The background of the cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the space. Each motif consists of a short stem with two leaves pointing upwards and outwards.

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

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Exploring the Best in People  
Volume 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Shane J. Lopez**

The logo for Greenwood Publishing Group, featuring a stylized green leaf motif to the left of the text.

**Greenwood**  
PUBLISHING GROUP

# Positive Psychology

# Positive Psychology

*Exploring the Best in People*

Volume 1

Discovering Human Strengths

Edited by

SHANE J. LOPEZ

Foreword by

SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY

*Praeger Perspectives*

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To three experts in giving positive psychology away  
Chip Anderson (1942–2005)  
Don Clifton (1924–2003)  
C. R. Snyder (1944–2006)

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## Foreword

In 1980, David Burns published the phenomenal best-seller, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*, in which he outlined the cognitive-behavioral techniques scientifically established to lift depression and anxiety. *Feeling Good* became the most frequently recommended book for depressed individuals by U.S. mental health professionals, and over four million readers purchased it. The book gave people suffering from depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem the tools to *feel better*. Indeed, studies showed that 70% of the book's readers markedly improved in their symptoms and maintained those improvements for a period of 3 years—essentially moving from a  $-8$  on a general mood scale to a  $0$ , or a perhaps even to a  $+2$ .

Times have changed. The goals of today's psychologists are loftier and more ambitious. During the last decade or so, researchers in the growing field of positive psychology have made tremendous advances in knowledge about not only how to lift people from feeling dreadful to *feeling good*, but how to elevate them to *feeling great*—to living flourishing lives, to developing their strengths, gifts, and capacities to the fullest. In a nutshell, positive psychology is the psychology of what makes life worth living. It represents a commitment on the part of research psychologists to focus attention on the sources of psychological wellness—for example, on positive emotions, positive experiences, and positive environments, on human strengths and virtues. The label is rooted in the principle that empowering individuals to build a positive state of mind—to live the most rewarding, fruitful, and happiest lives they can—is just as critical as psychology's conventional focus on mending their defects and healing their ailments and pathologies.

Positive psychology's focus on character, flourishing, and fulfillment may seem like a wise and obvious shift, yet psychology from mid-20th century on had been fixated on disease, disorder, and the dark side of life. Fortunately, we're in a new era, each month bringing us hot-off-the-presses scientific articles about how to achieve and sustain happiness, how to make

life more productive and more enjoyable, and how to build character and learn resilience. These key findings, however, are generally only published in technical scholarly journals subscribed by universities and thus they lie beyond the reach of the student or nonexpert. The body of work produced by positive psychology has yet to be brought together and elucidated in an accessible, comprehensive and comprehensible volume. Until now. This four-volume Praeger Perspectives set has assembled and translated for the first time the discoveries about how to become happier and more fulfilled, about how to define and develop human strengths, about how people rise to the occasion during the worst of times and about much more.

Yet I would wager that you have already been offered answers to many of these questions in self-help books, Dr. So-So's radio and TV programs, and in countless newspaper articles, magazine pieces, and blogs. Why then is this four-volume set from Praeger Perspectives needed? Because the answers, explanations, and prescriptions proposed by self-help gurus, and interpreted and often misinterpreted by the media, generally have limited grounding in scientific theory and even less empirical confirmation. In contrast to the information you generally find in today's media, every statement, claim, and recommendation in this set is backed up by cutting-edge scientific research. You will find few conclusions in these chapters purely based on the authors' life experiences or that of their grandmother or neighbors or depressed clients or random people they have interviewed. Empirical research holds multiple advantages over such anecdotal or clinical observations. By using the scientific method, researchers are able to untangle causes from effects and to study a phenomenon systematically and without bias. Of course, science is imperfect and has its own set of limitations, but we can be much more confident in its conclusions than those of a single person tendering advice based on his or her assumptions, prejudices, and narrow collection of experiences.

One of my all-time favorite letters to the editor was by this newspaper reader, who wrote on the subject of science:

There are questions of faith, such as "Does God exist?" There are questions of opinion, such as "Who is the greatest baseball player of all time?" There are debate questions, such as "Should abortion be legal?" And then there are questions that can be answered to a degree of certainty by the application of the scientific method, which are called empirical questions—in other words, those that can be largely settled by the evidence. (Ivins, 2000)

Questions about human strengths, the benefits of positive emotions, growth in the face of stress and trauma, and the pursuit of happiness and flourishing turn out to be just such empirical questions. Scientific advances in the field of positive psychology are now solid enough to interpret and translate into descriptions, explanations, and recommendations for the nonscientist. These four volumes about the best in people promises to be a landmark set, representing the most rigorous research and the current state of knowledge about positive psychology. Yet it is written in an

accessible and uplifting style, such that you may come away from reading the chapters with a new perspective on yourself, on human nature, and perhaps even with a clear sense of how to change your life.

Sonja Lyubomirsky

## REFERENCE

Ivins, M. (2000, September 22). The manufactured public schools crisis. *The Fort Worth Star Telegram*.

## Preface

**O**n my first bus ride to a new school I watched smiling kids hop on and interact with friends. As the new kid, I sat back quietly and watched people play, laugh, and bounce around. The happiest of the lot was a girl named Deana; her whole face smiled. Deana fascinated me; she was so comfortable and joyful. I assumed that she was a very popular kid who knew all the others on the bus; I was so wrong. She was also a new kid. And, unlike me, who had lived in the neighborhood for years but was switching to a different school, Deana was new to the town . . . and to the state. How did Deana learn how to walk into a strange situation with confidence, and to beam? That is the kind of psychology that grabbed me. Decades later, that brand of psychology came to be known as positive psychology. That is what this set of books is about.

During my 10 years in college, I learned valuable knowledge and skills needed to relieve human suffering. I have found great satisfaction in my work with people who are struggling with psychological disorders. I learned little about positive psychology, little about what cultivates the best in people. I learned little about the Deanas of the world. I wanted your educational experience to be different, more balanced, focusing on the suffering and the flourishing of all people. In this four-volume set for Praeger Perspectives, *Positive Psychology: Exploring the Best in People*, you will meet many Deanas and you will learn about positive psychology, the best in people, how they use their strengths and emotions to make good lives for themselves and those around them.

As editor, I asked some of the world's best positive psychology scholars and practitioners to tell the story of their research and ideas about the best in people. I encouraged each to write a chapter that his or her neighbors would want to read, rather than a chapter that colleagues down the hall would consider "scholarly." The contributors did an amazing job of condensing their life's work into accessible descriptions and explanations of how people are strong, happy, and buoyant in good

times and in bad. As a team, we comment on the major discoveries of positive psychology, that strengths are real and potent and positive emotions are extremely valuable to human development, and demystify how people overcome adversity and become the best people they can be. We share the story of positive psychology research and practice in four distinct yet related volumes:

- Volume 1: *Discovering Human Strengths*
- Volume 2: *Capitalizing on Emotional Experiences*
- Volume 3: *Growing in the Face of Adversity*
- Volume 4: *Pursuing Human Flourishing*

The real-world implications of positive psychology are communicated via anecdotes and case studies. At the end of each chapter, personal mini-experiments encourage you to put positive psychological principles to the test in daily life.

In Volume 1 (*Discovering Human Strengths*), we explore how human strengths are discovered, developed, and parlayed into successes in all domains of life. In this volume, educators, psychologists, and philosophers discuss how we work to bring out the best in ourselves and in others. In Volume 2 (*Capitalizing on Emotional Experiences*), contributors tell the story of some of the major psychology findings of the late 20th century, stemming from the study of positive emotions and how to make the most of them. While you will recognize many of the concepts presented in this volume, such as gratitude and emotional intelligence, these chapters will take you beyond a basic knowledge of positive emotional experiences and help you learn how to capitalize on them. Volume 3 (*Growing in the Face of Adversity*) focuses on resilience, which has been attributed to the ordinary magic of the human spirit. In this volume you will be struck by a consistent theme, individual growth during the hard times is a very social process. Finally, in Volume 4 (*Pursuing Human Flourishing*) school psychologists, family experts, college administrators, and business gurus review new work on how we can become successful and develop well-being at home, work, and school.

Positive psychology, the study of what is right with people, is reshaping the scholarly and public views of the science and practice of psychology and is shining a spotlight on the good in us all. I believe that *Positive Psychology: Exploring the Best in People* provides a comprehensive yet brief summary of this area of scholarship and practice and an abundance of exercises that we hope will pique your interest in strengths, positive emotions, resilience, and flourishing.

The experience of compiling and editing these chapters allowed me to discover the best in colleagues who contributed to this set. I thank them wholeheartedly, and I am especially grateful to Jeff Rettew (managing editor), Rhea Owens (assistant to the editor), Allison Rose Lopez (special editor), Neil Salkind (Studio B), and Elizabeth Potenza (Praeger) who gave life to this project.

## VOLUME 1: DISCOVERING HUMAN STRENGTHS

What would happen if we study the best in people? Donald Clifton, psychology professor and former chairperson of Gallup, posed this question and it has become incorporated into the mission of many positive psychologists. Scholars' responses to this question have led to the development of two measures of strengths that have been completed by over 2 million people and, as a result, strengths development programs are becoming commonplace in businesses, schools, and places of worship. No doubt you will be asked to take a strengths measure as part of a school or work experience within 5 years of reading this volume.

In this volume we introduce you to the two measures of human strengths, the Clifton StrengthsFinder and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths, that have stood the test of psychometricians and laypersons. Rettew, Lopez, Bowers, and Cantwell make personal, philosophical, and evidence-based cases for why strengths matter. Sparks and Baumeister extend their classic work on "bad is stronger than good" by considering why we should focus on strengths to balance our weaknesses.

Three chapters in this volume explore the many benefits of specific strengths, wisdom (Ardelt), courage (Pury), and optimism (Rasmussen and Wallio). The chapters on wisdom and courage suggest that these strengths, among others, can be learned. The optimism chapter summarizes an extensive body of work which indicates that positive expectations for the future and health go hand in hand.

The strengths of a historical figure, Martin Luther King Jr., are examined via his writings. Rice's chapter teaches us how to shine a light on the strengths of the inspirational figures in our lives.

Finally, one of the most eminent psychologists in the 20th century, Albert Bandura, describes how we can give positive psychology away to the world.

## VOLUME 2: CAPITALIZING ON EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Most people don't *know* how to respond to positive emotional experiences; they just do what feels natural. Until recently, social scientists and mental health practitioners knew much about managing negative emotions (e.g., anger, fear) and little about the how to make the most of positive emotions (e.g., joy, contentment). Now, positive psychologists are beginning to demystify how people respond to emotional experiences in productive ways. In this volume, we focus on the intrapersonal and interpersonal processing of positive emotions, the positive moral emotion of gratitude, the practice of giving, emotional intelligence, the new science of allophilia, and a new view of masculinity.

In the first chapter, Kok and colleagues explain the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions. In short, positive emotions expand our personal views of self and the world, help generate personal resources, and create an upward spiral of growth. The findings reviewed in this chapter

have enhanced much of our thinking about personal growth and human flourishing.

Danner and colleagues highlight some of the findings from landmark research known as the Nun Study. To pique your interest, the upshot is that positive emotions, as reflected in autobiographical essays of young women entering the convent, are related to living longer. Another example of a thin slice of personal data about positive emotions is shared by Impett and Gordon, close relationship researchers, who teach us how to capitalize on positive experiences in the interpersonal context.

Benefits of thanking (Tsang and colleagues; Froh and Bono), giving (Dillard and colleagues), and being emotionally intelligent (David and Ebrahimi) are described across four chapters. Little did we know that thanking others and doing good could be so good for us.

Finally, two groups of researchers cover some brand new ground. Pitinsky and Maruskin introduce us to a new word, “allophilia,” and a new science of interpersonal relations. Wong and Rochlen discuss the emotional side of men and how attending to emotional experiences can transform men and their relationships.

### VOLUME 3: GROWING IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

Growing up in southern Louisiana you learn to respect the water and the weather. In 2005, water and the weather joined forces in the form of two of the biggest and most destructive hurricanes ever, Katrina and Rita. Now, you have heard of Katrina; it nearly wiped out New Orleans. You may not remember Katrina’s not so little sister, Rita, which hammered my homeland, Acadiana. Two days after the storm, I was heading back home to help my mother, who lost her house in the storm. I wasn’t prepared for what I would experience, the worst and the best in people. And, I wasn’t surprised by how quickly people were bouncing back. Rebuilding of homes and lives was happening on every corner. Two observations I made during my time down there are supported by the chapters in this volume. First, people can bounce back from just about anything, and they do so by being determined and hopeful. Second, bouncing back is a social phenomenon; we rarely, if ever, do it alone.

In this volume, Fazio and colleagues tell compelling stories about their own growth through loss and adversity. They then provide a framework to help us think about how we move forward in our lives after experiencing the worst of times.

Two chapters (Berman and colleagues; Zacchilli and colleagues) explain how we deal with things we will all experience: romantic conflict and relationship loss. Most folks will wish they had read the work of these close relationship researchers before they started dating—I wish I had. Forgiveness (according to Holter and colleagues), a matter of choice, could be incorporated into attempts to deal with relationship struggles even at young ages.

A series of chapters address specific struggles and means for overcoming them. Specifically, Wehmeyer and Shogren discuss how students with mild cognitive disabilities become self-determined learners. Aronson and Rogers

describe the repercussions of stereotype threats and how to prevent or overcome them. Then, Ebberwein identifies a set of adaptive skills that will make workers more flexible across the career span.

The final chapter, by Greenberg, taps into one of the oldest forms of making meaning out of bad times—storytelling. The robust positive effects of emotional storytelling are described in compelling detail.

#### VOLUME 4: PURSUING HUMAN FLOURISHING

Imagine a ladder standing before you. The bottom rung is zero and the top rung is ten. On which step of the ladder do you stand today? On which step will you stand in 5 years?

Your responses to these questions, which have been used by pollsters and researchers for 50 years, tell us a great deal about your level of hope and well-being. The mental image conjured up when thinking about your life in 5 years probably involves flourishing, or living a good life. Flourishing is the focus of this volume.

The first chapter, by Ambler, defines human flourishing as complete mental health. In the presence of positive emotions and in the absence of symptoms of mental illness and distress, we move toward the top rung of the life ladder.

Two of the chapters (Kurtz and Lyubomirsky; Myers) consider the contributors to and sustainability of happiness. You may be surprised to learn that genetics and money are part of the complex story about human happiness. Vansteenkiste and colleagues add to the discussion of pathways to well-being by examining the negative role of materialism in achieving that state.

Next, three chapters (Gilman and colleagues; Harter; Eagle) describe how exemplars do well (very well) in school and at work and are part of families that work, and one chapter (Kerr and Larson) tells the story of how smart girls develop into talented, high achieving women.

Finally, the last three chapters show how we can actively seek optimal human functioning by becoming leaders (Avolio and Wernsing), cultivating civic engagement (Sherrod and Lauckhardt), and overcoming the depressive symptoms (Rashid) that may be burdening us.

# Discovering Your Strengths

Jeff G. Rettew and Shane J. Lopez

**W**hat are your strengths? When asked this question in casual conversation, most people fumble for an answer. Indeed, survey research suggests that only about one third of people can readily name their own trait-like strengths (Hill, 2001). Our hope in putting this chapter together is to provide you, the reader, with the tools to improve those statistics, because strengths are good for you. It's true.

When asked about personal strengths at a job interview, most people respond with some sort of forced, vague, and/or canned response that is somewhat awkward and incongruent. Even when folks know the question is coming, they struggle with an answer. "Most people think they know what they are good at. They are usually wrong. More often, people know what they are not good at—and even then more people are wrong than right" (Drucker, 1999, p. 164). The awkwardness in responses to this question perhaps can be explained by a cultural reluctance to boast about ourselves, because many people are raised with modesty as an aspirational virtue. Conversely, in today's American culture, it is perfectly acceptable, and often encouraged, to focus on what one does not do well.

It is strange that employers even ask about strengths, as it appears they have a tendency to focus on weakness rather than build from strength (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). This negativity bias (Seligman, 2002) is somewhat understandable when you consider humankind's seemingly hard-wired nature to focus on the negative in life. There are several theories as to why we have a tendency to focus on the negative. One such belief is that focusing on weaknesses or problems is an adaptive strategy. Throughout our history, focusing on our weaknesses or on what goes wrong in situations has promoted survival because what goes wrong has had dire

implications. In today's society, however, what we do not do as well, and the problems we face on a daily basis have more mundane consequences. For example, if I am horribly incompetent at firing a bow and arrow, I would survive just as well as a world-class archer in today's society. In the past, my poor bowmanship would have been a real barrier to procuring food.

We get the most out of our lives when we build on our strengths. Peter Drucker, business professor and guru, made the following observation back in 1967, "one cannot build on weakness. To achieve results, one has to use all the available strengths.... These strengths are the true opportunities" (p. 60). Donald Clifton, psychology professor and former chairperson of Gallup, echoed this sentiment, positing that the two most consistently prevalent assumptions of human nature—that anyone can learn to be competent at almost anything and that a person's areas of greatest potential for growth are in their areas of greatest weakness—are flawed (Clifton & Nelson, 1992; Hodges & Clifton, 2004). When you are deploying your highest strengths, you are more engaged, more productive, more successful, healthier, and happier; in short, you're at your best.

## DEFINING AND MEASURING STRENGTHS

Knowing what a strength is will help you build a vocabulary for describing the positive in people all around you. Discovering *your* strengths will change the way you see yourself and interact with the world every day. Here we begin with a brief discussion of the historical definition of psychological strength, follow with several of the most prevalent conceptualizations, and conclude with various methods of discovering your strengths.

A strength is a capacity for feeling, thinking, and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes (Linley & Harrington, 2006). This definition refers to the potentially broad benefit of strengths and yet does not suggest that strengths carry any inherent moral value. This is arguably a pragmatic definition, capturing the phenomena likely of interest in the real world.

### History of Strengths

Human strength has been discussed by classic Eastern and Western philosophers, but strengths have escaped intense focus from psychologists until fairly recently. Interestingly, the discussion of strengths appeared in the business literature forty years ago with the work of Drucker (1967) and subsequently through the work of Gallup (e.g., Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992), as we will discuss subsequently in this chapter. Now strengths are being examined and conceptualized as pieces of a larger, holistic understanding of positive human functioning rather than as isolated constructs, as they were in classical philosophy. Indeed, we are moving toward a much fuller picture of positive psychological functioning (Linley & Harrington, 2006).

The last decade has seen a bounty of fruitful work on the assessment of human strengths. Two comprehensive measures of strengths are now available online at minimal to no cost. One measure, the Clifton StrengthsFinder (Asplund, Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2007; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005), is based on a platform of 34 talent themes that are prevalent in society and predictive of educational and vocational success. The other, the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), is based on the belief that strengths are the lived manifestations of virtues and are associated with well-being; it measures 24 character strengths.

### The Clifton StrengthsFinder

The Clifton StrengthsFinder, one of the primary tools for strength identification, discovery, and development, was designed by Donald Clifton and Gallup. The development of the Clifton StrengthsFinder began when Clifton, who studied success across a wide variety of business and education domains over the span of 50 years (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992), hypothesized that talents could be operationalized, studied, and accentuated in work and academic settings. He viewed strengths as extensions of talent. More precisely, the strength construct combines talent with associated knowledge, skills, and effort and is defined as the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a specific task. Clifton identified personal talents using empirically based, semi-structured interviews, which led to the creation of this structured measure of talent in the 1990s.

On the basis of earlier interview data, Clifton identified about 400 talent themes, 34 of which are prevalent in society and generally associated with life success (see Appendix A). The resulting Clifton StrengthsFinder presents, in an online format (<https://www.strengthsfinder.com>), 178 item pairs designed to measure 34 talent themes (Asplund et al., 2007; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Lopez et al., 2005). It is appropriate for administration with adolescents and adults with reading levels of 10th grade or higher and is available in 20 languages. Although it is used to identify personal talents, the supporting materials are intended to help individuals discover how to build on their talents within particular life roles (e.g., Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992).

The Clifton StrengthsFinder provides information on an individual's "Five Signature Themes," that is, the five themes on which he or she scored highest. Remaining themes are not rank ordered or shared with the individual. The "Five Signature Themes" are provided to foster intrapersonal development. It should be noted, however, that this instrument is not designed or validated for use in employee selection or mental health screening. In addition, the Clifton StrengthsFinder is not sensitive to change over time. Your personal results may change slightly over time but will primarily remain stable.

There is also a youth version of the Clifton StrengthsFinder, the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer (CYSE). Similar to the StrengthsFinder, the

CYSE is an online assessment that identifies areas in which a young person's greatest potential for building strengths exist and that provides youth with the language to talk about their strengths. Gallup's success with Internet-based assessments in conjunction with 30 years of experience with the Youth Perceiver (a structured interview consisting of 81 open-ended questions) led to the CYSE's development. The new measure and the supporting educational materials are appropriate for youth ages 10–14 years (Lopez, Harter, Juskiewicz, & Carr, 2006). The CYSE provides information about the respondent's top 3 talent themes out of a set of 10 possible themes (see Appendix B). Giving youth positive labels and experiences of success encourages later successes as well as improved self-esteem and confidence. Giving prominence to human strengths by explicitly naming them suggests to the person and to those in the surrounding environment that there is merit in this identified characteristic (Lopez et al., 2006).

### Values in Action Inventory of Strengths

The Values in Action (VIA; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) Classification of Strengths is intended to serve as the antithesis of psychiatry's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-TR*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Peterson and Seligman noted that we currently have a shared language for speaking about the negative side of psychology, but we have no such equivalent terminology for describing human strengths. The VIA Classification of Strengths was intended to provide such a language.

The VIA classification system, originally commissioned by the Mayerson Foundation, was generated in response to two basic questions: (a) how can one define the concepts of “strengths” and “highest potential” and (b) how can one tell that a positive youth development program has succeeded in meeting its goals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. v). After reviewing dozens of inventories of virtues and strengths, Peterson, Seligman, and colleagues arrived at a list of 24 strengths, organized under six overarching virtues (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) thought to “emerge consensually across cultures and throughout time” (p. 29). The measure of virtues and strengths, the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), was designed to describe the individual differences of character strengths as continua rather than as distinct categories. The current version of the VIA-IS is available online (<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu>) and as a paper-and-pencil measure in English and several other languages. The 240 items take only about 30 minutes to complete. Despite the accumulating validity of the scales, users of these measures are not to treat the results as more real than the traits and habits that the scales attempt to measure. Psychology has gone down that road with respect to IQ scores and intelligence, and we should learn some lessons from that tragic tale. So, if someone scores relatively low on the VIA scale of kindness yet lives a life of obvious charity and benevolence, life trumps the scale. The discrepancy points to the less-than-perfect success of the measure and not to anything about the individual. Feedback is often provided to individuals about their top VIA strengths (see Appendix C for a

complete list of the 24 strengths), which is a convenient shorthand for identifying what an individual may do well. However, the comparison is to other measured strengths of the individual and *not* to the strengths of other people (Peterson, 2006).

There is also a youth version of the VIA-IS, the VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), which is intended for use by people ages 10–17 years (Park & Peterson, 2005). Similar to the VIA-IS, it is a face-valid questionnaire that measures the extent to which respondents endorse items reflecting each of the 24 VIA strengths.

Another method of utilizing the VIA classification to learn about your strengths is through the VIA Structured Interview, which helps individuals identify signature strengths by talking with someone about situations in which these strengths are most likely to be shown (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The interviewer asks respondents how they *usually* act in a given setting with regard to a particular character strength. Some strengths are more specific than others in terms of their applicability across situations. In the case of more narrowly focused strengths, such as courage, the setting of the interview question is more detailed. For example, it would be difficult to exhibit courage while driving to school or work. However, driving to your first day of school or work in a new town where you don't know anyone, and are not entirely sure of how to get there, takes courage. For strengths with a more varied array of deployment possibilities, such as optimism, the setting is presented as everyday life. If people describe an incident in which they displayed the strength the majority of the time, they are asked follow-up questions about how they “name” the strength; if the strength is “really” who they are; and whether friends and family would agree the strength is “really” who they are (Peterson, 2003).

Whether classification systems and measures focus on positive or on negative traits and behaviors, their development has been influenced by the values of society and the professionals who address these traits. As cultures change over time, it is imperative that these tools be revised with regularity to maintain their applicability (Snyder & Lopez, 2007).

## DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS

Discovering your strengths is like stumbling across your living room in the dark and then finally making it to the light switch. You can navigate the room in the dark because you know where everything is and have walked the route hundreds of times. However, you can do it much more efficiently with the lights on to help you avoid any stray toys left on the floor or furniture moved during vacuuming earlier that day. In the same way, discovering your strengths allows you to more efficiently navigate your everyday life. The light simply illuminates what you already knew was there, much like discovering your strengths sheds light on what you already knew about yourself.

The word *discover*, when used to describe the process of learning about and incorporating one's strengths, is apt terminology because it implies the pre-existence of the strengths, finding something that is already there in you. The VIA-IS and Clifton StrengthsFinder do not create strengths or

invent these qualities in someone; instead, they reach beneath our awareness and give strengths a name. These tools provide the language with which to talk about strengths. We, as human beings, have a tremendous affinity for labels. According to Snyder et al. (2003), labels simplify communication and provide pathways to usefulness and understanding. By labeling something, we appear to be gaining an improved understanding of it.

Are you too old to discover your strengths? Are you too young? Even at 2 years of age, children may show strengths such as kindness. Consider, for example, the 15-month-old boy who decided to bring his own teddy bear to a crying friend so that the child might feel comfort (Hoffman, 1975). In fact, consistent individual differences in caring have been observed in very young children. Dunn, Kendrick, and MacNamee (1981) reported that 25% of 2- to 4-year-olds frequently comforted a younger sibling, whereas 30% did so on occasion; the rest did so rarely. With the development of language, toddlers begin justifying their actions, and a preoccupation with fairness and justice becomes apparent (Eckerman, Davis, & Didow, 1989, as cited in Park & Peterson, 2006).

### Alternative Ways to Discover Your Strengths

If completing an online measure is not your preferred way of learning your strengths, another way to discover the best in you is through an activity called a positive introduction. The positive introduction involves telling a story about yourself at your best. The story should be about three hundred words and should be an in-depth account of a discrete period of time, including where you were, what you were doing, who you were with, what sounds you heard, what you smelled, etc. Then, review the story and pick out different strengths that seem to emerge. Once you have done that, write a second story and repeat the process. Look for common strengths that show up in both stories. Here is an example of a positive introduction (Peterson, 2006). See if you can pick out some of the VIA character strengths exhibited.

November 7, 2004. After eighteen weeks of dogged training, I stand with my legs quivering like Jell-O, my feet throbbing and bleeding, and my heart about to beat through my chest, in the valley between the greatest physical and emotional mountains of my young life.

With a 26.2 mile jog spanning all five boroughs of New York City in my rearview mirror, I focus now on holding back the tsunami of saline swelling up in my eyes and swallowing the gigantic orange lodged in my throat; all the while rehearsing the lines in my head. A volunteer removes the clip from my sneaker while another places a medal around my neck. I make my way over to the baggage truck to collect my personal effects, and then search for my cheering section.

I hear my mom before I see her, her trademark cheer etched into my brain from all of my soccer and baseball games when I was younger. I hug my brother, best friend, aunt, and on down the line, thanking them all for their support. Then, while giving my dad a great big bear hug, my mom slips the hardware to me behind his back. I take a deep breath, turn, and

with the blueberry-colored velveteen box in hand, crash to one knee. Looking up at her, I see the roaring river of tears come streaming down both sides of her face. After several fumbling attempts to remove my promise from the box, I slide the ring onto her delicate trembling finger. “I couldn’t have done this without you, and I never want to have to do anything by myself ever again. Will you marry me?”

The positive introduction does not have to describe a momentous achievement such as running a marathon or proposing marriage. It can be as simple as basking in the warm glow of the fading summer sun, surrounded by close friends. Perhaps it is a story about the time you nailed that group presentation in English class or when you got a role in the school play.

For those with great patience and a long view on personal development, Drucker (1999) describes the process of feedback analysis for discovering one’s strengths. Feedback analysis is a method dating back to German theologians in the fourteenth century, then to John Calvin, father of Calvinism, and to Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order. Each came by the process independently and incorporated it into the rules governing each of their group members (i.e., Calvinist pastors and Jesuit priests). Drucker attributes each group’s tremendous and rapid success to a reliance on the feedback analysis model. Within 30 years of their respective inceptions, Calvinism dominated the Protestant northern section of Europe, and the Jesuit Order prevailed over the Catholic south. The routine feedback from expectations to results, reaffirming their commitment and allowing them to focus on achievement and satisfaction, is the advantage feedback analysis conferred on the Calvinists and Jesuits (Drucker 1999).

To engage in feedback analysis, proceed as follows. Whenever you make a key decision or take an important action, write down what you believe the results of your actions will be. Then, approximately one year later, compare the expected versus actual results and reflect on how you (and your strengths) influenced meaningful outcomes. When practiced consistently over several years, feedback analysis will show you exactly where your strengths lie. In addition, it will also highlight what you are doing or are failing to do that inhibits reaching the full potential of your strengths. Furthermore, it will also show you the areas in which you are not competent and should refrain from performing. The main drawback to feedback analysis, as may be obvious, is that it takes a considerable period of time, approximately 2 to 3 years of consistent adherence to the method to determine your strengths, according to Drucker (1999).

Another way of discovering and enhancing strengths is the Strengths Strategies Primer (which can be completed alone or in conjunction with an online measure) developed by Lopez and Berg (2006). The Strengths Strategies Primer involves pairing a guided imagery session, focused on using strengths to achieve a goal, with an interactive dialogue about the guided imagery experience and a skills enhancement piece. The primer builds on the goals, pathways, and agency components of hope theory (Snyder, 2002) to identify and cultivate strengths.

## WHAT STRENGTHS LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE

As positive psychologists, we have committed ourselves to the discovery and development of the positive in others and, of course, we try to practice what we preach. We have identified our strengths through formal and informal assessment and try to capitalize on our strengths every day. People often describe their strengths-discovery process as an epiphany or as a sudden awareness and sense of clarity. Sometimes it is easier to show than to tell; such is the intent of this next section. We describe our personal journeys of strength discovery. Here is a brief account of how one of us (JGR) discovered his strengths and how he uses them in daily life.

### The Case of Jeff

I first discovered my VIA signature strengths (hope, optimism and future-mindedness; humor and playfulness; honesty, authenticity, and genuineness; capacity to love and to be loved; citizenship, teamwork, and loyalty) when I began a research assistantship on a joint project between Swarthmore College and the University of Pennsylvania implementing and evaluating a character education curriculum for ninth graders. A significant portion of the curriculum focused on the discovery and cultivation of strengths. Consequently, part of my training as a new research assistant was to read Martin Seligman's *Authentic Happiness* and take the VIA-IS online. As I completed the survey, I stared at the computer screen and thought, "That's all well and good, but what do I do now?" Discovery is only the first step on the strengths journey. I have since seen the amazing benefit of living an intentional life, building from strength.

The timing of my signature strength discovery was impeccable. I proposed to my wife shortly thereafter (an exercise in capacity to love and be loved; honesty, authenticity, and genuineness; hope, optimism, and future-mindedness) and was then knee deep in wedding planning (she said yes), a prime opportunity to take the rest of my signature strengths for a "test drive." It was a perfect storm of strengths: I was focused on planning an event for the future, which was designed to celebrate an intense connection with someone; the planning process was a team effort; my well-timed humor and playfulness helped keep the two of us sane when things got too intense; and we were always honest with each other about any decision that needed to be made.

Intentionally leaning on my signature strengths made the whole pre-nuptial experience quite engaging and exciting. Whenever people asked me how the wedding planning was going, they were always shocked when I told them how seamlessly everything was coming together and how much we were enjoying it. Now that the wedding is over, I have found other ways to deploy my strengths. To engage both my capacity to love and to be loved and my hope, optimism, and future-mindedness, I coordinate large weekend gatherings of my friends and family who are strewn across the country, so that we can all enjoy one another's company and reminisce. Humor and playfulness has been especially helpful for me as a teaching

assistant working with college freshman. Working in a joke or an activity keeps the discussions fresh and the students' minds engaged.

My strengths are my fuel. Whenever I feel drained from a long week, I'll purposefully seek out a way to use one of my top strengths. A trusty standby activity is to think about upcoming holidays and start planning a get-together. I'll send out some e-mails and get the ball rolling. After 10 to 15 minutes of that, I am ready to dive back in to whatever else needs my attention.

As I have learned what it feels like to use a high strength, I have begun to notice other strengths that are also salient with me, such as awe, wonder, and appreciation of beauty and excellence. There is a certain energy I get from a beautiful sunset, a blooming flower, or a walk in the park. I never thought of this feeling as a strength until I realized that my reaction to these things was different and powerful. I keep an orchid in my office where I see clients because it helps keep me at my best.

### The Case of Shane

When I (SJL) received the results of the Clifton StrengthsFinder and the VIA inventory, I reflected on the findings and tried to figure out how I could put them to immediate use. Then, I realized that I have been using these strengths everyday ... that is why they are my strengths! Nevertheless, I decided that I would be more intentional in my efforts to make my strengths come alive. That goal of intentionality addressed "how" I would capitalize on my strengths, but I hadn't addressed the "why." It turns out, however, that the "why" was pretty simple—I wanted to make my good life even better. That was the outcome I desired, and I thought that these "new" strengths would provide pathways to that goal.

Admittedly, my initial efforts to intentionally use my strengths every day were clumsy and not that successful. Although I thought the findings were accurate and I was excited to receive the strengths feedback, I was overwhelmed by how to refine my use of five or ten strengths at the same time. For that reason, I decided to capitalize on the strengths that I thought would help me the most in making my life better. I chose the top two themes (futuristic and maximizer) from the Gallup feedback and the top strength (gratitude) from the VIA results. Right away, focusing on three strengths seemed doable.

With those "three strengths that matter most" (as I began to refer to them) in hand, I consulted the "action items" associated with my futuristic and maximizer themes. For futuristic, I settled on one daily activity that might spark my tendency to project into the future: Take time to think about the future. Pretty straightforward, but reading this "action item" made me realize that I would go for considerable time without thinking about the future and this led to dissatisfaction with how my life was going. Putting this guidance into action has involved taking daily walks dedicated to thinking about the future. Often these happen in the evening, and I chat with my wife about the future of our work and of our family. At other times, I leave the office around midday and walk through the campus

reflecting on some of my aspirations. These walks have turned into a cherished time that yields exciting ideas and considerable satisfaction.

Regarding my maximizer theme, I believe this talent of making good ideas, projects, and relationships better contributes greatly to my success at work. Through examining my habits at home and work, I realized I was doing a fairly good job of systematically using this strength. This left me feeling unsure about how to proceed in my efforts to capitalize on this strength. Then one day I encountered a person who prided herself on playing “the devil’s advocate” every time an idea was presented during a meeting. I thought about the many devil’s advocates whom I have encountered over the years, and I concluded that these people were not necessarily providing constructive feedback that made a good idea better. They also were not offering alternative ideas that would work better. In my opinion, all they were doing was undercutting my creativity and enthusiasm (or that of other people). To “maximize,” I realized that I had to surround myself with people who knew how to make good ideas better. That criterion has become a critical one when I select friends, colleagues, and students, and I believe it has boosted my creativity and the quality of my work.

I have used futuristic and maximizing themes both at work and at home and I think my efforts helped me in both domains. I believe that capitalizing on these strengths have led to more creativity and productivity at work and greater sense of purpose for my family and me. Using gratitude (my third “strength that matters most”) with more intentionality has not generated more productivity or greater clarity in my personal mission, but it has been rewarding in that it brings joy and a sense of closeness to people. To make the most of my gratitude, I decided to spend part of most Friday afternoons writing thank-you notes (handwritten and mailed the old fashioned way) to people who have touched my life that week, and at other times I thank people who had done something nice for me that week. Occasionally, I write to a person who had done a good deed for me years ago (and I had never thanked them or I wanted to thank them again). Finally, I also write to people that have done “good works” (I may or may not know them personally) to express my gratitude for their efforts. This practice has enriched my emotional life and it has strengthened many of my relationships.

By focusing on three of my strengths I have been successful at making an already good life even better. Over time I have become more facile at capitalizing on other strengths, particularly ideation, hope, and wisdom. Living my strengths has become a way of life for me, and I look forward to finding out how this will influence the futures of my loved ones and me.

## DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

### Wanting the Strengths You Have

Many times people get hung up on not wanting what they have when it comes to strengths. Again, this goes back to the negativity bias we discussed previously. As human beings we are hard wired to focus on what has

gone wrong, even when we are being presented with what we do best. Someone tells you the stuff you do better than anything else, and you want to lament the things that did not make the cut. Don't be discouraged if you have this experience upon discovering your highest strengths. Rather, consider the real potential of your highest strengths. What would it look like to really immerse yourself in them, how would it feel to swim in that pool.

### Connecting and Distinguishing Power of Strengths

Discovering your strengths gives you the tools to both distinguish yourself from other people and connect with them. Know that your constellation of strengths is different, that not everyone thinks or acts the way you do, particularly when it comes to what you do best. This kind of uniqueness is different from simply saying you're different and special because now you have the proof to back it up. Having the knowledge about your strengths, as well as the strengths that people have the potential to possess, allows another level on which to connect with others. Certain strengths have an affinity for one another and certain combinations seem to complement one another quite nicely. For example, maximizers (see Appendix A) tend to be good managers because they thrive on getting the most from people. They are particularly effective when paired with achievers, who are constantly engaged by being productive.

### More on How to Develop Your Strengths

Strengths Mentoring (SM; Lopez, Tree, Bowers, & Burns, 2004, 2006) is a student development strategy designed to capitalize on the common factors of change and to boost academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), hope (Snyder, 1994), and personal growth initiative (Robitschek, 1998). SM, a three-session approach, promotes the use of strengths, as measured by the Clifton StrengthsFinder, in students' daily lives. Over the course of SM, trained mentors and student mentees identify salient academic goals that could be attained in a semester. The mentor helps mentees move through three stages of strengths development (naming, nurturing, and navigating). During this first session, the mentor develops academic goals, helps the mentee understand the StrengthsFinder feedback and how it relates to school-related goals, and helps incorporate the five StrengthsFinder talent themes into personal descriptions. Session 1 ends with Strengths imagery (see Appendix D). For homework, mentees share their feedback with people close to them and craft stories about how their strengths are used. In the nurturing session, mentees create a catalog of critical events that have been, or could be, resolved through use of strengths or "doing what you do best." Nurturing homework involves completing additional storytelling exercises about using strengths to attain goals. During the last session (navigating), mentees create pathways to resolve academic challenges or overcome real or perceived obstacles to academic success. Finally, the mentor and mentee discuss success experiences

associated with using strengths and concerns about future strengths-development and academic pursuits.

### WIIFM—What’s in It for Me?

More good days. More good minutes. More good moments. Discovering your strengths is just one small step on the path to increased life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Seligman (2002) talks about deployment of strengths as an essential component to increasing positive emotion, engagement, and well-being. The more you use your strengths, the more positive experiences you will have. Seligman also talks about how using your strengths in the service of something larger than yourself (school, church, community) leads to an increased sense of meaning, purpose, engagement, and connection.

Discovering your strengths isn’t just a means for making you happier. Gallup did some research on employee engagement in the workplace and found that people who report “having the opportunity to do what they do best every day” have a 44% higher probability of success on customer engagement and employee retention, and a 38% higher probability of success on productivity measures. These differences in probability of success can amount to millions of dollars to any large organization (Harter & Schmidt, 2002). In addition, studies show that a strengths-based development intervention increases self-confidence, direction, hope, and altruism (Hodges & Clifton, 2004).

### CONCLUSION

Strengths are part of human nature, but only recently have we developed the tools to discover them, the language to talk about them, and the research to explain just how powerful they really are. Discovering your strengths is a singular, unique experience, like looking in the mirror and having your reflection talk back to you. The next time you’re in a job interview and someone asks you to tell them about your strengths, you’ll have the knowledge and language to tell them exactly what your strengths are and how you use them every day. Moreover, you’ll actually enjoy going to work because you only accept jobs that would allow you to capitalize on your strengths. You won’t have to live weekend to weekend. Every day is a new canvas on which to paint your strengths. Use bold colors.

#### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

##### Discovering Your Strengths

*Testing the Negativity Bias:* Give yourself 60 seconds to write down all the things you do well in one column, and all the things you do poorly in another. Which list is longer? Why?

*Discovering Your Strengths:* In just over 1 hour, you can identify your signature strengths by completing the Values in Action–Inventory of

Strengths assessment (<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu>) online. This inventory is discussed in the chapter, and it is a wonderful (and scientific) tool to learn more about yourself.

**Reviewing Your Last Performance Evaluation:** Think about the last time you got back a test from a teacher or a report from a boss or were evaluated in any way. If you have access to that feedback, go and get it. Then, go back over it and take notice of what types of feedback you received. Did your teacher only mark the places where you lost points or made a grammatical error? Did your boss praise the things you did well or refer to areas of deficiency? More often than not, we are taught to focus on the negative because that is the only type of feedback we get on our performance. Think about what it would be like to focus on what you did well and then expand on that in future performance. The next time you give someone feedback, stop and think about focusing on what they did well in addition to pointing out their shortcomings.

**Family Tree of Strengths:** Have the rest of your family complete the VIA-IS (or VIA-Youth) or the Clifton StrengthsFinder (or CYSE) and then create a family tree, complete with each family member's signature strengths or themes of highest talent. Look for strengths that you have in common and that complement one another.

## APPENDIX A

### The Thirty-Four Clifton StrengthsFinder Themes

**Achiever:** People strong in the achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

**Activator:** People strong in the activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.

**Adaptability:** People strong in the adaptability theme prefer to “go with the flow.” They tend to be “now” people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

**Analytical:** People strong in the analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability think about all the factors that might affect a situation.

**Arranger:** People strong in the arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements that ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.

**Belief:** People strong in the belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of those values emerges a defined purpose for their life.

**Command:** People strong in the command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.

**Communication:** People strong in the communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.

**Competition:** People strong in the competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.

**Connectedness:** People strong in connectedness theme have faith in links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.

**Consistency:** People strong in the consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone in the world with consistency by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.

**Context:** People strong in the context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

**Deliberative:** People strong in the deliberative theme are best characterized by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate the obstacles.

**Developer:** People strong in the developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from those improvements.

**Discipline:** People strong in the discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.

**Empathy:** People strong in the empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives and in others' situations.

**Focus:** People strong in the focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track.

**Futuristic:** People strong in the futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their vision of the future.

**Harmony:** People strong in the harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.

**Ideation:** People strong in the ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

**Includer:** People strong in the includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out and make efforts to include them.

**Individualization:** People strong in the individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.

**Intellection:** People strong in the intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.

**Input:** People strong in the input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

**Learner:** People strong in the learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to improve continuously.

**Maximizer:** People strong in the maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate professional and group excellence. They seek to transform strong into something superb.

**Positivity:** People strong in the positivity theme have an enthusiasm that is contagious. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

**Relator:** People who are strong in the relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

**Responsibility:** People strong in the responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

**Restorative:** People strong in the restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.

**Self-assurance:** People strong in the self-assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.

**Significance:** People strong in the significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.

**Strategic:** People strong in the strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

**Woo:** Woo stands for “winning others over.” People strong in the woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.

## APPENDIX B

### The 10 Talent Themes of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer

**Achieving:** Youths especially talented in the achieving theme like to accomplish things and have a great deal of energy.

**Caring:** Youths especially talented in the caring theme enjoy helping others.

**Competing:** Youths especially talented in the competing theme enjoy measuring their performance against that of others and have a great desire to win.

**Confidence:** Youths especially talented in the confidence theme believe in themselves and their ability to be successful in their endeavors.

**Dependability:** Youths especially talented in the dependability theme keep their promises and show a high level of responsibility.

**Discoverer:** Youths especially talented in the discoverer theme tend to be very curious and like to ask “Why?” and “How?”

**Future Thinker:** Youths especially talented in the future thinker theme tend to think about what’s possible beyond the present time, even beyond their lifetime.

**Organizer:** Youths especially talented in the organizer theme are good at scheduling, planning, and organizing.

**Presence:** Youths especially talented in the presence theme like to tell stories and be at the center of attention.

**Relating:** Youths especially talented in the relating theme are good at establishing meaningful friendships and maintaining them.

## APPENDIX C

## VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge**—cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
  - Creativity [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it
  - Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering
  - Open-mindedness [judgment, critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly
  - Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows
  - Perspective [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people
2. **Courage**—emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
  - Bravery [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it
  - Persistence [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks
  - Integrity [authenticity, honesty]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions
  - Vitality [zest, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated
3. **Humanity**—interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
  - Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people

- Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
- Social intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

4. **Justice**—civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

- Citizenship [social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share
- Fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance
- Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

5. **Temperance**—strengths that protect against excess

- Forgiveness and mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
- Humility/Modesty: Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
- Prudence: Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
- Self-regulation [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions

6. **Transcendence**—strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

- Appreciation of beauty and excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience
- Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
- Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
- Humor [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
- Spirituality [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing

where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

## APPENDIX D

### A Strengths Strategies Primer (Lopez & Berg, 2006)

#### Part A: Strengths Imagery

I'd like you to relax in your chair, recline or lean back if you like, and close your eyes if you want to. First, I ask that you pay attention to the instructions that follow. I invite you to think about a time when you wanted to achieve something important to you ... a time when you felt really motivated ... a time when you utilized your strengths for getting to your goal. Sometimes people find it helpful to close their eyes in order to see the images more clearly. Have you thought of a time like this? A time when you felt hopeful that you could achieve something important to you ... something that motivated you ... something that you had the strengths to achieve. (Long pause.) You might notice how driven you felt ... how empowered ... you might remember times when you wanted to give up ... but didn't ... you kept going because of your commitment ... your desire ... instead, you might have worked harder ... you may have tried a different strength for dealing with the hard times ... you might have broken your goal down into steps ... with each step you achieved making you feel more energized ... more empowered ... more confident ... you may have noticed how you focused on the goal ... adjusting the goal based on what was happening ... so that you knew that your goal was challenging ... difficult ... but achievable ... knowing that once you achieved your goal ... you would feel confident ... motivated ... proud of yourself ... knowing that you have everything that it takes ... the motivation ... the ability to utilize multiple strengths ... the ability to set challenging goals ... and achieve them ... everything that it takes to be successful with future goals.... Take a moment to absorb all of these thoughts and then open your eyes (if eyes are closed). (VERY SLOW AND DELIBERATE.)

#### Part B: Interactive Dialogue

What situation did you think of?

Why was this goal so important to you?

How did you maintain your motivation when things got difficult?

How did you decide how you were going to utilize your strengths to achieve your goal?

How did achieving this goal make you feel?

How did these experiences help you to prepare for the future?

What did you learn from this experience that will help you on the task?

#### Part C: Skills Enhancement

I'd like to share with you some things that we have found through extensive research that enhance one's ability to reach goals. There are three main components necessary to reach your goals. One is your ability to set goals. Here are some strategies for setting goals:

- First, set goals that will be difficult but achievable. Be sure to set goals that are in line with your expectations, not the expectations of others.
- Second, be specific about your goals; define them objectively.
- And third, take time in setting your goals and allow yourself to adjust your goals once you have experiences to guide you.

The second component is your ability to utilize multiple strengths as strategies to reach your goals. Here are some ways to improve this skill:

- First, think about the steps involved in reaching your goal.
- Second, think about the different strengths that you could utilize to reach the goal.
- And third, in your mind, rehearse what you will need to do during the pursuit of your goal to be successful in reaching it. Also, anticipate the problems you might have in reaching your goal and the personal strengths you can use to overcome the problems.

The third component is the motivation to reach your goals. Here are some ways to increase motivation:

- First, think about the process of reaching your goal as a journey. Anticipating roadblocks that you might face may be helpful in reminding you that when you start to feel discouraged, it is a signal that you must increase your motivation and work harder.
- Second, as you work toward your goal, remind yourself of how far you have come and think positively about your progress toward the goal. Think about similar challenging situations where you were able to overcome the situation.
- And last, using positive self-talk like “I can do it,” “Keep going,” and “I am doing really well” tends to be helpful.

Which of these do you think you are particularly good at?

Which of these do you think you could stand improvement on?

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# Making the Most of Human Strengths

Kelly Bowers

**T**ake a moment and answer these questions: What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? If you were to sit down and create a list of both, which list would be easier for you to do? Which list would be longer, the list of your strengths or the list of your weaknesses? It seems to me that as a society, we focus almost exclusively on weaknesses and deficits. Within my field of psychology, in particular, our theories historically have been rooted in weakness, with a preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life (Seligman, 2002). The literature is inundated with language associated with weakness. We say someone is depressed or anxious or worse, psychotic. We talk about how someone lacks social support or has poor social skills or loose boundaries. We are for all practical purposes a science and practice focused on weakness. Many psychologists, me included, argue that by only focusing on weaknesses, psychologists have perpetuated a helping process that is out of balance (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). The positive psychology initiative, which began a few years ago, serves as a shift within psychology from a sole focus on weaknesses to a more comprehensive perspective, including positive characteristics of individuals and environments (e.g., home, school, companies). Simply stated, positive psychology seeks to help the whole person, examining and promoting strengths and managing deficits, maintaining that human strengths are as real as human weaknesses.

Think back to when you were very young and things didn't seem as serious or overwhelming. Didn't you gravitate toward things you were good at? For some, it was athletics or being competitive and working on a team; for others, it was art or seeing things abstractly and finding beauty in things. What were you good at, what did you enjoy doing? Growing up, I

found that my parents encouraged me to participate in activities in which I excelled: being empathic, meeting new people, organizing others, and making lists. Although I was certainly aware that I had areas of weakness, these weaknesses were not emphasized to the degree that my strengths were. As an adult, I have often reflected on these experiences. I have wondered how people learn what they are good at and what they do with that information. In my profession, I have witnessed many instances in which an individual's understanding of what he or she is good at has created positive change in that individual's life. It is not surprising, then, that the idea of individual strengths and their application has become my life's passion. Fortunately, the study of individual strengths is now a growing interest area within the field of positive psychology as well as within business and leadership development. This chapter focuses on the definition of a strength, the benefits of using strengths, and some ways in which individuals might capitalize on their personal strengths.

### STRENGTHS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO FIND THEM

When determining the definition of strengths, Donald Clifton, one of the foremost scholars in this area, conducted research based on one simple question: What would happen if we studied what is right with people? (Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005). Clifton believed that talents could be operationalized or defined and investigated. In an attempt to better understand this concept, Gallup conducted a systematic study, interviewing over two million people in a variety of professions about their strengths. These individuals were the "best of the best" in their respective lines of work. The goal of these semistructured interviews was to gain information from excellent performers regarding what they were doing (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). It was through these interviews that the anatomy of a strength became evident.

According to Tom Rath (2007), Clifton's grandson, a strength is consistent and near-perfect performance on an activity. This definition is comprised of three factors: talents or naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior; knowledge, which consists of facts and lessons learned; and skills, or the steps of an activity. These combine to create your strengths. Additionally, two principles are embedded in this definition of strengths. First, for a cluster of activities to be labeled as a strength, they must be performed consistently; that is, the strength is a predictable part of an individual's performance. Second, the strength does not need to be present in all aspects of an individual's life in order for the individual to excel. Embedded in this definition is the assumption that by maximizing on strengths, an individual will excel. In *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, Rath (2007) provided an equation for strengths: namely, talent (the natural way of thinking, feeling or behaving) multiplied by investment (or the time spent developing skills) equals strength (see Figure 2.1).

According to Rath, focusing solely on weaknesses is not as effective as sharpening strengths. So, a question you might ask yourself is this: When you get your report card, which grades are you (or your friends/family)

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{TALENT} \\ \\ \text{X} \\ \\ \text{INVESTMENT} \\ \hline \\ = \\ \\ \text{STRENGTH} \end{array}$$

**Figure 2.1. The Strengths Formula**

likely to focus on, those that are considered below average and that may illustrate your weaknesses, or those that are above average and may illustrate your strengths? Often our society focuses on weaknesses to the exclusion of strengths. According to strength research, examining or sharpening our strengths may be more beneficial.

A common language is needed to describe talents; there is already a rich and varied language for human weakness. Terms such as psychosis, depression, and schizophrenia hold meaningful differences among both professionals and nonexperts. Language of human strength, however, is sparse. Instead of specific and meaningful terms, generalizations that fail to convey universal significance are utilized. For example, “people skills” may mean different things to different people and hold varying connotations depending on the person possessing that strength. The development of a common language would aid in the understanding of strengths.

With the understanding of strengths comes a set of personal benefits. These benefits may take a variety of forms but typically are linked to well-being. For example, research indicates that high levels of hope (a universal strength) are related to better performances in academics and athletics as well as to superior therapy and physical health outcomes. Additionally, the universal strength of social connectedness has been linked to lower mortality rates, increased resistance to communicable diseases, and faster recovery from surgery (Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

## IDENTIFICATION OF STRENGTHS

With the knowledge that strengths are a part of understanding the best in people, psychologists have begun attempts at generating systems to identify strengths. One such identification system, the Clifton StrengthsFinder (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2004; Rath, 2007), was developed by Gallup. The purpose of the Internet-based Clifton StrengthsFinder is to assist individuals in identifying their personal talents as a means to increase personal and career successes through utilization of strengths. The Clifton

StrengthsFinder attempts to simulate real-world, spontaneous reactions to situations by providing the respondent with pairs of statements that they must respond to by choosing one statement over the other within a 20-second time limit (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001). The Clifton StrengthsFinder then sorts the statements and reflects the most dominant patterns of behaviors or talents. Upon completion of the measure, the participant receives a printout of five “signature strengths” with a paragraph describing each strength (see author’s strengths, Appendix A). There are a total of 34 themes of the Clifton StrengthsFinder (see Appendix A in Chapter 1 of this volume). The Clifton StrengthsFinder has proven to be both consistent and accurate as a measure of strengths (Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005).

## STRENGTHS PROGRAMMING

With an identification system in place, the next step in investing strengths was to create and implement strengths-based programming. Organized efforts in both creating and executing strengths-based programming are less than 10 years old, and the programs vary greatly. Some of the commonalities include the use of The Clifton StrengthsFinder (described previously) as a measure of strengths and of the *StrengthsQuest* book (Clifton et al., 2007) as a program guide for students. Most programs utilize trained facilitators (university staff, faculty, upper level students) to conduct strengths-enhancing exercises. And many programs attempt to track the potential effects of participation in a strengths-based program on academic achievement and retention. Last, the relationship between facilitators and students appears to be of vital importance (Lopez, Janowski, & Wells, 2004).

Many schools, colleges, and universities are currently in the process of developing or implementing some type of strengths program. For example, at Kansas University (KU), some freshmen students enrolled in an orientation seminar participate in the Kansas University Alliance for Identifying and Mentoring Strengths (KU AIMS) program in which students take the Clifton StrengthsFinder online, are provided with their signature strengths and a paragraph describing their signature strengths, and then attend three standardized strengths-mentoring sessions with trained psychology graduate students who have previously taken the Clifton StrengthFinder (Lopez, Tree, Janowski, & Burns, 2004). In these sessions, the students learn about their individual strengths and how to best utilize these strengths in their everyday lives. Students are given a copy of the *StrengthsQuest* book and complete a variety of homework assignments ranging from emailing friends and family with their strengths to elicit feedback to actively using one strength during the week. In addition, students are asked to write reaction papers on their personal strengths as part of their orientation seminar, which helps to synthesize their strengths-related knowledge.

Similarly, at Baylor University, a large Baptist university, students participate in a strengths-based development program titled Chapel Friday StrengthsQuest Presentation. Freshmen who attend the summer orientation (as well as some parents) take the Clifton StrengthsFinder measure, receive their signature strengths and a paragraph describing their top

strengths, and participate in the fall six-week Chapel Friday curriculum. These Friday sessions, which comprise small groups of students, are led by faculty and staff who have been trained on the StrengthsQuest program. The goal of this program is to help students identify their personal calling or mission associated with their personal strengths. Specifically, one part of the six-week program is a strengths session in which each of the strengths is discussed in detail (E. Hulme, personal communication, November 19, 2004).

One of the most prominent strengths-development programs takes place at Greenville College. Donald Clifton and Gallup partnered with Greenville College to make this school the first college or university to incorporate the Clifton StrengthsFinder in an ongoing study of student and faculty development. The Clifton StrengthsFinder was first administered to freshmen entering Greenville for the 2000–2001 academic year. When students finish the online test, they are given a printout of their top five strengths along with a narrative describing each strength. Each instructor is then asked to devote at least three class sessions to the Clifton StrengthsFinder results. Often class work and assignments focus on the students' application of their strengths. Later in their academic careers (typically their senior year), students participate in an interdisciplinary capstone course, which involves students working in small groups that must reflect a variety of academic majors and a constructive mix of students' strengths. This allows the students not only to be able to use their own strengths, but also to learn about other student's strengths and how to work with those strengths. All faculty and staff utilize the strengths perspective across campus, including extracurricular activities and health services.

## THE BENEFITS OF KNOWING YOUR STRENGTHS

The question I am asked most when talking with people about strengths is “Why do I need to know my strengths?” This is a legitimate question. Why use your strengths if they are of no benefit to you? In terms of quantitative research results on the benefits of strengths, most studies are based on students' self-reports or paper and pencil methods in which students are asked to reflect on their experience with the strengths programming. According to Anderson (2004), patterns of responses to open-ended questions and scaling questions concerning the benefits and influences of strengths-based programming include the following: increased awareness of talents (knowing/understanding talents, communicating about strengths/talents, explaining successes); increased personal confidence (more confident in personal abilities, recognizing how to be a leader based on talents and strengths); increased academic confidence (utilizing strengths in academics, optimistic about academics/careers); increased motivation to achieve (identifying personal motivating factors, willingness to work for goals); increased confidence about the future (clear future goals, realistic ability scaling); increased use of talents (applying talents in academics and in personal life, coping with difficulties based on talents); development of strengths (understand the theory of strengths development, feel responsible to maximize personal talents); improved interpersonal understandings and relationships (noticing talents and strengths in others, communicating with others

better); and other impacts of strengths awareness (valuing self, becoming more authentic).

A recent study conducted by Williamson (2002) with college freshmen enrolled at a private, faith-based university found similar results to those found by Anderson (2004). Students who participated in a strengths-based development group (who received information on their strengths) were compared with those who did not receive the strengths information. Those students in the experimental strengths-based development group took the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment and participated in two one-hour advising sessions with trained strengths coaches. These students, at the end of the first semester, had higher grade-point averages overall than did those students in the control group and met the minimum standards set for first-semester students more often than did those students in the control group.

Linda Cantwell (2006) from Tabor University measured the differences between strengths-based teaching and traditionally taught sections of public speaking. Students in the experimental group were more academically engaged and exhibited higher levels of learning course content and higher levels of performance. In addition, the strengths-based approach generated a series of behavior patterns that are exemplary of what most educators hope to see in their students (i.e., good attendance, punctuality). The main differences in the teaching methods included the following: (a) Feedback for the control group focused on areas in which the students performed least well and areas in which they needed to do the most work in order to improve; (b) In the strengths-based experimental section, students were given an inventory to identify their strengths and talents and were shown how they could apply their strengths to learn about and improve their performance; and (c) Feedback for the strengths-based experimental group focused on what the students did best, what strengths they had that caused their performance to be high in those areas, and how they could intentionally apply their strengths to increase performance (Cantwell, 2006).

In addition to quantitative research, qualitative narrative data from students support these benefits of strengths programming. According to Eileen Hume (personal communication, November 19, 2004), a strengths program leader now at Azusa Pacific University, students report positive outcomes as a result of participating in strengths programming. One student, after completion of the strengths program, stated: "This useful information undoubtedly has given many students on campuses a better understanding of their place in life and perhaps some prospective areas to which they may shape their academic studies." Indeed, my experience with college students was similar. Several students approached me after talking with me about their strengths. One student said, "These strengths are just so me. I can really use them everyday because they are just a part of who I am. I can be successful with them."

## CAPITALIZING ON STRENGTHS

It is evident from the literature that individuals who are able to identify their strengths benefit from this knowledge in a variety of ways. However,

this tells us little about the process of utilizing them. How do individuals apply their strengths after they have identified them?

To explore this, I spent some time in conversations with strengths programming directors discussing what they see in their students. The directors work with students on a daily basis and therefore get an opportunity to really examine what goes on after students identify their strengths. Invariably, these directors identify students who, after identifying their strengths, become excited about this knowledge and build on their strengths daily and in a meaningful way. Taking fictitious people and places, for example, let's assume that John Doe, a freshman at Strengths University, participated in a strengths-development program designed for all incoming freshmen. John, like the other students, took the Clifton StrengthsFinder online and received a printout identifying his signature strengths. He then spent a few weeks in class discussing these strengths with trained instructors and completed both class assignments and homework assignments designed to help him think about his strengths. According to the instructors, John was very enthusiastic about this new information and creatively applied it to his everyday life, utilizing his strengths in several arenas: academics, social endeavors, and extracurricular activities. John was living his strengths each day. The question then arises is this: What made John go from the identification of his strengths to the utilization of his strengths in his daily life? It is from this Point A, the identification of strengths, to Point B, the enthusiastic application of strengths, that captures the notion of capitalizing.

Capitalizing is defined as turning something to one's advantage (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2003). By capitalizing on strengths, individuals turn personal strengths into personal advantages. For example, once a student identifies his or her strengths, the student then incorporates these strengths into daily life, which leads to personal advantages (i.e., academic success, interpersonal confidence, career interests). What might help to explain the capitalizing process? Chickering's (1969) theory of college development and a few positive psychology theories help shed light on this phenomenon. First, related to college student development, Chickering's seven vectors of college student development illuminate the unique developmental tasks of the college student. According to this theory, college students continually rotate among the following tasks: developing competency (confidence one has in one's ability to cope with what comes and to achieve successfully what one sets out to do); managing emotions (manage the key emotions of aggression and sex and broaden their range of emotions); moving through autonomy to interdependence (disengage from parents and simultaneously recognize the importance of others); developing mature interpersonal relationships (increased tolerance and respect for those of different backgrounds, habits, values, and appearance, and a shift in the quality of relationships with intimates and close friends); establishing identity (the swing vector—first vectors needed to help identity develop—identity development leads to the next vectors of change); developing purpose (the individual develops answers not only to the question, Who am I?, but also to the question, Who am I going to be? Not just, Where am I?, but also, Where am I going?); and developing integrity (the clarification of a

personally valid set of beliefs that have some internal consistency and that provide at least a tentative guide for behavior). Chickering's theory asserts that students address these developmental tasks as they move through their college years, and the social function of universities helps to provide students with a sense of direction. Ideally, the students can strive to integrate their vocational needs and personal aspirations with higher order social needs. The individual will conceive him/herself in the broader picture of things. Again, these developmental stages provide a greater degree of understanding for the population of college students in terms of their developmental process, but they do not explain the capitalizing phenomenon.

In terms of positive psychological theories, hope theory, developed by Rick Snyder (1994), is a model that might help to explain capitalizing. Hope theory begins with the assumption that human actions are goal directed (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002). Goals may be short term or long term. In order to reach goals, individuals must generate routes to those goals. This process is labeled *pathways thinking*; it is the perceived ability to generate workable routes to desired goals. For example, for an individual with the goal of getting an "A" in algebra, one pathway might be to study each night for one-half hour. Another pathway might be to get the help of a tutor. The motivational component in hope theory is agency, or the perceived capacity to use pathways to reach desired goals. The agency then is the belief that "I can do this" and "I am not going to be stopped" (Snyder, Lapointe, Crowson, & Early, 1998). This theory states that positive emotions should flow from successful goal pursuits (Snyder et al., 2002). With the premise that all individuals are goal directed, the identification of strengths may assist with goal achievement through greater pathway and agency generation, allowing an individual to capitalize on strengths in an effective manner.

Similarly, self-efficacy may assist in understanding the phenomenon of capitalizing. Self-efficacy centers on people's beliefs in their abilities to produce desired effects (Bandura, 1977) or, simply stated, an individual's belief that he or she can accomplish something and be successful. The beliefs are important in the amount of effort that people choose to exert toward an activity (Maddux, 2002). These expectancy beliefs, as they are labeled, develop over the life span through our performance experiences, vicarious experiences (seeing others do things), imaginal experiences (pretend play), verbal persuasions (what do we tell ourselves; what do others tell us), and physiological and emotional states. Maddux (2002) has reported that individuals with high self-expectancy beliefs are able to perform and manage difficult situations calmly. This theory maintains that when one is equipped with a strong belief in his or her capacity for achievement, there are few limits to what can be accomplished. Therefore, self-efficacy may play a role in the application of strengths, such that students with high self-efficacy may be more confident in their ability to utilize their strengths.

A third psychological theory that may help explain capitalizing is Barb Frederickson's (2002) "broaden and build" model of positive emotions. Simply stated, this theory holds that positive emotions appear to expand people's ability to think of options and build their personal resources. The

first claim of this theory is that positive emotions widen the variety of thoughts and actions that come to mind. For example, positive emotions such as joy and contentment produce more thoughts and actions than negative emotions such as fear and anger (Frederickson & Branigan, 2005). The second central claim of the broaden and build theory is that this widening of options builds people's enduring personal resources. Using this framework, the possible positive emotions gained by individuals through the identification of strengths may enable these individuals to widen their utilization of strengths (i.e., using them across a broad spectrum of areas).

### Interviews with College Students

Although theories help people think about the process of capitalizing, they do not fully explain how an individual goes from identifying his or her strengths to applying these strengths enthusiastically in daily life. There appear to be certain key pieces to the capitalizing framework. Recent research (see Janowski-Bowers, 2006) investigated the missing pieces of the capitalizing phenomenon through interviews of college students who had participated in strengths-development programs in college and who had been nominated by strengths programming directors to meet certain criteria (i.e., could name and describe their strengths, actively used their strengths in one or more area of their life). These students were the "best of the best" in terms of strengths utilization, and it was the hope that through the research, a process of capitalizing might occur.

The interviews, which were tape recorded and then transcribed, included questions related to basic background/demographics, strengths-development programming, signature strengths, application of strengths, capitalizing, and perceived benefits of capitalizing. Several interesting themes arose from the coding of the eight interviews of college students (see Table 2.1).

Three overarching constructs appear necessary for the capitalizing process to occur: (a) continual social support, (b) experiences of success, and (c) the reinforcement of personal strengths. For the capitalizing process to occur, students need to feel continual support, to have some successful experiences (in school specifically), and to feel as if their strengths really do work for them. These three constructs are interrelated and overlapping. They do not occur in a linear fashion, one after the other (see Figure 2.2).

This figure illustrates the equal value held by each of the theoretical constructs, social support, successes, and the reinforcement of individual strengths. It is through the ongoing and cyclical relationship of these constructs that capitalizing may be achieved.

Under each of these constructs are themes that were repeated by many of the participants with specific statements that the participants used in their interviews. For example, under the construct of social support, one of the repeating themes was "I have many supports in my life," meaning that the students (all 100% according to Table 2.1) identified this as being important in their ability to capitalize on their strengths. The specific statements that the participants used to describe this traditional upbringing

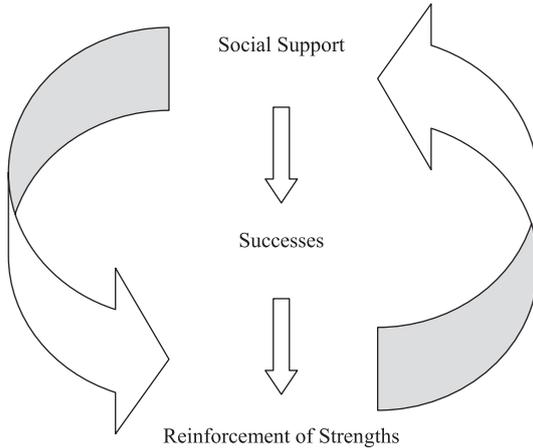
**Table 2.1**  
**Theoretical Constructs, Sensitizing Concepts, and Text-Based Categories**

I. Background of consistent support	
A. <i>Praising their traditional upbringing</i>	87.5%
1. My parents are still happily married	
2. My community was a stable environment for me	
3. My mom is supermom	
B. <i>I have many supports in my life</i>	100%
1. My parents are always there for me	
2. My friends support my life decisions	
C. <i>Spirituality is important to me</i>	100%
1. Spirituality is the strongest source of support for me	
2. My church/spirituality helps define who I am	
II. I have experienced success in life	
A. <i>I have success in academic settings</i>	75%
1. I am active in school activities	
2. I am a student leader	
3. School is fun; I like school	
4. I have always met/exceeded my academic goals	
III. I have accepted my strengths because I am reinforced by them	
A. <i>Strengths as integral to personal identity</i>	87.5%
1. I thought “Oh yea, that sounds like me”	
2. Other people said “That is so you”	
3. I live my strengths because that is who I am	
B. <i>Strengths are useful to me</i>	100%
1. Strengths help me understand others	
2. I understand myself through my strengths	
3. It is helpful to know what you are good at, as opposed to what you are not	
4. I feel more confident using my strengths	

*Note:* Percentages indicate the portion of participants who made similar statements and or used similar phrases as those in the table.

included “My parents are always there for me” and “My friends support my life decisions” (Table 2.1). During the interview, one student stated, “I feel very fortunate that I have the parents that I do—they are very supportive and have always been there with me to help me accomplish all the goals that I have accomplished thus far...”

Regarding the second overarching construct, students’ experiences of success, that was identified based on the interviews, the repeating theme was “I have success in academic settings.” The specific statements that the participants used to describe this included “I am active in school activities,” “I am a student leader,” “School is fun; I like school,” and “I have always met/exceeded my academic goals.” So again, students are reporting that for them to engage in utilizing their strengths (capitalizing), they identify that having success in their school life is important. This may be through sports, leadership, academics, etc. One student in the interview stated, “A



**Figure 2.2. Capitalizing on Strengths**

part of it just stems from I'm one of those people that I like a variety of activity and so, you know, I played every sport that I could, I joined every club that I could, I mean, I did everything from like president of student council to a class officer, I was, you know, I was in four different sports. I did National Honor Society...." Another student talked about how much she enjoyed school: "I love school, I enjoy going to school every day, I enjoy learning about something I love...."

