



positive psychology

#20

What makes us happy?

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

- Positive psychology
 - The study of human strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)
 - Psychology has been preoccupied with diseases and the worst things in life



<https://stephanieabonte.com/about-positive-psychology/>

Classification of 6 Virtues and 24 Character Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Virtue and strength	Definition
1. Wisdom and knowledge	Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
Creativity	Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
Curiosity	Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
Open-mindedness	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
Love of learning	Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
Perspective	Being able to provide wise counsel to others
2. Courage	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
Authenticity	Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
Bravery	Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
Persistence	Finishing what one starts
Zest	Approaching life with excitement and energy
3. Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others
Kindness	Doing favors and good deeds for others
Love	Valuing close relations with others
Social intelligence	Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others

The Character Strengths and Virtues project does for wellbeing what the DSM does for psychological disorders (Seligman et al., 2005).

4. Justice	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
Fairness	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
Leadership	Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
Teamwork	Working well as member of a group or team
5. Temperance	Strengths that protect against excess
Forgiveness	Forgiving those who have done wrong
Modesty	Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
Prudence	Being careful about one's choices; <i>not</i> saying or doing things that might later be regretted
Self-regulation	Regulating what one feels and does
6. Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
Gratitude	Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
Hope	Expecting the best and working to achieve it
Humor	Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
Religiousness	Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

The relative endorsement of the 24 character strengths is highly similar across regions and cultures (Seligman et al., 2005).

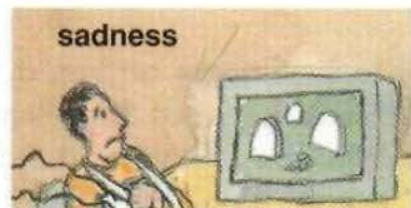
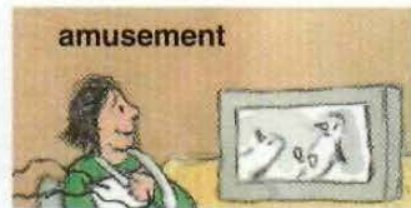
- Subjective well-being
 - People's evaluations of their lives
 - Focuses on subjective pleasure and satisfaction

BENEFITS OF HAPPINESS

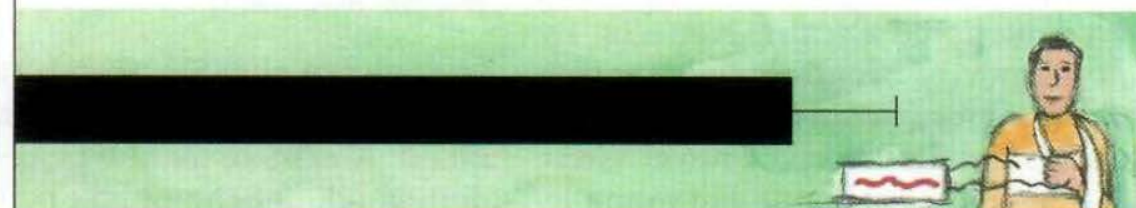
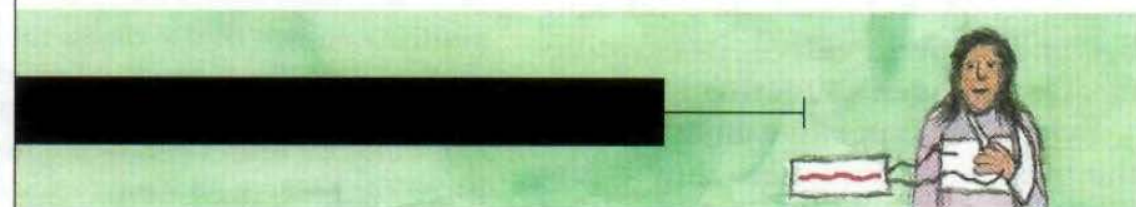
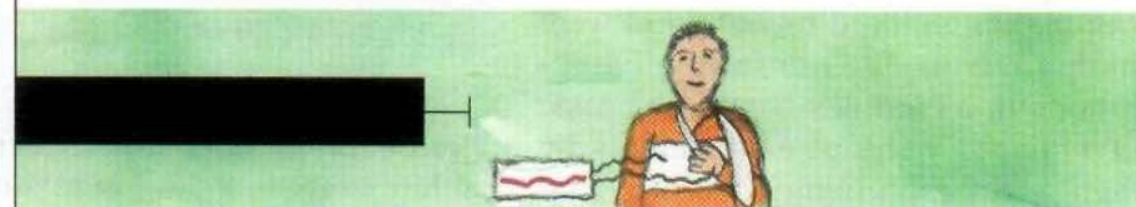
1 anxiety-provoking situation



2 short films shown



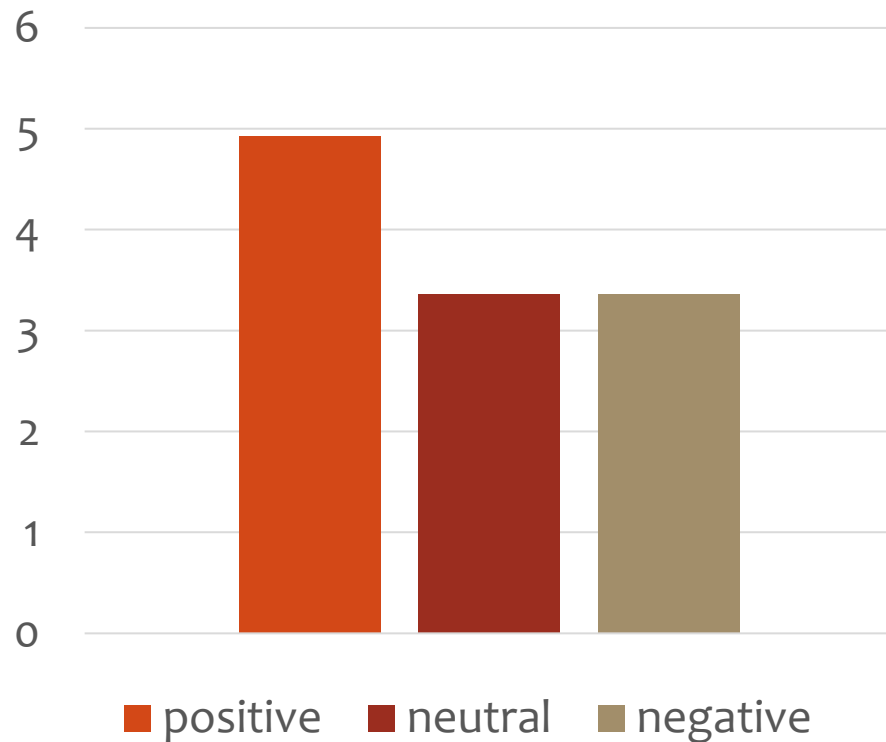
3 cardiovascular recovery



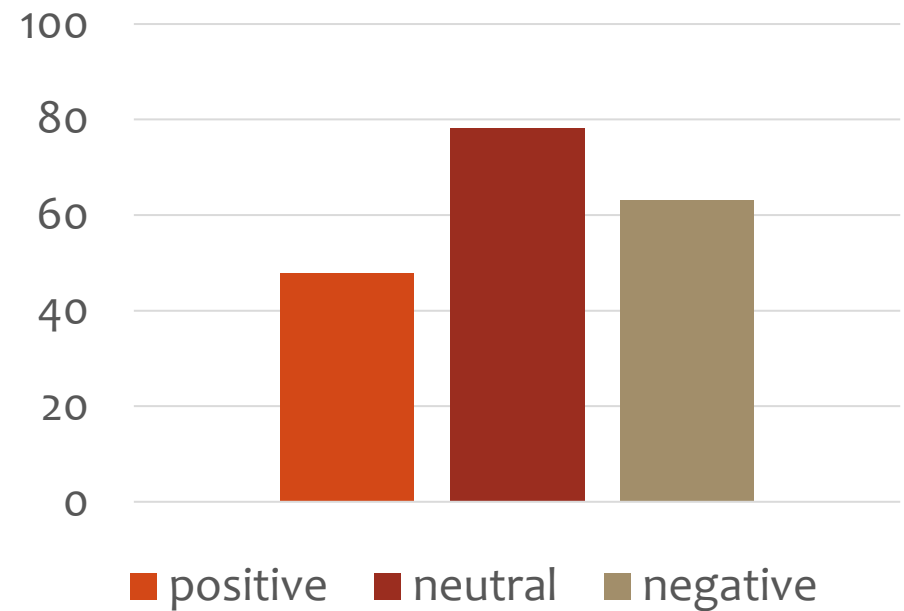
0 10 20 30 40 50
time (seconds)

