

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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Discussion Topics

1. A History of Positive Psychology
2. Positive Emotions
3. Well-Being
4. Optimism
5. Flow and Goal Pursuit
6. Mindfulness and Savoring
7. Love and Relationships
8. Meaning and Purposeful Living

A BRIEF
HISTORY OF
POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



A Brief History of Positive Psychology

- Study of the “good life” goes back to ancient times
- Ancient Greeks used logic and reason to find the formula for the good life
- Positive psychology is a fairly recent field, but has roots going back over 100 years
- **Martin P. Seligman** is credited with formally creating the field



POSITIVE
EMOTIONS

Positive Emotions

- Up until 1980's, mostly only negative emotions were investigated
- Eliminating negative emotions does not automatically lead to feeling positive ones!!!!
- Positive affect and negative affect comprise the basic dimensions of emotional experience
- **Positive affect:** approach-oriented, leads person to experiences that yield pleasure
- **Negative affect:** withdrawal-oriented


Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Model

- Negative emotions tend to limit our options, positive emotions tend to broaden them
- Negative emotions can make a person act quickly (i.e., fight or flight)
- Positive emotions broaden our thought-action repertoires
- We think of things that bring us pleasure, then pursue

Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Model (cont'd.)

- **Undoing hypothesis:** positive emotions help us overcome detrimental effects of negative emotions
- We look to other people and resources for social support and resource sharing
- Experiencing negative emotions restricts actions one feels like doing
- Positive emotions facilitate the undoing of physiological effects from negative emotions

WELL-BEING



Well-Being

- There are two overlapping and sometimes competing views of happiness and well-being: subjective view and prescriptive view



Subjective view Well-Being

- **Subjective view** states that happiness is defined by subjective well-being. Each person experiences happiness differently, rely on their self-report.
- Appraisal of subjective well-being based on life satisfaction, domains such as relationships, and generally feeling good



Prescriptive view Well-Being

- **The prescriptive view** is less prevalent
- States that certain factors must be present for a person to feel happiness and well-being

Measurement of Subjective Well-Being

- **Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire** asks people to rate their happiness on a 11-point scale
- Has strong correlations with daily affect and life satisfaction
- **Subjective Happiness Scale** has four items and uses a subjectivist approach
- **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL)** has five items with reliability and good construct validity

Measurement of Subjective Well-Being

- Two assumptions of self-report measures of happiness: quantifiable and that similar scores indicate similar levels of happiness
- Self-report measures find that people are generally happy
- Biologically-based measures would also be helpful to corroborate self-reports



A Happiness Set Point??

- **Happiness set point:** when we are too happy or unhappy, our internal biological regulators try to bring happiness levels back to a **genetically determined set point** (?!?!?)
- There is a large heritability influence on happiness ???
- Well-being generally stays constant across one's lifespan ???
- Personality is greater than circumstances ?????!

Hedonic Adaptation

Hedonic adaptation: novelty of a new stimulus (i.e., buying a new car) wears off and happiness levels return to baseline