The third construct that seems vital for the capitalizing process to occur is for students to feel reinforced by their strengths. This simply means that students feel strong when they use their strengths, and knowledge of strengths helps them make sense of the world. For example, one of the repeating themes was "Strengths are useful to me." The specific statements that the participants used to describe this included "Strengths help me understand others," "I understand myself through my strengths," "It is helpful to know what you are good at, as opposed to what you are not," and "I feel more confident using my strengths." The students identified that they capitalized on their strengths because they were beneficial to them. In a particularly interesting interview, one student reported, "I think that there are certain things that for some different reason there's things that I'm just not good at, so instead of me spending all my time trying to work on that and improve that, it's much more effective and much more beneficial for me to go and use what I'm good at to excel in that area instead of trying to bring everything up to par, taking those things that are already above par and excelling at those are in the long run much more beneficial, and so I have seen that by using that, that will help me, and I believe that that will help me to excel in those areas throughout the rest of my life...." Another student noted that knowing about strengths helped him to understand other people in his life and how to interact with them: "Knowing other peoples' strengths really helps me in being able to know how I am

going to react around people, or knowing why other people might act the way they do.” What these quotes tell us is that students capitalize on their strengths when they feel as if their strengths (or understanding strengths in general) help them. When the students feel reinforced by their strengths, they are more likely to use them again in the future.

This research provides a solid framework from which to define the process of capitalizing. Capitalizing on strengths can be defined by continual social support, experiences of successes, and the reinforcement of strengths. It is my opinion that these constructs of social support, successes, and reinforcement of strengths are necessary but not sufficient for capitalizing to occur. If one or more of these constructs were missing, the processing of capitalizing might look quite different. For example, let’s suppose a student lacks social supports in his or her life. Without the support of parents, friends, mentors, and/or churches, students may lack a certain amount of positive affect. Pulling from Frederickson’s (2002) broaden and build theory, the lack of positive affect may discourage the student from being open to new ideas, activities, and additional resources. Moreover, I believe that a change in the capitalizing process may be seen with the absence of any of the three constructs of social support, successes, and reinforcement of strengths in which the students identified as being vital in living their strengths.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research on strengths has moved from its infancy stage, the definition of a strength (consistent and near-perfect performance on an activity) to the identification of strengths with the Clifton StrengthsFinder, to the development of a variety of strengths-based programming. Now we are learning more about the process by which individuals actively apply their strengths called capitalizing. Although having covered significant ground, strengths research in general is still a new area within positive psychology and therefore has many avenues open for research. Future research endeavors may seek to conduct more interview studies to consider the current theory of social support, experiences of success and reinforcement of strengths, or to identify additional important factors of capitalizing. Moreover, from a college student development perspective, as well as from a programmatic perspective, it may be important for strengths programming leaders to examine if these factors exist in their students’ lives and to lend resources to help students capitalize on strengths.

Finally, with the expansion of positive psychology theory and practice, there are likely new perspectives that may help to illuminate this process and/or to direct future research. Throughout the research pursuits of strengths over time, one basic paradigm remains constant: Studying what is best and bravest is just as important as understanding what is worst and weakest (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). I believe it is our challenge to investigate what we are good at, what we are passionate about. It seemed to work when we were kids; maybe we can get back to that point.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Discovering and Capitalizing on Your Strengths

Use the exercises below to learn more about your strengths and to share them with your friends, family, teachers, and coworkers.

**Personal Reflections:** Spend some quiet time making a list of your strengths. Write down anything that comes to mind; don't edit yourself. Jot down activities that you have historically been good at, or enjoyed doing. You might even consider writing a personal strengths story in which you tell about a time in your life or an activity you performed during which you felt like you really used some of your strengths. While you are writing, think about the emotions attached to these strengths and the activities.

**Guess your Strengths:** Using Appendix A in Chapter 1 of this volume, look over the Clifton StrengthsFinder strengths and put a mark next to those words that seem to stand out to you as being a possible strength. When you complete the exercise below, you can see how accurate you were.

**Discovering Your Strengths:** In just under an hour, you can identify your signature personal strengths by completing the Clifton StrengthsFinder (<https://www.strengthsfinder.com>) online. This inventory is discussed in this chapter, and it is a wonderful (and scientific) tool that will help you learn more about yourself. It may be helpful to purchase the *StrengthsQuest* book or *StrengthsFinder 2.0* as a manual to provide additional knowledge on strengths.

**Use the Strengths Language:** After identifying your strengths via The Clifton StrengthsFinder, use the strengths language to tell others about your strengths and to talk with them about their strengths as well. Many people find it useful to share a common language with friends and family.

**Making the Most of Your Strengths:** There are numerous strategies for capitalizing on your strengths (see <https://www.strengthsquest.com>). For now, we would like you to capitalize on one strength. Pick one of your strengths and try to use that strength five times a day for five days. Your 25 attempts to capitalize on that strength have the potential to bolster it and create a habit of using that strength more each day.

## APPENDIX A

### Kelly Bowers's StrengthsFinder Results

Positivity  
Maximizer  
Achiever  
Strategic  
WOO

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# Human Strengths: Differences That Bring Us Together

Linda S. Cantwell

**H**is name was Joe. He was male. I was female. He was black. I was white. He was young. I was not. He was a sculpted athlete. I was a sedentary reader. He was a first-generation college student. I was the second generation in my family to attend college. He was raised in a rural farm community of less than one thousand. I was raised in a metropolis of over one million. He was a student. I was an educator. When I asked Joe on the first day of class what he loved and did very well, he quickly responded, “Football. I just love competing and winning; anything other than studying really. How about you?” I responded that I was energized by studying and learning about how to best help college students become the persons they were created to be and realize their potential (Anderson, 2004). How could Joe and I be any different?

I admit that I did not look at the fresh faces of the sixty-five freshmen on their first day of class and immediately select Joe or any other student as someone with whom I would make an instant connection. His initial admission that he loved anything other than studying only served to solidify my initial first impression. I thought we were on separate paths to separate destinations. His “loving football” response suggested to me that his desired path was to lead our college’s football team to a national championship. My path was much different. My path was to continue my scholarly endeavors of reading, writing, and teaching. Simply put, Joe and I were different people on different paths going to different destinations. However, before the second week of the semester had ended, Joe disclosed something deeper and more meaningful that suggested we were headed to the same destination. His disclosure was written at the bottom of his first exam

when he answered the question, “What could your instructor do to positively impact your learning this semester?” His transparently written, one-sentence response was, “Could you please help me pass just one test for just once in my life?”

As I initially read Joe’s request, I was overwhelmed by his honesty. I could not imagine myself disclosing something as personal, introspective, and negative as never having passed a test to a professor as a college freshman. Yet, as I reflected on his transparent disclosure throughout the day, I was profoundly affected by more than Joe’s honest admission of struggling to pass exams.

The many barriers Joe had to cross to write his statement at the bottom of his first exam were clear and profound. The first barrier was Joe’s admission of being a first-generation college student. By requesting help, Joe’s perception that as a faculty member I was concerned about him as a student was in direct opposition to my reading that first-generation college students “were less likely to perceive that faculty were concerned about students and teaching” (Pascarella, Pierson, Terenzini, & Wolniak, 2004). The second barrier was gender; Joe was male and I was female. Tannen’s (1995) work on gender communication suggests that such an admission of weakness (inability to pass an exam) from a male to a female was noteworthy. The third barrier was ethnicity. Joe was black and I was not. We each belonged to a different race “... as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings as dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets” (Disraeli as cited in Hacker, 2003, preface). The fourth barrier was age. Joe was 18 and belonged to what marketing professionals define as the millennial generation, born after 1982. I was defined by the generational marketing experts as an aging baby boomer, born between 1946 and 1964 (Solomon, Marshall, & Stuart, 2008). In short, Joe was a young black man asking an old white woman for help.

Without hesitation, I immediately turned over Joe’s exam that I was holding in my hands and I tallied the number of right answers. He had correctly answered thirty-one out of a possible one hundred; a failing grade by any standard.

Because of Joe’s honest and transparent written disclosure before he had seen his initial exam score of 31% and my desire to help students become the persons they have the potential to be, we met that day on the basis of our sameness. That sameness could be simply stated as we both wanted him to pass the class, although his terminology was “helping him to pass one exam for once in his life” and my terminology was “helping Joe become the person he had the potential to be,” which included learning and demonstrating his learning by passing multiple exams resulting in his passing my Introduction to Public Speaking class. Our simple demographic differences paled in comparison to our deeper value in both wanting him to succeed. Although Joe and I met on the basis of our sameness in the same class with the same goal of passing the class, we grew the rest of the term on the basis of our differentness (Satir, 1998).

## STUDENT LEARNING AND TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

### Growing on the Basis of Differences

Joe was unaware that 2 weeks before his initial exam, when he enrolled in my 11:00 A.M. section of Introduction to Public Speaking instead of the 12:00 noon section, he had become part of an experiment that would bring us together every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for 42 days over 14 weeks specifically to experiment with ways to maximize our unique differences to impact learning. The experiment was designed to answer one question: “Do my students learn best when I focus on what they have done wrong and instruct them in what they need to do to improve, or do my students learn best when I focus on their strengths, how they have applied their strengths to perform well, and how they could further apply their strengths to increase performance (Cantwell, 2006a)? To put it differently, I wanted to know the effects on learning by focusing on their unique strengths or differences and managing their weaknesses or “trying to bring out what God left in, instead of trying to put in what God left out” (Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002, p. 124).

### THE STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING

I taught two sections of the Introduction to Public Speaking course in two distinctive manners. In one section, I used a strengths-based approach and in the other, I used a traditional method of most public speaking courses (DeVito, 2000; Frobish, 2000; Lucas, 1990, 2004). The two groups were treated identically with the exception of the presence of the treatment or the strengths-based approach to teaching.

The strengths-based approach to teaching included three steps. The first step was to identify and affirm the strengths and talents of each student in the strengths-based group by administering Gallup’s Clifton Strengths-Finder (Gallup, 1998) after the students had completed all pretests to control for background and precollege characteristics such as academic engagement, public speaking content knowledge, and speech delivery skills.

The second step involved encouraging and reinforcing Joe and his peers to develop and intentionally apply their strengths and talents in learning and performance activities. More specifically, this included reading their public speaking text, studying for exams, and delivering six speeches during our 42 class sessions together. The process of encouraging students to develop and apply their strengths and talents in learning and performing involved four 50-minute class sessions in which the students (a) shared with each other their five strengths identified through the online assessment, the Strengths-Finder; (b) selected at least one strength that they would intentionally use while reading a chapter in their public speaking textbook; (c) identified at least one strength that they would intentionally use when studying for an examination; and (d) were encouraged to use their strengths more intentionally and consistently as they learned and performed in the Introduction to Public Speaking class (Cantwell, 2006a; Clifton & Anderson, 2002, 2004).

The third step was an ongoing process of interaction between the class and me, both collectively and individually. For example, after the students gave their speeches, I called attention to the ways in which each student performed best. I then helped the students understand how their specific strengths and talents enabled them to perform highly in that particular aspect of the public speaking process. Then I encouraged the students to think of ways in which they could use their specific strengths to make their speeches even more effective (Cantwell, 2006b). In other words, we started the semester by finding out who the students were rather than who they were not (Anderson, 2004), recognizing that each of us have strengths and talents that enable us to do certain things very well.

The strengths-based ( $n = 30$ ) and control ( $n = 30$ ) groups had no noticeable differences in participants. Both groups were exposed to the same course content and had the same examinations and performance expectations. I gave the same lectures and used the same textbook in both sections. The differences in instruction involved three things: (a) When the control group received feedback on speeches, examinations, and other performance activities, I focused on where the students performed least well and where they needed to do the most work in order to improve; (b) In the strengths-based experimental section, students were given an inventory to identify their strengths and talents and were shown how they could apply their strengths to learn and improve their performance; and (c) When I gave the experimental group feedback on speeches, examinations, and other performance activities, I focused on what the students did best and what strengths they had that caused their performance to be high in those areas; I then encouraged the students to apply their strengths even more intentionally to increase performance.

After 14 weeks of the intervention, both groups completed a battery of posttests including the Academic Engagement Index (Schreiner, 2004), Public Speaking Knowledge objective final exam, and a 5-minute informative speech that was videotaped and assessed by independent blind raters using the National Communication Association's speech performance instrument, The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form (Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, & Hulbert-Johnson, 1993).

## THE FOUNDATION OF STRENGTHS-BASED EDUCATION

It is important to understand certain underlying presuppositions of strengths-based education. Strengths-based teaching is not a group of techniques. According to Lopez, Janowski, and Wells (2005),

A strengths-based educational approach should not be confused with fads (that are sometimes atheoretical and often are only loosely associated with an education or psychological research base) that have swept through higher education. (p. 5)

Rather, they assert that strengths-based education is a return to "basic educational principles that emphasized positive aspects of student effort

and achievement, as well as their strengths” (p. 5). The strengths-based approach represents a philosophy of living that involves perceptions, attitudes, self-expectations, aspirations, approaches to learning, efforts to influence and modes of relating that represent a significant departure from many of the traditional approaches in higher education (Anderson, 2004).

Although grounded in historical principles and practices (Binet & Simon, 1916; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hurlock, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1947), strengths-based education is built on two current educational objectives. The first includes the measurement of outcomes/achievement (Carey, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2004), strengths, and determinants of positive outcomes (Lopez, 2005). The second is individualization, which encompasses educational professionals’ thinking about and acting upon the interest and needs of each student while systematically making efforts to personalize the learning experience (Gallup, 2004; Levitz & Noel, 2000). “These practices identify and marshal the academic and psychological resources of each student” (Lopez et al., 2005, p. 4).

Strengths are measured, and students are provided with the results to encourage awareness of their potential (Hodges & Harter, in press). Once students’ strengths are identified, the strengths and their definitions provide a unique opportunity for individualization that allows students to make personalized academic choices and set personal goals based on their strengths. Professional educators are able to assist students with attaining their goals and providing personal, relevant feedback (Gallup, 2003; Lopez et al., 2005).

## THE STRENGTHSFINDER ASSESSMENT

The decision to use the results from any instrument in working with students should be based upon careful examination of the validity of the instrument and the context in which it will be used. The Clifton StrengthsFinder has been used with over 2.5 million people in 20 languages and over 250 thousand college students in 170 colleges and universities nationwide. Within the strengths-based group, the StrengthsFinder instrument was used to identify the talents students brought with them into the learning environment that they could capitalize upon in order to achieve academic success, personal growth, and development (Schreiner, 2006).

The Clifton StrengthsFinder (<https://www.strengthsquest.com>) was developed by Gallup after decades of conducting research in 30 different countries to ascertain individuals’ natural patterns of behavior, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and motivations (Gallup, 2004). This research consisted of conducting over 2 million interviews, which resulted in Gallup being “able to identify over 400 themes of talent” (Clifton & Anderson, 2002, p. 7) using 34 signature themes, or strengths most prevalent in human nature. This online assessment presents individuals with 180-paired items to answers. “Each item lists a pair of potential self-descriptors, such as ‘I read instructions carefully’ and ‘I like to jump right into things’” (Clifton & Anderson, 2002, pp. 285–286). The descriptors are placed at opposite ends of a continuum. An individual chooses the descriptor that most describes

him or her; the responses are sorted by Gallup and presented immediately to the individual in the form of dominant patterns of themes of talent (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Hodges & Harter, in press).

For example, Joe's particular top five themes of talent identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder were competition, empathy, adaptability, developer, and significance:

*Competition:* People especially talented in the competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.

*Empathy:* People especially talented in the empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives or others' situations.

*Adaptability:* People especially talented in the adaptability theme prefer to "go with the flow." They tend to be "now" people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

*Developer:* People especially talented in the developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from these improvements.

*Significance:* People especially talented in the significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized. (Gallup, 2000)

My top five signature themes of talents identified by the Clifton StrengthsFinder include:

*Achiever:* People especially talented in the achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

*Strategic:* People especially talented in the strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

*Input:* People especially talented in the input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

*Learner:* People especially talented in the learner theme have a great desire to learn to and want to continuously improve. In particular, the process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

*Intellection:* People especially talented in the intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions. (Gallup, 2000)

## APPLYING THE AREAS OF GREATEST TALENT TO NEW OR CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Results from the StrengthsFinder provided Joe and me with a common language to talk about strengths, validated and affirmed our experiences, and provided many talking points for us inside and outside of class. We were able to identify each other's natural way of processing information, interacting with people and ways of seeing the world. For example, Joe's initial

self-reported “love of winning” the first day we met not surprisingly was later identified as one of his five top themes and labeled as competition. Reading in our StrengthsQuest text (Clifton & Anderson, 2002) that Joe’s strength of competition not only served as motivator for himself but also as a stimulator for others to be more productive and to reach for excellence encouraged me to find ways to help Joe to learn, develop, and apply his strength of competition in new and challenging situations. Reading the campus newspaper and hearing Joe’s name over the loudspeaker at Saturday football games assured me his competition talent had been well developed and successfully practiced each weekend. The next step was to apply his areas of greatest talent to new or challenging situations, such as earning a passing score on an exam.

Because one of the objectives of strengths-based education is thinking about and acting upon the interest and needs of each student while systematically making efforts to personalize the learning experience (Gallup, 2004; Levitz & Noel, 2000), I incorporated interactive classroom activities to challenge Joe and to find new ways to develop and apply his competition talent in the classroom. More specifically, I conducted an interactive classroom activity using a quiz designed in the format of the television program *Jeopardy!* to assess knowledge of persuasive speaking concepts in our textbook. My experience from teaching the course numerous times was that the persuasive-speaking chapter was one of the most dreaded by students and most difficult to understand for first-semester freshmen.

After deciding to incorporate *Jeopardy!* and announcing it to the class, I asked for volunteers to serve as team captains. Of course, Joe’s hand shot into the air first! The next hand into the air was another male football player who also had the identified strength of competition.

After the game had ended, I asked the students for feedback on the class session. One female student wrote in her reflective paper about the experience,

When I came to class today, I knew I was going to be on someone’s team. I read the chapter and all, but I really didn’t care all that much. But, somehow after the first few questions, Joe started jumping up and down, whooping and hollering, and got the rest of us excited. All of a sudden, I started to care and before I knew it, I started answering questions, got involved and we won. It felt great! I still don’t know how we did it. (Clark, 2004)

Joe had successfully learned, developed, and applied his area of greatest talent (competition) to a new and challenging situation (passing a chapter quiz). Joe had successfully made the connection from his competition talent enabling him as an athlete to lead his team to Saturday football victories to now leading his team in the classroom to *Jeopardy!* victory over persuasive speaking concepts.

The next step was to apply his areas of greatest talent to another new or challenging situation, which was the second midterm exam. Joe scored 47 correct out of a possible 100 possible points. From my perspective Joe had improved, but 47% was still a failing grade. My enthusiasm was well under control and I was not excited to share the scores with the class.

### Growing on the Basis of Our Differences

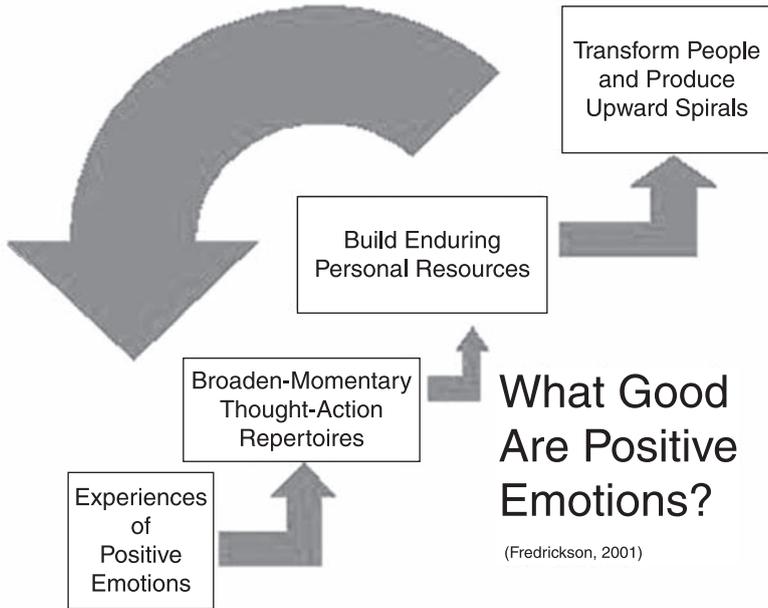
However, because the research seems clear that college freshmen desire almost constant and immediate feedback (Chickering & Gamson, 1991; McKeachie, 2001), and the strengths-based perspective includes not only individualization with students but also feedback on progress (Lopez, 2005), I brought the students' second exam scores with me to class in an electronic spreadsheet format. The names of the students were disguised with a secret code or color name they had chosen at the beginning of the term. I hesitated when the grades were illuminated on the large screen in front of the classroom, fearful of the students' reactions. I did not want to humiliate or embarrass anyone, and truthfully, I was not very pleased with my part as Joe's teacher with his exam progress from 31% to 47%.

I tried not to make eye contact with any of the students as I displayed the scores on the screen in front of the classroom. However, as soon as the scores were on the screen, I saw this big, burly football player with the strengths of competition, empathy, adaptability, developer, and significance shoot up out of his chair with both arms raised above his head and heard him bellow, "Woo hoo! I went up. I went up!"

Again, in that moment, Joe and I grew on the basis of our differentness. We saw his score completely differently. I perceived his score of 47% as a second failed exam. Joe perceived his score of 47% as 16 points higher than his previous score of 31%. He had compared his two scores and, from his competition and developer perspectives, had won. Also, because of his StrengthsFinder (Gallup, 1998) talent identified as developer, he was able to spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from these improvements—hence his raised-arm stance of victory. Joe's different perspective helped me to see progress through the eyes of his developer and competition strengths—strengths that I do not have. He had made progress, and he was grateful for that progress.

### The Power of Positive Emotions

Joe had experienced and I had witnessed what heretofore I had only read about in Fredrickson's (2003) and Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki's (1987) work about positive emotions and problem solving. Fredrickson's (2003) broaden and build theory contends that positive affect leads to greater creativity, flexible thinking, increased negotiation and problem-solving skills, resilience to internal and external stressors, an openness to solutions versus problems, and more productivity and happiness (see Figure 3.1). Joe continued his upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003) with greater creativity, flexible thinking, and increased negotiation and problem-solving skills after the second exam in two ways. First, he scored 63 out of a possible 100 points on his midterm exam in public speaking—a passing grade. Joe had passed an exam for once in his life and, more important to me as an educator, had made upward progress. Second, he developed, applied, and practiced his talent theme of empathy (e.g., the ability of individuals to sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves



**Figure 3.1. The Broaden and Build Model of Positive Emotions**

in other people’s lives and situations) by serving as the catalyst for a class project that began the same day as he received his exam score, the Monday following the Thanksgiving break. I shared with the students an announcement from our dean of students about a young man in our class who was not returning to complete the term. His name was Josh. His car had collided with a semi-trailer truck as he was returning to campus after the break, crushing his leg. When I made the announcement in class about Josh, I heard the students’ heartfelt sighs.

After class, Joe approached me with the question, “What are we going to do about Josh?” I said, “Joe, I do not know. I do not have the strength of empathy. You do. What do you think we should do?”

We decided to send an e-mail and invite the other six students in the class with the identified talent theme of empathy to collectively brainstorm. Through the flurry of messages, the students commented that the only thing that was different about our public speaking class from Josh’s other classes was the fact that we were strengths-based and had a common language to talk about our individual differences. First, we considered buying a typical greeting card for everyone to sign. But one of the students who had the strength of maximizer (e.g., the ability to transform something especially talented into something superb) coupled with empathy suggested sending Josh a giant get well card so that everyone in the class could send a personal greeting. Within a few moments another student with the strengths of ideation (e.g., creativity) and empathy decided that we could each prepare an artistic expression of our five strengths in combination and create a huge greeting card the size of a quilt. She suggested we draw,

diagram, or sketch on a 10-inch square of fabric. Thus, we purchased a 6-foot square of canvas fabric to make a quilt for Josh to send to him at the hospital as a Christmas gift.

First, I painted a grid on the canvas and affixed it to our classroom wall, next to a table of colored permanent markers. Next, I left the classroom unlocked so that whenever the students had time before class, after class, or on weekends, they could stop by and complete their squares with a unique message to Josh. Because the students had decided the only thing unique about our particular class was the fact we had all taken the StrengthsFinder (Gallup, 1998), the project became known as “The Strengths Quilt.”

At first, the students were reticent to produce a creative expression of their signature themes (Anderson, 2003). However, they were able to artistically produce their personal uniqueness and identity as a reflection of their strengths and talents. Thus, every day the quilt became more and more complete. In fact, others on campus who knew Josh saw the quilt and artistically completed squares. For example, our college president, a department chair, and a faculty member in the art department completed the center square with my caricature (see Figure 3.2).

One of my teaching assistants interviewed and videotaped the students as they worked on the quilt. Before long, we had completed a 30-minute videotape full of verbal greetings to Josh to include in the box with our quilt. In addition to the quilt and the videotape, students completed personalized certificates for Josh to redeem when he returned with the assistance of crutches for second semester. Again, those with the identified talent theme of empathy created the five certificates that included (a) carrying Josh’s tray in the cafeteria, (b) carrying his book bag to class, (c) carrying his basket of dirty clothes to the laundry room, (d) driving him wherever he needed to go, and (e) assisting him up the stairs if he had a class on the third floor of an old campus building without an elevator. Again I learned from my students whose strengths were different from mine exactly how their unique talent of empathy brought a class and a campus together.

### THE REST OF JOE’S STORY

As the semester came to a close, Joe continued coming to class every day on time. He continued to turn in his assignments, sit for exams, and deliver speeches as scheduled. My teaching assistant delivered the final exams to my office late one evening. I quickly perused the 65 exams glancing at the scores and then purposefully finding Joe’s.

When I saw Joe’s score, I picked up the telephone and called him. When he answered the telephone he said, “Professor Cantwell, do you know what time it is? It is almost midnight. Do you call all of your students this late?” I assured him that although I had the talent theme of achiever, which identified my behavior to work very long and hard, I did not make it a habit to call all of my students after midnight. However, since I had great news about his final exam score in public speaking, I hoped he would forgive my

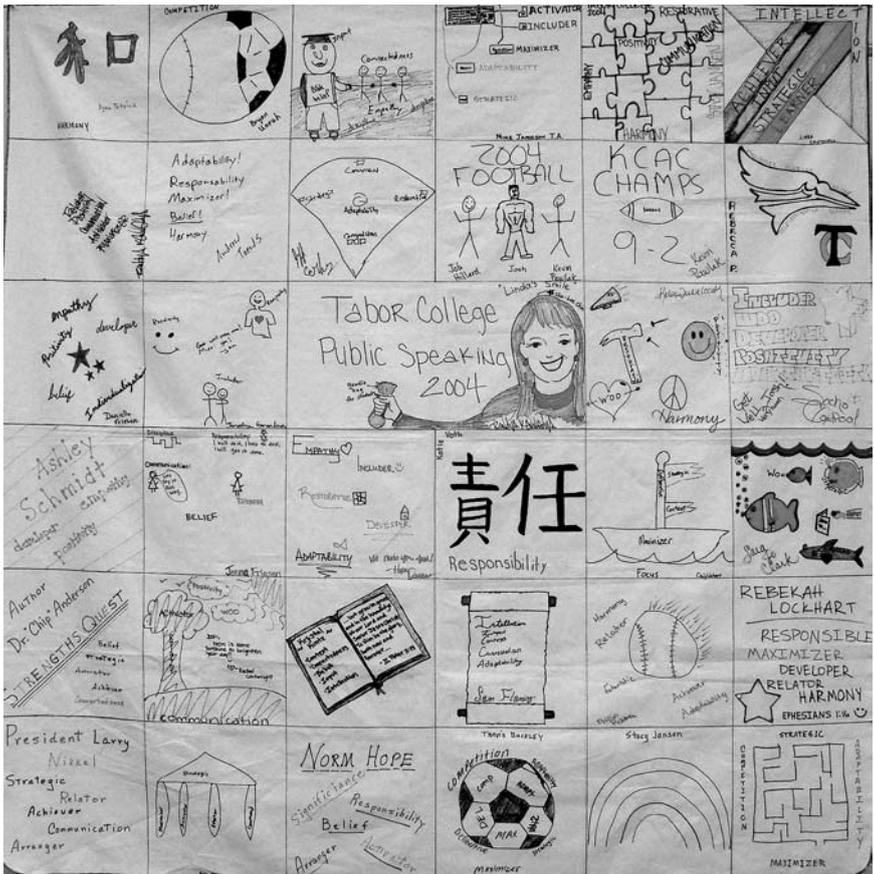


Figure 3.2. The Strengths Quilt

late-night interruption. Then, I asked Joe to guess his final-exam grade. His first guess was 70 out of 100; an improvement of 7 points from his third mid-term exam score of 63. However, I told Joe his score was higher than 70. He second guess was a very sheepishly stated 73. I told Joe his score was higher than 73. So he boldly guessed 75. I said, “No Joe. Higher than 75. You scored 85 out of 100 points on the final exam!” His immediate reply was, “No way. I am coming to your office to see for myself!” It was, and he did.

STRENGTHS AND SELF-AUTHORSHIP

At that moment, right in front of me was what I had been reading about. A strengths-based approach to teaching and learning seemed to generate positive emotions and an upward spiral (Frederickson, 2003) and self-authorship (Kegan, 1994).

Kegan's (1994) concept of self-authorship calls for people to "be self initiating, self-correcting, and self-evaluating rather than depend on others to frame the problems, initiate the adjustments, or determine whether things are going acceptably well ..." (p. 168). Kegan's original research focused on women who had reached very high professional levels and suggests that high-achieving women do not allow themselves to be defined or limited by arbitrary sources of feedback. Rather, they selectively take in data from their environment and then, in an act of self-authorship, write a new story for their future. Tagg (2004) suggests that students moving toward self-authorship embrace "substantive and transformative learning goals at a deep level" (p. 8).

I have personally seen that when students learn about their strengths, they are given a new language and a new confidence with which to begin writing the story of their life. Becoming aware of their strengths helps them rewrite that story so that their past successes and challenges make sense to them. Armed with their new strengths language and strengths-based confidence, these students take up the pen of self-authorship and begin writing a new, more positive future. I stand on this conclusion because I have seen it occur in virtually every student I have taught; not just Joe.

## IRONY IN RESEARCH

Often, irony occurs in conducting research investigations. Sometimes the very best discoveries and the very best insights are not captured by the measurements established at the beginning of the experiment. For example, it was thought to be overly ambitious to address student persistence and attrition in this investigation. However, one of the most remarkable findings was that four out of 30 students in the control group officially dropped out of college before the end of the term, while none of the students in the strengths-based group voluntarily left. Moreover, it is noteworthy that all five students admitted to the institution on academic probation (not meeting entrance requirements), including Joe, were retained in the strengths section, particularly when all three of the students admitted on probation in the traditional section withdrew from college halfway through the term.

After only one week of beginning the experiment, I began documenting behavior patterns of the students in both sections. There were enormous differences between the behaviors of these two groups of students. On the most elementary level, students in the strengths-based class typically came to class on time, while students in the traditionally taught class did not. Beyond tardiness, students in the strengths-based class had better class attendance, while students in the traditional class more frequently missed class. In the traditional class, I frequently had to stop my teaching in order to curtail side conversations and disruptive behavior. I rarely had to say anything about side conversations or disruptive behaviors in the strengths class.

The students in the strengths-based class demonstrated by their behavior patterns that they were more academically engaged. In fact, my teaching

assistants kept logs on such behaviors as the number of questions asked in class and the number of spontaneous contributions to discussions in the class taught with the strengths-based approach versus the class taught with the traditional approach. On average, three times more questions were asked and three times more contributions were made to discussions in the strengths class. Moreover, the level of engagement was more widespread in the strengths section. Virtually everyone participated in discussions in the strengths class, whereas in the control class only a fraction of the students actively participated. These patterns were also evident in how students handled assignments. The students in the strengths class turned in a higher percentage of their assignments, and a higher percentage of their assignments were turned in on time. All of these behavior patterns are direct indicators of academic engagement and are supported by the literature on behavioral academic engagement (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Fincham, Hokoda, & Sanders, 1989).

These differences in academic engagement also were noted outside of class. Records were kept on the number of student-initiated e-mails and how quickly students retrieved feedback on their drafts and results from quizzes. Once again, the students in the strengths class participated outside of class more frequently and in a more timely manner. Finally, records were kept on students who came to the office during office hours, sought advice on their speeches, and attended the examination preparation sessions. Again, it was the students in the strengths section who voluntarily participated more in these academic and educational opportunities. So, it is equally evident that the strengths-based approach generated a series of behavior patterns that are exemplary of what most educators hope to see in their students.

## CONCLUSION

This investigation sought to produce learning within students that was deep and permeating. On the basis of the theory and research of Tagg (2003), I implemented a strengths-based approach to teaching in order to increase students' intrinsic motivation and their academic engagement, resulting in deep learning of course content and performance skills. In fact, I attempted to train students in how to use their strengths to produce deep learning by stimulating their intrinsic motivation and reinforcing their academic engagement. The results demonstrated that when students are taught using strengths-based methods, they learn more content knowledge, they learn to deliver more effective speeches, and they become more academically engaged.

The strengths-based approach to educating has five major components (Anderson, 2005). First, strengths-based educating helps students identify their strengths and affirm those strengths as qualities worthy of investment in time and energy. Second, strengths-based educating trains students to employ their strengths to increase their learning and academic performance. Third, strengths-based educating involves professors disclosing their own strengths and talents and how they use their strengths in the various

aspects of curriculum planning and in-class instruction. Fourth, strengths-based educating involves professors interacting with students on the basis of their strengths, affirming students when they are using their strengths, and encouraging students to complete academic tasks by applying their strengths and talents. Fifth, strengths-based educating encourages all members of the class to provide feedback to one another by pointing out when they see each other being at their best and then noting which of their strengths were at work. In so doing, peers become an extension of the professor in affirming each other as they are using and developing their strengths.

On the basis of the foregoing descriptions of the five key elements within the strengths-based method of teaching, it becomes clear why strengths-based educating would have such a powerful impact on students' engagement as measured by the Academic Engagement Index (Schreiner, 2004). Capitalizing on strengths resulted in higher levels of motivation, greater engagement in the task at hand, personal satisfaction, productivity, and higher levels of performance in objective exams and speech-delivery skills.

There are two additional aspects that might contribute to why strengths-based teaching could lead to students experiencing more intrinsic motivation. Several studies have demonstrated that as students become more aware of their strengths, they experience increased confidence (Anderson, Schreiner, & Shahbaz, 2003, 2004) and increased hope (Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). When individuals experience increased confidence, they experience more pleasure.

The connections between increased hope and confidence and intrinsic motivation seem clear. Hope and confidence are both internally pleasurable experiences. Intrinsic motivation stems from and is based on internal pleasurable experiences. Therefore, as students experience more pleasure in the form of increased confidence and hope through becoming aware of and employing their strengths, they become intrinsically motivated and reinforced by the positive experience of their hope and confidence. Finally, intrinsic motivation increases as a result of experiencing success. It is simply more pleasurable to succeed than to fail. As students are provided with means of increasing their learning effectiveness by applying their strengths, students experience more success. With successful experiences come the intrinsically motivating experience of pleasure resulting from achieving and being successful.

What were initial obvious differences between a professor and her students at the beginning of the semester, such as age, ethnicity, gender, cultural background, and parental education level, were not changed. How could they be? Instead we built on differences that were left in each of us (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999), which were our habits, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs that lead to greater efficiency, unique ways of processing information, ways of interacting with people, and ways of seeing the world identified by the StrengthsFinder (Gallup, 1998). Our new common language of our top-five strengths provided a springboard for our discussions, bridged our initial differences, and sparked students' academic engagement

in ways that positively impacted their learning. Knowing my strengths and my students knowing their strengths made a difference. Moreover,

As educators, our challenge and our joy is helping students move to levels of personal excellence by becoming the persons they have the potential to be. And the marvelous thing about this perspective is that in the process we also move toward our own levels of personal excellence, becoming the persons we have the potential to be. (Dr. E. C. [Chip] Anderson, personal communication, February 15, 2005)

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Discovering and Capitalizing on Your Strengths

In this chapter, we have discussed a measure of human strengths. We encourage you to learn more about your strengths and to share them with family, friends and colleagues.

**Discovering Your Strengths:** In about 30 minutes, you can identify your signature personal strengths by completing the Clifton StrengthsFinder (<https://www.strengthsquest.com>). This inventory was discussed in the chapter. We encourage you to take the inventory, print your Signature Themes Report (found under the Strengths icon after you log in to <https://www.strengthsquest.com>) and share the results with people close to you.

**Gaining Awareness of Your Strengths:** There are numerous strategies for gaining awareness of your strengths (see <https://www.strengthsquest.com>). For now, we would like for you to simply raise your level of awareness of your strengths by printing your Top 5 Certificate from the website (see <https://www.strengthsquest.com>). Click on the Strengths icon and then click again on Top 5 Certificate. Frame the Top 5 Certificate and place it on your desk or outside of your office door. It will serve as a “talking point” for those people you interact with on a daily basis and allow you to gain awareness of your particular five strengths identified by Gallup’s StrengthsFinder. Often those closest to us have a different perspective on what we are good at, and their feedback can be helpful.

**Claiming and Confirming Your Strengths:** In order to receive feedback from those close to you, add your five signature strengths underneath your name before you send your e-mail correspondence. Many programs allow you to add your signature electronically. Adding your five strengths in italic or bold is an easy way for you to invite confirmation from others who may have personally witnessed your particular behaviors, attitudes, and ways of interacting but didn’t know what to call them. You have now given them five words—your signature strengths.

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# If Bad Is Stronger Than Good, Why Focus on Human Strength?

Erin A. Sparks and Roy F. Baumeister

**O**n an episode of *House*, a popular television drama about a brilliant doctor who diagnoses patients with mysterious illnesses, a sick inmate on death row ends up in Dr. House's care. In an effort to uncover the cause of his baffling symptoms, one of Dr. House's staff members, Dr. Foreman, has a conversation with the convicted murderer about his family history. The convict reports that he raised one younger brother on his own. When Dr. Foreman inquires about the brother's health, the convict says, "I haven't heard from him since I went inside. Spent sixteen years with him changing his [diapers]. Can you imagine your whole life being all about the worst thing you ever did?" Dr. Foreman responds, "You killed four people. Somehow making mac 'n cheese just the way he wants kind of loses its significance."

Imagine that a man lives alone and suffers from a cancer that has just come out of remission. Luckily for him, he has a friendly neighbor who faithfully mows his lawn every week and brings him dinner every night. One weekend his 4-year-old-grandson comes to visit and toddles into the neighbor's yard, accidentally crushing her prize chrysanthemums. The sick man opens his window, only to hear his angry neighbor call the boy a spoiled careless brat and make him cry. If the man was called upon to speak on his neighbor's behalf, would her numerous good deeds overshadow her single transgression, or would he describe her as a basically bad person?

Imagine that a person attends a local carnival and an employee at a game booth stops him and offers him the following bet: If the person agrees to play, the employee will spin a roulette wheel that has an equal number of losing and winning pockets. If the ball falls into a losing pocket, the person must pay the carnival employee \$10. If it falls into a winning pocket, the

employee will pay the customer \$10. Would the average person choose to play this gamble? If the potential winnings were increased to \$11, would most people be tempted?

Just as the disillusioned convict expresses to Dr. Foreman, people's lives frequently seem to be all about the worst things they have done, despite the long list of virtuous acts they are able to provide in their own defense. Many people likely would call the neighbor in the above scenario a bad person, no matter how many times that neighbor slaved over a hot stove cooking for the sick man. Few people would risk the pain of losing \$10 for the potential pleasure of winning \$10, and most would decline to play even if the potential winnings were increased to \$11 (making it a favorable gamble).

These examples illustrate the general psychological principle that bad is stronger than good. This principle can be seen as presenting a challenge to the positive psychology movement. In this chapter, we seek to address this challenge: If bad is stronger than good, why focus on human strength? We begin by providing a brief overview of the substantial body of evidence that negative psychological phenomena are more powerful than positive psychological phenomena. We then present several key reasons why the study of human strength has merit, despite (and perhaps even because of) this important psychological reality. Last, we outline how research on self-control (which we view as the master human strength) provides a compelling illustration of why the study of human strength is necessary and beneficial.

## BAD IS STRONGER THAN GOOD

As proposed in an extensive review article by Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001), bad is stronger than good across multiple domains of psychological phenomena. The convict's estrangement from his brother and the neighbor's fall from grace illustrate this principle at work in close relationships. People's reluctance to risk losing \$10 in order to get an equal chance of gaining \$10 is widely taken as indicating the attitude that a loss has more impact than a gain. More generally, when compared with pleasant results, negative outcomes produce effects that are more dramatic and enduring. This principle seems to hold true in a surprisingly consistent and widespread way. In particular, Baumeister et al. reviewed psychological evidence in 15 different domains: reacting to life events, close relationships, other relationships and interactions, emotions, learning, neurological processes, child development, social support, information processing, memory, stereotypes, forming impressions, the self, feedback, and health. Rozin and Royzman (2001) also reviewed a wide range of evidence that negative events have a larger impact than positive events. Baumeister et al. noted that the consistency and strength of the evidence across all domains do vary, but the general trend is very striking. In particular, they were unable to identify a single area in which they could make a compelling case for the reverse pattern, namely one in which good is stronger than bad.

When researchers proposed the bad is stronger than good hypothesis in recent years, it was a broad way to think about psychological truisms that had been present in the literature for quite some time. For example,

Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984) discovered that people weigh losses more heavily than gains when making financial decisions. The gambling game that we described in the introduction to this chapter is perfectly fair. People stand to win as much as they stand to lose. If they played the game multiple times, they would break even. However, most people would not be ambivalent about playing this gamble. They would assign a negative value to losing that would be greater in magnitude than the value assigned to winning. In other words, losing \$10 hurts more than winning \$10 feels good. Tversky and Kahneman (1991) noted that people typically need to stand to win about twice as much as they stand to lose before they are willing to take a gamble. This asymmetry is referred to as loss aversion.

Psychologists have also demonstrated that bad is stronger than good in close relationships. Gottman (1979, 1994) began with the finding that the number of positive behaviors exhibited by members of a married couple was not related to the number of negative behaviors (that is, just because members of a couple demonstrated a high number of positive behaviors, this did not necessarily predict that they would demonstrate a low number of negative behaviors). Of these two apparently independent variables, the number of negative behaviors was a better predictor of relationship satisfaction than the number of positive behaviors. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) also demonstrated that negative interactions between married people were more related to relationship satisfaction than positive interactions. A review of this evidence led Gottman (1994) to suggest that the ratio between positive and negative interactions in a close relationship has to be five to one, or the relationship will likely fail. In other words, a successful relationship consists of at least five times as many positive as negative interactions. This suggests that bad events are close to five times as powerful as good ones.

Negative emotions seem to have stronger and more lasting effects than positive emotions. For example, Thomas and Diener (1990) conducted two different studies that required participants to report on their daily moods over a course of weeks. At the conclusion of each study, participants were asked to estimate what percentage of the time they were in a predominantly positive (versus negative) mood. Participants overestimated the frequency of negative affect versus positive affect. These results suggest that bad emotions might be more easily recalled than good emotions because they are more intense. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) gave participants in psychology experiments surveys about mental health and had them report on their daily emotions for about a month. They found that people who were functioning at optimal levels typically reported positive and negative emotions at a ratio of at least 2.9 to 1. Because bad is stronger than good, people need to experience positive emotions about three times as often as bad emotions.

A substantial body of evidence suggests that bad information has a stronger impact than good information during impression formation (for a review, see Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Researchers have referred to this phenomenon as *positive-negative asymmetry*. Peeters and Czapinski (1990) noted that participants typically demonstrate this effect when they provide overall ratings of people exhibiting good and bad traits or when they

evaluate the morality of people engaging in bad and good actions. Results indicate that bad traits and bad actions influence people's overall evaluations more strongly than good traits and good actions. For example, Hodges (1974) asked participants to rate single-trait descriptions of people (e.g., "An intelligent person" or "A selfish person"). He also asked participants to rate two-trait descriptions of people (e.g., "An intelligent, selfish person"). When a positive trait was paired with a positive trait, participants gave the two-trait description an overall rating that fell halfway between the ratings for the two individual traits. When a negative trait was paired with a negative trait, the overall rating typically was lower than either of the individual trait ratings. That is, two bad traits implied that a person was worse than either of the individual traits, but two good traits implied that a person was only as good as the average of the two. When a positive trait was paired with a negative trait, the overall rating was much closer in value to the rating for the negative trait than the positive trait, indicating the power of bad over good.

Richey, Koenigs, Richey, and Fortin (1975) presented research participants with paragraph descriptions of people's behaviors. Every paragraph contained a combination of sentences depicting bad and good behaviors. In the first segment of the study, paragraphs included five bad behaviors and one, two, three, four, or five good behaviors. In the second segment of the study, paragraphs included five good behaviors and one, two, three, four, or five bad behaviors. In almost every version, the overall rating of the person's character was much lower than the simple average of the ratings of the individual sentences (indicating that bad behaviors were weighed more heavily than good). In addition, one bad sentence had a very powerful effect. Character ratings for people exhibiting five positive behaviors and just one negative behavior were not significantly better than ratings for people exhibiting five positive behaviors and five negative behaviors. These results indicate that the first occurrence of bad behavior can do more damage to somebody's character than subsequent bad actions.

Recent neurological evidence indicates that the brain responds more strongly to bad stimuli than good. Cunningham, Johnson, Gatenby, Gore, and Banaji (2003) presented participants with names of well-known people who were bad (e.g., Adolf Hitler) or good (e.g., Bill Cosby). In one condition, they asked participants whether the names referred to people from the past or the present. In another condition, they asked participants to judge whether the people were good or bad. They observed more activity in the amygdala when participants were responding to bad names versus good names, regardless of whether they were consciously evaluating the valence of the names. Other work has indicated that the amygdala responds more strongly to bad stimuli than good (e.g., Isenberg et al., 1999; Morris et al., 1996). Bartholow, Fabiani, Gratton, and Bettencourt (2001) presented participants with descriptions of people and then had them read a sentence describing an individual behavior that was inconsistent with the prior information they had received (negative sentences were presented for people with positive descriptions, and positive sentences were presented for people with negative descriptions). When the sentence described a negative

inconsistency, the amplitude of event-related brain potentials (ERPs) was greater than when the sentence described a positive inconsistency. These results are consistent with the idea that unexpected bad information causes people to engage in more thorough processing than unexpected good information.

The previous examples are just a sample of the kind of evidence that led Baumeister et al. (2001) to conclude that the bad is stronger than good principle is a fundamental psychological truth. These authors suggested that people might have adapted to respond more strongly to bad events than good ones. (For example, although most affect regulation strategies are aimed at improving one's emotional state, people have far more strategies for getting rid of bad feelings than for inducing, increasing, or prolonging good ones; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994.) When people miss out on something good, they may experience regret and fail to reap the benefits of the positive event. However, when people ignore signs of danger, they often are placed at risk for injury or death. People who are particularly good at responding to bad things quickly and intensely might pass on their genes more frequently than those who are not.

#### WHY FOCUS ON HUMAN STRENGTH?

One of us once held a job outside of academia and was notorious for her messy desk. When her supervisor would introduce her to new people or wander into her office, inevitably, some comment would be made about the disarray of her work space. Admittedly, her desk occasionally did look like it was not quite possible that a real person actually worked there. However, she felt competent, successful, and at ease with her coworkers and frequently received praise for her work. Her coworkers noted that she was particularly good at picking up new software skills and getting to the root of chronic organizational problems that had been challenging the team for some time. The mess never seemed to get to the point where it hindered her ability to excel at her job. However, she increasingly became convinced that her boss could speak more accurately about how tall her stacks of paper were than about her latest report or the new software skills she had acquired. Eventually, when she knew her boss would be stopping by, she found herself spending her spare moments straightening up her desk instead of getting extra work done.

Marcus Buckingham, an advocate of putting your strengths to work and a leading expert on the principles of good leadership and employee success, spent years working for Gallup and conducted interviews with employees across the country. In a talk at the Wharton Leadership Conference, Buckingham observed that managers have become consumed with repairing weakness. When most employees have evaluative meetings with their bosses, they come expecting to hear about what they are doing wrong and how to fix it. However, he noted that managers who spend more time focusing on how to profit from what each employee does well typically have the most productive and successful groups of employees. He wrote a book with Donald Clifton titled *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001), and he

hopes to start a revolution of sorts in the management world (“Good managers focus,” 2005). Buckingham’s sentiments seem to make a certain amount of common sense. When one of us reorganized her work space, it still did not look quite as perfect as the pristine desk of the employee in the next cubicle. She did not have a natural ability to keep things filed well, and even at her most organized her boss still called her the messy one. The best she could hope to achieve in this domain was mediocrity. Perhaps her professional team would have benefited if she’d spent her extra time doing what she did well.

A similar revolution has begun in the world of psychological research. In his Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association in 1998, Martin Seligman noted that by studying how to build human strength and promote flourishing and success, psychologists also might uncover new ways to prevent illness before it arrives. In particular, Seligman mentioned optimism, courage, work ethic, future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, the capacity for pleasure and insight, and social responsibility as positive traits that should be studied (Seligman, 1999).

In a special issue of the *American Psychologist*, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) presented their case for the positive psychology movement. In particular, they outlined positive psychology as the study of positive emotions and experiences, positive personal traits, and positive institutions and citizenship. More succinctly, positive psychology has been defined as “nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues” (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216). The study of human flourishing is certainly nothing new, but the supporters of the movement are calling for an end to unevenness in the field. Linley, Joseph, Harrington, and Wood (2006) pointed out that positive psychology is in part a shift in focus rather than a new science.

Supporters of the positive psychology movement have since made progress in providing a framework for researchers to study human strengths and virtues. In 2004, Peterson and Seligman published a book titled *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. This handbook represents an effort to establish a system to classify and measure positive strengths consistently. Peterson and Seligman divide 24 important human strengths into six broad categories of virtue: wisdom and knowledge (cognitive strengths), courage (emotional strengths), humanity (interpersonal strengths), justice (civic strengths), temperance (strengths that protect against excess), and transcendence (strengths that provide meaning).

The recent development of this taxonomy of strengths raises the obvious question that we will address in the remaining portion of this chapter: If bad is stronger than good, why focus on human strength? That is, if psychological evidence overwhelmingly indicates that bad emotions, bad interpersonal interactions, and bad life events have a larger and more lasting impact on people than their positive counterparts, why not spend more time studying the bad than the good? To be sure, psychologists have taken this approach. When 17,000 articles were reviewed in major psychology journals, 69 percent dealt with negative topics (Czapinski, 1985). More recently, Rand and Snyder (2003) found that when all psychology

publications in a major database (PsycINFO) were coded for content, articles focusing on negative topics outweighed the positive by two to one. Baumeister et al. (2001) suggested that the imbalance might be due to the fact that new faculty members needing a good publication record find it beneficial to study things that produce the strongest effects. If the effects of the positive are weaker than the effects of the negative ones, then more sensitive measures are needed to detect them. Studying bad things is the easier, safer route toward tenure.

We review several reasons why the study of human strength might be a crucial (rather than subordinate) part of the field of psychology, despite (and even because of) the asymmetry between bad and good. We do not mean to diminish or undermine the importance of the breadth of high quality work that has focused on what most people term the bad. Rather, we seek to present findings that make a compelling case for the validity and importance of studying human strength, despite the apparent imbalance in the field.

### Most People Are Doing Just Fine

Recently one of us had a conversation with a close friend who said, “You know, this might sound a bit cheesy, but people are just great. Every person that I talk to has something new and interesting to say, and everybody’s so happy. It’s just such a joy to get to talk to people.” Statistically, the odds are that the average person has coworkers, friends, or family members who have their share of problems. Some of them might even suffer from various forms of mental illness. However, if people are asked to consider everybody they know as a whole, most people will not report that their friends are slugging through each day with little hope of surviving. The typical human experience is not a hideous journey that begins with birth and only ends when death is kind enough to relinquish a person from the tortuous grip of life.

One might think that this is because we are relying on the typical modern American experience, and life in America is arguably exceptionally comfortable. But international data support the same positive conclusion. In an article appropriately titled “Most People Are Happy,” Diener and Diener (1996) reviewed many national polls that consistently revealed that people in most countries reported that they fell above the neutral midpoint. In addition, most people said they were satisfied with specific domains of life, such as their career, their marriage, etc. These authors observed that psychologists should be studying why so many people are happy and so resilient. Bad events presumably are taking place every day. On the whole, however, people recover from them. The authors did not mean to minimize the presence of unhappiness and mental illness or suffering where it does exist, but they made the important point that the general trend is toward happiness.

Given that as a whole people seem to be doing fine, a psychology limited to the study of pathology and weakness seems to represent the entirety of the human condition poorly. If psychological research only focuses on bad

events, bad emotions, or how to identify and repair illness, it has little to say to a large portion of the population. A single bad event might be stronger than a good one, but good still seems to be winning, most likely by sheer force of numbers. Although there is an asymmetry between bad and good in terms of the impact of individual events, the asymmetry goes in the other direction in terms of the overall human state. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) made this point when they noted that just as people suffering need a way to end their pain, normal people need to know how to achieve excellence and maximize their human experience. Since the data suggest that so many people are doing just fine, the overall human condition will be most improved if psychology is not restricted to the study of how to fix the people who are not.

### Some of the Bad Is Overrated

Recently, one of us had a close friend who had to switch jobs because the grant funding for her position ran out due to budget cuts at the national level. She had been working at her job for about 7 years, and over the course of those years, she had poured all of her time, energy, and emotional strength into her position. Her job required her to work long overtime hours, but she worked these hours because she felt personally committed to what she was doing. Her professional life consisted of a very small team of people working closely together. Intense bonding had taken place while they leaned on each other for support in the midst of the stress of the extreme workload. They saw each other socially outside of the workplace, and occasionally they would play practical jokes on each other to relieve the stress. She often described her place of work as more of a family than a job. When she found out that she would be leaving after 7 long years, she could not imagine coping with this blow. Yet at a recent lunch date, she reported that she was doing just fine. She was enjoying her new job, and she found she rather liked having her day end at 5:00 P.M. instead of being forced to take her work home with her. She was experiencing a resurgence in her relationships with the members of her immediate family; they were doing things together again instead of merely cohabitating in the same house. She expressed surprise at how seamlessly she had adapted to the change after 7 long years.

Most people probably have experienced something similar to the change that our friend underwent. They have dreaded an upcoming event and struggled to imagine surviving or escaping unscathed. Then, to their surprise, they take a look at their lives and realize they are doing just fine. This example illustrates one important finding in the psychological literature in recent years. People often grossly overestimate how intensely they will react to future events. This overestimation is actually present for both good and bad events, but it particularly seems to be present for bad events. People cannot imagine how they will be able to cope with something unfavorable, but as it turns out, psychological immune systems do pretty well (Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005; Wilson, Meyers, & Gilbert, 2001).

In particular, people seem to be very bad at predicting their own regret. Much of what people decide to do is determined by the regret they anticipate feeling if things go a certain way. Gilbert, Morewedge, Risen, and Wilson (2004) demonstrated through a series of studies that people thought they would experience more regret if they missed out on something by a very small margin than if they did not even come close. For example, people thought they would experience more regret if they missed a subway train by 30 seconds than if they missed it by 10 minutes. As it turned out, people grossly over-predicted the degree of additional regret they would experience for the tragic near miss.

Recent evidence also suggests that loss aversion (as described previously in this chapter) exists more in people's predictions of experiences than it does in people's actual experiences. In one study, Kermer, Driver-Linn, Wilson, and Gilbert (2006) paid psychological participants five dollars and then had them play a gambling game where they stood to either lose or win money. They had half of the participants actually play the game, whereas the other half predicted how they would feel if they either won or lost. Interestingly enough, the predictors anticipated about the same amount of happiness upon winning as the experiencers reported feeling. However, the predictors anticipated much more sadness upon losing than the experiencers reported feeling. These results led the authors to conclude that loss aversion is an affective forecasting error. That is, people incorrectly assume that they will experience financial losses more intensely than equivalent gains. These studies obviously do not rule out the possibility that financial losses might be experienced somewhat more intensely than gains, but they certainly provide some initial evidence to suggest that the actual asymmetry might not be quite as striking as people think it will be.

Certainly, most of the evidence for the bad is stronger than good hypothesis exists in actual experiences, and not predictions about actual experiences. We do not mean to imply that bad is stronger than good only in people's imaginations. However, at least in some specific domains, people do seem to overestimate the impact of the bad more than they overestimate the impact of the good. This forecasting error is important to consider because particularly misguided beliefs about the true impact of bad might lead people to behave in a way that doesn't serve to maximize their own happiness. A science of human resilience and strength possesses the potential to correct some of these forecasting errors by refocusing people's attention on something that is frequently underestimated.

### It Takes a Great Deal of Good to Counteract the Bad

As Baumeister et al. (2001) pointed out in their review article, the bad is stronger than good hypothesis does not in any way require a pessimistic approach to the study of psychology. While a single bad event is more impactful than a comparable good event, good events can still serve to counterbalance or offset the effects of bad events. However, because bad is stronger than good, people need to generate a higher quantity of good than bad to win out by sheer force of numbers. In this sense, the study of

human strength and virtue makes sense precisely because bad is stronger than good, not merely in spite of it. Gottman's (1994) ratio illustrates this principle at work in close relationships. While Gottman found that negative behaviors had a more powerful effect on relationship satisfaction than good ones, he also found that positive interactions had the power to offset the effects of the bad ones if they occurred in enough abundance. In particular, the evidence suggested that relationships could be successful if they consisted of at least five times as many positive as negative interactions. While the prevention and repair of bad interactions certainly warrant study, bad interactions cannot be prevented or repaired with a guarantee. When they do take place, a relationship will suffer if there are not five times as many good ones waiting in reserve to counterbalance the effects. If human strength and virtue can be fostered to the point where good is generated in large enough supply, the good can overcome the negative effects of the bad.

The emotion ratio proposed by Fredrickson and Losada (2005) illustrates the same point. As discussed, these authors found that mental health was associated with people who experienced positive emotions at least three times as frequently as they did negative emotions. No matter how much psychologists study people's strategies for avoiding the onset of bad moods or bringing an end to bad moods, it is unlikely they will ever successfully identify the cure for bad moods (though this work would turn more than a few heads). When bad moods arrive, they better happen on the backdrop of a predominantly positive emotional life. Bad is too much stronger than good not to attack it from all sides, both through the prevention and treatment of the bad and the promotion of the good.

In a recent update on the progress of the positive psychology movement, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) reported on their efforts to stage happiness interventions. These studies were driven by the goal to promote more positive aspects of people's daily lives. The authors conducted week-long Internet studies from a website for one of Seligman's books. Participants completed happiness exercises for a period of a week, and the researchers followed up with them after one week, one month, three months, and six months. Three of the interventions worked: *Using signature strengths in a new way*, *Three good things in life*, and *Gratitude visits*. Participants who promoted strengths in a new way took an inventory of their character strengths, identified their top strengths, and tried to use them in new and different ways every day. Participants in the three good things in life group spent time every day writing about three things that went well. In the gratitude visits group, people spent time writing a letter to somebody who had done something nice for them. One month later, participants in a control condition were no happier than they were at the beginning of the study. However, people in the three intervention groups were happier and less depressed than they were at baseline. Obviously, the mechanisms responsible for these effects are not fully understood, and not all of the attempted interventions were successful at bringing about lasting improvements in happiness. However, these studies do suggest that promoting and generating the positive on a daily basis can increase happiness.

Bad may be stronger than good, but this fact should encourage people to cultivate as much positivity as possible.

### Good Prevents the Bad

We have reviewed some evidence that suggests that people need a considerable quantity of good events in their lives in order to combat the effects of the bad. However, we would be remiss not to mention another crucial point that advocates of the positive psychology movement have made. Cultivating positivity is both about winning a war against the bad after it arrives and serving as a primary prevention of the bad. As Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) pointed out, psychologists have recently begun to pay increased attention to primary prevention (i.e., eliminating the onset of problems, as opposed to treating them after the fact). In addition, researchers who study effective prevention have learned that certain human strengths or virtues (such as courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope honesty, perseverance, etc.) seem to reduce the odds that people will suffer from depression, substance abuse, outbursts of aggression, and other negative life outcomes. In this sense, it is very artificial to pit the study of preventing or repairing the bad against the study of promoting the good.

Fostering human strength might serve as primary prevention of the bad in two different key ways. First, as Harris and Thoresen (2006) pointed out, increasing positive human traits and behaviors can guarantee that bad traits and behaviors will be absent because it is difficult for both to be present at once. These authors cite emotions as one example of this point. It is difficult to experience upsetting and detrimental thoughts if one is experiencing positive thoughts. As discussed previously in this chapter, Baumeister et al. (1994) noted that people work much harder to end bad moods than to prolong good moods, presumably because bad moods have greater impact than good ones. But, as Harris and Thoresen argued, if people can put themselves in a good mood and stay in a good mood, it is difficult to be in a bad mood at the same time. These authors also noted that this theme has emerged in other types of research as well, such as work on substance use. Correia, Benson, and Carey (2005) have examined intervention strategies for people with substance abuse problems. In one study, undergraduates were asked to spend four weeks monitoring how much time they spent exercising and behaving creatively (alternative positive behaviors). Despite not being told specifically to try to reduce substance use, in follow-up sessions in the lab at the end of the month they reported less frequent substance use than they did during the 28 days prior to the beginning of the study. For domains in which the bad is incompatible with the simultaneous experience of the corresponding good, the promotion of good might reduce the frequency of the bad.

Second, apparently temporary positive psychological phenomena can have long-lasting effects that act as a buffer against a wide range of different negative life outcomes. For example, positive emotions might have benefits that last beyond their temporary experience. Fredrickson (1998,

2001) reviewed evidence in support of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. She suggested that while negative emotions are temporary adaptive responses that allow people to deal with immediate threats, positive emotions evoke broadened mindsets. In particular, they broaden people's thoughts, actions, and attention and build up physical, intellectual, and social resources that have long-lasting benefits. Positive emotions lead to original and creative thinking that enhances people's coping mechanisms long term and builds up psychological resilience to bad events. Danner, Snowdon, and Friesen (2001) studied the autobiographies of 22-year-old nuns and counted instances of positive emotions. From ages 75 to 95 years, a nun's risk of death was linked to the amount of positive emotional content in her autobiography at age 22. The stronger the positive emotional content, the longer a nun was likely to live. This work obviously does not isolate the positive emotions as the cause of the good health, but results suggest that positivity could have long-lasting preventative benefits.

As Tedeschi and Kilmer (2005) noted, the mental health field has experienced a recent growing interest in assessing human strength and resilience as buffers against the onset of problems. For example, optimism, the ability to find meaning in events, and a belief in personal control have been associated with better psychological health and a better course of physical health among patients diagnosed with illnesses and people exposed to threatening events (see Taylor, 1983; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000, for examples). Optimism has also been linked to success in school, work, sports, and relationships. Optimistic people are also less at risk than other people for depression (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Seligman, 1991).

In general, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that primary prevention works quite well. Durlak and Wells (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of a broad range of work on the primary prevention of behavioral problems in children and teenagers. A meta-analysis is a statistical technique that allows researchers to examine results from a large number of different studies instead of just one. Durlak and Wells concluded that across studies, children in primary prevention programs exhibited a reduction in behavioral problems by about 59% to 82% when compared with control groups.

## THE STUDY OF SELF-CONTROL STRENGTH

Self-control (or self-regulation, which we will use interchangeably) refers to people's ability to change themselves. Human beings seem to be distinct from animals in their unique capacity to regulate their own behavior. People are not slaves to their own impulses. Unlike more primitive beasts, humans can demonstrate very complicated and unpredictable patterns of behavior because they can alter their very selves. Self-control is typically studied in four main domains: impulse control, control over one's thoughts, affect or mood regulation, and control over the processes that define the quality of one's performance. The majority of self-regulation involves putting a stop to an unhealthy impulse (Baumeister et al., 1994).

Almost everybody can recall a time when he or she felt his or her hands reaching toward a big piece of chocolate cake or some other tempting food product packed with empty calories. Sometimes (often more frequently than not), self-control fails, but other times, people are able to hold their hands back and refrain from partaking in the unhealthy indulgence. Smokers who successfully quit exhibit extreme self-control, and students who forego a party or their favorite television show to study for a test execute it successfully as well.

Because we believe that self-control lies at the core of most human strengths, we give special attention to the study of self-control here. The program of research that we present demonstrates how studying human strength can serve as an effective response to the power of the bad in people's daily lives. Results reveal that self-control can act as a buffer against a wide range of negative life outcomes, but self-control relies on a limited resource that can be easily exhausted and make it difficult for people to continue to self-regulate. However, self-control strength can potentially be improved over time, making people less susceptible to the strong effects of the bad events that take place when self-control resources run low.

### Self-Control as the Master Virtue or Strength

In *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (2004), self-control is listed as one of the 24 human strengths. Specifically, it is one of the four strengths that make up the broad classification of temperance, one of six main virtues. Here, we adopt the perspective on self-control presented by Baumeister and Exline (1999, 2000). That is, we conceive of self-control as a master virtue or human strength that is a necessary prerequisite for most other strengths and virtues.

Consider the perspective of Baumeister and Exline (1999, 2000) in light of the six virtues presented by Peterson and Seligman (2004): wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Self-control seems to be intimately tied to wisdom and knowledge. As Baumeister and Exline noted, living a life characterized by prudence, foresight, and wisdom requires the ability to choose worthwhile, courageous, and appropriate actions over risky, impulsive, or cowardly ones. It is nearly impossible to make these choices without the ability to hold the long-term benefits in higher regard than the short-term benefits. This process always involves some element of self-control. Courage is forcing oneself to take a specific action despite being afraid. When a stimulus in somebody's environment triggers a flight response, a person needs self-control to override that impulse and force oneself to persevere despite the temptation to give up. Humanity includes the strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence. When people temper their anger, hold their tongue, or force themselves to behave graciously when they are out of patience, they are relying on their self-control resources. The civic strengths that comprise justice also rely on self-control. As Baumeister and Exline argued, living in community involves some element of sacrificing short-term self-interests for the greater good. If a man is running low on

cash and he knows a way to steal a loaf of bread without getting caught, it would certainly be in his immediate interest to do so. However, if he broke the rules, the society would begin to fall apart and he would not be acting as a fair citizen. Without self-control, the man would not be capable of restricting his short-term hunger impulses to abide by the rules and regulations of the group. Temperance is clearly related to self-control, as it is listed as one of the strengths that comprise this virtue. Transcendence (finding deeper meaning) includes the strengths of gratitude and spirituality. Gratitude requires the overriding of selfish impulses in order to force oneself to reflect on what others have done, and spirituality is inextricably linked to self-discipline.

### Self-Control Works Like a Muscle

As stated previously, Baumeister et al. (1994) identified that self-control has typically been studied in the domains of emotion regulation, thought control, impulse control, and performance management. These researchers reviewed the self-control literature and observed that self-control seems to work like a human muscle. That is, self-control relies on a centralized limited resource that can be exhausted with use. This idea fits the lay conception of “willpower.” When this limited resource model of self-control was put to the test in the laboratory, results revealed that self-control does indeed seem to rely on a limited resource. Participants who had to complete initial self-control tasks, such as suppressing emotional responses to movies, performed more poorly on follow-up self-control tasks than those who did not have to exert self-control on the initial tasks (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). One study required participants who were hungry to resist eating chocolate chip cookies placed right in front of them. Instead, they had to eat radishes. When compared with people who didn’t have to resist eating the cookies, these participants gave up much more quickly on follow-up tasks that were frustrating and required perseverance (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). These authors adopted the term *ego depletion* to describe the state of diminished self-regulatory resources. Depletion effects have been found across different self-control domains. That is, all types of self-control seemed to rely on the same generalized resource (for review, see Baumeister, Schmeichel, & Vohs, 2007).

Follow-up studies further clarified these findings and ruled out some obvious alternative explanations. A common suggestion was that participants were merely giving up on the second task because they were demoralized with respect to their confidence in their own self-control abilities. Wallace and Baumeister (2002) tested this theory by asking participants about their perceptions of their own self-control abilities after the first task. These perceptions were completely unrelated to their performance on the second task. In addition, giving people false feedback about how well they did on the first task didn’t affect performance on the second task. Participants also could have been refusing to try on the second task because they were bored with the study or frustrated with the experimenter for making

them do too many unpleasant things. Presumably, participants come into the laboratory thinking they are only obligated to give the experiment a certain amount of their own effort and energy. Muraven et al. (1998) demonstrated that when some participants were given unpleasant first tasks that didn't require self-control, they did not demonstrate impaired performance on the follow-up tasks. Muraven, Shmueli, and Burkley (2006) demonstrated that impaired performance on follow-up tasks may have reflected an effort to conserve limited self-control resources. That is, participants were not completely out of self-control resources after the first task and rendered unable to self-regulate. Rather, much like a tired athlete who recognizes he is running low on energy, they acted to conserve their precious self-control resources.

Additional studies revealed that making controlled and effortful choices relies on the same resource (Baumeister et al., 1998; Vohs, Baumeister, Twenge, Schmeichel, & Tice, 2006). Participants who had to make hard decisions performed worse on follow-up self-control tasks across all domains. In addition, exercising self-control changed how people made decisions. To list some examples, when compared with control groups, depleted participants were more likely to opt out of making a difficult choice, choose extremes instead of more nuanced compromises, and violate assumptions of rational choice (Amir, Dhar, Pocheptsaya, & Baumeister, 2006).

More recent work has suggested that this limited resource model of self-control is not just a metaphor. There might be at least some biological component to self-control. Gailliot et al. (2007) demonstrated that participants forced to exert self-control on an initial task had lower blood glucose levels than control group members. In addition, blood glucose levels were linked to performance on the follow-up self-control task (the lower the glucose levels, the worse the performance). When participants had a drink of lemonade with sugar in between the two tasks, depletion effects on the follow-up task disappeared. Giving participants a drink of lemonade that tasted the same but contained Splenda did not produce the same result, ruling out some alternative explanations for these results (such as increased motivation due to receiving a tasty reward). Glucose is the brain's energy. It is not surprising that there is some physiological component to ego depletion, though we do not suggest that glucose levels represent the entirety of the depletion effect.

