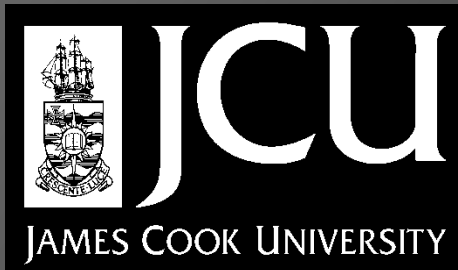


HAPPIER: USING THE NEW SCIENCE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY TO REALISE YOUR POTENTIAL FOR LASTING FULFILMENT



Koong Hean Foo, PhD
Consultant Psychologist, CBT Therapist,
Positive Psychology Centre
Lecturer, James Cook University, Singapore

20 November 2008



Psychology in the early days

Past assumptions about human behaviour that they are driven by aggression, egoistic self-interest, and pursuit of simple pleasures

Psychology in the early days

- Has focused mainly pathology and the cure for mental illness
 - no real cures, until the discovery of psychopharmacology in the 1950s
- Also focused on development of intelligence, to find and nurture genius and talent
 - Made changes to environments of school, workplace, and families to help creativity, to tap potentials; Few studies on genius and talent
- Has tried to make normal life more fulfilling
 - Has ignored people's need for challenges to test skills, opportunity for learning new ideas and developing talents, and freedom to reinvent themselves

The Birth of Positive Psychology

- ⦿ Named in 1998 by Martin Seligman
- ⦿ Proposes to correct imbalance and challenge the pervasive assumptions of the disease model
- ⦿ Not abandoning past psychology on understanding of human problems
- ⦿ Human goodness and excellence are as authentic as disease, disorder and distress
- ⦿ Focuses on strength as on weakness, interest in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, fulfilling the lives of healthy people as healing wounds of the distressed

Definition of Positive Psychology

“Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning that aims to discover and promote factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive”

(Seligman, 2000)

Pillars of Positive Psychology

- ⦿ Positive subjective experiences
- ⦿ Positive individual traits
- ⦿ Positive institutions

Theoretically:

Positive institutions facilitate the development and display of positive traits, which in turn facilitate positive subjective experiences

Pillars of Positive Psychology

⊙ At the subjective level, looks at positive subjective states or positive emotions

- Happiness
- Joy
- Satisfaction with life
- Relaxation
- Love
- Intimacy
- Contentment
- Optimism
- Hope
- Feelings of energy
- Vitality
- Confidence
- Laughter

Pillars of Positive Psychology

⦿ At the individual level

- Courage
- Persistence
- Honesty
- Wisdom
- Aesthetic sensibility
- Creative potentials
- Excellence

⦿ At the group or societal level

- Civic virtues
- Healthy families
- Healthy work environments
- Positive communities
- All citizens

Basic Themes and Assumptions of Positive Psychology

The Good Life

- ✓ *Not about having wealth, power, prestige, beauty*
- ✓ A combination of positive connection to others, positive individual traits, and life regulation qualities

People are highly Adaptive and desire Social Relationships

People can thrive and flourish

- ✓ Be good parents
- ✓ Treat others with some degree of respect
- ✓ Love those close to them
- ✓ Find ways to contribute to society and welfare of others
- ✓ Live life with integrity and honesty

Basic Themes and Assumptions of Positive Psychology

Strengths and Virtues are central to Well Being

- ✓ Good character of virtues, values, and character development--e.g., honesty, fidelity, courage, tolerance, self-control

Persons exist in Social Contexts

- ✓ Well being is a pursuit in social environments

Importance of Positive Emotions to both Mental and Physical Health

- ✓ Satisfaction with life
- ✓ More rewarding interpersonal relationships
- ✓ More productive at work
- ✓ Helpful to others
- ✓ Attain goals in life
- ✓ Physical healthier, more resistant to illness, may live longer

