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Positive Psychology – the basics

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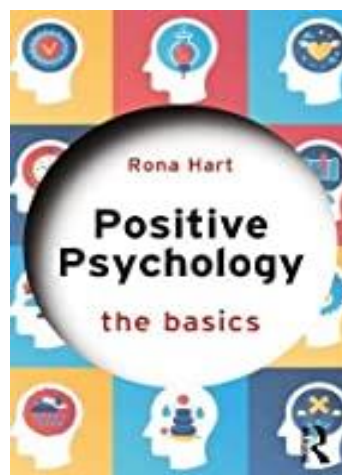
These are exciting times for positive psychology! Launched in 1998 as a rebellious discipline, it has become within a short space of time, an influential social movement, which has captured the imagination of the scientific community and the public.

This book provides an accessible and balanced introduction to positive psychology scholarship and its applications, incorporating an overview of the development of positive psychology and a detailed examination of some of its key topics including:

- Happiness, wellbeing and positive emotions
- Optimism, hope and goal pursuit
- Self-regulation and flow
- Meaning in life
- Character strengths and virtues
- Positive relationships
- Stress, coping, resilience and posttraumatic growth
- Positive psychology interventions

Positive Psychology: The Basics is an essential resource for students, practitioners, academics, and anyone who is interested in understanding the essence of a life well lived.

Dr Rona Hart is a senior lecturer in Applied Positive Psychology, and the former Programme Leader of the immensely popular MSc in Applied Positive Psychology Programme and the MSc in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology Programme at the School of Psychology, University of East London, UK.



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PREFACE

Consider a scientific scholarship that is as invested in promoting happiness, wellbeing, strength and resilience, as much as it is concerned in alleviating stress and distress. A science that explores what makes a good life, and disseminates concepts, research findings and interventions that can help us flourish and grow. This is what positive psychology is about.

Launched as a rebellious discipline just over two decades ago, positive psychology challenged the emphasis of applied psychology on disease and dysfunction and offered a new, more balanced perspective on human life. Since its establishment it has seen a remarkable progress, and has laid down solid theoretical and empirical foundations for its concepts and its applied work.

This book delineates positive psychology's journey as a discipline, takes stock of its achievements, and provides an updated overview of its core topics, exploring the theory, research, and interventions in each.

Chapter 1 delineates the background that has led to the establishment of positive psychology, and defines what it contains and where its focus lies. It also provides an overview of its development in the past two decades, discuss its future trajectory, and the key debates and critique that emerged over the years around its concepts.

Chapter 2 and 3 review and discuss two core topics in positive psychology that have attracted significant public interest over the years: Wellbeing and happiness. Chapter 2 reviews the mounting research on happiness and considers why happiness matters and what determines happiness. Chapter 3 opens with a distinction between hedonia and Eudaimonia, and then reviews of the leading models of wellbeing and the recent research on them.

Chapter 4 unpacks a key component of happiness and wellbeing: Positive emotions. The chapter discusses the structure of emotions and their utility, and reviews the Broaden and Build Theory of positive emotions. The final section explores the leading models of Emotional Intelligence.

Chapter 5 explores two classic concepts in positive psychology: Optimism and hope. The chapter describes the three leading models of optimism, summarises the concept of hope, and reviews the empirical work on the upshots of optimism and hope for wellbeing and healthy functioning.

Chapter 6 explores two related concepts: Goal pursuit and change. The chapter opens with a review of goal theory, and then considers the optimal parameters for setting goals. The chapter then offers a brief review of two leading models of behavioural change.

Chapter 7 focuses on a prominent component of performance that can lead to persistent goal-pursuit and achievement: Self-regulation. The chapter explores the concept, and considers the benefits of self-regulations and its costs when it fails. The chapter also summarises the concept of grit.

Chapter 8 explores the concept of flow: What it entails, the conditions under which it can occur, and its upshots and dark side.

Chapter 9 examines meaning in life: A core component of wellbeing. The chapter addresses the question what makes life meaningful, and reviews the empirical research on the benefits of meaning in life.

Chapter 10 reviews a key construct in positive psychology that has attracted significant public interest: Character strength and virtues. The chapter describes the VIA Character Strength and Virtues classification, and concludes with a review of the recent research on its applications.

Chapter 11 focuses on relationships and their impact on wellbeing, and offers some insights from recent research as to how relationships can be improved and strengthened.

Chapter 12 explores four interrelated topics: Stress, coping, resilience and posttraumatic growth. The chapter examines how stress occurs and the upshots of stress, and reviews the leading coping strategies. The chapter then reviews the concept of resilience, and explores the factors that can promote resilience. The chapter ends with an exploration of the construct of posttraumatic growth.

Chapter 13 examines the applied side of positive psychology: Positive psychology interventions. The chapter opens with an overview of this topic and makes a distinction between two types of interventions offered today: Composite programmes and discrete exercises. The chapter then discusses the conditions for optimal delivery of these interventions, and the research on their impact.

Finally, on a personal note: Positive psychology has unquestionably transformed my life and the life of those around me for the better, enabling us to lead a more meaningful, fulfilling life, as well as to weather the difficult times. Many of our students who undertook The MSc in Applied Positive Psychology or the MSc in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology at the School of Psychology, at UEL assert the transformational power of the body of knowledge that constitutes positive psychology. I therefore wish the reader the best possible implementation of the knowledge shared in this book, and an insightful, enjoyable journey of growth.

COVER

This book provides an accessible and balanced introduction to positive psychology scholarship and its applications, incorporating an overview of the development of positive psychology.

Positive Psychology: The Basics delineates positive psychology's journey as a discipline, takes stock of its achievements and provides an updated overview of its core topics, exploring the theory, research and interventions in each.

Launched as a rebellious discipline just over two decades ago, positive psychology challenged the emphasis of applied psychology on disease and dysfunction and offered a new, more balanced perspective on human life. From its foundations in the late 20th century to recent "second-wave" theories around the importance of recognizing negative emotions, this compact overview covers the key ideas and principles, from research around emotional wellbeing, optimism and change, to posttraumatic growth and positive relationships.

The first jargon-free introduction to the subject, Hart introduces the reader to a range of issues, including self-regulation and flow, character strengths and virtues and positive relationships, concluding with a chapter on how interventions can affect happiness and wellbeing.

Positive Psychology: The Basics is an essential resource for students, practitioners, academics and anyone who is interested in understanding the essence of a life well lived.