Positive Psychology and Counseling

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Session Agenda

- What is Positive Psychology?
- How is a positive psychology counseling perspective different from a traditional perspective?
- Why be happy?
- Can we become lastingly happier?
- If so, how?
- Applications

Psychological Studies
(since 1887)
14-1 Negative to Positive Ratio

Maslow’s Positive Psychology

"Psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side ... it has revealed to us little about his potentiates, his virtues, his achievable aspirations ... It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that, the darker, meaner half."

—Maslow (1954)
A Freudian legacy?

Freud thought the best we could hope for was “ordinary misery.”

I feel that life is divided into the horrible and the miserable.
--Woody Allen

What is Positive Psychology?

psychology should:

- Be as concerned with strength as with weakness
- Be as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst
- Be as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling as with healing pathology
- Develop interventions to increase well being not just to decrease misery.


Theoretical Foundations

- The Pleasant Life (Positive Emotions)
- The Engaged Life (Engagement)
- The Meaningful Life (Meaning)
- The Social Life (Positive Relationships)
- The Achieved Life (Accomplishment)

Each is Measurable  Each is Teachable

FULL LIFE = P+E+R+M+A
Positive Education and Counseling

Current Status

- Between 2000 and 2010 more than a thousand articles published.
- Academic Programs
- Professional Organizations: IPPA Conferences
- Books
Counseling Strategies: To name just a few
- Solution-Focused Brief Therapy
- Quality of Life Therapy
- Hope Therapy
- Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy
- Well-being therapy
- Positive Psychotherapy
- Penn Resilience Project
- Strengths-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

How is a Positive Psychology Perspective Different from Traditional Approaches?

Positive Psychology
- Believes people care about much more than simply relief from their distress.
- People want to explore, express, and enhance strengths.

Traditional Approaches
- Aim to address basic human deficiencies.
- Focus on negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
The Positive Psychology view of counseling asks that we reconsider what it means to be psychologically healthy.

*Health is not simply the absence of disease: it is something positive...*

—Henry Sigerist (1941, p. 100).

### Mental Health as Flourishing

**Hedonia**
- Positive Emotion
- The Pleasant Life

**Eudaimonia**
- Doing Good
  - The Engaged Life
  - The Meaningful Life
  - The Social Life
  - The Achieved Life

### Flourishing

(Keyes, 2009)

**Hedonic Well-Being**
- Feeling Good
  1. Satisfied with your life
  2. Positive affect in life
  3. Interested in life

**Eudaimonic Well-Being**
- Doing Good
  4. Autonomy
  5. Personal growth
  6. Environmental mastery
  7. Positive relations with others
  8. Social integration
  9. Social contribution
  10. Social acceptance
  11. Social interest and coherence
  12. Social growth
Unpacking Hedonia

**Emotional Well-Being**
- Positive Affect
  - cheerful
  - in good spirits
  - happy
  - calm and peaceful
  - satisfied
  - full of life
- Avowed QOL
  - Satisfaction with life
  - Happy with life
  - Interest in life

Unpacking Eudaimonia

**Psychological Well-Being**
- Self-Acceptance
- Personal Growth
- Purpose in Life
- Environmental Mastery
- Positive Relations
- Autonomy

**Social Well-Being**
- Social Acceptance
- Social Growth/Potential
- Social Contribution
- Social Interest/Coherence
- Social Integration

Mental Health as Flourishing

**Hedonia**

**Flourishing**

*The Full Life*

**Eudaimonia**

An inclusive view of mental health
Where youth are succeeding and where they need help:

Positive Youth Development

“Problem free does not mean fully prepared.”
—(Pittman, 1992)

- Confidence (self-worth or acceptance)
- Character (accountability, self control, compassion)
- Connection (integration, belonging, membership)
- Competence (mastery, social contribution, growth)

Four-Front Approach to Assessment

Based on Outcome Goals, it becomes Crucial for Counselors and Students/Clients to Consider:

1) Deficiencies or Weaknesses of the Client
2) Strengths and Assets of the Client
3) Deficits and Destructive Forces in the Client’s Environment
4) Resources and Opportunities in the Client’s Environment

(Wright & Lopez, 2002)

Outcomes and Assessments

- Positive Affect
- Subjective Well-Being/Happiness
- VIA Inventory of Strengths
- Engagement/Interest/Flow
- Meaning
- Social Support/Attachment
- Optimism
- Hope
- Self-efficacy
Different Questions and Conversations

- What are the obvious and hidden strengths, resources, resiliencies, and competences contained in the client’s story?
- What are the competing stories—the stories of clarity, coping, endurance, and desire that exist simultaneously with the confusion, pain, suffering, and desperation?
- What already exists that can be used in service of the client’s goals?

Strengths Talk

- Talk about a time you felt hopeful about your life and circumstances. What was going on in your life that made you feel hopeful?
- Talk about what others might say are the qualities that keep you going in the face of stress and adversity.
- How have you reminded yourself to keep moving forward during these more difficult times?

Positive Psychological approaches to counseling suggest we should strive not to restrict ourselves to repairing or fixing weakness because such actions will not necessarily make our clients stronger or happier.
A focus on positive outcomes may ultimately be the most effective means to prevent and reduce mental health problems or disorders.

Why be happy?
Barbara Fredrickson
University of North Carolina
Check it out on YouTube

What’s Good About Positive Emotions?
- “…they open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and creative.”
- “…positive emotions allow us to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge and new ways of being.”

Positive Emotion jolts us into a different mode of thought!

Upward Spiral of the Benefits of Positive Emotions
Positive emotional experience may lead students to pursue their interests more vigorously and think more expansively about subjects of interests. And related approach behavior may facilitate the development of relationships with other students and teachers that would make learning an increasingly collaborative and rewarding process.