Basic Themes and Assumptions of Positive Psychology

The Predictors of Positive Emotions are unique

- ✓ Elimination of negative emotions \neq inclusion of positive emotions, but = state of neutral emotionality
- ✓ Process is needed to move from negative emotions to positive emotions

Negative Emotions are still important

- ✓ E.g., for survival
- ✓ Cannot eliminate fear, pain, anxiety, etc.
- ✓ Tragic elements in life enrich human experience

Basic Themes and Assumptions of Positive Psychology

All Positive Emotions are not the same

- ✓ Bodily Pleasure is the good feeling from satisfying needs and meeting expectations; e.g. food
- ✓ Higher pleasures are experiences that feel good but are more cognitively complex and tend to have more lasting effect on mood; e.g., joy, excitement
- ✓ Enjoyment involves meeting expectations of fulfilling a need and then goes beyond those expectations to create something new, unexpected, or even imagined
- ✓ Hedonism—basic motivation force behind most human behaviours
- ✓ Eudaimonic well being—being true to one inner self

Role of Science in the Study of Well Being

The new science of Positive Psychology

Can you make yourself lastingly
happier?

Google search statistics show an 8 million average hits on search result of the word depression

Happiness

Study 1:

- ◎ Lee Anne Harker and Dacher Keltner (2001)
- ◎ Analyzed 114 pictures from 1958 and 1960 yearbooks of Mills College, Oakland, California
 - All but 3 women were smiling, but varied smiles.
 - Average rating 3.8 for the smiles
 - Decades after, young women who expressed positive emotions (happiness) had better marriages in middle-age

Happiness

Study 2:

- Deborah Danner, David Snowdon and Wallace Friesen (2001) analyzed the emotional content of autobiographical essays of 180 nuns in American School of Sisters of Notre Dame
- All sisters born before 1917; by 1990s, 40% most have died
- Scored on emotional content (sentences or words)
- In 1930, each sister asked by Mother Superior to write short essay about childhood, schools attended and religious experience, and reasons for taking vows
- Positive emotional content (happiness) relate to longevity
- Happier nuns (upper 25%) lived on average 10 years longer than less happy counterparts (bottom 25%)

Explaining Happiness

Traditional Theories of Happiness

- ① 1. Hedonism--sum of happiness over lifetime
- ② 2. Desire Theory--happiness is getting what you want, whether or not it involves pleasure
- ③ 3. Objective List Theory
 - Achieving some truly valuable things in the world
 - E.g., freedom from disease, material comfort, a career, friendship, children, education, knowledge

Explaining Happiness

- ⦿ Currently, researchers measure happiness by surveying or interviewing people and taking what they report at face value
- ⦿ Terminologies emerged are:
 - Quality of Life
 - Subjective Well Being
 - Life Satisfaction

Table 4.1. Positive Correlations With Happiness and Life Satisfaction

Zero to Small	Moderate	Large
age	number of friends	gratitude
gender	being married	optimism
education	religiousness	being employed
social class	level of leisure activity	frequency of sexual intercourse
income	physical health	percent of time experiencing positive affect
having children	conscientiousness	test-retest reliability of happiness measures
ethnicity (majority versus minority)	extraversion	happiness of identical twins
intelligence	neuroticism (negative correlation)	self-esteem
physical attractiveness	internal locus of control	

(Peterson, 2006)

The new science of Positive Psychology

Can we learn to be optimistic?

Optimism

- ⦿ was defined as “a mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future”

(Lionel Tiger, 1979; Anthropologist)

- ⦿ now defined “as a cognitive characteristic—a goal, an expectation, or a causal attribution”

- ⦿ As an inherent human nature
- ⦿ As an individual difference

Optimism

- ⦿ Among the 6 core predictors of subjective well-being:
 - Positive self-esteem
 - Sense of perceived control
 - Extroversion
 - Optimism
 - Positive relationship
 - Sense of meaning and purpose in life
- ⦿ is also a positive emotional state

Optimism

- Seen as Expectations that things will turn out well
- Seen as Hope
- Seen as the way people explain the causes of events for themselves (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995)
- E.g., people who explain bad events in a circumscribed way—with external, unstable, and specific causes—are optimistic
- E.g., people who favour internal (self-esteem), stable (long-lasting), and global (pervasive) causes are pessimistic

Learning to be Optimistic?