### Strengthening the Self-Control Muscle

Even if human strengths could act as a buffer against bad events, supporters of the positive psychology movement would have little reason to invest so much time and effort into their study if they were static forces that could not be improved. The laboratory results reviewed in the preceding section confirmed that self-control seemed to work like a muscle that could become very quickly exhausted with use. An important implication of this model was that self-control potentially could be strengthened like a muscle over the long term. Initial laboratory results provided support for the suggestion that self-control strength could be fostered. For a thorough

review of some of this work, see Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, and Oaten (2006). Muraven, Baumeister, and Tice (1999) brought participants into the lab and put them through a typical depletion study. First, participants held onto a handgrip to get a baseline measure of their stamina. They next had to engage in a thought suppression task. Following this, they performed the handgrip task again. On average, participants performed worse on the final handgrip task than they did initially. Some of these participants were then asked to engage in self-control exercises for two weeks, and others were not. When all participants were brought back to the lab for a procedure that was essentially the same as the initial one, the participants who had engaged in the self-control exercises did not suffer the same degree of impairment on follow-up self-control tasks when compared with the control group. Obviously, people are expected to get better at certain tasks with practice, but the self-control exercises that participants completed in the laboratory were different than the exercises they completed over the course of the two weeks. Participants seemed to be strengthening the central self-control muscle. There were some unanswered questions, and not all of the self-control exercises that the authors tried worked. However, these studies did provide some initial evidence that self-control can be strengthened over time.

In further studies, Oaten and Cheng (2006a) gave some participants a 2-month long exercise program. The participants who took part in the program improved on self-control tasks in the laboratory in other domains. Perhaps more importantly, they reported that they were eating better, keeping up with household tasks, consuming less unhealthy substances, etc. Oaten and Cheng (2005) also demonstrated that students suffer from self-control breakdown near exam time. Most people can probably recall a time when they had a huge final exam to study for and they started smoking again, made an impulsive purchase, snapped at their friends, or cheated on their diet. These authors suggested that people have an instinctive fight or flight response to stressful situations. When people have to override the natural flight response to force themselves to study for long hours, they use up limited self-control resources. Oaten and Cheng (2006b) staged an intervention and attempted to reduce the effects of stress at exam time. They put one group of students through a rigorous daily study schedule. Compared with the control group, these students experienced much less stress at exam time. They also reported a host of self-control successes, such as eating healthier, demonstrating better emotional control, smoking less, and consuming less alcohol. Not only that, when they were brought into the laboratory, they performed better on self-control tasks unrelated to academic performance.

Attempts to improve self-control strength long term have produced some mixed results, and they do not indicate that people are necessarily increasing baseline self-control abilities. Some results do indicate, however, that people can make themselves less vulnerable to the effects of exhausting their limited self-control resources. In all these studies, effects were observed across self-control domains, indicating that some core willpower muscle can be strengthened.

## Benefits of Improving Self-Control Strength

The findings we have reviewed thus far reveal that self-control (the master human strength) works like a muscle that can be built up over time. Because self-control can be improved, researchers have reason to study what self-control brings to the daily struggle against bad events. Results indicate that self-control acts as a form of primary prevention against an extremely wide range of negative life outcomes.

Ego depletion has been linked to indulging in unhealthy impulses. In the laboratory, dieters ate more after being depleted (Vohs & Heatherton, 2000), drinkers had more alcohol (Muraven, Collins, & Neinhuis, 2002), and new couples engaged in more sexual behavior (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007). Vohs and Faber (2007) also demonstrated that people depleted of self-regulatory resources engaged in more impulsive spending. In short, when people are at full self-control capacity, they are less likely to suffer from the negative effects of engaging in these tempting but unhealthy behaviors. When self-control resources are depleted and people lose this buffer, the powerful effects of these bad events are more likely to overwhelm the good in people's lives.

Self-control has also been linked to close relationship success. People who scored higher on a scale containing questions about their self-control abilities reported that they had better intimate relationships (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Finkel and Campbell (2001) demonstrated that conflicts and fights were resolved more productively by people who had high self-control abilities. In addition, when self-regulatory resources were depleted, individuals were less likely to respond to destructive behavior in an accommodating way. Recall that Gottman (1994) demonstrated that because bad interactions in close relationships are so powerful, good interactions need to outnumber the bad by five to one. Self-control resources appear to enable people to minimize these bad interactions and improve relationship satisfaction.

Participants depleted of self-regulatory resources are also more likely to behave aggressively. Stucke and Baumeister (2006) noted that participants who initially had to refrain from eating tempting food responded more aggressively after being insulted, when compared with participants who were allowed to eat all they wanted. DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, and Gailliot (2007) discovered that depleted participants did not behave more aggressively than the control group if there wasn't a separate stimulus that triggered an impulse to act aggressively. That is, depletion itself did not lead to aggression, but it rendered participants less able to control their aggressive instincts if these were provoked by the situation. Again, these findings suggest that self-control acts as a buffer against potentially detrimental negative responses to negative events.

People who are depleted have trouble suppressing stereotypes. If a person is high in prejudice, it takes self-control to regulate one's impulses and not behave in a manner that is inappropriate. Evidence has suggested that engaging in interracial interactions is depleting (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Richeson, Trawalter, & Shelton,

2005). In addition, Gordijn, Hindriks, Koomen, Dijksterhuis, and Van Knippenberg (2004) found that participants who were asked to write about a day in the life of a skinhead without using stereotypes later expressed more stereotypes when they were asked to talk about the elderly than those people who wrote about skinheads with no restrictions. Earlier in this chapter we reviewed work that demonstrates that a single bad behavior can have damaging effects during impression formation. Self-control resources enable people to inhibit impulses to express socially inappropriate stereotypes and potentially protect reputations from the overwhelming impact of just one bad display.

Self-control ability has been correlated with academic success. Duckworth and Seligman (2005) followed a group of 140 eighth-grade students over the course of a year and measured their self-discipline in the fall. At the end of the year, results of the initial self-discipline questionnaires given to the students, their teachers, and their parents predicted attendance records, standardized test-scores, grades, and other positive academic outcomes. When these researchers replicated these results with a second group of students, they added an IQ test. Self-discipline accounted for about twice as much variation in academic outcomes when compared with IQ. Other studies have linked self-control ability to positive academic outcomes (e.g., Tangney et al., 2004; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995). One group of researchers tracked children from the age of 4 years into early adulthood. The ability to delay short-term rewards as young as age 4 was linked to academic success during the teenage years (Mischel, Shoda, & Peake, 1988; Shoda, Mischel, & Peake, 1990). Schmeichel, Vohs, and Baumeister (2003) demonstrated that after participants had been depleted of self-regulatory resources in the laboratory, they scored lower on reading comprehension and logic and reasoning tasks. Self-control could improve academic performance through the promotion of positive habits and the prevention of unhealthy behaviors that interfere with schoolwork. Regardless of how self-control contributes to success, it clearly helps establish a winning ratio of good to bad in this domain.

### A Summary: Why Study Self-Control Strength?

The positive psychology movement asserts that the study of positive human strength has value, despite the fact that individual bad events are much stronger than individual good events. We have presented findings related to self-control and ego depletion because we view self-control as the foundation of many other human strengths. In this sense, what we learn from this program of research has implications for why the study of human strength in general serves as an effective response to the power of bad events. As evidenced through the literature we have reviewed, self-control seems to work like a muscle. Laboratory results reveal that self-control resources are quickly and easily depleted but that self-control strength potentially can be improved with practice. These findings illustrate that human strength is worth studying because it can be fostered. There are still many unanswered questions about the best way to increase

self-control strength longitudinally, demonstrating the need for further work.

Additionally, this program of research serves as an effective illustration of why human strength should be studied, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that bad is stronger than good. Earlier in this chapter we suggested that a psychology solely devoted to human weakness is limited in scope because most people are doing fine. The self-control research we have reviewed likely will resonate with most readers. Most people want to know how to improve romantic relationships, perform better on reasoning tasks and final exams, succeed at dieting, quit smoking, resolve conflict successfully, and make less impulsive consumer decisions. In short, the work done in this arena demonstrates how researchers can build a psychology for the common man and woman.

We also suggested earlier in this chapter that it takes a lot of good to counteract the bad. To be sure, building self-control strength is a good example of how psychologists can help teach people how to work to promote more good in their lives. People need self-control to regulate their own affect and generate a surplus of positive emotions, drag themselves to the gym to exercise, eat healthy foods to improve their physical health, behave honestly and kindly toward people they don't like, study for exams, and focus on long-term goals that will maximize benefits over the course of their lifespan.

Last, the program of research presented here is a good illustration of how the study of human strength can lead to the successful primary prevention of the bad. Most acts of self-control involve the inhibition of an unhealthy impulse. The evidence we have reviewed demonstrates that self-control depletion leads to conflicts in relationships, bad decisions, unhealthy impulsive behavior, etc. Self-control is the buffer against these negative outcomes, but self-control resources are limited and easily exhausted. Research on building self-control strength over the long-term has the potential to delay the onset of an indescribably broad range of negative consequences. Results thus far have been promising but mixed, demonstrating the overwhelming need for more extensive research on how people might strengthen their moral muscles and make themselves less susceptible to depletion effects in the long term.

## CONCLUSION

Psychological literature has become overrun by the study of the bad, largely because people seem to have adapted to respond much more strongly to the bad than the good. In response, positive psychologists have started a strengths revolution. The inception of this movement begs the obvious question: If bad is stronger than good, why study human strength? We have presented a wide range of evidence that demonstrates that the study of human strength has the potential to reach the common individual and serve as an effective response to the overwhelming power of bad psychological phenomena. We do not call into question the merit of the body of literature devoted to negative interactions, emotions, or life events, nor

do we suggest that the positive deserves more attention than the bad. Rather, we argue that the asymmetry between the impact of bad and good does not preclude the study of how to foster and grow positive character strengths. In particular, research on self-control indicates that people's moral muscles can be strengthened to promote the good and prevent the onset of bad in their daily lives. The negativity bias found so consistently in the literature does not require the adoption of a pessimistic view of the human condition or warrant a science that does not address the full spectrum of the human experience.

If anything, the greater power of bad events than good ones underscores the need for a positive psychology to cultivate the good ones. If life consists of equal parts good and bad fortune, the superior power of the bad ones will make life overall bad. Life is mostly good and people are mostly happy precisely not because individual good events outweigh individual bad ones, but rather because people generally have far more good than bad experiences. Numerical superiority is the main way for good to triumph. Although it is useful and valuable to understand the bad parts of human life, it is also urgent for psychological science and practice to find ways to increase the quantity of the good parts. That is probably the most important reason to study human strengths and positive outcomes despite the fact that bad is stronger than good.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Counteracting the Bad in Your Daily Life

Throughout this chapter, we suggest that because bad is so much stronger than good, positive traits, events, interactions, and emotions must be promoted and fostered, both to counteract the bad after it arrives and serve as a primary prevention of the bad. We encourage you to complete these personal mini-experiments to work to promote a winning ratio of good to bad in your daily life.

**Promoting Good Feelings:** Think about the extent to which you've experienced negative and positive emotions in the past 24 hours. Are the negative emotions easier to remember than the positive emotions? For one week, start each day by reflecting only on the positive emotions you experienced the day before. Think about how they came about and how you might use this knowledge to promote more good feelings for yourself and others throughout the course of the next day. At the end of the week, reflect on whether you feel any happier and whether it is any easier for you to remember and talk about your good moods.

**Promoting Good Interactions:** Pick a person in your life with whom you have a very close relationship. Talk with this person about times in your relationship that you have had very positive interactions and times when you have had very negative and unhealthy interactions. How easy is it to remember the negative interactions? How much time do you spend in your relationship talking or thinking about your negative interactions compared to your good interactions? Brainstorm ways in which you can work each day to combat the powerful effects of bad interactions by promoting a large quantity of positive interactions in your relationship. Try to remember what led to the

positive interactions and write down ways to create more. When you find yourself thinking about your negative interactions, reflect instead on the times when things went well. Set aside regular time to talk together about the positive interactions you've experienced together recently and how you can continue to promote them so they outnumber the bad.

*Promoting Your Strengths:* Write down all your positive attributes and strengths. For each one, write about some examples of when you demonstrated the strength and how it helped you. Do the same thing for your weaknesses, but write about some examples of times when you demonstrated the weakness and how it hurt you. As you are completing this exercise, note how quickly and easily you are able to remember and talk about your weaknesses compared to your strengths. Make a list of ways in which you can put your positive qualities to new use every day. For one week, try to use three of your strengths in at least three new ways each day. Write in a diary each night about the ways in which you effectively used your strengths in a new way that day.

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## Being Wise at Any Age

Monika Ardelt

Every year I ask my undergraduate students to think about a knowledgeable/intelligent individual and a wise individual and to describe their characteristics and the major differences between those two persons in a short two-page paper. Students are asked to submit this assignment *before* we discuss the differences between intellectual knowledge and wisdom in class. This year, after obtaining approval from our Institutional Review Board, I asked students in my “Society and the Individual” class for their permission to analyze their submissions and to use excerpts from their submissions in this book chapter to illustrate the characteristics of knowledgeable/intelligent and wise individuals. Of the 60 students in the class, 39 students (15 male and 24 female) granted the permission and submitted the assignment.

As always, my students’ answers were insightful and echoed contemporary theoretical and empirical research on the characteristics of wisdom and the differences between wisdom and intellectual knowledge. I coded all submissions for the gender and approximate age of the knowledgeable/intelligent and wisdom nominee, whether the nominee had a university degree or was in the process of earning a degree, whether the nominee had gained knowledge through experience and/or books, whether the knowledge described was deep and/or vast, whether the nominee was sought out for advice, and whether the nominee was described as a compassionate and empathetic person. The students’ descriptions of a knowledgeable/intelligent and wise person did not differ significantly by their gender. For example, both male and female students were more likely to nominate a man rather than a woman as a wise person (78%) and also as an intelligent/knowledgeable individual (67%). The purpose of this chapter is to

compare the characteristics of intellectual knowledge and wisdom in the domains of goals, acquisition, approach, range, relation to aging, and effects on the knower. The differences are summarized in Table 5.1.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

### Goals

Both intellectual knowledge and wisdom pursue knowledge, truth, and the answers to difficult problems (Assmann, 1994; Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Sternberg, 1990) or as one student wrote,

A common aspect [that] intelligence and wisdom share is that they both try to explain the otherwise unexplainable situations. This can be through intelligence explaining the scientific reasons why the earth revolves around the sun or the philosophical reasons why we are in existence.

This quote shows that the knowledge that wise and intelligent individuals seek is not the same. Whereas intellectual knowledge is about the discovery of new truths, wisdom is about the rediscovery of the *significance* and *meaning* of old truths (Kekes, 1983). In accordance with this distinction, students' descriptions of an intelligent/knowledgeable individual often emphasized the search for new knowledge.

When I think of a knowledgeable and intellectual person I think of my 24 year old friend in law school. He graduated from UF with a degree in history, and has read more books on this subject than anyone I have ever met. However his knowledge and intellect goes beyond just history. Most people who go to college specialize in certain areas and tend to gain a great deal of knowledge about their areas of interest. My friend on the other hand prides himself on being as educated in all the areas of study that he can.

[My uncle] is an ever so hungry man for knowledge. I think he feeds off of it.... He is a man to love the adventure of a new culture or way of thinking. He opens his arms to knowledge of the past, present, and future. He is a man of travel, and one who loves to hear indigenous knowledge right from the horse's mouth. He keeps every story of every man he has passed along the way in his life in a sacred place in his mind. My uncle has always been a man to inform me of something new and worthy of investigating.

By contrast, when describing a wise individual, students emphasized an understanding of life and the meaning and significance of knowledge to daily life.

Wisdom seems to address more than the knowledge of pure facts. Someone who is wise is able to make good decisions. They have common sense and can function well in the world because they have an understanding of it.

I believe wisdom represents an understanding of the world as it actually is, as well as an appreciation of it. It doesn't even necessarily mean that wise

**Table 5.1**  
**Differences Between Intellectual Knowledge and Wisdom**

Domain	Intellectual Knowledge	Wisdom
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Quantitative: Accumulation of knowledge and information</li> <li>● Discovery of new truths</li> <li>● Mastery of the outside world</li> <li>● Striving for certainty, regularity, and predictability to plan for the future</li> <li>● Knowing how to deal with the expected</li> <li>● <i>How</i> to do certain things—giving advice about technical matters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Qualitative: A deeper understanding of salient phenomena and events</li> <li>● Rediscovery of the <i>significance</i> and <i>meaning</i> of old truths</li> <li>● Mastery of the inner world</li> <li>● Acceptance of uncertainty, irregularity, unpredictability, and impermanence</li> <li>● Knowing how to deal with the unexpected and the unknown</li> <li>● <i>Should</i> I do certain things?—giving advice about life matters</li> </ul>
Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Detached experiences: learning from books, lectures, media, research, or observations</li> <li>● Intelligence/cognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personal experiences: learning from life's lessons</li> <li>● Combination of cognition, self-reflection, and self-transformation</li> </ul>
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scientific</li> <li>● Theoretical</li> <li>● Abstract, detached</li> <li>● Impersonal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Spiritual</li> <li>● Applied</li> <li>● Concrete, involved</li> <li>● Personal: intrapersonal and interpersonal</li> </ul>
Range	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Time-bound: Subject to political and historical fluctuations and scientific and technological advances</li> <li>● Domain-specific</li> <li>● Narrow, particularistic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Timeless: Independent of political and historical fluctuations and scientific and technological advances</li> <li>● Universal</li> <li>● Broad, holistic</li> </ul>
Relation to aging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reversed u-shaped pattern</li> <li>● Influenced by cognitive decline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potentially positive</li> <li>● Influenced by a willingness to learn from experiences and to engage in self-reflection and self-examination</li> </ul>
Effects on the knower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increased self-centeredness if one believes that one knows</li> <li>● Pride and a feeling of superiority towards people with less intellectual knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Diminished self-centeredness because one knows that one does not know</li> <li>● Sympathetic and compassionate love for others</li> </ul>

*Note:* From Intellectual versus wisdom-related knowledge: The case for a different kind of learning in the later years of life, by M. Ardel, *Educational Gerontology: An International Journal of Research and Practice*, 26, 771–789. Adapted with permission.

people know why events unfold the way that they do, what is important is that the wise person can derive the meaning from these events.

The fact that intellectual knowledge aims to discover new truths also implies that an intelligent/knowledgeable individual is likely to know a large amount of information. Indeed, all but one of the students mentioned that an intelligent/knowledgeable person possesses large quantities of knowledge. The following descriptions were typical.

My father ... is the most intelligent person I know. When I was a little girl there wasn't one day that passed by where I asked 100 questions and I didn't receive 100 answers.... In my later childhood years, when I was almost getting through the whole "question everything" phase, I even started just asking questions to see if he would not have an answer for me. Wrong. He always did ... and still does.

The knowledgeable person seems to know everything. He is the one you would call if you were on a game show and you had an opportunity to "phone a friend." It can be said that to be knowledgeable is to own facts. My mother owns more facts than anyone else I have ever met. She is highly educated and regularly refreshes her mind through teaching. She would definitely be my "phone a friend" for any question. Over the years I have been able to turn to her whenever curiosity has gotten the best of me. Whenever I don't know how something works or where something is located, she is able to appease my quandaries.

Wise people might not necessarily know as many facts as intelligent/knowledgeable individuals, but they have a deep understanding of salient phenomena and events and of life itself (Assmann, 1994; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Moody, 1986; Sternberg, 1990). Only 20 of the 39 students (51%) mentioned a large amount of knowledge as a characteristic of a wise person. However, 35 students (90%) characterized the knowledge of a wise person as deep, whereas only 7 students (18%) characterized the knowledge of an intelligent/knowledgeable individual in this way. Many students agreed that a wise person can see the forest and not just the trees. As one student wrote,

When I think of someone who is wise, I think of my boyfriend's grandpa, Pop. He is in his mid-seventies.... Pop is a man that sees the big picture in life, and can look beyond the little things that don't matter. He knows a lot of things, but he is in no way boastful about it. His life has allowed him many experiences that he uses to interpret and live through new experiences.

Because intelligent/knowledgeable people are smart and know a lot of facts about the world, it tends to be relatively easy for them to master the outside world. The following two excerpts are examples of this kind of mastery.

My best friend and roommate, Leigh, is someone I would refer to as knowledgeable and intelligent. She is 21 years old, and she is finishing her last semester as an undergraduate at the University of Florida. I consider Leigh to

be an intelligent person because she displays competencies over many different aspects in life.... Leigh achieves academically among the top students in all of her classes. She performs well in all subject areas, and she does not have a hard time achieving it. She is well versed, both in conversation and in script. Her vocabulary is extensive, and she has the ability to clearly and effectively communicate what she needs to. She is usually a quick thinker, but when she doesn't know something right away or even at all, she isn't afraid to find out how to learn about it and persist until she gets it. These kinds of intelligences make it easy for Leigh to get where she wants to in life and get along with others.

I think a good example of a well-known knowledgeable person is Donald Trump. From what I can gather about Trump, he has a wealth of knowledge in the skill of "prospering" in a capitalist society. He is apparently a very intelligent man. Surely, it takes a smart guy to climb their way up to the top of the socio-economic ladder. With his great knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship and realty he is now one of the wealthiest people in the entire world.

Wise individuals, however, do not only know how to master the outside world, but also how to master the inner world of emotions. They have learned to regulate their emotions (Labouvie-Vief & Medler, 2002; Schwartz, 1987) and to develop equanimity, no matter what the circumstances (Assmann, 1994; Hanna & Ottens, 1995). They are unlikely to be exuberant, depressed, or angry for long periods of time, but they exhibit an inner contentment that cannot easily be disturbed (Hart, 1987; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005). As one student wrote,

[One] reason I consider my grandfather to be wise is his composure. He is always very even keeled and I have never honestly seen him get worked up about anything. Even at times of absolute joy all one sees is a very satisfied smile. I believe that this is an important mark of wisdom as he understands that there is always going to be good and bad events in one's life and that fussing about it changes nothing. Furthermore, he is able to live by this in addition to understanding it. The balance he lives his life by is ultimately the reason I consider him to be wise.

Most researchers in the field of wisdom would agree that wise people are exceptionally mature and have the ability to cope with the vicissitudes of life (Ardelt, 1998, 2000a; Assmann, 1994; Baltes & Freund, 2003; Bianchi, 1994; Clayton, 1982; Kekes, 1983, 1995; Kramer, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003; Sternberg, 1990, 1998; Vaillant, 2002). The equanimity that wise people have developed guides them through the most difficult crises and hardships in their lives. In a qualitative study on how wise people cope with crises and obstacles in their lives, I found that wise individuals first tended to take a step back to relax and calm down in order not be overwhelmed by an unpleasant situation (Ardelt, 2005). This theme of calmness in dealing with difficult situations was echoed in a number of students' statements.

Wise people are able to handle any situation that comes their way. They know what to do and what not to do. These decisions are not hard for wise

people; they are just natural to these people. Wise people are able to prevent and predict bad things that are about to happen and avoid them. They act in ways that are effective and sensible. Wise people are also able to handle these situations much calmer than others are able to handle situations.

I also associate a certain degree of calmness with wisdom. The wise person can weather the storm without losing his head. My father has always exemplified this trait, amazing me with his ability to think rationally even under the most unnerving circumstances.

Because wise people have accepted that life is unpredictable and uncertain, they know how to deal with the unexpected and unknown (Assmann, 1994; Brugman, 2000). Intelligent/knowledgeable individuals, by contrast, are experts in solving problems where all the pieces of information are known (Strijbos, 1995). As one student wrote,

An intellectual and knowledgeable person knows all the various facts and statistics on different issues, and understands the different sides and consequences to taking a stance one way or the other. When I think of an individual as being knowledgeable and intellectual I think of someone who has taken the time to do all the research.

An intelligent/knowledgeable person who is familiar with all sides of an issue is usually a good source of advice about technical matters.

When I think of a knowledgeable and intelligent individual, my boyfriend Wesley is the first to come to my mind.... Whenever a problem or situation arises, he is the first one I go to. For example, over Christmas break, the electricity went out and ruined the connection to the Internet. My first instinct was to call my ISP (Internet Service Provider) and have them take a look at it. However, Wesley came over and took apart the cables and somehow came to the conclusion that the cable modem had been struck by electricity and that a new modem would be necessary. This is just one of the every day situations that come about that Wesley can easily solve.

I feel that [my mother] is the smartest person I have ever met.... I always go to her whenever I have some sort of financial situation because she always helps me out by showing me new methods to save money or how to rearrange my funds in order to maximize my current money.

Although intelligent/knowledgeable individuals are expert problem solvers and good at giving technical advice, wise people are more likely to be sought out for advice about life matters (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2005). In fact, 28 students (72%) mentioned giving advice as one of the characteristics of a wise person, whereas only 10 students (26%) listed advice-giving as a characteristic of an intelligent/knowledgeable individual. Students listed many examples of wise advice. The following examples are representative of the reflective, multiperspectival nature of wise advice.

My mother is someone I would describe as wise. I didn't really start discovering the benefits of having a wise parent until about my late teenage years,

when all that “real life stuff” finally started occurring in my life and I needed some guidance, some direction. That’s what my mother always gives me ... my mother really goes beyond just looking at things as black and white, right or wrong ... for her, there are always many aspects to every lesson I ever grew up learning in my house.

My father is at the same time level headed and passionate. He can think things through from many different angles, but he still has his own beliefs. These qualities are part of why I consider him to be a wise individual. I believe a wise person can give advice to someone that doesn’t perfectly match up with what he himself would do. A truly wise person never gives someone concrete advice, but rather offers up different alternatives and the possible outcomes of each.

A wise person typically does not give a definite answer to an advice-seeker, but lays out all the options and possibilities. Whereas an intelligent/knowledgeable individual tends to give a specific answer to a specific question, such as “How can I make the most of my current money?” or “How can I get reconnected to the Internet?,” a wise person asks the advice-seeker to consider the consequences of each course of action. The question changes from “*How* should I do certain things?” to “*Should* I do certain things?” (Assmann, 1994; Clayton, 1982; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Kekes, 1983, 1995).

I consider my mother to be very wise. I go to her when my life gets confusing because she always seems to have the right answer. Not only does she offer the right answer, but she can offer different solutions and the consequences of each of those solutions.... I consider my mother to be wise because she has had many various experiences throughout her lifetime. And, it is because of these experiences that she is able to offer me advice to get through my life’s experiences. Sometimes the answers she provides are solutions that are relatively simple but I always find myself saying “I should have thought of that.”

By offering different solutions to life problems and explaining their consequences, it is ultimately up to the advice-seeker to choose a certain kind of life. Wise people know that everyone has to decide on their own what kind of life they want to live and that they can be nothing more than a helpful guide, someone who has traveled the path before them and can guide them along on the way.

## ACQUISITION

How do people gain intellectual knowledge and wisdom? Students generally agreed that intellectual knowledge is acquired primarily through learning, whereas wisdom is acquired through personal experiences. Of the 39 students, 28 (72%) described an intelligent/knowledgeable individual as “book smart,” but none of the students characterized a wise person in this way. By contrast, 34 students (87%) mentioned that wisdom is gained through experiences, whereas only one student believed that experience is

an ingredient of intellectual knowledge. This is confirmed by studies on implicit (i.e., lay) theories of wisdom. When people are asked to rate or name characteristics of wise individuals, “being experienced” or “learning from experiences” is almost always mentioned (Bluck & Glück, 2005). The following quotes illustrate the difference between intellectual knowledge and wisdom.

Two terms easily contrast the meanings of intelligence and wisdom: an individual that is said to be “book smart” may be considered intelligent, whereas an individual that is said to [have] “knowledge from experience” may be considered wise.

[W]hen I think of someone who is wise I think of someone who has actually experienced what a knowledgeable or intellectual person has only researched. Take for example the two people I chose to describe, my [knowledgeable and intelligent] friend wrote his thesis paper on the Vietnam War and could draw a detailed timeline of every event that took place and the level of troops that were deployed at any certain time. However, my father lived through the Vietnam War and experienced how the citizens of the United States were feeling at that exact moment. He can literally describe the feeling of his friends and neighbors dying and the protests that went on. He may not know the exact number of troops in Vietnam at a certain date, but he certainly remembers how many of his friends died. That is the difference between knowledge and intellect and being wise, researching versus actually experiencing.

Thus, intellectual knowledge can be acquired through more detached experiences than wisdom, such as reading books or articles, listening to lectures, watching TV, engaging in research, and objective observations (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Taranto, 1989). For example,

[T]o choose a knowledgeable and intelligent individual ... there is no better person that I could think about than my primary physician. He went through many years of school to understand the concept of medicine and diseases.... Any doctor or specialist can be viewed as a knowledgeable and intelligent person because they acquire the knowledge while in school studying for their PhD.

I have a twenty-year-old friend named Karan.... I believe that he is a very knowledgeable and intelligent young man.... Karan just loves absorbing new information that he receives from school, books, and TV. He had one class in which attendance was not required, and everyone else that I knew that took the same class did not attend because they received good grades without doing so. However, Karan wanted to go to class so that he could learn the information instead of just memorizing the information for the test.

The acquisition of intellectual knowledge requires cognitive skills and a desire to learn. Yet, as one student wrote,

Knowledge is something which can be acquired much easier than wisdom. It is something which can be learned. I generally think of my peers who do

very well academically when I think of people who are knowledgeable. I truly marvel at how much time they must invest to obtain and maintain such an enormous base of facts.

Cognitive skills and an investment of time to learn a large amount of facts, by contrast, are not enough to develop wisdom. Wisdom is gained through experiences, but only if people are willing to learn and apply the lessons that life has to offer them (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Ardel, 2005; Assmann, 1994; Hanna & Ottens, 1995; Moody, 1986). The following quotes highlight this point.

Being wise means that one embodies the ability to look at certain things with insight, maybe its most distinct quality. When looking to identify one person in my life as being wise, this was the characteristic that paralleled my mother most perfectly. Through all her years, it seems that my mother has taken in every experience and learned a great deal from it. Gaining wisdom is not something that can be taught, it is evident that it must be something that is gained through life's practice.

My mother is wise because of her experience. I think I read a quote once that said something along the lines of, "Learn from others' mistakes, for you can't live long enough to make them all on your own." Well, anything I have ever come to my mother about, she will always have some anecdote either involving herself or someone she knew... My mother has always told me she grew up making a lot of mistakes, but she always took something positive from each of her mistakes. I think she took something positive from everyone else's mistakes too because she seriously always has input on any type of situation you come to her about. She will always have an anecdote or an adage that relates to any situation I am concerned about and as soon as I am done speaking with my mother, she always leaves me thinking about everything we discussed.

Perhaps the most important factor of all in choosing my father [as a wise person] though is that he has tons of "life experience." He's been around a long time, and has been in all sorts of situations, and has experienced many different life events that I won't get around to until I'm older... My dad just knows a lot about life's joys and sorrows and mysteries, and I admire and respect him greatly for it.

[My wise grandfather] was someone who had a great deal of experiences in life... Although my grandfather did complete junior college and seminary he knew a lot of things and had good advice just by simply learning from life itself. Wisdom is not something you can learn from a book or in a classroom; it is something that comes from within. It comes from personal experiences and tribulations in your life. You can not go to school and take classes to become wise but you can go to school and take classes to become knowledgeable.

I believe due to his life experience, my great-grandfather had the characteristics of a wise individual. Throughout his life he experienced a lot of oppression and difficulty. My great-grandfather viewed each life experience, no matter how challenging, as a lesson learned.

To be able to learn from one's mistakes, failures, and obstacles in life is one of the hallmarks of wisdom (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Ardel,

2005). Wise people generally do not have a life free of hardships and disappointments. As one of the students wrote, “A knowledgeable and intelligent person can become wise when they have faced many hardships, grown older, or gain valuable experience.” In fact, there is some empirical evidence that being able to cope successfully with crises and hardships in life is one of the pathways to wisdom (Ardelt, 1998, 2005; Bianchi, 1994).

However, crises and hardships in life do not automatically lead to wisdom. If people are unable to cope with a particular crisis or hardship, it might result in depression and despair rather than wisdom. For example, evidence from a longitudinal study shows that adults who experienced economic hardship during the Great Depression and who were rated as relatively wise in old age (in 1968/69) tended to become psychologically healthier after the Depression years. By contrast, the psychological health of men and women who encountered similar Depression hardship but were rated as relatively low on wisdom in old age tended to decline after the Depression years (Ardelt, 1998). Similarly, in a study on the effects of marital separation among women, Bursik (1991) found that marital separation was related to either growth or regression in ego development, depending on the women’s overall adjustment one year after the separation or divorce. This suggests that the development of wisdom does not depend on *what* kind of events people encounter in life but on *how* they deal with those events (Holliday & Chandler, 1986). It appears that wisdom can only be obtained if people are willing to accept the lessons that life has to offer and to be transformed in the process (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Ardel, 2004b; Assmann, 1994; Kekes, 1983; Kupperman, 2005; Moody, 1986). As Randall and Kenyon (2001, p. 99) explain, “wisdom is not a matter of putting a Band-Aid over a problem, or even of coping, in a sense of merely getting by on the basis of a clever coping strategy. It involves the possibility for real growth and transformation.”

Hence, intelligence might help a person to gain intellectual knowledge, but it is not sufficient for wisdom to emerge. The following quote illustrates this point perfectly.

I believe that due to his young age, [my intelligent boyfriend] ... has a lot more to experience to make him a wise individual. In addition, I believe that [his] overall intelligence will assist him to one day become wise, as well as his ability to be a conscientious observer of the world around him. Intelligence does not equate to [being] wise, yet intelligence may in fact allow an individual to hone those skills.

A certain amount of intelligence or cognitive abilities are clearly necessary, albeit not sufficient, for the acquisition of wisdom. As one student commented, “I also feel that you cannot be a wise person in age if you don’t share some type of intelligence. I think that you really cannot have one without the other, like you cannot have the yin without the yang.” However, this does not mean that wise people need to earn a college degree or a Ph.D. Whereas 33 (85%) of the 39 students mentioned that their intelligent/knowledgeable nominee had earned or was in the process

of earning a college degree, only 10 students (26%) specified that their wisdom nominee had a college education. In fact, another 10 students emphasized that they considered a particular person as wise, even though that person had never obtained a college degree.

What distinguish wise people from intelligent/knowledgeable individuals are not their cognitive abilities but their capacity for self-reflection and self-transformation (Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995). Several students mentioned this fact. "Wisdom requires self-awareness, empathy, creativity and mental acuity, traits that are extremely hard to find, let alone in one person. I find them all in my father." "A wise individual is someone who has obtained knowledge through experience, reflection, and insight." The following examples illustrate the process of attaining wisdom.

My father is what I refer to as a "wise" individual. As he approaches his early sixties, he can reflect on his past which has transformed him into the person he is today. My father always has a story for everything because he has experienced so much throughout time.... Wisdom is taking the facts or knowledge from past experiences, and using them as guidance.

My grandfather has been able to reflect on the decisions he has made in his life and looked at where and what he would change. This is the biggest difference I see in wisdom and knowledge. It is the difference of really being able to sit down and reflect on and look over what had happened and is happening. In doing so my grandfather has been able to realize what he could have done better and pass it down to my father, my siblings and myself. This gives us a better opportunity to succeed in life.

Although my [wise] uncle often talks about times he has failed or done the wrong thing, he has a hopeful spirit about him that he knows he isn't supposed to know how to do everything in this world correctly, but can provide insight into what he has learned from himself and those around him. He is somewhat quiet in that he notices little things about himself, he is self-observant, but also notices what others do as well.

By looking at phenomena and events from different perspectives, including their own thoughts, emotions, and behavior, wise people are gradually able to transcend their subjectivity and projections (Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995; Clayton, 1982). This allows them to see reality with greater clarity rather than from a self-centered point of view, and makes it less likely that they would become overwhelmed by negative thoughts and emotions, which in turn might lead to destructive actions (Hart, 1987; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003; Levitt, 1999; Pascual-Leone, 2000). For example, having an argument with someone is likely to cause feelings of anger, thoughts of righteousness, and, if things get out of hand, negative behavior, such as shouting or fighting. However, if people are able to see all sides of an argument, they are less likely to get angry because they can acknowledge different viewpoints. This, in turn, might make it easier to find a compromise that satisfies all of the parties involved. Through self-reflection and self-observation, wise people might sense very early in the encounter when a situation becomes tense, which might enable them to steer the conversation in a more constructive direction.

## APPROACH

Because people acquire intellectual knowledge and wisdom in different ways, their approach to knowledge also varies. An intelligent/knowledgeable person typically approaches knowledge from an abstract, detached, scientific, and theoretical point of view (Strijbos, 1995). Hence, it is not surprising that many of the students' intelligent/knowledgeable nominees have earned or are in the process of earning a college degree or even a Ph.D. As one student wrote,

I define a knowledgeable and intelligent individual as someone who has had an abundance of education. For example, I regard a person with a Ph.D. as someone who is highly intelligent in their chosen field. If you have a Ph.D. that means you thoroughly understand the knowledge of what you study. So when I think of a knowledgeable person, the first person I think of is a university professor.

However, intellectual knowledge can also be obtained outside the formal educational system. For example,

When I think of someone I know that is intellectual and knowledgeable, I think about my dad. He is in his mid fifties and is very knowledgeable about digital cameras. He looks at cameras from a very scientific way. For example, he will buy ten cameras at a time, research about them, open them up and take a look inside, and evaluate each and every one. Sometimes, it takes him months to decide which camera he wants.... I know that my dad feels like he is learning more every time he "plays" with a camera. He will manipulate them, read the owners manual cover to cover, and research about them online.

This kind of knowledge tends to be impersonal rather than personal and might not necessarily help an individual in social situations. For example, one student observed, "at times [my intelligent/knowledgeable friend] can be a bit socially awkward. It seems there are times when he can't apply his [vast] knowledge to a situation and he may, in turn, struggle with that situation."

The quest for wisdom, by contrast, is inherently personal (Clayton, 1982). It is about finding answers to spiritual questions, such as "What is the meaning and purpose of life?" and "How should I best live my life?" (Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Kupperman, 2005). This kind of knowledge is applied, concrete, and involved and addresses intrapersonal and interpersonal issues, such as one's fears and desires and one's social relationships with others (Ardelt, 2000b; Clayton, 1982; Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes, 1990; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Kramer, 1990; Strijbos, 1995; Taranto, 1989). Wisdom is knowledge that is realized through experiences, self-reflection, and self-examination by listening to the lessons that life offers (Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995). The following quote from one of the students illustrate this best.

Jimi Hendrix, who is in my eyes one of the greatest musicians and thinkers of our time, put it best when he said, "Knowledge speaks, but wisdom

listens.” While this simple statement may not seem overly profound at first glance, it does indeed carry a world of meaning in highlighting the vast differences between wisdom and knowledge.

Whereas intellectual knowledge is “out there” (e.g., in books, the media, or the Internet), wisdom is “in here” and transforms the individual accordingly (Ardelt, 2004a; Moody, 1986). Yet, this is another reason why wisdom cannot be as easily taught as intellectual knowledge. Simply reading a book or listening to a lecture on wisdom will not make a person wise. As one student explained,

While [my intelligent/knowledgeable friend] may be able to memorize every fact from a textbook, she is not capable of processing these facts into everyday life. My father, on the other hand, may not be able to memorize every fact in a textbook, but his knowledge from his experiences will help guide him in the right direction for his future.

Although life experiences remain the key for the acquisition of wisdom, a wise mentor can serve as a guide through those experiences (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kupperman, 2005; Pascual-Leone, 2000). For example,

It never fails that I learn something about myself when I am around [my wise grandmother] whether it is how not to be selfish or egotistical, how to show appreciation to my mother, to stand up for myself and my beliefs, and to always maintain my dignity no matter what.

My grandfather ... always had an answer for everything or at least a way to figure out the questions that I had. He always had some kind of inquisitive quote to explain a daily thought, or to explain how sometimes as a young child I wouldn’t understand certain things. His favorite sentence was, “now listen to me, really listen to what I am saying, not just what I speak but the words too.”

As the above Jimi Hendrix quote illustrates, being able to truly listen to other people and to one’s own experiences in life is essential for the development of wisdom. However, this is not easy. Normally, we only hear what we want to hear, and we often use projection to blame other people and circumstances for our own situation (Bradley, 1978; Green & Gross, 1979; Riess, Rosenfeld, Melburg, & Tedeschi, 1981). To be still and listen, therefore, is an important prerequisite of becoming wise (Lozoff, 2000).

## RANGE

Intellectual knowledge tends to be time-bound and subject to political and historical fluctuations (Clayton, 1982; Clayton & Birren, 1980; McCarthy, 1996). For example, for many centuries it was considered a “fact” that women are inferior to men. As Zerubavel (1991, p. 65) wrote,

In 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft published her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a distinguished Cambridge professor rebutted with a satirical

*Vindication of the Rights of Brutes.* Only two centuries ago, the mental gap between the sexes was so wide that women were perceived as ‘closer’ to animals than to men and granting them political rights seemed as ludicrous as extending such rights to beasts.

For most people in the Western world, those “facts” about women are no longer considered true. Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged in the scientific community that intellectual knowledge is superseded by superior intellectual knowledge in the future (Assmann, 1994; Weber, 1973), just as Newton’s view of the universe was superseded by Einstein’s theory of relativity. As one student rightly pointed out,

One interesting aspect of intelligent individuals is that in order to remain intelligent they must be current with their knowledge. For example, if you walk into an English class and the only critics or scholars they recognize are from the 1930s, the students’ perspective of them may change. Especially with scholarly research, it is imperative for the professor to be up-to-date in order to continue to appear intelligent.

Changes in intellectual knowledge might be caused by changes in the political climate of a culture or by scientific and technological advances, such as ease of travel and exchange of information or the invention of supercomputers and scientific instruments to map the genes of individuals and view the stars of distant galaxies.

Although intelligent/knowledgeable individuals tend to know a large amount of information, their knowledge is likely to be domain-specific, narrow, and particularistic (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990). The available quantity of intellectual knowledge in the Internet age is just too vast to be known by one specific person, which means that most intelligent/knowledgeable individuals are experts in their field, but not necessarily beyond (Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Strijbos, 1995). The student responses echo this sentiment:

My professor in Real Estate Analysis is very knowledgeable about the laws and markets of real estate, but he might not be knowledgeable in the study of astronomy.

For example, one that is knowledgeable is someone that knows a lot about cars, history, and fishing but maybe not so much in plumbing, science and golf. Not saying that these people don’t know anything about the other subjects, but it’s just that they tend to know less or are limited to these areas. In a way it’s like we’re classifying these individuals as professionals in these areas of interests.

Wisdom, by contrast, is timeless and independent of political and historical fluctuations or scientific and technological advances because it gives universal answers to universal questions related to the basic predicament of the human existence (Assmann, 1994; Clayton, 1982; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Levenson & Crumpler, 1996). For example, answers related to the meaning and purpose of life and human conduct in

the face of injustice, impermanence, and uncertainty are relevant for every culture independent of its specific place in history. This kind of knowledge is not restricted to a specific domain but is relevant for all aspects of life, including one's private, professional, and public life (Assmann, 1994; Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Strijbos, 1995). Hence, wisdom tends to be universal, broad, and holistic rather than domain-specific, narrow, and particularistic (Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Strijbos, 1995). Many students wrote that being wise implies seeing the "bigger picture" rather than only the individual parts.

I think that including the relation of the bigger picture is a major and important characteristic of being wise. It combines all knowledge and intelligence into one big pool, rather than separating it into its individual categories.

Wisdom is a state of being.... My Uncle Bill symbolizes for me a ball of wisdom. I say a ball because it never ends with him, as if his wisdom was for infinity. He is wise, mentality, physically, and most important to me spiritually.... To me wisdom is something that comes from within. Within the soul you see your potential and your chance at wisdom. Wisdom contains more of a bigger picture than the title of being knowledgeable.

This also means that unlike intellectual knowledge, wisdom will not become outdated with time, which allows older people to become the bearers of wisdom.

## RELATION TO AGING

The above descriptions of the differences between intellectual knowledge and wisdom make it clear that intellectual knowledge can be learned early in life through all kinds of media, whereas the acquisition of wisdom requires learning from life itself through personal experiences, which is likely to take more time (Brugman, 2006; Kekes, 1983). Several students expressed this sentiment.

A wise man can also be intelligent and knowledgeable but wisdom is usually seen in elder individuals, whereas knowledge and intelligence can be seen in the youth ages.

I believe that wisdom, like wine, is better with age, if not in-existent at all if it weren't for age, solely based on the assumption that with age comes experience. I think to be wise you have to have lived a lot.

I associate wise people with more mature, older people that have been able to live more.

When I envision a wise person, I immediately see someone who is much older. I see someone who is no younger than 70.

In many traditional societies, older people were venerated for their wisdom (Assmann, 1994), and the students in my class also followed this pattern. In general, wisdom nominees were more likely to be older than intelligent/knowledgeable nominees. When students thought about a wise

person, a grandparent came most often to mind, whereas a friend or parent came to mind when they thought about an intelligent/knowledgeable individual. Consistent with theories and empirical research on the development of wisdom and intellectual knowledge (Ardelt, 2004b; Jordan, 2005), middle-aged people, such as parents and college professors, tended to be characterized as both wise and intelligent/knowledgeable individuals. As one student wrote,

[W]hen I picture [a knowledgeable and intelligent] person in my mind, this person is not very young. This could be because in our society being young is often associated with being foolish and being engaged in processes of learning, not knowing an abundance of knowledge yet. Therefore, I picture a university professor, male or female, no younger than the age of 35.... A knowledgeable person has the characteristic of being middle-aged. This is because they are old enough to be able to understand their chosen field, and are engulfed in the knowledge of their studies, and they are therefore labeled as intelligent. However, they are only middle-aged and have not entered into old age, so they are still lacking many life experiences that one must experience to be considered a wise individual.

The association between intellectual knowledge and age tends to follow a reversed u-shaped pattern. That is, intellectual knowledge first tends to increase with age but then is likely to diminish in old age due to memory loss, general cognitive decline, and/or outdated knowledge (Baltes, Staudinger, Maercker, & Smith, 1995; Clayton, 1982; Moody, 1986). By contrast, the relation between wisdom and age is *potentially* positive as long as the individual remains willing to learn from experiences and to engage in self-reflection and self-examination (Kekes, 1983; Kramer, 1990).

The potential decline in intellectual knowledge with age is described by this student.

Like wisdom, knowledge is presumed to be gained over time. However, many people admit that there are frequent exceptions to this. Anyone in possession of a deep well of information can be said to be knowledgeable, whether he be a child prodigy or a retired professor. Many think that it is easier to become knowledgeable than to develop wisdom. I do not agree with this at all. Once someone develops wisdom, it is very rare that he loses his ability to think wisely. On the other hand, knowledge must be constantly worked on and added to. This is especially difficult when considering my definition of knowledge that involves general information on many different topics.

However, not all students agreed that wisdom is related to age. One student stated,

Many people attribute wisdom to age, but I do not agree with this. I do believe that wisdom develops through life experiences. However, I have met wise individuals of all ages. Those with wisdom at a young age seem to have lived through many things in a short period of time. At the same time, there are many individuals well advanced in years that have gone through life, and

gained no wisdom. In fact, I do not personally know many older people whom I would deem wise.

Most wisdom researchers would concur that wisdom does not automatically increase with age and that it is relatively rare even among older adults (Ardelt, 1997; Assmann, 1994; Baltes & Freund, 2003; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes, 1990; Jordan, 2005; Staudinger, 1999; Sternberg, 1990; Webster, 2003). It is also possible to find wisdom in younger people, particularly those who have become wise beyond their years by dealing with hardships in their life, such as serious health or family problems (Bluck & Glück, 2004; Pascual-Leone, 2000). In fact, three of the students named people in their early twenties as exemplars of a wise person. Still, as Kekes (1983, p. 286) declared, "One can be old and foolish, but a wise man is likely to be old, simply because such growth takes time" or at least requires a certain accumulation of life experiences.

The empirical evidence on the association between age and wisdom is mixed, however, and might also depend on the definition and measurement of wisdom (Sternberg, 2005). The Max Planck Institute group in Berlin defines wisdom as expert knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life and the conduct and meaning of life (e.g., Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Baltes et al., 1995; Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes, 1990; Smith & Baltes, 1990; Smith, Staudinger, & Baltes, 1994). The group measures wisdom-related knowledge by rating people's answers to hypothetical life problems in the areas of life planning, life management, and life review in relation to five wisdom criteria: rich factual knowledge, rich procedural knowledge, life span contextualism, value relativism, and the recognition and management of uncertainty (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Smith & Baltes, 1990). Using the average of those five wisdom criteria, Baltes and colleagues found that in a cross-sectional study of participants between the ages of 14 and 37 years, wisdom-related knowledge tended to increase with age up to the age of about 24 and remained relatively stable thereafter (Pasupathi, Staudinger, & Baltes, 2001). In another cross-sectional sample of 533 participants between the ages of 20 and 89 years, wisdom-related knowledge was not statistically related to age, although a decrease in wisdom-related knowledge was observed after 80 years of age (Baltes et al., 1995; Staudinger, 1999). Similarly, younger people were equally represented among the top 20% of wisdom performers as older participants above the age of 60 (Baltes et al., 1995; Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1992), and clinical psychologists between the ages of 25 and 37 years received similar scores on wisdom-related knowledge as older clinical psychologists between the ages of 65 and 82 years (Smith et al., 1994; Staudinger et al., 1992).

Yet, Takahashi and Overton (2002, 2005), who define and measure wisdom as a combination of analytic wisdom (knowledge and abstract reasoning) and synthetic wisdom (reflective understanding, emotional empathy, and emotional regulation), showed that older adults (mean age = 70 years) tended to score higher on wisdom than middle-aged adults (mean age = 45 years) in a sample of American and Japanese participants.

In my own research, I define wisdom as a combination of cognitive (a deep understanding of life and a desire to know the truth), reflective (self-awareness and a perception of phenomena and events from multiple perspectives), and affective (sympathetic and compassionate love for others) personality qualities, based on earlier studies on implicit wisdom theories by Clayton and Birren (Ardelt, 1997, 2004b; Clayton & Birren, 1980). Using a self-administered three-dimensional wisdom scale (3D-WS) to measure wisdom (Ardelt, 2003), I found that older adults between the ages of 52 and 87 years (mean age = 71 years) did not score significantly higher on wisdom than current college students. However, older adults with a college degree had significantly higher wisdom scores, on average, than current college students and were also overrepresented among the top 20% of wisdom scorers compared with current college students and older adults without a college degree (Ardelt, 2006). The results suggest that wisdom might increase with age for those people who have the motivation and the opportunity to pursue its acquisition.

Cross-sectional studies are, of course, ultimately unable to answer the question whether the wisdom of a person tends to increase with age. If some people gain wisdom with age, while others lose it, the net effect would be zero and give the impression that wisdom is unrelated to age. However, in a longitudinal study on the development of wisdom, Wink and Helson (1997) found that practical wisdom (measured by self-reported cognitive, reflective, and mature adjectives from the Adjective Check List) tended to increase between the ages of 27 and 52 years, which was even more pronounced for clinical psychologists than for nonpsychologists. Hence, it appears that wisdom *can* increase with age but that such personal growth also requires motivation, determination, self-examination, self-reflection, and an openness to all kinds of experiences to do the necessary inner work that the development of wisdom demands (Kekes, 1983, 1995; Kramer, 1990; Pascual-Leone, 2000; Staudinger & Kunzmann, 2005).

## EFFECTS ON THE KNOWER

Through reflection, self-reflection, and openness to all kinds of experiences, a wise person is likely to arrive at Socrates' realization, "I know that I don't know." Because wise people have a deep understanding of the human condition, they are also aware of the inherent limits of human knowledge, the complexities of human nature, including its positive and negative aspects, and the uncertainty, unpredictability, and impermanence of life (Brugman, 2000; Kekes, 1983; Sternberg, 1990). As one student stated,

Now when I think of a wise individual I think of Yoda from the movie Star Wars. This type of character is usually an elder being.... They have knowledge and intelligence though not only by studying it, but they have experienced it as well.... They have the answer to every question you ask and possibly even put it in a way that makes total sense to you. When this person tells you something you say "aha". You feel and should feel that it's an honor that you can meet one of these types. They are very understanding of

the youth and ... they are very patient.... They just know what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done. What makes the wise great is that they don't ever think they know it all. The wise will continue to grow even more than you could imagine.

Wise individuals have “seen through illusion” (McKee & Barber, 1999) by transcending their subjectivity and projections, which includes the illusion of the permanence of their own self (Levitt, 1999; Metzinger, 2003; Takahashi, 2000). Through the practice of self-examination, self-reflection, and mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), wise people have diminished their self-centeredness and achieved humility and self-transcendence (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Hart, 1987; Kekes, 1995; Levenson, Aldwin, & Cupertino, 2001; Levitt, 1999; Taranto, 1989). Comparing a wise individual with an intelligent/knowledgeable person, one student noted,

If you compare the Dalai Lama with someone like Donald Trump you'll find that while Trump's life basically revolves around his ego, the Dalai Lama has a perfect grasp on his. Donald Trump studied hard and learned the ways of the business world to better his own life and in doing this, one becomes inherently competitive.... Knowledgeable people in general do a lot more speaking than they do listening, when listening is what in fact makes someone wise. To be a listener (or a wise person), you must be able to separate your self from your ego, which is in fact hard to do, and which is exactly what the Dalai Lama has done. Without having an excessive ego or overbearing pride, one can truly open oneself up to learning from others and every event they experience in their lives.

Intelligent/knowledgeable individuals are not necessarily humble, particularly if they are under the illusion that they know. They might be proud of their knowledge and develop a feeling of superiority toward people with less intellectual knowledge. In fact, several of the students mentioned this danger.

An example of a knowledgeable and intelligent person that I know is my roommate. [He has a] high confidence level, but sometimes too high for his own good.

There also seems to be this sense of elevation over others.... This elevated status can go from being “smart” to all the way to being a genius. This elevated status sometimes seems to separate the individual from those who are not seen as knowledgeable or intelligent. Some stay humble, but others may buy into this elevation and consider themselves superior.

[T]his person I hold as the most intelligent and knowledgeable individual I know ... is the most ambitious, most promising, smartest and most driven person I have ever known, but he lacked wisdom, compassion, and the big picture. He now attends Harvard and serves jail time in the summers.

Humility and self-transcendence, however, are not the same as having low self-confidence or low self-esteem (Helson & Srivastava, 2002; Maslow, 1970). On the contrary, the transcendence of self-centeredness tends to be accompanied by positive emotions, such as joy, serenity, and a general

sentiment of good-will and sympathetic and compassionate love for others (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Hart, 1987; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Kramer, 1990; Levitt, 1999; Pascual-Leone, 1990). Sixteen of the 39 students (41%) explicitly mentioned that their wisdom nominees were compassionate, empathetic, and understanding, whereas none of the intelligent/knowledgeable nominees were characterized in this way. The following examples highlight some of the positive qualities that students attributed to wise individuals.

The Dalai Lama is well known for being one of the most influential spiritual leaders of Tibetan Buddhism, and in many ways is the epitome of wisdom. In listening to many of the Dalai Lama's [talk's] you immediately feel an overwhelming sense of humbleness and kindness emanating from his teachings. At the core of his beliefs is always radiating compassion and love to each [and] every life form you come in contact with. It is abundantly clear that the Dalai Lama feels that in the grand scheme of life, money, status, and other material things should be on the back burner to qualities such as patience and empathy. Not surprisingly, you will find that the large majority of people immediately fall in love with the Dalai Lama upon either seeing him speak or simply exposing themselves to his valuable lessons in life.

Someone I view as a wise person would be a psychology teacher I had in high school.... This teacher was very understanding and accepting of everyone, which I found amazing as ... students in high school are usually obnoxious. He seemed to have a higher understanding I could not comprehend and thus the reason why he seemed never to get upset with students. While I knew he was very intelligent and wise, he did not seem to boast [about] these attributes or to even openly consider himself wise.

[My wise] grandfather shows a lot of sympathy and compassion for people. He never holds grudges and always knows what is best for everyone. He never seems concerned about his own welfare, but more concerned about the welfare of the people around him.

Amongst the many lessons my [wise] great grandfather taught me, the most valuable was the one that I learned watching him live his daily life. In every situation, my great grandfather looked for the good in people. He always put himself on the line for others and truly knew the value of charity. He was extremely self-less and caring.

Being concerned about other people's welfare rather than only one's own welfare was one of the characteristics of wise individuals that students described. In general, students seemed to agree that wise people know how to lead a life that is good for themselves, good for others, and good for the whole society (Baltes & Freund, 2003; Baltes, Glueck, & Kunzmann, 2002; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Hart, 1987; Kekes, 1995; Kramer, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003, 2005; Kupperman, 2005; Sternberg, 1998). The following quote illustrates the connection between a wise person, others, and society.

A wise person is one that is introspective, gains knowledge for the sake of understanding himself as well as his society and hoping that one day, by imparting that knowledge upon others, he might be able to positively

change society... [I believe] people like Mahatma Gandhi, Buddha, and Mother Teresa are wise. Gandhi was a lawyer but he did not care about the monetary gains of law and led the people of India through his actions of peace, unity and concern for the fellow man to independence. He was influenced by his religious beliefs as well as morals that everyone is created equally. Buddha was the son of a prince but he was shocked by the sight of poverty and death and was driven by his internal desire for knowledge and wisdom. Through pain and suffering, he learned about both the good and bad aspects of living and imparted them upon others in society... Buddha influenced society because even today people follow the teachings of Buddha. Mother Teresa was driven by her religious beliefs, however it was her ultimate faith in the goodness of people and her desire to help others that allowed her to see humans as equals. By helping people, she led by example and today many are inspired by her to help others.

Paradoxically, by caring about others rather than themselves, wise people might experience contentment and satisfaction with life even if objective circumstances are less than ideal (Ardelt, 2005). For example, in several studies of younger, middle-aged, and older adults, wisdom was positively related to life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Ardelt, 2003; Brugman, 2000; Takahashi & Overton, 2002), even after controlling for finances, physical health, socioeconomic status, physical environment, and social involvement (Ardelt, 1997, 2000a).

## CONCLUSION

The students' responses, describing the characteristics of a wise person, were consistent with earlier studies on implicit (lay) theories of wisdom, which asked participants to rate or name characteristics of wise individuals. For example, Bluck and Glück (2005) listed cognitive ability, insight, reflective attitude, concern for others, and real-world skills as the most common qualities ascribed to wise people by participants in five different studies on implicit wisdom theories. Given those descriptions, wisdom is often considered to be the pinnacle of human development (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Brugman, 2006).

Yet, is it true, as most students in this study appear to believe, that unlike intellectual knowledge, wisdom cannot be learned in schools and universities but "is [only] gained through accumulation of experience over the years"? Some scholars have argued that schools and universities should not only teach intellectual knowledge but also promote the development of wisdom so that individuals at any age will have the chance to be wise and to benefit from their wisdom throughout the life course (Bassett, 2006; Brown, 2004; Ferrari, 2004; Reznitskaya & Sternberg, 2004; Sternberg, 2001). This, however, would require more than teaching the acquisition of intellectual skills and knowledge (Jax, 2005; Sternberg, 2001). Wisdom "... transcends the intellect" (Naranjo, 1972, p. 225) and, therefore, surpasses an intellectual understanding of phenomena and events (Ardelt, 2000b, 2004b; Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Clayton, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Taranto, 1989). As Blanchard-Fields and

Norris (1995, p. 105) remarked, “wisdom is not simply one aspect of knowledge, but knowledge is only one aspect of wisdom.” To become wise necessitates a profound personal transformation (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Ardel, 2004b; Assmann, 1994; Kekes, 1983; Kupperman, 2005; Moody, 1986). Hence, according to Jax (2005, p. 37), wisdom “is the use of knowledge in light of spiritual purpose.”

Although it is not possible to teach wisdom as straightforward as intellectual knowledge, Sternberg (2001) argued that schools can at least provide the scaffolding for the acquisition of wisdom by teaching students not just *what* to think but also *how* to think. Sternberg (1998, p. 347) defines wisdom “as the application of tacit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balance among multiple (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, and (c) extrapersonal interests in order to achieve a balance among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments.” Brown (2004) advocates the promotion of wisdom in colleges and universities by providing a learning environment that is based on reflection, integration, and application and, thus, enables students to learn from their experiences by engaging, for example, in service learning (Honnet & Poulsen, 1989).

Finally, spiritual practices have been designed to foster the development of wisdom in addition to learning from life experiences (e.g., Hart, 1987; Lozoff, 2000). The practice of meditation, in particular, tends to result in self-reflection and self-awareness, a decrease of self-centeredness, greater sympathy and compassion for others, and ultimately greater wisdom (Pascual-Leone, 2000). In fact, teaching meditation to students might be one way to promote the development of wisdom in schools and universities (Holland, 2006; Oman et al., 2007; Rockefeller, 2006; Wall, 2005)

In sum, although intellectual knowledge is important in life, it is not sufficient to lead a life that is good for oneself, good for others, and good for society as a whole (Baltes & Freund, 2003; Baltes et al., 2002; Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Hart, 1987; Kekes, 1995; Kramer, 2000; Kunzmann & Baltes, 2003, 2005; Kupperman, 2005; Sternberg, 1998). As one of the students wisely stated,

It seems that it is more beneficial to be wise and not knowledgeable than it is to be knowledgeable and unwise. Since there are many who have been blessed with a lot of knowledge, it is important they seek wisdom as well.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Becoming Wise

There are no easy shortcuts for the development of wisdom. However, the following exercises in mindfulness might help you to learn from your experiences and, therefore, promote the acquisition of wisdom.

**Observe Everything:** Look out your window or sit in your own backyard. Close your eyes and take a couple of conscious breaths. Open your eyes and

for approximately 15 minutes try to observe *everything*! Do not talk to anyone during that time. Observe *everything* in your surroundings. Repeat this exercise in different environments.

**Be Mindful:** Practice “mindful presence” and “mindful listening” when talking with someone. Try to listen completely to the other person. Don’t interrupt the person who is talking, don’t try to tell your own story, and don’t think “ahead” while the other person is talking. Practice mindful listening and being fully present in the moment.

**Move Toward Meditation:** Practice spending some time *with* yourself (rather than just by yourself). Be mindfully aware of *everything* you do. For example, be aware that you are walking, that you stop walking, that you are sitting down. Close your eyes and feel yourself breathing and sitting. Observe the thoughts that come into your head. Don’t follow or indulge in the thoughts, just realize the thoughts that are there. Try to feel your body. After about 15 minutes, open your eyes and realize how you feel. Don’t judge yourself. Just realize whether you feel calm, nervous, agitated, peaceful, angry, loving, and so on.

To really make progress on the path to wisdom, participate in a meditation retreat. Information on many meditation courses and retreats can be found on the Internet. For information on an ancient mindfulness meditation technique that traces its roots to the teachings of the Buddha, see <http://www.dhamma.org>.

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# Can Courage Be Learned?

Cynthia L. S. Dury

**W**esley Autry was waiting for a subway in New York City when a stranger collapsed from a seizure. Autry and two others came to the man's aid, and the stranger was back on his feet. Then the man stumbled, falling off the platform into the path of an oncoming train. Autry later said he "chose to dive on top of him" and jumped onto the tracks with the man. He held the man down in a shallow pit between the two tracks as the train roared overhead. Both survived (Buckley, 2007; "Rescuer pins fallen man," 2007).

Sherron Watkins, a vice president at a major corporation, was asked find assets to sell. Her search led her to a pattern of unusual and undocumented arrangements, and she developed a growing suspicion that her company was setting up dummy corporations to hide losses. Despite fears for her job, she decided to inform the chairman of her suspicions. First she tried an anonymous letter, then a personal meeting accompanied by detailed notes. Those notes later became the basis for government action that ended the illegal accounting at her Houston-based energy company, Enron, and led to prison sentences for several of its executives (Duffy, 2002).

John Nash was a brilliant young mathematician. In his 20s, he developed a new approach to game theory that would eventually win him the Nobel Prize in Economics. At age 30, he suffered the first of many psychotic episodes, and Nash spent several decades suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. Crippling social fears, bizarre delusions (including a belief that he was the emperor of Antarctica) and other symptoms led to intermittent institutionalization, the apparent end of his career, and a chaotic personal life. Yet, many decades later, Nash willfully rejected his delusional thinking as unproductive. He said he got well by avoiding thinking about politics, the

main area of his delusions. The ability to consciously reject delusions and to avoid falling back into delusional thinking is quite rare in people with severe and long-lasting psychosis. Nash began to “dabble” in mathematical research, convinced his Princeton colleagues to take him on again, made up with his ex-wife, and became a caretaker for their son, who also has schizophrenia (Nasar, 1998).

Chris Gardner started life facing poverty and racism. He dreamed of a better life and aimed to become a stockbroker. Starting at the bottom was not easy—he earned little and, after being left to raise his young son alone, both he and his boy became homeless. Gardner kept going to work, where he excelled despite his personal poverty. Eventually he became a stockbroker—and an extremely successful one. After a few years he started his own firm, Gardner Rich, and has found both personal and financial success (Yang, 2006).

Alice Sebold was a freshman completing her first year in college when she was raped by a stranger. She spent the summer at home, with family and friends suggesting that she take time off or seek enrollment at a different college. Despite the fact that her attacker had not been caught, she returned to the same school, *her* school, in the fall. One day she spotted the rapist on the street. Instead of running, she identified him to the police, testified at his trial, and saw him sentenced to jail (Sebold, 1999).

Each of these people received public acclaim for his or her courage. Atruy’s bravery was celebrated by, among others, the president of the United States and the mayor of New York. Watkins was one of *Time* magazine’s People of the Year in 2002, and, according to a report in *Time*, she was frequently stopped by strangers in her home town and asked for an autograph. Nash’s life was the subject of the award-winning biography *A Beautiful Mind*, which later formed the basis for an Oscar-winning movie of the same name. Gardner has published his autobiography, which has also been made into a movie—*The Pursuit of Happyness*. In her memoir, *Lucky*, Sebold (1999) describes how she was sought out by police officers of her college town, who wanted to meet such an exceptionally brave young woman.

Of course, not all courageous actions are as extreme, as celebrated, or even as unique. My father was drafted into the army just out of high school. Whenever I asked about his time in the service, he told me about the live-fire exercises at the end of training, especially about crawling on his belly while real bullets were shot over his head. If he would have gotten up, he said, pausing for dramatic effect, he would have been shot—just like that! But he kept going and made it to the end.

My maternal grandfather had been a successful engineer for a large company. He was by all accounts happy there, until one day his boss asked him to certify that equipment he had been working on passed all safety inspections. The inspections had not been carried out, so my grandfather refused to sign. He was asked again, and he refused. He was fired, blackballed by other employers, and spent the rest of his working life painting other people’s houses.

Perhaps this ran in the family: his brother was a professor at a college celebrated both for its football team and for the team’s star coach. My

granduncle failed several students one semester, including some top players. The coach and other powerful administrators tried to pressure him into changing the players' grades, but he would not. Although tenure saved his job, the conflict took a toll on his relationship with the college's administration.

As a young woman, my paternal grandmother emigrated from Hungary to the United States. She came to the United States knowing only her sister and her sister's husband. Like nearly all immigrants before or since, she left most of her old life behind her and started anew, learning a new language and new culture as she went.

My father died while we were on a family vacation when I was 12. My mother told me later about her adjustment in the first few days after his death. We were in an airport two thousand miles from home, she said, and she was at her wit's end. She felt like giving up, but then she took my hand and decided that she needed to cope because she needed to raise me.

Like the courageous acts of most people, these actions didn't win my family members medals or public acclaim. They were not unique: my father shared his military training with thousands of others and my grandmother was one of millions of immigrants. Yet, they had a profound influence on my world as a child and young adult. These stories told me what mattered: integrity, adventure, and duty. You likely have similar stories in your own family: the cousin who saved someone from drowning, the sister who stood up to the class bully, the great uncle who lived with grace despite serious illness.

But how did these people, famous and unknown, distant and close, become courageous? Can you learn courage? Although courage has been a popular topic for philosophical speculation from the time of the ancient Greeks, researchers are just now starting to take a closer look at the psychology of courage. This chapter will first explore what we know so far about courage, including its defining features, followed by different typologies of courage. Next, I will outline components for change, or those features of courage that might be modified to make a courageous act easier. Finally, I will speculate on the ways in which people might learn to become more courageous.

## FEATURES OF COURAGEOUS ACTION

Cooper Woodard and I have defined courage as "the intentional pursuit of a worthy goal despite the perception of personal threat and uncertain outcome" (Pury & Woodard, in press). This definition highlights several of the defining features of courage found by Christopher Rate and his colleagues (Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, & Sternberg, 2007).

### Intentionality

First, the action is intentional. Someone who accidentally saves another person from being shot by being pushed into the would-be shooter is

unlikely to be praised as a hero. Instead, for these actions to be considered courageous the person herself needs to have decided to tackle the gun-wielding assailant—she had to have had a choice to do something else. Likewise, imagine an individual undergoing a risky, experimental medical treatment. If the person selected the treatment himself from a list of options, he may well be described as courageous. On the other hand, if the treatment was selected by his next-of-kin while he was unconscious, then the patient did not have a choice and is not acting courageously. A course of action that is not attributable to the person him or herself is not an act of courage.

### Pursuit of a Worthy Goal

Next, the action is in pursuit of a worthy goal. It is my belief that this distinction is best captured by the fine line between brave and foolish. For example, someone running into flames to save a child would be considered a hero, while someone who walks into a burning campfire just to see what it feels like would be considered a fool.

### Personal Threat

Personal threat, or the possibility of a negative outcome for the actor him or herself, is also required. A person who risks her own life to save that of another person is brave: a person who risks the lives of others, but not her own life, to save another person may not be. It is worth noting that it is the *belief* in a threat that matters, not the actual existence of danger. So, a person who believes, incorrectly, that there is a bomb in a suitcase and throws himself on it is demonstrating courage, even if everyone else knows there is no bomb. Likewise, the threat may be internal to the person. Commonly, this threat involves fear or other unpleasant emotions, such as the person with spider phobia who holds a tarantula during treatment despite great fear.

### Uncertain Outcome

Finally, the overall outcome of the action including its side effects may not be certain. Will the drowning man be saved? Will you drown trying to save him? Will the bully back down? Will he hit you in the process? If you are guaranteed success with no adverse effects, then there is no risk and the action is not courageous.