Participants prepared a speech under time pressure (which evoked their anxiety). They were then shown a film which induced different emotions. Positive emotions led to quickest cardiovascular (e.g., heart rate, blood pressure) recovery (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998).

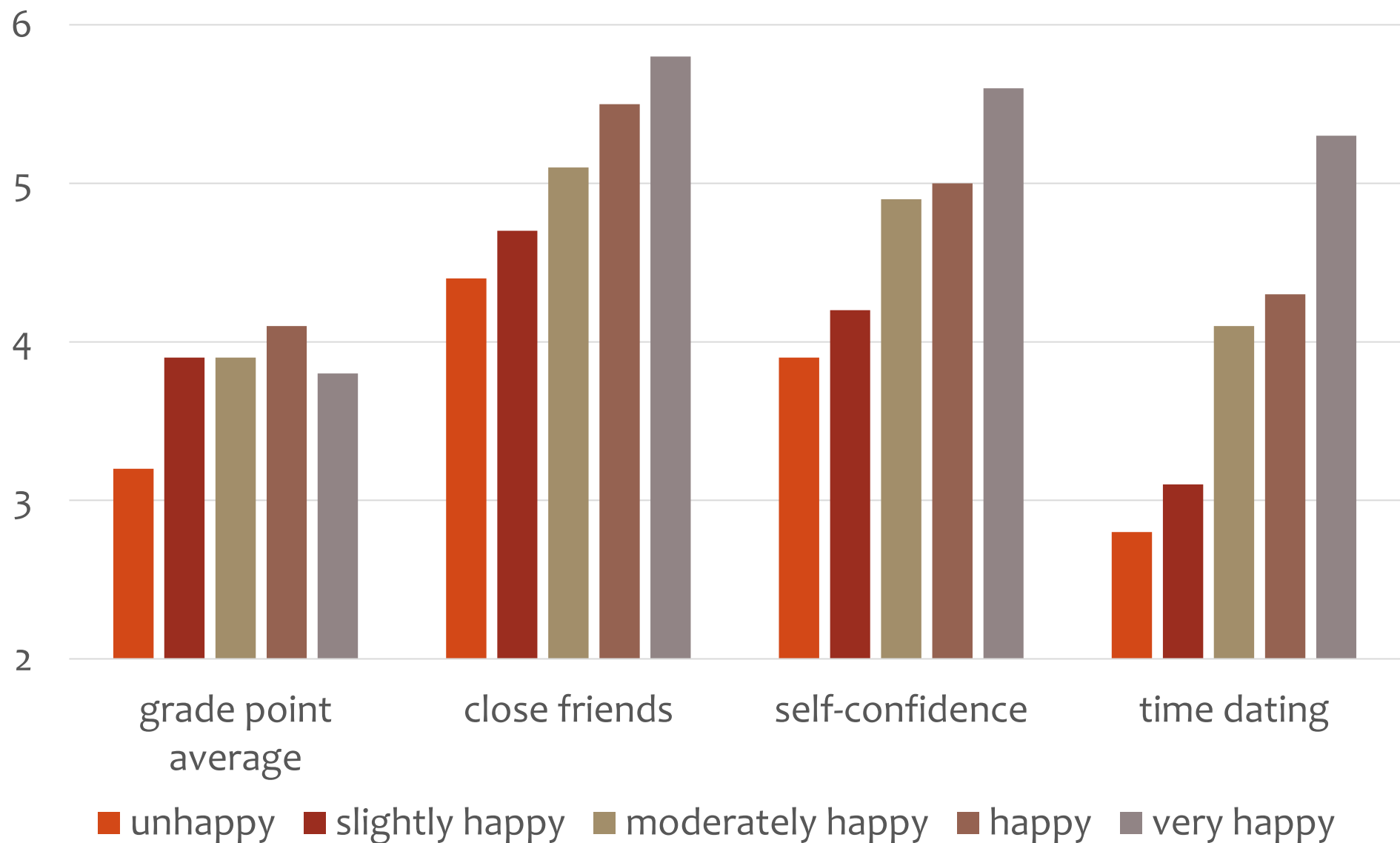
No. of unusual associates



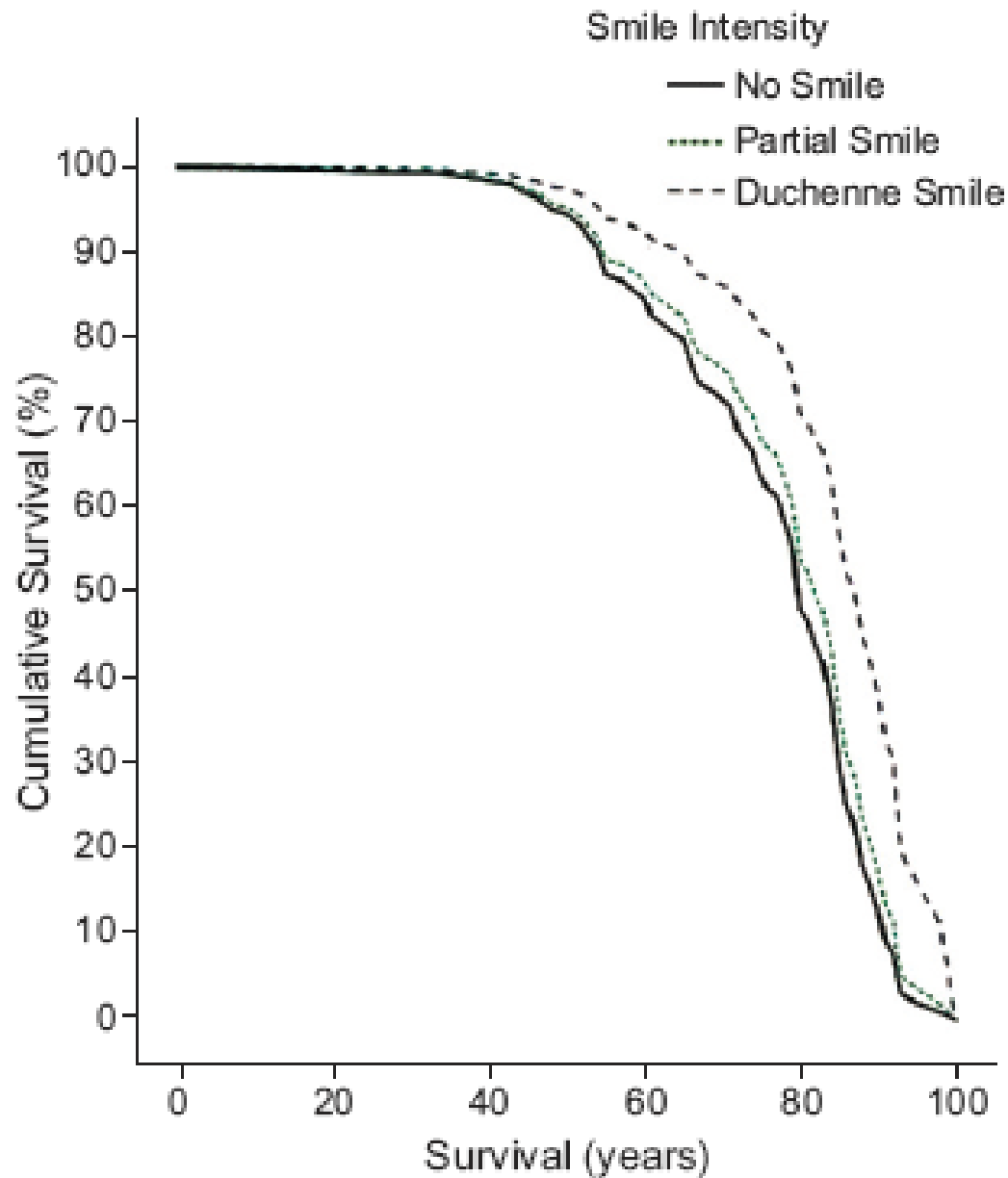
No. of respondents in the normative sample giving the same response



