

## **Happiness and Well-being Theories: Continued**

Earlier, Fredrickson (1998) proposed a theory of positive emotions, the **Broaden and Build Theory**, which has been subsequently revised, placed under the perspective of positive psychology and supported by more empirical evidence (2001, 2004). Pointing out that positive emotions cannot be forced to fit into the existing general models for emotions, Fredrickson (1998) argued that all emotions may not lead to specific set of actions being performed, and all action tendencies do not necessarily have to be physical in nature. Majorly, the theory proposes that positive emotions “broaden” an individual’s momentary thought – action repertoire. In other words, when an individual experiences a subset of positive emotions, the pool of behaviours that can be drawn out and performed is increased. Thus positive emotions may promote discovery of novel and creative actions, cognitions and social bonds. This is the broaden hypothesis. Secondly, these behavioural and cognitive tendencies in turn build a wide range of the person’s resources which can be drawn upon later for coping and ultimately evolutionary survival. This is instrumental in optimizing health and well-being. This is also known as the build hypothesis.

These distinct subset of emotions include joy, interest, contentment, love (Fredrickson, 1998) and pride (Fredrickson, 2001). For example, when “joy” is experienced, it makes the individual playful which can be experienced physically, intellectually and artistically thus promoting creativity and the skills learnt can be used later. When interest is ignited, it urges the individual to explore, which may or may not be tangible thus adding to the gamut of experiences and information that add to the self. Related to intrinsic motivation, evolutionarily it is important for continuous learning and self-development. Contentment on the other hand leads to more cognitive activity than physical and creates an urge to savor thus enhancing the experience and creating a new sense of self and the world. For example, it is a feeling which is usually experienced after experiencing the state of “flow” (Fredrickson, 1998). Likewise, love which subsumes multiple other positive emotions such as joy, interest and contentment and is felt under various circumstances whether relationships or as passion for activities, encourages exploration, savoring and playfulness while strengthening social ties thus building social resources that can be tapped into later. The emotion of pride felt after personal accomplishments urges individuals to share this information with others, and set greater goals for future thus enabling both cognitive and physical action.

### **The neurochemical basis of happiness**

- Dopamine: Related to goals, desires, and needs, feeling of pleasure after achievement; low levels linked to procrastination, low enthusiasm; lab rats low in dopamine may lack energy to eat even leading to death by starvation – Can be improved by celebrating smaller goals and interim milestones. Break big goals down into little pieces. Rather than only allowing your brain to celebrate when you’ve hit the big finish line, you can create a series of little finish-lines for frequent dopamine release. And it’s crucial to actually celebrate—for example going to your favorite restaurant whenever you meet a small goal.
- Serotonin: Released when positive emotions are experienced; low levels may result in depression; most antidepressants focus on increasing production of serotonin. Loneliness and depression are present when serotonin is absent. It’s why people fall into gangs and criminal activity – Can be improved by getting more sunlight that is not harmful (early morning or during sun set); and expressing gratitude or thankfulness for things that we already have in our lives
- Oxytocin: Intimacy, trust, social interaction, relationships; oxytocin blocks alcohol from reaching brain receptors in lab rats- Can be improved by having more strong relationships with other people, and celebrating these relationships by presenting gifts. Often referred to as

“the cuddle hormone,” a simple way to keep oxytocin flowing is to give someone a hug. Inter-personal touch not only raises oxytocin, but reduces cardiovascular stress and improves the immune system.

- Endorphins: Helps to deal with pain and stress; is the body’s reaction to any stressful situation to save us from pain. Low levels result in anxiety, depression- Can be improved through – laughter It is one of the easiest ways to induce endorphin release. Even the anticipation and expectation of laughter e.g. attending a comedy show, increases levels of endorphins. Taking your sense of humor to work, forwarding that funny email, and finding several things to laugh at during the day is a great way to keep your endorphins flowing. The second way is by physical exercise.