### Common Emotional Elements

This uncertainty, as well as the personal threat itself, can create fear and anxiety in the actor. Perhaps because of the close relationship between fear and threat, fear has been long associated with courage. Stanley “Jack”

Rachman, a psychologist who performed some of the first empirical investigations of courage, even described courage as requiring the presence of fear. Without fear, Rachman argues, even the most apparently courageous acts are better described as fearless rather than courageous (Rachman, 1990). However, other researchers in the area suggest that while fear commonly co-occurs with courage, due to the presence of risk and uncertainty, it is not a necessary component (e.g., Pury, Kowalski, & Spearman, 2007; Rate et al., 2007). When fear does occur, it declines with time over the course of the courageous action (Pury et al., 2007; Rachman, 1990).

As the uncertainty is overcome, the actor may experience an increase in confidence (Pury et al., 2007; Rachman, 1990) or a sense of “I can do it.” The belief that one is capable of bringing about a desired state is called *self-efficacy* and has been studied extensively by Albert Bandura (e.g., 1997, 2000). It has been associated with a wide variety of positive outcomes, including a greater sense of control and decreased anxiety.

In our studies (Pury et al., 2007; Pury & Kowalski, 2007), we asked people to describe a time when they acted courageously. The more fear and the less confidence our participants reported, the more they said that their action was courageous just for them in particular. These types of actions, high in what we call *personal courage*, included a person with arachnophobia killing a spider, a lost child asking for help, and other instances of the individuals overcoming personal limitations. Conversely, the more confidence and the less fear participants reported, the more they said that the action was courageous for anyone, not just for them. These types of actions, high in *general courage*, included saving someone from drowning, standing up to influential others for one’s own beliefs, and other actions that frequently garner public recognition. Notably, participants who reported less fear and more confidence also reported less of a struggle to take the action, suggesting, but not guaranteeing, that changing these emotional states may make taking a courageous action easier.

Tobias Greitemeyer, Peter Fisher, Andreas Kastenmüller, and Deiter Frey (2006) asked participants to describe a time when they took a civil courageous action (acting bravely to aid a stranger in a dangerous situation) or a time when they engaged in ordinary altruism (helping a stranger in a minimally dangerous situation). They assessed three different emotions: evaluation apprehension (fear of embarrassment and ridicule), empathy for the person in need, and anger. All three states were higher in courageous situations than in ordinary helping situations. While evaluation apprehension may reflect the personal threat associated with courage, empathy and anger both may point to the moral involvement of a worthy goal.

## TYPES OF COURAGE

The famous and not-so-famous courageous actions described at the beginning of this chapter also illustrate another common finding in the literature: there are different types of courageous actions (Lopez, O’Byrne, & Peterson, 2003; Woodard & Pury, in press). These types may represent

differences in the actual characteristics of the action, in the people willing to take them, or in the underlying strengths needed for action.

Shane Lopez and his colleagues (2003) described three major types of courage: physical courage, moral courage, and vital or psychological courage. The most well-delineated distinction is between physically courageous and morally courageous actions. Physically courageous actions involve physical risk or difficulty for the actor, commonly undertaken to save someone else from a physical danger. Both *Autry's* dive to save the stranger from the train and my father's live-fire training required physical courage. Like *Autry's* action, physically courageous actions to save others are typically highly visible and frequently lauded: both the Congressional Medal of Honor—the United States' highest award for military valor—and the Carnegie Hero Medal—the United States' highest award for civilian valor—are awarded for such actions. Both medals are commonly given for risking grievous bodily harm to save another person from a similar harm. For example, the Congressional Medal of Honor is frequently awarded to a soldier who risks his own life to save his fellow soldiers from enemy fire (U.S. Army Center of Military History, n.d.). The original episode that prompted Andrew Carnegie to establish the Hero Medal was the Harwick mine disaster of 1904, in which volunteers died attempting to rescue trapped miners and were overcome by the same poisonous gases that threatened the trapped miners (Bleier, 2004). The Carnegie Hero Medal has been most commonly awarded to individuals who brave rough seas or icy water to save others from drowning (Carnegie Hero Fund, n.d.). Both medals also are frequently awarded posthumously; indicating that the risks to personal safety are great indeed.

Moral courage, on the other hand, is defined by favoring a morally good goal over social approval. Cases of moral courage involve standing up for what is right in the face of real or potential opposition from others, such as *Watkins' drafting a memo outlining her company's wrongdoing or my grandfather and his brother both standing up to their employers. Initially, at least, the risk is normally one of ostracism or social rejection by others. This can be either informal, involving rejection by a peer group with no particular structure, or formal, involving a legal termination of rights and privileges. A high school student who intervenes when peers are teasing an unpopular classmate risks informal rejection; a whistleblower who informs local media of a company's wrongdoing risks the formal loss of her job. In extreme instances, the risk of morally courageous action may escalate from disapproval and ostracism to include physical risks as well. For example, U.S. civil rights activists in the 1960s were routinely threatened with death, with many assaulted and some murdered.*

In each of these cases, the risks and difficulties encountered by the actor are external ones. Facing internal risks—loss of psychological comfort or the decision to confront serious problems—are the crux of the third type of courageous action. *Nash's rejection of his own delusions, Gardner's pursuit of his professional goals, Sebold's confrontation of her rapist, my grandmother's immigration, and my mother's decision to cope with my father's death all exemplify this type of courage. Philosopher Daniel*

Putman (2004) writes about psychological courage, or risking one's own psychological equilibrium for a good cause. Paradoxically, these psychological risks are commonly undertaken for the sake of improved mental health. For example, a psychotherapy patient who confronts memories of a difficult childhood for the sake of his current mental health displays psychological courage. Deborah Finfgeld, a nurse, has coined the related term *vital courage*, or the courage to thrive in the face of serious illness or personal stressors (1995, 1999). In both cases, the risks have to do with the person's own problems (psychological, physical, or both) and the morally valued goals are commonly, but not always exclusively, for the actor's own good.

Along with my colleague Robin Kowalski and my students, I asked 250 college students to describe a time they acted courageously (Pury et al., 2007). Our participants described a variety of actions. Among the most common were saving someone else from drowning, choosing to come to a more challenging or less familiar college, and standing up to peers who were teasing a less fortunate classmate. We also asked them to rate their actions on a wide variety of dimensions, including various risks and difficulties. By using factor analysis (a statistical technique to look at the interrelationships between multiple variables), we found three main types of risks and difficulties across all actions: physical risk and difficulty, nonphysical difficulty, and image risk. Physical risk and difficulty was just what it sounds like: the action involved a risk to the physical well-being of the actor and a physically demanding task. Nonphysical difficulty included interpersonal difficulty, emotional difficulty, and intellectual difficulty; problems that had a strong positive correlation with a struggle to take the action and may even reflect different reasons to be uncertain about the outcome. Finally, image risk involved both appraisal by others—risking a lowered opinion of other people, and self-appraisal—facing something negative about one's self.

We coded the description of each action as physical, moral, or psychological courage, without knowing how participants rated the risks and difficulties. When we compared our codings to the risks and difficulties rated by the participants themselves, we found that the actions we thought were physically courageous were in fact rated as more physically risky and difficult. The actions we coded as morally courageous were rated as involving both more nonphysical difficulty and more image risk. Finally, the actions coded as psychologically courageous were rated higher only on nonphysical difficulty. Thus, we found that these three different types of courageous action also had three different patterns of risks and difficulties associated with them.

Differences in these risks, however, may not add up to differences in the people willing to take them. In other words, it does not necessarily mean that there are physically courageous people, morally courageous people, and psychologically courageous people. Instead, differences between people may depend upon the context of the action rather than the type of risk. Cooper Woodard has developed a scale to measure individual differences in stated willingness to take courageous action (Woodard, 2004). His scale asks people to imagine a variety of scenarios that call for courageous action: for example, intervening in a dangerous domestic dispute, moving to a

foreign country for the perfect job, and giving your life for your country. It is interesting to note that when Woodard and I examined how these items were related to each other (again, using factor analysis), we found that they were related with respect to the type of goal that was being pursued, not the type of risk being faced. The factors we found included acting with integrity in the context of your job or career (work courage), acting courageously for your country or belief system, acting courageously for other people who are not family members, and acting courageously to aid one's family (Woodard & Pury, in press). In this framework, work courage may be seen by Gardner's pursuit of a stockbroker career, Sebold's return to college, Nash's return to Princeton, Watkins's memo, my grandfather's refusal to sign safety inspections, and my granduncle's refusal to change grades. Acting courageously for a belief system may be best captured by my father's military training and by millions of military heroes, religious martyrs, and civil rights advocates throughout history. Acting courageously to save non-family others may be exemplified by Autry's heroic rescue of the stranger on the tracks and the daily actions of emergency personnel; whereas acting courageously for family includes both Gardner's and my mother's efforts as single parents.

A different partitioning of courage, one based on underlying personality variables, is proposed by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman. In their Values in Action system, Peterson and Seligman (2004) draw from classic works on virtue in Eastern (Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, Southeast Asian Buddhism and Hinduism) and Western (ancient Greek, Judeo-Christian, and Islamic) thought. They use those works to develop a short list of human virtues valued across cultures and across time. Their final list includes courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence, and wisdom. They then propose twenty-four different trait-like character strengths that each fall under one of six virtues. Their virtue of courage is composed of four major character strengths: bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. These strengths may map onto the separate components of the definition of courage given previously. Bravery involves not giving in to risks and challenges—likely it helps one deal with personal risks and uncertainty. Persistence involves finishing what one starts despite obstacles or a desire to quit—requiring, in essence, sustained intentionality. Integrity involves being one's true self, which may related to a noble cause. Presumably, a person standing up for his or her beliefs, or what is noble and personally meaningful, is acting with integrity. Finally, vitality involves doing things with energy and enthusiasm. It may promote high levels of intentionality. These traits can work in harmony with each other, rather than being mutually exclusive. For example, Sebold's ability to have her rapist incarcerated might be due to both the bravery to face her rapist and the persistence to see the trial through to the end. Autry's success in saving the stranger may have been due to both the bravery needed to jump onto the tracks and the vitality needed to move quickly enough to avoid impact with the train. Watkins could have drawn on both integrity to confront her bosses about unethical behavior and persistence to continue to discuss the matter.

In a follow-up to our study discussed previously, Robin Kowalski and I asked nearly three hundred undergraduates to describe a time they acted courageously, then asked them to rate that action on all twenty-four of Peterson and Seligman's character strengths. Persistence, integrity, and bravery were rated as quite descriptive of courageous actions, but vitality was not. Two strengths from other virtues—hope and kindness—also were rated as very characteristic of courageous action. Hope, involving the belief that one can attain a desired goal, actually was rated as more descriptive of our participants' courageous actions than bravery! Kindness ranked just behind and was especially descriptive of courageous actions that helped another person (Pury & Kowalski, 2007). These two additional strengths also may map onto definitional features of courage: higher levels of hope may be related to increased levels of confidence and the intentionality that accompanies it, along with a reduction in the uncertainty of the outcome. Kindness speaks to the moral good of the goal.

Thus, there are at least three different ways to divide up courage. The first and most traditional looks at the risks and difficulties of the action: physical, moral, and psychological or vital. It may be the best way to think of individual courageous actions. The second, based on the courage scale developed by Woodard (2004), finds individual differences depending upon the context and goal of the action. The third, also based on individual differences, describes different underlying traits that should lead to courage.

## COMPONENTS FOR CHANGE

To summarize: courageous actions all seem to share several features. They are intentional and frequently involve increasing self-efficacy. They are taken despite personal risks and uncertainty, which may cause fear. Finally they are taken for a noble purpose, and, depending on the circumstances, that purpose may have emotional consequences of empathy for the victim or anger. These four necessary components of courage—intentionality, facing risks, facing uncertainty, and noble purpose—might provide a more refined set of skills to develop for anyone trying to learn courage. Changing the emotional states that frequently are associated with courage (i.e., fear, anger, and confidence) also may offer pathways to increased courage. This is particularly true when fear itself might be one of the barriers to action, as with actions high in personal courage in which fear must be overcome. It also may be true for actions made more difficult by a person's lack of confidence. Finally, anger, possibly righteous anger, might be associated with a greater sense of the moral rightness of the goal. Research by Jennifer Lerner and her colleagues (e.g., Lerner & Keltner, 2001) suggests that anger also may make it easier to face risks and uncertainty.

Preliminary evidence suggests that these components distinguish times when people take courageous action from times they do not. In addition to asking people to describe situations that involved courageous or ordinary helping, Greitemeyer et al. (2006) also asked half of the people they

surveyed to tell them about a time when they *could* have acted with courage or with ordinary helping, but instead chose to take no action. Within each type of situation: courageous or ordinary helping, they looked at differences when people were asked about a time they actually helped compared with a time they did not help. Both courageous and ordinary helping were more likely when someone saw the situation as an emergency and when other people would have been expecting them to help, both related to the worthiness of the goal. Courageous helping, but not ordinary helping, was predicted by several factors also related to the worthiness of the goal: greater perceived responsibility, greater negative social consequences for not acting, and greater moral norms in favor of acting. One possible emotional consequence when the goal is more important, anger, also was a predictor of courageous but not ordinary helping. An indirect measure of confidence, a belief that one has the skills needed, also predicted courageous helping but not ordinary helping. Finally, one thing that might not work to increase courage: Greitemeyer and his colleagues found that greater empathy was associated with ordinary helping but not with courageous helping. Participants who described a time when they wanted to act courageously but did not feel about the same amount of empathy for the victim as those who did help. So, acting courageously might be facilitated by seeing the situation as an emergency, feeling social pressure to help, feeling internal pressure to help, believing one has the skills needed to help, and experiencing the emotion of anger.

Results from my lab (Pury et al., 2006) reveal that when people are asked to describe a time they acted courageously, 82% of the participants reported that they did something to try to increase their courage. Participants who reported trying to increase their courage also reported more confidence overall and more fear before taking action, but not during or after the action. We asked a second sample explicitly how much they tried to increase their courage and how successful they were at it. When we statistically controlled for how much our participants tried to increase their courage, success at increasing it was correlated with the same pattern found in our previous sample: increased fear before the action (that declined during the action) and increased confidence before, during, and after the action.

We also looked at the types of strategies people reported to increase their courage. Classic research from the coping literature (see Lazarus, 1993, for a review) suggests that there are two major ways to cope with stress: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves anything a person does to directly solve the problem they are confronting. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, involves attempts to manage one's own emotional response to the problem. In our research, we found that 12% of participants described increasing their courage by problem-focused coping, including gearing up for action, reminding themselves of their training, and mentally rehearsing what they planned to do. Emotion-focused coping was used by 30% of participants, who described increasing their courage by strategies such as keeping a positive focus, reminding themselves of the reasons not to be afraid, and getting encouragement from other people. A third broad category, which we

called outcome-focused strategies, was used by 48% of participants. This approach included thinking of the person being helped, reminding one's self of the rightness of the action and thinking about one's obligation to act, among others. Doing nothing was reported by 18%, 5% reported acting on instinct (a close relative of doing nothing), and 1% reported praying. Finally, 13% reported using multiple strategies, typically an emotion-focused strategy combined with something else, thus the numbers reported add up to more than 100%.

Use of these three major types of strategies—problem-focused, emotion-focused, and outcome-focused—varied with the type of courageous action the participant reported. Problem-focused strategies, while uncommon in most groups, were the most common among participants who described a physically courageous action, with 26% of these participants focusing on the problem. Emotion-focused strategies were most common among participants who described a psychologically courageous action, with 48% reporting various emotion-focused strategies. Finally, outcome-focused strategies were most common, and indeed nearly universal, among those taking morally courageous action, with 93% reporting outcome-focused strategies.

Reinterpreting these results in terms of the definitional features of courage, the fact that people report strategies to increase their courage may speak to the intentionality of courageous behavior. Problem-focused strategies might decrease personal risk and uncertainty. Emotion-focused strategies might help individuals cope with the emotional difficulties encountered as a result of risk and uncertainty, primarily fear. Finally outcome-focused strategies seem to highlight the worthy nature of the goal.

## LEARNING TO BE COURAGEOUS

All of these studies rely on self-reports of prior incidents. Self-report data depend on participants' recall of events, which may be subject to bias and distortion. The events themselves varied widely, and, given the retrospective nature of the data, no attempt was made to try to increase courage via a manipulation or an experimenter instruction. What would such attempts, efforts to teach people to become more courageous, look like? One possibility would be to break courage into its necessary components and their associated emotional reactions. Teach ways to decrease the components that hinder courageous action and increase the components that facilitate courageous action, and you may have taught courage.

### Learning Mechanisms

Before describing ways in which each of these components may be learned, you need to know about different types of learning processes. The study of learning has a very long history in psychology and applies to more than just the overt type of learning that occurs in classrooms. *Conditioning* is a term used by psychologists to describe behavior change in both humans

and other animals in response to a change in the environment; it is learning that may or may not be mediated by conscious processing. In other words, you need not know that it is occurring for it to happen. Three types of conditioning are commonly studied: classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational conditioning.

*Classical conditioning* is the type of learning first observed by Ivan Pavlov. It is based on several relationships between stimuli and responses. The first relationship occurs without any intervention, when an unconditioned stimulus elicits an unconditioned response. For example, the presence of food elicits salivation, and the experience of a shock elicits sweating and increased heart rate, both signs of fear. The experimenter then pairs the unconditioned stimulus repeatedly with a conditioned stimulus, for example, the sound of a bell is paired with the presence of food; a light bulb turning on is paired with the presence of shock. Eventually, the presence of the conditioned stimulus alone elicits a response very similar to that elicited by the unconditioned stimulus—thus, the tone alone leads to drooling and the light alone leads to fear. Classical conditioning models of fears and phobias are quite common in both research and treatment literature (e.g., Field, 2006). They propose that irrational fears and phobias begin as classically conditioned responses. At one point in the person's past, an unconditioned stimulus, such as a spider, has been paired with a conditioned stimulus, such as pain. Through a process of generalization, the person comes to fear all spiders. These models have led to one of the primary treatment methods for clinical anxiety disorders: exposure therapy.

Exposure therapy relies on a robust finding from classical conditioning, extinction of the conditioned response. After enough presentations of the conditioned stimulus without the unconditioned stimulus, the conditioned response extinguishes, or ceases to be shown. So, after enough presentations of just the bell without food, the dog stops drooling. After enough presentations of just the light without any shock, the animal or human participant stops showing signs of fear. In exposure therapy, the client with an irrational fear is presumed to have a conditioned fear response to the feared object. That is, the client may have associated the presence of snakes, heights, strangers, dirt, or other feared situations with a naturally unpleasant unconditioned stimulus, such as pain, dizziness, humiliation, or illness. The client then purposefully experiences the feared conditioned stimulus (a snake, a high place, a group of strangers, grimy hands) and remains in the situation until his or her fear level declines. This is repeated as many times as it takes, until, in the words of one of my clients, "it gets boring," or no more fear responses are elicited.

While classical conditioning starts with stimuli that lead to behavior, *operant conditioning* starts with the behavior of the organism. The human or animal participant, in other words, does something. That something can range from incredibly simple actions, like pressing a key or hitting your sister, to rather complex actions, like washing, drying, and ironing all of the laundry or solving a set of calculus problems. Regardless, the behavior is followed by a reinforcer—usually a reward or a punishment. As you might assume, rewards tend to increase whatever behavior

preceded them; punishments tend to decrease whatever behavior preceded them.

Both classical and operant conditioning rely on direct experience. *Observational conditioning*, on the other hand, demonstrates similar learning based on vicarious experience, or *modeling*. Watching a model, someone like you, get rewarded for good grades, get punished for stealing, or enjoying a particular brand of chocolate can change your behavior as if you actually had experienced those situations yourself. In addition, observing the actions of another can simply provide information that the portrayed action is possible.

These three types of conditioning do not say anything about the active thought processes a person may go through when experiencing them. Indeed, the behaviorists, a school of psychologists devoted to studying only observable behavior, were prominent early researchers in both classical and operant conditioning, and both types of conditioning have been reliably observed in nonhuman animals (e.g., Mackintosh, 1974). They also can be observed outside of conscious awareness in humans. For example, classical conditioning has been found even when the conditioned stimulus is presented so rapidly that the person cannot say what they just saw (Williams, Watts, MacLeod, & Mathews, 1997). However, much modern psychotherapy is based Aaron Beck's *cognitive model*: that what we think has important consequences for our emotions and our actions (e.g., Beck, Emory, & Greenberg, 1985; Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emory, 1979). The most basic version of this model states that we do not make responses directly to reality, but rather to our interpretation of reality. A classic example used by psychotherapists is the "crash in the other room": Imagine that you are at home. You hear a loud thump and a crash in the other room. How do you feel? What do you do?

Your response to this situation, Beck and others argue, depends on what you think caused the crash. If you think that it was someone breaking into your home, you may feel fearful and possibly angry. If you think it was a family member falling down the stairs, you may feel great concern and distress. If you think it was your disliked cousin dropping a stack of your grandmother's antique china, you would respond differently again.

While the actual origin of the crash may be easy to check in reality, your plan of action, based on your thoughts, may not be. For instance, if it is a burglar and if you are confident in your ability to handle yourself in a physical confrontation, you might grab a heavy object and go see what happened. If you are not confident in this ability, you may grab your phone, hide, and call 911. If it is a relative falling down the stairs, your response may depend on your belief in your own first aid skills and your ability to remember those skills. If it is your disliked cousin dropping your grandmother's antique china, your response may depend on your belief that it was intentional as opposed to accidental.

These four learning processes—classical, operant, and observational conditioning and cognitive mediation—are inherently value-free. Reinforcement may increase children's altruism when they are praised for helping others, or it may increase their aggression if they only receive attention after

hitting peers. Cognitive mediation of the world as a place of opportunities may lead to hope; cognitive mediation of it as a punitive place may lead to depression.

Observational conditioning of pseudo-courageous behavior in particular can go tragically wrong: the 1993 film *The Program* featured a scene in which characters lay down in the middle of a busy highway to test their nerves as cars speed by. Before the filmmakers removed the scene, at least two people were killed and four were seriously injured when they tried the same thing on roads in the real world (“Highway stunt ends tragically,” 1994).

All four of these processes are harnessed for positive goals in a powerful type of treatment for psychological problems known as *cognitive-behavioral therapy*, or CBT. CBT practitioners commonly use exposure, rewards, modeling, and strategies designed to change cognition. These techniques, together or separately, have been shown to lead to changes in both behavior and emotion in a wide variety of clinical disorders (e.g., Butler, Chapman, Foreman, & Beck, 2006). Two types of disorders that are especially amenable to CBT are anxiety disorders and unipolar depression. Both share features with noncourageous responses. Anxiety disorders are characterized by fear and anxiety, whereas depression commonly includes a sense of hopelessness, or a sense that “I can’t do it.” Acting courageously, on the other hand, may be easier under conditions of reduced fear and increased confidence, or a sense of “I can do this.” Thus, techniques borrowed from CBT may be useful in learning courage, particularly in changing the emotional correlates of courageous action.

### Decreasing Fear

One possible way to increase the likelihood of acting courageously would be to decrease the amount of fear felt in a given situation. Rachman (1990) has found that individuals decorated for physical courage, such as bomb disposal operators who have won awards for valor, show fewer physiological signs of fear and report lower levels of fear when experiencing a laboratory stressor. Although he calls such people fearless rather than courageous, it is clear that they have a past performance history of being able to accomplish a goal that, for most of us, would require a great deal of courage. Their lower fear may be the key—suggesting that lowering fear would increase the chances of acting courageously.

Several techniques from CBT seem to hold promise here. First and foremost is exposure therapy. Purposely facing a feared situation and remaining in it by definition requires psychological courage. Thus, exposure therapy may not only reduce the fear commonly experienced by those who would like to be courageous, but it may also give the person direct experience with intentionality—specifically, intentionality that kicks in when fear is present. Exposure therapy provides limited experience with facing risks: most exposure therapies take place in the context of objectively safe situations (e.g., a person with a fear of snakes would be asked to handle only

nonvenomous ones). Although exposure therapy has been used only in the context of irrational fears, some of the live-fire exercises in military training seem to work on similar principles and may offer the same type of benefits. Exposure therapy may be the most useful when fear is the major issue inhibiting courageous action, particularly irrational fear.

Cognitive changes also may be used to reduce fear. Increased fear and anxiety are associated with greater attention to negative information over neutral or positive information (e.g., Williams et al., 1997). Fear and anxiety also are associated with a bias to interpret neutral information in a more threatening way; perceiving the word “growth,” for example, as a reference to cancer rather than height (MacLeod & Cohen, 1993). CBT for irrational fear makes much of reducing these catastrophic interpretations—instead of thinking about the worst possible outcome, clients are instructed on ways to think of more benign interpretations. The simplest technique is to ask yourself just how likely a feared outcome is, and, if it does happen, would it really be as terrible as you predict? As with exposure therapy, this approach may be best when the level of fear is greatly out of proportion with the actual risk present.

Another category of techniques used in CBT pairs an incompatible response with the fear-provoking stimulus. In the 1920s, Mary Carver Jones (1924) proposed that eating was an ideal incompatible response for fear. When the feared stimulus was gradually introduced while the participant was eating, fear was efficiently extinguished. However, emotion-related eating can lead to binge eating and significant weight gain (e.g., Masheb & Grilo, 2006), and eating to calm fears rightfully has been abandoned as a treatment.

Fortunately, there is a less calorie-intensive incompatible response to fear: relaxation (e.g., Wolpe, 1958). A variety of techniques can be used to induce relaxation. An easy way to relax is to focus on a piece of relaxing music, a calming piece of art, or even a calming memory or daydream. Picture yourself in a quiet, sunlit meadow, for example, or taking a soothing stroll down the beach.

A second technique makes use of breathing strategies. Direct your attention to your breathing. Breathe in slowly through your nose, hold for just a moment, and breathe out even more slowly through your mouth. With each inhalation, pay attention to the cool, fresh air entering your nose and mouth. With each exhalation, attend to the relaxing, calming sensation you feel. With each breath, your stomach, not your chest, should rise and fall: this is a sign you are using your diaphragm to breathe rather than chest muscles, and diaphragmatic breathing increases relaxation.

A third technique, muscle relaxation, works best if practiced well ahead of time. Start by directing your focus of attention on different muscle groups, one at a time ... your feet and legs, your torso, your arms and hands, your neck, your head. For each group, tense just those muscles and hold for a few seconds, noticing the feelings of tension and tightness. Then release that tension and let go, allowing those muscles to become totally loose and relaxed. Eventually, you will be able to inventory each muscle

group, notice any tension, and let it go without having to tense the muscle group first.

All of these relaxation techniques have been used successfully in many contexts to reduce fear and the physical tension that accompanies it. They may be particularly useful when a clear head or physical calmness will aid successful performance. They also may be useful when fear is keeping the person from acting courageously.

### Increasing Anger

Although anger is not normally a positive emotion, it may serve a positive goal. A rush of adrenaline and other signs of arousal of the sympathetic nervous system commonly accompany an emergency situation. These physiological changes are commonly called the *fight or flight response*, indicating a fair amount of overlap between emotional reactions preparing one to fight, such as anger, and preparing one to flee, such as fear. These preparations also might be related to different cognitive interpretations of risk. Lerner and Keltner (2001) have proposed an *appraisal tendency* model of specific emotions. It states that separate emotional states, such as fear, anger, and happiness, lead people to think about situations in different ways. This is particularly true when the situation is both uncertain and partially, but not completely, under your control (e.g., the chance that you will have a heart attack before age 50; the chance that you will have your achievements written up in a newspaper). Lerner and Keltner found that both happy and angry participants believed that they had more control over these future negative and positive events and were more certain of how they would turn out than were fearful participants. Happy and angry participants were also more optimistic about their future than were fearful participants. Lerner and her colleagues (Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003) found similar results of induced emotion in United States residents after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Participants asked to write about the events in an angry way were more optimistic and less pessimistic about future terror attacks on the United States than were participants asked to write about the events in a fearful way.

One possible emotional manipulation to increase courage may be to change fear into anger. Compared with feeling afraid, feeling angry may decrease the perceived risk and may increase the perceived likelihood of the desired outcome, thus facilitating courageous action. Lerner and her colleagues used a simple manipulation to create a state of anger about September 11: they asked participants to describe what made them most angry about the attacks and then to describe the single thing that made them most angry in detail. Such a simple intervention might work in other situations as well, including when one is trying to increase courage. Of course, overuse of anger may have significant drawbacks including damage to close relationships (e.g., Sanford & Rowatt, 2004) and risks to physical health (e.g., Smith, 2006).

### Increasing Self-Efficacy: Confidence and Intentionality

Bandura (1997) reviews a variety of factors associated with increased self-efficacy—the belief that you can attain a desirable goal and the ability to go after it. Many of them are amenable to change in a person's life, and thus, may increase both the confidence associated with and the intentionality needed for courage.

Most of Bandura's features associated with self-efficacy have to do with either the direct or the vicarious experience of the individual. First, direct experiences of the individual will lead to greater self-efficacy if they include past successes, especially under difficult circumstances and on similar tasks. (Note that this type of experience also may be at work in exposure therapy—the person undergoes a variety of successes in dealing with his or her feared situation.) These successes, if attributed to ability rather than to hard work or to luck, will be more likely to lead to increased self-efficacy, and possibly to an increased chance of acting courageously.

The extent to which individuals pay attention to their past successes or failures, and to signs of success or failure in the current situation that demands courage, also matter (Bandura, 1997). Someone who attends to signs that they are failing will have low self-efficacy, whereas someone who attends to signs that they are succeeding will have higher self-efficacy. For example, a single parent struggling to get by may have opportunities to see herself as both failing—an argument with her child and her request for a raise denied—and as succeeding—a good report card from her child and a successful repair made to the family home. Whether she dwells on the signs of failure or focuses on the signs of success will have repercussions for her self-efficacy, confidence, and perhaps courage.

Bandura (1997) describes a variety of other experiences that also matter for self-efficacy. Seeing yourself as improving makes it easier to predict future improvement, and I suspect may be involved in the courage to continue a long, arduous task. Clarity about the demands of the task will also increase self-efficacy. This may reflect the intersection of self-efficacy and hope (see Pury & Kowalski, 2007; Snyder, 2002) as knowing exactly what to do will create what Rick Snyder called a pathway: a known way to reach an important goal.

The influence of experience on self-efficacy is seen both for your own behavior and for behavior modeled by others. The effects of models are stronger if they are perceived as similar to yourself, if you attend to what they are doing and recall it, if you understand all of the steps modeled, and if you observe the model being rewarded for producing valued outcomes (Bandura, 1997). For example, watching someone else disagree with a group dramatically increases the chance that a research participant will be willing to disagree with a group later (Nemeth & Chiles, 1988), a form of moral courage.

### Decreasing Risk and Increasing the Likelihood of the Desired Outcome

Aside from changing the way people think about the risks and outcomes in a courageous action, in many situations the probability and magnitude

of the actual risks and outcomes may be altered as well. Two of the most straightforward ways of learning to become courageous may, if extremely successful, end up leading to actions that are no longer considered courageous. Training, practice, and planning may directly reduce personal risks. For example, fire departments routinely issue safety gear and require extensive training before sending someone into a burning building. Even with such precautions, rescuing people from burning buildings is a dangerous business as any firefighter memorial will make plain. In other areas, however, risk may be reduced to nearly nothing. For instance, while a roller coaster at an amusement park exposes thousands of people every day to high speeds, sharp turns, and steep drops, remarkably few fatalities or injuries occur due to good design, restraints, and other safety devices (see Levenson, 2005). Crossing the street, taken for granted as a safe activity for nearly all adults, could be filled with danger if we did not learn from childhood to cross at crosswalks, wait for walk lights, and, most importantly, look for traffic. Spending a night in the cold wilderness with nothing but the clothes on your back and a thin sweater may be risky, but add a few hours' worth of preparation and a trip to the local camping goods store and the risk (and discomfort) can be all but eliminated.

The same may be said for actions that directly increase the chance of meeting the goal of a courageous action. Writing a speech ahead of time and practicing it makes the success of a presentation more likely: the presentation then also may demand less courage. Preparation may have positive emotional consequences as well. Being fully prepared for a job interview may not only make it more likely that you will be offered the job, it may make you less nervous and more confident as well.

Dealing directly with the risks and the chances of reaching a desired goal were themes we found when we asked people about trying to increase their courage (Pury, 2006). In a separate study, we asked people about a time they saved someone from physical danger (Pury, Brisbon, & Higgenbottom, 2007). I was expecting to find anecdotes about saving others from drowning, dangerous animals, and a wide variety of imminent dangers. While some of the answers were similar to those in the other courage studies (and were rated as quite courageous), many were not. "I drove a drunk friend home." "I helped one of the children I babysit out of the end of the pool that was too deep for him." "There was an iron falling from the top of my wardrobe and I moved it out of the way." All of these actions were taken before there was any immediate danger to anyone, including the actor, and were taken in ample time to ensure success. They were not, however, rated as even remotely courageous.

### Highlighting the Noble or Valuable Nature of the Goal

Finally, reminding yourself of the noble nature of the goal may aid in increasing courage. Several months ago I was reading a bedtime story to my 4-year-old. She had selected a much-abused copy of *The Ugly Duckling*. As we started to read, I realized that the final pages of the book had fallen

out. Much to my dismay, the book ended as the ugly and ungainly duckling was teased by a wide spectrum of barnyard fowl. Even the turkeys laughed at him—the end. In the original tale, many of the duckling's actions are fine examples of vital courage as we wait for him to turn into a lovely swan. The same actions appear pathetic and foolish if we leave him an ugly outcast, belittled by all. The outcome of the story matters.

Our participants tell us that outcomes matter as well. Participants overwhelmingly state that their courageous actions make the situation better and do not make the situation worse (Pury et al., 2007); Autumn Hensel and I have found similar results for judgments about other people's actions (Hensel & Pury, 2005). Outcome-focused strategies were the most common way reported to increase courage (Pury, 2006). It may be that focusing on the goodness of the outcome you are seeking may be the most encouraging of all.

### A Comprehensive Course

Like CBT, it is likely that programs to teach courage may incorporate many of the strategies above, sometimes working together in the same intervention. In one of the first studies deliberately attempting to increase courageous responding, Sylvia Osswald (2007) asked participants to think about a neutral topic, to think about a time when they did the right thing in the past, or to think about a local hero who resisted the Nazis during World War II. Participants were then asked to give a talk about racial unity and inclusion to a group of juvenile delinquents who were either described as nonviolent delinquents or as dangerous Neo-Nazis. Agreement to give the talk did not depend on what they had been thinking about when the group was relatively harmless; however, it did matter for the threatening group. Participants who thought about times when they did right or who thought about a well-known heroic model were more likely to volunteer than were participants who thought of a neutral topic. Both thinking about times when you did right in the past and about a notable moral hero may model courageous behavior and highlight the righteousness of your goal.

### CONCLUSIONS

We are in the early days of courage research. While it seems quite likely that courage can be learned, the question of how best to learn it remains untested at present. I believe it is likely that future programs to teach courage will draw on current methods of learning behavior change for behaviors related to courage. For now, I predict that these will be based on decreasing fear and objective risk, increasing anger, confidence, intentionality, and the objective likelihood of reaching the goal, and highlighting the noble nature of the goal. Like CBT for anxiety disorders, a comprehensive program to teach courage may include teaching many or even all of the components. The components included, however, may change as our knowledge advances.

On a more theoretical note, changing the components of a courageous action may paradoxically make the action less courageous. For example, nearly all definitions of courage would say that eliminating or even lessening risk would reduce the courageousness of an action. Some definitions of courage, such as Rachman's (1990), suggest reducing fear reduces the courageousness of an action. All of the changes outlined above, however, are likely to increase the chance that the goal of the action will be met: in other words, the drowning person will be saved, the teasing will end, or the individual will successfully complete therapy. At the end of the day, the question might not be "Can courage be learned?" but rather "Can the goal be reached?"

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Can Courage Be Learned?

Courage has four necessary components: intentionality, pursuit of a worthy goal, personal risk, and uncertain outcome. These components frequently elicit fear, anger, and confidence. While fear may hinder courageous action, anger and confidence may facilitate it. Changing these components and related emotional states may help someone behave more courageously.

**Your Personal Courageous Models:** Create a book of courageous role models, just for you. Include family stories of courage and times you saw friends acting courageously. Finally, describe times when you acted courageously.

**Wisdom and Courage:** Wisdom and courage may be thought of as interlocking virtues (e.g., Snyder & Lopez, 2007)—each is necessary for the other. Which of the strategies to learn courage outlined in the chapter could make a situation worse if used unwisely?

**What's Holding You Back?** Think of a situation in your life in which you would like to be more courageous. Analyze the risks and the goal involved. Is there a way to objectively decrease the risk? Is there a way to objectively increase your chance of reaching the goal? If so, these may be the appropriate first steps to take. Is fear or uncertainty in your way? Consider the techniques outlined in the chapter to reduce your fear or to increase your confidence.

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# The Health Benefits of Optimism

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**T**he idea that thinking positively can affect a person's health is a popular idea in modern culture. Do a person's thoughts and emotions actually affect how he or she feels physically? What about the influence of the mind on disease processes? Or, on a more basic level, is there even a connection between the mind and body? These are questions without clear answers, however intriguing associations between the mind and body have been uncovered. In this chapter, we will review the research on the one aspect of the mind, optimism, and its relationship to health and disease.

Certainly, health is a primary concern in the United States. In 2004, national health expenditures reached \$1.9 trillion or \$6,280 per person. Spending is expected to increase steadily reaching \$4 trillion by 2015 (National Coalition on Health Care, 2007). Heart disease and cancer are the two leading causes of death for all age groups in the United States (Centers for Disease Control National Center on Health Statistics, 2007). Approximately one in two men and women will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime (National Cancer Institute, 2007) and at any given time, one in three adults has some form of cardiovascular disease (American Heart Association & American Stroke Association, 2006). Many of these diseases are influenced by social, psychological, and behavioral factors. It should be clear, then, that researchers need to answer crucial questions regarding the link between mind and body. This knowledge will increase our understanding of how to prevent and effectively treat disease as well as promote health.

One question that researchers have set out to answer has to do with the relationship between optimism and health or disease. Within the past decade, the psychological literature has started to focus more attention on

constructs related to human strengths. Since the call for a positive social science (Seligman, 1998), many researchers now are gathering data on hope, courage, and well-being. The construct of optimism though has been until fairly recently the exception to this gap in the psychological literature. It is widely researched, and we now provide an overview of some of the most widely recognized views of optimism.

## DEFINITIONS OF OPTIMISM

Chang (2001, p. 5) notes that generally optimism is defined as an “expectation that good things will happen.” Various researchers have operationalized optimism in distinct ways, which leads to different theoretical models and measurement. The two principal scientific approaches to optimism are generalized outcome expectancies (Scheier & Carver, 1985) and attributions for positive events (Peterson & Seligman, 1984). Both the attributional theory of Peterson and Seligman (1984) and the theoretical framework of Scheier and Carver (1985) will be described; however, much of the research on optimism and physical health has focused on generalized outcome expectancies. Finally, some studies focus on expectations that are specific to the domain being studied, such as expectations of fatigue in studies of breast cancer.

### Attributions for Positive Events

Peterson and Seligman (1984) have defined optimism and pessimism as the way people explain experiences in their lives, or their *explanatory style*. This concept stemmed from the learned helplessness model (Maier & Seligman, 1976) or the expectation of future helplessness that is generalized to new situations. From the wealth of research on learned helplessness, it became clear that the model was an oversimplification of human behavior as it did not capture the full range of human reaction to uncontrollable events. Thus, people who have an optimistic explanatory style attribute problems or barriers in their lives to temporary or unstable, external, and specific causes. People who have a pessimistic style attribute problems to stable or permanent, internal, and global causes (Gillham, Shatte, Reivich, & Seligman, 2001). For example, if a person with an optimistic explanatory style failed an exam he or she might attribute the failure to a difficult exam, poor teaching by the instructor, or a recent illness that prevented more studying; a person with a pessimistic explanatory style might attribute the failure to low intelligence, poor test-taking ability, or a tendency to procrastinate in studying.

Peterson and Steen (2002) noted that explanatory style influences how people respond to difficulties in their lives. Uncontrollable events happen to everyone; a person responds according to their explanatory style. An optimist will see the difficulty as temporary and external to themselves. A pessimist will see the difficulty as permanent and unchangeable. It is easy to see how negative explanatory style has been linked to depression and

physical illness (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988). In contrast, those with an optimistic explanatory style see their world as filled with fewer hassles, which affects their overall well-being (Dykema, Bergbower, & Person, 1995). Peterson and Steen (2002) note that more attention needs to be focused on the mechanisms that lead from explanatory style to adaptational outcomes.

### Generalized Outcome Expectancies

Scheier and Carver (1985) have conceptualized optimism as a person's positive expectations for the future. Their viewpoint includes elements of the expectancy-value model of motivation (Carver & Scheier, 2001, 2002). The general idea is that people are affected by their beliefs about the probable outcomes of their actions (Scheier et al., 1989). First, the authors posit that behavior is goal-directed and that goals are qualities or states that are viewed as desirable or undesirable. People organize their behavior toward goals they see as valuable or desirable. In contrast, people try to stay away from those states or qualities they see as undesirable. This describes the *value* element of their framework; the more perceived value of a goal, the more motivated the person is to try to achieve the goal. In other words, without having a goal that is valued, the person may not be motivated to act (Carver & Scheier, 2001). For example, a person who values being physically fit will be more likely to eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly to achieve that goal than a person who does not value fitness.

The second component is expectancy. Expectancy refers to a person's expectations (confidence or doubt) that they will achieve the goal (Carver & Scheier, 2001). If they have doubts about achieving a goal, they will have little reason to act. On the contrary, if they are confident about achieving the goal, they will act and will continue their efforts if they have attained sufficient confidence—even when faced with barriers and hardship (Carver & Scheier, 2001, 2002).

A person's goals can range from general to very specific and concrete to abstract just as their expectancies can range from doubtful to confident, depending on the domain. Carver and Scheier (2001, 2002, 2003) note that expectancy-value theories imply that behavior is best predicted from expectancies when the specificity of the expectancy is equivalent to that of the behavior. In other words, to predict behavior in a specific domain, measure a specific expectancy. To predict behavior over a range of domains, researchers should measure generalized expectancy or dispositional optimism. For example, people encounter situations that they have never experienced and situations that are constantly changing. In these situations, people with a broad, generalized sense of confidence would be more likely to act to achieve the goal—even in the face of adversity—because they would assume they would be able to handle the situation successfully (Carver & Scheier, 2001). Thus, generalized outcome expectancies would be useful to measure to predict emotional reactions, as well as behaviors (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

## MEASURES OF OPTIMISM

### Explanatory Style

Explanatory style can be measured using the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ), developed by Peterson and colleagues (1982). The instrument is designed to measure three dimensions of attributional style: (1) internal versus external, (2) global versus specific, and (3) stable versus unstable. It has six subscale scores (e.g., Negative Internal [NI], Negative Stable [NS], Negative Global [NG], Positive Internal [PI], Positive Stable [PS], Positive Global [PG]). Composite attributional style scores can be calculated for positive events (composite positive) and negative events (composite negative). Individuals who score high on internal, global, and stable dimensions of explanations for negative events are considered to have a pessimistic style. Since the original conception, the ASQ has been revised and expanded (Peterson & Villanova, 1988). Research indicates that an optimistic explanatory style is linked with higher levels of physical well-being and lower levels of depression (see Buchanan & Seligman, 1995; Gillham et al., 2001).

### Dispositional Optimism

To measure dispositional optimism or generalized outcome expectancies, Scheier and Carver (1985) developed the Life Orientation Test or LOT. The instrument has since been revised into a briefer version, and items that did not seem to measure expectancies were rewritten. This newer 10-item measure is called the Life Orientation Test—Revised or LOT-R (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). The measure does not split people into distinct groups of pessimists and optimists, rather it provides continuous distributions of scores (Carver & Scheier, 2002). The LOT-R has been used frequently in research assessing optimism as it is commonly understood and defined (Chang, 2001). Researchers, though, have used the scale as a measure of pessimism versus optimism.

It is still unclear as to the nature of the relationship between optimistic explanatory style and dispositional optimism (generalized outcome expectancies). Relatively few studies have been conducted to assess this relationship, and, those that have done so have yielded inconsistent results. Correlations between the ASQ (Peterson et al., 1982) and the LOT (Scheier & Carver, 1985) have ranged from .20 to .77 (for a review, see Gillham et al., 2001; Hjelle, Belongia, & Nesser, 1996; Kamen, 1989).

### Other Measures

Researchers have used still other measures of optimism such as the Respiratory Illness Opinion Survey (Kinsman, Jones, Matus, & Schum, 1976; see also Maes & Schlosser, 1987; Staudenmayer, Kinsman, & Jones, 1978), an optimism subscale extracted from a subjective well-being measure (see Giltay, Geleijnse, Zitman, Hoekstra, & Schouten, 2004), the optimism

subscale from the Medical Outcomes Study—HIV Responses (Tarlov, Ware, & Greenfield, 1989; van Servellen, Aguirre, Sarna, & Brecht, 2002), and items from the Terman Life-Cycle Study (Friedman et al., 1993; Terman & Oden, 1947). As mentioned, researchers also are interested in measuring expectations that are unique to the situation under investigation, such as specific expectancies about the outcomes the researchers were investigating (Montgomery & Bovbjerg, 2001, 2004; Segerstrom, Taylor, Kemeny, & Fahey, 1998). While all of these researchers have measured a construct they term “optimism,” it is unclear whether these different measures are actually measuring the same thing.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical health can be conceptualized as either the absence or presence of illness symptoms (subjective indicators) or objective indicators of illness or injury. Added to this heterogeneity is the variety of measures used to assess physical health. These measures include immune parameters, cardiovascular reactivity, survival and mortality, physical symptoms, pain, and perceived health, to name a few. The different measures can be categorized into subjective and objective physical health outcomes. Objective health outcomes are those outcomes that primarily reflect biological endpoints or outcomes that can be objectively determined (such as immune parameters or mortality), whereas subjective outcomes are primarily self-report measures (such as reports of pain levels or physical symptoms).

The previous description of optimism and health provides a context to understand the remainder of the chapter. The review offered is not comprehensive, rather, we have attempted to offer recently published studies, as well as earlier studies that have made an impact on this area of research. By doing so, we hope to give a sense of the overall findings on optimism and health.

## OPTIMISM AND SUBJECTIVE HEALTH

Several studies link optimism to better subjective health measures, such as physical symptom reports. Scheier and Carver (1985) conducted a study with college students examining the relationship between optimism and physical symptoms, such as fatigue, muscle soreness, and coughs. They found that optimism and symptom reporting were negatively associated at the initial measurement and at later measurements. In other words, optimism at the beginning of the study was associated with fewer reported symptoms at that time and four weeks later. Scheier and Carver (1987) acknowledge that one limitation of their study is that physical symptom reporting is an imperfect measure of underlying physiological mechanisms and actually may represent a number of other factors—including psychological factors. In a similar study, using a population of male and female Turkish college students, Üstündağ-Badak and Mocan-Aydin (2005) found dispositional optimism to be the most significant predictor of physical

well-being, as measured by a checklist of physical symptoms. These results suggest that optimism relates to good health across diverse cultures.

Other studies have found that less pain was reported in more optimistic samples of older individuals and patient populations (Achat, Kawachi, Spiro, DeMolles, & Sparrow, 2000; Affleck et al., 2001; Chamberlain, Petrie, & Azariah, 1992; Costello et al., 2002; Fitzgerald, Prochaska, & Pransky, 2000; Scheier et al., 1989; Shneck, Irvine, Stewart, & Abbey, 2001; B. W. Smith & Zautra, 2004; Tennen, Affleck, Urrows, Higgins, & Mendola, 1992). Similar beneficial effects of optimism have been observed in a study focused on patients recovering from coronary artery bypass surgery (Mahler & Kulik, 2000). In this study, optimism was assessed two to three days following surgery. Additional psychosocial measures were administered at the same point in time, and again at one, three, six, and twelve months after hospital discharge. Optimism was significantly associated with fewer reports of pain during the earliest assessed recovery periods. In addition, in a study of individuals with early, intermediate, or established rheumatoid arthritis, as defined by duration of illness, higher levels of optimism related to lower pain for those in the early and intermediate stages (Treharne, Kitas, Lyons, & Booth, 2005). Across all groups, those with higher optimism reported less anxiety, less depression, and greater satisfaction with life.

Another study found that optimistic individuals report better sleep quality (Norlander, Johansson, & Bood, 2005). There also are many studies tying optimism to better perceived health and physical functioning in patient populations (Curbow, Somerfield, Baker, Wingard, & Legro, 1993; de Ridder, Fournier, & Bensing, 2004; Fournier, de Ridder, & Bensing, 2002a, 2002b; Glazer, Emery, Frid, & Banyasz, 2002) and in healthy populations (Fry, 1995; Hooker, Monahan, Shifren, & Hutchinson, 1992; Lyons & Chamberlain, 1994). Finally, optimism is associated with reports of fewer physical symptoms (e.g., symptoms of upper respiratory infection, disease specific symptoms) in both diseased (Motivala et al., 1999; Northouse et al., 1999; Tomakowsky et al., 2001; van Servellen et al., 2002; Wyatt et al., 1999) and nondiseased populations (Kurdek & Siesky, 1990; Lam et al., 2004; Lyons & Chamberlain, 1994, 1998; Treharne, Lyons, & Tupling, 2001). In a study of cardiac patients, preoperative optimism related to reduced postoperative physical fatigue (Ai et al., 2006). Also, Kivimäki (2005) found a relationship between high levels of optimism, reduced risk of health problems, and faster recovery following a major life event, defined as death or severe illness in the family. Among a group of Finnish employees, those with high optimism had a smaller increase in sick days and returned to their preevent frequency of sick days faster than those with low optimism.

In addition to directly impacting health, optimism influences the relationship between other psychological variables and subjective physical health. In a group of university students, optimism was not only directly related to fatigue but partially mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and fatigue (Browne & Schutte, 2006). Optimism appears to be a component of emotional intelligence, which allows individuals to

develop protective buffers—such as mood, social support, and adaptive interpretations—against the impact of physical stresses.

## LONGEVITY

Research has investigated explanatory style as a risk factor for early death using scores from the Optimism–Pessimism scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI; Malinchoc, Offord, & Colligan, 1995). Maruta, Colligan, Malinchoc, and Offord (2000) examined explanatory style as a risk factor for early death. Participants were 839 patients who had completed the MMPI as part of a larger study from 1962 to 1965. Thirty years later, the researchers ascertained the survival status of these patients. Analysis revealed that explanatory style is associated with all-cause mortality, beyond that due to age and sex. In other words, a pessimistic explanatory style is significantly associated with shorter life span. The researchers concede that the mechanisms underlying the relationship between explanatory style and early death are unclear. They posit that optimists may be less likely to develop depression, or perhaps optimists may be more positive in seeking medical help, or the mechanisms could be biological in nature.

In another study, Peterson, Seligman, Yurko, Martin, and Friedman (1998) conducted a study consisting of one thousand individuals over 50 years. They were interested in the relationship between physical well-being and optimistic explanatory style. Evidence suggests that those who had a pessimistic explanatory style were more likely to die at earlier ages than those with an optimistic style. This could be due to links between pessimism and depression, as depression is a risk factor for mortality (Frasure-Smith, Lesperance, & Talajic, 1993; Wulsin, Vaillant, & Wells, 1999). Also, optimists are likely to engage in positive health practices, such as exercise and healthy diets, which could be associated with increased longevity.

## MORBIDITY

Higher levels of dispositional optimism have been associated with decreased morbidity such as fewer postsurgical complications (Contrada et al., 2004) and fewer new coronary events in a sample of cardiac patients (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Several studies on pregnancy outcomes have found that dispositional optimism benefits gestational age, birth weight, and decreased pregnancy loss (Lobel, DeVincent, Kaminer, & Meyer, 2000; Nelson, McMahon, Joffe, & Brensinger, 2003; Rini, Dunkel-Schetter, Wadhwa, & Sandman, 1999).

A few studies have focused on reactions of cardiac patients. Scheier and colleagues (Scheier, 1989) conducted research with 51 middle-aged men undergoing and recovering from coronary artery bypass surgery. Patients provided information at three points in time: (1) the day before surgery, (2) six to eight days after the surgery, and (3) six months postsurgery, including questionnaires assessing their mood, reactions to surgery, coping

strategies, and quality of life. The authors statistically controlled for medical factors, including extensiveness of the patient's surgery, severity of the underlying coronary artery disease, and standing on the major risk factors for coronary heart disease. Dispositional optimism was related to several physiological reactions during surgery; optimists were significantly less likely to have shown physiological evidence indicative of myocardial infarction (heart attack) during the course of surgery than pessimists. Although the authors state that this finding should be interpreted cautiously, as the base rate for myocardial infarction was low in the study. The authors (Scheier et al., 1989) noted that their findings suggest that patients who are pessimists may be at risk for a more difficult and extended recovery. Indeed, in a later study of 309 patients following coronary artery bypass surgery, optimism predicted a lower rate of rehospitalization after the surgery (Scheier et al., 1999).

## SURVIVAL

Survival studies are prospective studies of groups of people suffering from serious (often fatal) diseases. An idea derived from folklore and popular media is that being optimistic is beneficial to survival. Few studies have examined this assertion. Only two studies have considered the impact of optimism on survival; these found little to no benefit in head and neck cancer patients or in lung cancer patients (Allison, Guichard, Fung, & Gilain, 2003; Schofield et al., 2004), potentially due to the advanced stage of disease. It may be that at the end stages of disease, optimism is most beneficial for quality of life rather than extending life duration. Currently, there simply is too little evidence to make any definitive conclusions.

## DISEASE SEVERITY AND PHYSIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

Increased levels of optimism are associated with fewer hospitalizations in patients with asthma (Maes & Schlosser, 1987), suggesting that positive expectations are beneficial. Another study (Matthews, Raikkonen, Sutton-Tyrrell, & Kuller, 2004) explored the effects of optimism against progression of carotid atherosclerosis. Healthy middle-aged women, who were enrolled in a larger ongoing study of cardiovascular risk factors, underwent two carotid ultrasound scans to measure intima media thickness (IMT), considered to be an early indicator of atherosclerosis, at 10 and 13 years after study enrollment. Over the three-year period between scans, optimists were less likely than pessimists to have had an increase in carotid IMT, even when statistically controlling for possible biological, lifestyle, and medication covariates. Indeed, those who were optimistic exhibited virtually no increase in IMT over the time period.

There also have been studies investigating the links between optimism and immunity. Milam (2006) studied posttraumatic growth (PTG; perceiving positive changes since diagnosis) in 412 people living with HIV. Findings indicate that optimism moderated the relationship between PTG and

disease status. Among those low in pessimism, PTG was negatively related to viral load. Interestingly, it seems the greatest benefit among people living with HIV is those who do not hold strong positive or negative expectancies. In another study focusing on 177 people living with HIV (Ironson et al., 2005), dispositional optimism predicted slower disease progression as measured by less decrease in CD4 (a measure of immune system strength) and less increase in viral load—even after controlling for baseline CD4 and viral load. The researchers also found that optimists had higher proactive behavior, less avoidant coping, and less depression.

Other studies have researched the associations between optimism and immunity in patients living with cancer. In a study investigating women undergoing chemotherapy for ovarian cancer (de Moor et al., 2006), baseline optimism predicted a decline in CA 125 (a cancer antigen and measure of disease progression) at the end of treatment. While optimism predicted a decline in disease progression, it did not predict CA 125 falling to normal levels. The authors noted, however, that the finding that optimism predicted decline in CA 125 could still be clinically significant. Finally, Penedo and colleagues (2006) investigated optimism and immunological function (NKCC; natural killer cell cytotoxicity) in men being treated for prostate cancer (PC). Lower NKCC has been associated with tumor progression in animal models. The results indicated that optimism is positively associated with NKCC in men being treated for PC. Optimism also was associated with less depression and less anger suppression; of interest, depression was not related to NKCC. These latter findings lend support to the idea that psychosocial interventions targeting adaptive self-regulation strategies may benefit the physical and mental health of men undergoing treatment for PC.

## OPTIMISM, HEALTH BEHAVIORS, AND TREATMENT ADHERENCE

The relationship between health behaviors and optimism, from the explanatory style framework, also has been examined. Peterson and colleagues (1988) investigated the relationship between optimistic explanatory style and healthy behaviors. Findings indicate that an optimistic explanatory style is associated with healthy behaviors such as drinking in moderation, avoiding fatty foods, and exercising.

In the Scheier and colleagues (1989) study of cardiac surgery patients (described previously), at six months, optimists were significantly more likely to have returned to vigorous physical activity and more likely to have a higher quality of life than pessimists.

There also have been studies examining whether optimism predicts success in making health changes as part of a rehabilitation program. In one study of 22 patients participating in a cardiac rehabilitation program (Shepard, Maroto, & Pbert, 1996), researchers observed whether people who are high in dispositional optimism were more likely to make health changes associated with lower risk for CHD than those low in dispositional optimism. Patients participated in an 18-week cardiac rehabilitation program that targets people who have recently had heart surgery, a myocardial infarction,

angina pectoris, or have been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease. They completed measures of dispositional optimism, coping strategies, depression, and lifestyle history before beginning the program. Outcome measures, which were completed at the beginning and the end of the program, were global coronary risk, aerobic capacity, percent body fat, weight, percent saturated fat, high density lipoprotein (HDL; “good” cholesterol) and low density lipoprotein (LDL; “bad” cholesterol) levels. Evidence suggests that by the end of the program, those scoring high on dispositional optimism were more successful than those scoring low on optimism at reducing the proportion of saturated fat in their diet, their body fat, and their global coronary risk to recommended levels. Also, optimistic persons were more likely to increase their aerobic capacity compared with pessimistic persons. These findings remained significant even after controlling for the effects of age, sex, and magnitude of the health change goal. In other words, persons high in dispositional optimism did not have fewer or smaller health changes to make. Again, these findings provide evidence that optimism is important in the recovery of cardiac patients. The authors noted, however, that their findings are based on a sample of 22 patients and, thus, must be examined cautiously. With that said, optimism predicted a significant proportion of the variance related to several of the outcome variables, which indicates the effects are robust.

In a similar study, Glazer, Emery, Frid, and Banyasz (2002) evaluated the effects of optimism, depression, and neuroticism on adherence to cardiac rehabilitation. Forty-six patients completed measures during the first and last week of the 12-week rehabilitation program. The researchers included a measure of neuroticism, which is characterized by negative emotions, insecurity, and distress, because other studies (Scioli et al., 1997; Smith, Pope, Rhodewalt, & Poulton, 1989) have found it to be inversely related to optimism. Recently, however, Scheier and colleagues (1999) found that optimism influenced health outcomes of coronary artery bypass surgery patients, independent of neuroticism. Glazer and colleagues acknowledged these findings but also were interested in the extent to which optimism predicts health outcomes independent of neuroticism. Analysis of baseline measures revealed that depression was strongly correlated with neuroticism and symptom reporting and was negatively correlated with optimism. Optimism also was inversely related to neuroticism at baseline. Evidence suggests that lower depression and neuroticism and higher optimism had a positive effect on adherence to cardiac rehabilitation, when controlling for age and gender. However, when controlling for mood and personality variables, additional analyses revealed that depression was a particularly relevant variable for participation in rehabilitation, above and beyond the influence of pessimism and neuroticism. The researchers recognized the limitations of their study, including the lack of control group for comparison and the relatively small sample size.

Other studies also have found optimists are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors. Schroder and Schwarzer (2005) investigated health behaviors among 381 heart surgery patients. Patients reported on their level of optimism and healthy behaviors prior to surgery and at six months

following surgery. Findings indicate that optimism was positively related to health behaviors, including eating a healthy diet and engaging in physical activity at both time points. Another study found that optimism is associated with healthy aging (Steptoe, Wright, Kunz-Ebrecht, & Iliffe, 2006). Optimism and health behaviors were assessed in 128 men and women aged 65 to 80 years. After controlling for sociodemographic factors and clinical condition, analyses revealed that optimism was associated with not smoking, moderate alcohol consumption, and brisk walking. Similar findings are reported for the Terman Study of the Gifted (Holahan & Suzuki, 2005). This study was started in 1921 by Terman (1925) and followed 1,500 gifted children. Holahan and Suzuki (2005) explored predictors of health-promoting behavior in later aging in the remaining 162 members who answered their survey. Optimism was correlated with positive health behaviors, including exercise and physical recreation, getting enough sleep and relaxation, good nutrition, and regular checkups. Finally, in the previously mentioned Milam (2006) study, optimism was negatively associated with illicit drug use and positively associated with treatment adherence in this sample.

#### OPTIMISM, COPING, AND HEALTH

It is clear that optimism tends to be beneficial to one's physical health. It is unclear as to why optimists and pessimists experience different outcomes. One empirically supported hypothesis is that optimists and pessimists cope differently with adversity.

An overview of the optimism and coping literature is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it is important to note that Scheier and Carver (1992) argue that expectations are important in behavioral responses to health threats. People who have positive expectations about the future exert continuing efforts at dealing with challenges, even serious health threats. In contrast, people who are pessimistic about the future tend to withdraw effort by pulling away or seeking distractions not aimed at problem-solving.

These differences in coping have been examined in a number of studies on optimism and distress, exploring whether differences in coping mediate differences in well-being. Many of the studies were conducted with cancer patients. For example, Stanton and Snider (1993) followed a group of women undergoing breast biopsy. Measures of optimism, mood, and coping were obtained the day before biopsy in all participants. Women who received a cancer diagnosis were then reassessed 24 hours before surgery and three weeks after surgery. Women with a benign diagnosis also completed a second assessment. Pessimists used more cognitive avoidance in coping with the upcoming diagnostic procedure than did optimists. This contributed to distress prior to biopsy and also predicted post-biopsy distress among women with positive diagnoses.

In another example, research by Carver and colleagues (1993) examined women diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer during the first year after treatment. Both before and after surgery, optimism was associated with a

pattern of reported coping strategies that involved accepting the reality of the situation, placing as positive a light on the situation as possible, trying to relieve the situation with humor, and (at presurgery) taking active steps to do whatever there was to be done. Pessimism was related to denial and behavioral disengagement (giving up) at each measurement point.

Aspinwall and Taylor (1992) reported that optimists approach problems more effectively by using more active and direct coping strategies. The research evidence indicates that optimists tend to use more problem-focused coping strategies than do pessimists and when problem-focused coping is not feasible, optimists turn to adaptive emotion-focused strategies (e.g., acceptance, humor, positive reframing). Pessimists tend to use such strategies as overt denial and mental and behavioral disengagement from the goals with which the stressor is interfering.

### IS OPTIMISM ALWAYS BENEFICIAL?

While the literature generally seems to indicate that optimism and active coping are beneficial, some studies have linked optimism to negative outcomes. As Carver and Scheier (1990) noted, some goals are simply unattainable and disengaging from such goals may play a beneficial role in effective self-regulation. An analysis of the Terman sample of gifted children found that cheerfulness (from a combined parent or teacher rating of optimism and sense of humor) during childhood was associated with *greater* risk for death 65 years later (Friedman et al., 1993). It should be noted, however, that optimism in this study was measured with items such as “Extraordinarily cheerful and optimistic. Never sees the dark side. Never worries” (Martin et al., 2002). The authors note that this measure of optimism could be tapping into unrealistic optimism, rather than dispositional optimism or a sense of perseverance. Also, in the Treharne et al. (2005) study, high optimism patients with early and intermediate stage rheumatoid arthritis reported less pain; however, high optimism patients with established rheumatoid arthritis reported higher pain. The authors suggest that for high optimism patients with advanced disease, not having their expectations met may have negative consequences for pain. This suggests that encouraging optimism at the onset of disease and adjusting expectations to be more realistic over time may produce the best health outcomes. Finally, Segerstrom (2005) found that optimism is negatively related to measures of cellular immunity when stressors are complex, persistent, and uncontrollable. In contrast, when stressors are straightforward, brief, and controllable, optimism is positively related to measures of cellular immunity. The author hypothesizes that optimistic people are more likely to remain engaged in dealing with a stressor, even under difficult circumstances, which is related to higher cortisol levels and lower cellular immunity. Pessimists tend to disengage or give up. This giving up is a protective response as pessimists minimize their exposure to stressors and, in turn, the negative physiological effects. The Segerstrom (2005) does state that while optimism is related to lower immunity in the short-term, it is generally not related to worse physical health in the long term. It appears, though, that

optimism may not always be beneficial and it is not clear as to when and under what circumstances optimism is detrimental to health.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Optimism All Around You

In this chapter, we have discussed various operationalizations and measures of optimism. We invite you to learn more about optimism by engaging in the following activities.

**How Optimistic Are You?:** You can complete the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) online to learn about your level of dispositional optimism at the following address: <http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/ccarver/slLOT-R.html>. You also can take an optimism test, along with other positive psychology questionnaires, after registering at Authentic Happiness, Martin Seligman's Positive Psychology Research Center Web site: <http://www.authentic-happiness.sas.upenn.edu/register.aspx>.

**Finding the Positive:** The next time you face a challenge, generate a list of possible positive outcomes. For example, if you have an illness, positive outcomes might include a quick recovery or growing closer to a family member as a result.

**Learn From Another's Optimism:** Select an individual in your life who you feel has a positive outlook, specifically someone who has faced a significant illness. Interview this person about his or her experience and how he or she remained optimist in times of stress. Focus on incorporating this outlook the next time you face a stressor.

**Expressing Yourself Through Writing:** In a recent study, Langens and Schüler (2007) found that writing about negative experiences or emotions can increase positive expectations. The next time you are experiencing a stressor or feeling depressed or anxious, write about your experience. Writing sessions can be short, five or ten minutes, and can be used throughout an ongoing experience, such as an illness.

**Mindfulness and Optimism:** Develop an awareness of your negative thoughts, feelings, and sensations through conscious attention to them. Engage nonjudgmental acceptance of these negative reactions understanding that they are interpretations, not facts, about your experiences. Your reactions are influenced by a variety of factors including mood and prior learning.

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# Living Lessons: The Psychological Strengths of Martin Luther King Jr.

Suzanne Rice

Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil. The greatest way to do that is through love. I believe firmly that love is a transforming power that can lift a whole community to new horizons of fair play, goodwill, and justice. (King, 1998, p. 63)

**I**t is often said that the lessons of a good teacher live on, even when the teacher himself is no longer with us. By this standard, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a very good teacher indeed. Most of King's teaching was not done in a classroom. Rather, he taught from the church pulpit, the street corner, and the rally podium. King's lessons, in the form of sermons, speeches, and other writings, are as important—perhaps more so—today than when he first offered them to the world.

King's are lessons in the virtues of love, courage, hope, and—perhaps surprisingly—righteous nonconformity and impatience. King provides a powerful example of a teacher who “walked the talk.” He not only wanted others to adopt the values he taught, he embodied these values in his daily life.

A better understanding of King's lessons, and the sense in which these represent psychological strengths, will be gained if one recalls the historical context of the man who gave them. Hence, this chapter begins with an overview of King's life and time, including key social, economic, personal (including familial and educational) aspects. Next, the chapter turns to a more detailed analysis of King's psychological strengths. Here, these strengths are conceptualized as traits of character or virtues.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

King was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929, a time when the country, and especially the South, was blatantly racist and segregationist. Not long after the Civil War ended, a system of what were known as “Jim Crow” laws were passed that enforced segregation legally until 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed. The term “Jim Crow” is indicative of the racism embedded in these laws; it refers to a song, *Jim Crow Jump* that was performed by whites in blackface; the song’s lyrics derided African Americans’ moral character in especially crude terms. Practically every institution, business, and form of public accommodation was segregated along racial lines. There were African American hospitals and white hospitals, African American schools and white schools, even African American cemeteries and white cemeteries. Restaurants, hotels, movie theatres, public parks, bathrooms, buses and trains were all segregated. In the vast majority of cases, key institutions, such as schools, that were used by African Americans were not only separate, but also unequal. Segregation was not designed merely as way to keep African Americans and white Americans separate; it was a reflection of, as well as a means of perpetuating, oppression and exploitation.

King had many firsthand experiences with Jim Crow. In his autobiography, he recalled a childhood trip with his father to a shoe store. When they sat in chairs at the front of the store, a white clerk asked them to move to the back. King’s father refused to move, and the clerk would not wait on them. Father and son left without new shoes, the elder King asserting, “We’ll either buy shoes sitting here or we won’t buy shoes at all” (King, 1998, p. 8). King had other recollections of Jim Crow from his childhood and youth:

For a long time, I could not go swimming, until there was a Negro YMCA. A Negro child in Atlanta could not go to any public park. I could not go to the so-called white schools. In many of the stores downtown, I couldn’t go to a lunch counter to buy a hamburger or a cup of coffee. I could not attend any of the theaters. (King, 1998, p. 8)

One of these experiences with Jim Crow poignantly foreshadowed history-changing events that were to come. Many people believe that the Civil Rights Movement—and King’s ascendancy to a top leadership position in the Movement—began when Rosa Parks violated Jim Crow by refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a bus. As it turns out, many years earlier, in his youth, King, too, had been denied a seat on a bus. When he was fourteen, King traveled with a high school teacher, Mrs. Bradley, to a speech event in Dublin, a Southern Georgia town where he gave an award winning talk, “The Negro and the Constitution.” When they were returning home, some white passengers got on the bus in which they were traveling and the driver told King and his teacher to move to the rear. King recalled:

We didn’t move quickly enough to suit him, so he began cursing us. I intended to stay right in that seat but Mrs. Bradley urged me up, saying we

had to obey the law. We stood up in the aisle for ninety miles to Atlanta. That night will never leave my memory. It was the angriest I have ever been in my life. (King, 1998, p. 10)

In the year of King's birth, the United States was on the brink of the Great Depression, which would affect practically all the people of the world, including all Americans. Briefly, the Great Depression began in October 1929 when the New York Stock Market plunged; by 1932, stocks on average had lost 80 percent of their value. Also by 1932, nearly one-half of all United States' banks had failed. During this same awful period, unemployment skyrocketed. While the jobless rate varied across different regions of the country, on average, it was roughly 25 percent. Whites and African Americans all suffered during the Depression, but the latter group was hit especially hard because so many African Americans were already experiencing terrible economic hardships as a result of Jim Crow laws and other forms of racism. African Americans had been excluded from many forms of work, and when the Depression hit, they were laid off in large numbers so that white workers could have their jobs. So while a quarter of all whites were out of work, depending on the region, African Americans experienced a jobless rate of between 50 and 75 percent.