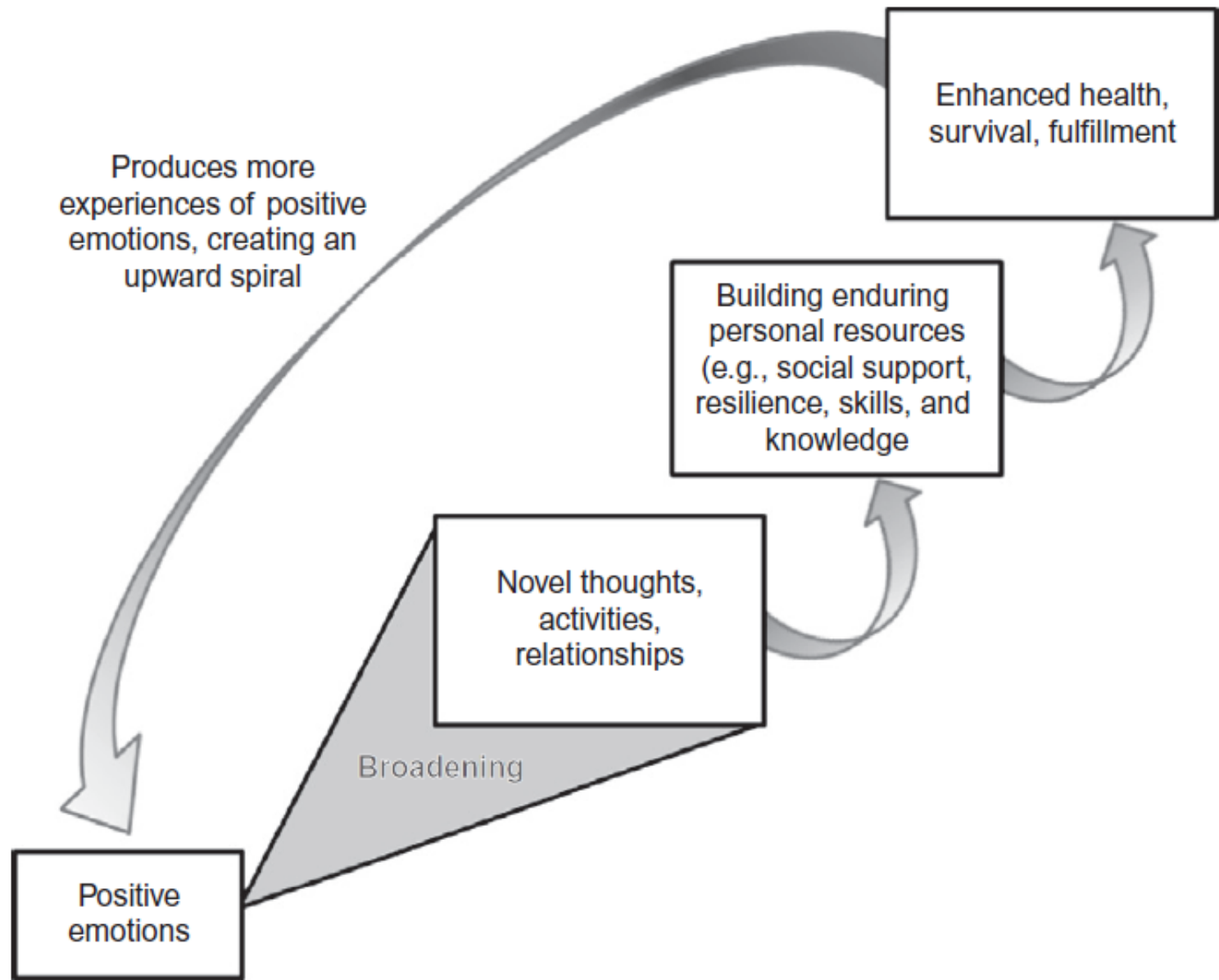
Participants read 20 words and write down their first associate to each word. Participants put in a positive mood generated more unusual word associates than did participants put in a neutral or negative mood (Isen et al., 1985).



Freshmen who were happier enjoyed a range of better university life outcomes (Oishi et al., 2007).



Players who displayed the Duchenne smile in their photos in the Baseball Register lived a longer life than others (Abel & Kruger, 2010).



The broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2013) states that positive emotions, through broadening and building, improve odds for survival, health, and fulfillment (hence an upward spiral).

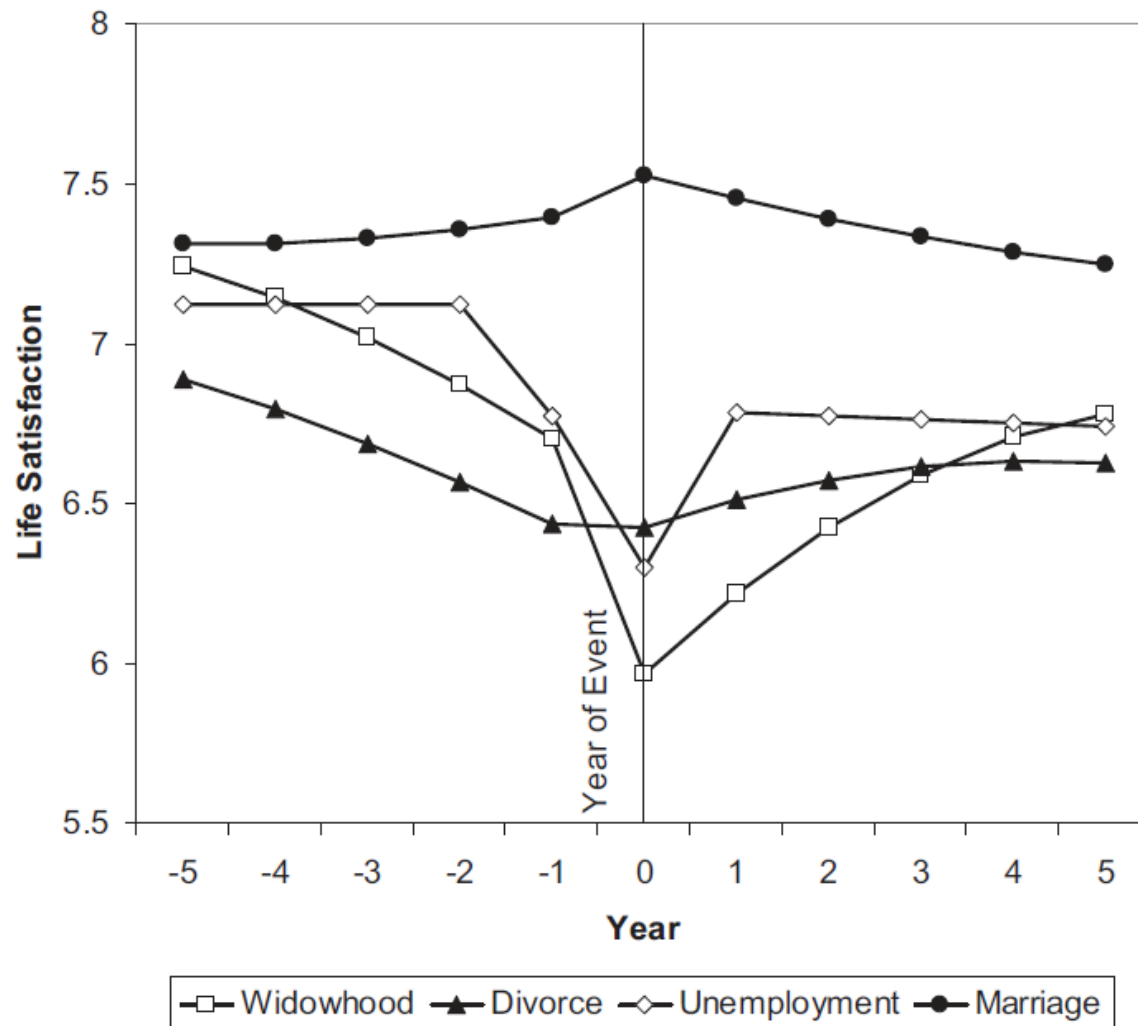
- The broaden-and-build theory
 - The broaden hypothesis: Positive emotions (e.g., joy, interest) widen thoughts and motivations
 - e.g., creativity, flexibility, openness to new information, action urges, efficiency