## Conclusion

- Many theories on well-being
- Complex phenomenon; random factors and subjective experiences makes it difficult to describe, predict, and assess it
- Attempts to understand well-being from different perspectives
- Recent researches also focus on how to increase happiness

## **Determinants of Happiness:**

- i. Genetics
- ii. Life events/ circumstances
- iii. Intentional activities

### **The Sustainable Happiness Model (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004)**

**The Set Point-** The point or range at which one’s happiness level is generally “set” or fixed

Research suggests that this is genetically determined (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996)

Contributes to 50% of our happiness or well-being

**Intentional Activity-** Actions or exercises that a person chooses to engage in like positive psychology interventions. Contributes to 40% of our happiness or well-being

**Circumstances-** Contributes to 10% of our happiness or well-being. Factors constituting:  
Demographics (e.g., gender, ethnicity)

Personal Experiences (e.g., traumas and triumphs)

Life Status Variables (e.g., relationships/social life, education level, health, and income)

### **i. Genetics:**

Serotonin-transporter gene: The serotonin-transporter gene comes in two functional variants—long and short. Longer one produces more transporter-protein molecules than the shorter one. Individuals have two versions of each gene, one from each parent

Therefore, the possible combinations are- Two long variants, OR two short variants, OR one of each. Individuals with two long variants of the serotonin transporter gene, report significantly higher levels of well-being indicators as compared to others.

## ii. Life events/ circumstances

Life circumstances denote aspects of one's life over which one has little or no control. Perhaps the most counterintuitive finding is that only about 10 percent of the variance in our happiness levels is explained by differences in life circumstances or situations—that is, whether we are rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, beautiful or plain, married or divorced, etc.

Major investigations conducted

### **Lottery Winners & Accident Victims – Brickman et al. (1978)**

Brickman and his colleagues studied 22 lottery winners and 29 accident victims. While the lottery winners had won money in the range of \$50,000–\$1 million, the accident victims had become paralyzed to various degrees. These participants were interviewed within 1 month to 1 year of the critical event, that is, either winning the lottery or being in an accident.

- Participants were required to rate:
- their happiness in the past, present, future
- happiness generated by some mundane everyday activities

Main findings:

- **A Contrast effect** was present. Lottery winners rated the pleasure of mundane events of everyday life significantly lower than expected. They kept comparing every event with the one big positive event in the past.
- **A Nostalgia effect** was seen. Accident victims reported a happier past. Here the past is much happier than the present. Lottery winner didn't not exhibit this.
- **Habituation effect** was identified. Accident victims were not as unhappy, as expected. They showed lower general happiness than lottery winners, but these levels were above the mid-point of the scale. Interpretation: Extreme event led to extreme changes in the environment. However, lottery winners not as happy as expected and accident victims not as unhappy as expected. Severe outcomes do not have as great an impact as might be expected

### **What kind of life events have a long lasting impact on happiness?**

According to set-point theory, individuals react to circumstances and then return to their earlier level of happiness.

However, some studies have shown that a few circumstances have a sustained impact on one's happiness in adult life (Lucas, et al, 2004)

- Loss of spouse
- Continued unemployment

Individuals who experience such events may not return to their earlier level of happiness.

## iii. Intentional Activity

Intentional activities are actions which people choose to engage in. They are understood to have the effect of changing one's levels of happiness (Lyubomirsky & Sheldon, 2005). It includes behavioural as well as cognitive activities. For example, choices, locus of control. Higher internal locus of control leads to greater engagement with intentional activities thereby increasing happiness and well-being. However, it also increases the likelihood of self-blame after a failure thereby affecting well-being negatively. An external locus of control reduces engagement with intentional activities but acts as a buffer against self-blame after failure.