Even though King was protected from the worst effects of the Depression—his own family retained its relatively comfortable middle class standing—he was deeply moved by the misery of others. One of his early memories was of unemployed people standing in “breadlines” waiting for a handout. Even though a much higher percentage of African Americans than whites were thrust into dire poverty by the Depression, King understood that suffering transcends race. Reflecting on an experience working as a teen in one of the few integrated workplaces that existed at the time, King observed, “Here I saw economic injustice firsthand, and I realized that the poor white was exploited just as much as the Negro” (King, 1998, pp. 10–11).

While far from subtle, much of the racism King experienced was verbal and symbolic: he heard adult African American men being referred to as “boy” and the “n” word was used against African Americans with impunity. But King also experienced and witnessed physical violence. As a child, he was slapped by a white woman after accidentally stepping on her foot. Of that incident King remembered:

When I was about eight years old, I was in one of the stores of Atlanta and all of a sudden someone slapped me, and the only thing I heard was somebody saying, “you are that nigger that stepped on my foot.” And it turned out to be a white lady. Of course I didn't retaliate at any point; I wouldn't dare retaliate when a white person was involved. (King, 1998, pp. 8–9)

King was also familiar with the Ku Klux Klan, an organization dedicated to segregation and the oppression of African Americans—by any means. From his youth, King recalled, “I remember seeing the Klan actually beat a Negro. I had passed spots where Negroes had been savagely lynched”

(King, 1998, p. 10). These experiences, too, seem prophetic. Years later, as an adult, King would literally “turn the other cheek” when he was assaulted while leading marches for civil rights.

## KING'S FAMILY

For all of us, including King, part of the historical context that influences who we are is the family in which we are raised. A brief note on King's family is therefore in order. As is widely known, King was a deeply spiritual person, with tremendous affinity for the teachings of Jesus. He came by his spirituality naturally, it seems, as King himself explains: “I grew up in the church. My father is a preacher, my grandfather was a preacher, my great-grandfather was a preacher, my only brother was a preacher, my daddy's brother is a preacher. So I didn't have much choice” (King, 1998, p. 1).

By all accounts, King's mother, Alberta Williams King, was a warm, intelligent woman, who King described as being “soft-spoken and easy-going” (King, 1998, p. 3). His father, in contrast, was strong-willed and often demanding. One commentator described him as follows:

A strapping, booming assertive man, commandingly erect and chesty, Martin Luther King, Sr.—later to be known as “Daddy King”—was the bluffly autocratic preacher at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, who liked to advertise how, at one congregational meeting, he had quelled an obstreperous member by threatening to collapse a chair over his head. (Frady, 2002, p. 11)

In King Jr.'s writings, his father's physical “assertiveness” receives scant attention, but others have noted that he often and freely used his belt as a form of discipline. The younger King was stoic in the face of the beatings; his tears might flow, but he did not cry out. This stoicism is, perhaps, prophetic as well. As we shall see, nonviolent resistance was the cornerstone of King's method of protest; and it is a method that consistently required self-restraint, even when faced with the risk of physical assault.

All families have difficulties, but whatever these were in King's family, he chose not to dwell on them in his autobiographical writings, focusing instead on his parents' admirable qualities, namely, his mother's kindness and his father's protectiveness.

## FORMAL EDUCATION

No doubt, King's psychological strengths have roots in the historical context into which he was born, including the broad social, economic, political circumstances, and the more intimate circumstances of his own family. These roots were nourished in formal educational contexts. After graduating from high school, King matriculated at Morehouse College when he was fifteen. Morehouse is a historically African American college, and it is where King's father and grandfather (on his mother's side) had enrolled. College was not always easy for King, as his reading skills were not

yet particularly well developed. Further, King struggled with the decision over what career path to follow: The law? Medicine? The ministry?

King felt some inclination toward the ministry, yet he was not altogether comfortable with some of the religious practices of the African American churches with which he was familiar. To him, they could appear superstitious and backward. Were it not for the influence of two professors at Morehouse, George Kelsey and Benjamin Mays, King may have opted for something other than the ministry. Fortunately, their intellectual prowess, coupled with their deep commitments to Christianity (both were ministers), provided King with a model that combined reason and faith. It was a model that held great appeal for King.

After graduating from Morehouse, King attended Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he earned a divinity degree. There, in addition to reading the Bible and other Christian texts, King read many of the great philosophers, and by all accounts was a serious, dedicated student. In the words of one biographer:

[At Crozer, King] had turned into ferociously diligent student, beginning a prodigious, systematic campaign—studying in his room often through the night—to compile an intellectual vision for himself, forging through Plato, St. Augustine, Rousseau, Hobbes, Locke, Nietzsche, surveys of Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, as if determined to methodically stalk and capture the final meaning, the Truth, of all life. (Frady, 2002, p. 20)

Perhaps the most significant intellectual development in King's time at Crozer occurred when he first encountered the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. These ideas, combined with key Christian values, would form the intellectual basis of King's commitment to nonviolence, which was both a moral ideal and a practical method for engaging in protest for the sake of social change. It would be hard to overstate Gandhi's influence, as King himself explained:

As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform.... Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in the Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking. (King, 1998, pp. 23–24)

King was so moved by Gandhi's ideas that he visited India in 1959, a trip that redoubled his commitment to nonviolence. This commitment did not waver, even years later when King would be verbally and physically attacked in the most vicious ways.

All King's studying at Crozer paid off in his own personal growth and helped to provide the intellectual foundation for his later work in the ministry and in the Civil Rights Movement. But his studiousness also had a more immediate return: he graduated from Crozer with the highest grade point average in his class, was named valedictorian, and was given a scholarship to pursue further academic study. All this from a young man who had struggled with his reading just a few years earlier!

King used the scholarship to attend Boston University, where he would earn a Ph.D. While he was a student, King met Coretta Scott, who would become his wife in the summer of 1953. At the time of their meeting, Coretta was also a student, enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music. As was fairly common in that day and age, Coretta gave up her plans for a career in music when she married King, choosing instead to support her husband's aspirations. Shortly after their marriage, the two left Boston and moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where King would begin his ministry at the now famous Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

### AN ACCIDENTAL LEADER?

From his youth, King was sensitive to and moved by the plight of those who suffered the effects of injustice, and he most certainly wanted to do what he could to alleviate human suffering. However, he could not have anticipated becoming what Andrew Young described as “the Voice of the [20th] Century” (King, 2001, p. vii). King's ascendancy to that lofty place began rather humbly, not long after he accepted a call to the pastorate at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954. In his first sermon he uttered these words: “I come to you with nothing so special to offer. I have no pretense to being a great preacher or even a profound scholar” (King, 1998, p. 46). King's hope was relatively modest: to be a good and faithful pastor, and to minister to his congregation.

Soon it would become apparent that King was far more special than he had assumed, though, for within little more than a year, he was instrumental in organizing the Montgomery bus boycott. With that boycott, the Civil Rights Movement began in earnest, and King was at its helm. This is what happened. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American seamstress, refused to give up her seat to a white man on a segregated bus. This was a violation of Jim Crow, and she was arrested and thrown in jail. Leaders in the local African American community asked Parks if she would be willing to make a legal “test case” out of her ordeal, the purpose being to end segregation on Montgomery's buses. Part of the African American community's effort to challenge bus segregation entailed forming a new organization, the Montgomery Improvement Association. The purpose of the organization was to coordinate activities so that individuals could work together more effectively. As Parks herself observed, King—still a newcomer in town—was chosen to head the association, probably in large part because he *was* relatively unknown (King, 2001, p. 2). King was ambivalent about the idea of a boycott and did not want to take a prominent role on its behalf; in fact, it took a fair amount of convincing to gain his support. But once his support was won, his centrality not only to the boycott, but also to the whole Civil Rights Movement, became apparent almost immediately. When King spoke in support of the protest at the Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, 1955, he concluded with these prophetic words to those gathered:

We are going to work together. [Applause] Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future (yes), somebody will have

to say, “There lived a race of people (well), a *black* people (yes sir), fleecy locks and black complexion (yes), a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights. [Applause] And thereby injected a new meaning into the veins of history and of civilization. (King, 2001, p. 12)

The Montgomery bus boycott lasted a little over a year, during which time African Americans who had relied on the buses for their transportation found alternatives. At first, African American taxi cab drivers transported large numbers of passengers at a reduced fare. That stopped when an obscure law prohibiting such low fares was discovered. African Americans developed what amounted to an alternative mass transportation system, complete with a time schedule for drop-offs and pick-ups. Some white employers drove their African American workers. Many African Americans chose to walk. In one way or another, the vast majority of African Americans stayed off the busses until after the U.S. Supreme Court declared that bus segregation laws were unconstitutional. On December 21, 1956, at 5:55 in the morning, King and three of his friends and associates were the first African Americans to ride an integrated bus in Montgomery.

The significance of the bus boycott cannot be stressed enough. It was important in its own right, ending a segregationist practice that had long demeaned thousands of African Americans. Beyond that, the boycott was the beginning of the end of segregation in all its ugly and destructive manifestations. Finally, the boycott embodied and exemplified the psychological strengths that would sustain King for the rest of his life. In the words of one scholar, “In many ways ... [the] struggle in Montgomery was to contain the genetic code, as it were, of almost all to follow in King’s future” (Fradley, 2002, p. 37).

It is hard to imagine today the kind and intensity of animosity that the boycott inspired—much of which was directed at King. He was arrested on trumped-up charges, jailed, and fined for a minor traffic violation; King received between thirty and forty threatening phone calls a day, death threats were made against him, and most frightening of all, his house was bombed. Through all these and other trials and tribulations, King stuck to his principles. He kept love at the center of his life and never resorted to violence.

The Montgomery bus boycott was but the first in a series of protests in which King (and other participants) suffered much, but also achieved much. There was the “sit-in” movement, for example. This began in earnest in 1960 when King and his family moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where King had been selected as co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. By their very presence in places reserved for whites only, African Americans participating in sit-ins at lunch counters, churches, stores, and other venues seriously challenged existing power relations. At the same time, King organized or participated in economic boycotts, in which African Americans refused to spend money in segregated business. Added to that—and perhaps most visible—were the mass marches and public demonstration held in state capitols and Washington, D.C. At these events, hundred and sometimes many thousands, of African American and sympathetic whites

would march on behalf of justice and equality. Not all of King's civil rights work was so public, of course. He also worked behind the scenes with lawmakers and other officials in efforts to change policies and laws. Likewise, not all of the challenges King faced played out in the public eye. Because he was trying to effect significant social, political, economic, and legal change, King was perceived as a threat to those who had an interest in maintaining the status quo. Local law enforcement, and even the FBI, kept a close and often intimidating watch on King.

### KING'S FINAL SPEECH

The Montgomery bus boycott established a pattern of conduct that remained consistent throughout the rest of King's life—no matter the city, state, or country, no matter the particular form of protest, no matter the hostility encountered. It is therefore not surprising that, despite feeling discouraged and ill, King returned to Memphis, Tennessee on April 3, 1968, to speak to and encourage sanitation workers who were on strike. He concluded with these now famous words:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life.... But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. (King, 1992, p. 203)

The next day, April 4, King was shot and killed.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTHS: AN ETHIC OF LOVE AND ITS VIRTUES

As the foregoing section of this chapter may suggest, the psychological strengths of King are revealed, in part, through his public conduct and his own reflections on his personal life. But these strengths are made clearer still when one examines King's speeches, sermons, letters, and other papers; these writings plainly articulate the ethical commitments King lived and exemplified for others who, during the 1950s and 1960s, witnessed the struggle for social justice and human dignity.

Such an examination reveals that King viewed these strengths as ethical qualities. King was an activist, but he was also a student of theology and philosophy. As such, King was concerned with questions about how one should act (conduct) and the kind of person one should strive to be (character). At least *some* such questions are discussed in all of King's published works; other works are dedicated almost solely to ethical matters. When pieced together, what emerges from this literature is what might be called King's "ethic of love." While King (like academic ethicists) was concerned with conduct and character, what most clearly distinguishes his ethic is its emphasis on conduct and character in relation to achieving social,

economic, and political justice. It should be recalled that most of the sermons and speeches in which King extolled certain values were given to predominantly African American audiences. In speaking to these audiences, King was not indicting the morals of African Americans, but rather trying to shore up those qualities that he believed were necessary, not only for being a “good Christian,” but also for engaging in the struggle for civil rights. King knew that rights for African Americans would be hard won *by* African Americans, not granted by the white establishment as an act of generosity. His ethic of love comprises the qualities that he no doubt hoped would energize and embolden that struggle.

This section of the chapter offers a systematic account of King’s ethic that, as it was originally expressed, is scattered among the many works he authored. Even though this ethic promotes values (such as economic equality) that some would regard as instrumental, it is nevertheless best characterized as an ethic of virtue. While different scholars conceptualize virtue somewhat differently, there is a family resemblance between these conceptualizations that enables one to distinguish an ethic of virtue from alternative ethical orientations. First, in contrast to rule- or principle-based orientations, an ethic of virtue emphasizes traits of character—virtues—as essential to the moral life and to human flourishing or well-being generally. In addition to love, the virtues that largely constitute King’s ethic include courage and hope and—perhaps surprisingly—nonconformity and impatience. Second, virtue theorists often conceptualize virtues as “means” between two extremes, or vices. One of King’s unconventional virtues, “impatience,” for example, can be viewed as a mean between the extremes of rashness and complacency. Similarly, what is entailed in enacting any particular virtue depends on the circumstances at hand. Courage, for instance, differs considerably whether one is facing an angry street mob or taking a tough exam in school. Third, the acquisition of virtue is generally conceived by virtue ethicists as a process of habituation; as famously (and seemingly paradoxically) expressed by the philosopher Aristotle, one becomes virtuous by acting virtuously. The road to moral maturity begins, in this view, by modeling and approximating the conduct of persons of good character; with practice, and the kind of understanding that develops through reflection and study, a person becomes increasingly morally mature.

## THE VIRTUES OF KING’S ETHIC

At the heart of King’s ethic is the virtue love. While love is a dominant theme in many of King’s writings, some of his most engaging discussions about this virtue are found in his sermons. In these works, love is not conceptualized in its more familiar romantic or sentimental manifestations; instead, King discusses a variety of love that is robust and tenacious. King often uses the Greek word *agape* to express his conception, and said in the sermon “Loving Your Enemies” that this love is “understanding and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men” (King, 1963, p. 52). It might even

be said that, for King, love constituted a kind of power, indeed *the* power that is adequate to the task of overcoming oppression. In this same sermon, King interprets the biblical command to “love one’s enemies” in almost pragmatic terms: “Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies—or else? The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation” (King, 1963, p. 53). Given his theological orientation, there can be little doubt that King embraced love as an unqualified good to be nurtured for its own sake. But as the quote immediately above suggests, King also seemed to believe that love has a certain instrumental value. Love, in this view is an end in itself, as well as a means to other good ends.

The virtue of love is allied with King’s commitment to nonviolence—a commitment, as noted earlier, that was strengthened by his study of the work of Gandhi: “As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi ... I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence, is one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom” (King, 1963, p. 150). The method of nonviolence is no doubt simpler in principle than in practice. At its most basic, nonviolent protest entails the peaceful breach of unjust laws and social customs. The sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, boycotts of segregated public transportation, and mass marches are perhaps the most familiar demonstrations of nonviolent protest. The principle of nonviolence required African American (and sympathetic white) protesters to refrain from retaliating against verbal taunts and even physical assaults.

The outward self-control required of nonviolent protesters was obviously tremendous, but added to that was the requirement to protest in the “right spirit.” Protesters were called on to view those against whom they were protesting not as enemies, but rather as individuals caught up in an unjust system. As understood by King, nonviolence cannot be motivated by a desire to humiliate or defeat others, no matter how repugnant their ideas and actions may be. Instead, it must be motivated by love. King explained: “At the center of our movement stood the philosophy of love [and the] attitude that the only way to ultimately change humanity and make the society that we all long for is to keep love at the center of our lives” (King, 1986/1992, p. 31). Indeed, love and justice are closely linked in King’s ethical thought: “Justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love” (King, 2001, p. 11). Love and justice are also linked with power in King’s formulation, which is apparent in his 1967 speech, “Where Do We Go From Here?”: “Power ... at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love” (King, 2001, p. 186).

As conceptualized by King, the love that should motivate nonviolent protest does not entail complacency or tolerance of plainly intolerable degradation. The point of such protest is to push those in positions of power toward acknowledging the existence of injustices. In King’s words:

“Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.... So the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so tension-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation” (King, 1986/1992, pp. 86–87).

King saw love as serving another of the central virtues in his ethic: courage. His most succinct definition of courage is the “power of the mind to overcome fear” (King, 1963, p. 118). Throughout their history on this continent, African Americans have been given good reason to be fearful. It is only sensible to fear the master’s whip and the Klansman’s rope. These and other real threats that have faced African Americans are all too familiar. As conceptualized by King, however, courage does not entail indifference to danger any more than it entails an absence of fear. To be courageous, in this view, is to persevere even in the *presence* of fear and danger.

Hope is the third main virtue in King’s ethic. Given African Americans’ history of oppression, it comes as no surprise that, like courage, King saw hope as a virtue. All virtues are difficult to develop and to maintain as part of human character, otherwise there would be no reason to classify these qualities *as* virtues. Achieving and maintaining a state of hopefulness is especially difficult for people who are regularly psychology degraded and physically abused. To be hopeful under slavery or segregation would require tremendous will and effort. Yet, in King’s view, a lack of hope would almost certainly doom African Americans to continuing oppression. As noted earlier in this section, King recognized that freedom would not be presented to African Americans as a gift; if freedom were to be achieved, this would be the result of African Americans’ own efforts. As expressed by King: “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed” (King, 1986/1992, p. 87). But lacking hope that freedom could become reality, there would be no motivation to engage in the struggle. In this sense, King believed that the failure to hope for a better world served those who sought to maintain oppressive social relations. King discussed the experiences of enslaved forebears to illustrate the human capacity for hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles:

They had no alternative except to accept the fact of slavery, but they clung tenaciously to the hope of freedom. In a seemingly hopeless situation, they fashioned within their souls a creative optimism that strengthened them. Their bottomless vitality transformed the darkness of frustration into the light of hope. (King, 1963, p. 93)

Here, King suggested what might be regarded as a psychology of hope, a method for remaining hopeful in the face of disappointment and degradation. In part, this requires resisting two equally paralyzing alternatives: bitterness and fatalism. Bitterness almost always hurts the person who is bitter and rarely, if ever, does anything to remedy its causes. Fatalism, the belief that a situation is inevitable and unalterable, all but ensures that the

situation will in fact remain unchanged. As difficult as this is, the alternative, King argued, is to realize that even the most challenging of circumstances may contain opportunities: “To guard ourselves from bitterness, we need the vision to see in this generation’s ordeals the opportunity to transfigure both ourselves and American society” (King, 1963, p. 93). Hope is not blind, King reminded, but rather a creative capacity for imagining possible alternative futures.

Many philosophers in a wide variety of traditions, ranging from Aristotle to Dewey have considered love, courage, and hope to be virtues, although different thinkers have conceptualized these attributes somewhat differently. In his constellation of virtues, King included a quality that, at first glance, seems an odd candidate for virtue status: this quality he called variously “nonconformity,” “maladjustment,” and “dissatisfaction.” Specifically, he called on listeners to be maladjusted to segregation and discrimination, to mob rule, to physical violence and to “tragic militarism” (King, 1986/1992, p. 33).

“Nonconformity as virtue” is a central theme of one of King’s more famous (and more radical) writings, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (King, 1986/1992, pp. 83–100). There King takes to task Christian ministers who had failed to engender sufficient “maladjustment” among their parishioners, arguing that the alternative is a deadening complacency. This is the condition of those very few African Americans of King’s time who had achieved middle-class status, and in the process of doing so, became callous toward the suffering of the vast majority of their less fortunate peers. King recognized that poor African Americans were also vulnerable to complacency—a state of “adjustment”—to their situation resulting from longstanding oppression.

King’s criticism of his fellow pastors focused not only on the relation between the clergy and their congregations but also on the relation between the churches and their local communities: “Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church’s silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are” (King, 1986/1992, p. 97). King stopped short of calling such complacency a vice, but his message was clear: churches abet an unjust social order when they withhold their criticisms of it, and worse, conform to it.

In the speech “Where Do We Go from Here” (King, 2001, pp. 165–199), this virtue is called by the name “dissatisfaction.” This speech is concerned mainly with unemployment, poverty, and other manifestations of economic inequality, in regard to which King’s audience was reminded of the legitimacy of their dissatisfaction. King began his enumeration of a list of twelve social conditions that he thought *ought* to be regarded with dissatisfaction with these words: “And so I conclude [this speech] by saying today that we have a task, and let us go out with divine dissatisfaction. Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds.... Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity” (King, 2001, p. 96).

The fifth of King's virtues, "impatience" is a logical companion of nonconformity, maladjustment, and dissatisfaction, and like these qualities it is not generally regarded as a virtue. In his address at the freedom rally in Cobo Hall King responded to moderates' pleas for patience, to "Slow up" and "Cool off":

They say, "Why don't you do it in a gradual manner?" Well, gradualism is little more than escapism and do-nothingism, which ends up in standstillism.... And so we must say: Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.... Now is the time to get rid of segregation and discrimination. (King, 2001, p. 65)

Elsewhere in connection with the virtue of impatience, King discussed the "myth of time," according to which African Americans should wait for a later date to achieve freedom and equality on the grounds that everything will be made right—in time. This myth, Kings argued, represents a "tragic misconception of time. It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills" (King, 1986/1992, p. 92). Here, King stated the problem fairly delicately; but in his Cobo speech, it is clear King believed that by making a virtue out of patience, some were attempting to forestall equality and social justice.

King recognized that not all manifestations of nonconformity, maladjustment, dissatisfaction, and impatience are virtuous. In regard to "nonconformity," for example, he said, "Nonconformity in itself, however, may not necessarily be good and may at times possess neither transforming nor redemptive power. Nonconformity per se contains no saving value and may represent in some circumstances little more than a form of exhibitionism" (King, 1963, p. 26). And in certain circumstances—in many interactions with small children, for example—impatience generally would also not be seen virtuous. In what sense might these qualities, which are usually considered to be undesirable, be regarded not merely favorably, but as *virtues*? For King, at least, Christianity provided the foundations upon which these qualities had virtue status. In regard to the virtue of nonconformity, King quoted the Book of Romans: "Be not conformed to this world" (King, 1963, p. 21). And Jesus himself, King pointed out, was "maladjusted" to his time (King, 1986/1992, p. 33), and was, beyond that, an impatient "extremist" (King, 1986/1992, p. 94).

While it is important to understand that, for King, these unconventional virtues are rooted largely in Christian doctrine, there are other secular strands in the tradition of virtue ethics according to which these qualities may be counted as virtues as well. Aristotle, for one, thought that all virtues acquired their stature in relation to particular circumstances; virtues, in this sense, are context dependant. As noted earlier, the virtue of courage, for example, will appear and be manifested quite differently whether one is, physically threatened or faced with a tough decision. In light of this interpretation of virtue theory, is not unreasonable to conclude that nonconformity and impatience should indeed be counted among the virtues under circumstances such as those experienced by King and other African

Americans. The context in which King lived was oppressive and unjust, and failure to “adapt” to this context, let alone to strive for its transformation, carried monumental risks. From an Aristotelian perspective, these risks also contribute to the status of the qualities King named as virtues. Beyond that, however, it should be recalled that virtue ethics is ultimately concerned with human flourishing. For African Americans to flourish, racial oppression had to be undone, and impatience, nonconformity, maladjustment, and dissatisfaction, while not sufficient alone, are qualities of character necessary to achieving that end.

### CONNECTIONS BETWEEN KING’S VIRTUES

For the sake of clarity, the virtues that largely define King’s ethic have been discussed singly, yet the virtue of love can be viewed as permeating or augmenting all the virtues. First, love provides a motivational lever that enables those who possess the virtues to act in accord with them. Take “courage,” for example. Love, whether for another person or for an idea (such as justice or equality) is emboldening, even in the presence of real danger. Love, which for King was a love for humanity, also provides an intellectual foundation for these virtues. As conceptualized by King, love is, *by reason*, tied to courage, hope, nonconformity, and impatience. And were these qualities not permeated with love, there is some doubt as to whether they should be regarded as virtues at all; courage, hope, nonconformity and impatience can serve bad purposes as well as good ones, and they can diminish human character as well as enlarge it. It might be said that love points these qualities in the right direction: toward the good.

Both conceptually and practically, these virtues are connected in another way as well; each virtue serves to modify or check other virtues. For example, all by itself nonconformity will typically not lead to social change. But when nonconformity is allied with, say, courage, the result is more likely to entail active participation in efforts to bring the desired change to fruition. When love is added to this mix, motivation and sense of direction are strengthened further.

### THE MATERIAL DIMENSION OF KING’S THOUGHT

So much of the contemporary discourse on virtue and character dichotomizes the moral and the material sides of life, as if good character can be willed into existence no matter what the circumstances. As mentioned previously, like all ethicists, King was concerned with human conduct and character. But to a greater extent than most, King recognized that conduct and character are shaped by material context. Repeatedly, King asserted the same basic concern for material conditions as that expressed in this excerpt:

The gospel is at its best when it deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being but his material well-being. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is

not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial. (King, 1992, p. 58)

The implication of King's thought in this regard is that if we as a society are serious about the character of youth and of our society broadly then we ought to attend much more closely to social, political, and economic injustices that shape all our lives.

King not only accounted for the relation between character and material context but also for the relation between individuals in an oppressive social order. In fact, King reminds us that oppressive and unjust social conditions can have terrible moral consequences for everyone involved including those who, in some sense, benefit from injustice. This is obvious in cases where injustice is intentionally perpetuated. But as King understood, morally speaking, problems arise in subtler cases as well. Ignorance of the privileges that accrue on the basis of white skin or middle-class status is hardly a virtue, and to the extent that such ignorance is willed, may be regarded as a vice. Segregation not only reflects but also reproduces oppressive relations:

All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and the segregated a false sense of inferiority.... So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful. (King, 1986/1992, p. 89)

Thanks in no small part to King's efforts, segregation can no longer be enforced through the law; the statutes to which he referred are gone. Yet largely because of economic inequality, we have not yet overcome segregation to the extent envisioned by King. Were he alive today, King would no doubt do battle against the social conditions that continue to diminish humanity.

## CONCLUDING COMMENT

From the pulpit, street corner, and podium, King urged his parishioners and other listeners to embrace the virtues, and beyond that, he was engaged with them in activities in which these virtues were made manifest. Love, courage, hope, nonconformity, and impatience were embodied in the sit-ins, boycotts, and marches, in which King himself was often a participant. The example King set serves as a powerful reminder of the efficacy of living the lessons one wants to teach. King explained: "The nonviolent approach does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them strength and courage that they did not know they had" (King, 1963, p. 151). Indeed, judging from commentaries of those who lived through the Civil Rights Movement, King may also be regarded as an exemplary public educator. Although he "taught" in the streets and from the pulpit, it would be difficult to overstate King's moral influence. Among the many lessons that are part of King's legacy, few are more significant than those contained in his ethic of love. The virtues of love, courage,

hope, and even non-conformity and impatience, are not merely personal qualities that enrich the lives of those who possess them, but also qualities that work on behalf of social justice.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Discovering and Capitalizing on Your Strengths

This chapter discussed the particular psychological strengths of Martin Luther King Jr. You are now encouraged to reflect on your own strengths and to see how these strengths are similar to and different from those of King.

**Personal Reflections:** Find a time and place where you can reflect on your strengths. As these come to mind, write them on a piece of paper. Don't worry about spelling, writing in complete sentences, or anything else; just write what comes to mind. Love, courage, hope, nonconformity, and impatience were King's special strengths. What are yours? King was involved in many marches and other gatherings on behalf of causes he believed in. What beliefs do you believe in most strongly? Would you participate in a march or other public demonstration to show the strength of your beliefs?

**Sharing Stories and Asking Others:** While King is widely regarded as a great American, not everyone has had a chance to reflect on the strengths that made him great. Share this part of King's life story with others. See if they agree that love, courage, hope, nonconformity, and impatience are strengths. Ask your family and friends about what they see as your personal strengths. Are your strengths the same as King's in some ways? Many ways? Sometimes we see our strengths differently than do our family members, friends, and others. It is helpful to get these other peoples' perspectives on our strengths. When we ask others, we sometimes discover strengths we didn't even know we had!

**Getting to Know Your Friends' and Family Members' Strengths:** Ask others about their strengths. This is a good way to better understand how the people you care most about see themselves. If you believe that your friends or family members have strengths that they do not recognize, tell them!

**Exercising Your Strengths:** The old adage "if you don't use it you lose it" holds true when it comes to personal strengths. After you have identified your strengths, decide to really exercise one of them. Five times a day for five days in a row, put your strength into action. If "love" is the strength you pick, do five loving things every day. Whatever strength you identify, by exercising it you will make it even stronger!

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# An Agentic Perspective on Positive Psychology

Albert Bandura

**T**his chapter addresses the field of positive psychology from the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; 2006b). To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and the course of environmental events. In this view, people are contributors to their life circumstances not just products of them. Among the mechanisms of agency none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy. This core belief is the foundation of human motivation, well-being, and accomplishments. Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by one's actions.

## SELF-EFFICACY FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN LIFE

It is exceedingly difficult to maintain hope and optimism if one is plagued by self-doubt in one's ability to influence events and convinced of the futility of effort. Indeed, empirical studies confirm that optimism, positive thinking about the future, hedonic balance with positive affect exceeding negative affect, and satisfaction with one's life are rooted in a sense of personal efficacy (Bandura, Caprara, Regalia, & Barbaranelli, 2007; Benight & Bandura, 2004; Caprara & Steca, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Caprara, Steca, Gerbino, Paciello, & Vecchio, 2006). Some of the theorizing on the role of affect in human functioning is based on a direct-effects model. Positive affect does good things. Negative affect does bad things. Evidence that positive affect raises perceived self-efficacy and negative affect lowers it

suggests that the impact of affect on psychosocial functioning works partly through beliefs of personal efficacy (Kavanagh & Bower, 1985). In everyday life, adaptive functioning requires regulation of affect. Perceived self-efficacy to regulate positive and negative affect also plays a role in the quality of psychosocial functioning (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003).

Human well-being and attainments require an optimistic and resilient sense of efficacy. This is because the usual daily realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of frustrations, conflicts, impediments, adversities, failures, setbacks, and inequities. To succeed, one cannot afford to be a realist. Realists forgo the endeavor, are easily discouraged by failures should they try, or they become cynics about the prospect of effecting personal and social changes.

We are currently witnessing the pathologizing of optimism. A positive outlook is regarded as a “cognitive failing” requiring downward correction to match performance. The functional value of veridical self-appraisal of one’s capabilities depends on the venture, however. In activities where the margins of error are narrow and missteps can produce costly or injurious consequences, personal well-being is best served by conservative efficacy appraisal. It is a different matter where difficult accomplishments can produce substantial personal or social benefits and the costs involve one’s time, effort, and resources. Individuals have to decide for themselves which abilities to cultivate, whether to invest their efforts and resources in ventures that are difficult to fulfill, and how much hardship they are willing to endure in pursuits strewn with obstacles and uncertainties.

Turning visions into realities is an arduous process with uncertain outcomes. Innovators and social reformers do not come from the ranks of realists. Societies enjoy the considerable benefits of the accomplishments in the sciences, technologies, arts, and social reforms of its persisters and risk takers. The risks of overconfidence are studied extensively, but the self-limiting costs of underconfidence are largely ignored. This bias reflects the conservative orientation of our theorizing.

Virtually every innovation that has touched our lives was repeatedly rejected at the outset. In his delightful book titled, *Rejection*, John White (1992) reports that the prominent characteristic of people who achieve success in challenging pursuits is an unshakable sense of efficacy and a firm belief in the worth of what they are doing. Resilient self-efficacy provides the needed staying power to weather a lot of frustration and to override repeated early rejections. The functional belief system in difficult undertakings combines realism about tough odds but optimism that one can beat those odds through self-development and perseverant effort. To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, reasonable people adapt to the world, unreasonable people try to change it; therefore, progress depends on the unreasonable ones. Those who are successful, innovative, nonanxious, nondespondent, and tenacious social reformers take an optimistic view of their efficacy to influence events that affect their lives.

When people are asked for their regrets in life, for the most part, they regret the actions not taken rather than the actions taken (Hattiangadi,

Medvec, & Gilovich, 1995). They regret the educational opportunities forsaken, the careers not chosen that would have provided satisfaction and fulfillment, the risks not taken, and the relationships not cultivated or short-changed. In the words of the late Senator Paul Tsongas, "No one on their deathbed ever expressed regret for not spending more time in the office." The reach of worklife has undergone transformative changes with the advent of wireless technologies. People are now wired to their workplace. The mobile office increasingly intrudes on family, social, and recreational life. An ad by a mobile broadband network, emblazoned on the wall of an airport, urges travelers to work actively to strive to "make just about any place a workplace"! These wireless technologies create new challenges to striking a balance between the competing priorities of life.

### Sources and Diverse Effects of Perceived Self-Efficacy

People's beliefs in their efficacy can be developed in four ways. The most effective way of building a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences. Successes build a robust efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially in early phases of efficacy development when people feel insecure about their capabilities. If people experience only easy successes, they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. Resilient efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Success is achieved by learning from failed efforts. Hence, resilience is also built by training in how to manage failure so it is instructive rather than demoralizing.

The second way of developing self-efficacy is by social modeling. Models are sources of aspiration, competencies, and motivation. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by perseverant effort, raises observers' beliefs in their own abilities. In contemporary society, ideas, values, belief systems, and lifestyles are socially transmitted via the extensive modeling in the symbolic environment of the electronic media. This enables people to transcend the confines of their lived environment. Social persuasion is the third mode of influence. If people are persuaded to believe in themselves they will exert more effort. This increases their chances of success. Credible persuaders must be knowledgeable and practice what they preach. Effective efficacy builders do more than convey faith in others. They arrange situations for others in ways that bring success and avoid placing them prematurely in situations where they are likely to fail. They encourage judgment of success by self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others. Pep talks without enabling guidance achieve little.

People also rely partly on their physical and emotional states in judging their efficacy. They read tension, anxiety, and weariness as signs of personal deficiencies. Mood also affects how people judge their efficacy. Positive mood enhances a sense of efficacy; depressed mood diminishes it. Efficacy beliefs are strengthened by reducing anxiety and depression, building physical strength and stamina, and changing negative misinterpretations of physical and affective states.

Efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional processes. Such beliefs influence whether people think pessimistically or optimistically, in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways. Efficacy beliefs also shape people's outcome expectations—whether they expect their efforts to produce favorable outcomes or adverse ones. In addition, efficacy beliefs determine how opportunities and impediments are viewed. People of low efficacy are easily convinced of the futility of effort in the face of difficulties. They quickly give up trying. Those of high efficacy view impediments as surmountable by development of requisite competencies and perseverant effort. They stay the course in the face of difficulties and remain resilient to adversity. Moreover, efficacy beliefs affect the quality of emotional life and vulnerability to stress and depression. It is natural to feel despondent following setbacks and failures on matters of import. It is the bounce-back capacity that is important. Belief in one's recovery efficacy supports the effort needed to restore one's well-being. Last, but not least, efficacy beliefs determine the choices people make at important decisional points. By choosing their environments they can have a hand in what they become. Beliefs of personal efficacy can, therefore, play a key role in shaping the courses lives take by influencing the types of activities and environments people choose to get into. In self-development through choice processes, personal destinies are shaped by selection of environments conducive to the cultivation of valued potentialities and lifestyles.

### Modes of Agency

Social cognitive theory distinguishes among three modes of agency. They include individual, proxy, and collective agency, each of which is founded on belief in the capacity to effect change. In personal agency exercised individually, people bring their influence to bear on their own functioning and on environmental events. In many spheres of functioning, people do not have direct control over conditions that affect their lives. They exercise socially mediated or proxy agency. They do so by influencing others who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire. People do not live their lives in individual autonomy. Many of the things they seek are achievable only by working together through interdependent effort. In the exercise of collective agency, they pool their knowledge, skills, and resources and act in concert to shape their future. People's shared belief in their collective efficacy to achieve desired results is a key ingredient of collective agency. People's shared beliefs in their collective efficacy influence the type of futures they seek to achieve by working together; how well they use their resources; how much effort they put into their group endeavor; their staying power when their efforts fail to produce quick results or meet forcible opposition; their vulnerability to the discouragement that can beset those taking on tough social problems; and what they accomplish by their collective efforts (Bandura, 1999).

The strength of families, communities, education systems, organizations, social institutions, and even nations lies partly in people's sense of collective efficacy that they can solve the problems they face and improve their lives through unified effort (Bandura, 1997). The distinctive blend of individual, proxy, and collective agency varies cross-culturally. But everyday functioning relies on all three forms of agency to make it through the day, wherever one lives.

### Misconstrual of Self-Efficacy

Because efficacy beliefs involve self-referent processes, self-efficacy is often misconstrued as self-centered individualism with aggrandizement of the self. Self-efficacy does not come with a built-in singular value system. People's goals, values, and aspirations shape the purposes their efficacy serves. In point of fact, personal efficacy can serve diverse purposes, many of which subordinate self-interest to the benefit of others. Gandhi provides a notable example of self-sacrifice in the exercise of unwavering self-efficacy for social change under powerful opposition. He lived ascetically, not self-indulgently. Without a resilient sense of efficacy, people are easily overwhelmed by adversities in their efforts to improve their lives and that of others.

Personal efficacy is valued, not because of reverence for individualism, but because a resilient sense of efficacy has generalized functional value regardless of whether activities are pursued individually or by people working together for common cause. Research testifies to the cross-cultural generalizability of self-efficacy theory. The factor structure of efficacy beliefs, their determinants, their functional value, and even the mechanisms through which they operate are much the same, regardless of whether the cultures are oriented around an individualistic or collectivistic ethic (Bandura, 2002). These cross-cultural findings debunk the misconception that belief in one's efficacy is an egocentric orientation wedded to Western individualism.

People cannot be all things. The specialized complexities of contemporary societies require diversity in efficacy to enable people to manage and gain satisfaction in different types of pursuits. Some become chefs; others develop their efficacy to fly airplanes, play the tuba, service automobiles, provide medical services, educate students, perform religious services, or cultivate the land. Within these diverse pursuits, some members aim for the top and labor arduously to get there. Most are content with a sufficing self-efficacy. They are overjoyed at breaking a golf score of 100 rather than strive for the professional ranks. Self-efficacy theory embraces the French dictum: *Vive la différence*. Interpersonal diversity in self-efficacy complements and enriches our lives.

Our psychological discipline is infected with a negativity bias that manifests itself in diverse forms across virtually every sphere of human functioning. The sections that follow contrast, both conceptually and empirically, the negativity orientation toward human functioning with the more positive orientation within an agentic view of humanity.

## OVERPREDICTION OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Our theories grossly overpredict psychopathology. Consider familial examples. Families in our inner cities are living under dismal conditions of high poverty, physical decay, social disorganization, and inadequate human services. These environments provide few prosocial opportunities, but many antisocial ones. Our theories would lead one to expect that most of the children living in these impoverished, risky environments would be heavily involved in crime, addicted to drugs, or too psychically impaired for a normal life. In fact, most of the children make it through the many developmental hazards. In adulthood, most support themselves through legitimate jobs, form a household partnership, and stay clear of criminal activities.

Families achieve these results through perseverant effort and considerable self-sacrifice. They seek enabling social environments that help to promote their children's positive development (Furstenberg, Eccles, Elder, Cook, & Sameroff, 1999). They monitor and guide their children's activities outside the home to protect them from dangerous activities that can set a detrimental life course. They carve out functional subcommunities through active involvement in supportive and enabling social systems. These affiliations link their children to positive models, constructive activities, supportive social networks, and values and social norms that parents hold dear. These social ties compensate for meager neighborhood resources and protect against a neighborhood's hazardous aspects. In short, by exercising their sense of efficacy, the parents don't let their dismal environment defeat them.

## RESILIENCE: REACTIVE RISK MODELS VERSUS PROACTIVE MASTERY MODELS

Our discipline is more heavily invested in theories of failure than in theories of success. Risk factors command our attention. Enablement factors, that equip people with the skills and resilient self-beliefs to manage their lives, receive less notice. When enabling factors are considered, as in resilience, they are depicted in static, epidemiological terms as protective factors. Protectiveness shields individuals from harsh realities or weakens their negative impact. In contrast, enablement equips people with the personal resources to select and construct their environments in ways that set a successful course for their lives.

Consider the power of enabling factors in a family life replete with grim risk factors (Chernow, 2004). Born out of wedlock on a tiny island in the Caribbean, his mother was imprisoned by her husband for adultery. Father deserts the family. Mother dies. His guardian commits suicide. He is left destitute in childhood with the death of his aunt, uncle, and grandfather. His meager belongings are sold off, leaving him penniless. A key enablement factor overrides this grim catalogue of risk factors. A clergyman raised funds from local merchants to educate him at King's College, now

Columbia University. Alexander Hamilton thrived in this new environment. He became a founding father of our nation and left a staggering legacy of achievements that shaped our federal governmental systems.

A number of studies have examined the developmental trajectories of children burdened with extremely disordered home lives (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Werner, 1992). These children grow up in families plagued with chronic poverty, discord, physical abuse, divorce, parental alcoholism, criminality, or serious mental disorders. Remarkably, a good number of the children surmount such enormous hardships and develop into efficacious, caring, and productive adults. Their personal triumphs have given us a better sense of some of the determinants of extraordinary resilience (Werner & Smith, 1992).

A key factor is the development of a stable social bond to a competent and caring adult. Such caregivers offer emotional support, guidance, and promote meaningful values and standards. They model constructive styles of coping and create opportunities for mastery experiences. Enabling caretaking builds trust, competencies, and a sense of personal efficacy. Physical attractiveness and a sociable temperament help to draw nurturing caretaking. As children develop positive attributes they become more engaging to others and attract support from them. Supportive teachers are often important enabling influences in the lives of children who surmount severe adversities. Social connectedness to a variety of other caring persons outside the family provides continuing guidance and opportunities for self-development. The children cultivate interests that bring satisfactions and save them from becoming engulfed by the turbulent home life. Intellectual competencies, which are essential for managing the demands of everyday life, are also uniformly strong predictors of successful development under adversity.

The children's heroic life stories support an agentic, rather than a protective, view of resilience. The children play a proactive role in shaping their life courses. They become highly resourceful in finding and creating environments conducive to their development. They take upon themselves the responsibilities of managing the household and care of younger siblings when their parents are unable to do so, which is often the case. For example, a daughter comes home from school to find her mother drunk on the floor in this disordered household. She takes care of her mother, prepares the meals, and cares for her younger siblings. This is the exercise of agency not shelteredness by protective factors. Theories of resilience should be recast in proactive agentic terms, rather than in epidemiologic terms of protective factors buffering against the negative effects of adversity.

## DIATHESIS-STRESS MODEL

The difference between an agentic and a reactive conception of human adaptation also applies to the diathesis-stress model that dominates the thinking in the field of psychopathology. In this model, external stressors act upon personal vulnerabilities to produce emotional and behavioral disorders. This model is often combined with epidemiological risk-buffer models. Protective factors are posited as buffers to stressors.

This theory is heavily cast in reactive terms, devoid of agentic functions. A person is simply a host for vulnerabilities on which the environment acts. In fact, people play a proactive role in their adaptation. They do not simply undergo happenings in which environments act upon their personal endowments. Through the exercise of self-regulatory influence they have a hand in which environments they get into. They create supportive environments for themselves by seeking out beneficial social networks. They develop competencies that enable them to transform taxing and threatening environments into benign ones.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Because of selective inattention to successes, our theories similarly overpredict the inability to overcome tough problems, such as substance abuse. We build theories for why people are seemingly powerless to change addictive behavior. In the case of smoking, which is one of the most addictive substances, it is said to be intractable because it is compelled by two types of dependencies: biological and psychological. With regard to biological dependence, each puff sends a reinforcing nicotine shot to the brain. Prolonged use is said to create a relapsing brain disease. Once addicted, aversive withdrawal reactions drive the users to heavy continual use of the substance.

A brief period of abstinence eradicates the physiological withdrawal reactions. The major challenge is resumption of drug use, after aversive withdrawal reactions are long gone as motivators. Environmental cueing of "craving" was proposed as the driving mechanism. In this explanation, exposure to situations that have been associated with drug use induces physiological craving that impels use of the substance. Negative affect was also invoked as a precipitating motivator that drives people to seek relief in smoking. The problem with these motivational explanations is that they predict vastly more than has ever been observed. Over forty million people have quit smoking on their own. About 90% of the ex-smokers have done so in this way. Where was their brain disease? How did they cure it on their own? Superimposed on the forty million self-quitters, the dismal relapse curves that populate our journals are based on selective focus on hard-core cases. They are but a tiny ripple in the vast sea of successes.

The forty million ex-smokers were not detached from the situational smoking cues and smokers around them in their daily activities. As for the negative motivators, everyday life is strewn with episodes of negative affect. The forty million self-quitters are not leading lives free of negative affectivity. They manage to maintain abstinence despite bouts of negative affect. Both the cueing and emotive explanations require a self-regulatory component to explain successful self-management under situational and affective instigators. In other dysfunctions, negative affect precipitates problem behavior in those of low efficacy, but infrequently in those of high efficacy (Love, Ollendick, Johnson, & Schlezinger, 1985; Schneider, O'Leary, & Agras, 1987). Overcoming nicotine dependence is a tortuous process, often

involving periods of torment and repeated relapses. But those who can persevere in the face of relapses have a good chance of eventual success.

There is similar inattention to personal successes in overcoming alcohol and narcotic addiction. Robins (1974) reported a remarkably high remission for heroin addiction among Vietnam veterans without the benefit of treatment. In other studies, successful quitters sever ties with drug-using friends and build new lives for themselves with enabling and supportive social networks (Hunt & Azrin, 1973; McAuliffe, Albert, Cordell-London, & McGarraghy, 1991). Vaillant (1995) has shown that a large share of alcoholics eventually quit drinking without treatment, assistance from self-help groups, or radical environmental change. Such successes testify to the human capacity for self-regulation. Granfield and Cloud (1996) put it well when they characterized the conspicuous inattention to successful self-changers in substance abuse as, "The elephant that no one sees." The massive elephant in our midst can tell us a lot about the mechanisms of successful self-change and how to enable people to overcome substance abuse.

To understand the human capacity for self-directedness requires study of successful self-changers not just the intractable ones (Bandura, in press). Naturalistic studies of self-directed change by Perri (1985) show that successful self-regulators are highly skilled in enlisting the component subfunctions of self-regulation. They track their behavior and the conditions under which they engage in it. They set proximal goals for exercising control over their behavior. They draw from an array of coping strategies rather than rely on a single technique. They create motivating incentives to sustain their efforts and apply self-influence more consistently and persistently than do ineffectual self-changers.

## PROSOCIAL FOUNDATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORIES

Over the years much theorizing and research have been devoted to the adverse effects of early proneness to aggression on subsequent academic development and social relationships. Prosocialness involves cooperativeness, helpfulness, sharing, and empathy. It promotes relationships conducive to social and academic development. Despite the many benefits of prosocialness on children's developmental trajectories, it has received comparatively little attention.

The relative impact of early prosocialness and aggressiveness on children's later social ties and academic achievement has been tested longitudinally (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000). Prosocialness has a strong positive impact on later academic achievement and positive peer relationships. But early aggressiveness has no significant effect on either sphere of functioning. Such findings underscore the value of investing resources to develop and promote children's prosocialness. Doing so enhances the academic learning environment, facilitates academic success, and builds enabling social-support networks. Prosocial orientations, in turn, can contribute to more positive communal norms. It promotes beneficial modeling and social practices that together can help reduce aggression in our schools and communities.

## HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION

Human health is another domain in which we often tell only half the story, mainly the negative half. Our conception of health is heavily grounded in a biomedical disease model. We are pouring massive resources into medicalizing the ravages of detrimental health habits and prescribing vast amounts of pills to alleviate the common problems of life. A positive conception of health shifts the orientation from a disease model to a health model. It emphasizes health promotion rather than mainly disease management. It is just as meaningful to speak of levels of vitality as of degrees of impairment and debility.

The quality of health is heavily influenced by lifestyle habits. This enables people to exercise some measure of control over the state of their health. To stay healthy, people should be physically active, reduce dietary fat, refrain from smoking, keep blood pressure down, and develop effective ways of managing stressors. By managing their health habits, people can live longer, healthier, and retard the process of aging. Self-management is good medicine. If the huge benefits of these few habits were put into a pill, it would be declared a scientific milestone in the field of medicine.

Current health practices focus heavily on the medical supply side. The growing pressure on health systems is to reduce, ration, and delay health services to contain health costs. The days for the supply-side health system are limited. People are living longer. This creates more time for minor dysfunction to develop into chronic diseases. The social cognitive approach, rooted in an agentic model of health promotion, addresses the demand side (Bandura, 2000, 2004). It promotes effective self-management of health habits that keep people healthy through their life span. Psychosocial factors influence whether the extended life is lived efficaciously or with debility, pain, and dependence (Fries & Crapo, 1981; Fuchs, 1974). Aging populations will force societies to redirect their efforts from supply-side practices to demand-side remedies. Otherwise, nations will be swamped with staggering health costs that consume valuable resources needed for national programs.

There are two major ways in which people's belief in their personal efficacy affects their health. At the more basic level, such beliefs act on biological systems that mediate health and illness. At the second level, they operate by the exercise of control over habits that affect health and those that impair it. Stress is an important contributor to many physical dysfunctions. Perceived controllability appears to be the key organizing principle in explaining the biological effects of stress (Maier, Laudenslager, & Ryan, 1985). Exposure to stressors with ability to exercise some control over them has no adverse physical effects. But exposure to the same stressors, without the ability to control them, activates autonomic, cardiovascular, catecholamine, and opioid systems.

Uncontrollable stressors can also impair immune function. Most of these findings are based on studies with animals in which they exercise either complete control over physical stressors or none at all. In contrast, most human stress is activated while developing competencies for managing the

demands of everyday life. Moreover, their stress is governed, in large part, by beliefs about their coping efficacy. Stress experienced while gaining mastery and hope enhances immune status rather than impairs it (Wiedenfled et al., 1990). The higher the growth in perceived self-efficacy, the better the immune status. This has substantial evolutionary benefits. Given the prevalence of stressors in everyday life, if they only impaired immune function, we would be bedridden much of the time, if not done in.

There are countless studies of the adverse effects of stressors on immunocompetence. The few studies that have examined the immune effects of positive emotions in everyday life show that antibody levels to orally ingested antigens are higher on pleasant days (Stone et al., 1994). We are heavily preoccupied with the physically debilitating effects of stressors. Self-efficacy theory also acknowledges the physiologically strengthening effects of mastery over stressors. A growing number of studies document the physiologically toughening effect of successful coping (Dienstbeir, 1989). The benign neglect of the positive side of emotional life limits our understanding of the psychosocial contributors to health.

Effective self-management of health behavior is not a matter of will. It requires development of self-regulatory skills on how to influence one's own motivation and behavior. Knowledge of self-regulatory mechanisms has provided the theoretical foundation for new health-promotion models that are highly effective in enhancing health and reducing risks for disease (Bandura, *in press*; DeBusk et al., 1974; Holman & Lorig, 1992). These self-management systems equip participants with the skills and personal efficacy to exercise self-directed change. These systems are individually tailored to participants' needs, provide them with personalized guidance that enables them to bring their influence to bear on their health and offers valuable health-promoting services at lower costs and higher effectiveness than the standard medical care.

Vast populations worldwide have no access to services that promote health and help in early modification of habits that jeopardize health. For example, high smoking rates worldwide foreshadow a massive global cancer epidemic. We need to develop implementational models of global reach that are readily adaptable to diverse ethnic populations. Internet-based systems enable people worldwide to exercise some control over their health, wherever they may live, at a time of their own choosing, at little cost. Even people at risk of health problems who have access to health services often ignore preventive and remedial help. But they will use Internet-delivered guidance because it is readily accessible independent of time and place, highly convenient, flexible, and provides a feeling of anonymity.

A growing body of evidence based on randomized controlled trials attests to the effectiveness of online self-management programs in diverse spheres of functioning (Lorig, Ritter, Laurent, & Plant, *in press*; Muñoz et al., 2006; Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2007; Taylor, Winzelberg, & Celio, 2001). There is every reason to expect that benefits of such models will be enhanced as we gain further knowledge on the optimal level, timing, and quality of online interactivity and how to blend of online and face-to-face interactivity for individuals at different levels of changeability and at different phases of change.

## NEGATIVE SPILLOVER OF DUAL ROLES

According to the prevailing theories of human stress, it arises when perceived task demands exceed perceived coping capabilities. But there is another demand-capability relation that is largely ignored even though it is an important stressor. People also experience emotional strain when they are trapped in activities that permit them little opportunity to make full use of their talents.

Whether overload or underload is stressful is largely determined by perceived self-efficacy. Matsui and Onglatco (1992) found that women employees who have a low sense of efficacy are stressed by heavy work demands and responsibilities. In contrast, those of high efficacy are frustrated and stressed by blocked opportunities to make full use of their talents.

The neglected underload stressor highlights the prevailing negative bias in research on the effects of multiple role demands on women in dual career families. The family has been undergoing major structural changes that are altering women's roles. A sharp drop in birthrate and increased longevity creates the need for purposive pursuits for women that provide satisfaction and meaning to their lives over the expanded life span. They are seeking fulfillment in career pursuits as well as in their family life. These changes pose new challenges on how to strike a balance between family and occupational demands.

The effects of combining dual roles are typically framed negatively in terms of interrole conflicts' breeding family distress and discord. There are countless studies on the negative spillover of job pressures on family life, but few on how job satisfaction enhances the quality of family life. Ozer's (1995) research shows that women's sense of efficacy in managing dual roles contributes to personal well-being and better health. We need to be studying the positive spillover on family life of fulfilling career pursuits.

## DUAL NATURE OF MORAL AGENCY

Our theories about the exercise of moral agency also tell only half the story. They focus heavily on the inhibitive form of morality but neglect the positive side of moral functioning. In social cognitive theory, the exercise of moral agency has dual aspects: inhibitive and positively proactive (Bandura, 2004). In the inhibitive form, people refrain from behaving inhumanely to avoid self-condemnation for violating their moral standards. However, there are many social and psychological maneuvers by which moral self-sanctions can be selectively disengaged from inhumane conduct (Bandura, 1999). This enables people to behave transgressively and injuriously while preserving their self-regard.

In the positively proactive form, people behave humanely by investing their sense of self-worth so strongly in humane convictions and social obligations that they act against what they regard as unjust or immoral even though their actions may incur heavy personal costs. Failure to do what

they regard as right would bring self-devaluation. Psychology emphasizes how easy it is to bring out the worst in people through dehumanization and other self-exonerating means. What is rarely noted is the equally striking evidence for the power of humanization to curb cruel conduct even under authoritarian pressure (Bandura, 2004). Experiences in which people's joys and suffering are experienced conjointly create empathic responsiveness to the plight of others (Bandura, 1992). Empathy fosters prosocial behavior and curbs inhumane conduct.

The extraordinary power of humanization to curb violence is poignantly documented in a remarkable event on the battlefield in 1914. It is recreated in the movie, *Joyeux Noel*. It is Christmas Eve. The Allied and German forces are poised in their trenches for a bloody assault. A few Allied soldiers start singing Christmas hymns and carols. The singing spreads and before long, the entire Allied and German forces are in spiritual song. They leave their trenches and mingle with each other, during which they personalize their lives. They spontaneously create a one-day truce during which they share their rations and drinks, look at pictures of their families, and play cards and soccer.

They then return to their trenches to prepare for the battle to follow. The German commander walks over to the Allied trench. He invites his foes to come over to the German trench because they will be bombarded unmercifully in ten minutes. He spares their lives. The military commanders realize that this act of humanization pacified their forces. They resorted to a depersonalization solution. The French relocated their soldiers to another battlefield, the Scots sent their soldiers back, and the Germans shipped their soldiers to fight on the Russian front.

The force of proactive moral agency to override compelling pressures to behave inhumanely is tellingly documented in Holocaust rescuers (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). They saved persecuted Jews from the death camps at great risks to themselves and their families. They took on a heavy burden of extended protective care. The rescuers had no prior acquaintance with those they sheltered and nothing material or social to gain by doing so. Such moral commitments involve courageous humaneness amid overwhelming evil. As previously noted, humanization rouses empathic sentiments and a strong sense of social obligation. This enlists self-evaluative reactions that motivate humane actions on behalf of others at sacrifice of one's self-interest or even at one's own peril. The rescuers viewed their behavior as a human duty rather than as extraordinary acts of heroism.

The transforming power of a sense of common humanity is further illustrated in a daughter's mission of vengeance (Blumenfeld, 2002). Her father, a New York rabbi, was shot and wounded in Jerusalem by Omar, a Palestinian militant. Twelve years later the daughter set out to gain revenge by forcing him to confront his victim's humanity. In the course of exchanging letters with the jailed gunman, under a concealed identity, the parental victim, militant gunman, and filial avenger were humanized in the process. In a dramatic courtroom parole hearing the daughter identified herself to Omar as she pleaded for his release from prison, vowing he would never hurt anyone again. He wrote to her father, likening his daughter to "the

mirror that made me see your face as a human person deserved to be admired and respected.” Hatred that breeds escalative cycles of violence turned into mutual compassion.

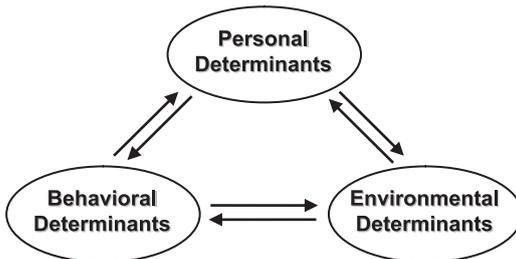
At the national level, Nelson Mandela displaced hatred for the practitioners of apartheid, which could have produced a national bloodbath, with reconciliation by affirming common humanity. Social psychology often emphasizes the power of the situation over the individual. In this case of proactive moral courage, the individual triumphs as a moral agent over compelling situational forces.

### LOCI FOR PROMOTING HUMAN WELL-BEING

People do not operate as autonomous agents, nor is their behavior wholly determined by situational influences. Rather, human well-being and attainments are products of a reciprocal interplay of intrapersonal, behavioral, and environmental determinants (see Figure 9.1). All three of these complimentary classes of determinants—cognitive, behavioral, and environmental—can be enlisted in the service of human well-being. At the cognitive locus, self-hindering habits of thinking are supplanted with positive, enabling ones. Functional cognitive skills are cultivated for comprehending and managing one’s environment in beneficial ways. The cognitive focus also involves commitment to values that give meaning and purpose to one’s life.

People have a hand in shaping the course of their lives by the choices they make and the actions they take. They affect the world around them by how they express their beliefs and value commitments in their behavior. Efforts at the behavioral locus center on cultivating competencies and adopting behavioral pursuits that bring satisfaction through what one is doing. Efforts at the environmental locus are aimed at creating hospitable environments that foster personal development and provide supporting resources and opportunity structures that enable people to realize a satisfying and meaningful life.

A heavy self-oriented focus invites dismissal of positive psychology by critics as a “feel-good psychology” in which individuals are self-absorbed in their emotional states. Positive psychology is not confined to the pursuit of



**Figure 9.1.** Schematization of Triadic Reciprocal Determination Through the Dynamic Interplay of Intrapersonal, Behavioral, and Environmental Influences

happiness. Indeed, contentment does not make for personal growth and social efforts to improve the conditions of life. The striving for satisfaction and well-being must be considered within the broader purposes of life. Self-satisfaction comes from fulfilling standards linked to something one cares about. Personal investment in a desired future helps people to organize their lives, motivates them, enables them to put up with hassles along the way, and gives them meaning, purpose, and a sense of accomplishment. Without commitment to something one feels is worth doing, individuals are bored, apathetic, and seek escape from the tedium in diversionary activities and hedonic gratifications.

It is not enough to have a vision of a future one cares deeply about (Bandura, 1997; Locke & Latham, 1990). Long-range goals set the direction for one's pursuits. But there are too many competing influences for distant futures to regulate current behavior. Short-term subgoals focus efforts on what has to be done in the here and now to turn a distal vision into reality. Subgoal accomplishments build belief in one's efficacy and beget satisfaction. These positive experiences create intrinsic interest in the activity. Through these motivational processes, even activities that initially held little interest can become a labor of love. People gain satisfaction from ongoing advancement toward what they value rather than suspend satisfaction until they fulfill the distal goals they set for themselves. Ongoing engagement in things one cares about provides the basis for a satisfying and meaningful life.

For life to be enduringly satisfying requires self-renewal for the transitional changes across the life course. When their worklife no longer commands their attention, people have to find new pursuits that give them a sense of purpose and satisfaction. With foreknowledge of their passing, their self-reflection turns to transcendental and spiritual issues.

There is a difference between pursuing happiness and achieving it through meaningful pursuits. Viewed from the perspective of social cognitive theory, perceived well-being and satisfaction are derived from how one lives one's life not just from episodic good feelings or transient pleasures. Annas (2004) has argued for broadening the perspective on the nature, determinants, and effects of perceived well-being and satisfaction. A society in which individuals strive to maximize their well-being with little regard for others would become an egocentric and divisive one. In contrast, a society in which individuals invest their well-being in the well-being of others as well would function more humanely, equitably, and with a sense of civic commitment.

At times, this involves even sacrifice of one's own well-being for the well-being of others. Millions of people are living under degrading conditions in social systems that marginalize them and deny them aspiration and their liberty and dignity. An agentic psychology also works toward enhancing people's well-being by enabling them to effect social reforms that improve the quality of their lives. These reform efforts are motivated by discontent with existing life conditions and hope for a better future. The concluding section of the chapter reviews such applications at the macro-social level.

## COMPARATIVE DETERMINATION OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Many of the defining properties ascribed to subjective well-being have a hedonic flavor. They include high pleasant affect, low level of unpleasant affect, and satisfaction with one's lot in life. Self-satisfaction and subjective well-being are rooted in comparison processes. These include the following: temporal comparison, social comparison, and aspirational comparison. The state of one's satisfaction and well-being is determined, in large part, relationally rather than solely by the absolute properties of one's life condition. For example, in contemporary society, even people of modest means are considerably better off than the royalty of yore in terms of objective life conditions, for example, advanced health care, electrification, countless labor-saving devices, running water, cornucopia of appetizing food, limitless media entertainment, and speedy transportation, just to mention a few of the benefits.

The valence and functional status of the objective reality can be transformed depending on the relational context in which it occurs (Bandura, 1986; Premack, 1965). The same modest reward is satisfying in comparison with smaller prior rewards, but dissatisfying in comparison with large prior rewards. In *temporal comparison*, subjective well-being and satisfaction with one's life depends on whether it is better or worse than it was before. Even small gains can be dissatisfying if they fail to match larger prior ones (Bandura, 1991). Accomplishments in one's worklife that surpass earlier ones bring a continued sense of self-satisfaction. But people derive little satisfaction from smaller accomplishments, or even devalue them, after having made larger strides. The price of early notable success can be later self-dissatisfaction even with continuing attainments if they fall short of one's earlier accomplishments. When Linus Pauling was asked what one does after winning the Nobel Prize, he replied, "Change fields, of course!" The strategy for maintaining a sense of well-being over the life course focuses on self-comparison during the period of progressive improvement, but shifts to social comparison with similar-aged cohorts when capabilities begin to wane in later years (Frey & Ruble, 1990).

People's judgments of their lot in life are also heavily influenced by unavoidable comparison with that of others. In *social comparison*, well-being and satisfaction depend on whether the quality of one's life compares favorable or unfavorably with the quality of life others enjoy. The people chosen for comparative evaluation make a big difference in one's level of satisfaction. Even the rich, who compare themselves against the super rich flaunting their affluence, can drive themselves to discontent despite their objective wealth. In the past, social comparisons were largely confined to one's immediate environment. The prolific songwriter, Irving Berlin, described how a bounded reality affects judgment of well-being in commenting on the hard times of his early life, "I never knew poverty because I never knew anything else."

People judge their satisfaction by what they make of their lives. In *aspirational comparison*, people's subjective well-being and satisfaction are influenced by how their life status measures up against the life ambition

they set for themselves. For those who live up to the valued standards they set for themselves, life is likely to be satisfying and self-fulfilling. In contrast, those who see their life hopes dashed and opportunities foreclosed view their life as a disappointment.

Because of the relational nature of subjective well-being and satisfaction, individuals who vary markedly in objective life conditions may nevertheless be similarly satisfied with their lot in life. The combination of some improvement in one's life circumstances, being slightly better off than one's cohorts, and having low ambition for upward mobility can produce some measure of satisfaction with even a marginal existence. Conversely, stagnation or decline in one's life circumstances, seeing one's cohorts prosper, and adhering to high social status and riches as the standard of adequateness will breed discontent even in individuals living under objectively affluent conditions. Because of these dynamic comparative determinants, increases in wealth and alluring material possessions over time have not raised people's level of satisfaction with their lives (Diener & Seligman, 2004). For similar reasons, those living under impoverished conditions in Calcutta may not differ all that much in satisfaction with their lives from those living affluently amidst the balmy palms in Beverley Hills.

The outcomes that figure in subjective well-being include not only material possessions and the approval of others but self-evaluative ones as well. People live in a psychic environment largely of their own making. They have to live with themselves. They adopt standards of merit and morality and regulate their conduct and emotional life by their self-evaluative reactions. They do things that give them satisfaction and a sense of self-worth, and they refrain from behaving in ways that violate their standards because such conduct would bring self-disapproval. A sense of self-worth and positive self-regard weighs heavily in people's subjective well-being. Indeed, it would be difficult to enjoy a happy and satisfying life while harboring a low sense of self-worth.

## SOCIOCOGNITIVE MODEL FOR EFFECTING SOCIETY-WIDE CHANGES

The most ambitious applications of social cognitive theory toward human betterment are aimed at abating some of the most pressing global problems. Soaring population growth is an ecologically consequential global problem of massive proportions—deforestation, advancing desertification, global warming, raising sea levels by ice-cap and glacial melting flooding low-lying regions, topsoil erosion and sinking of water tables in the major food-producing regions, and depletion of fisheries. In addition to destroying the earth's life-support systems, soaring population growth is degrading the quality of life and draining resources needed for national development. Millions of people are living under squalid conditions and are struggling to survive with scarcities of food, fresh water, basic sanitation, medical services, and other necessities of life. Promotion of family planning is unique in the scope of its benefits (Cleland et al., 2006). It reduces the cycle of poverty, decreases maternal and child mortality,

liberates women for personal development by relieving the burden of excessive childbearing, and aids environmental sustainability by stabilizing the planet's population, which is headed for a 50% increase in the next 50 years.

Another widespread problem is the pernicious gender inequality in familial, educational, health, and social life. In these societies women are subjugated, disallowed opportunities to develop their talents, denied their liberty and dignity. Given that women constitute approximately half of the population, societies that marginalize or subjugate women undermine their nation's social, technological, and economic viability by neglecting this vast human resource. The spreading AIDS epidemic is another mounting global problem with devastating societal consequences. Some societies present unique problems that require special social themes tailored to their cultural practices. Approximately 130 million women in Africa are subjected to the brutal genital mutilation procedure. In our change program, Muslim clerics explain that these practices are not sanctioned by their religion. In the African nation of Mali, child traffickers trick impoverished parents with large families into giving up children under the promise that they will receive good care and send money home. They are then sold for slave labor under inhumane conditions. Some are sold for the sex trade. These traffickers also sell orphans of parents who died of AIDS. The change programs dramatically expose these cruel practices.

One method that change programs use is long-running serial dramas, which serve as the means for promoting personal and social changes. These productions bring life to people's everyday struggles and the effects of different social practices. The storylines speak ardently to people's fears, hopes, and aspirations for a better life. They inform, enable, motivate, and guide viewers for personal and social changes that can improve their lives. These productions are not just fanciful stories. They dramatize the realities of people's everyday lives and the impediments with which they struggle. These enabling dramas help viewers to see a better life and provide them with strategies and incentives that enable them to take the steps to realize it. The storylines model family planning, women's equality, degrading dowry systems, spouse abuse, environmental conservation, AIDS prevention and a variety of life skills. Hundreds of episodes get people emotionally engaged in the evolving lives of the models and identify with them.

There are three major components to this social cognitive approach to fostering society-wide changes (Bandura, 2001). The first component is a *theoretical model*. It specifies the determinants of psychosocial change and the mechanisms through which they produce their effects (Bandura, 1986, 1997). The second component is a *translational and implementational model*. It converts theoretical principles into an innovative operational model and specifies the content, strategies of change, and their mode of implementation. Miguel Sabido, (1981) a creative playwright and producer, devised the translational model based on the tenets of social cognitive theory. The third component is a *social diffusion model* on how to promote adoption of psychosocial programs in diverse cultural milieus. Population Communications International (PCI) and the Population Media Center

(PMC) serve as the global diffusion mechanisms (Poindexter, 2004; Ryerson, 1999).

### Cultural and Value Analyses

These are not social programs foisted on nations by outsiders in pursuit of their self-interest. The dramatic serials are created only on invitation by countries seeking help with intractable problems and in partnership with their media personnel. Extensive cultural and value analyses are conducted to create serials appropriate to their culture. This formative phase identifies problems of major concern and the obstacles people face. These interviews provide the culturally relevant information for developing realistic characters and engrossing functional plotlines. The dramatizations are grounded in the internationally endorsed values codified in United Nations covenants and resolutions. These values embody respect for human dignity, equitable opportunities, and social practices that support common human aspirations. Once a program is aired, producers monitor how viewers perceive the characters, with whom they are identifying, how they view the dramatized options, and the types of futures they envision. The dramatized options and how they affect the course of life enable people to make informed choices to improve their lives.

### Elements of Enabling Serials

There are four basic principles guiding the construction of the dramatic serials. The first principle enlists the power of *social modeling* for personal and social change. Seeing people similar to themselves change their lives for the better not only conveys strategies for how to do it, but raises viewers' sense of efficacy that they too can succeed. Viewers come to admire and are inspired by characters in their likenesses who struggle with difficult obstacles and eventually overcome them.