- The broaden-and-build theory
 - The build hypothesis: The broadening effects spur the development of resources, placing people on positive trajectories of growth
 - e.g., resilience, social connection

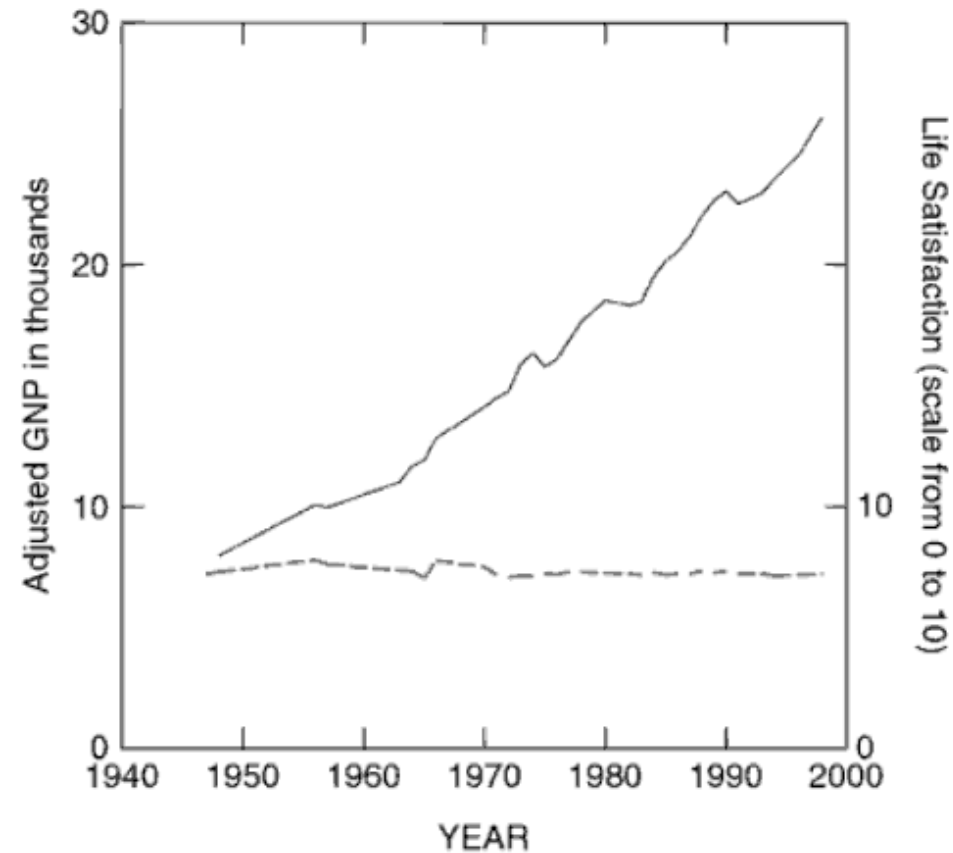
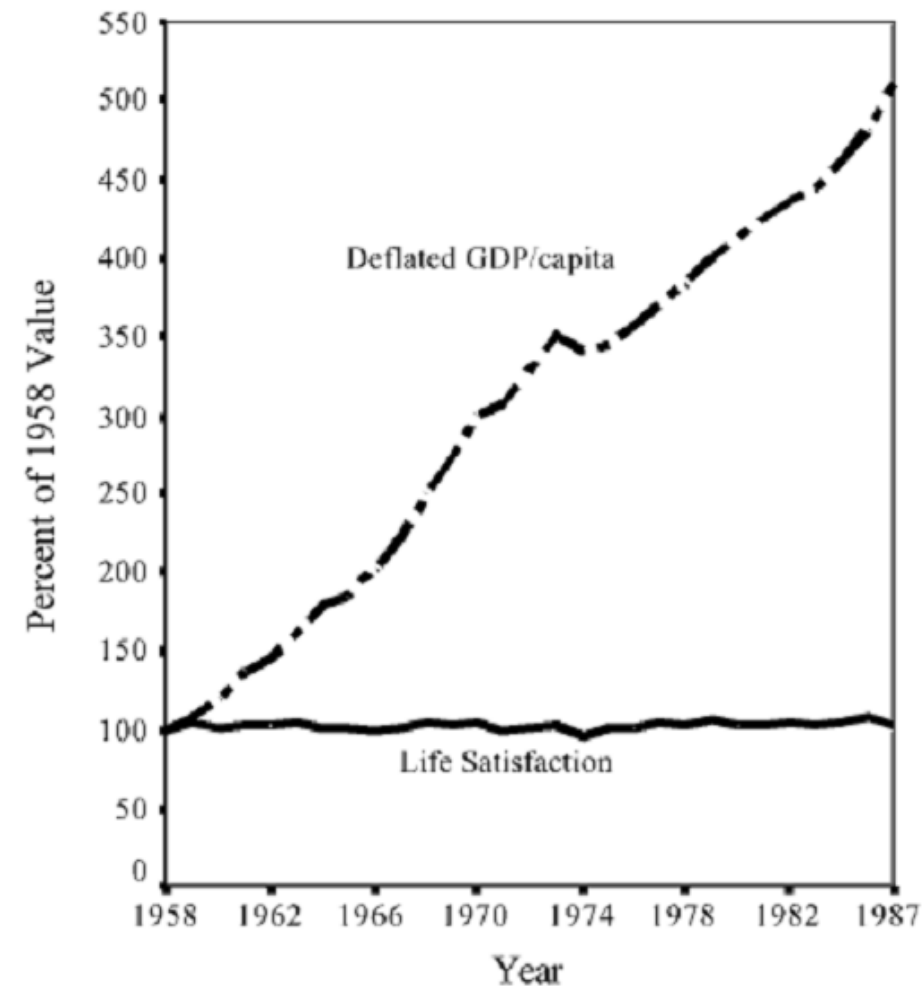
WHAT MAKE US HAPPY

- Hedonic treadmill theory
 - People react to events just briefly; in a short time they return to neutrality (Brickman & Campbell, 1971)
 - Happiness (and unhappiness) is short-lived; thus, people continue to pursue it

- Revised adaptation theory
 - People have a general set point for happiness, which is partly determined by temperaments (Diener et al., 2006)
 - People tend to adapt to changes in life and return to their set point



Adaptation to life events is generally observed, but the extent varies across different events (based on 24,000 respondents in a German Panel Study) (Diener et al., 2006). There was little evidence of adaptation for people with disability, for instance (Lucas, 2005).