Hedonic Adaptation

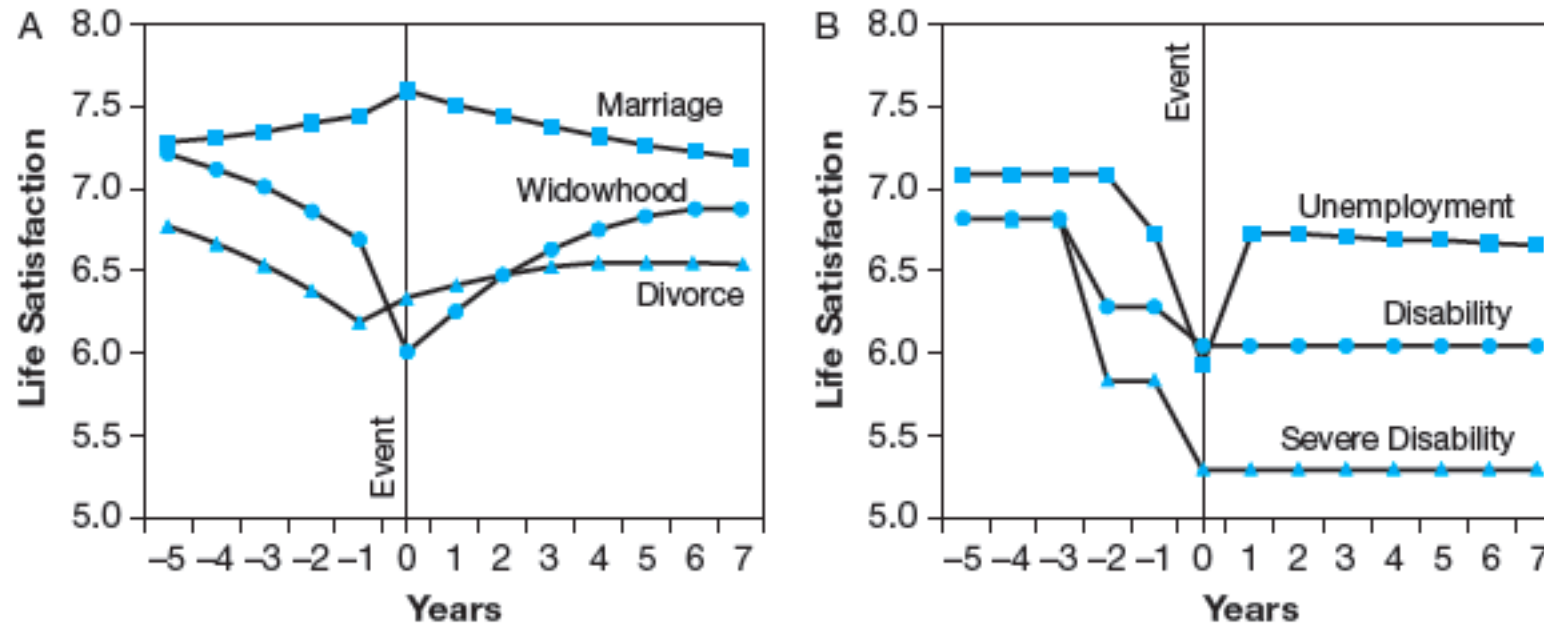


Figure: Lucas's (2007b) findings suggest that hedonic adaptation is more likely to occur for marriage, widowhood, and divorce and is least likely to occur for disability and severe disability.