Did you smile in your college yearbook photo?

Positive emotional expression in college pictures predict health and well-being outcomes up to 30 years later.

(Harker and Keltner, 2001)

Are positive emotions related to better physical health and longer lives?

- The Nun Study: (Danner et. al, 2001)
- Handwritten autobiographies from 180 Catholic nuns, composed when participants were a mean age of 22 years, were scored for emotional content and related to survival during ages 75 to 97.
The Nun Study (Danner et al., 2001)
- Only positive feelings predicted longevity
  Age 85: 90% of most cheerful quartile alive; 34% of least cheerful quartile alive.
  Age 94: 54% of most cheerful quartile alive; 11% of least cheerful quartile alive.

Positive Emotions Build Durable Physical Resources
- "We need to take more seriously the possibility that positive emotional style is a major player in disease risk."

What Good are Positive Emotions in Crises? Studying Resilience and Emotions after 2001
- Assessed in early 2001
- Trait resilience
- Psychological resources
- Assessed after September 11
- Depression
- Psychological resources
- Positive emotions

Folkman’s Original Model
Folkman’s Revised Model


The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect: Does Happiness Lead to Success?


Can we become lastingly happier?

Hedonic Treadmill

- The tendency of a person to remain at a relatively stable level of happiness despite a change in fortune or the achievement of major goals.

"When we have an experience-- hearing a particular sonata, making love with a particular person, watching the sun set from a particular window of a particular room-- on successive occasions, we quickly begin to adapt to it, and the experience yields less pleasure each time. Psychologists call this habituation, economists call it declining marginal utility, and the rest of us call it marriage" (Gilbert, p. 130).

Happiness is Relatively Stable

What we imagine will happen: Permanent effects

What actually happens: We adapt very quickly (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978)
Positive Psychology interventions teach skills that are sustainable and enjoyable. They build pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

Is it possible to increase and sustain happiness?

Sonya Lyubomirsky
University of California Riverside

Happiness Enhancing Strategies

- **Count your blessings**: Express gratitude for what you have (either privately—through contemplation or journaling—or to a close other) or convey your appreciation to individuals whom you’ve never properly thanked.
- **Cultivate optimism**: Keep a journal in which you imagine and write about the best possible future for yourself or practice by looking at the bright side of things.
- **Avoid over thinking and social comparison**: Cut down on how often you dwell on your problems and compare yourself to others.

Happiness Enhancing Strategies

- **Practice acts of kindness**: Do good things for others, whether friends or strangers, either directly or anonymously, either spontaneously or planned.
- **Nurture relationships**: Pick a relationship in need of strengthening and invest time and energy in cultivating it.
- **Do more activities that truly engage you**: Look for activities at home and work that challenge you and provide opportunities to use strengths.
- **Replay and savor life’s joys**: Paying close attention, take delight, and go over life’s pleasures and wonders—through thinking, writing, drawing, or sharing with another.
### Happiness Enhancing Strategies

- **Commit to your goals**: Pick one, two, or three significant goals that are meaningful to you and devoting time and effort to pursuing them.
- **Develop strategies for coping**: Practice ways to endure or surmount a recent stress, hardship, or trauma.
- **Learn to forgive**: Work on letting go of anger and resentment towards others who have hurt or wronged you.
- **Practice religion and spirituality**: Becoming more involved in your church, temple, or mosque, or reading and pondering spiritually-themed books.
- **Take care of your body**: Engage in physical activity, meditation, smiling and laughing.

### Enhancing Relationships through Active and Constructive Responding

Listen carefully to when people you care about report good events to you, and go out of your way to respond actively and constructively.

#### Your partner got a big promotion and shares the news with you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Destructive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructive</td>
<td>Destructive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That's great! I'm so proud of you! I know how hard you worked for this and you really deserve it! How did it happen? Let's go out and celebrate.</td>
<td>I guess you're going to be home even less from now on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good news. You deserve it.</td>
<td>Did you run by the store on your way home?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Positive Psychotherapy for Depression

- **14 Sessions, 12 exercises**
- **Examples:**
  - *Using Your Strengths*
  - *Three good things*
  - *Life Summary*
  - *Gratitude visit*
  - *Active and constructive responding*
  - *Savoring*
The Penn Resiliency Program

- School-based group intervention
- For late elementary & middle school students (5th-8th grade)
- Based on CBT and social problem-solving techniques
- Twelve 90-120 minute sessions
- Modular

Jane Gillham, Ph.D. and Karen Reivich, Ph.D.

The 5 Pillars of Fishful Thinking

- Resilience: Bounce Back
- Optimism: Think Positive
- Emotion Awareness: Know Yourself
- Empowerment: Believe “I can”
- Hope/Goal Setting: Reach Goals

--Jane Gillham, Ph.D. and Karen Reivich, Ph.D.

The conclusion of the research and implications for counseling:

“Flourishing takes work!”

Resources

- Popular books based on empirically sound research.
  - Martin Seligman, *Flourish*
  - Barbara Fredrickson, *Positivity*
  - Sonja Lyubomirsky, *The How of Happiness* and *The Myths of Happiness*
  - M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*

- Internet based resources
  - Complete positive psychology measures: [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org)
  - Readings, videos, and podcasts highlight recent research on well-being, gratitude, empathy and other positive states: [www.gratetogether.berkeley.edu](http://www.gratetogether.berkeley.edu)
  - Seligman’s Positive Psychology Center: [www.positivepsychologycenter.org](http://www.positivepsychologycenter.org)

- School Resource
  - M. Furlong, R. Gilman, E. Scoot Huebner *Handbook of Positive Psychology in the Schools (2nd Ed).*