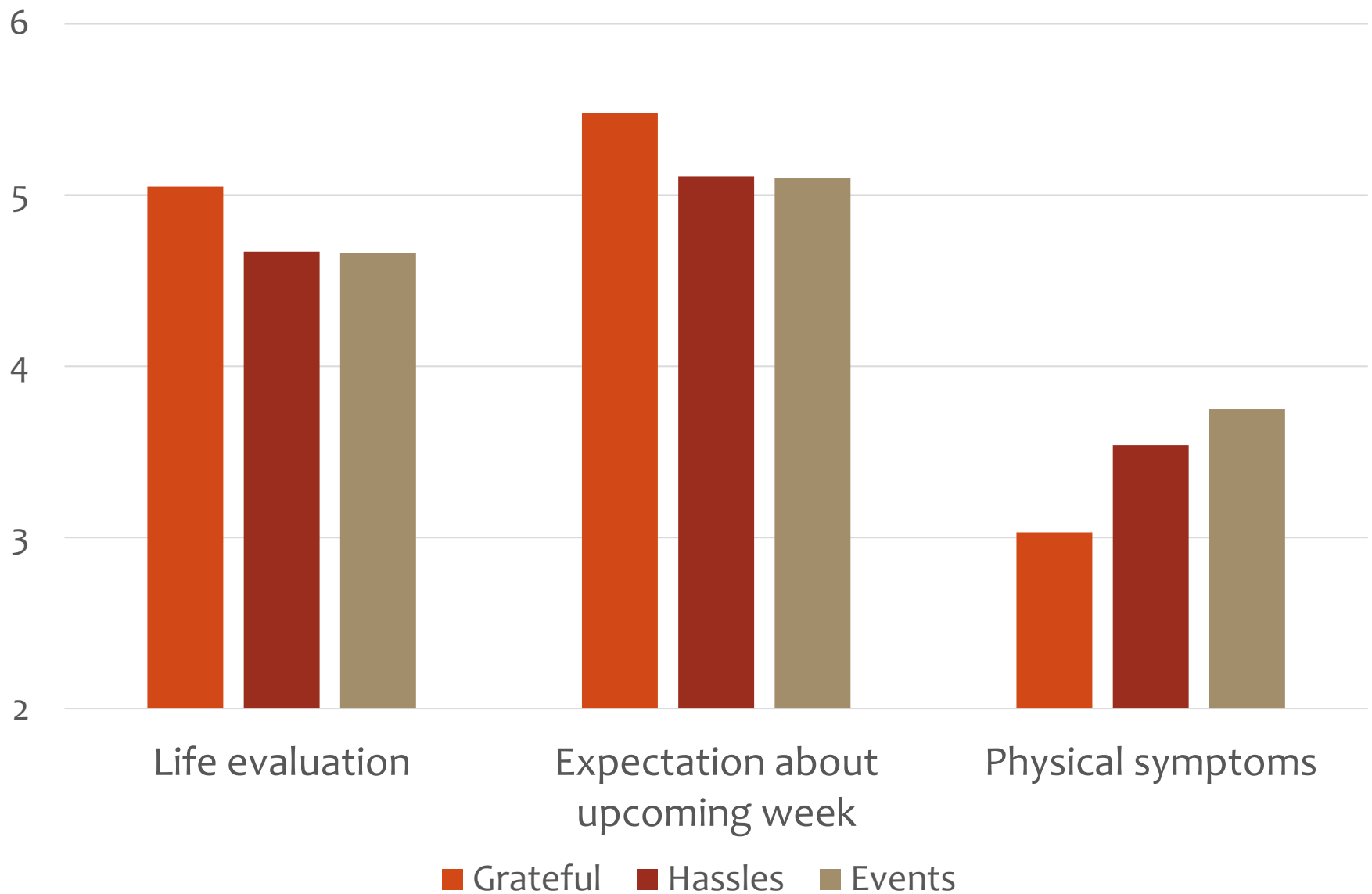


Despite increasing economic prosperity over decades, both Japanese (left) and American's life satisfaction has stayed remarkably constant (Diener & Diswas-Diener, 2002; Diener & Kahneman, 2004).

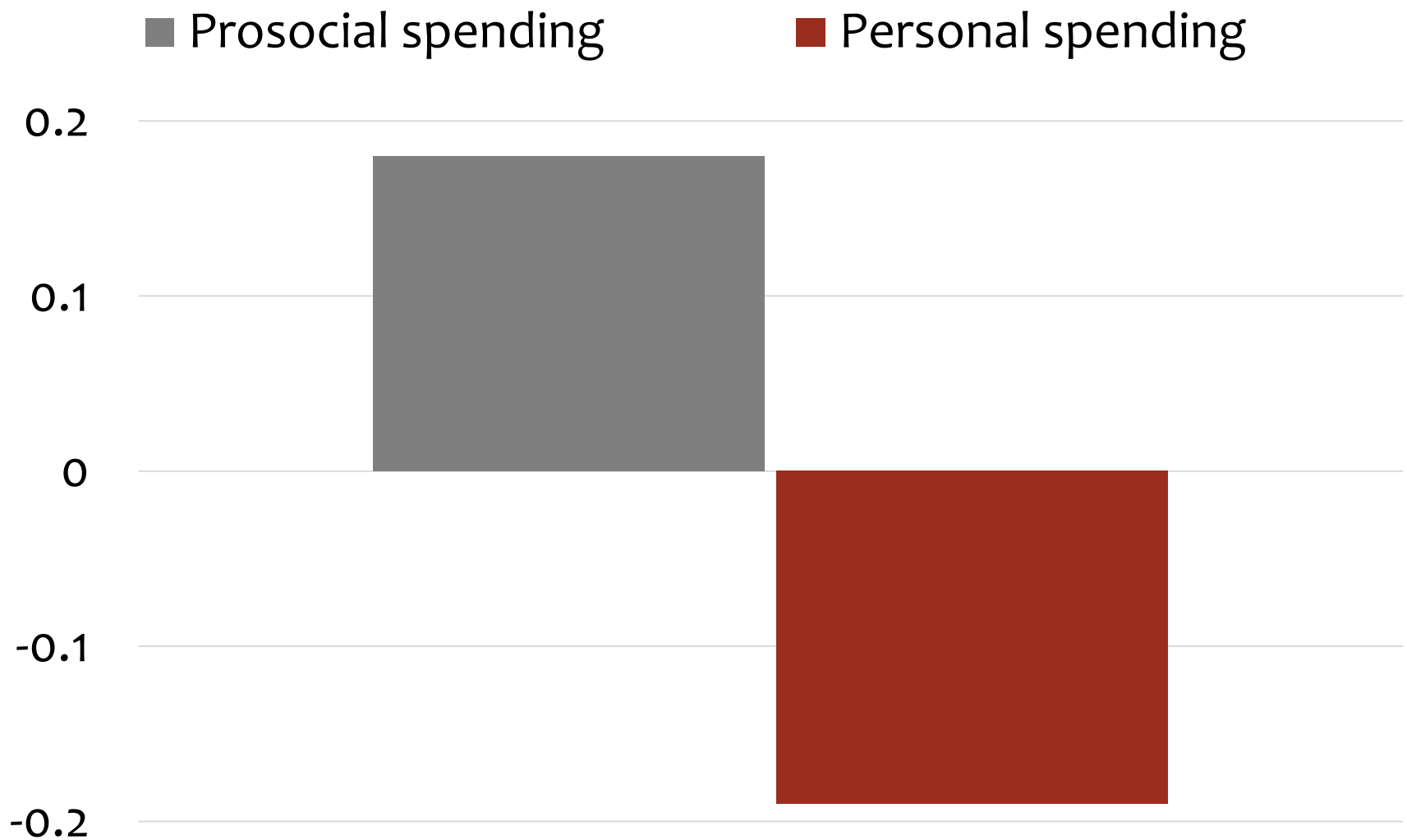
- Construal theory of happiness
 - Objective circumstances impact people's happiness through multiple cognitive and motivation processes (Lyubomirsky, 2001)