Resilience

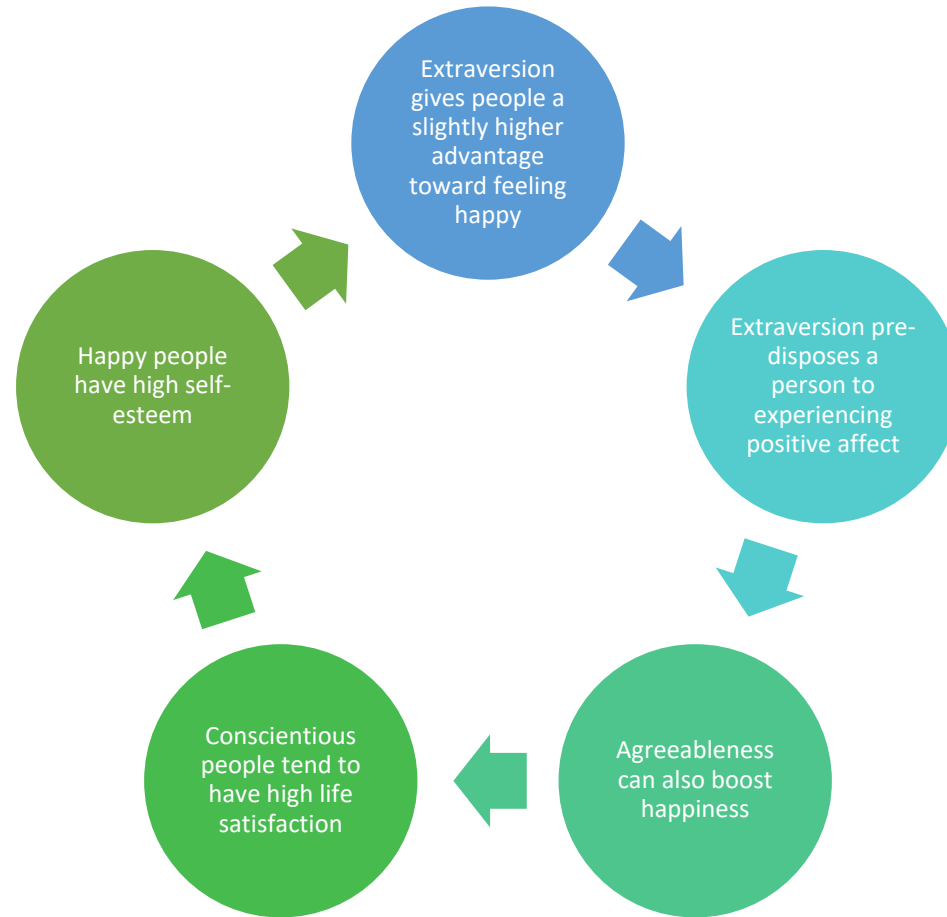
Resilience

- **Resilience:** people not only cope with a negative event they are transformed by the experience
- Some people show positive response patterns and thrive
- **Resilience trajectory** seems to be the most common way people respond to adversity



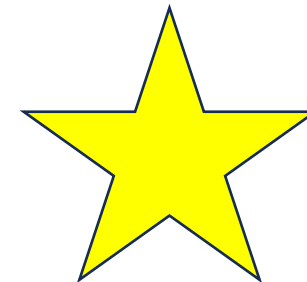
Happiness

Traits of Happy People



Life Circumstances

- **Bottom-up theories of happiness:** life's circumstances influence happiness
 - **Top-down theories of happiness:** happiness levels begin in ourselves and they effect how we view life's circumstances
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- Nb. Interactions of the two theories may occur