- ⦿ Disputing strategy (from Martin Seligman's Learned Optimism)
 - careful monitoring of and recognition of thoughts; changing negative thoughts
 - *what can go wrong changed to what can go right*
- ⦿ Monitoring and Changing explanatory style
 - looking for the causes and influences of previous positive and negative events
 - switch to external (non self esteem), unstable, and specific (circumstances) explanations for bad events
- ⦿ Good to be pessimistic as well! For safety and be prepared!
- ⦿ Through religion
- ⦿ Through social learning

The new science of Positive Psychology

Discover and renew your
signature strengths and
virtues

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

- VIA = Values in Action Institute created by Mayerson Foundation in 2000
- Contains 24 character strengths organized under 6 core values

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

1. Strengths of Wisdom and Knowledge

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Love of Learning
- Open-mindedness
- Perspective

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

2. Strengths of Courage

- Authenticity
- Bravery
- Persistence
- Zest

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

3. Strengths of Humanity

- Kindness
- Love
- Social intelligence

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

4. Strengths of Justice

- Fairness
- Leadership
- Teamwork

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

5. Strengths of Temperance

- Forgiveness/Mercy
- Modest/Humility
- Prudence
- Self-regulation

VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Values

6. Strengths of Transcendence

- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humour
- Religiousness/Spirituality