■ Gratitude

- A positive emotional reaction to the receipt of a benefit that is perceived to have resulted from the good intentions of another



Participants who wrote a weekly journal for 10 weeks on gratefulness (or hassles or events) subsequently reported more positive life satisfaction and fewer physical symptoms (Emmons et al., 2003).



Participants were given money for personal spending (settling a bill or a gift for self) or prosocial spending (donation or a gift for someone). Those who spent the money on others reported a higher level of happiness (Dunn et al., 2008).



In a study of survey data from 136 countries (Aknin et al., 2013), prosocial spending was consistently found to be associated with greater happiness around the world, in poor and rich countries alike.

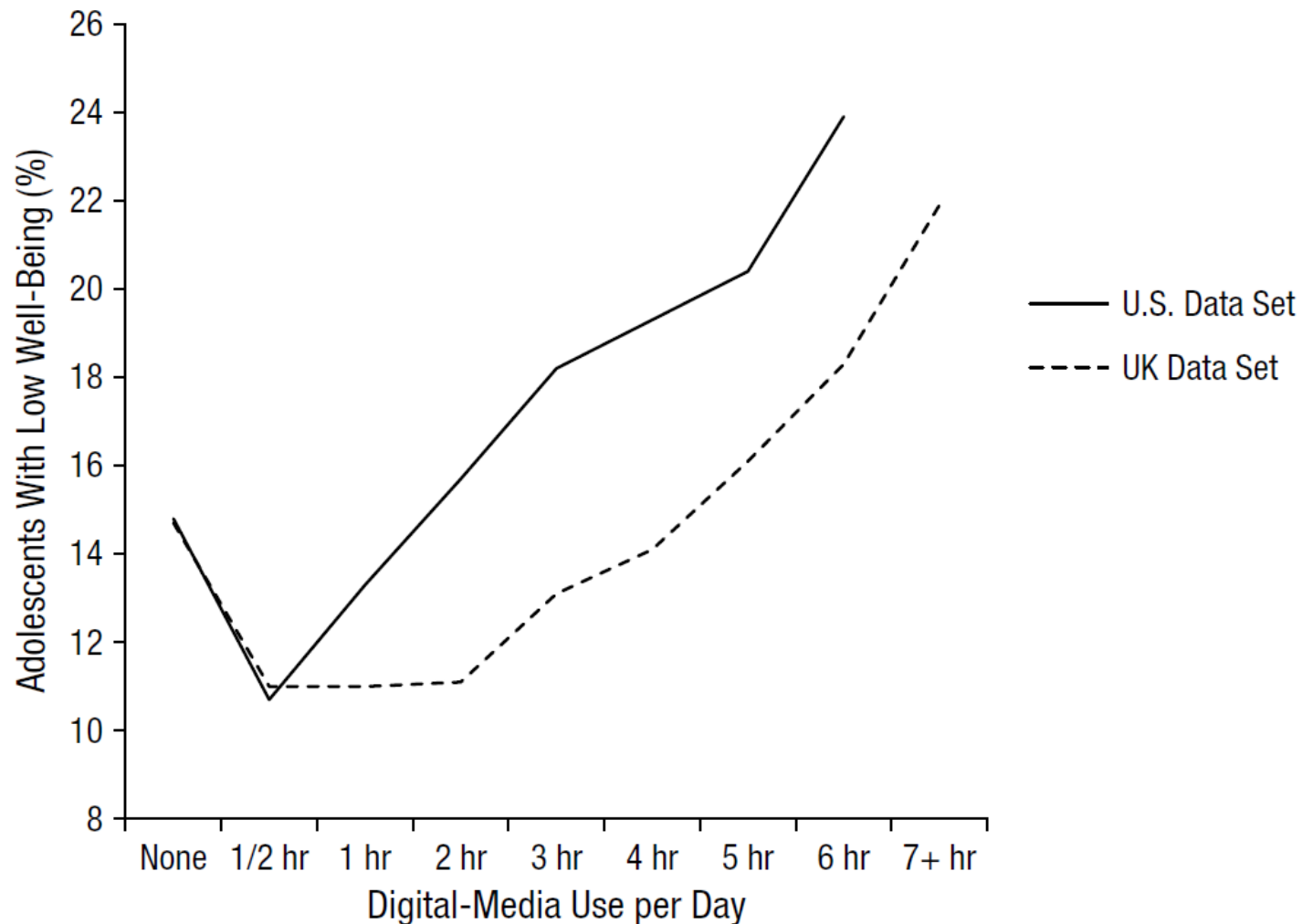


Fig. 1. Percentage of adolescents with low well-being as a function of their frequency of digital-media use. Demographic controls are included. U.S. data are from Twenge, Martin, and Campbell (2018), examining time online and unhappiness. UK data are from Twenge and Campbell (2019), examining smartphone use and low well-being (the UK data were originally presented in Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017).

Heavy use of digital media is apparently associated with lower levels of wellbeing (Twenge, 2019).