### **Character Strengths and Virtues**

In Seligman's and Peterson's (2004) book, "Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification", the authors describe a total of 24 universal character strengths, grouped into 6 broader universal virtues. VIA – 6, is the 6th version of the VIA-IS currently is available as an online (<http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu>) measure in English and several other languages. There are 240 items (10 for each strength), which are answered with a 5-point scale. These can be

completed online after which a report is generated. The feedback report consists of the top 5 strengths, which are called signature strengths.

Character strength: Psychological ingredients that define the virtues. A person may have only 1 or 2 strengths within a virtue and will rarely display them all at once. These help us be productive. They are also parts of our personality such that they answer questions of-

- Who am I/ you?
- What makes me/you tick?
- How can I/ we contribute to the greater good?

Research shows that women score higher on Humanity strengths than men. While African Americans score higher than members of other racial and ethnic groups on the scale of spirituality strength

Overview of Research on Character Strengths: Gratitude is constantly identified as one of the five top strengths for individuals across various studies. Thus engaging and practicing techniques of gratitude in daily life is expected to increase feelings of well-being.

### **Character Strength of Gratitude**

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others -Cicero, Roman Philosopher.

#### **What is Gratitude?**

Gratitude is more than saying “Thank You”. It is about living in a state of thankfulness – and appreciating people, experiences, blessings and circumstances that matter (Emmons 2004). Term is derived from *gratia* (Latin) – equivalent of grace, gracefulness. It is defined as: “...an emotion which emerges upon the realization that one has obtained a positive outcome from another individual who behaved in a way that was:

- (1) costly to him/her
- (2) valuable to the recipient
- (3) intentionally rendered

– Emmons (2005); Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, (2008)

What are the effects of gratitude on human health, happiness and well-being?

1. **Psychological** (Positive affect: alert, attentive; Interpersonal relationships: more helpful and connected to others, less isolated)

**Physical** (better sleep, fewer symptoms)

Research also shows that grateful athletes are more satisfied with their team and show less athlete burnout (Social Indicators Research, 2008). Gratitude leads to happiness and well-being and is positively associated with performance, commitment, morale (Wright & Staw, 1999). It also helps cope with stress and trauma (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003).

#### **Myths about Gratitude**

1. Associated with complacency and passive resignation

It is claimed that if people are grateful, they are not going to be motivated to challenge the status quo or improve your lot in life. They will just be satisfied, complacent, lazy and lethargic, perhaps passively resigned to an injustice or bad situation. They will give up trying to change something. In fact, studies suggest that the opposite is true: Gratitude not only doesn't lead to complacency, it drives a sense of purpose and a desire to do more. Emmons and colleagues found that people are actually more successful at reaching their goals when they consciously practice gratitude. When we ask people to identify six personal goals on which they want to work over the next 10 weeks—including academic, spiritual, social, or health-related goals, like losing weight—it was found that study participants randomly assigned to keep a gratitude journal, recording five things for which they're grateful once a week, exert more effort toward those goals than participants who aren't made to practice gratitude. In fact, the grateful group made 20 percent more progress toward their goals than the non-grateful group—but they don't stop there. They reported continuing to strive harder toward their goals. Gratitude inspires “pro-social” behavior such as generosity, compassion, and charitable giving—none of which suggests passivity or resignation. Instead, it suggests that gratitude motivates

people to go out and do things for others—to give back, some of the goodness that they recognize receiving themselves.

2. Gratitude is just another form of positive thinking

Claims are made that gratitude is just about thinking nice thoughts and expecting good things—and ignores the negativity, pain, and suffering in life.

However, evidence shows it's much more than that. Based on Emmon's research, gratitude is understood as a specific way of thinking about receiving a benefit and giving credit to others beside oneself for that benefit. This requires that we recognize our dependence on others, and that's not always positive. Individuals have to humble themselves, so as to become a good receiver of others' support and generosity. That can be very hard—most people are better givers than receivers. Another form of experiencing gratitude is through the benefit finding exercise. This makes individuals dwell on the challenges and adversities they have faced, thus making the experience the negative emotions associated with the incidence.