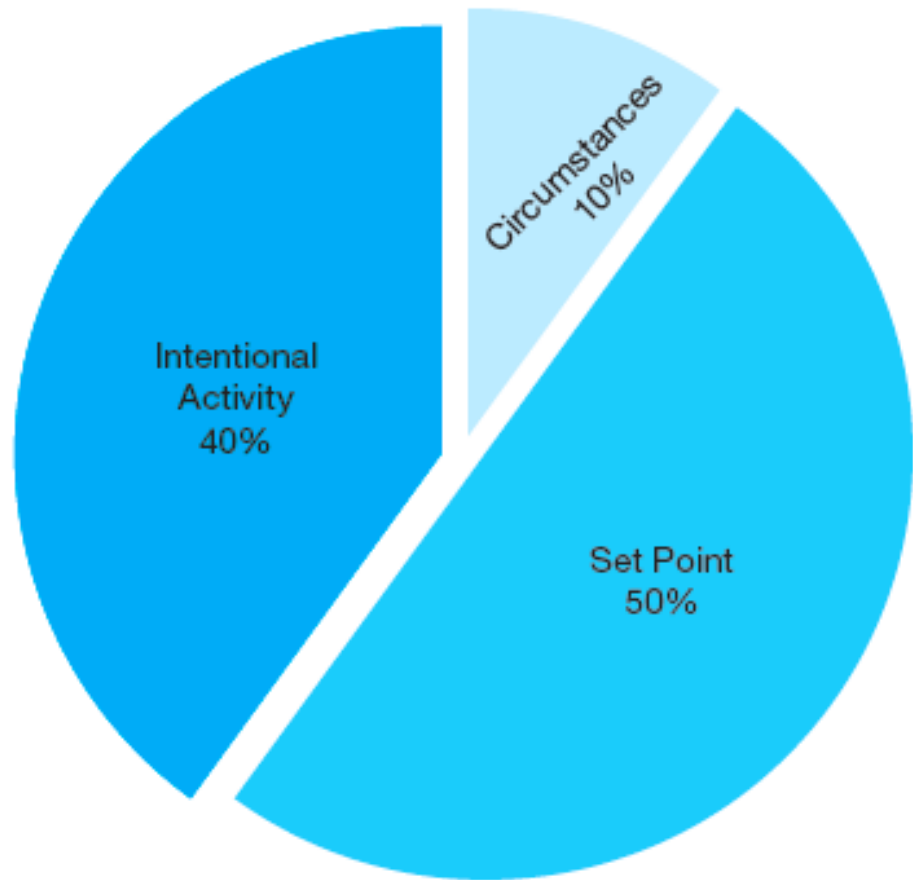


Figure: Sonja Lyubomirsky's estimate of what determines happiness: **Life circumstances only account for 10%**

NOTE: Adapted from *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*, p. 20, by S. Lyubomirsky, 2007. New York, NY: Penguin

Life Circumstances

- As one's income rises above the level of meeting basic needs, hedonic adaptation begins
- If the nation itself is wealthy, very little difference in happiness among its rich and poor
- Happy people are more likely to get married than unhappy people
- Marriage itself does not cause happiness

Life Circumstances (cont'd.)

- Aging may cause decrease in health but increase in life satisfaction
- Gender, intelligence, and education do not appear to be related to happiness