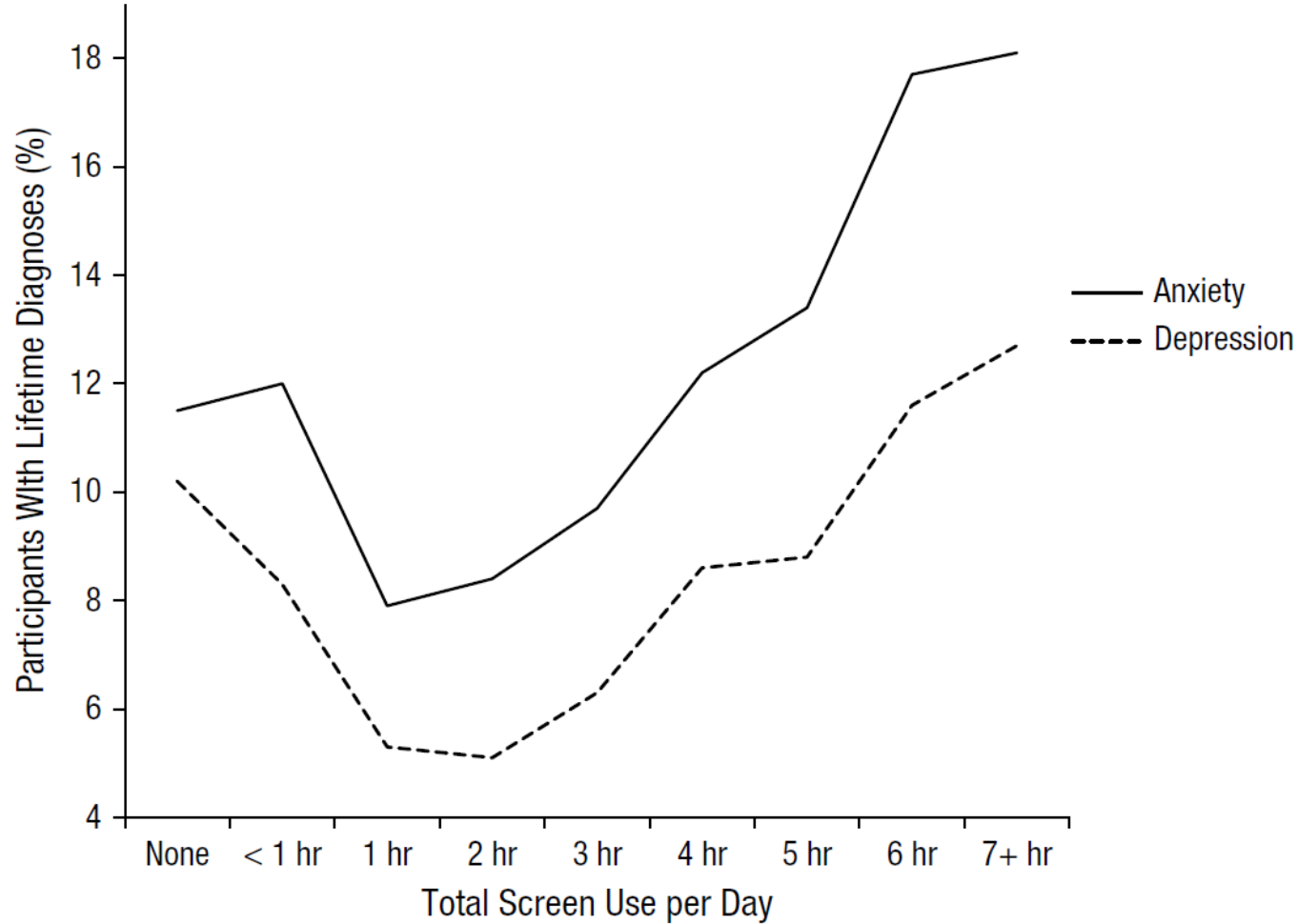


Fig. 2. Percentage of 14- to 17-year-olds with lifetime diagnoses of anxiety and depression as a function of their hours per day of screen use. Demographic controls are included. Data are from the National Survey of Children's Health (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

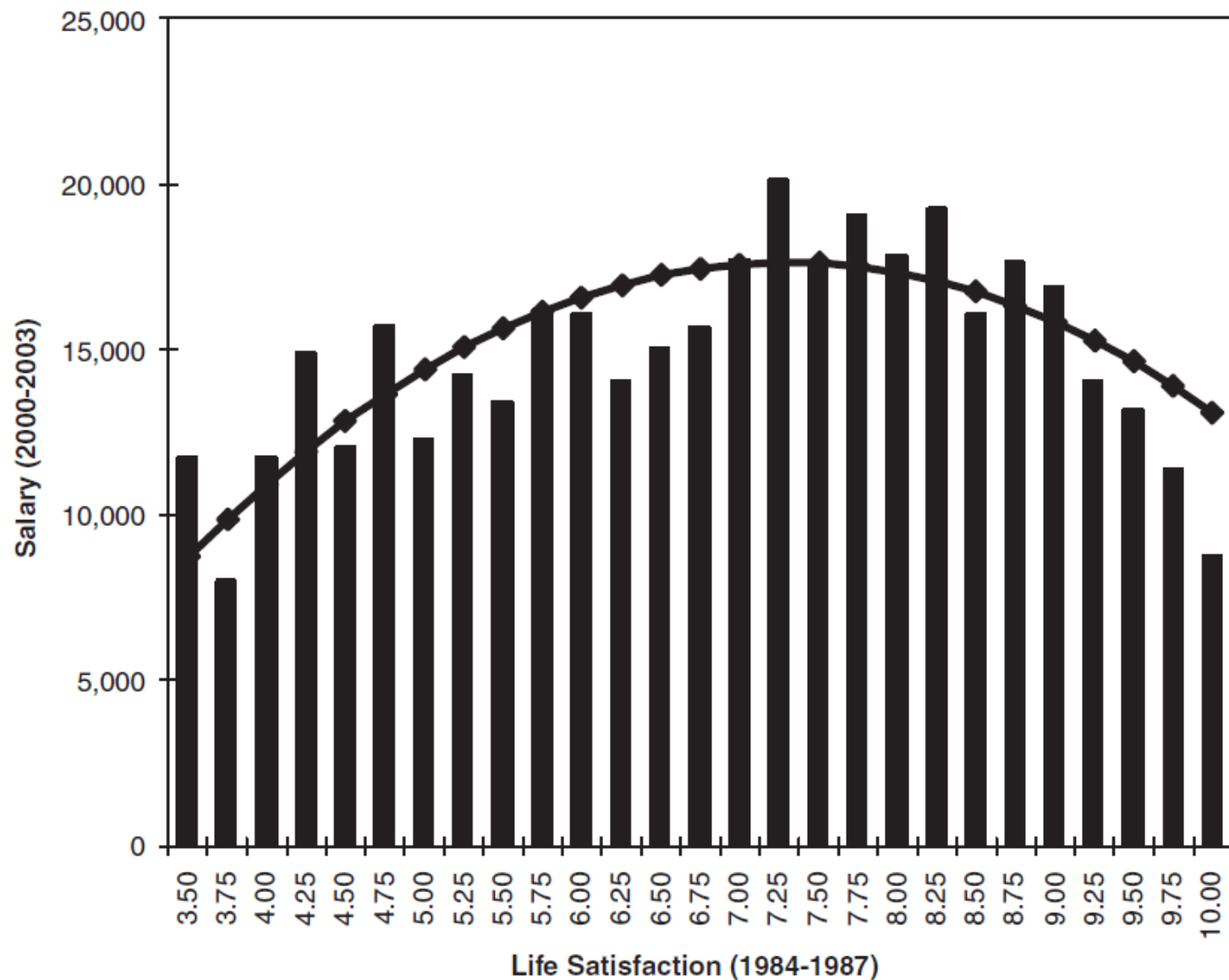
Heavy use of digital media is also associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression (Twenge, 2019). Potential mechanisms include displacement of beneficial activities (e.g., outdoor play, sleep), upward social comparison, and cyberbullying.

TOO MUCH HAPPINESS?

- Optimum level of well-being
 - Once people are moderately happy, the optimum level of happiness depends on the specific outcomes or domains (Oishi et al., 2007)

Life satisfaction rating	Men			Women		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Income						
1	2,815	3.25	2.142	2,887	3.09	2.040
2	2,034	4.20	2.379	2,167	3.99	2.343
3	3,039	3.82	2.137	2,975	3.64	2.141
4	3,043	4.06	2.150	2,997	3.88	2.194
5	7,259	4.22	2.120	7,600	4.02	2.181
6	4,812	4.65	2.312	5,063	4.34	2.286
7	6,748	5.07	2.418	6,400	4.73	2.400
8	8,516	5.37	2.532	8,472	5.03	2.526
9	5,406	5.58	2.568	5,623	5.23	2.581
10	6,620	4.88	2.530	7,355	4.61	2.531
Total	50,292	4.71	2.457	51,540	4.44	2.442
Education						
1	3,092	3.90	2.110	3,192	3.82	2.180
2	2,233	4.06	2.303	2,398	3.68	2.269
3	3,279	4.19	2.258	3,266	3.91	2.286
4	3,321	4.32	2.190	3,306	4.16	2.255
5	8,066	4.38	2.262	8,610	4.05	2.270
6	5,432	4.53	2.203	5,788	4.20	2.253
7	7,733	4.75	2.222	7,475	4.49	2.268
8	9,824	4.82	2.198	10,011	4.66	2.252
9	6,242	4.79	2.285	6,709	4.56	2.321
10	7,565	4.22	2.272	8,756	4.05	2.252
Total	56,786	4.49	2.251	59,512	4.25	2.283
Political action						
1	2,935	0.5373	0.97701	2,995	0.3846	0.79472
2	2,128	0.5787	0.94007	2,251	0.4505	0.78661
3	3,068	0.6888	1.09811	3,006	0.4298	0.84078
4	3,115	0.6400	1.02667	3,108	0.4933	0.86507
5	7,596	0.5964	1.01525	8,087	0.4535	0.84837
6	5,131	0.6963	1.02778	5,440	0.5286	0.87792
7	7,372	0.8070	1.07284	7,096	0.6298	0.92708
8	9,501	0.8682	1.09412	9,597	0.7190	0.97449
9	6,094	0.8603	1.08530	6,483	0.7401	0.96393
10	7,313	0.6718	1.01723	8,407	0.5480	0.88636
Total	54,254	0.7257	1.05330	56,468	0.5721	0.90592