Three types of contrasting models are used to highlight the personal and social effects of different styles of behavior. The episodes include positive models portraying beneficial lifestyles. Other characters personify negative models exhibiting detrimental views and lifestyles. Transitional models are shown transforming their lives by discarding detrimental styles of behavior in favor of beneficial ones. Viewers are especially prone to draw inspiration from, and identify with, transforming models by seeing them surmount similar adverse life circumstances.

The second feature of the dramatic productions enlists *vicarious motivators* as incentives for change. Unless people see the modeled lifestyle as improving their welfare they have little incentive to adopt it. The personal and social benefits of the favorable practices and the costs of the detrimental ones are vividly portrayed. Depicted beneficial outcomes serve as positive incentives for change, whereas depicted detrimental outcomes function as disincentives.

Some of the efforts at social change challenge power relations and entrenched societal practices supported by individuals who have a vested

interest in preserving the adverse practices. Successes do not come easy. To change their lives for the better, people have to challenge adverse traditions and inequitable constraints. They must be prepared for the obstacles they are likely to encounter. There are several ways of building resilience to impediments through social modeling. Common problem situations and effective ways of overcoming them are modeled. People are taught how to manage setbacks by modeling how to recover from failed attempts and to enlist guidance and social support for personal change from self-help groups and other agencies in their localities. Seeing others succeed through perseverant effort also boosts staying power in the face of obstacles.

The third principle aids personal change by enhancing attentional and emotional engagement in the dramatized lives. To change deeply held beliefs and social practices requires strong emotional bonding to enabling models who exemplify a vision of a better future and realistic paths to it. Plotlines that dramatize viewers' everyday lives and functional solutions get people deeply involved. They form emotional ties to models who speak to their hopes and aspirations. Unlike brief exposures to media presentations, that typically leave most viewers untouched, ongoing engagement in the evolving lives of the models provide numerous opportunities to learn from them and to be inspired by them.

It is of limited value to motivate people to change if they are not provided with appropriate resources and environmental supports to realize those changes. Environmental guides and supports are provided to expand and sustain the changes promoted by the media. Epilogues delivered by culturally admired figures provide contact information to relevant community services and support groups.

### Global Applications

Social cognitive principles are generalizable but their application has to be tailored to the cultural practices and the types of desired changes. Many worldwide applications of this creative format in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are promoting personal and society-wide changes that are bettering the lives of millions of people. Some of these applications and formal evaluations of their effects are summarized briefly in the sections that follow. These applications are reviewed elsewhere in greater detail (Bandura, 2006a; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004).

Literacy is vital for personal and national development. To reduce widespread illiteracy, the Mexican government launched a national self-study program. People who were skilled at reading were urged to organize small self-study groups in which they would teach others how to read with primers developed for this purpose. It was a good idea but enlisted few takers. So Sabido created a yearlong serial with daily episodes to reach, enable, and motivate people to enlist in the program (Sabido, 1981). A popular performer was cast in the role of the literate model. She recruited a diverse set of characters to represent the different segments of the population with problems of illiteracy. Assumed similarity enhances the power of social modeling.

A prior interview survey revealed several personal barriers that dissuaded people from enrolling in the literacy program. Many believed that they lacked the capabilities to master such a complex skill. Others believed that reading skills could be acquired only when one is young and that the critical period was long gone. Still others felt that they were unworthy of having an educated person devote their time to them. These self-dissuading misbeliefs were modeled by the various characters and corrected by the mentor as she persuaded them that they possess the capabilities to succeed.

The episodes included humor, conflicts, and engrossing discussions of the subjects being read. They portrayed the characters struggling in the initial phases of learning and then gaining progressive mastery with self-pride in their accomplishments. To provide vicarious motivators to pursue the self-education program, the dramatic series depicted the substantial benefits of literacy both for personal development and for national efficacy and pride. One of the epilogues, by an admired movie star, informed the viewers of this national self-education program and encouraged them to take advantage of it. The next day 25,000 people showed up at the distribution center to enroll in the self-study program!

Millions of viewers watched this series faithfully. Compared with nonviewers, viewers of the dramatic series were much more informed about the national literacy program and expressed more positive attitudes about helping one another to learn. Enrollment in the literacy program was about 90,000 in the year before the televised series but rose abruptly to a million during the year of the series (Sabido, 1981). As people develop a sense of efficacy and competencies that enable them to exercise better control over their lives, they serve as models, inspiration, and even tutors for others in the circles in which they travel. In the year following the televised series, another 400,000 people enrolled in the self-study literacy program.

Another serial drama in Mexico promoted family planning to check the cycle of poverty heightened by a high rate of unplanned childbearing. Contrast modeling portrayed the process and benefits of family planning. The storyline centers on the lives of married sisters. The beneficial family life of a small family was contrasted with that of a married sister burdened by a huge family living in impoverishment and hopelessness. Much of the drama focused on the married daughter from the huge family living in her parents' despairingly crowded and impoverished environment. She has two children and is pregnant with the third. She is in marital conflict and distress over her desire for a voice in her family life and to cease having more babies that will condemn her family to an impoverished life without ability to care adequately for them. This young couple served as the transition model. As the drama unfolds, the couple is shown gaining control over their family life with the help of a family planning center and bringing about meaningful changes in their family life. In epilogues, viewers were informed about family planning services to facilitate the changes.

Compared with nonviewers, heavy viewers were more likely to link lower childbearing to social, economic, and psychological benefits (Sabido, 1981). They also developed a more positive attitude toward helping others plan their family. Family planning centers reported a 32% increase in new contraceptive

users over the number for the previous year. People reported that the televised program was the impetus for their consulting the health clinics. National sales of contraceptives rose from low of 5% and 7% in the baseline years to an abrupt increase of 23% in the year the program was aired.

Efforts to reduce the rate of population growth must address not only the strategies and benefits of family planning but also the role and status of women in societies in which they are treated subserviently. In some societies, the equity problems stem from machismo dominance; in others, from arranged marriages with no say in the choice of husband or the number and spacing of children; and in still others from dispossession by polygamous marriages. Exploiting the cultural preference for sons in India, radiologists offer cheap ultrasound tests to identify female fetuses, some of which get aborted. This practice is producing a growing imbalance of women to men that will have huge long-term societal consequences.

India has passed the one billion mark and is on the brink of surpassing China as the most populous nation in the world. At the present fertility rate, the population will double to two billion in 40 years. The serial in India was designed to raise the status of women, as well as to promote a smaller family norm. It addressed a variety of themes about family life in the context of broader social norms and practices (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). The sub-themes devoted particular attention to elevation of the status of women in family, social, and economic life; educational opportunities and career options for women; son preference and gender bias in child rearing; the detriment of dowry requirements; choice in spouse selection, teenage marriage and parenthood; spousal abuse; family planning to limit family size; youth delinquency; and community development. Some of the characters personified positive role models for gender equality; others were proponents of the traditional subservient role for women. Still others were transitional models. A famous Indian film actor reinforced the modeled messages in epilogues.

The series was immensely popular, enjoying the top viewership on television and a massive outpouring of 400,000 letters from viewers offering advice and support to the characters. The programs fostered more equitable attitudes toward women. The more viewers were aware of the messages being modeled, the greater was their support of women's freedom of choice in matters that affect them and limiting family size (Brown & Cody, 1991; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Intensive interviews with village inhabitants revealed that the dramatizations sparked serious public discussions about the broadcast themes concerning child marriages, dowry requirements, education of girls, the benefits of small families, and other social issues (Papa et al., 2000). The enrollment of girls in elementary and junior high schools rose from 10% to 38% in one year of the broadcasts.

The serial drama in Kenya illustrates the creative tailoring of storylines to key cultural values. Land ownership is highly valued in Kenya. A major storyline in this serial drama linked the impoverishing effect of large families to the inheritance of land. The contrast modeling centered on two brothers, one of whom has one wife, a son, and several daughters, whereas the other brother has multiple wives, nine sons, and even more daughters. They squabble over how to pass on the inherited family farm to their next

generation. In Kenya, only sons can inherit property. The monogamous brother argues that his lone male heir is entitled to half the land, the polygamous brother insists on dividing the farm into ten small plots that would provide, at best, a marginal subsistence for them all. In another concurrent plotline, a teacher pleads with parents—who want their young daughter to quit school, be circumcised, and married off to an arranged partner—to allow her to continue the education that she desperately desires.

The serial drama, which was broadcast via radio to reach rural areas, attracted 40% of the Kenyan population each week as the most popular program on the air. Adoption of contraceptive use increased by 58%, and desired family size declined 24%. A survey of women who came to health clinics reported that the radio series helped to persuade their husbands to allow them to seek family planning. Quantitative analyses included multiple statistical controls for possible determinants (Westoff & Rodriguez, 1995). These included life-cycle status, number of wives and children, and a host of socioeconomic factors such as ethnicity, religion, education, occupation and urban-rural resident. The media effect remained after applying these multiple controls. The social impact of the dramatizations was enhanced with increased exposure to them. Internal analyses of evaluation surveys further revealed that the media influence was a major factor in raising motivation to limit birthrate and adopt contraception practices.

China faces a projected doubling of its current population to the two billion mark in about 70 years. This enormous population growth will have devastating effects on ecological systems that already are plagued with advancing desertification and massive air and water pollution. Urban areas have achieved replacement level fertility, but the inhabitants in rural areas continue to have large families. The Chinese one-child policy heightens the traditional cultural preferences for sons.

A televised serial, which won numerous prestigious awards, addressed a variety of societal issues with multiple intersecting plots, in addition to the discriminatory gender norms and practices. These include girl's education, arranged marriages, coerced pregnancy, son preference, and allowing women to have some voice in their lives. The dramatizations graphically portray the tragedy and injustice of social practices that force women into arranged marriages they do not want and what occurs when they bear baby girls who are culturally devalued.

Societies are undergoing a historic transition to the information era. It is supplanting brawn with intellect in modern worklife. At times of transformative change, there is a mismatch or structural lag between dated normative practices and contemporary social reality. The drama tries to foster a better normative match to the challenges and opportunities of this new era.

In one serial a father is desperate to receive a dowry payment so he can buy a bride for his son, his pride and joy. He demands that his daughter agree to an arranged marriage to an arrogant man of means. She resists because she is in love with a musician of modest means. But to spare her younger sister, who the father targets next, she eventually agrees to the arranged marriage. As the wedding procession is going down the river, her boyfriend is running along the riverbank shouting to her and playing a tune

he played when they first met. Her husband is enraged by the boyfriend's intrusion. He kicks out the guests after the wedding ceremony and rapes her. She finds herself trapped in a miserable marriage with an abusive husband. As the story unfolds, she gives birth to a female infant. He demands she get pregnant again to bear him a son. She leaves him, remarries, and pursues a successful career.

Viewers were inspired and strengthened by the determination and courage of female characters who challenge the subordinate status of women and who strive to change detrimental cultural practices. The central figure in this serial has become a highly admired national model for raising the valuation of women and expanding opportunities for them to become active participant in the social and economic life of Chinese society.

Tanzania, which contains regions with separate radio transmitters, provided a unique opportunity for an experimental comparison of the effectiveness of the serial dramas to a nonbroadcast region coupled with a delayed treatment design. The population of Tanzania is thirty-six million, the fertility rate is 5.6 children per woman, and the doubling time for the population at the current rate is 25 years. No economic development can cope with this soaring population.

The serial drama was broadcast by radio in one major region of the country, and the other region served as the control. The program targeted both family planning and sexual practices that increase vulnerability to infection with the AIDS virus. At the outset, the populace was well informed about contraception and AIDS prevention and was not unfavorably disposed toward such practices. They had access to contraceptive methods and family planning clinics. But they did not translate these attitudes into action. When other influences conflict with personal attitudes, people can find reasons not to act on their attitudes or justify exemptions to them. The problem was neither informational nor attitudinal, but motivational. The dramatic series provided the impetus for change.

Compared with the control region, the serialized dramatizations raised viewers' perceived efficacy to determine their family size, decreased the desired number of children, increased the ideal age of marriage for women, increased approval of family planning methods, stimulated spousal communication about family size, and increased use of family planning services and adoption of contraceptive methods (Rogers et al., 1999). Both regions increased slightly at the same rate during the 3-year prebroadcast period. The adoption rate increased only slightly in the control region but at an abrupt pronounced rate in the broadcast region. These effects were replicated when the serial was later broadcast in the control region. The replicated effects provide further support for a genuine conditional relation.

As in the Kenya findings, the more often people listened to the broadcasts, the more the married women talked to their spouses about family planning and the higher the rate of adoption of contraceptive methods. These diverse effects remained after multiple controls for other potential determinants, including exposure to other radio programs with family planning and AIDS contents, prebroadcast levels and changes in education, increased access to family planning clinics, radio ownership, and rural-urban differences.

Some segments were included to prevent the spread of the AIDS virus. A particular problem was the transmission of AIDS heterosexually by long-distance truckers at truck stop hubs with hundreds of prostitutes. About 60% of them are infected, and about a third of the truck drivers are also infected. The common belief was that AIDS is transmitted by mosquitoes. Some of the men believed that condoms caused infection, that having sexual intercourse with a virgin would cure AIDS, and that sex with young girls is safe because they are unlikely to be infected. The program quickly debunked the false beliefs.

In the contrast modeling, the negative trucker engages in risky sex with multiple partners; the positive model adopted safer sex practices and cut back on the number of partners; and the transitional model begins with risky practices but adopts safer ones. The truckers using the safer practices try unsuccessfully to talk their friend into changing his risky ways. He refuses. His wife fears that she will get infected. The community helps her to gain employment to support her family. She leaves her husband, who eventually gets infected and dies of AIDS.

Compared with residents in the control region, those in the broadcast region increased belief in their personal risk of HIV infection through unprotected sexual practices, talked more about HIV infection, reduced the number of sexual partners, and increased condom use (Vaughan, Rogers, Singhal, & Swalehe, 2000). The number of condoms distributed annually by the national AIDS program remained low in the control region, increased substantially in the broadcast region, and increased significantly in the control region after exposure later to the broadcast.

The serial drama in Ethiopia also addressed the widespread AIDS problem. Compared with their baseline status and with that of nonviewers, viewers were more informed on how to determine their HIV status. They were more likely to get a blood test for their HIV status. Knowing one's serostatus fosters adoption of safer-sex practices (McKusick, Coates, Morin, Pollack, & Hoff, 1990). To augment the impact of the serial drama, the truckers and sex workers were provided audiocassettes focused on AIDS prevention. They lined up eagerly for each new episode.

Like the other serial dramas, the radio serial in Sudan had multiple intersecting plot lines. These included the benefits of family planning to limit the number of children and their spacing, providing educational opportunities for daughters, the injustice of forced marriage and risks of early child-bearing, domestic violence, embroilment in drug activities leading to a life of crime and narcotics, and prevention of HIV infection. A special theme centered on the devastating consequences of the widespread practice of genital mutilation. In the dramatization, Muslim clerics disapproved such practices as without religious justification. As the storyline unfolds, the dangers and deadly consequences of this practice were portrayed. It reversed the social norm from favoring this brutal practice to widespread support for abolishing it.

The Population Media Center assists in creating significant social themes that can be easily incorporated into the popular *telenovelas* on TV Globo in

Rio de Janeiro. Dubbed into different languages, the prime-time telenovelas reach 900 million people worldwide.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Humans have an unparalleled capacity to influence the course and quality of their lives. The present chapter documents the benefits across diverse spheres of life of an agentic positive psychology that accents human enablement rather than dwells on human failings and dysfunctions.

The lives that people lead are rooted in social systems. The potentialities they cultivate and the life paths that become open to them are partly determined by the societal systems to which their development and well-being are entrusted. Social systems that cultivate competencies, build people's belief in their efficacy to influence events that affect their lives, create equitable opportunity structures, provide aidful resources, and allow leeway for self-directedness, increase the changes that people will realize what they wish to become and gain a sense of fulfillment in what they make of their lives. An agentic positive psychology also addresses future societal and ecological well-being. This includes improving the quality of life in societies at large and preserving a habitable planet for future generations.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Increasing Your Self-Efficacy

In this chapter, an agentic perspective of positive psychology was discussed with self-efficacy as the central theme. We encourage you to work toward increasing your self-efficacy to increase your well-being.

**Setting and Achieving Goals:** Write down three things you hope to accomplish today and a short list of ways you can accomplish each of those goals in one day. Keep the list do-able, but meaningful. Check your list throughout the day and mark the tasks you accomplish successfully. You can make this a weekly or monthly activity by keeping an ongoing list.

**Resilience:** When faced with an obstacle, brainstorm alternate ideas to overcome that obstacle. Share your ideas with friends or families and ask for their input as well. Try using various ideas.

**Reframing Thoughts:** Make a conscious effort to maintain positive thoughts. If you catch yourself having a negative thought, reframe it to be positive. (i.e., you lock your keys in your car on your lunch break. Thought: "Something always goes wrong!" Adaptive Response: "This isn't the end of the world. I will call my sister to bring me an extra copy of my key and will be a little late getting back to work.")

**Recognizing Your Accomplishments:** Keep an ongoing journal in which you identify and describe what you have accomplished or have made strides in accomplishing each day.

**Applying Previous Challenges to New Experiences:** If you do not accomplish a goal you had hoped to, write down what you learned from the experience and how you can apply what you learned to another attempt at achieving your goal.

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# Positive Psychology

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*Exploring the Best in People*

Volume 2

Capitalizing on Emotional Experiences

Edited by

SHANE J. LOPEZ

Foreword by

SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY

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# The Broadening, Building, Buffering Effects of Positive Emotions

Bethany E. Kok, Lahnna I. Catalino,  
and Barbara L. Fredrickson

**W**hy do we feel good? Is there a reason for our positive emotions, or are they simply byproducts of our actions and reactions, with no real effect on what we do? Aristotle believed that happiness was the byproduct of leading a virtuous life, and said that positive emotions existed merely to motivate us to live well—our “carrot on a stick,” as it were. Pop songs don’t appear to have moved far beyond this idea: as Tina Turner sings, “What’s love but a second-hand emotion?”

It is easy to think of positive emotions such as joy, serenity, gratitude, or love as purely hedonistic—their only purpose is to feel good, and indulging in them feels selfish. In contrast, few people, and certainly few psychologists, would argue that negative emotions are without psychological worth. Decades of research have provided support for the idea that negative emotions cause us to behave in very specific, self-protective ways that were evolutionarily adaptive. When you feel fear, adrenaline rushes through your body and you’re ready to run or fight to stay alive. When someone attacks you, you become angry and devote all your energies to fighting back and protecting yourself. When something unfortunate happens to you, you become sad; you go somewhere quiet and remain still to recuperate. All of these evolutionarily adaptive responses help you to stay safe, protect yourself, and conserve your energy in response to negative life events. You don’t simply feel angry, or frightened, or sad, and do nothing; your feelings cause you to act in certain narrowly-defined ways in response to the situation.

It is more difficult to think of specific actions triggered by positive emotions. The emotion of joy is defined as a nonspecific urge to act—when you feel joyful, you want to do anything: dance, sing, hug people, read a novel, paint, or laugh. On the other hand, when you feel serene, you don’t

want to do anything. People who feel serene tend to sit back and savor the moment, paying attention to the details of their surroundings, relishing each one. With such a wide range of possible responses to each positive emotion, and with the responses being so subtle (it can be hard to tell if a person is savoring, and the urge to “do anything” is a subjective experience impossible to observe), it has been extremely difficult to tell what positive emotions do, or whether they had an evolutionary purpose. Was it useful to simply sit back and enjoy a beautiful sunset, or to feel the urge to play an instrument, sing, and dance all at once? How did these urges, borne out of positive emotions, help our primitive ancestors to avoid predators, find food and shelter, win mates, and raise their young?

For many years, there was no answer. Theories of “emotions” generally focused on negative feelings, and when scientists said that they could explain the evolutionary function of emotions, they really meant that they could explain *negative* emotions. One theory that attempts to explain both positive and negative emotions is Carver and Scheier’s control-process view of the origins and functions of emotions (1990). Carver and Scheier present the perspective that all emotions, both positive and negative, exist to notify people of progress toward goals. A negative emotion is a way of signaling that no progress toward a goal is being made, or that the goal is moving even farther away. A positive emotion lets a person know that progress is being made toward a desirable goal. Gradations of these emotions, from less to more intense, indicate the rate of positive or negative progress. Mixed emotions, like laughing through tears, are due to the fact that human beings hold multiple goals simultaneously, and these goals can sometimes conflict or progress in different directions at the same time. Carver and Scheier’s theory of emotions is tied up in their overall conceptualization of human psychology as primarily motivational: people are motivated to work toward certain goals, and our actions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings are in response to the goals we choose and the progress we make toward them.

While Carver and Scheier explain emotions from a motivational perspective, their ideas do not rule out other explanations from an evolutionary perspective. Research on negative emotions provides evidence that negative emotions are adaptive not only as motivational markers but because they induce specific action tendencies: if you’re frightened, you want to run; if you’re angry, you want to fight; and so on. Not only can emotions indicate whether you’re making progress toward your goals, but they also can prepare you to take certain actions. These specific action tendencies are embodied thoughts: they not only affect the mind by causing you to think nervously or aggressively, but they also ready the body to complete certain actions. If, at this moment, you saw danger looming and were experiencing fear, you would not only experience an overwhelming urge to flee to safety, but also within milliseconds your cardiovascular system would have switched gears to redirect oxygenated blood to large muscles so that you’d be physically ready to run away.

While the concept of specific action tendencies is extremely useful for explaining the evolutionary significance of negative emotions, and while it

contributes to our understanding of how emotions affect both the mind and body, it fares less well in attempting to explain the effects of positive emotions. How can the body ready itself for a specific action when joy causes a person to want to do ... anything at all? Can the “doing nothing” associated with serenity really be called a specific action tendency? It seems that positive emotions operate via different processes than negative emotions. This idea is supported by research indicating that over large periods of time, positive and negative emotions are independent: the amount of positive emotion a person feels does not affect the amount of negative emotion experienced, and vice versa. Just because it’s your birthday and you’re feeling incredibly happy doesn’t prevent you from feeling incredibly sad later that day when you come across a framed picture of your beloved Uncle Morty, who passed away last month. Positive and negative emotions can change independently, so you can feel both at the same time. Specific action tendencies explain the usefulness of the negative dimension. The “broaden-and-build” theory, proposed by Barbara Fredrickson (e.g., Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005) provides an evolutionary explanation for the utility of positive emotions.

#### EARLY WORK ON POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Research by Alice Isen on creativity laid some of the groundwork for Fredrickson’s later work on positive emotions. Isen found that when individuals experienced positive emotions due to a small gift of candy or watching a short comedic film, they were more creative in a wide variety of measures than individuals who experienced neutral or negative emotions. Individuals who experienced positive emotions were more likely to make unusual word associations in a word-association task, to find novel ways of solving problems, and to create and use more inclusive categories when grouping objects. Isen and her colleagues believed that these effects were the result of changes in cognitive organization caused by positive emotions (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). In other words, when people were experiencing a positive emotion, the way they thought about problems and organized their knowledge changed, making it easier for them to make associations or connections between unrelated objects.

This flexible thinking increases problem-solving ability, an important survival trait for both our evolutionary ancestors and for us. An example of one of Isen’s creativity tasks should help to illustrate this adaptive benefit of positive emotions. Isen asked participants to complete what is called the “candle task.” Participants are seated at a table holding a candle, a box of matches, and a thumbtack. A corkboard is on the wall next to the table. The participants are given the task of attaching the candle to the corkboard “in such a way that it will burn without dripping wax onto the table or the floor beneath it” (Isen, Daubman & Nowicki, 1987, p. 1123).

Can you think of how to accomplish this task? The usual solution is to take the tray out of the matchbox and attach it to the corkboard with the thumbtack, thus forming a shelf on which to set the candle. In Isen’s study, 75% of the participants who watched a short positive emotion-inducing

film before they sat down were able to solve the problem and complete the task. Meanwhile, only 20% of the participants in the neutral film condition, and 13% of the participants in the negative film condition were able to complete the task. While the ability to “MacGyver” a candle to a corkboard will probably never be the lynchpin upon which an individual’s survival rests, the flexible thinking required to see alternative uses in everyday objects would have been fundamental to the survival of primitive humans and is still of vital use today.

## THE BROADEN-AND-BUILD THEORY OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS

The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions generalizes from these effects on creativity to make a statement about the effect of positive emotions on human cognition and behavior in general. This theory holds that, unlike negative emotions, which narrow people’s ideas about possible actions (through specific action tendencies), positive emotions broaden people’s ideas about possible actions, opening their awareness to a wider range of thoughts and actions than is typical for them.

Whereas the narrowed mindsets sparked by negative emotions were adaptive in instances that threatened survival in some way, the broadened mindsets sparked by positive emotions were adaptive in different ways and over longer time frames: Broadened mindsets were adaptive because over time such expansive awareness served to build our human ancestor’s resources, spurring on their development, and equipping them to better handle subsequent and inevitable threats to survival.

As an example, consider the playful mindset we associated previously with joy. Ethological research documents that as complex organisms play with their age-mates, they forge social alliances, otherwise known as friendships, thus gaining social resources. These social resources increase the odds of survival and, in certain circumstances, might spell the difference between life and death. Consider also the contemplative mindset associated with our description of serenity. One of the hallmarks of human beings is the ability to learn from experience. Without the reflective, integrative thinking that occurs when one is feeling serene and savoring one’s current experiences, this learning could be seriously impeded. The gains in knowledge and perspective that come from connecting one’s current experiences to one’s past might, once again, make the difference in a life or death situation.

The broaden-and-build theory states that positive emotions were adaptive to our human ancestors because, over time, positive states and their associated broadened mindsets could accumulate and compound in ways that transformed individuals for the better, leaving them with more social, psychological, intellectual, and physical resources than they would have otherwise had. When these ancestors later faced inevitable threats to life and limb, their greater resources would have translated into better odds of survival, and of living long enough to reproduce. To the extent that the capacity to experience positive emotions was genetically encoded, this capacity would have been shaped by natural selection in ways that explain

the form and function of the positive emotions we modern-day humans experience.

The broaden-and-build theory posits that positive emotions have different effects over the short and long terms. Over the short term, positive emotions widen the repertoire of peoples' possible actions, resulting in creativity and in direct contrast to the narrowing of the range of likely actions that occurs when people experience negative emotions. Positive emotions also widen the scope of attention, causing people to notice more of their environment and to be more aware of what is going on around them. Positive emotions also create openness to new experiences, whereas negative emotions cause people to narrow their focus and reject new experiences in favor of the safe and familiar. Essentially, while negative emotions narrow a person's repertoire of thoughts, actions, and interests, positive emotions broaden it.

To better conceptualize these effects, imagine Abby, who is going out for a night on the town with her friends. She's just had a nasty fight with her boyfriend, and is feeling very angry. As the group drives into town, Abby changes lanes and nearly hits another car. She claims that it "came out of nowhere!" though her friends all insist the other driver had done nothing unusual. Abby's friends want to go to a new club in town, but Abby refuses. She decides to go leave the group and go to her usual diner, where she orders her usual soda. Abby's focus on fighting, her lack of attention to the environment around her and her lack of interest in new experiences are hallmarks of the short-term narrowing effects of her feelings of anger.

In contrast, imagine Claire, who is also going out for an evening on the town with her friends. Claire is in a great mood; she's feeling joyful and up for anything. As they drive downtown, Claire rolls down the windows and takes a deep breath of the spring air, noticing the complex potpourri of scents coming from the local arboretum. Though she has never gone to the arboretum before, she is suddenly seized with the desire to go explore it. Claire's free-floating desire to do anything, her attention to minor details in her environment and her interest in trying something new are all related to the short-term broadening effects of her feelings of joy.

Positive emotions also have effects on people over longer time spans. The broaden-and-build theory posits that the long-term psychological effects of positive emotions may result from the build-up of benefits from many short-term experiences of broadening. Short-term increases in creativity, problem-solving ability, attentional scope, and openness to experience lead to making healthier, wiser life choices, which have the effect of building a person's social, psychological, intellectual, and physical resources. This increase in resources is demonstrated by better coping in adversity, increased relationship closeness and mindfulness, and improved immune functioning.

To illustrate the different long-term effects of negative and positive emotions, let us return to Abby and Claire. When we first met Abby she was angry. This is a typical mood for her; she is goal-driven, impatient, and frequently stressed. As a result, she is driving away many of her friends, and

has trouble keeping a boyfriend. The anger also keeps her levels of stress and adrenaline high, taking a toll on her health. Because she spends so much time feeling angry, she doesn't always see the best options when making decisions and tends to be more interested in being quick than being right. Because Abby is so driven, being sick increases her stress level and she tends to stay ill for long periods of time. Abby's rough social demeanor, bad decision-making, and frequent ill health prevent her from connecting with other people and enjoying opportunities she might otherwise have had. This makes her more angry, which leads to even more social isolation and poorer health and decision-making. When tough times come, Abby has few, if any, resources left to support her and she has trouble bouncing back.

Claire's joyful mood also was fairly characteristic of her approach to life. Since Claire is usually in a good mood, her friends enjoy spending time with her. This creates strong friendships with people who support her when times get tough, helping her to bounce back from adversity. Claire's cheerfulness also helps her to counteract stress, letting her focus on the sources of her problems without feeling overwhelmed by negative emotions. She solves problems creatively, which helps her get ahead at work and avoid trouble before it starts. Claire tries to meet even illness with perspective, and since she doesn't spend all her energy fretting about being sick, she gets better that much faster. Over time, the resources she accumulates—good health, good friends, good problem-solving skills—add up, and help her not only cope with problems as they come, but avoid problems in the future. This leads her to feel even more positive, because her cheerful outlook on the world has led to good results. When positive emotions lead to increased resources, which in turn lead to more positive emotions, it is called an “upward spiral.” The result of this spiral is a bank of long-term resources that increase resilience in the face of trouble and make life richer and more meaningful.

## SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR BROADEN-AND-BUILD

So how did we come to discover the ways that positive emotions work? The answer lies in a body of psychological research conducted over many years in laboratories and in the field. Through rigorous application of the scientific method, the predictions of the broaden-and-build theory were tested using the principle of random assignment to conditions. Experimenters investigated the effects of positive emotions on individuals from college students to older adults from many different walks of life. In many studies, experimenters induced positive emotions in some participants, neutral feelings in others, and negative emotions in others, in order to tease out the different effects of these feelings. In studies where emotions were induced, either by watching videos, reading passages, or other methods, participants were randomly assigned to conditions. This means that each person was equally likely to experience a positive, negative, or neutral emotion in the course of the study.

The purpose of randomly assigning participants to conditions is to ensure that all groups are equivalent to one another, so that the results of the study cannot be attributed to factors such as personality traits, gender, culture, etc. In other words, each group has a similar balance of egocentric people, compassionate people, women, men, the well-to-do, introverted or extroverted people, and so on—the groups are basically the same, for the purpose of the study. The only difference among them is what experimental treatment each group received (for example, which type of video each group is shown in a study).

## BROADENING

According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions broaden our scope of attention and expand the array of thoughts and actions that come to mind, also known as our “thought-action repertoire.” The studies described in this section illustrate how the scientific method was used to test the predictions of the broadening element of the theory. These studies allow us to say that the broadening effect of positive emotions appears to be a real, reliable phenomenon, supported by data as well as by common sense.

### Broadened Attention

Let us return to Abby to illustrate the benefits of thinking broadly. After school, Abby and her friends usually hang out until dinner. Some days Abby and her friends decide to play checkers. When Abby feels upbeat, she finds it easier to keep track of the board as a whole, therefore allowing her to make smarter decisions about what piece to play next. In contrast, when Abby feels sad, frustrated or just neutral, she finds it more difficult to keep track of the entire board at once. She finds herself focusing on only segments of the board instead of the big picture, and her game suffers. The influence of emotions on our attentional scope was found in a study by Fredrickson and Branigan (2005). Participants were randomly assigned to watch film clips that elicited positive, negative, or neutral emotions. A film clip featuring penguins slipping and sliding on ice elicited amusement; a film clip featuring nature scenes such as mountains, streams and meadows elicited contentment; a film clip featuring a mountain-climbing accident elicited fear; a film clip featuring a group of men taunting others elicited anger and disgust; and a film clip featuring a computer screensaver elicited no emotion. After participants watched the film clips, they were asked to report which of two geometric figures was more similar to a “standard geometric figure.” Neither choice was right or wrong, but one of the geometric figures looked like the standard geometric figure in a global arrangement, and the other in local, detailed parts (see Figure 1.1 for an illustration of the geometric figures participants in the study saw). The participants who watched either of the two positive emotion film clips were more likely to choose the geometric figure in a global arrangement, in



**Figure 1.1. Global-Local Visual Processing**

comparison to the participants who watched neutral or negative emotion film clips. Positive emotions *broadened* people's scope of visual attention.

It is easy to imagine several ways in which the influence of positive emotions on our scope of attention affects our everyday lives. Consider the activity of driving a car. In driving school, we were warned that the key to good driving is to attend broadly to the road, rather than focusing narrowly on an object in the environment outside, such as the immediate car ahead of us. Focusing broadly means that we are aware of the wide expanse of the road ahead of us—the vehicles to the left and right of us and far ahead—and as a result, we are better drivers. The broaden-and-build theory predicts that feeling positive emotions benefits us during activities that demand broadened attention such as playing checkers or driving through traffic. When feeling content or tranquil, we may be more likely to be aware of the big picture on the road or on the checkerboard in its entirety. This tendency would be reversed, however, when feeling negative or neutral emotions.

### Broadened Thought-Action Repertoires

In addition to broadening the scope of our attention, positive emotions expand the array of thoughts and actions that come to mind. Consider the high school student Claire and her friends, also hanging out after school. On days Claire and her friends feel indifferent or downhearted, they find it difficult to come up with things they would like to do. On days in which Claire and her friends feel content or joyful, they find it easier to come up with a number of interesting possible activities. Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) explored how emotions influence our behavioral choices. After participants watched film clips that elicited either positive, negative, or neutral emotions, they were asked to imagine themselves in a situation in which the emotion they experienced from the film clip would arise. For instance, participants who experienced amusement imagined themselves in a

situation in which they would experience amusement. Keeping this feeling in mind, they were asked to make a list of all of the things they'd like to do. The participants who watched positive emotion film clips were more likely to come up with a longer and more varied list of things they'd like to do, in comparison to the participants who watched neutral or negative emotion film clips. That is, positive emotions "broadened" people's personal inventory of actions they would like to engage in. The influence of emotions on the range of actions we'd like to engage in may provide one reason why people act more adventurously while on vacation. Our elevated mood elicited by a beautiful location may contribute to our willingness to hang-glide for the first time or eat new and exotic foods we would otherwise not try.

### Broadening and Perceiving Others

Positive emotions' effects on cognitive broadening also change the ways in which we perceive others. Johnson and Fredrickson (2005), for instance, tested whether positive emotions improved face recognition for viewing faces of another race. They were interested in this issue because humans share a tendency to be *less* able to distinguish between people of a different race. So for people who are white, the ability to tell black faces apart is usually poorer than the ability to tell apart other whites. The psychological term for this tendency is the *own-race bias* in facial recognition.

Johnson and Fredrickson put together a two-phase study to investigate whether positive emotions changed Whites' ability to recognize Black faces. First, White participants were presented with a series of White and Black faces to learn (the learning phase). They were then presented with twice as many White and Black faces to test their ability to distinguish between the old faces they saw in the learning phase and the new faces (the testing phase). Either before the learning phase or after it, experimenters induced different emotions in the participants. Participants either watched a film clip of a stand-up comedian that elicited joy, a film clip featuring a succession of everyday items that elicited neutral emotions, or a film clip of a horror film that elicited fear. Compared to participants who experienced neutral or negative emotions, participants who experienced positive emotions before either the learning or the testing phases no longer showed the own-race bias. That is, the experience of positive emotions improved Whites' ability to recognize people of a different race.

Exactly *why* the own-race bias disappears after experiencing positive emotions is not completely known. The scientists who carried out the study describe two possible explanations, both supported by previous work on positive emotions. As we typically process faces of our own race as wholes, broadening the scope of our attention through positive emotions may improve our recognition of other-race faces. This would only be true to the extent that we typically notice specific features of other-race faces rather than the whole face. Another possible reason is that positive emotions may broaden our identities to include members of other social groups. That is,

positive emotions may diminish the differences we perceive between ourselves and members of another group, because positive emotions encourage us to think of ourselves and those around us as “all of us” rather than “us” (my racial group) versus “them.”

In line with the finding that positive emotions eliminate racial group differences in face recognition, positive emotions may reduce distinctions between the self and others in additional ways. Specifically, positive emotions increase the amount of connection people experience between themselves and other individuals. This connection is sometimes conceptualized as including the “other” in the “self,” whether the other is a friend or a stranger (Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991). A shorthand way to refer to this connection is “self-other overlap.” Imagining the overlap between our self-concept and another person’s self-concept is certainly an abstract task and probably is not something we normally do. For the sake of illustration, imagine yourself and your best friend. Assuming you have a good relationship with him or her, you probably perceive your self-concept and your best friend’s self-concept as overlapping substantially. You define yourself partially as “my best friend’s friend,” and share many traits and preferences. Now, imagine yourself and your physician. Assuming you are not close friends with your physician, it is likely that your self-concept and your physician’s self-concept do not overlap as much. You have less in common and are less likely to claim that your identity as “my physician’s patient” plays a significant part in your self-concept.

The extent to which your self-concept overlaps with another’s may have consequences for your relationship with that person. If the self-other overlap is great, you likely empathize with the other person more and act responsively to their needs. Conversely, if the self-other overlap is low, you may show little, if any concern, for the other person and his or her well-being.

Waugh and Fredrickson (2006) were interested in how positive emotions may affect our self-other overlap with new college roommates. New college freshman answered questions about their emotions, personality, and self-other overlap with their roommates one week into the semester and then again four weeks later. Additionally, participants answered questions about their emotions everyday between these two time periods. Waugh and Fredrickson found that one week into the semester, college freshman who reported higher positive emotions also reported increased self-other overlap with their new roommates. Also, college freshman who experienced a high ratio of positive to negative emotions throughout the first month of college reported a greater increase in self-other overlap than freshman with a low positivity ratio. The findings of Waugh and Fredrickson point to another way positive emotions lead to broadening. Positive emotions not only expand our visual attention and the thoughts and actions we bring to mind, but also broaden our self-concept to include others. That is, the invisible boundary that exists between ourselves and others becomes less distinct and we feel more socially connected. The implications that greater self-other overlap has for social relationships are covered later, when we discuss how positive emotions help to build social resources.

## Broadening and Creativity

The tendency for positive emotions to produce cognitive broadening is associated with thinking that is more flexible and creative. There are a variety of tasks which demand creative thinking—thinking that integrates seemingly dissimilar ideas in a reasonable but original way—in our everyday lives (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). Consider the process of decorating one's new apartment on a budget and owning an old mismatched wooden coffee table with only \$10 to spare. A creative approach would be to use the \$10 to buy a can of spray paint and stencils in order to turn the table into a contemporary piece of living room furniture. A less creative approach would be to search for a new coffee table that cost \$10.

We mentioned the influence of positive emotions on creativity previously, when we described Isen et al.'s (1987) candle task. However, the effect of positive emotions on creativity is not limited to solving creative brainteasers involving tangible objects. Creative thinking also aids us being able to integrate seemingly dissimilar elements in a useful, yet original manner. Consider the task of writing a poem about one of the four seasons. In order to do so and not bore our readers, we would have to utilize our creative skills. In the 19th century, John Keats wrote the poem "To Autumn." He described autumn as:

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run*  
(Keats, 1994, p. 193)

Depicting the season as a friend of the sun who schemes about ways to ripen fruit on the trees is certainly far more creative than an explanation one might find in a dictionary. For example, a more mundane description would state that autumn occurs between summer and winter, specifically from the September equinox to the December solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, and that the leaves usually change color at that time and the weather cools. This description, however, fails to elicit the true sense of what it is to experience autumn. The popular board game Taboo presents another opportunity for looking at the world in a creative manner. During each round, a player from one of the teams reads a card with the target word (e.g., felt) and a list of words (e.g., material, fabric, art projects, etc.) he or she cannot use in prompting the target word from his or her team members. A common tactic to succeed in the game is to think of the target word in an unconventional manner. For example, instead of trying to prompt the word "felt" with words that relate to its definition as a kind of material, a player could try to prompt the word "felt" with words that related to its definition as the past tense verb "to feel."

The effect of positive emotions on our creativity also was explored in another of Isen's 1987 studies. After some participants were given a bag of candy to elicit positive emotions and others were given nothing, all participants were asked to complete a Mednick Remote Associates Test, which

asks people to think of a word that relates to a group of three other words. For example, given the group of words *sore*, *shoulder*, and *sweat*, people are asked to think of one word that is associated with each of the three words in the group. The correct answer in this example is *cold*. One can imagine a “cold sore,” “a cold shoulder,” and a “cold sweat.” At first glance, however, the three words appear to be completely unrelated. Thus, coming up with a word that conceptually links all three of the words together requires flexible, creative thinking. In the experiment, participants who received the bag of candy, and as a result felt more positive emotions, came up with more correct answers on the test, in comparison to the participants who watched neutral emotion film clips. That is, the experience of positive emotions broadened people’s cognition, leading to more creative thinking.

## BUILDING

The broaden-and-build theory describes building as coming from many short moments of broadening. Broadened thought-action repertoires result in different patterns of actions and decision-making than narrowed repertoires, leading to increased investment in the physical, intellectual and social realms. Over time, this investment can “add up” and create long-term physical, intellectual, and social resources, even if the positive emotions that begin the process are generated in a lab. These resources manifest in various ways such as health, understanding of the world, and strong relationships with others. Research on building culminates in controlled, scientific studies in the laboratory, but it began with observations rooted in the natural world.

### Building Physical Resources

Support for the idea that positive emotions build physical resources over time comes from research on animals, heart health, and the immune system. Scientists who study positive emotions are sometimes inspired by animal behavior, specifically animal play. While the fact that animals play is not evidence that animals feel emotions, or the same emotions that humans do, play behavior is sometimes used as a substitute for positive emotions when observing animals in the lab, such as in the work we discuss here.

Young animals at play show behaviors that are similar to the actions taken by adult animals of the same species when escaping from predators or fighting for territory or resources. An example of these behaviors is the “jinking play” of juvenile African ground squirrels, in which the young squirrels run from tree to tree, jumping straight up in the air and then taking off in a new direction (Ewer, 1966). Adult squirrels use this pattern of behavior when making emergency escapes from predators. The spontaneous play of the juvenile squirrels may be a way for them to hone these escape skills with peers in a non-threatening environment before they are needed for survival. While there are many differences between a person and an African ground squirrel, observing the ways that juvenile play helps to

prepare animals for adult activities provides a starting point to theorize about the role of play, and the positive emotions associated with play, in human beings.

In a more general mode, the rough-and-tumble play that takes place among the young of many species, and which is often accompanied by positive emotions in humans, is a way to develop important physical skills such as hand-eye coordination and motor control, as well as build muscular strength and endurance (Boulton & Smith, 1992). The endless chasing games that children engage in at the playground are good not only for working off excess youthful high spirits, but also for building endurance, coordination, and strength, all resources that are vital for healthy physical development.

In addition to physical coordination, a healthy heart is another important physical resource. Research shows that positive emotions play a role in regulating cardiovascular reactivity, or the way heart rate changes in response to changes in the environment. In what Fredrickson and Levenson (1998) call the “undoing effect,” participants who watched videos of a puppy at play or waves washing along the beach after watching a frightening film showed a faster return to resting, or baseline, heart rate than participants who watched an abstract or sadness-inducing video. In addition, participants who smiled spontaneously while watching a sad film showed a faster return to baseline heart rate after the film than participants who did not spontaneously smile. In other words, the heart rates of participants who saw a positive-emotion inducing stimulus or showed facial expressions consistent with feeling positive emotion slowed faster than those of other participants. Faster cardiovascular recovery from negative, or just unexpected, events is related to cardiovascular health, as stress to the heart is lessened.

To understand why heart health, as affected by rapid cardiovascular recovery, is useful, imagine the following scenario. You walk into your house, open the door to your bedroom and something leaps out at you! Immediately, your heart begins to race. You may gasp in surprise, pulling extra oxygen into your lungs. Blood speeds to all the muscles in your body, readying you to fight or run away. However, your heart is not designed to beat very quickly for long periods of time. Your body is prepared to remove the threat as fast as possible, and then to return to its resting state. When your heart continues to beat quickly long after the frightening or startling stimulus is removed, your entire body experiences unnecessary wear and tear—which may well decrease heart health and increase the risk of heart attacks.

Positive emotions promote heart health by shortening the amount of time that the heart beats quickly in situations where the fight-or-flight response is no longer useful: for example, when your friends leap out at you and yell “Surprise!” on your birthday. When you feel positive emotions such as contentment or amusement, your heart rate returns to a slower, resting rate more quickly than if you are not experiencing positive emotions. Just as, over time, the amount of stress from extended cardiovascular reactivity can accumulate to damage the heart, the “undoing effect” may well help, over time, to prevent cardiovascular damage, leading to a healthier heart.

Along with leading to a healthier heart, experiencing positive emotions may help keep you from catching a cold. Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, and Skoner (2003) conducted a very interesting study to determine whether people who typically experience more positive emotions have a greater resistance to minor diseases (such as colds) than people who typically experience fewer positive emotions. First, Cohen et al. asked participants about their feelings on the day before the interview, in order to determine how many positive and negative emotions participants typically experienced. Participants were then put in quarantine for six days, isolated from any free-floating viruses that might cause them to spontaneously get sick. On the first day, the participants' health was evaluated. Then, on day two, the experimenters placed solutions containing one of two cold viruses in participants' noses. For days three through six of the experiment, participants remained in quarantine and the experimenters recorded which of the participants got sick. After analyzing the data, Cohen et al. found that participants in the study who were high in positive emotional style developed fewer colds than participants who were low in positive emotional style. In other words, having a lot of positive feelings each day might help to keep you healthy.

Why might positive emotions help you to avoid colds? Davidson et al. (2003) found that experiencing positive emotions was related to increased immune function, making the body better able to fight off disease. In a study comparing individuals who performed mindfulness meditation for eight weeks to individuals who did not meditate, participants who meditated showed more brain activity characteristic of positive emotions, and this emotion-related brain activity predicted increases in immune function. In other words, experiencing positive emotions may regularly keep you healthy by making the body better able to fight off infections, decreasing your likelihood of getting sick.

With all of these benefits to your body, heart, and immune system, it is not surprising that several longitudinal studies which followed individuals over long periods of time found that positive affect is correlated with living longer. The most well-known of these longitudinal studies is referred to as the Nun Study (Danner, Snowdon & Friesen, 2001). In this study, researchers analyzed the autobiographies of 180 Catholic nuns, written when each nun was about to take her final vows to join the convent. The average age of these nuns at the time that they were writing was 22. When the autobiographies were analyzed for emotional content almost 60 years later, researchers found that the amount of positive emotion expressed in a nun's autobiography was correlated with how long she had lived. In the sample, nuns who expressed the most positive emotion in their writing lived an average of 6.9 years longer than nuns who expressed the least amount of positive emotion.

These nuns lived in the same type of environment and were from similar backgrounds with similar educational levels, so it is unlikely that this large difference in longevity is due to environmental factors. It seems that, for the nuns, experiencing more positive emotion was strongly related to having longer lives. This effect also was found in a number of other studies

using different populations (not just nuns), with similarly large effects (Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002; Moskowitz, 2003; Ostir, Markides, Black, & Goodwin, 2000). It appears that experiencing more positive emotions forecasts a longer life, an effect that may be due to the fact that individuals who experience more positive emotion tend to have more resources (physical, intellectual, and social) with which to respond to events in their lives.

### Building Intellectual Resources

Remember Claire? She is a college student now, on her way to her first class. As she walks into class, the students already sitting in the classroom burst out laughing. Claire doesn't know anyone here, and she isn't sure why they are laughing. Claire isn't sure what to do. Should she ask someone to let her in on the joke? Or should she pretend she doesn't hear anything, in case the joke is on her? If Claire asks about the joke, she is showing approach behavior, seeking more information about her environment. If Claire decides not to ask, she is showing avoidance behavior, trying to keep from looking stupid or learning something bad. Research shows that the option which Claire chooses—to approach or avoid the situation—is related to how she was feeling before she arrived at the classroom. Negative emotions lead to avoidance behavior, whereas positive emotions promote approach behavior (Fazio, Eiser, & Shook, 2004). So if Claire was feeling fairly happy, she would be more likely to ask why people are laughing, and if she was feeling fairly unhappy, she would be more likely to stay quiet.

Both approach and avoidance behaviors are useful. Avoidance behavior helps individuals keep away from situations, objects, or people they consider dangerous, and is important for survival. We wouldn't get very far if we didn't learn to avoid putting our hands on hot stove burners or walking on the highway in the middle of rush hour. In this example, Claire's classmates actually might be laughing at her, which would make Claire very unhappy if she knew.

On the other hand, approach behavior helps individuals to gather information about their environment. This rich store of information becomes a resource on which people can draw to make better decisions. Claire's classmates might be laughing because she has toilet paper stuck to the bottom of her shoe—a very useful thing to know! The avoidance orientation induced by negative emotions is extremely useful for preventing people from actively harming themselves, but it makes it extremely difficult to learn new information about ambiguous stimuli. When a person avoids something, he or she can't learn more about it, and so incorrect ideas go uncorrected. On the other hand, when a person approaches ambiguous situations, he or she gains more information about them and is better able to gauge how best to react.

Here is an example of how the relationship between positive emotions and approach motivation described above can result in increased intellectual

resources. This time, let's think about Abby. In ninth grade, long before she became such a grouch, Abby enrolled in a Spanish class. As she took the required class, she discovered that her interest in learning the language was greater than that of most students. She genuinely enjoyed learning about the mechanics of a different language. Her interest, a positive emotion, fueled her motivation to study for hours without a second thought, seek unassigned texts, and begin volunteering in a bilingual elementary school. The result is knowledge of Spanish that is greater and more thorough than any of her fellow students. Each year, her knowledge grows and her language skills eventually will become a valuable asset when applying for jobs. Abby's positive emotional reaction to learning Spanish activated a natural impulse to explore the material further, continue learning, and inevitably gain even more knowledge. That is, her positive emotions triggered a series of actions that ultimately resulted in building her intellectual resources.

### Building Social Resources

Positive emotions also help to build social resources, such as friendships. To return to the animal play example mentioned previously, juvenile animals at play are not only building physical resources—they also are creating and reinforcing social bonds of mutual benefit and support. This works similarly for humans: when play is a social activity, we create and confirm positive connections with the people with whom we play, who associate us with positive emotions and shared positive experiences. In a different way, think of a teacher whose class you really enjoyed. As a result of your enjoyment of the course, you formed a good relationship with that teacher. This relationship is a resource, which you could probably draw on for references or letters of recommendation in the future.

To return to the example of play and positive emotions, children at the playground do more than simply make friends. They also develop social skills. As children play, they learn important skills related to compromising, sharing, and perspective-taking. These skills help children to make friends and work with others as they grow older. In addition, since emotions spur people to action, individuals who feel positive are more likely to go out and interact with others, making more friends. Sophisticated social skills and broad friendship networks are valuable social resources that individuals can draw on throughout their lives.

The study by Waugh and Fredrickson (2006) mentioned earlier provides an example of the way that positive emotions build social resources. We discussed how freshman college students' tendency to experience positive emotions in general was correlated with feeling more connected to their new college roommate one week after the beginning of classes. Another result of this study was that the feeling of connection was in turn related to a more complex understanding of their roommates. In other words, it appears that people who experience more positive emotion develop closer relationships and a more thorough understanding of the people they

interact with. While some of this effect may be due to the fact that others like to spend time with cheerful people, and thus cheerful people are more likely to make friends quickly, the development of complex understanding suggests that more is going on. It seems that people who experience more positive emotions are also, in some way, better able to parse the information they receive from the social interactions they experience, building a richer store of information and understanding concerning the people they know.

## CONCLUSION

Why do positive emotions matter? The broaden-and-build theory describes positive emotions as adaptive mechanisms that help people to think creatively, flexibly, and globally, which leads to increased physical, social and intellectual resources. These resources, in turn, may help individuals lead longer, richer lives. Positive emotions are not, as Tina Turner's song says, "second-hand emotions," good for nothing, simply signaling when life is good or bad. Just as negative emotions provided strong evolutionary advantages for our ancestors by promoting self-protective responses to aversive circumstances, positive emotions helped and still help us to explore and understand our environments. The beneficial effects of positive emotions may be part of what drives us to explore, understand and develop ourselves and our world, changing our lives and the lives of those around us for the better.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Your Turn to Broaden, Build, and Buffer

*Understanding Your Adventures:* Write a list of 10 adventurous or out-of-the-ordinary things you have done that were not planned. Your list might include things such as going waterskiing for the first time, eating an exotic new cuisine like snails, painting your room a bright color, or dancing on stage in a dance club. Then, describe the situation you were in and how you felt when you decided to do these things. Notice the type of emotions you were experiencing prior to your adventures.

*Inducing Positive Emotions to Aid Creativity:* The next time you are engaging in a task that demands creativity (e.g., coming up with an essay topic, decorating your room) and experience frustration, take a break and do something that elicits positive emotions. Then, return to the task and try again. Chances are you will be more likely to succeed with the task than before.

*Greater Self-Other Overlap after Experiencing Positive Emotions:* Before you watch a comedic television show or movie with friends, ask them to draw themselves and another person as two circles that may overlap on a piece of paper. After you all watch the comedy, ask them to draw themselves and the same person as two circles again. Compare the two sets of drawings among your friends. Do you notice greater self-other overlap after they watch the comedy?

**Building Resources:** Once each day for a week, try to do an ordinary task differently than you would normally: take a different route home, eat something new for lunch, etc. After a week, write down any changes in your life that have resulted from these small variations from the routine. How many of these changes are increases in your physical resources such as health and stamina; intellectual resources, such as discovering a new restaurant, or acquiring a better mental map of your area; social resources, such as meeting new friends, or gaining a different perspective on old friends? What do you think would happen if you continued to do old things in a new way for longer than a week?

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# Personal Narratives, Positive Emotions, and Long Lives: The Nun Study

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While searching the archived records of the School Sisters of Notre Dame seeking insights for a research proposal, Dr. David Snowdon, an epidemiologist from the University of Minnesota, discovered carefully preserved handwritten documents. These 50-year-old documents were the personal writings of sisters who, at the time of their induction into the order, had been asked to write autobiographies. Although such well-preserved records of original writing, vocabulary, language usage, and personal reflections on early life experiences are rare, this collection was remarkable. Most of the sisters were teachers, had lived in convents, ate foods prepared in communal kitchens, had not had children, and had not smoked or drunk in excess. Thus, many of the variables that frequently confound research studies were controlled by the nature of this population of religious women.

Dr. Snowdon approached the sisters and they readily agreed to participate in a study of their physical and mental health and also granted access to their records and early life writings. Longitudinal studies of normally functioning elderly persons were uncommon at the time, and the discovery of co-existing records for the sisters throughout adulthood and self-reflections on their early years was extraordinary. Dr. Snowdon had struck research gold. His research proposal was funded in 1990, and since that time the sisters have received yearly physical, neurological, and cognitive examinations, and the relationships between characteristics of their early writings and their performance on cognitive and physical tests have been examined. The voluminous amount of information on the sisters has prompted an examination of hundreds of hypotheses and variables. Some of the most striking findings have addressed questions that many would

never have thought to ask: Would the early life writings predict the sisters' current level of functioning or current health status? Would the writings forecast future events as the sisters lived their final years? These were but a few of the questions a study of the School Sisters of Notre Dame would investigate.

The nuns of the School Sisters of Notre Dame religious congregation had all lived and taught in schools in midwestern, eastern, and southern towns. Beginning in 1930, the Mother Superior of the North American sisters requested that before sisters completed their final vows, they "write a short sketch of [their] life. This account should not contain more than two to three hundred words and should be written on a single sheet of paper ... include place of birth, parentage, interesting and edifying events of childhood, schools attended, influences that led to the convent, religious life, and outstanding events." The instructions were not intended to influence how the life events were described nor were they completed specifically for this study of emotional content. It is likely that the autobiographies were required to gather information to help in the determination of future education for the sisters. Even though there were similarities in the events that were presented in the writings, large differences were shown in how the events were described.

The following brief summary describes findings from the Nun Study examination of the emotional content of the autobiographies and serves as the basis for this chapter:

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 when the sisters were aged 75 to 95. A strong inverse relationship was found between the use of positive emotion words in early life and risk of mortality in late life ( $p < .001$ ). As the quartile ranking of positive emotion word usage increased, a decrease in risk of mortality occurred with a 2.5-fold difference between the lowest and highest quartiles. The difference between age at death for the highest and lowest quartiles for the sisters was 9.4 years for number of positive emotion words and 10.7 years for number of different positive emotions. (Danner, Snowdon & Friesen, 2001)

The brief summaries provided below are from the beginning and end of the autobiographies for two sisters, one with low and one with high positive emotion content.

Sister 1 (low positive emotion): I was born on September 26, 1909, the eldest of seven children, five girls and two boys.... My candidate year was spent in the Motherhouse teaching Chemistry and Second Year Latin at Notre Dame Institute. With God's grace, I intend to do my best for the Order, for the spread of religion and for my personal sanctification.

Sister 2 (high positive emotion): God started my life off well by bestowing upon me a grace of inestimable value.... The past year which I have spent as a candidate studying at Notre Dame College has been a very happy one. Now I look forward with eager joy to receiving the Holy Habit of Our Lady and to a life of union with Love Divine.

## BACKGROUND FOR LONGEVITY FINDING

Variation in the emotional content of the sisters' writings aroused research interest, even though neither theoretical guidelines nor empirical evidence existed to support the hypothesis that such writings would predict later life health or longevity. Examination of the writings showed wide variability in how and if emotional reactions to life events were included as a part of the sister's early life writings. When the sisters wrote their autobiographies, they were at a turning point in life and were becoming members of the religious order. They were ready to begin their profession as teachers.

Although scientific evidence did not exist to show that writing style would predict health outcomes, there was well-established evidence that facial expressions of emotions were universally understood and expressed (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Izard, 1971). Furthermore, the literature supported distinctive autonomic nervous system patterns associated with specific emotions (Levenson, Ekman & Friesen, 1990). The University of Kentucky researchers who worked with Dr. Snowdon were excited about what a comprehensive evaluation of the writings would reveal and created a coding system to describe the emotion words used in the Nun Study writings (Danner, Friesen & Snowdon, 2001). The evidence from universality and distinctive autonomic nervous system patterns was used as the basis for developing the word coding system—a system that identified English words associated with the seven basic emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise, and contempt. Two coders were trained and 180 autobiographies were scored for the frequency of emotion words. The 180 autobiographies were selected because the original, handwritten documents had been preserved, providing evidence of their authenticity, and these sisters had all agreed to participate in Dr. Snowdon's longitudinal study of physical and cognitive abilities in later life. The sisters had also agreed to, upon their death, donate their brains for autopsy. This commitment from the sisters facilitated ongoing studies of the neurological effects of aging and dementia and allowed researchers to follow the sisters until the end of life and gather information on longevity. Concurrent with the development of the emotion coding system and the coding of the autobiographies, other researchers proposed theories that would support what was found with the sisters' autobiographical writings.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POSITIVE EMOTIONS AND LONGEVITY

Research literature builds a case for writing as an expressive modality that can reflect an emotional style that, if positive, can yield benefits for both health and longevity. These studies suggest that positive attitude and sustained or frequent positive emotional responses may protect the body by muting and balancing both the cardiovascular and immune system responses to stressful and negative emotional events in life. Seligman (2000) proposed that an insightful, positive attitude in dealing with life events could lead to greater feelings of well-being and perhaps to a longer life. Also, a 30-year longitudinal investigation by Maruta, Colligan, Malinchoc, and Offord (2000) found optimism to be associated with a lower risk

of death. A basic premise underlying such research is the idea that positive affect results in vasodilatation whereas negative affect acts as a vasoconstrictor. The result for higher positive affect could be lower blood pressure and lower associated risk of heart attack and stroke, and perhaps more importantly, lower levels of negative affect. Negative affect prepares the organism for a fight or flight response by increasing blood pressure and alertness. Headey and Waring (1992) suggested that individuals maintain levels of positive and negative affect determined by their personality and that, after emotional arousal or stress, these levels return to an individual baseline (Diener, 2000). This reasoning suggested that a response pattern of frequent or sustained negative emotional arousal with a slow return to a tranquil baseline could prompt cardiovascular activity that could accelerate disease mechanisms such as atherosclerosis. Further, a pattern of regular and rapid return to a calm baseline could benefit health. Findings also suggested that the suppression of emotional expression exacerbates autonomic nervous system and bodily responses to negative emotion and that over time this suppression could have adverse health consequences (Gross & Levenson, 1997). In 1998, Fredrickson and Levenson demonstrated the muting effects of positive emotion on the body's responses to negative emotion. In studies of written language, Pennebaker and colleagues have shown how writing about emotional events can be related to both physical and psychological health (Hughes, Uhlmann, & Pennebaker, 1994; Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker & King, 1999).

In the Nun Study, we don't know how the daily actions of the high positive emotion sisters differed from the low positive emotion sisters. However, for positive emotion to have extended their lives for such a long period of time, the difference must have involved something that the sisters did frequently, if not daily, that protected their bodies from the inevitable stresses and negative emotions they experienced throughout their lifetimes.

## POSITIVE EMOTIONS OF HOPE, DESIRE, AND ASPIRATION

Positive emotion has traditionally been included under the rubric of happiness, with little attention paid to variations in positive emotional states. We won't attempt to elaborate on the taxonomy of positive emotions, beyond noting that some, such as amusement, are short and reactive, whereas others are sustained and provide motivation for current and future actions. For this discussion, we will focus primarily on the future-oriented emotion associated with hope, desire, and aspiration, which potentially motivated and protected the sisters throughout their working years.

Hope, desire, and aspiration are words that describe a cluster of future-oriented positive emotions that motivate and drive our actions over extended periods of time. Moreover, these emotions make difficult and unpleasant tasks easier to complete. For example, consider the following statements:

“I want to get up because I want to get to work,” versus  
 “I must get up because I have to get to work.”

“I want to get a birthday present for John,” versus  
 “I must get a birthday present for John.”

“I want to learn, I want to get an education,” versus  
 “I must finish my education to get a job.”

We’ve all spoken using both types of statements and heard such statements from others. Furthermore, we’ve all known people who enjoy work, shopping, and attending classes, and others who find these tasks annoying. If you want to do something, you are more likely to experience positive emotion while doing it as compared to feeling that you must do it. One statement implies an inner desire to perform a task; the other implies an outside pressure demanding that you perform the task. Are you more motivated when doing something you want to do, or when doing something you must do to avoid penalties?

Formal education provides an excellent example of the differences between these experiences. By early adulthood, we’ve all completed classes that captured our attention and those that did not. Certainly, fear of failure will motivate study for a test and will get you through a course. However, reflect for a moment on the difference between what you have learned and retained from classes you wanted to attend, versus classes attended solely because they were required for graduation or ones that simply failed to capture your imagination. Can you remember the difference in your emotional state when confronting a new day in the ways implied in these contrasting statements? What made you anticipate the pleasure of the day on one occasion and approach another day with dread? What if every day began with a feeling of desire to get to work or school?

## MODEL OF AN EMOTIONAL EVENT

From the beginning of self-help writings, emphasis has been placed on achieving a positive attitude, typified by viewing the glass as half full rather than half empty. In this chapter, we will not provide ways to achieve a positive attitude because what works will likely differ for each of us. Rather, we will emphasize how positive emotion influences attitudes that in turn increase opportunities for the arousal of more positive emotion. Just as negative emotions and negative attitudes can generate a vicious cycle leading to depression and ill health, positive emotion and positive attitudes can be self-generating and cyclical.

Table 2.1 is a simplified model of an emotional event and describes the key components of emotional arousal. In most theories of emotion a similar model is either described or implied. This model fits transient life events best, but also includes constructs that are important for understanding enduring emotional experiences. Because enduring emotional states are not well understood, we do not know whether these states are repeated arousals of the same emotion, or whether a single elicitation of the emotion was sufficient to sustain the state without recovery from the initial arousal. Sadness or grief from the loss of a loved one is usually the emotional state of longest duration. Although persons may grieve for several years when

**Table 2.1**  
**Simplified Model of Emotional Event**

Antecedents (Elicitor)	Appraisal	Arousal	Display Rules	Expressive Behavior	Instrumental Action	Experience: Self-Report
		CNS ANS		Face Voice Body	Approach Avoidance	
				↓	↓	↓
←-----Reappraisal----- ----- ----- ----- -----→						

they lose a loved one, generally the experience is not constant sadness without relief. Events such as visits from friends or sharing another’s happiness are capable of temporarily interrupting the sadness and grieving.

An emotional event does not occur in isolation, and with the exception of a few innate elicitors, the emotional response is neither a reflex nor is it automatic. Like reflexes, automatic responses may be disrupted and modified by established habits, or by processing that is so rapid that it is not possible to distinguish response time of the modified from the original innate response.

Potential emotional elicitors occur in a context of *antecedents*. Antecedents include all past experiences with the elicitor and similar elicitors, the agent(s) of the elicitor, and associations with previous arousal of the emotion most likely to be activated. For example, fear is elicited by a threat to life or limb. The loss of physical support, such as having your chair break, will elicit fear innately and rapidly. However, the anticipatory fear of going to the dentist involves memories of previous dental visits and perhaps pain. Earlier experience with a particular dentist may increase fear.

Cognitive processing, or *appraisal*, of the elicitor and antecedents occurs rapidly. When there is a match between the elicitor and one of the basic emotions, an emotional response is triggered. Note that the arousal process may be interrupted at any point by reappraisal, even during the initial appraisal process.

Whether *arousal* or autonomic nervous system (ANS) activity (increased heart rate, blood pressure, and sweating) begins at this early point or is triggered simultaneously with facial behavior has not been established. The cognitive processing of the central nervous system (CNS) activity begins during the appraisal process and continues throughout the emotional event.

*Display rules* describe when, where, and how intensely an emotion is openly expressed. Many of the rules are culture-specific, both general and regional, and many apply to specific contexts, whereas other rules are self-imposed without a cultural basis. When imposed, these rules determine whether the expressed emotion is shown on the face or in the voice. Display rules are not always successful and micro-momentary expressive patterns may appear before the expressions are halted or masked with another emotional expression. Display rules are possible because the facial and vocal muscles can be voluntarily controlled and therefore expressions can be simulated and suppressed. In the most successful application of a display rule, the emotional expressive behavior does not appear.

The original demonstration of display rules (Friesen, 1972) compared the facial behavior of Japanese and American students while watching pleasant and unpleasant films, both alone and in the presence of an authority figure. When watching the unpleasant film alone, both Japanese and Americans expressed the negative emotions that they experienced. However, when the authority figure was in the room during the unpleasant film, the Japanese students smiled while the American students expressed the experienced negative emotions just as they had when alone. This study illustrated a cultural display rule and showed that negative emotional experiences can be suppressed and masked with another expression. Within American culture, the acceptable display of grief at a funeral depends upon the relationship between the grieving person and the deceased. While intense grief is appropriate for the spouse and children of the deceased, such displays would not be considered acceptable for a casual acquaintance.

*Expressive behavior* is a marker of the emotional experience. Awareness of facial or vocal response can elicit another emotion or activate masking behavior that changes the expression of the original emotion. Re-appraisal may occur or the response can be interrupted if the elicitor proves insufficient. The response can be halted before it intensifies and before instrumental action is taken, or the emotional arousal may elicit a different emotional response. If the emotion is fully expressed, instrumental action (approach or avoidance) will take place. For example, a sudden loud noise when walking along a dark, isolated street will likely elicit a fear response. However, when the identification of the noise is a car backfiring, the threat to life and limb will be reappraised; the subjective threat eliminated and the fleeing behavior halted before it begins. Laughing at oneself for the misidentification of the noise might be a secondary response.

The ANS prepares the body for taking *instrumental action*, fleeing in fear, fighting in anger, or shutting off intake of an odor or taste in disgust. No functional action is associated with positive emotion as neural firing is slowed or halted by positive emotions. Yet, this slowing of heart rate and lowering of blood pressure may provide an explanation for the healing power of positive emotion. Although excited happiness can result in physical activity, in success and achievement, this state has no known survival benefit. This activity will release tension and could add to the health benefits of the positive emotions.

The *emotional experience* involves all phases of the emotional event, and multiple emotions can be elicited during the same event. Self-report of the emotional event is complex, especially when more than one emotion is expressed at the same time. Gathering self-report data requires careful questioning and probing to separate different phases of the event and to obtain specific information about the aroused emotion or emotions.

## THE SISTERS' EXPERIENCE OF HOPE, DESIRE, AND ASPIRATION

As suggested previously, the sustained positive emotional state of hope and desire is likely to involve repeated elicitations of the emotion and can

lead to the emotional events depicted in Table 2.1. Over their lifetimes, the sisters in this study also experienced negative emotions. Thus, we speculate that the re-arousal of their positive emotions allowed the sisters to recover from these negative events and move forward with their professional and personal lives. We propose that the more frequently that positive emotion was aroused and the longer it was sustained, the greater the positive impact on the body. It seems reasonable to assume that, when the driving power of a positive emotion—such as desire or want—is sustained long enough to achieve a future goal, moments of discouragement, anxiety, stress, disgust, or anger likely interrupted the positive emotional response and had to be overcome to re-arouse the positive emotional state.

When we speculate about the everyday lives of the sisters, we assume that their classrooms were not unlike those of other teachers. In the classes that they taught, there were likely students who were disruptive as well as students who could not or did not want to learn. These students may have frustrated, annoyed, or even angered the sisters. Similarly, administrators and colleagues may have disagreed and interfered with the sister's teaching, resulting in episodes of annoyance and frustration. Also, the sisters probably taught students eager to learn and who worked hard but were forced to drop out of school, or they may have had a favorite student who became sick. These are a few of the many events that may have aroused sadness and grief for the sisters that had to be overcome.