3. Most expressions of gratitude are insincere

4. Gratitude is fine in a religious context, but it has little relevance in practical life

5. It is impossible to be grateful in the midst of suffering

### Obstacles to Gratefulness

1. **Selective perception of negativity:** Negative selectivity bias is the cause for less focus on life's blessing and more focus on problems. There is the tendency to therefore ignore or forget our blessings

2. **Inability to accept dependency:** Acknowledging help from others may be interpreted as not being self sufficient. According to Emmons (2013), gratitude places a person at an inferior position.

3. **Habituation:** "We are not grateful for things that we expect to happen..." (Krech, n.d.). That is, we tend to feel grateful only for what is unexpected. This explains the failure to acknowledge those we take for granted. Example: gratitude towards strangers for help rendered but not towards family

Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg and Hermon (1977): Less gratitude expressed in closer relationships and more resentment felt if help is refused

Emmons (2013): People who are ungrateful tend to be characterized by an excessive sense of self-importance, arrogance, vanity, and an unquenchable need for admiration and approval. They expect special favours and feel no need to pay back or pay forward.

4. **Distractions/Forgetfulness:** A preoccupation with the self can cause us to forget our benefits and our benefactors, or to feel that we are owed things from others and therefore have no reason to feel thankful.

5. **Sense of entitlement:** People who are ungrateful tend to be characterized by an excessive sense of self-importance, arrogance, vanity, and an unquenchable need for admiration and approval. They expect special favours and feel no need to pay back or pay forward. Entitlement is at the core of narcissism. - "Life owes me something" or "People owe me something" or "I deserve this." Entitlement and self-absorption are massive impediments to gratitude.

### Gratitude in India

- Gratitude among adolescents leads to high levels of well-being but contradictory findings in Jammu and Rajauri adolescents (Ghosh & Deb, 2016). This was attributed to the conflict ridden political situation of the area.
- Gender: Female participants were found to display higher levels of gratitude and forgiveness than males (Kirmani, 2015).
- Population: Using gratitude techniques along with other exercises, Singh and Choubisa (2009) found a significant increase in different measures of self-improvement among students.

- Major themes experienced with gratitude among Indian engineering students: Positive emotions, relationships, personal growth and positive adaptation, accomplishments, were found to be the major underlying themes of gratitude experiences (Ghosh & Deb, 2017).

### **How to enhance well-being?- POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS**

Built on the foundation of character strengths. The basic premise is, that if an individual is high on a character strength, engaging in intentional activity/ exercises directed at these will increase the person's well-being. It tries to not only bring a person experiencing psychological distress to a state without symptoms but also make a happy person happier. Seligman, Rashid, & Parks (2006) propose that positive psychology interventions increase positive emotion, engagement, and meaning rather than directly targeting depressive symptoms. Seligman & Wyatt (2008) have argued that positive psychotherapy involves a person discovering insight, and going beyond the pain and suffering of the process.

“Positive psychology intervention may be understood as any intentional activity or method (training, coaching, etc.) based on

- (a) the cultivation of valued subjective experiences,
  - (b) the building of positive individual traits, or
  - (c) the building of civic virtue and positive institutions”
- (Meyers, Woerkom & Bakker, 2013)

- a) Peterson and Seligman proposed that well being can be enhanced by enhancing character strengths.
- b) This can be done by (a) searching for signature strengths and (b) using these signature strengths in personal and professional domains.
- c) Such interventions are useful for making an unhappy person happy and a happy person happier

### **Strengths- Based Developmental Intervention: Instructions**

- Take the Values in Action (VIA) Strengths Survey and write down your five highest strengths
- Next one week, use the strengths in a way not used before
- Write down - strength you used, how you felt before, during, and after the activity, and whether you plan to repeat it in the future.

Using this developmental programme Williamson (2002) found that students fared better in studies and other activities than those who did not undertake the programme. Similarly, Connelly (2002) in Toyota North American Parts Center California, conducted this intervention on 400 employees and 54 work teams. Within a year per person productivity at the warehouse increased by 6% as compared to previous three years of less than 1%.

