool for interventions. A meta-analysis conducted by Weiss et al. (2016) found support for interventions based on Ryff's theory.

The Nested Model

One of the newer multidimensional models takes a somewhat different approach to understanding well-being. In the **nested model**, George Henriques et al (Figure 2.4). (2014) proposed that four domains could be used to understand how people experience well-being. They assumed that "well-being should be defined as being far more than the subjective state of being happy or satisfied with one's life" (p. 8). Of course, feeling happy and satisfied is an important part of well-being. However, they recognized that well-being occurs in a broad context that includes our biology, our social relationships, and our values in addition to our emotions and thoughts. The four domains they proposed were the following: the subjective, health and functioning, environmental, and values and ideology. Each of these could have subareas, so the full model can get a bit complicated. We will illustrate the nested model by imagining a young woman named Brittany.

The *subjective domain* is about our inner experience or the first person perspective. Our awareness of our own emotions and our thoughts is part of this domain. Brittany is aware that she often feels happy and says she is fairly satisfied with her life. The *health and functioning domain* is divided into the biological, which is everything associated with our physical self, and

FIGURE 2.4 ■ The Nested Model of Well-being

Source: Henriques, G., Kleinman, K., & Asselin, C. (2014). The Nested Model of Well-Being: A Unified Approach. *Review of General Psychology, 18*(1), 7–18.

the psychological, which is everything related to personality. Brittany is quite healthy and feels a sense of physical vitality. She also has a relatively even temperament and is not prone to worry or anxiety. The *environmental domain* has two subareas: financial and social. Financial involves our access to economic resources. The social area is everything from our immediate social world of close relationships to our community involvements to the larger cultural context we live in. Brittany has a stable career, a number of close friends that provide her consistent support, and she volunteers at the local shelter for abandoned animals. Lastly, the *value and ideology domain* is concerned with the values, ideology, and worldview that are used to create evaluations of what is and what is not an acceptable example of well-being. That is, “well-being is inherently an evaluative construct” so “there must be a place for the evaluator’s perspective” (Henriques et al., 2014, p. 9). In other words, whether a specific behavior is viewed as “positive” depends on the values used to evaluate the behavior. Brittany is a young professional who lives in Toronto, Canada. Her sense of well-being is based on a set of important values that include love of learning, creativity, authenticity, and leadership. Note that those values might not be important to the well-being of other women—especially young women living in different cultures.

The nested model is one way to acknowledge that a sense of well-being is more than simply feeling positive emotions or thinking happy thoughts. Our sense of well-being is derived from a complex set of interactions among a number of factors, including our inner world, our relationships, our physical health, and our values. If we take a lesson from the perspective of the psychologically rich life (see preceding section), then this complexity can make our lives more fulfilling, richer, and more interesting.

SUMMARY

This chapter has reviewed topics relevant to positive psychology. Appropriately, the first examined was positive emotionality. Current psychological perspectives on emotion see positive emotional experiences as multidimensionally determined by biology, cognition, behavior, our current social situation, and the society and culture in which we live. The uniqueness of positive emotions was explored through broaden-and-build theory. That is, positive emotions can help us adapt by broadening our response options and building psychological and social resources for the future. Newer theories of motivation view people as actively involved in seeking out intrinsically satisfying experiences and engaged in a process of continuous development centering on needs for competence, relatedness, autonomy, and hopeful expectations for the future. Finally, theories of well-being were discussed that provide the foundation for ideas and research in positive psychology.

LEARNING TOOLS

Key Terms and Ideas

affective forecasting	hedonism
authentic happiness	neuroplasticity
autonomous motivation	self-concordance
broaden-and-build model	self-determination theory (SDT)
character	signature strengths
controlled motivation	strengths
emotional intelligence (EI)	strivings
eudaimonia	undoing hypothesis
happiness set point	well-being theory

Books

Gallup. (2017). *CliftonStrengths for students: Your strengths journey begins here*. Gallup Press. (popular)

Linley, A., Willars, J., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). *The strengths book: Be confident, be successful, and enjoy better relationships by realizing the best of you*. CAPP Press. (popular)

Peterson, C. (2012). *Pursuing the good life: 100 reflections on positive psychology*. Oxford University Press. (popular)

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourishing: A Visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press. Seligman's book that presents his PERMA model. (popular)

Walton, D. (2018). *Get smart about emotion: A practical guide to emotional intelligence*. Icon Books. [popular]

Zimbardo, P., & Boyd, J. (2009). *The time paradox: The new psychology of time that will change your life*. Atria Books. [popular]

On the Web

<http://www.strengthsquest.com/home.aspx>. Homepage for CliftonStrengths for Students.

<http://www.viacharacter.org>. Website for the VIA Institute on Character.

<https://peplab.web.unc.edu>. Website for Barbara Fredrickson's Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory.

<https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu>. Homepage for The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1hauE_OKP8. Positive psychology in a pandemic. Video by Martin Seligman (2021, January 20).

https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/what_we_do/greater_good_magazine. The Greater Good Science Center. They explore what people do right and how ideas are changing the world. They also offer a range of online tools, a free magazine, and other resources.

<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu>. Seligman's site for multiple resources on positive psychology including books, initiatives, and questionnaires to measure positive psychology constructs.

Personal Exploration

Psychologists have found that we each have a happiness “set point” that seems relatively resistant to major change. Yet our moods certainly change from day to day and sometimes fluctuate within the same day. Over the next week, record your mood on a 10-point-scale (1 = extremely unhappy to 10 = extremely happy) each day at these eight times

- a. When you wake up in the morning
- b. When you leave your home in the morning for school or work
- c. When you have lunch
- d. When you talk to a family member
- e. When you go online, such as visiting a social networking website
- f. When you have dinner
- g. When you watch television or listen to music in the evening
- h. When you get ready for sleep

After one week, you will have recorded a total of 56 entries: (a) What was your average number in total? Does it surprise you? Why or why not? (b) What was your average number for each of these eight activities? Do any of these numbers surprise you? Why or why not? (c) What was the range of your numbers, from lowest to highest? (d) From this activity, what insights have you gained about your moods and their relative stability or changeability in terms of the various times and activities of your day?

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