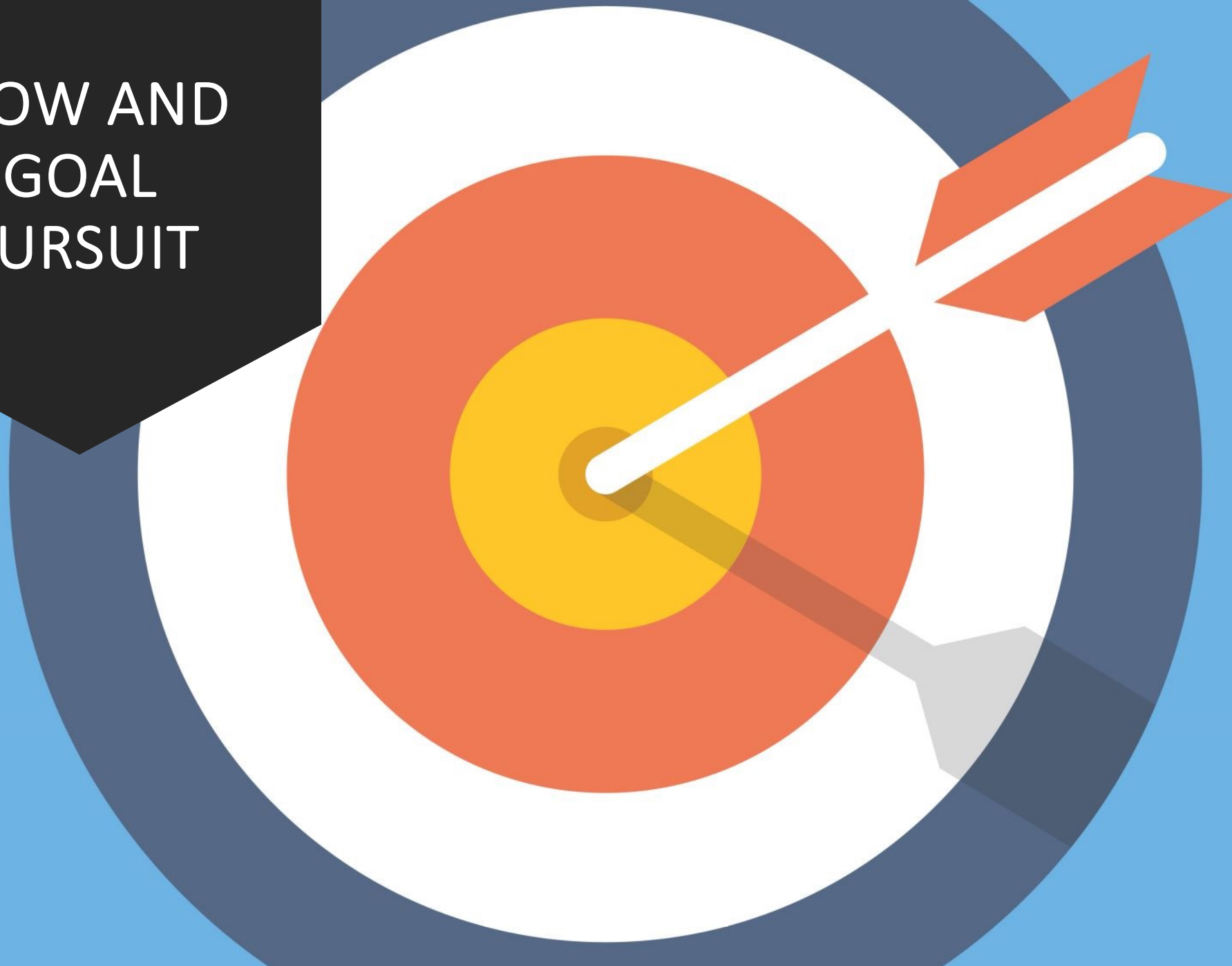
OPTIMISM

Optimism

- Optimists see bad events as temporary and specific to the situation
- **Learned optimism:** belief that one's own efforts lead to improvement and hope
- **Realistic optimism:** optimism that does not involve deception, is the best form
- Optimists adjust to stress better than pessimists

FLOW AND GOAL PURSUIT

FLOW AND
GOAL
PURSUIT



Flow and Goal Pursuit

- **Flow:** experience of complete absorption in the present moment; being “in the zone”
- Most likely to occur in activities that challenge the upper range of our capacities
- Flow usually occurs when people are at work; happiness and flow do not always go together

Hope Theory

- Hope is a combination of cognitive pathways and agency
- Some adults are more disposed to experience hope
- Hope acts as an emotion while optimism is a cognitive process
- Hope is motivating, but can cause us to pursue unrealistic goals

MINDFULNESS
AND
SAVORING

MINDFULNESS AND SAVORING



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Mindfulness and Savoring

- **Mindfulness:** heightened state of awareness of what is occurring in the present
- People with high levels of trait mindfulness have higher levels of psychological well-being



Mindfulness and Savoring

- **Savoring:** applying mindful awareness to enjoyment experiences
- Savoring leads to more frequent and intense feelings of happiness



LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Love and Relationships

- Two-factor theory of love states that love is comprised of passionate and companionate love
- Compassion, empathy, and altruism relate to helping and identifying with others
- Forgiveness helps to restore relationships
- Agreeable people are more likely to forgive
- High levels of gratitude are a strong predictor of well-being and life satisfaction



MEANING
AND
PURPOSEFUL
LIVING

Meaning and Purposeful Living

- Meaning in life reflects both
 - a cognitive component (comprehension)
 - a motivational component (purpose)
- We gain a better understanding of our place in the world and what we're meant to do with our lives
- Engagement in religious and spiritual endeavors is associated with higher levels of health and well-being



Summary



- Positive psychology is the study of what people do right
- Subjective well-being based on the individual's experience while eudaimonic well-being is based on meeting particular needs
- Happiness set point determines approx. 50% of our happiness, circumstances only 10%
- Extraversion, agreeability, conscientiousness, and social relationships related to happiness

Summary (cont'd.)

- Influence of happiness appears to be more top-down
- Flow experience more likely when we challenge our capabilities
- Mindfulness and savoring associated with well-being and health
- Love, compassion, empathy, and altruism strengthen relationships
- Meaning in life/purpose linked to happiness