When we speak of overcoming anger, sadness, stress, or anxiety, we are not suggesting a Pollyanna-type denial of the negative emotion, but an approach to overcoming the negative emotion even when the emotion is experienced and felt. How can this be done? Recently a friend asked, "What happened? I planted five seeds and only one flower came up?" Not knowing much about growing flowers, another horticulturalist friend was contacted with the expectation to learn about soil conditions, contaminated soil, lighting, and temperature. But his answer came back short and sweet; "Be delighted you have a flower and enjoy it." Now, the friend was not saying to ignore the failed seeds, but rather to delight in small success rather than dwell on failures.

We don't know for sure that the sisters with high positive emotions focused only on the flowers. However, we do know that there are times when it is difficult to find the flower in the weeds. Yet, in these challenging times, with re-appraisal of the situation, the flower can often be found. For the sisters' positive attitude to have provided sufficient protection for their bodies to have extended their lives, they must have been able to find the flower in the inevitable weed patch.

Were the sisters who used highly expressive writing styles born with a temperament that made a positive attitude natural for them? Were the earliest life experiences of these sisters such that positive habits were easily developed and sustained, and finding the flower became automatic? Despite the extensive information available on the sisters' lives, we cannot answer these important questions. Scientific advances have made possible an examination of genetic differences, and theoretical and empirical advances have shown that the constructs of tabula rasa and learning theory are usually

inadequate to explain complex human behaviors such as emotional tendencies and attitudes.

We propose that a positive attitude can be learned, and that a negative attitude can be changed. However, it seems improbable that simply changing the words used to describe emotional events would have a health effect. Nevertheless, if a person reflects on hearing him- or herself saying he or she “must” do something too often, there might be doubt whether the things that are being done are truly necessary. Some “must” tasks might be given a lower priority, or a re-appraisal of these tasks might reveal that they are in reality tasks the person wants to do and can provide satisfaction.

Such changes in what tasks are given priority or changes in the reasons for executing the tasks could lead to the next step in self-realization—being driven by one’s own goals instead of by outside demands. This self-realization can lead to greater satisfaction with life, which over time, could be beneficial to health. We don’t know for certain, but the positive reflections on their early life coupled with their enthusiasm for entering into their profession suggest this was likely the case for the sisters with high positive emotions.

We have no way to determine whether the high positive nuns enjoyed teaching and working with students more than the low positive nuns. Likewise, we have no way to determine if the low positive nuns were more likely to have felt that they had to get to classes and may have dreaded encounters with their students. If this description correctly describes the daily attitudes for the two groups of sisters, we would expect the attitudes to have had the effects on health and longevity that were found.

We know that, at one point in their early adult years, the high positive sisters described their lives by emphasizing the positive emotions they experienced in a variety of life situations. In another study (Friedman, 1999), happy, positive children were followed over an extended period with the expectation that they would be healthier and perhaps live longer than children who had been less happy. However, these happy children tended to engage in risky health behaviors that resulted in life expectancy no longer than others. This is not to suggest that all happy children will engage in life-shortening risky behavior that results in early death. However, the study does emphasize how uncontrollable variables could negate findings. We were fortunate that such variables were somewhat controlled by lifestyle in the study of the sisters of Notre Dame.

While we have focused primarily on the healthy impact of positive emotion on the cardiovascular system, evidence also supports the view that positive emotion and smiling can improve immune system response. It seems obvious that avoiding even minor illnesses could have a cumulative benefit on health and longevity.

We also have concentrated on only one positive emotion, which is not to imply that enjoyment, amusement, and relief are not important to health. However, when considering longevity it would seem that the sustained positive emotions play the most significant role. As noted earlier, much remains unknown about the daily, emotional lives of the sisters. Fortunately, we visited and got to know several of the impressive women we

studied. When talking with them following their retirement from daily teaching, we learned that many continued to accept new challenges that required long term motivation for learning and sustained effort for reaching new goals. For us, their activity seemed to confirm that the sustained positive emotion hypothesis remained at work.

## STUDY OF POSITIVE EMOTION AS AN EMERGING FIELD

An explanation of how positive emotion can improve health and add years to one's life is relatively simple. Negative emotion, stress, and anxiety elevate cardiovascular activity and reduce immune responses. Positive emotion hastens the return to baseline for these functions. An appreciation of the historical perspective on the study of emotion is helpful in understanding why the study of positive emotion is now emerging and allows recommendations to be made as to where future study in the field is needed.

The study of basic emotions had virtually disappeared from social sciences by the early 1940s. Darwin (1872) had proposed that the facial expression of basic emotions had evolved from functional facial actions which, in modern man, served to provide information about inner states of emotion. Those who first tested this theory assumed that facial expressions had evolved and that the link between elicitor and expression was innately wired, occurred automatically, and would be difficult or impossible to modify or suppress. Further, they assumed that since the facial expressions of anger, fear, disgust, and sadness occurred spontaneously, they would be duplicated when performed deliberately or when a past emotional event was relived. Likewise, they assumed that observers would see universal facial expressions of emotion when a basic emotion was aroused. When these investigators failed to find uniformity between performed target emotional expressions and judgments of the intended emotional facial expressions, they concluded that there were neither universal facial expressions of emotion nor innate emotions.

While the study of basic emotions virtually disappeared during this time, studies of non-specific negative emotional arousal continued by researchers in psychosomatic medicine. Research related to the effects of stress and anxiety and Type-A personality on health continued, with each found to have adverse effects. Stress and anxiety are emotion-related, but they are not basic emotions. Stress is likely, over time, to arouse multiple negative emotions; and anxiety is a form of anticipatory fear. The agent or elicitor for anxiety is often diffuse and unclear, and anxiety often occurs when no elicitor is present. Time urgency, a characteristic of the Type-A personality, has the potential for arousing states of stress and anxiety. However, such an eliciting source was idiosyncratic and difficult to isolate and define. Likewise, overt behavioral signs of anxiety or the effects of stress were difficult to detect and measure objectively. The evidence that chronic states of stress and anxiety increased the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and other cardiovascular disorders, as well as lowered immune protection, proved solid.

Measures of elevated blood pressure, sweating and heart rate, and the effects of ANS activation became the critical measure of anxiety and stress in both clinical and laboratory research. Logically, any activity that diverted attention from stressful, anxiety-producing situations would appear to benefit physical and psychological health. Naturalistic and laboratory research that examined beneficial situations and activities suffered from non-specificity as did studies of stress and anxiety; or these studies were overly specific with too little attention directed to why one activity would be effective for one person and not for another.

The lack of specificity in studies of adverse and beneficial attitudes, contexts, and activities was due to skepticism about the existence of basic emotions with distinguishable elicitors and distinctive expressive and instrumental behaviors. Questions such as the following were rarely addressed: Which negative emotions are most detrimental to physical or mental health? Do negative emotions differ in their receptivity to the healing response of positive emotion?

Additionally, there were no objective measures of the overt signs of emotion. Only one overt sign of positive emotion had been defined: the smile. Therefore, making observable distinctions between accomplishment, satisfaction, amusement, hope, and desire was difficult or impossible. Further, the smile of pleasure is the most easily simulated of the basic emotional expressions and is used socially whether positive emotion is aroused or not, allowing it to be used to conceal the expression of aroused negative emotion. Although the behavioral characteristics of the social and expressive smile have been proposed and studied (Abel, 2002; Ekman & Friesen, 1982), research should identify further distinctions. Facial expression is only one component of emotional arousal, and studies that focus on each phase of an emotional event are required. Unfortunately the primary tool for examining the emotional experience is a self-report and this can only be done retrospectively. Informants, even if they are insightful, find it difficult to unravel the complexity of neural/cognitive activity that occurs in milliseconds between the elicitation of emotion and the behavioral responses. It may actually be difficult to identify which emotions were aroused and even more difficult to overcome social expectations and taboos about revealing the experience of some emotions.

Although stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, and anger share characteristics of ANS arousal and their potential adverse health effects, they are not identical (Levenson, Ekman, & Friesen, 1990). Moreover, the elicitors and display rules of these emotional states differ. Most important, recovery from these states is likely to be as different as what arouses the ameliorative positive emotion. If earlier research had emphasized the health effects of the basic negative emotions of fear, sadness, and anger, rather than the diffuse states of stress and anxiety, we would know more about health risk factors and methods of prevention. Why research has not taken this approach is understandable. Despite the universality of elicitors for basic emotions, antecedents across individuals differ as do the appraisal and re-appraisal process. Thus, it is difficult for controlled laboratory studies to find a single eliciting

condition that will arouse fear, sadness, or anger across subjects; meanwhile it is less difficult to arouse the more diffuse states of stress and anxiety. Important theory development and empirical work may provide part of the solution to this problem (e.g., Scherer & Ellgring, 2007). Currently work related to appraisal theory is often presented as an alternative to basic emotion theory. We suggest that these theories are not mutually exclusive, but rather are complimentary. That is, theory and research are needed to determine the appraisal process that triggers each basic emotion. How the process works for the person whose emotional arousal is dysfunctional is the job of the therapist. How this process operates in normal emotional arousal is the task of science and it is through the explanation of this process that the study of emotions will move forward.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

### Making Faces, Making Feelings

The Nun Study emotion findings will not likely be replicated. To have the opportunity to follow a group of individuals in the same profession with similar lifestyles and risk factors over a lifetime with preserved records of their life events is improbable. There is, however, a simple experiment that can demonstrate the power of positive emotions.

**Making Faces:** The idea to conduct systematic research similar to what is suggested below resulted from a serendipitous finding while Drs. Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen were developing the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) (Ekman & Friesen, 1978). FACS is an anatomically-based system for describing facial behavior through facial muscle actions and their combinations. To code facial actions, the coder learns to describe changes on the surface of the skin when a muscle of the face is contracted. In the development of this system, Drs. Ekman and Friesen contracted each muscle and combinations of muscles of the face. They studied their own and each other's faces and wrote notes for describing the changes they observed. One day, in the middle of making and describing facial configurations, one said "I feel terrible, I have to stop"; to which the other readily replied in agreement.

Looking over the work for the day, they realized that they had inadvertently created a day of making faces for only negative emotions. They discussed how they had felt during previous days and realized that the physical and emotional stress of the current day was unique. The search began for an expert in the moment by moment measurement of ANS activity who would collaborate on studies of the relationship between facial expressions of emotion and ANS arousal.

Years of collaborative research with Dr. Robert Levenson of the University of California at Berkeley not only explained the uncomfortable feelings Drs. Ekman and Friesen had experienced that day, but also described universal, differential ANS patterns triggered by the facial expressions of happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. The ANS patterns for the negative emotions are consistent with changes that are needed for the body to take survival action, e.g., flight in fear, fight in anger (Levenson, Ekman, & Friesen, 1990). Dr. Levenson and his students have continued these studies, and their

work provides evidence for how positive emotion shuts down the ANS effects of negative emotions that, if sustained, puts stress on the cardiovascular system (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998).

The following exercise demonstrates how to create two different facial expressions. Try to imitate face A, and record your experience; then, wait several minutes before imitating face B. Finally, perform face A, followed immediately by face B, before recording your experience. Have someone read the step by step instructions to you while you move your face to create the configuration and add each movement until the expression is completed. Hold the expression for 10 seconds before relaxing your face. Immediately record how you felt. Did you feel an emotion, and if so, how intense was the feeling? Be sure to describe any sensations in your stomach, chest, shoulders, arms, or other parts of your body.

***Instructions—Face A:***

1. Tighten and press your lips together and hold.
2. Now tighten your lower eyelid.
3. Raise your upper eyelid.
4. Now, pull your brows down and together.
5. Hold for 10 seconds.
6. Now, relax and record what you experienced.

**Reporting the Experience:**

Did you experience an emotion? If so, which one(s)? Rate the intensity of each emotion you experienced (using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is no experience of emotion at all and 10 is the most intense emotional experience one can have).

Describe any sensations in your stomach:

- Was there tightness and tension?
- Was there a sensation of heat?
- Were there cold sensations?

Describe any sensations in your chest:

- Was there tightness and tension?
- Were there hot sensations?
- Were there cold sensations?

Describe sensations in your arms, shoulders, back or other parts of your body: For each body part:

- Was there tightness and tension?
- Were there hot sensations?
- Were there cold sensations?

***Instructions—Face B:***

1. Raise the corners of your lips toward your ears as far as you can.
2. Now, lift your cheeks pushing your lower eyelid upward.

3. Hold for 10 seconds
4. Now, relax and record what you experienced answering the questions above.

**Instructions—Face A Then Face B:**

1. Make face A, relax, and *immediately* make face B.
2. Now, relax and record what you experienced answering the questions above and the following additional questions.

When you made face B:

- Were there changes in any body sensations?
- Did tensions in a body area relax? Rate each change 0 to 10, with zero being no change and 10 being complete absence of sensations produced by face A.

Stomach  
Chest  
Shoulders, etc.

**DO NOT READ THE FOLLOWING BEFORE PERFORMING THE EXPERIMENT AND RECORDING YOUR RESPONSES**

While holding the facial configuration in the face A instructions, you probably felt your heart racing, tightening in your chest, and possibly tightening in your shoulders and tensing of the muscles in other body areas. These are the facial movements involved in the expression of anger. When completing the facial configuration in the face B Instructions, you probably felt lightness in your chest and a lack of tension in other areas of the body. This effect was probably most pronounced at the moment you added the eye involvement while holding up the corners of the lips, and gradually faded while you held the full facial expression. It is unlikely that there was any increase in heart rate or muscle tension while holding the facial configuration because you were activating the facial muscles necessary for the experience of pleasure or happiness. Performing the instructions for face A then face B immediately following, you probably felt tension, and when face A was performed alone and then face B; you likely experienced some release of tension. This release was probably more noticeable than when you simply relaxed after performing face A alone or when you performed face B.

**Gathering Data on Additional Participants:** Recruit participants for a “Study of Making Faces.” Select participants who can easily control their facial muscles. Sit directly in front of a participant and explain that you are going to instruct him or her to contract selected facial muscles and when he or she has performed all of the muscle actions, ask him or her to hold the actions for 10 seconds before relaxing. Then, explain to the participant that you will be asking a few questions about how they felt while making the face. Read the instructions for contracting the muscles around the mouth; when those muscles are contracted correctly, instruct the participant to perform the actions around the eyes. When all muscles have been contracted, instruct the participant to hold the facial expression. After 10 seconds instruct the participant to relax. Ask the same questions as above and record the participant’s answers.

**Summarizing the Data:**

For each participant enter the following in a database:

- Gender
- Age
- Did the participant perform face A correctly (yes or no)?  
*If no, what was correct and what was deficient?*
- The emotion(s) experienced and the intensity of each emotion.
- The location, nature (tension/relaxation), and intensity of each body sensation reported.

***What Did This Mini-Experiment Teach You About the Experience of Positive Emotion?*** We think that your results will reinforce the findings presented in this chapter. The experience of positive emotion is a powerful tool for modifying stressful life events. You should have felt changes in your body during this exercise. Your body's experiences are cumulative and perhaps with the awareness gained from this experiment of how your body responds to negative emotion, you can begin to shorten these responses and live longer and happier. That is our hope!

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## Exercising Gratitude

Jo-Ann Tsang, Wade C. Rowatt,  
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Imagine the feelings of Cameron Hollopeter's father, as he stood in front of reporters and thanked Wesley Autrey for saving his son's life just hours before. Early in the afternoon on January 3, 2007, Cameron Hollopeter began convulsing from a seizure while on a New York subway platform. He fell onto the tracks just as a train was approaching. Mr. Autrey, a complete stranger who had come to Hollopeter's aid when the seizure started, leapt onto the subway tracks. Autrey pressed Hollopeter into a space in the tracks and lay on top of him as five subway cars rolled inches above them. Both men survived with only minor scrapes and bruises, although Hollopeter was taken to the hospital for his seizure. That afternoon, Hollopeter's father stood in front of the hospital and thanked Autrey in front of reporters, his eyes tearing over with gratitude (Buckley, 2007; Lee & Feldman, 2007).

Heroic, life-saving acts can elicit gratitude both from the recipients of those acts, and from those who merely observe them. Since he risked his life to come to the aid of a stranger, Autrey has appeared on numerous talk shows and received \$10,000 from the business mogul Donald Trump, a trip to Disney World, New York City's Bronze Medallion award, and a guest seat as well as acknowledgment from the president at the 2007 state of the union address (The Associated Press, 2007; Barrett, 2007; Dobnik, 2007). His courageous act seems to have earned the gratitude not just of Cameron Hollopeter and his immediate family, but of the entire nation.

More mundane, everyday things also may induce gratitude. For some individuals, even negative circumstances eventually may elicit gratitude. One woman's account of gratitude in the midst of tragedy is described by Ryan (1999):

My only son died five years ago; he was four and a half. One of the gifts his death brought was an excuse to stop the rush. For the first year, I allowed grief to wash over me whenever I needed to, and I let myself be open to the healing that surrounds us in this incredible world. I had time for a hug and to talk with my friends; I had vast amounts of time to cherish four and a half years of memories. Nowadays it isn't unusual for me to stop in my tracks when a rainbow arches over the bay outside my office window, or a tiny feather drifts down to me from the sky, or a child's laugh at McDonald's brings tears to my eyes. I realize how lucky I am, not that I have lost my son but to have had him for as long as I did. I'm lucky to have known the importance of certain moments that catch your soul and may never come again. (p. 63)

What is it that ties these diverse experiences of gratitude together, from the mundane to the dramatic, from the everyday to the spiritual? In this chapter, we first present a psychological definition of gratitude that encompasses all of these examples. Then, we outline the social and moral functions of gratitude, presenting psychological research that supports these functions. We also discuss the existence of a "grateful personality," and outline research that supports the health benefits of experiencing gratitude. Lastly, we provide readers with a number of "gratitude exercises" designed to facilitate the experience of gratitude in their own lives.

#### DEFINITION OF GRATITUDE: WHAT GRATITUDE IS AND IS NOT

Before we discuss these issues, a more fundamental question needs to be addressed. What exactly is gratitude? Psychologically, *gratitude* can be thought of as the pleasant feeling that can occur when we receive a favor or benefit from another person (Emmons & Shelton, 2002; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). For example, home-bound persons are often grateful for a delivered meal and brief visit from a more mobile friend or neighbor. Many people (e.g., newlyweds, new parents) often feel genuinely thankful for gifts of items they need for their family. When college students were asked to "think back over the past week and write down up to five things in your life that you are grateful of thankful for," examples they listed were:

- waking up this morning
- the generosity of friends
- God giving me determination
- wonderful parents (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, p. 379)

Take a moment and think about to whom or for what you are grateful. When have you received a benefit, favor, or gift from another person? Have you experienced a dramatic act of kindness, as Cameron Hollopeter did when Wesley Autrey saved his life? Or are you simply grateful for the small things in your day? What occasions tend to trigger gratitude for you? Research psychologists are just beginning to study this virtuous emotion and are learning more about how it works.

Gratitude is a reaction to intentional actions from others—we do not typically feel grateful for things that people do for us by accident (Heider, 1958) or for benefits that we give to ourselves (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). It is not necessary for the other person to even be successful in giving us something positive: if someone intended to give us something, but failed, we can be grateful for their good intentions. The targets of our gratitude are not always other people, however; we also can feel grateful to God, fate, or the universe, for example.

In contrast to the positive feeling of gratitude, the feeling of indebtedness is a negative reaction to a favor. Consider the following situation: A student receives a monetary gift from another individual to help pay for the semester's tuition. The recipient may respond with gratitude, say, if this gift comes from a relative or from a longtime friend. However, were this gift to come from someone who is disliked, then the recipient may feel that the gift has "strings attached" and may have a negative reaction of indebtedness to the gift. Psychologists have found that feelings of gratitude and indebtedness are distinct emotions that lead to different reactions from people. For example, Philip Watkins and colleagues (Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek, & Kolts, 2006) found that when individuals expected people to repay a favor, feelings of indebtedness increased but feelings of gratitude decreased. Interestingly, they also found that people who felt more grateful were more likely to actually want to repay the favor, whereas people who felt indebted felt more hostile toward their benefactor.

Clearly, we do not always have positive reactions to favors from others; sometimes we feel entitled or resentful rather than grateful (Tsang, 2006a; Watkins et al., 2006). An ill-timed favor done for a supervisor could be perceived as "brown-nosing" instead of as an intended act of kindness. On Christmas morning some children might not appreciate simple gifts of school clothes; others might display upset because the gift they received was not the gift they most desired. Even though our reactions to favors might not always be positive, researchers have found that people express gratitude often. In a 1998 Gallup poll, the majority of Americans said they express gratitude to God (54%) and others (67%) describe feeling grateful "all the time."

## MORAL FUNCTIONS OF GRATITUDE

The fact that many people experience gratitude makes it an important emotion to study, but what makes gratitude even more important is that it can affect how we relate to others. Michael McCullough and colleagues (McCullough et al., 2001; McCullough & Tsang, 2004) outlined three ways that gratitude can affect our relationships. First, feelings of gratitude let us know that someone has done something good for us (the *moral barometer* function of gratitude). Second, gratitude also motivates us to want to help others, including the person who just did us a favor, but even unrelated others (*moral motivator*). Third, when people express gratitude, this can be rewarding to the benefactor and motivate him or her to do further good deeds (*moral reinforcer*).

### Gratitude as a Moral Barometer

Many psychologists believe that emotions in general serve an important informational function, providing us with information about ourselves and the situation around us (Batson, Shaw, & Oleson, 1992; Schwarz, 1990). Gratitude as a *moral barometer* serves this informational function, letting us know that we have received something positive from someone else. Specifically, when we feel gratitude it tells us that someone (a “benefactor”) *intentionally* put a lot of *cost* or *effort* into causing something *valuable* to happen to us (the “recipient”), and that this person acted not only out of duty, but acted *gratuitously*.

Intention is thought to be one of the most essential components of gratitude (Berger, 1975; Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Steindl-Rast, 1967). In essence, “it’s the thought that counts.” Indeed, Fritz Heider (1958) claimed that individuals feel grateful only for outcomes that were intentional. If the benefactor were forced to provide the benefit or felt obligated to do so, the recipient would be less likely to feel grateful. Sandra Graham and Bernard Weiner (1986) believed that gratitude was one of many “attribution-dependent” emotions, which are elicited by individuals’ perceptions of the causes of specific outcomes. They stated that gratitude is felt when the individual perceives that a positive outcome that benefited the self was under the control of and intentionally caused by another person. Richard and Bernice Lazarus (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994) believed that gratitude is elicited when a recipient perceives a situation in terms of “appreciating an altruistic gift” (p. 118). A benefit is perceived as “altruistic” when an individual believes that the benefactor gave it with good and selfless intentions.

The costliness of the benefit also may be important in gratitude (Berger, 1975; McCullough et al., 2001). People who make costly sacrifices of time, money, or even their life often produce enduring gratitude in the recipients of the sacrificial deed. The heroic actions of Wesley Autrey elicited so much gratitude in part because of his costly choice to risk his life. Andrew Ortony and colleagues (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988) theorized that the cost of a benefit would contribute to the perceived praiseworthiness of an action, thereby increasing the intensity of gratitude. Robert Trivers (1971) placed gratitude in an evolutionary framework, positing that gratitude evolved in part to help sensitize humans to cost/value ratios of altruistic acts, and to increase the adaptiveness of these altruistic acts by encouraging reciprocation. Hence, increases in the cost and value of a received benefit should lead to increases in gratitude. As is the case with value, it is the recipient’s *perception* of the benefactor’s cost, not necessarily the actual cost of the favor that will determine the recipient’s experience of gratitude.

Favors of larger value should also increase feelings of gratitude (Berger, 1975; McCullough et al., 2001; Roberts, 2004; Tsang, 2007). All things being equal, a \$5 gift may invoke a good amount of gratitude, but a \$500 gift would invoke even more gratitude. Since gratitude is felt on the recipient side, it is important to note that the effect of benefit value, as well as of the other variables such as the costliness of the benefit, lies in the construal of the recipient (Ortony et al., 1988; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996; Roberts,

2004). If the benefactor believes that the benefit is valuable, but the person receiving the favor does not, the recipient will not experience gratitude (although the benefactor may expect gratitude and therefore label the recipient's reaction as ungrateful).

Individuals may also be more likely to feel grateful for benefits that are gratuitous, rather than expected (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; McCullough et al., 2001; Roberts, 2004). Ortony and colleagues (1988) theorized that individuals would feel more grateful for benefits that fell outside of role-based expectations. Individuals may feel that their family and friends are obligated to provide them with benefits, and thus feel only a small amount of gratitude for their favors. In contrast, help from a stranger or mere acquaintance might induce greater amounts of gratitude, because the favor appears more gratuitous and less based on roles or implied obligations. Another factor that contributed to the public's grateful reaction to Wesley Autrey's actions is that he did not know the man for which he risked his life, and had no obligation to help him. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) noted, however, that individuals can still feel grateful for benefits given in the context of role-based obligations if the recipient feels that the benefactor went above and beyond the call of duty. Patients may feel grateful to doctors who save their lives, even when the doctors are only "doing their job." Another possible factor affecting gratuitousness and consequently gratitude is the worthiness or merit of the recipient. Heider (1958) believed that individuals were less likely to feel grateful for benefits that they felt they already deserved. Therefore, undeserved benefits such as forgiveness may produce more gratitude than benefits that are perceived as deserved, such as payment for services rendered.

There is much scientific evidence about these possible causes of gratitude (see Table 3.1 for a summary of various gratitude studies). Abraham Tesser and colleagues (Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968) as well as Jeneva Lane and Norman Anderson (1976) had study participants read scenarios that contained different levels of *intention*, *value*, and (in Tesser and colleague's study), *cost*. They found that people reported more gratitude for favors that were intentional, of more value, and higher in cost. Similarly Daniel Bar-Tal and colleagues (Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977) had their participants imagine requesting help from different people, who ranged in closeness from an acquaintance to a parent. Participants felt more grateful when imagining that a stranger helped them compared to their parents, suggesting that gratuitous favors seen as separate from role-based obligations might elicit more gratitude. Shinichiro Okamoto and Peter Robinson (1997) conducted a field study where they held open doors for unsuspecting individuals. They varied how much trouble it was for a benefactor to hold open a door for someone: for example, with some individuals, accomplices of the experimenters held open the door as they themselves were walking through the door, thus providing a "low-cost" favor that took very little effort. For other individuals, the accomplice was walking in the opposite direction of the participants and stood to one side and let the participant walk through as he held open the door. In this condition, the accomplice took substantially more trouble to open the door,

**Table 3.1**

**Recent Scientific Findings About the Functions and Benefits of Gratitude**

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**General Gratitude Research**

- In a 1998 Gallup poll, the majority of Americans said they express gratitude to God (54%) and others (67%) “all the time.”
- People identify gratitude as a positive rather than negative emotion (Storm & Storm, 1987; Van Overwalle, Mervielde, & De Schuyter, 1995).
- People identify gratitude with outcomes caused by other people, rather than themselves (Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1978, 1979; Zaleski, 1988)
- People are more likely to acknowledge the help of others when they are doing so publicly, versus privately (Baumeister & Ilko, 1995).

**The Development of Gratitude**

- Children express gratitude more frequently as they age, and their conception of gratitude grows from concrete to more abstract as children get older (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938).
- Some children as young as preschool-age can recognize when the expression of gratitude is necessary. In one study, 37% of preschool children said “Thank you” upon receiving a sticker, with girls and children from lower income families expressing thanks more often (Becker & Smenner, 1986).
- When asked to describe a story that illustrates the emotion “gratitude,” English-speaking 7-year olds are better able to tell a story that accurately portrays gratitude, compared to 5-year olds (Harris, Olthof, Meerum Terwogt, & Hardman, 1987).
- Children aged 5–11 years reported feeling more gratitude in a scenario where a favor was under the benefactor’s control, compared to when the benefactor was forced to give the favor, but this distinction was made more often by children 8 years and older. Children also were more likely to state that they would reciprocate a controllable favor with a gift, and again this distinction was made more often by children at least 8 years of age. Children’s understanding of complex emotions seems to grow as they age, with a more abstract understanding of gratitude coming at around age 8 (Graham, 1988).
- Children under 4 or 5 years old who go “trick-or-treating” on Halloween do not usually spontaneously say “thank you” upon receiving candy. Between the ages of 6 and 10, children will begin to thank adults for the candy without prompting. This again shows that children develop a better understanding of gratitude and the conditions under which people should say “thank you” as they age (Gleason, & Weintraub, 1976).
- In another developmental study, 7-year-old children did not understand gratitude any better than did 4-year-olds, but children of all ages were able to identify gratitude as a positive rather than negative emotion (Russell & Paris, 1994).
- Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) found that a daily gratitude intervention compared to a focus on hassles increased mental (but not physical) well-being in adolescents.

**The Moral Barometer Function of Gratitude**

- People report more gratitude for favors that were intentional, of more value, and higher in cost (Lane & Anderson, 1976; Okamoto & Robinson, 1997; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968; Tsang, 2007).

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(continued)

**Table 3.1** (*continued*)

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- People felt more grateful when imagining that a stranger helped them compared to their parents (Bar-Tal, Bar-Zohar, Greenberg, & Hermon, 1977).

**The Moral Motivator Function of Gratitude**

- Women who reported having an influential mentor as a young adult and who were presumably grateful for this mentor scored higher on a measure of generativity (nurturing and mentoring others) at mid-life (Peterson & Stewart, 1996).
- People who feel grateful are more likely to return the favor to their original benefactor (Barlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006b, 2007) as well as to unrelated others (Barlett & DeSteno, 2006).
- When we feel grateful, we are less likely to do harm to the person who helped us (Baron, 1984).

**The Moral Reinforcer Function of Gratitude**

- Customers of a jewelry store who were called and thanked showed a subsequent 70% increase in purchases (Carey, Clicque, Leighton, & Milton, 1976). In comparison, customers who were thanked and told about a sale showed only a 30% increase in purchases, and customers who were not called at all did not show an increase.
- Case managers for youth with delinquent behavior increased their visits to their clients after they and their managers received a thank-you note from an adolescent residential unit (Clark, Northrop, & Barkshire, 1988).
- Restaurant patrons gave bigger tips when their servers wrote “Thank you” on their checks than when they did not write anything on their checks (Rind & Bordia, 1995).
- Adults who were thanked for helping an accomplice of the experimenter by giving that accomplice directions were much more likely to help another accomplice in the near future—a person who dropped his or her books in the street, for instance—than were benefactors who were rebuked for giving help to the first accomplice (Clark, 1975; Goldman, Seever, & Seever, 1982; Moss & Page 1972).

**The Grateful Personality**

- Rather than being a separate trait, gratitude seems to be positively related to the personality trait of agreeableness, and negatively related to the trait of openness (Saucier & Goldberg, 1998).
- Grateful persons were rated by others as being more helpful, religious, extroverted, and sociable (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).
- Persons who report more grateful personality reported that they were more forgiving, had higher life satisfaction (Adler & Fagley, 2005), and felt more positive and less negative emotions than individuals who had less grateful personalities (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).
- Grateful individuals are less materialistic, less prone to envy, and had lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to individuals who had less grateful personalities (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).
- Grateful individuals report being more humble and less arrogant than less grateful people (Rowatt, Powers, Targhetta, Comer, Kennedy, & LaBouff, 2006).

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(*continued*)

**Table 3.1** (*continued*)

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- Grateful people scored lower in negative traits such as depression, aggression, resentment, superficial religiousness, and narcissism (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003).
  - In contrast, individuals with narcissistic personalities were less likely to experience gratitude during a cooperative task, and were less likely to share credit with their task partner for their success (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998).

**Gratitude and Health**

- After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, psychologists questioned a number of college students and found that along with negative emotions, many of these students also reported experiencing positive emotions such as gratitude, love, and sympathy. These positive emotions helped resilient individuals experience less depression and more tranquility, optimism, and life satisfaction after the terrorist attacks (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).
  - Individuals who thought about a person for whom they were grateful showed significant increases in their experiences of positive emotion. Individuals who had grateful personalities to begin with showed the greatest benefit from the gratitude exercise (Watkins et al., 2003).
  - Individuals who wrote and delivered a letter of gratitude to a person they had yet to thank reported being more happy and less depressed than individuals who only wrote about their memories, and positive psychological effects lasted for up to a month after the gratitude exercise (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).
  - Keeping a daily or weekly gratitude journal can increase mental and possibly physical health (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).
  - Research suggests that women may reap more benefits from gratitude and gratitude interventions than men (Kashdan, Froh, Mishra, Emmons, & Breen, 2007).
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providing a “higher cost” favor. Individuals who had the door held open for them in these higher cost conditions expressed more thanks to accomplices compared to individuals in the lower cost conditions.

It seems that value, cost, intentionality, and gratuitousness are all sufficient to increase feelings of gratitude, although it is not necessary for all of these factors to be present. For example, if a person intentionally provided someone with a gift that ended up being of low value—say, a child drew us a picture at school—we might still feel very grateful. The moral barometer function states, however, that all things being equal, we should feel more grateful for favors that are higher in value, cost, intentionality, and gratuitousness.

### Gratitude as a Moral Motive

Once an individual feels grateful, he or she will likely be motivated to express gratitude in words and action (Berger, 1975). The second function of gratitude is to motivate us to return the kindness, either to the person

who helped us in the first place, or to unrelated others. The 2000 movie *Pay It Forward*, gives an example of gratitude as a moral motivator. In the movie a social science teacher instructs his students to think of something to improve the world. One of the students decides to “pay forward” favors instead of returning them and by doing so inspires those receiving the favors to themselves go and do something good for others. The family members of Cameron Hollopeter expressed their gratitude to Wesley Autrey publicly a number of times, stating at one point, “He is a hero in every sense of the word, and truly a blessing from the Almighty. He deserves all of the attention and the accolades that are now being bestowed upon him” (Bennett, 2007, p. 18).

Psychological research generally has supported this moral motivator function of gratitude (see Table 3.1). For example, Graham (1988) had elementary school children read scenarios where one child received a favor from another child and felt differing amounts of gratitude. Participants judged that the more grateful the recipient child felt, the more likely that child would be to try and return the gift. Other researchers (Barlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006b, 2007) have looked at individuals’ reactions to actual favors in the laboratory, and found that participants who thought they had received a favor from another participant felt more grateful and were more likely to return the favor.

Similarly, when we feel gratitude, we are less likely to harm the person who helped us. Aesop’s fable of “Androcles” tells the story of a slave who eased the pain of a lion by pulling out a large thorn from the lion’s paw. The slave was later captured and thrown to the lions, but as the hungry lion ran out to devour him, it recognized its friend who had pulled out the thorn and instead started licking the man’s hands in appreciation. Looking at psychological research, Robert Baron (1984) found that participants who had been given a gift by an accomplice of the experimenter (and presumably felt some gratitude in response) were more likely to value the use of cooperative strategies with the accomplice, instead of competitive strategies.

Trivers (1971) viewed gratitude as an evolutionary adaptation that regulated people’s responses to altruistic acts, especially altruism from strangers. Trivers viewed altruism, or helping behavior, as evolutionarily adaptive if there was a high likelihood that the helping would be reciprocated in the future by the person who was helped. The help had to be just as costly when returned as it was when it was given in order for it to be maximally adaptive. Trivers held that grateful emotions were especially sensitive to the cost/benefit ratio of altruistic acts, with relatively costly benefits eliciting more gratitude. This increase in gratitude should lead to greater levels of reciprocation between strangers, and to more cooperative and constructive future interactions.

### Gratitude as a Moral Reinforcer

Not only can gratitude affect the person who feels grateful, but when gratitude is expressed it has the potential to affect the person who is thanked as well. This warm feeling that we might feel when someone says,

“Thank you” provides us with a psychological reward for our helpful behavior, making us more likely to help others in the future. On the other hand, when someone is ungrateful we tend to feel quite negatively toward them (Stein, 1989), making it less likely that we will help them in the future. Perhaps Wesley Autrey might be more likely to help others in the future because of the outpouring of gratitude he has received from the person he helped as well as from the nation. A number of clever field studies have shown that benefactors who are thanked for their efforts are willing to give more and work harder on the behalf of others than are benefactors who have not been thanked. For example, Ronald Carey and colleagues (Carey, Clicque, Leighton, & Milton, 1976) found that customers of a jewelry store who were called and thanked showed a subsequent 70% increase in purchases. In comparison, customers who were thanked and told about a sale showed only a 30% increase in purchases, and customers who were not called at all did not show any increase. Hewitt Clark and colleagues (Clark, Northrop, & Barkshire, 1988) found that case managers for youth with delinquent behavior increased their visits to their clients after they and their managers received a thank-you note from an adolescent residential unit. Bruce Rind and Prashant Bordia (1995) found that restaurant patrons gave bigger tips when their servers wrote “Thank you” on their checks. Several experiments (Clark, 1975; Goldman, Seever, & Seever, 1982; Moss & Page 1972) all found that adults who were thanked for giving directions to an accomplice of the experimenter were much more likely to help another accomplice in the near future—a person who dropped his or her books in the street, for instance—than were benefactors who were rebuked for giving help to the first accomplice.

There seems to be substantial research to support the moral reinforcer component of gratitude (see Table 3.1). People who have been the recipients of sincere expressions of gratitude are more likely to be helpful toward their beneficiaries in the future. Also, people are more likely to help third parties after having received sincere thanks from someone upon whom they have already conferred a benefit. In this way, gratitude can produce smoother, more helpful social relationships.

## THE GRATEFUL PERSONALITY

Although gratitude is something that anyone can experience, some people seem to feel grateful more often than others. People with this grateful personality tend to recognize other people’s roles in their positive outcomes more often, and thus experience and express gratitude more frequently than people with less grateful personalities. According to opinion polls, there are quite a few people with grateful personalities. A 1998 Gallup poll found that 25% of adults say they know a lot of dispositionally grateful people, and 68% say they know at least a few.

The grateful personality seems to occur concurrently with a host of other positive traits. People who tend to experience gratitude more frequently than do others also tend to be happier, more helpful, more forgiving, and less depressed than their less grateful counterparts. McCullough

and colleagues (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002) created a six-item measure of grateful personality called the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6). Individuals who scored higher in grateful personality were rated by themselves and by others as being more helpful, religious, extroverted, and sociable. They also reported that they were more forgiving, had more life satisfaction, and felt more positive and less negative emotions than individuals who had less grateful personalities. Grateful individuals also were less materialistic, less prone to envy, and had lower levels of depression and anxiety compared to individuals who had less grateful personalities (McCullough et al., 2002). Research has also found that grateful individuals report being more humble and less arrogant than less grateful people (Rowatt, Powers, Targhetta, Comer, Kennedy, & LaBouff, 2006).

Watkins and colleagues (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003) developed a more complex 44-item scale to measure grateful personality. They also found that individuals who scored higher in grateful personality reported more life satisfaction, higher subjective well-being, more devout religiousness, greater control over their lives, and more positive emotion compared to individuals who scored lower in grateful personality. Grateful people also scored lower in negative traits such as depression, aggression, resentment, superficial religiousness, and narcissism. In addition, individuals with more grateful personalities responded more favorably to a gratitude intervention that increased positive emotions.

A recent twin study on character strengths, including gratitude, offers a new window into the development and possible cultivation of this virtue (Steger, Hicks, Kashdan, Krueger, & Bouchard, 2007). In this study Michael Steger and his colleagues administered a measure of gratitude to 336 middle-aged identical and fraternal twins. They compared the gratitude reported by identical twins (who share 100% of their genetic material) with the gratitude reported by fraternal twins (who share about 50% of their genetic material). They found that the different genetic make-up of people is responsible for some of the differences in their gratitude (about 40% of the difference) and unique (or unshared) environments and socialization experiences account for some of the differences in their gratitude (about 60% of the difference). In other words, gratitude has both genetic and environmental roots. It is highly unlikely that there is a single “gratitude gene” that governs the experience or expression of gratitude in everyday life. Rather, it is more probable that some of a person’s gratitude comes from the complex function of multiple genes that influence many different types of emotions and behaviors. Because gratitude has some additional environmental origins, gratitude also may be a learned response, and with practice and exercise many of us may become more grateful and experience the benefits that come from being grateful.

## GRATITUDE AND HEALTH

Many studies have shown that certain interventions can increase temporary feelings of gratitude, and these interventions bring with them a

number of salutary effects on mental and even physical health (see Table 3.1). For instance, Watkins and colleagues (Watkins et al., 2003) had individuals test a number of different gratitude exercises, such as thinking about a living person for whom they were grateful, writing about someone for whom they were grateful, and writing a letter to deliver to someone for whom they were grateful. Individuals in the control condition were asked to describe their living room. Individuals who engaged in a gratitude exercise showed significant increases in their experiences of positive emotion immediately after the exercise, and this effect was strongest for individuals who were asked to think about a person for whom they were grateful. Individuals who had grateful personalities to begin with showed the greatest benefit from these gratitude exercises.

Martin Seligman and colleagues (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005) found that a gratitude exercise was successful in increasing happiness over a longer time period. Participants in their study were asked to write and deliver a letter of gratitude to someone to whom they were thankful, but had not yet thanked. Comparison participants wrote about their childhood memories. Individuals who were asked to write and deliver the letter of gratitude reported being more happy and less depressed than individuals who only wrote about their memories, and positive psychological effects lasted for up to a month after the gratitude exercise.

If thinking about gratitude during a single exercise might influence mental health, how might thinking about gratitude on a regular basis improve our health? Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough (2003) found that a gratitude journal intervention improved psychological well-being in both college students and a population of adults with neuromuscular disorders. Across three experiments, participants were asked to fill out journals daily or weekly from between two to 10 weeks. Some individuals were instructed to write about things that made them grateful, others were asked to write about daily hassles, and still others wrote about ways in which they were better off than other people. People who wrote about gratitude reported more positive emotion and higher life satisfaction compared to people in the other conditions. Additionally, some participants reported less physical illness and better health-related behaviors when they wrote about gratitude. Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) similarly found that a daily gratitude intervention compared to a focus on hassles increased mental (but not physical) well-being in adolescents. Research suggests that women may reap more benefits from gratitude and gratitude interventions than men (Kashdan, Froh, Mishra, Emmons, & Breen, 2007). Together, research shows that the simple act of writing down for what one is grateful, either as a one-time exercise, or on a regular basis, seems to increase one's psychological and perhaps even physical well-being.

Barbara Fredrickson (2004) theorized that the benefits of gratitude go even beyond individual mental and physical health. Her "broaden and build" theory of positive emotion states that positive emotions such as gratitude can build not only personal and social resources, but can serve to strengthen communities. Fredrickson pointed out that gratitude's moral motive encourages individuals not toward simple tit-for-tat reciprocation,

but to creatively consider different ways to help the benefactor and others. These prosocial actions work to strengthen social resources such as friendships and other social bonds. Additionally, gratitude can work to strengthen society by linking members to the community and encouraging moral behavior among citizens. Fredrickson also noted that many world religions emphasized the importance of gratitude, pointing to the role of gratitude in strengthening the believer's relationship to God. Gratitude thus has the potential to build enduring resources and strengthen social bonds at many different levels.

## CONCLUSIONS

Gratitude is a positive emotion that alerts individuals that someone has intentionally and gratuitously done something costly and of value for them. Gratitude motivates us to return the favor, and the expression of gratitude rewards benefactors, making it more likely they will help again in the future. The experience of gratitude has the potential to positively affect individual mental and physical health, and may even work to strengthen social, community, and religious bonds. Although some people may be more dispositionally grateful than others, everyone can easily facilitate their own experiences of gratitude.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Cultivating Gratitude

Here are a few exercises modeled after the research discussed in this essay that can help you increase the amount of gratitude you experience:

**Gratitude Letter:** Take a week to think about and write a letter to someone who is still living to whom you feel grateful. Try and pick someone that you have not yet had a chance to thank properly. After you have written this letter, deliver it to them either in person or by mail.

**Gratitude Journal:** Every day for at least two weeks, take about five minutes each evening to write about the things you were thankful for during that day. Briefly describe any events that may have triggered your gratitude, and note the specific people to whom you were grateful in those situations.

**Measure Your Grateful Disposition:** The GQ-6 takes less than five minutes to complete, and can help you measure your own grateful personality. The questionnaire appears at the following link: <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/gratitudequestionnaire6.pdf>. Further information about the scale appears in an article by McCullough et al. (2002).

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# The Gratitude of Youth

Jeffrey J. Froh and Giacomo Bono

“James” was an anomaly. The majority of students I (JJF) worked with while I was a school psychologist came from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds. James lived in a shelter with his mother—nutritious meals and restful sleep were luxuries. Every morning German imports lined the front of the school because many parents drove their children to school; James arrived by bus after commuting 1½ hours.

Winter approached, yet he still wore T-shirts. His teacher, “Mrs. Riebe,” got him a sport jacket for warmth. A kind gesture, but a sixth-grader with a sport jacket in a public school meant one thing: a bully target. I looked for James to discuss how to keep himself safe. When I found him, to my surprise, he was not embarrassed from wearing oversized business attire—he smiled widely. “Dr. Froh, check out this cool jacket Mrs. Riebe gave me,” he said. “I love it. I can’t stop thanking her.” James stood in the hallway wearing an oversized sport jacket, tired, hungry—and expressing gratitude. This was a defining moment for me. Gratitude, in my view, needed to be injected into our students—and youth in general.

The experience with James triggered reflections about my own childhood. Dubbed “The King of Thank You,” I always expressed gratitude toward others—particularly friends. Thanks was communicated verbally (e.g., saying, “thank you”), written (e.g., a “thank you” letter), or via the norm of reciprocity (e.g., returning the favor). Noticing the boost that expressing gratitude gave to my well-being during childhood and adolescence leads me to think of the million-dollar question: If I benefited from early expressions of gratitude could everyone?

Thanks to Robert Emmons, Michael McCullough, and colleagues, progress is being made in understanding gratitude in adults. But little is known

about gratitude in children and adolescents. Gratitude research in children and adolescents is critically needed to understand and promote the full spectrum of child development—namely, flourishing into happy, productive, and helpful members of society. The primary aim of this chapter is to shed light on what is known about gratitude in youth. We begin with a general discussion of gratitude, and then elucidate the development of gratitude. We then describe the personal and interpersonal consequences of gratitude, and interventions created for increasing gratitude. We conclude with fruitful directions for future research on gratitude in youth.

## GRATITUDE DEFINED

Gratitude is experienced when people receive something beneficial; it is the appreciation one feels when somebody does something kind or helpful. It has been defined as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Emmons, 2004, p. 554). Gratitude is a source of human strength because it promotes personal and relational well-being (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000), and is a highly valued trait—one that is encouraged by many philosophers (e.g., Cicero) and by all the major religions of the world.

While gratitude has been largely ignored throughout the history of psychology, it has recently attracted considerable interest from the scientific community (Bono, Emmons, & McCullough, 2004; Bono & McCullough, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2004; Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Kashdan, Uswatte, & Jilian, 2006; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Tsang, 2008; Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek, & Kolts, 2006). In fact, even popular culture has taken interest (e.g., Emmons, 2007; Emmons & Hill, 2001; Hay, 1996; Norville, 2007; Ryan, 2000). We have made advancements but have much more to learn about the psychology of gratitude.

Gratitude is an emotional trait, mood, or emotion (McCullough et al., 2002). Trait gratitude, or the disposition toward gratitude, is “a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains” (McCullough et al., 2002, p. 112). People high in trait gratitude are likely to experience and express gratitude more easily, more often, and more strongly. For instance, a dispositionally grateful child may experience lots of gratitude toward her father for taking her out on a fishing trip, even though she spent most of the time enjoying a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and talking with her father rather than catching any fish. She may even offer her father unsolicited help afterward with cleaning the boat and fishing supplies to express her gratitude. On the other hand, a less grateful child may instead focus on the “wasted” time sitting on the boat and not catching fish (presumably the goal of fishing!), thus experiencing frustration and a desire to be someplace else. Further, she may even leave the cleaning up to her father afterward and, knowingly or unknowingly, rush off to a friend’s house to play in an act of ingratitude. Grateful

people recognize and appreciate the numerous gifts bestowed upon them at any given time. They are grateful for the “little things,” such as peanut butter and jelly and time spent with loved ones. With gratitude comes abundance.

McCullough and colleagues (2002) suggest four facets of the grateful disposition that may lead to distinct emotional experiences. The first facet is *intensity*. Grateful people are likely to feel a stronger sense of gratitude for a positive event than their less grateful counterparts. The second facet is *frequency*. Grateful people report feeling grateful many times during the day and being thankful for small favors or acts of politeness. The third facet is *span*. Grateful people are grateful for many life circumstances (e.g., family, friends, teachers, health, and ice-cream) at any given time. The fourth facet is *density*. Grateful people feel grateful to many people for a single positive outcome. To illustrate, the valedictorian at a high school graduation may thank her parents for helping her with homework over the years, kindergarten teacher for instilling a love of learning, friends for supporting her long hours in the library, and younger brother for letting her catch up on sleep over the weekends.

According to Erika Rosenberg (1998), moods are like emotions, in that they change during or across days (Clark, Watson, & Leeka, 1989), but they probably last longer than emotions (Davidson, 1994). Like traits, moods may strongly influence one’s thoughts and behaviors; but unlike traits, moods are more likely to be consciously experienced by people. Gratitude, sustained as a mood over time, may influence people’s ability to process information and respond to certain situations (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004). For instance, constructively framing adversity likely stems from gratitude as a mood, not an emotion (e.g., one may acknowledge that a romantic breakup hurts but remain grateful for supportive friends through the ordeal).

The emotion of gratitude is experienced when people receive a valued gift or favor that was intentionally provided by someone, usually at some cost to that person (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). As an emotional state then, gratitude stems from a positive outcome that was not earned or deserved but the result of someone’s good will (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Further, as an emotion, it is psychologically beneficial not just because it feels good but also because it elicits the tendency to help others, which in turn promotes relationship strengthening. Children experiencing gratitude as an emotion are not only more likely to return the favor to the benefactor (i.e., direct reciprocity), but may also help others not involved in the initial altruistic exchange (i.e., upstream reciprocity) (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2008). If gratitude as an emotion promotes prosocial behavior toward benefactors and even others—conceivably several others—the result may be an epidemic of altruism (Nowak & Roch, 2007). Therefore, because gratitude likely fosters community cohesion in the long run, it can also serve as an impetus for turning schools into communities of children helping children.

Certain conditions must be met for someone to experience gratitude as an emotion. Fritz Heider in 1958 suggested that gratitude is felt when the

beneficiary perceives the actions of the other person as intentional. To illustrate, a child may experience gratitude when he learns that his mother, who always works in the evening, takes the evening off to attend his play or recital. Children begin to understand people's intentions only after developing a theory of mind (we address this in the development section of the chapter). Abraham Tesser and colleagues in 1968 expanded on Heider's observation. First, they suggested that the more the beneficiary thinks the benefactor acted intentionally, the more he will perceive the act as genuine, presumably because the benefactor expects little in return. Because gratitude is an interpersonal emotion, believing someone acted intentionally with one's best interest in mind is vital for experiencing it (Heider, 1958; see Graham & Weiner, 1986, and Weiner & Graham, 1988, for reviews). Gratitude, however, can also be experienced toward impersonal (e.g., nature) or non-human sources (e.g., God, animals, the cosmos). This is referred to as *transpersonal gratitude* (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

Second, the beneficiary experiences more gratitude if he perceives the benefactor to have incurred more cost. The mother may have had to work hard to convince her boss to let her go, use much needed sick time, or work extra hours just to be able make it to the play. The more her son realizes and appreciates this, the more strongly he will feel grateful.

Finally, the beneficiary should value the benefit. The son will experience gratitude to the degree that his mother attending his play recital is important to him (Tesser et al., 1968). The longer and harder he practiced for it, the more important the play is to him (e.g., he has an exciting or prominent role, acting may be in his future), and the more it means to him to see his mother in the audience, the more likely he will experience and express gratitude for her being there.

Gratitude can also be conceptualized as a virtue (McCullough et al., 2001). McCullough and colleagues operationalized gratitude as a moral emotion—one that motivates concern for others and propagates supportive social ties. After thoroughly reviewing the literature in developmental, evolutionary, social, and personality psychology, they concluded that gratitude serves three moral functions. As a *moral barometer*, gratitude signals the beneficiary that someone has given her a gift. As a *moral motive*, gratitude encourages the beneficiary to behave prosocially either directly towards the benefactor (i.e., direct reciprocity) or toward others (i.e., upstream reciprocity). Finally, as a *moral reinforcer*, gratitude increases the probability that the benefactor will act prosocially toward the beneficiary in the future. Thus, it is a virtue that builds trustworthy social relationships.

Whether considered as a trait, mood, emotion, or virtue, gratitude's link to personal and relational well-being in children and adolescents is undeniable. We contend that gratitude may be essential for flourishing in youth and that it makes sense to include gratitude in the scientific pursuit of positive youth development precisely because it helps build personal resources for ensuring well-being, social integration, and generativity at a critical stage in life when social identity and belonging go hand in hand (Bono & Froh, in press). We provide a brief overview of the development of gratitude in children and adolescents below.

## GRATITUDE DEVELOPMENT

The development of gratitude in youth remains a mystery. In her essay “Envy and Gratitude,” Melanie Klein in 1957 proposed a psychoanalytic theory describing the development of gratitude in children. She asserted that gratitude first emerges in the earliest stages of infancy, but only if envy does not overpower its development. Envy, Klein maintained, originated during the development of the mother-child bond if the mother deprived the child either of physical nourishment via breast milk, or emotional nourishment via love and care. The ultimate consequence for a child who develops envy in this way is being deprived of the opportunity to experience joy. The infant only experiences absolute enjoyment if the capacity for love is adequately developed—this enjoyment is the foundation for gratitude. Klein argued that the infant’s early experiences with the mother “constitute not only the basis of sexual gratification but of all later happiness and make possible the feeling of unity with another person; such unity means being fully understood, which is essential for every happy love relation or friendship” (p. 18). Because joy, according to Klein, is the precursor to gratitude, a child who develops envy becomes unable to develop gratitude. This is most troublesome because only gratitude can defend against the destructiveness of envy and greed.

Gratitude, according to Klein (1957), is crucial for the infant to build a strong relation with the “good object” (i.e., mother) and fosters an appreciation of oneself and others, as well as fostering hope, trust, and goodness. It is also a natural byproduct to the capacity for love; the more the infant experiences maternal love, the more the infant will also experience gratitude. The more gratification the infant feels towards maternal nourishment, the greater the experience of being the recipient of a valued gift. Regular gratification will foster the experience of joy and gratitude in the child. In this instance, gratitude engenders generosity (Klein). “If this gratitude is deeply felt it includes the wish to return goodness received and is thus the basis of generosity. There is always a close connection between being able to accept and to give, and both are part of the relation to the good object” (Klein, 1963/1987, p. 310 as cited in Komter, 2004).

Like Klein (1957), Dan McAdams and Jack Bauer (2004) maintained that the early attachment experience, as conceptualized by Bowlby (1969), might be where gratitude originates. But empirical investigation is needed to support this speculative view of gratitude’s foundations in infancy. Indeed, a criticism of Klein’s theory—as psychoanalytic interpretations in general—is its lack of empirical support. Aafke Komter (2004) argued that, “the clinical material she (Klein) adduced to support her ideas may be considered too idiosyncratic, too filtered through her own analytical perspective” (p. 202). Because sustained effort and focus are needed to develop virtues such as gratitude, Emmons and Charles Shelton (2002) argued that, “gratitude does not emerge spontaneously in newborns” (p. 468). Therefore, while infancy still remains a plausible developmental stage for the development of gratitude, firm conclusions will only be reached with rigorous empirical confirmation.

Some submit that the experience of gratitude is enhanced during development (Baumgartner-Tramer, 1938; Graham, 1988). That is, older children report experiencing and expressing more gratitude compared with younger children. Jean Gleason and Sandra Weintraub (1976) audio-taped conversations between 115 children (2–16 years of age) and adults on Halloween night with the aim of elucidating language routines in child development. During three Halloweens and in two houses, a cassette recorder was hidden near the door and turned on every time the bell rang. Children were asked their age as they were leaving the house. The authors also accompanied two mothers and their children as they traveled from house to house to collect data on what the mothers say to the children about receiving candy. In this “trick or treat” routine, children younger than six thanked an adult for giving them candy noticeably less (21%) compared with 10-year-olds (83%) and 11- to 16-year-olds (88%).

Other researchers found similar results. Esther Greif and Jean Gleason (1980) conducted a laboratory investigation in 22 boys and girls aged 2 to 5 and their parents studying politeness routines for “hi,” “thanks,” and “good-bye.” Parental prompting lead 86% of the children to express gratitude; but with no prompting, expressing gratitude became the least frequent politeness routine—only 7% of children spontaneously expressed gratitude.

The finding that preschool children in these studies seldom say “thank you” may not necessarily suggest they are not experiencing gratitude. Because these studies were conducted in novel situations (i.e., Halloween night in the first study and in a laboratory in the second), the children may have been more focused on the unfamiliar aspects of the situation instead of the saying “thank you.” These studies may not give a true picture of the experience and expression of gratitude among youth in normal natural settings (Becker & Smenner, 1986). Indeed, Judith Becker and Patricia Smenner reported that 37% of 3½- to 4½-year-olds spontaneously said “thank you” in a familiar context. These findings, however, were influenced by the children’s socioeconomic status (SES). Lower income children were more likely to say “thank you” compared with middle-income children (34% vs 18%). Thus, familiar situations may promote more gratitude expression in children. Nonetheless, these studies suggest that gratitude may begin developing in early childhood—probably solidifying in middle childhood (Weiner & Graham, 1988)—and is affected by individual differences in socialization (Becker & Smenner).

Adults can likely foster gratitude development in children and adolescents. Children’s language acquisition is facilitated by input from adults in the environment (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976). As illustrated by Greif and Gleason’s (1980) laboratory study, discussed previously, gratitude is expressed spontaneously less so than after adult prompting. But certain linguistic behaviors and social scripts spark more explanatory conversation between adults and children than others. For example, adults teaching children a lexical item and concept embed it in several frames: “See the bird? That’s a bird. The bird is flying.” But adults do not as often expand on politeness formulas, such as expressing gratitude and saying “thank you.”

Instead, gratitude expressions seem to be taught as social scripts and little, if any, time is spent explaining *why* thanks should be given. Parents seem primarily concerned with the context and timing of saying “thank you” (e.g., when a friend helps with homework), giving little emphasis to the reasons for the helping (e.g., the friend *noticed* your need and *chose* to provide help) (Gleason & Weintraub). Because gratitude can be taught and is an acquired virtue (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), consistent support from adults can help instill in children the skills to both express and experience gratitude. Encouraging the practice of gratitude as politeness *and* as awareness of other’s good efforts should in turn facilitate the development of gratitude.

Children and adolescents seem to differ with respect to the experience and expression of gratitude. In 1938, Franziska Baumgarten-Tramer embarked on perhaps the most ambitious study to date on the development of gratitude in youth. She asked 1,059 school children ages 7–15 years in the city of Berne, Switzerland two questions: (a) What is your greatest wish? and (b) What would you do for the person who granted you this wish? After coding the responses, four types of gratitude emerged. *Verbal gratefulness* (e.g., “I should thank him”) occurred in 30% to 48% of the total replies. It was mainly expressed in 15-year-olds (72%).

*Concrete gratefulness* occurs when the child wants to give the benefactor something in return for the gift (e.g., “I should give him a book, a bow, a pocket knife”). There are two kinds of concrete gratefulness: exchange and material. Exchange gratitude occurs when the beneficiary gives the benefactor an object in return for an object (e.g., a skateboard in return for a video game). As with Tesser et al.’s (1968) belief that more gratitude is experienced when the gift received is highly valued by the beneficiary, Baumgarten-Tramer (1938) maintains that the degree of exchange gratitude experienced by the beneficiary reflects the subjective value of the object given in return for the gift. Data were not provided on the percentage of children demonstrating exchange gratitude. Material gratitude occurs when the beneficiary shares with the benefactor some benefits of the gift (e.g., giving the benefactor a ride to town on a bike). This type of gratitude was most frequent with 8-year-olds (51%) and least frequent with children between 12 and 15 years of age (6%). Both exchange gratitude and material gratitude involve tit-for-tat gift exchange. But exchange gratitude occurs when different objects are swapped, and material gratitude occurs when both the beneficiary and benefactor benefit from the same gift, yet different aspects of it.

*Connective gratitude* is an attempt by the beneficiary to create a spiritual relationship with the benefactor. “I would help him in case of need” characterizes this type of gratitude. Connective gratitude was reported by children as young as 7 years of age but became more frequent at the age of 11 and occurred in 60% of 12-year-olds (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938). Here, children seem to lose some of their egocentrism and become more other-centered and capable of abstract thought, developmental growth that corresponds to improved social understanding and the development of empathy during early adolescence (Berk, 2007). This type of gratitude also

occurs after theory of mind is established, or the ability to perceive people's behaviors as purposeful—something which begins to develop around the ages of 3 to 4 (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Wellman, 1990). According to McAdams and Bauer (2004), “[c]hildren can feel and express gratitude toward others when, and only when, they understand that other people (like themselves) are intentional beings whose behavior is motivated by desire and belief. In a random universe without motivated actors ... gratitude is impossible” (p. 88). By developing a theory of mind, children begin to understand that behavior can be intentional—the key thought in experiencing gratitude. Thus, with connective gratitude, children presumably begin to grasp the social cognitive appraisals inherent in adult theories of gratitude, such as appreciating and reciprocating the beneficial intentions of others (McCullough et al., 2001; Tesser et al., 1968).

Lastly, *finalistic gratefulness* is the “tendency of the child or youth to reciprocate for the realization of his wish by an action which would be in some way helpful for the object or the situation desired, or would promote their personal development” (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938, p. 62). This is exemplified by the child who wishes to make the field hockey team and, if she achieves her goal, intends to express gratitude by always practicing her drills at home and being early to practice and games. Similar to Klein's (1957) psychoanalytic interpretation of gratitude development in infancy, there are no empirical data to support Baumgarten-Tramer's findings. Aside from Jeffrey Froh, Charles Yurkewicz, and Todd Kashdan (2008), who exclusively investigated the development of gratitude in early adolescents, and Froh (2008), who investigated the development of gratitude in both early and late adolescents, Baumgarten-Tramer's study remains the only known attempt at scientifically elucidating the development of the experience and expression of gratitude in youth.

Can children be taught the distinction between obligatory gratitude and genuine gratitude? Social etiquette such as saying “thank you” when someone holds the door for them helps children successfully navigate the social world (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976). But such social scripts do not require the child to respond with gratitude. Feeling grateful occurs mainly when someone believes the benefactor gave a gift intentionally (McCullough et al., 2001). The person held the door intentionally—they did not have to. Not expressing gratitude can lead to social problems (Apte, 1974), but expressing gratitude can help individuals become socially effective communicators and proactive in securing positive social interactions as well as supportive and satisfying relationships (Hess, 1970, as cited in Becker & Smenner, 1986). It therefore seems fruitful to teach children and adolescents the intricacies behind the experience and expression of gratitude. Doing so may foster its development.

## PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL CONSEQUENCES

Gratitude has long been considered a critical component of health and well-being for individuals and social stability for society, and its practice has

been encouraged and maintained in cultures throughout the world (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). Even though it is widely acknowledged as an uplifting experience (Gallup, 1998), only in the last decade have the personal and interpersonal consequences of gratitude been tested empirically. Overall, evidence suggests that gratitude may be beneficial for individuals in the short run and in the long run. In fact, Emmons (2004) recently described how gratitude fulfills the criteria of being a character strength or virtue of transcendence because it helps provide meaning and a sense of connection to the universe. Nansook Park and Christopher Peterson (2006) subsequently showed that it contributes to the moral competence and character of youths.

### Links to Subjective Well-Being

Gratitude is associated with various positive states and outcomes. Research on gratitude as a disposition consistently demonstrates that grateful people, young or old, tend to be happy people (McCullough et al., 2002, 2004; Watkins, 2004). For example, McCullough and his colleagues (2002) demonstrated that, compared to less grateful people, grateful people report experiencing more satisfaction with life, optimism, vitality, less depression and envy; and they also tend to report greater religiousness and spirituality. They determined that grateful individuals generally have more agreeable, more extroverted, and less neurotic personalities. Further, they found that the aforementioned relationships could all be obtained using self and peer reports as well, suggesting that gratitude and its positive correlates are visible to oneself and to friends, relatives, and romantic partners. This research, along with other research on adults (Overwalle, Mervielde, & DeSchuyter, 1995; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003), has also shown that relatively grateful people tend to experience greater positive emotions and states, such as more positive moods, contentment, happiness, and hope, as well as less envy, depression, and negative moods. It appears that gratitude and happiness may mutually reinforce each other in a cyclical manner (Watkins et al., 2003).

Until the last few years, research on gratitude and subjective well-being has mostly been conducted on adult populations. Froh et al. (2008), however, recently began filling this gap by examining the correlates of gratitude in early adolescence. Exploring the relationships between a grateful mood (i.e., feeling grateful since the day before) and well-being, they found that early adolescents' gratitude was positively related to many of the same emotions found in the adult research, such as hope, forgiveness, pride, contentment, optimism, inspiration, excitement, and overall positive affect. Gratitude was also positively related with gratitude in response to aid, providing emotional support, and satisfaction with school, family, friends, community, and self; it was negatively related to physical symptoms. Demonstrating gratitude's robust relationship with physical and psychological well-being, many of these relationships remained even after accounting for the effects of global positive affect. Gratitude, however, was unrelated with

global negative affect, a finding that was consistent with some adult samples (Watkins et al., 2003) and inconsistent with others (McCullough et al. 2002). As with much of the research on gratitude and subjective well-being in adults (cited above), the correlational nature of this research precludes casual interpretation. If gratitude increases such positive emotions and psychological outcomes in youth, however, as has been shown in adults (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006), then these findings suggest that encouraging gratitude among adolescents may help promote their well-being and development.

We now turn to some of the main reasons for the positive relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being. Evidence from Barbara Fredrickson and her colleagues suggest that the regular experience of positive emotions in general can improve individuals' functioning and well-being, making them healthier, more resilient, and more socially integrated (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Thus, positive emotions help broaden individuals' thoughts and actions so that they actually accrue lasting physical, intellectual, and social resources for later success and well-being (Fredrickson).

Gratitude has been implicated in these same processes too. Fredrickson, Michele Tugade, Christian Waugh, and Gregory Larkin (2003) found that gratitude was the second most commonly experienced emotion in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (out of 20 emotions, only compassion was more common). They found evidence that the experience of positive emotions helped resilient people actively cope with the tragedy. A subsequent archival study of newspaper accounts about what children were thankful for before and after September 11 produced further evidence that gratitude plays an important role in coping—for adults and children as well. Anne Gordon, Dara Musher-Eizenman, Shayla Holub, and John Dalrymple (2004) found that themes of gratitude for basic human needs (i.e., family, friends, and teachers/school) increased after September 11. Therefore, evidence suggests that gratitude may be a powerful emotion for coping with adversity (Fredrickson, 2004).

### Resource for Interpersonal Well-Being

Individuals who are more grateful tend to be more helpful toward others. McCullough et al. (2002) also found that dispositional gratitude was associated with being more helpful, supportive, forgiving, and empathic toward others. Again, these associations held using self reports and peer reports as well. Other research has shown that relatively grateful people are also less narcissistic (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). Here too, there is evidence to suggest that gratitude may be helpful for the relational well-being of youths. In addition to satisfactions with their peer and family contexts, the early adolescents in the study by Froh et al. (2008) also reported greater perceived peer and family support. Together, the evidence then suggests that individual differences in gratitude correspond to other personality traits, all of which are geared toward upholding supportive and

caring ties to friends and family, and perhaps other social relationships in general.

Recent experimental research has demonstrated that gratitude can actually cause prosocial behavior. The experience of gratitude can cause direct reciprocity, leading individuals to respond prosocially to a benefactor (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006, 2007); and can cause upstream reciprocity, leading them to treat other people prosocially in subsequent interactions (Bartlett & DeSteno). Moreover, the prosocial behavior spurred by gratitude appears to increase as a function of the value of the benefit to the beneficiary (Tsang, 2007).

Aside from increasing helping behavior, gratitude may also lead individuals to inhibit destructive interpersonal behavior. Robert Baron (1984) engaged college students in a conflict simulation task related to work with a confederate who disagreed with whatever views they held. During a break in the task the confederate then introduced one of four conditions (i.e., gift, sympathy, humor, or a control). Participants in the gift and humor conditions characterized the confederate as more pleasant and reported that they would be more likely to use collaboration to resolve such conflicts in the future, compared with participants in the control group. Though this research did not assess whether gratitude accounted for this effect in particular, these results suggest that experiencing gratitude may aid the resolution of social conflicts.

Grateful individuals may act prosocially as a way of merely expressing their gratitude, however, over time these actions can have lasting impacts on people's social relationships (Emmons & Shelton, 2002; Harpham, 2004; Komter, 2004). Gratitude helps build trust in social relations in general (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, the evidence supports the notion that gratitude serves to maintain and build personal resources of social support (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2004). This may be crucial for youths with disabilities, special needs, or social adjustment difficulties. A critical challenge faced by adolescents is coordinating social and academic goals effectively (Wentzel, 2005). Given the centrality of social acceptance and the strength of peer relationships in determining adolescents' social behavior and development (Berk, 2007; Youniss & Haynie, 1992) then, gratitude may be quite valuable for helping adolescents align their social and achievement goals. We proceed to a brief focus on another potential mechanism, one less explored empirically, through which gratitude may boost personal and interpersonal well-being.

### Does Gratitude Foster Intrinsic Motivation?

Fredrickson's broaden and build hypothesis of positive emotions (2001) suggests that gratitude may also help individuals build other lasting resources for well-being. Specifically, it may nurture creativity, greater intrinsic motivation, and a stronger purposefulness. This may be one reason why grateful people tend to be higher in vitality and optimism and more religiously and spiritually minded than less grateful people (McCullough et al,

2002). Gratitude for help received early in life—like mentoring—may motivate later generative behavior for the sake of the original cause or for society (Peterson & Stewart, 1996). People who are more grateful tend to also be less materialistic (McCullough et al., 2002), and the constant pursuit of extrinsic or materialistic goals has been shown to erode more purposeful engagement in life (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). All of these findings could be explained by the fact that gratitude likely focuses individuals on intrinsic goals, other-oriented motivations, and the fulfillment of higher-order needs (e.g., achievement in a self-relevant domain), whereas materialism focuses them on extrinsic goals, individualistic motivations, and the fulfillment of lower-order needs (e.g., possessions of comfort and safety) (Polak & McCullough, 2006). Gratitude may safeguard against this erosion.