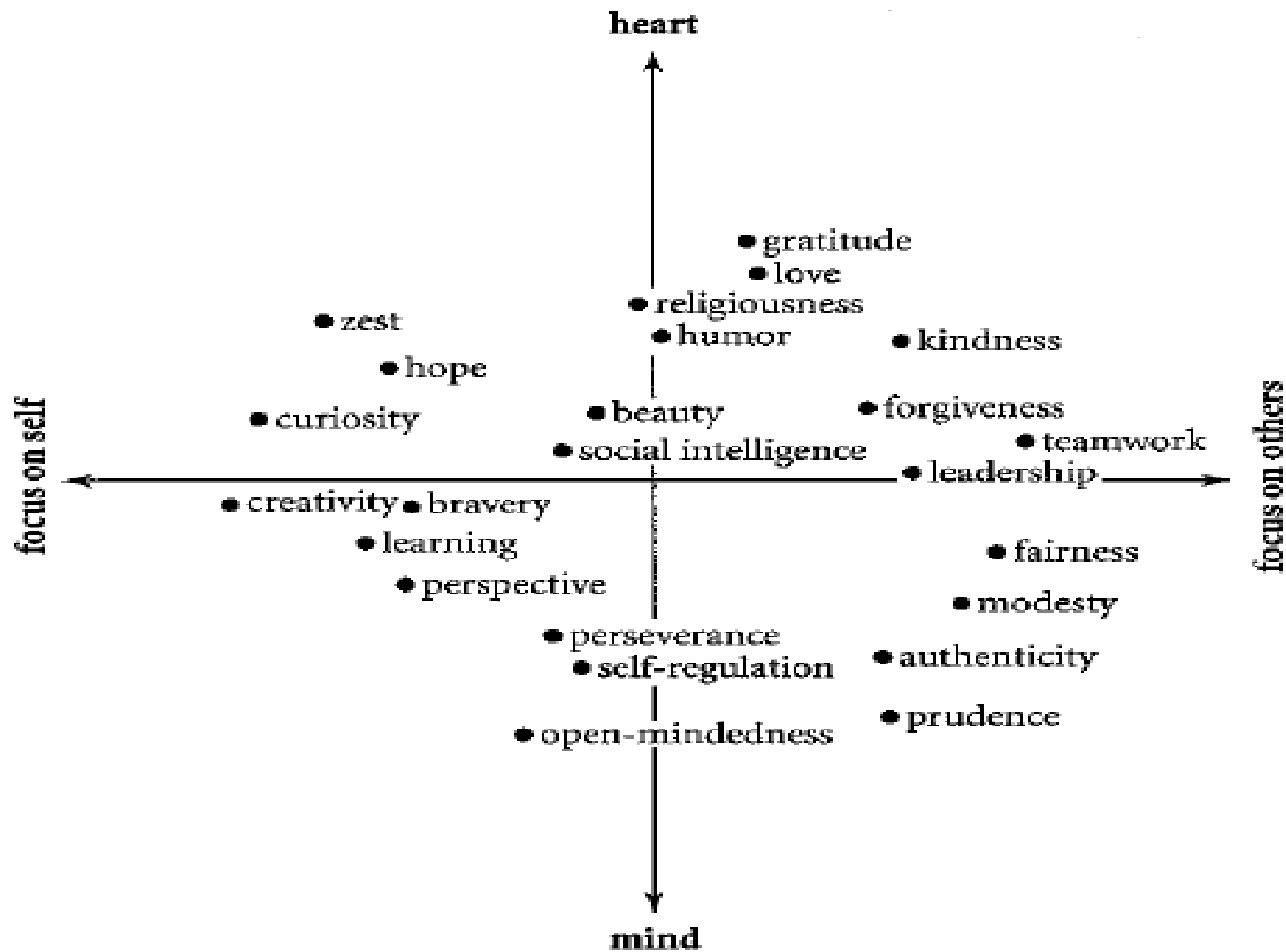


Figure 6.3. Tradeoffs Among Character Strengths

The farther apart are two strengths, the less likely it is that the same person habitually shows both.

Possible Criteria for a Signature Strength

- a sense of ownership and authenticity (“this is the real me”) vis-à-vis the strength
- a feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first
- a rapid learning curve as themes are attached to the strength and practiced
- continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength

- a sense of yearning to act in accordance with the strength
- a feeling of inevitability in using the strength, as if one cannot be stopped or dissuaded from its display
- the discovery of the strength as owned in an epiphany
- invigoration rather than exhaustion when using the strength
- the creation and pursuit of fundamental projects that revolve around the strength
- intrinsic motivation to use the strength

Positive Psychology Centre, Singapore



- has seen an increasing number of students/members of the public approaching to gather information on positive psychology education and therapy services.
- to date we are training close to 150 students since year 2007 in various positive psychology courses from corporate to academic qualification
- the new science of positive psychology is gathering more awareness and popularity in current times.
- The dissemination of positive psychology is important as it is in its birth stages in Singapore.
- It will still take more time, months, years before it settle down as one of the essential sciences in Asian population.

Positive Psychology Centre, Singapore



- The positive therapy centre under positive psychology centre Singapore has also reported an increasing number of clients who seek for therapy treatments.
- People know about positive psychology but do not know how it can help them in dealing with their problems or skills to promote their abilities yet.
- There is a shortage of such professionals in this region.
- The dissemination of the science of positive psychology in Singapore will work better if there are more awareness supported by different associations.

Readings available at

<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/publications.htm>

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

Sheldon, K.M. & King, L.K. (2001). Why is positive psychology necessary. *American Psychologist*, 56, 216-217.

Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and Why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 103-110.

References

- Boniwell, I. (2006). Positive Psychology in a Nutshell: A balanced Introduction to the Science of Optimal Functioning. GB: PWBC.
- Compton, W. C. (2005). Introduction to Positive Psychology. Australia: Wadsworth.
- Peterson, C. (2006). A Primer in Positive Psychology. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Synder, C. R. (2005). (Eds.). Handbook of Positive Psychology. New York: Oxford University Press.