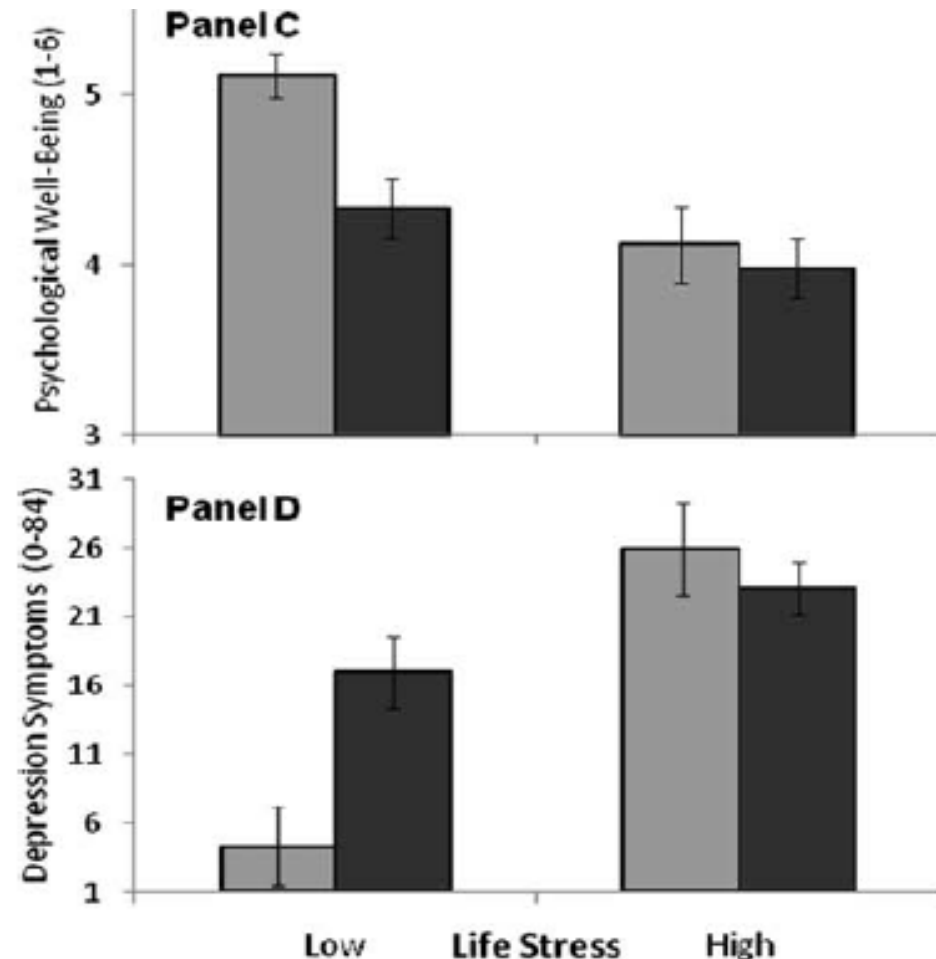
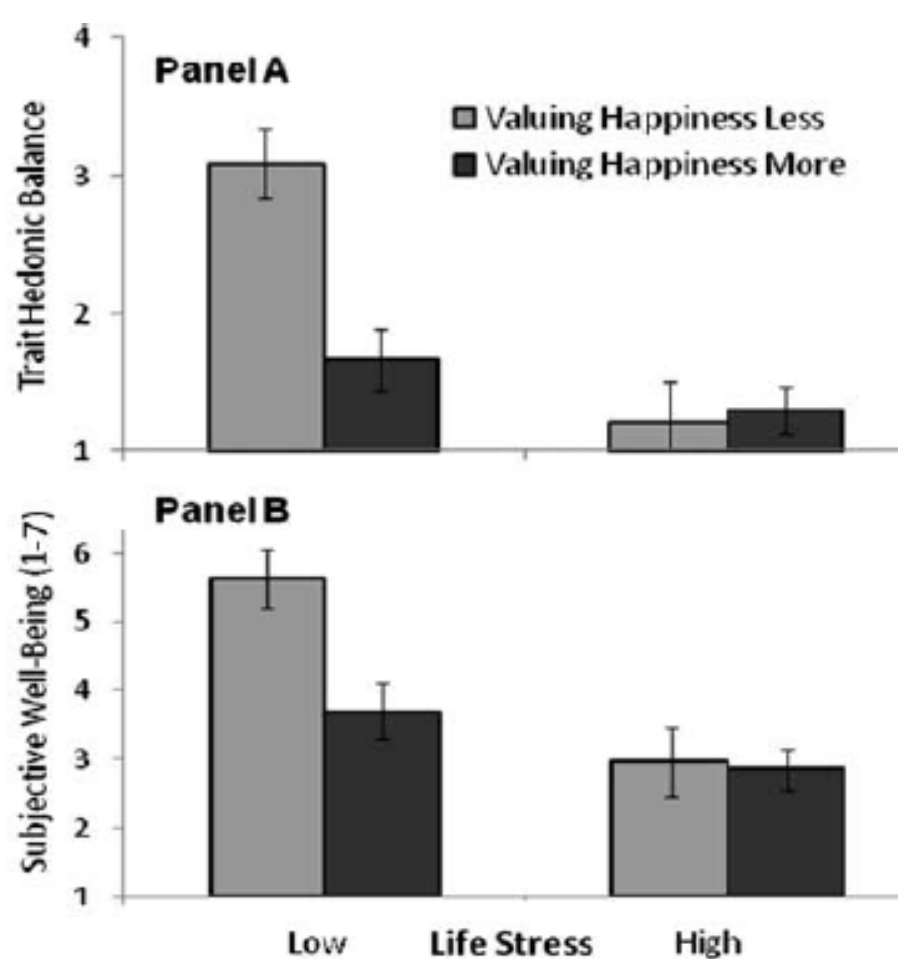
The best levels of income, education, and political action were found among people who are moderately happy (Oishi et al., 2007).



A panel study in Germany: Individuals with moderately high levels of satisfaction reported highest incomes later in life. However, beyond this point, salary levels actually dropped (Oishi et al., 2007).

- Optimum level of well-being
 - Defensive pessimism—anticipating failure and compensating for it—could be adaptive (Norem & Cantor, 1986)
 - Extreme satisfaction might prevent individuals from pursuing changes

- Valuing happiness
 - People who value happiness to an extreme tend to have worse psychological health (Ford et al., 2015)



Among people with low life stress, those who valued happiness more were not as happy, satisfied with life, and flourishing as those who valued it less; they were even more depressed (Mauss et al., 2011).