### **Interventions for the Character Strength of Gratitude**

Gratitude Interventions: Most popular intervention tools:

1. Three Blessings Exercise
2. Gratitude Diary
3. Gratitude Visit
4. Gratitude Journal

**Positive selectivity bias:** Consciously focusing on what went right instead of what went wrong.

### **From negative selectivity to positive selectivity**

- While negative selectivity is important from the point of view of survival, it often catastrophizes some events that do not deserve to be treated as serious threats
- On the other hand, positive selectivity or focusing on positive events helps to acknowledge positive emotions, and cherish those experiences.

**Pollyanna Principle:**

The story of Pollyanna (Author: Eleanor H. Porter) that is commonly cited in this context; It is the tendency to focus on the positive side of events, even if there is an adversity.

**Three Blessings Exercise/ Three Good Things:**

At the end of the day think of three good things that you are grateful for & ask *what did you do to make those things happen?*

Example: From Seligman (2005)

“At the workplace: Identify three things that you are grateful for or that have gone well for you this week - try to focus specifically on your work and people you work with

Write them down

Homework - continue this exercise for the next month and see if you notice any differences in behaviour (your own or that of others)

Emmon’s instructions:

“Each day for at least one week, write down three things that went well for you that day, and provide an explanation for why they went well. It is important to create a physical record of your items by writing them down; it is not enough simply to do this exercise in your head. The items can be relatively small in importance (e.g., “my co-worker made the coffee today”) or relatively large (e.g., “I earned a big promotion”). To make this exercise part of your daily routine, some find that writing before bed is helpful.”

**Benefit finding:** Difficult situations can be viewed as challenges or opportunities for self growth and discovering strengths instead of treating them like unsurmountable obstacles. In situations of adversity, benefit finding could help us notice the blessings in an unfavorable situations that otherwise would not have come to light.

**Gratitude Journal:** Regular accounts of situations when “you benefited because of someone else’s kindness, helpfulness, or generosity” - Jeffrey Froh

**Gratitude Visit:** “Think of someone to whom you are very grateful, but who you have never properly thanked. Compose a letter to them describing your gratitude, and read the letter to that person by phone or preferably in person” – Seligman

Things to keep in mind:

- Use the method best suited to you: **writing**, art, choosing a particular time everyday, or identify just one thing that ordinarily goes unnoticed or substitute an ungrateful thought for a grateful one
- Keep the strategy fresh: vary it
- Most effective when conveyed directly to another person: phone, letter or face-to-face

**Positive Psychology Interventions are most effective when (Conditions):**

1. Self-selection- individuals select the exercises they want to perform themselves
2. With increase in age – due to more emotional and self-regulation
3. Format of treatment is individual therapy. Followed by group and then self-administered PPI.
4. Longer durations of PPIs lead to greater well-being

PPI and Physical Health: Findings about their usefulness are inconclusive (Ghosh & Deb, 2017).

**Conclusion**

- Lyubomirsky and Della Porta (2008): Happiness can be amplified by intentional activity
- Positive psychology interventions aim to enhance well-being by increasing positive emotions and experiences. This is different from the deficit based approach popular earlier where symptom

reduction was the aim of psychologists

- Peterson and Seligman proposed that well-being can be enhanced by developing and enhancing character strengths; and practicing their use in personal and professional domains regularly
- Researchers study (1) the relationship of each character strength with other strengths, and also (2) the effect of these strengths on well being
- Most researches show that positive psychology interventions have led to an increase in happiness and well-being levels.
- Interventions limited to some character strengths only; future researchers need to develop interventions for other character strengths as well
- Also, more interventions with a focus on specific populations such as clinical samples, employees, and students are required
- Positive psychology interventions may be considered useful for making an unhappy person happy and a happy person happier.