Giacomo Bono and Emily Polak (2008) conducted a daily diary study examining gratitude and materialism over a two-week period and provided more direct evidence for such an interpretation. They found that people were less materialistic than they usually are on days when they were also more grateful. This link emerged regardless of the degree to which people were materialistic, and it was stronger the more they endorsed stimulation values. In particular, temporary increases in gratitude accounted for temporary reductions in all three aspects of materialism—financial striving, appealing appearance, and social recognition. Moreover, gratitude and materialism were divergently related to states of social loneliness and conflictual social interactions. These findings imply that gratitude and materialism sway individuals toward opposing modes of being—one that values connecting to people and social capital and another that values possessions and social status. Couple these findings with other evidence that overreliance on extrinsic values is associated with increased use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana, as well as increased sexual intercourse (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000), then it becomes apparent that gratitude may help youth flourish because it also encourages growth toward purpose and community. Indeed, contribution to society represents the desired outcome of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005). Thus, instilling an attitude of gratitude when this character strength is just developing (Park & Peterson, 2006) holds much promise because it could help adolescents cope successfully with central challenges and facilitate their identity achievement (Rowe & Marcia, 1980).

## GRATITUDE ENHANCING INTERVENTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Religious and self-help groups commonly conduct activities that have members reflect on the gifts or good conditions that they are grateful for in their lives. These practices rest on the assumption that the exercise of grateful thinking enhances well-being. Experiments aimed at increasing gratitude in people have applied similar methods with apparent success, showing how such activities can foster psychological and social functioning.

Emmons and McCullough (2003) conducted three experiments investigating whether gratitude-inducing exercises (i.e., counting blessings) could

lead to heightened well-being over time, compared to focusing on hassles, downward social comparisons, or neutral life events. Across three studies, participants were randomly assigned to these experimental conditions and then completed daily or weekly records of their positive and negative affect, health behaviors, physical symptoms, coping behaviors, and overall life appraisals. In the first study, participants completed these exercises and measures once a week for 10 consecutive weeks. Afterward, those in the gratitude condition not only reported being more grateful than those in the hassles condition—showing that the activity successfully induced grateful affect—they also reported feeling better about their life as a whole, being more optimistic about the future, having fewer health complaints, and exercising more than participants in the comparison conditions. Thus, a simple weekly gratitude intervention demonstrated significant emotional and health benefits.

Participants in the grateful condition in Emmons and McCullough's (2003) Study 2 (i.e., counting blessings on a daily basis for two weeks) indicated that they felt more joyful, enthusiastic, interested, attentive, energetic, excited, determined, and strong than those in the hassles condition. They also reported having offered more emotional support or help with personal problems to others, indicating that the gratitude induction also increased prosocial motivation. As with the first study, the gratitude manipulation showed a significant effect on positive affect relative to the hassles condition, but no reliable impact on negative affect. Study 3 then replicated these effects in adults who had neuromuscular diseases. Similar to the previous studies, the gratitude group showed significantly more positive affect and satisfaction with life, but they also showed less negative affect than the control group. Moreover, both the self-reports of the participants and reports by their spouses reflected the increases in positive affect and life satisfaction. These three studies demonstrate that gratitude has a causal influence on subjective well-being and suggest that various populations could benefit from the regular experience and expression of gratitude.

To investigate which method of expressing gratitude best enhances positive affect, Watkins et al. (2003) conducted an experiment in which they assigned students to one of four conditions (Study 4)—three were gratitude-related (i.e., thinking, writing an essay, or writing a letter about someone to whom they were grateful) and one was a control condition (i.e., writing about the living room). People in the gratitude conditions reliably reported increases in positive affect, compared to those in the control condition. Thus, expressing or even reflecting on grateful experiences can enhance one's mood. They also found that this effect was strongest in the grateful thinking condition, relative to the writing conditions, which suggests that meditating on grateful experiences may enhance positive moods more than processing them analytically. One reason may be that scrutinizing grateful experiences may inhibit positive memory biases (Watkins, Grimm, & Kolts, 2004). Nonetheless, these findings imply that gratitude interventions should consider their targets in terms of whether the induction exercises are interesting and engaging to them, the amount of time available for the intervention, and the degree or kind of intervention that is most appropriate given the circumstances.

Women seem more likely to experience and express gratitude (Becker & Smenner, 1986; Gordon et al., 2004; Ventimiglia, 1982) than men. Todd Kashdan and colleagues (2008) conducted multiple studies investigating potential sex differences in gratitude and found support that men and women differ in the perception of and reaction to gratitude. In a sample of 148 college undergraduates (Study 3), gratitude was positively related to greater relatedness and autonomy for women—but not men. This relationship was explained by women's tendency to accept and express positive emotions (e.g., gratitude). Men typically express emotions associated with power and status (Brody, 1997, 1999). Therefore, because gratitude, indebtedness, and dependency are associated with each other in some ways (Solomon, 1995) but not all (Watkins et al., 2006)—men may regard the experience and expression of gratitude as a detriment to their social standing. With this in mind, it seems that tailoring gratitude interventions to individuals so that they can find their own appeal in grateful behavior would be a good idea for both sexes—because building strong and satisfying relationships may benefit anyone, whether they seek more communal or individualistic strivings.

Froh et al. (2008) found that girls tended to report experiencing gratitude more than boys. This is consistent with other youth samples (Becker & Smenner, 1986; Gordon et al., 2004) and adult samples (Kashdan et al., 2008; Ventimiglia, 1982). But boys, compared with girls, appear to derive more social benefits from gratitude, findings that were inconsistent with adult samples (Kashdan et al., 2008). In extrapolating from the volunteer research summarized by Post and Neimark (2007), being grateful may help boys more than it helps girls, and being ungrateful may hurt girls more than it hurts boys. Boys may potentially derive more benefit from gratitude because doing so is beyond others' expectations; and this may increase their confidence and self-esteem. But girls may not only derive less benefit for expressing gratitude—because doing so adheres to social norms—they may also experience more negative symptoms for experiencing and expressing ingratitude.

These sex differences in the experience and expression of gratitude suggest that the sex of the child should be considered in gratitude interventions. Because sex differences in gratitude may emerge in childhood (Froh et al., 2008; Gordon et al., 2004) emotional reeducation might be needed to encourage boys that expressing gratitude for gifts from others does not necessarily undermine their own accomplishments or autonomy. Reeducation may be more successful by appealing to boys' desire to be seen as brave (Emmons, 2004). For instance, acknowledging others' help in academic success can be framed as knowing what you need or whom to count on to do a good job. Such efforts would encourage youth to express gratitude because they would help frame target behaviors as desirable and make thanking others for their help compatible with the need to feel competent. This would, in turn, help instill healthy goal striving habits and greater social emotional intelligence in the long run.

Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) conducted the first experimental investigation of a gratitude intervention in early adolescents. For two weeks

students were asked on a daily basis to either count up to five things for which they were grateful (i.e., gratitude condition), five things they found annoying (i.e., hassles condition), or just complete the measures (i.e., control condition). Gratitude journal entries included benefits such as: “I am grateful that my mom didn’t go crazy when I accidentally broke a patio table;” “My coach helped me out at baseball practice;” “I am thankful for my family, friends, religion, education, health, and happiness;” and “My grandma is in good health, my family is still together, my family still loves each other, my brothers are healthy, and we have fun everyday.”

Counting blessings was related to more gratitude, optimism, life satisfaction, and less negative affect. Students who claimed feeling grateful for receiving help from others reported more positive affect. In fact, the relationship between feeling grateful for help from others and positive affect became stronger during the two-week intervention and was strongest three weeks after the intervention ended. Gratitude in response to aid also explained *why* students instructed to count blessings reported more general gratitude. Recognizing the gift of aid—yet another blessing to be counted—seemed to engender more gratitude.

The most significant finding, in our view, was the relationship between counting blessings and satisfaction with school. Students instructed to count blessings, compared to either students in the hassles or control conditions, reported more satisfaction with their school experience (i.e., find school interesting, feel good at school, think they are learning a lot, and are eager to go to school) (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000) both immediately following the two-week intervention and three weeks after completing the intervention (see Figure 4.1). Expressions of school satisfaction included: “I am thankful for school;” “I am thankful for my education;” “I go to a good school;” and “I am thankful that my school has a track team and that I got accepted into honor society.” School satisfaction is positively related to academic and social success (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Many early and late adolescents, however, indicate significant amounts of dissatisfaction with their school experience (Huebner et al., 2000;

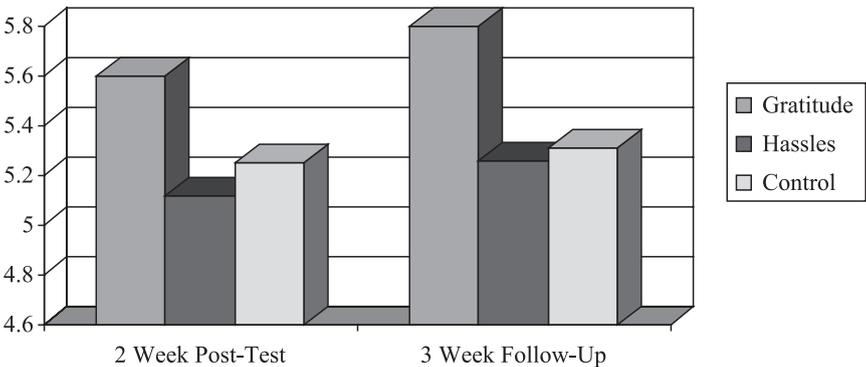


Figure 4.1. School Satisfaction

Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005). Therefore, inducing gratitude in students via counting blessings may be a viable intervention for mitigating negative academic appraisals and simultaneously promoting a positive school climate—one that nurtures both academic and social competence.

Gratitude interventions are relatively easy to implement, making them potentially appealing to practitioners and individuals—because the aim of finding fulfillment in life is basic and universal. When practicing as a school psychologist, the first author (JJF) organized a school-wide counting blessings exercise for over 1,000 middle school students. For two weeks all students were asked to follow the same directions as those in Froh and colleagues' gratitude condition on a daily basis (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). Teachers were instructed to process the experience with the students after the two-week intervention by following a gratitude lesson plan created specifically for this intervention. Adhering to the focused conversation method of teaching (Nelson, 2001), students were asked the following types of questions in this order: objective (e.g., What specific blessings did you count?), reflective (e.g., What did you like most about counting your blessings), interpretive (e.g., What are the benefits of giving thanks?), and decisional (e.g., How can we inject gratitude into our lives and school?).

Anecdotally speaking, students seemed to benefit from counting blessings. Some students reported recognizing that "life could be so much worse." One student, who was from a wealthy family, stated "I realized how good I really have it. Some kids have nothing. I just never thought about it before." This is just one of the many creative ways we think youth can be taught to experience and express gratitude (Froh, 2007). Another option is to dedicate a specific time of year (e.g., a certain month) to expressing gratitude to others. For instance, students can write a thank you card each week for a gift received, such as by another student (e.g., protecting them from a bully), an administrator (e.g., supporting a class trip to a museum), a teacher (e.g., waiting with them until their parents arrive at school to pick them up), or support staff (e.g., ensuring the heat works during the cold winter months). Also, students could be encouraged to embark on a gratitude visit and personally read the letter to their benefactor. This practice in particular has been shown in adults to cause a significant increase in happiness and decrease in depression for up to one month later (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Given the ease of inducing gratitude, its potential for making school tasks and exercises more creative, and its benefits to individuals and their environments, gratitude interventions for youth, in our view, should be seriously considered by those interested in fostering positive youth development.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Because the scientific understanding of gratitude in children and adolescents is in its infancy (Bono & Froh, in press), the avenues for inquiry are endless. We provide some structure for future investigations by offering several areas of gratitude research we think are currently in need of

expansion. First, while counting blessings in youth has been shown to be related with psychological well-being (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008), whether gratitude adds anything unique to such outcomes beyond positive emotions is still unclear. Maybe children offer help to others because thinking about things they should be grateful for makes them happy, which in turn leads to helping others. While Froh, Yurkewicz, and Kashdan (2008) addressed this issue with a correlational study, addressing this issue through gratitude intervention experiments would be important for distinguishing gratitude's beneficial effects from those of positive moods.

Second, an important issue is determining how much effort should be expended in practicing gratitude. Sonja Lyubomirsky, Kennon Sheldon, and David Schkade (2005) found that adults who counted blessings once a week reported more life satisfaction than those who counted blessings three times a week. The authors suggested that this may have happened because counting blessings several times a week can cause the exercise to lose its freshness and maybe even become boring. Therefore, with the practice of gratitude more may not always be better, and the ideal frequency should be explored—especially when it concerns youth, whose attention is quickly engaged and disengaged.

Third, other variables likely influence the magnitude of effects reported by using gratitude interventions. Variables such as sex, personality, dispositional gratitude, religiosity, spirituality, age (e.g., children vs adolescents) should be considered as potentially enhancing the effects of such exercises. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2004) maintain that some activities make people happier than others and that person-activity fit plays an important role in such interventions. Due to idiosyncratic values, interests, strengths, and inclinations, some gratitude exercises may do nothing for one person, but may make another person substantially happier simply because it “fit” that person better.

More recently, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006) found support for this notion. They examined the motivational predictors and positive emotion outcomes of regularly practicing two mental exercises: counting one's blessings (gratitude) and visualizing best possible selves (BPS). Both exercises caused more positive affect than the control group. But the BPS exercise may be better at raising and maintaining positive affect compared to the other two conditions—counting blessings came in second. They concluded that sustained personal effort, regardless of exercise, maintained the positive impacts of such interventions over time. Because the person-activity fit influenced this sustained effort, we agree that engaging youths' intrinsic interest in any gratitude exercises is critical for interventions to have any meaningful impacts on them.

Fourth, longitudinal research that follows the same group of people over an extended period of time is needed to ascertain the development of gratitude. In particular, it will be critical to determine social cognitive differences that enable or inhibit the experience of gratitude. Also, data from children and the people in their environments (e.g., parents, siblings, and teachers) will help identify the social factors that facilitate the development of these determinants. For instance, is gratitude only spoken about during

grace at dinner and prayers at bedtime? Do children speak about gratitude more with their fathers or mothers, and if so, why? Does the family's religious denomination play a role in gratitude development? These questions largely remain unanswered.

Longitudinal research will also help determine the long-term effects of gratitude interventions. In 2005, Martin Seligman, Tracy Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) found in an adult internet sample, that the gratitude visit lead to significant gains in happiness and reductions in depression for one month after the intervention compared to an intervention that possibly could have also lead to positive outcomes (i.e., writing about early memories). Two studies aside (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Froh, Ozimkowski, Miller, & Kashdan, 2008), we are unaware of other studies investigating sustainable outcomes for gratitude interventions in youth.

Finally, asking children and adolescents to complete questionnaires about gratitude may produce questionable results due to social desirability (i.e., answering the questions the way they think they "should"). An improvement could be to include behavioral measures of gratitude (e.g., frequency of saying "thank you" after an intervention). But this also has limitations. Is saying "thank you" a true measure of gratitude or is it just politeness? It is therefore ideal when studying gratitude to use self-report and behavioral measures (Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003).

We argued here and elsewhere (Bono & Froh, in press) that while we now understand the development, assessment, promotion, and outcomes of gratitude in youth more than ever (see Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007, for a review), we still only see the tip of the iceberg—much work is needed! Gratitude has been associated with a host of positive outcomes in children and adolescents. In addition to personal benefits, gratitude also yields relational benefits—strengthening families, peers, schools, and communities. It seems that gratitude may be a simple way to help children and adolescents actualize their social, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual potentialities. We hope this chapter helps consolidate our understanding of gratitude among youths and that it helps spark future research exploring its benefits to individuals and society.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### The Giving of Thanks

We grouped the personal mini-experiments into two main categories: ranging from lots of effort and time to little effort and time. We believe that individuals will experience a stronger boost in gratitude after completing the more effortful exercises of counting blessings or making a gratitude visit, compared with the others. These more effortful exercises should be tried if one is interested in testing how much a boost—be it personal or relational—one can obtain from the experience and expression of gratitude.

***Much Effort and Time Needed:***

*Counting blessings:* There are many things in our lives, both large and small, for which we could be grateful. Think back over the past day and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or

thankful for. Keep a journal and do this daily for two weeks. As a variation, you may also want to focus on one thing you are grateful for and deeply reflect on why this might make you feel particularly grateful.

*Gratitude visit:* Think of someone to whom or for whom you are grateful, but never quite gave the thanks she deserved. Write a letter to her explaining in detail why you feel so much gratitude toward her. Then read the letter to her in person. If distance and travel make it difficult to do this in person, you may also read the letter over the phone.

***Little Effort and Time Needed\*:***

- Every day, thank someone for something that you might otherwise take for granted (e.g., thanking the janitor who cleans your hallways). As can be done with most of these exercises, it may help to first think of the different environments in your daily life (school, park, home, a friend's house, the neighborhood, etc.) and then think about the people in each of those environments that did something that helped you or made you happy. Also consider things that those people did not have to do, things that they went out of their way to do, or things that were really tuned in to your needs, goals, or wishes at the time.
- Keep a record of the number of times you use the words “thank you” in a day. Over the course of the first week, try to double the number of times that you say the words.
- Call a parent/sibling/friend each day and thank him or her (e.g., for helping you achieve something important to you, for helping you avoid a bad or negative outcome, for helping you to become who you are, or for always being there for you).
- Send someone a “thank you” e-greeting or instant message.
- Leave a note on your roommate/apartment mate suitemate/hall mate that thanks her for something about her that you appreciate (e.g., maybe they cleaned up or left you food or treats to eat).

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\*Jonathan Haidt developed some of these exercises with his students. We are grateful to him for sharing them with us.

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# For the Good of Others: Toward a Positive Psychology of Sacrifice

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It's Friday night, and you and your partner can't agree on which movie to see. You want to see the new romantic comedy, and your partner wants to watch the latest action film.

You're sitting in rush-hour traffic at the end of an exhausting workday, looking forward to getting home. Your partner calls and asks you to pick up dry cleaning from a store back by your office.

Your partner calls to excitedly tell you about a great new job offer in another state, far away from your family and friends.

Situations in which partners have conflicting interests and desires are inevitable in close relationships. After all, what is best for one person may not always coincide with his or her partner's own interests, and vice versa. Sometimes those situations are as mundane as choosing which movie to see or deciding to run an errand for your partner; while at other times they can be as momentous as choosing where to build a life together. Couples must learn to negotiate these times successfully if they want their relationships to survive and grow. One way that partners can deal with conflicting interests is to sacrifice, defined as giving up one's own interests in order to promote the well-being of a partner or a relationship (Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997). Many people include sacrifice, along with caring, respect, and loyalty in their definition of what it means to truly love another person (Noller, 1996).

The topic of sacrifice is important for several reasons. First, it is inevitable that couples will be confronted with situations in which they have

conflicting interests and desires. It is essential that we understand more about when sacrifice is a useful and beneficial strategy for couples if we want to promote healthy, happy, and long-lasting relationships. Second, sacrifice is a topic to which everyone can relate. If you bring up the topic of sacrifice at a dinner party, each guest will be waiting their turn to tell their own story about being the one staying up late to feed the crying baby or attending a dreaded family gathering as a favor to their partner. Third, shifting gender roles in today's society that place a greater emphasis on autonomy and independence for women may create even more possibilities for conflicts of interest in male-female romantic relationships. In some ways, learning how to promote healthy sacrifice—for both women and men—may be more important than ever before.

In this chapter, we explore the role of sacrifice in romantic relationships, considering both the benefits and the costs of decisions to give up one's own wishes and preferences for the good of another person. In the first section, we provide a definition of sacrifice and review the ways in which sacrifice has been measured in psychological research. In the second section, we discuss factors that promote sacrifice, examining the circumstances under which people are willing to sacrifice their own self-interest for the sake of their partner or their relationship. In the third section, we review research on the positive side of sacrifice, presenting research on the potential benefits of sacrifice for the person who sacrifices, the recipient of sacrifice, as well as the relationship between the partners. Fourth, we advance a word of caution about the possible dangers of sacrifice, especially when sacrifice is not mutual in relationships. Fifth, we present a motivational perspective on sacrifice that sheds light on when sacrifice is beneficial versus costly for people and their relationships. In the sixth section, we consider the roles of both gender and culture with regard to the willingness to sacrifice. In the final section, we present several important directions for future research on sacrifice. At the end of the chapter we present personal mini-experiments that will enable you to apply the research on sacrifice to your own life and relationships.

We should note at the outset that this chapter focuses on sacrifice in the context of *adult romantic relationships* because the bulk of the empirical research on sacrifice has focused on these types of relationships. Nevertheless, we believe that understanding sacrifice in a variety of different relationship contexts (e.g., with friends, parents, children, etc.) is an important endeavor and one that provides many interesting directions for future work. Further, our discussion of sacrifice is based on the assumption that sacrifices are made willingly, so this chapter excludes situations in which an individual is coerced or controlled into giving in to another person.

## WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

Consider the following three actions: (a) Jane spends her Saturday afternoon helping her boyfriend move to a new apartment; (b) Ryan orders Chinese food because it is his girlfriend's favorite food; and (c) Joe transfers

to a different college to be closer to his girlfriend. Sacrifice has been defined as foregoing one's immediate self-interest in order to promote the well-being of a partner or a relationship (Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). Based on this definition of sacrifice, would you consider any of the above actions a sacrifice? Without being provided with additional information about why Jane, Ryan, and Joe engaged in those behaviors, and what they had to give up in the process, it is difficult to tell if their actions represent sacrifices. In this section, we clearly define sacrifice, we distinguish between sacrifice and help, and we describe different types of sacrifices that people make in their relationships.

### Is Sacrifice the Same as Helping Others or Doing Favors?

Is sacrificing the same as helping or doing someone a favor? Although sacrificing for a romantic partner may indeed be a provision of help, sacrificing and helping are not the same thing. In general, helping behavior provides a positive benefit for another person without giving up one's own personal goals (Eisenberg, 1990). Sacrifice, on the other hand, involves providing a positive benefit for another individual by subordinating one's own personal goals and potentially accruing personal costs in the process (Killen & Turiel, 1998). The same behavior may be considered a sacrifice or an act of helping, depending on whether the enactor put aside his or her personal goals and interests in order to provide help. For example, if Mary asks her partner to pick her up from the airport, her partner John may feel that he is helping her (instead of sacrificing) if he did not have any pre-existing plans or obligations. However, if John had to miss an important meeting at work in order to pick up Mary, then he may consider his action a sacrifice, especially if he incurred a personal cost in the process (e.g., he was reprimanded by his boss). This example illustrates how sacrifice involves the subordination of personal goals whereas helping typically does not.

### Types of Sacrifice

Researchers have identified various types of sacrifices that people make in their relationships. One distinction is between active and passive sacrifice (Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). *Active sacrifice* involves doing something, either for or with your partner, which you do not particularly want to do. Such undesirable behaviors may include hanging out with a partner's friends instead of your own, attending a work function for your partner, or moving to a new city to be closer to your partner. In contrast, *passive sacrifice* involves giving up or forfeiting something that you would otherwise want to do or experience, such as not spending time with your friends, not going to your choice of movie, or not accepting an impressive job offer in another city. Many sacrifices involve both giving up a desirable behavior and engaging in an undesirable behavior. Imagine that you and your partner are trying to plan your Friday night. You want to stay home and watch

a movie, but your partner wants to go out to dinner and a jazz show. If you decide to honor your partner's wishes and go out for a night on the town, you give up something that you want (an active sacrifice: staying at home to watch a movie), and do something that you do not want to do (a passive sacrifice: going out for a night on the town).

Another distinction is between major and daily sacrifice. Some conflicts of interest in relationships are of major importance. You may have to decide whether to relocate to a new city so that your partner can take a better job, whether to support your partner financially as he or she pursues a degree, or whether you should give away your beloved puppy because your partner is allergic to dogs. In early research, which focused on major sacrifice, participants were asked to list the three or four most important activities in their lives (Van Lange, Agnew et al., 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). Most individuals listed activities either from various life domains, such as education, religion, and favorite pastimes; or activities that they engaged in with particular people such as parents, siblings, and friends (e.g., going to the beach, playing soccer). Participants were then asked: "Imagine that it was not possible to combine [a particular activity] with your current relationship.... To what extent would you be willing to give up that activity?" Complete the first personal mini-experiment to assess your own willingness to make major sacrifices in one of your close relationships.

Not all sacrifices are as major as moving to a new city or giving up your beloved puppy. Relationships also require that people make relatively small sacrifices in their day-to-day lives (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). When partners have differing tastes (e.g., on food, movies, outings, intimacy), one of them may sacrifice his or her own desires for the sake of the partner or the relationship. For example, you may favor reality TV over action shows, Chinese food over Mexican food, and going out over staying at home. These small differences present opportunities for couples to navigate the realm of sacrifice on a daily basis. Table 5.1 lists 11 kinds of common sacrifices that individuals can make in their romantic relationships (Impett et al., 2005). We should also note that daily sacrifices may become more major with the passage of time. For example, giving up an occasional outing with your best friend may eventually lead to becoming estranged from him or her entirely.

In summary, although all sacrifices involve the foregoing of one's self-interest for the sake of a partner, there is great variability in the kinds of sacrifices that people make for their partners. Sometimes people give up things that they want or enjoy, and other times they engage in behaviors that are undesirable. Some sacrifices are of major importance, whereas others are more mundane and can occur repeatedly in relationships. Why do some people sacrifice while others pursue their own self-interests? In the next section, we consider several factors that promote sacrifice in relationships.

## WHAT PROMOTES SACRIFICE?

Consider the following scenario: It's Friday night, and Sarah's friends invite her to go out dancing at a club. She really wants to go but knows that her boyfriend gets upset when she goes out dancing without him.

**Table 5.1**  
**Types of Sacrifices Listed by Participants**

Type of Sacrifice	Examples (Active and Passive Sacrifices)
Friends	“Went to his friend’s party” and “Cancelled plans with my friends”
Recreation	“Went to the LA auto show” and “No video games when she comes over”
Errands, Chores, & Favors	“Ironing his clothes” and “No laundry when he’s at my apartment”
School & Work	“Editing his papers” and “Spending less time studying”
Health & Lifestyle	“Got him medicine when he was sick” and “Smoke less when I’m around her”
Family	“I went to Thanksgiving with his family” and “I don’t see my sister very much”
Communication & Interaction	“Staying up late to talk to him” and “Gave up seeing him when he was studying”
Gifts and Money	“Bought a necklace for her” and “Provided for him when he was unemployed”
Male-Female Interactions	“I avoid talking to other men” and “Stopped dating other girls”
Appearance	“Wearing things he finds sexy” and “Not wearing revealing clothes”
Intimacy	“Having sex when I don’t want to” and “Gave up physical contact”

*Source:* Impett et al. (2005).

Sarah has to make an important choice between doing what she really wants to do (go dancing) and doing what will make her boyfriend happy and prevent conflict in her relationship (stay at home). If Sarah decides that avoiding conflict in her relationship is more important than going dancing with her friends, then she transforms her motivation from concerns about her own self-interest to concerns about what is best for her partner and her relationship. Under what circumstances are people willing to sacrifice their own self-interest and act in the best interests of their partner or their relationship? In this section, we consider two factors that promote greater willingness to sacrifice: commitment to one’s relationship and the desire to reciprocate a partner’s sacrifice (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

### Commitment

Rusbult (1980) defines commitment as having a sense of psychological attachment to one’s relationship including the desire to maintain the relationship “for better or worse.” According to Rusbult’s (1980; 1983) Investment Model of Commitment, people who are high in relationship satisfaction, have few alternatives to their relationship (i.e., few attractive options other than their current partner), and are highly invested in their relationship (both emotionally and materially) will be the most committed

to their relationships. People need not have all three characteristics to feel committed to their relationships. For example, a woman who is unhappy in her marriage may still feel highly committed to her relationship if she thinks she cannot find someone else or if she has already invested a lot in the relationship. If she relies on her husband's income and they have children together, she may feel that the costs of ending the relationship are too great (even though she is dissatisfied), and she may choose to stay married to her husband. Complete the second personal mini-experiment to assess your own commitment to your closest relationship.

Individuals who are highly committed to their relationships are more willing to sacrifice than individuals with lower levels of commitment (Van Lange, Agnew et al., 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). There are several important reasons why high levels of commitment promote a desire to maintain relationships even at the cost of self-interest. First, people who are highly committed to their relationships are often highly *dependent* on their partners and their relationships. Individuals who are highly dependent feel a greater need to stay with their partners and go to great lengths to make sure that the relationship continues. Because these individuals need their relationships, they are more willing to sacrifice in order to maintain the relationship (Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). For example, a young college woman who is highly dependent on her relationship may choose to live with her boyfriend rather than in her sorority house in order to please her boyfriend and ensure that their relationship continues.

Second, individuals who are highly committed to their partners have a *long-term orientation* toward their relationships in which they consider not only the immediate outcomes of their actions but also the outcomes of their actions down the road (Van Lange, Agnew et al., 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). Such outcomes include successfully maintaining a relationship over time as well as ensuring that one's partner will sacrifice in similar situations in the future (Axelrod, 1984; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). For example, a man with a long-term view of his relationship may pass on having a bachelor party weekend in Las Vegas because he knows it will upset his fiancée and believes that promoting her happiness is more important to him than a weekend in Las Vegas. Or, he may sacrifice in the hopes that his fiancée will choose not to have a bachelorette party.

Third, people who are highly committed to their relationships think more communally about their relationships than people with lower levels of commitment. *Communal orientation* refers to a focus on one's relationships rather than a focus on the self (Clark & Mills, 1979). When making decisions, communally oriented people think less often about what is best for "me" and more often about what is best for "us." For example, a woman who views her relationship in a communal context may pass on a job promotion that would require her to move to another city because the job promotion, while great for her ("me"), would not be the best move for her relationship ("us").

Fourth, people who are highly committed may become *psychologically attached* or "linked" to their partners in such a way that their partners' moods, thoughts, and emotions affect them as well. What makes one

partner happy may make the other one happy; what makes one partner sad may make the other one sad. People may choose to sacrifice their own immediate interests because the interests of their partners become their interests as well (Aron & Aron, 1986). For example, a guy may decide to “give in” and go out to a club with his girlfriend even though he is tired after a long day at work simply for the reason that going out will make her happy, and her happiness becomes his own reward.

### Desire to Reciprocate a Partner's Sacrifice

An individual's own commitment is an important factor that promotes willingness to sacrifice, but the partner also plays an important role. Although people dislike thinking about close relationships in exchange (i.e., tit for tat) terms, partners often reciprocate favors and kindnesses toward each other (Foa & Foa, 1974). When people depart from self-interest, their partners may feel compelled to reciprocate (Axelrod, 1984). Research has shown that people are more willing to sacrifice for their partners when they think that the partner is willing to sacrifice for them (Van Lange, Agnew et al. 1997; Wieselquist et al. 1999). One of the reasons for this is that people desire reciprocity. People may be inclined toward equity, expecting a balance between what they give to their partners and what is given back to them. Therefore, the more often that people sacrifice for a partner, the more likely it is that their partner will sacrifice in return.

In summary, a man who is contemplating whether or not to give up his own apartment and move in with his girlfriend will be more likely to make the move if he is highly committed to maintaining his relationship. He will also be more likely to make the move if his partner has shown that she cares about the future of the relationship by making sacrifices of her own. In what ways does sacrifice benefit relationships? In the next section of the chapter, we review research on the personal and interpersonal benefits of sacrifice.

## THE POSITIVE SIDE OF SACRIFICE

For it is in giving that we receive.  
—Peace Prayer of St. Francis

What are the gifts that we receive when we choose to make a sacrifice in our relationships? In this section, we review available research on the possible benefits of sacrifice—not just for relationships—but also for the person who makes the sacrifice and for the recipient of sacrifice.

### Benefits for the Relationship

One way in which sacrifice can benefit relationships is by promoting greater relationship satisfaction and stability over time. Several studies of dating and married couples have shown that willingness to sacrifice was

associated with greater relationship satisfaction and stability (Van Lange, Agnew et al., 1997; Van Lange, Rusbult et al., 1997). More specifically, people who were more willing to sacrifice for their partners reported more intimacy, better problem-solving, and more shared activities. Willingness to sacrifice also predicted people's abilities to maintain their relationships successfully over time. The more willing people were to make sacrifices, the more likely they were to still be together with their partners six to eight weeks after the research was over.

Another way in which sacrifice can benefit relationships is by increasing individuals' commitment to and trust in their partners (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Trust is defined as the expectation that one's partner can be relied upon to behave benevolently and be responsive to one's needs (Holmes, 1989; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985; Sorrentino, Holmes, Hanna, & Sharp, 1995). People learn to trust their partners when they see that their partners are caring and responsive enough to make sacrifices. The more that individuals trust their partners, the more committed they become to the relationship (Wieselquist et al., 1999). The more committed they become, the more likely they are to sacrifice in turn, setting a "mutual cyclical growth" process into motion that leads to more trust, commitment, and sacrifice among both partners in the relationship.

Research has also shown that people's attitudes toward sacrifice can also affect the quality and stability of their relationships. One attitude toward sacrifice concerns the extent to which people derive satisfaction from sacrificing for their partner. Stanley and Markman's (1992) "Satisfaction with Sacrifice" scale assesses the degree to which individuals view sacrifice for the relationship to be rewarding with items such as "I get satisfaction out of doing something for my partner." In a longitudinal study of married couples, the couples who derived more satisfaction from sacrifice were less likely to be distressed or divorced six years later than the couples who reported less satisfaction with sacrifice (Stanley, Whitton, Sadberry, Clements, & Markman, 2006).

### Benefits for the Person Who Sacrifices

The person who makes the sacrifice may also derive important benefits from giving up his or her own self-interest for several reasons. First, engaging in sacrifice may help people maintain images of themselves as good partners who care about their partner's needs (Holmes & Murray, 1996). Second, people may engage in behaviors that they would otherwise find undesirable because by making their partners feel good, they make themselves feel good (Blau, 1964; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976). A woman may give up her own weekend plans in order to attend a work party with her partner because she finds pleasure in being able to do things that make her partner feel happy and loved. A third possible benefit is the increased chance that one's partner will sacrifice in return (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Fourth, by engaging in sacrifice people may be able to promote long-term goals such as reducing conflict or promoting coordination with a partner. In other words, what may be a sacrifice in the moment might actually satisfy one's own self-interest in the future.

Consider a young couple who is in the process of planning a wedding. Tom wants to get married in their hometown whereas Sally wants to get married in Hawaii. Sally knows how important it is for Tom to get married in their hometown, so she decides to give up her dream of having a destination wedding because she is more interested in having a long and happy married life with Tom (her long-term interest) than she is in getting married on an exotic island (her current self-interest). This example illustrates that one personal benefit of giving up one's immediate self-interest is the promotion of longer-term goals.

### Benefits for the Recipient of Sacrifice

The recipient of sacrifice can also benefit. Besides the obvious benefit of having your own desires fulfilled, recognizing that your partner has sacrificed may bolster the perception that your partner is caring and responsive. People often pay attention to whether their partner deviates from self-interest (Kelley, 1979), making important judgments about the meaning behind their partners' actions (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). As reviewed previously, when people perceive that their partner has deviated from self-interest for the sake of the relationship, they develop trust in their partner as a caring, reliable and thoughtful person (Wieselquist et al., 1999).

It is the norm rather than the exception in close relationships to keep a partner's best interests in mind, and research has shown that sacrifice can promote more relationship satisfaction and stability. However, there may be times when sacrificing, rather than being a positive tool for relationship maintenance, can actually be harmful, a possibility to which we now turn.

### A WORD ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DANGERS OF SACRIFICE

To thine own self be true.

—William Shakespeare (*Hamlet* 1.3.543)

In Western societies such as the United States, there is a particularly strong value that emphasizes individualism, autonomy, and the relentless pursuit of one's own personal truth. Quotes such as the one above suggest the importance of remaining "true" to our own wishes and desires rather than becoming what our parents, friends, romantic partner, or community tell us we "should" or "ought" to be. In this section, we suggest that sacrifices that are not made in a mutual and reciprocal manner may actually be harmful. In addition, we draw upon feminist research to show that a failure to "speak one's mind" can set the stage for increased depression and decreased well-being.

### Unilateral Sacrifice

It is possible that sacrifice may have negative consequences if one partner consistently carries the full burden of sacrifice in the relationship (Drigotas,

Rusbult, & Verette, 1999). Whereas some people consistently give up their own interests for the sake of a partner, others often act in a more self-interested manner (Neff & Harter, 2002), reflecting individual differences in willingness to sacrifice. In one example of this imbalance, people who lack power in their relationships may be more likely to routinely engage in sacrifice. Mutuality of dependence refers to the extent to which partners need their relationship to the same degree (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Individuals who are more dependent on their partners may lack power in their relationships and may feel compelled to repeatedly sacrifice to make their partners happy and ensure the continuation of their relationships. For example, in a study of college women in dating relationships, the women who felt that their partners were less committed than them to maintaining the relationships were the most likely to agree to engage in "sexual sacrifice" (Impett & Peplau, 2002).

When people focus on other people at the expense of focusing on themselves, they may experience diminished happiness and well-being (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). *Unmitigated communion* refers to the extent to which people are excessively concerned with others and place others' needs before their own needs. People who are high in unmitigated communion would agree with such statements as "I always place the needs of others above my own" and "I can't say no when someone asks me for help." Research has shown that both men and women who are high in unmitigated communion experience more anxiety, more depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and poorer physical health than individuals who are low in unmitigated communion (see review by Helgeson & Fritz, 1998). This research does not mean that every person who focuses on other people instead of focusing on themselves is depressed. Some people may derive genuine happiness from putting the needs of other people before their own needs. Nevertheless, the results of this research suggest that sacrifice is not always a beneficial strategy, and that people should proceed with caution when giving up their own interests for the sake of others, particularly if they are involved in relationships in which their sacrifices are not reciprocated.

### Failure to "Speak One's Mind"

In addition, feminist psychologists advance another word of caution about a possible danger of sacrificing or "silencing" one's own thoughts, opinions, and desires in relationships (Jack & Dill, 1992). While feeling connected to others is an important part of a woman's (and a man's) sense of self (Jordan, 1991; Miller, 1986), this desire for connection can come with a cost. Sometimes the desire to feel connected to others makes people reluctant or scared to voice their true thoughts and opinions for fear of making other people angry or upset (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Research conducted with adolescents (Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996) and young adults (Harter, Waters, Pettitt, Whitesell, Kofkin, & Jordan, 1997) has shown that not stating one's "true opinions" is associated with greater depression, more hopelessness, and lower self-esteem. In other studies, the more that adolescent girls agreed with statements such as

“Often I look happy on the outside in order to please others, even if I don’t feel happy on the inside.” and “I express my opinions only if I can think of a nice way of doing it,” the lower their self-esteem and the higher their depressive symptoms (Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006).

In short, there may be some circumstances under which it is costly to sacrifice, such as in relationships in which partners do not share power equally. Further, not “speaking up” and communicating the truth about how you feel to another person may also be harmful. Next, we consider people’s motives or reasons for making sacrifices as an important determinant of when sacrifice is beneficial and when it is costly for people and their relationships.

## TO SACRIFICE OR NOT TO SACRIFICE: THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION

Can you think of times when you sacrificed to make another person happy, to feel closer to your partner, or to feel good about yourself? These are approach-motivated sacrifices (Impett et al., 2005). Avoidance-motivated sacrifices were those sacrifices that you made to avoid feeling guilty, to prevent a fight, or to prevent your partner from losing interest in the relationship. In this section, we introduce “approach-avoidance theory” and apply it to the study of sacrifice.

### Approach-Avoidance Motivation

A distinction made by many theories of motivation is whether a person acts to obtain a positive outcome (an *approach motive*) or to avoid a negative outcome (an *avoidance motive*) (Carver & White, 1994; Gray, 1987). For instance, you could stay up late studying for an exam because you strive for academic success and recognition from fellow classmates (approach motives) or you could stay up late studying to avoid looking inferior to your classmates or disappointing your teacher (avoidance motives). Applied to sacrifice, an individual can sacrifice for approach motives, such as to make a partner happy or promote intimacy in the relationship; or for avoidance motives, such as to avoid conflict or feeling guilty (Impett et al., 2005). Consider these comments made by women who were asked why they engaged in sexual activity when they did not particularly want to do so (Impett & Peplau, 2000).

1. I am in a very loving and nurturing relationship with the person I will eventually marry and I wanted to satisfy the desire for intimacy. I believe that sexual intercourse is one way that we can express love rather than only physical desire. So, even though I am tired, I want to show him my love constantly. He would do the same for me (p. 7).
2. He told me that one thing he hated about his ex-girlfriend was the fact that she wasn’t sexual. I am afraid that if I am not sexual, he won’t want to be with me (p. 7).

Although both of these women's reasons for "sexual sacrifice" center on desires to maintain important relationships, they differ in their focus. The first woman emphasized wanting to share positive experiences with her partner, such as intimacy, desire, and love. The second woman, in contrast, focused on avoiding appearing uninterested in sex and possibly jeopardizing her relationship. Complete the third personal mini-experiment to measure your own motives for sacrifice.

### Sacrifice Motives, Relationship Satisfaction, and Well-Being

Recent research has applied the approach-avoidance distinction to understand the costs and benefits of sacrifice. In one study, college students in dating relationships reported on their sacrifices at the end of each day for 14 consecutive days (Impett et al., 2005). For each sacrifice, participants completed measure of approach and avoidance motives. The results of this study showed that on days when participants sacrificed for approach motives, they experienced more positive emotions, greater satisfaction with life, and greater relationship satisfaction. In contrast, on days when they sacrificed for avoidance motives, they experienced more negative emotions, less relationship satisfaction, and more relationship conflict. Some of the most striking findings from this study concerned what happened to the relationships one month after the study. Sacrificing for approach motives over the course of the study led to participants being twice as likely to still be together at the one-month follow-up, whereas sacrificing for avoidance motives led to participants being two and a half times as likely to have broken up by the one-month follow-up. The results of this study suggest that giving up one's interests and desires may only be beneficial for relationships when people sacrifice for approach, as opposed to avoidance, motives.

Let's apply the results of this research to a real life example. John and Mary are trying to decide where to go on their next vacation. John wants to go skiing, but Mary wants to go somewhere tropical. After spending an hour arguing over their vacation choice, John acquiesces and tells Mary that they can go on a tropical trip. Why did John sacrifice his vacation choice? Perhaps he sacrificed for approach reasons because he knew how much the vacation meant to Mary and wanted to do something that would make her happy. Or, perhaps he sacrificed for avoidance reasons because he was sick of arguing with Mary about the vacation and wanted to avoid further conflict. At first glance, the motivation behind his sacrifice may not seem that important; no matter his motivation, he still gets to go on a tropical vacation with his partner. However, the results of the study described previously suggest that his motivation is crucial. If John sacrificed because he wanted to make Mary happy, his sacrifice will probably increase his personal well-being and the well-being of the relationship. However, if he sacrificed in order to avoid fighting, his sacrifice may detract from his own relationship satisfaction, and potentially his girlfriend's satisfaction as well.

The study described above also included data from the participants' partners, enabling the researchers to see how sacrifice impacts the recipient

of sacrifice. When people thought that their partner sacrificed for approach motives such as to create intimacy and to express their love, they experienced more positive emotions, greater life satisfaction, and more relationship satisfaction. In contrast, when people thought that their partner sacrificed for avoidance motives such as to avoid conflict and tension in the relationship, they felt more negative emotions, less life satisfaction, and less relationship satisfaction. This research finding further emphasizes the importance of John's motivation when sacrificing his vacation choice. His motives for sacrifice may affect not only his own happiness, but his partner's happiness and well-being as well. If Mary thinks that John agreed to her vacation choice because he wanted to make her happy, she may experience greater happiness. If, however, she thinks that he gave in merely because he didn't want to deal with the conflict of making a decision, she may feel less satisfaction, both personally and in her relationship.

This research has helped us to understand when it benefits people to give up their own self-interest for a partner as well as the particular importance of approach motives. Why do people choose to sacrifice for approach or avoidance motives? Next, we consider personal as well as situational influences on people's motives for sacrifice.

#### Dispositional Influences on Sacrifice Motives

Research has shown that there are important individual differences in people's tendencies to pursue approach and avoidance motives in their interpersonal relationships (Carver & White, 1994; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000). Some people are predisposed to enter interactions with other individuals with the intent of gaining positive social outcomes such as feeling close to others or having a good time. These people are high in "hope for affiliation" (Mehrabian, 1976). Other people, in contrast, are predisposed to enter social interactions with the intent of avoiding negative outcomes such as rejection or conflict with others. These people are high in "fear of rejection." One study showed that individual differences in hope for affiliation and fear of rejection predicted people's motives for making sacrifices (Impett et al., 2005). More specifically, people who were higher in hope for affiliation were more likely to sacrifice for approach motives, whereas people who were higher in fear of rejection were more likely to sacrifice for avoidance motives.

Imagine a couple at the theater trying to pick which movie to watch. The guy, high in hope for affiliation, graciously allows his girlfriend to pick the movie, looking forward to making her happy and enjoying a pleasurable evening together. His sacrifice lifts both their moods and they enter the theater feeling happy and excited about the evening ahead. In the theater across town, another couple is also trying to pick a movie, and once again the guy allows his girlfriend to make the final choice. This guy, however, is high in fear of rejection. He allows his girlfriend to choose the movie because he is afraid that his girlfriend will be angry or upset if she doesn't get to pick. His sacrifice leaves him in a sour mood, and his girlfriend picks

up on his negativity, so they enter the theater dreading the long evening ahead. Although both couples were in a similar situation, the two guys' differing dispositions led the couples to have very different experiences for the evening.

### Situational Influences on Sacrifice Motives

People sometimes sacrifice for different reasons depending on the situation. Certain aspects of people's current relationships may call out for approach- or avoidance-motivated behaviors (or both). For instance, feeling highly satisfied with a relationship may lead people to focus on the positive incentives (e.g., affection, happiness) that they can attain by maintaining their relationships (Frank & Brandstatter, 2002; Strachman & Gable, 2006). In contrast, focusing on investments in a relationship or the fact that one has few alternatives to a current relationship may lead people to pay attention to the negative incentives (e.g., losing valuable investments, feeling lonely) that are generally connected to the dissolution of a relationship. In short, certain aspects of relationships may influence people's motives for making sacrifices in their relationships. What other aspects or traits of individuals influence their willingness to sacrifice? Next, we consider how an individual's gender and cultural background might affect sacrifice.

### THE ROLE OF GENDER AND CULTURE IN SACRIFICE

A discussion about sacrifice and romantic relationships would be incomplete without talking about the roles of gender and culture. Beginning with gender, it may be reasonable to assume that women are relatively more interested in men in taking their partners needs and desires into account, given that maintaining successful relationships is an important part of a woman's role in this society (Miller, 1986; Wood, 1993). One possibility is that women may be more willing than men to sacrifice or may sacrifice more frequently than do men. However, research has not consistently supported this popular idea. For example, one study showed that while women rated marriage and close family ties as more important than did men, men and women were equally likely to indicate that they would sacrifice their most important life goals for the good of their relationships (Hammersla & Frease-McMahan, 1990). Other research has looked at the ways in which men and women typically resolve conflicts in their relationships. In a study of dating and married couples, Neff and Harter (2002) found that the majority of men (62%) and women (61%) reported the use of compromise to solve their problems. Smaller, but relatively equal numbers of men and women reported using the other strategies (14% of men and 19% of women prioritized their own needs over the needs of their partners; 24% of men and 20% of women subordinated their own needs to the needs of their partners). Bishop (2004) also found no gender differences in frequency of daily sacrifice among college students in dating relationships. One fairly consistent gender difference that has been found, however, is in

“unmitigated communion,” defined earlier as the tendency to be excessively concerned with others and to place others’ needs before one’s own needs (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998; Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Research has shown that women score higher than men on measures of unmitigated communion (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Taken together with the previously reviewed findings, it is possible that, in most relationships, men and women sacrifice with relatively equal frequency. However, women may be more likely than men to take sacrifice to the extreme—to focus on other people so much that they neglect themselves in the process.

Although women and men may not differ in their overall frequency of sacrifice, research has shown that women are more likely than men to sacrifice in the particular domains of career, sexuality, and health. For example, in long-term marriages, women are also more likely to be in the role of “trailing spouse,” adopting their career plans to the needs of their spouses (Bielby & Bielby, 1992). In the domain of sexuality, roughly twice as many women as men in dating and married relationships indicate that they have engaged in “sexual sacrifice” (i.e., consenting to engage in sex when one has little or no desire) (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Research has also shown that women were more likely than men to make sacrifices that involved promoting the health and lifestyle of their partner such as picking up prescriptions or scheduling appointments (Bishop, 2004), consistent with previous research (Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, & Slaten, 1996). In contrast to sacrifice measured more generally, sacrifices in the domains of career, sexuality and health are more likely to be made by women. Future research is needed to explore the kinds of sacrifices that men may be more likely than women to make for a romantic partner.

Research also suggests that willingness to sacrifice may have less to do with whether a person is a man or a woman and more to do with whether people identify with and enact conventional gender roles. Regardless of their gender, people who possess stereotypically feminine personality characteristics such as understanding and sensitivity are the most willing to sacrifice, whereas people who possess stereotypically masculine personality traits such as independence and assertiveness are the least willing to sacrifice (Hammersla & Frease-McMahon, 1990; Stafford, Dainton, & Hass, 2000). Another reason why studies may have failed to find consistent gender differences in frequency of sacrifice is the possibility that women may be less likely to label their actions as sacrifice. Despite the fact that many married women work outside of the home, they continue to do the majority of the housework and, if they have children, the majority of the childcare (Coltrane, 2002; Shelton & John, 1996). It is possible that women do more “nice” or “helpful” things for their partners (particularly in the domains of housework and childcare) but are less likely to define these things as “sacrifices” since doing things for and taking care of others is an expected part of women’s role in this society (Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007). Future research is needed to explore this intriguing possibility.

Sacrifice may also have different meanings to people from different cultural backgrounds, especially to people who come from backgrounds that place more emphasis on maintaining harmony in relationships.

“Collectivist” cultures place great emphasis on the subordination of personal goals to goals for the group as a whole (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). “Individualistic” cultures, on the other hand, place great emphasis on personal goals, even at the inconvenience of the group. People from collectivist and individualistic cultures may approach situations of conflict in different ways. Individuals with a collectivist orientation are more likely to sacrifice their own goals for the good of the group (e.g., to maintain harmony, to help others, and to show respect) than individuals with more individualist orientations (Briley & Wyer, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Research on sacrifice in romantic relationships, thus far, has focused on the role of sacrifice in Western (i.e., individualistic) cultures. Future research examining the role of sacrifice in collectivist cultures is needed.

## CONCLUSION, FUTURE DIRECTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Sacrifice is an important and positive tool that people can use to maintain their relationships over time. In every relationship, people have to navigate situations in which their wants or needs do not match their partner’s interests. People are more likely to sacrifice when they are highly committed to the relationship, when they trust their partner, and when they feel that their partner would be willing to sacrifice in return. For the most part, sacrifice is a highly useful strategy that couples can use to demonstrate their love for each other, promote happiness, and ensure the success of their relationships. However, when sacrifice is not reciprocal or when people sacrifice a core aspect of themselves, sacrifice may actually be harmful. An individual’s endorsement of conventional gender roles and cultural background may also influence willingness to sacrifice or the meaning of sacrifice. Understanding people’s reasons or motives for sacrifice is critical. Sacrificing is an act of the utmost generosity, and when done for approach (as opposed to avoidance) reasons, these actions have the power to enhance both the stability and quality of interpersonal relationships.

There are many interesting directions for future research on sacrifice. First, most of the existing research on sacrifice has focused on adult romantic relationships in which the participants are either dating or married and are almost always heterosexual. Future research is needed to explore the salience of sacrifice in different types of relationships. A particularly interesting direction would be to explore sacrifice in relationships where the caregiving dynamic is unequal, such as parents caring for a child or people caring for an aging parent. Second, the majority of research has focused on sacrifice only from the perspective of one partner. It is important to point out that motives for sacrifice are inherently different from motives in other domains such as achievement and other life tasks in that they, by default, involve coordination with another person who has his or her own motives. This complexity requires the collection of data from both members of the couple, sampled at specific moments in their daily lives as well as over longer periods of time. Third, previous research on sacrifice in romantic

relationships has been conducted in Western cultures. Cross-cultural research on sacrifice presents an important and exciting direction for future work.

Finally, the results of the research reviewed in this chapter have important implications for clinicians and counselors who work with distressed couples. People who are in unhappy or distressed relationships often focus on the ways they want their partners to change and how they can go about instituting change. Research on sacrifice suggests that couples therapists could shift the focus away from something that partners have no control over (each other's behaviors) to something that they can in fact control (their own behavior). People can be taught the importance of learning how to give to their partner in unselfish yet healthy ways. Indeed, commitment is more than just toughing it out "through thick and thin" or "for better or worse." True commitment involves genuinely giving to one's partner for the greater good of the relationship. This kind of love and commitment is typified by such short stories as "The Gift of the Magi" in which a young married couple, Jim and Della, sell their most prized possessions to buy each other Christmas gifts (O. Henry, date unknown). Della sells her own hair to buy Jim a chain for his grandfather's watch, while Jim sells his watch to buy Della tortoise shell combs that she has long admired for her hair. This story is at the same time both tragic and touching. On the one hand, Jim and Della have sacrificed their most cherished possessions to give each other gifts which, in a matter of moments, have become obsolete. On the other hand, Della and Jim's sacrifices are but small prices to pay to demonstrate their love and devotion. Though outwardly foolish, Jim and Della knew the true and lasting value of their gifts.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

#### Measuring Your Willingness to Sacrifice

*What would you give up?:* On the following three lines, please list the three parts of your life—the three activities in your life—that are the most important to you (other than your relationship with your partner).

Most important activity is: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Second most important activity is: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Third most important activity is: \_\_\_\_\_

Imagine that it were not possible to engage in these activities and maintain your relationship (impossible for reasons unrelated to your partner's needs or wishes; that is, it wasn't your partner's fault).

To what extent would you consider giving up Activity 1? Circle the appropriate response.

*I definitely would not consider giving up activity*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    *I would definitely consider giving up activity*

To what extent would you consider giving up Activity 2? Circle the appropriate response.

*I definitely would not consider giving up activity*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    *I would definitely consider giving up activity*

To what extent would you consider giving up Activity 3? Circle the appropriate response.

*I definitely would not consider giving up activity*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    *I would definitely consider giving up activity*

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## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

### Measuring Your Commitment

**How committed are you?** Think about your closest relationship (if not romantic, then with a best friend, family member, etc.) and then answer the questions below by circling the corresponding number.

- I feel satisfied with our relationship.  
*Do not agree at all*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    *Agree completely*
- My needs for intimacy, companionship, etc., could *not* easily be fulfilled in an alternative relationship.  
*Do not agree at all*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    *Agree completely*
- I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if the relationship were to end.  
*Do not agree at all*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    *Agree completely*
- I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.  
*Do not agree at all*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    *Agree completely*
- I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).  
*Do not agree at all*    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    *Agree completely*

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## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

### Measuring Your Sacrifice Motives

**Why did you sacrifice?** Think of a recent time you made a sacrifice for your partner, a friend or a family member. Check all that apply to measure your approach and avoidance motives for sacrifice.

#### Approach Motives

- To express love for my partner  
 To enhance intimacy in my relationship  
 To make my partner happy

#### Avoidance Motives

- To avoid conflict in my relationship  
 To prevent my partner from getting upset  
 To avoid feeling guilty

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| ___ To feel good about myself         | ___ To prevent my partner from getting angry   |
| ___ To gain my partner's appreciation | ___ To prevent my partner from losing interest |

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# Helping Behavior and Positive Emotions: Implications for Health and Well-Being

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**S**ocial contact is beneficial for health and well-being. People in close relationships are healthier, happier, and live longer than those who are socially isolated (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). But what is it about social contact that is beneficial for health and how do our social relationships influence health and well-being? Traditional approaches to these questions have emphasized the benefits of receiving social support from others. However, tests of the idea that receiving support is beneficial for health have produced contradictory findings (Smith, Fernengel, Holcroft, & Gerald, 1994). Some studies show that receiving support can actually be harmful (S. L. Brown & Vinokur, 2003; Seemen, Bruce, & McAvay, 1996). Below, we describe new research that suggests that at least some of the benefits of social contact may reside in the contribution individuals make to others, in addition to (or as opposed to) support that is received. We begin by reviewing studies of volunteering and helping behavior. We will then discuss the possible roles of positive emotions and social bonds as potential sources of helping-induced benefits, concluding with a theoretical framework that can be applied to understanding why helping behavior may be beneficial for health and well-being.

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING AND MOTIVATION TO VOLUNTEER

Volunteers are more likely than non-volunteers to perceive themselves as being in good health (Young & Glasgow, 1998). In fact, the health benefits of volunteering include reduced mortality risk (Harris & Thoresen, 2005; Musick, Herzog, & House, 1999; Oman, Thoresen, & McMahan, 1999) and less vulnerability to depression (Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Musick & Wilson,

2003; Wilson & Musick, 1999) and serious illness (Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992). For example, Sabin (1993) demonstrated that people who volunteered were less likely to die over the course of 4 years compared to those who did not volunteer. These effects persisted even after controlling for baseline indicators of physical health. Musick and colleagues (1999) found the relationship between volunteering and mortality was curvilinear. People who volunteered too much (i.e., for more than one organization) or people who never volunteered had the highest rates of mortality. The curvilinear relationship, however, stands in contrast to Oman et al's (1999) findings. They studied the relationship between mortality and volunteering among an elderly population, and found that compared to non-volunteers, high volunteers (i.e., those who volunteered for two or more organizations) had a 44% reduced mortality rate. This finding controlled for a number of potential confounds, including physical and psychological health, received support, and sociodemographics.

Although still beneficial, the effects of volunteering may be slightly different depending on age. In their review of the literature, Wilson and Musick (1999) argued that younger individuals who volunteer may display less anti-social behavior. Their argument is supported by findings from a national intervention study with adolescents. In another study, Allen and colleagues (1997) found that, compared to non-volunteers, females who volunteered were less likely to get pregnant and drop out of school (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Kuperminc, 1997). The national study also showed that volunteering was successful in reducing a host of other problem behaviors. In addition to age, some have found that likelihood of volunteering also differs depending on marital status, education, and income. Wilson and Musick (1997) reported that married individuals, individuals with higher levels of education, and those with higher incomes are more likely to volunteer.

What motivates individuals to be a volunteer? In their review, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) outlined several possible models for why people are motivated to volunteer to help. One of the models related to personality or dispositional characteristics. The authors argued that people who have traits of helpfulness or abilities to take another person's situation into perspective may be particularly likely to volunteer to help others. Other reasons that people volunteer is because it may fulfill certain goals such as learning a new skill, developing one's self-concept, and allowing one to express his or her personal values and civic commitment. In addition to these characteristics, individuals may be motivated to help for other, less explicit reasons. For example, individuals may instinctively sense that volunteering is good for them. They may use it to distract themselves from their problems or to increase their positive self-regard. These ideas about motivations for volunteering fit with the large body of literature suggesting that helping others has positive physical and psychological consequences for the helper.

## HEALTH BENEFITS OF HELPING AND MOTIVATION TO HELP

Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, and Smith (2003) conducted one of the first studies to show that helping others, as opposed to receiving help from

others, is associated with improved longevity. They examined the independent influences of both providing and receiving support on mortality risk in a sample of 846 participants from the *Changing Lives of Older Couples* study. They defined support as both (a) instrumental (e.g., childcare, transportation) support to/from neighbors and relatives, and (b) emotional support to/from spouses. Results showed that over a 5-year period, providing support, not receiving it, was consistently associated with a reduced mortality risk. Importantly, the effects were not due to age, gender, social contact, or physical and mental health status, as they controlled for these variables in their analyses.

Recently, W. M. Brown, Consedine, and Magai (2005) replicated Brown et al.'s (2003) results in a large and ethnically diverse sample of older adults. These authors found that after controlling for demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), education, and marital status, it was social support *given*, not received, that was associated with lower morbidity rates. In addition to the demographic variables, they controlled for size of social network (i.e., opportunity to give) and physical function (i.e., ability to give) in their analyses. The latter two variables are important confounds that prior studies have failed to control. Thus, like Brown et al.'s (2003) findings, the results of this study showed that giving is linked to positive health outcomes, irrespective of prior physical health and size of social network.

Helping others has also been found to benefit those who are currently in poor physical health. McClellan, Stanwyck, and Anson (1993) asked beginner dialysis patients to report characteristics of their social support network. Patients reported the amount of social support they received from and provided to family and friends. The authors monitored the patients' health for the next 12 months. They found that giving support was negatively associated with mortality; those who reported higher levels of providing support to both family and friends were less likely to have died over the course of 12 months. There was no association, however, between different levels of receiving support and mortality.

There are benefits to helping others even when one is experiencing an extremely stressful event. Having a spouse die can cause individuals much grief and despair, putting them at risk for depression (Zisook & Schuchter, 2001). Research shows that approximately 12% of these individuals develop major depressive disorders (Futterman, Gallagher, Thompson, Lovett, & Gilewski, 1990), which can persist up to 3 years after the event (Chou & Chi, 2000). Using data from the *Changing Lives of Older Couples* study, Brown and colleagues investigated the effects of helping behavior on individuals' depression after losing their spouse (S. L. Brown et al., 2008a). They examined participants at three time points: Time 1, baseline (before the loss); Time 2 (6 months after loss); and Time 3 (18 months after loss). Of the bereaved individuals who were experiencing high levels of grief, those who reported they provided some kind of help to others during the 6 months after they had experienced the loss of their spouse were more likely to show a decline in depressive symptoms compared to those who did not report that they had provided help to others during this time. This

decline was observed from 6 months after the loss to 18 months after the loss. Importantly, the individuals did not have larger social networks, nor did they enjoy better physical or mental health—analyses controlled for the amount of support received, health status, and personality.

In one of the few experimental studies attempting to separate the effects of providing support from receiving support, Schwartz and Sendor (1999) recruited participants to conduct “phone therapy” with individuals suffering from multiple sclerosis. Both helpers and recipients had multiple sclerosis. During the intervention and one year later, investigators examined both the health of participants who provided the therapy and participants who received it. Results indicated that participants who provided the therapy were 8 times more likely than participants who received it to report increases in subjective well-being. For example, those who provided the therapy reported greater life satisfaction, higher levels of autonomy, and lower levels of depression. In addition, qualitative analyses showed that participants who had provided the therapy felt their lives had undergone a dramatic change because of the experience.

Many of these studies highlight the beneficial effects of engaging in helping behavior, but these findings stand in contrast to the large body of research indicating detrimental effects of being a caregiver (Bookwala, Yee, & Schulz, 2000; Cacioppo, Poehlmann, Burlinson, Berston, & Glaser, 1998; Esterling, Kiecolt-Glaser, Bodnar, & Glaser, 1994; Schulz & Beach, 1999). Indeed, Brown et al. (2008c) argue that many of the studies on caregiving have often been plagued by small sample sizes and extreme cases in which individuals are providing care to spouses with severe disabilities and impairments. In a prospective study, Brown and colleagues used a large representative sample ( $N = 4,298$ ) from the *Health and Retirement Study* to test whether hours spent caregiving (as reported by care recipient) would predict mortality of the caregiver. Unlike past studies on caregiving and health, their study controlled for being married to someone who suffered from severe disability or cognitive impairment. Results showed that those who spent at least 14 hours a week providing care to a spouse were less likely to die during the 7-year study period relative to those who provided no care to their spouses. The results did not differ depending on participant gender, age, race, education, employment, self-reported health, and depression scores.

These results are consistent with numerous studies that document positive physical and psychological health consequences associated with helping others (Avlund, Damsgaard, & Holstein, 1998; S. L. Brown, Brown, House, & Smith, 2008a; Hays, Saunders, Flint, Kaplan, & Blazer, 1997). Despite these findings, we still know very little about what motivates helping behavior in the first place. Researchers still debate the age-old question of whether people help for selfish (i.e., self-interested) reasons or other (i.e., altruistic) reasons (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). Cialdini and others (1973) theorized one of the most popular explanations for why people help. They suggested that helping others allows individuals to relieve their negative moods. One experiment designed to test their negative state relief hypothesis involved participants who either (a) saw another

person being harmed, or (b) caused a person to be harmed. Later, when given the opportunity to help a confederate, both chose to help. However, if participants had already been given an opportunity to feel better (before given the chance to help), they were less likely to help the confederate.

More support for this negative relief state model (Cialdini et al., 1997) comes from research showing that helping behavior increases positive moods. In their first study, Yinon and Landau (1987) showed that giving participants an opportunity to be helpful increased their positive mood. In their second study, they showed that compared to participants who expected their positive mood to deteriorate, those who expected their positive mood to remain intact were less likely to display helping behavior. Because participants who expected to be in a bad mood were more likely to help than those who expected to be in a good mood, the researchers suggested that people help to increase positive moods.

If Cialdini et al's (1973) negative state relief model is accurate, and people help to manage their moods (i.e., relieve bad moods, increase positive ones), then one possibility is that positive moods are responsible for the link between helping and the observed health benefits (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973). The explanation would certainly fit with the growing literature showing that positive emotions are associated with an array of health benefits.

#### CAN POSITIVE EMOTIONS ACCOUNT FOR THE LINK BETWEEN VOLUNTEERING/HELPING AND HEALTH BENEFITS?

One explanation for why volunteering and helping are consistently associated with beneficial health outcomes is because they produce positive emotions, and research shows that positive emotions are associated with an array of beneficial health outcomes. For example, positive emotions often act as a buffer against short-term and long-term stressors. In a study by Fredrickson and Levenson (1998), researchers showed college students a fearful film to induce cardiovascular arousal. After the film, participants watched another film, which was either positive (contentment or amusement), negative (sadness), or neutral. Compared to participants who watched negative or neutral films, those who watched positive ones returned to baseline cardiovascular levels faster.

In a separate study investigating the effects of positive emotions on short-term stressors, Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, and Tugade (2000) asked participants to prepare a speech to induce cardiovascular arousal, although no one actually gave a speech. After preparing the speech, participants watched a film, which was positive (contentment or amusement), negative (sadness), or neutral. Like the study by Fredrickson and Levenson (1998), the results showed those who watched the positive films recovered the fastest from cardiovascular arousal.

The benefits of positive emotions have also been observed in studies of more serious or long-term stressors. In a study by Epel, McEwen, and Ickovics (1998), for example, researchers recruited women who had

experienced a traumatic event in the past. They then exposed them to a series of laboratory stressors. Their results showed that compared to women who had not found positive meaning in their past traumatic event, those who had reported finding positive meaning in the past event showed a healthier stress response (i.e., cortisol adaptation to the laboratory stressors). This study is similar to a study by Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, and Larkin (2003), which examined responses to a traumatic event in real time. These authors assessed the occurrence of positive emotions before and after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Their results indicated that, for resilient individuals, positive emotions were directly responsible for the attenuation of depression after September 11. Both studies provide support that experiencing positive affect amidst a stressful experience may build coping resources and/or increase one's resilience to future stressors.

In addition to stressful events, positive emotions have also been shown to alleviate depression resulting from experiencing chronic stress. In a study of AIDS caregivers, Moscovitz, Acree, and Folkman (1998) examined the levels of positive and negative affect in men who did or did not experience clinical depression after losing their spouse to the disease. Compared to men who did not experience clinical depression, those who did experience depression reported lower levels of positive affect and higher levels of negative affect.

In addition to its stress-buffering capabilities and its role in alleviating depression, research also shows that positive emotions can influence perceptions of physical health as well as actual physical health. In a study by Petit, Kline, T. Gencoz, F. Gencoz, and Joiner (2001), investigators examined the relationship between positive and negative emotions and perceptions of physical symptoms over a 5-week period. Their results showed that compared to participants who reported low levels of positive affect at baseline, those who reported high levels reported fewer physical health symptoms 5 weeks later.

In another study examining the relationship between positive emotions and *actual* physical health (i.e., mortality), Danner, Snowdon, and Friesen (2001) examined the personal essays of young catholic nuns written over 60 years ago. In the essays, the nuns wrote about things such as their childhood, prior religious experiences, and the events that led them to become nuns. After scoring the essays for positive emotion content, the researchers examined mortality rates for the women. Their findings indicated that nuns whose essays contained high positive emotion content lived up to 10 years longer than nuns whose essays contained low positive emotion content.

Fredrickson and others have explored *how* positive emotions affect individuals. She showed that positive emotions can actually build personal resources over time (Fredrickson, 1998). For example, in one prospective study, Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) found evidence of a reciprocal relationship between positive affect and coping. Their results showed that baseline positive affect and coping were related to both positive affect and coping 5 weeks later.

Taken together, there are obvious similarities in the positive emotions and helping/volunteering literatures. First, positive emotions and helping/

volunteering are linked to stress-buffering (W. M. Brown et al., 2005; Henry & Wang, 1998). Second, positive emotions and helping/volunteering studies show associations with increased subjective well-being (Melia, 2000; Petit et al., 2001) and longevity (S. L. Brown et al., 2003; Danner et al., 2001).

One additional way in which studies of positive emotion and studies of helping and volunteering are similar is that they both hypothesize similar cognitive processes. For example, Fredrickson has provided evidence that positive emotions “broaden” cognitions (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). That is, they lead to more novel and flexible thought patterns as well as greater attention spans, all prompting what she calls “big picture” thinking. This big picture thinking relates to Wilson and Musick’s (1999) conceptualization of cognitive activity that occurs when people engage in volunteer work. They suggested that the act of volunteering makes people feel “more connected” to others and “less self-absorbed.”

In sum, we have described evidence showing that helping behavior is linked to positive emotions, and positive emotions are linked to a variety of health benefits. Because both helping behavior and positive emotions have been linked to some of the same health outcomes, it is reasonable to argue that positive emotions mediate the link between helping and health outcomes. If this is true, then positive emotions are directly responsible for the health benefits that helpers experience, and helping is only beneficial to the extent that it produces positive emotions. Only one experiment to date has examined whether effects of helping are mediated by positive emotions.

Brown and colleagues attempted one of the first explorations of the possible mediating role of positive emotions on physiological effects of helping others (S. L. Brown, Johnson, Fredrickson, Cohn, Figa, & Gupta, 2008b). They exposed participants to a stressor, a speech preparation task, and then randomly assigned them to one of three conditions: *control* (no help), *help-reward*, and *help-punish*. Participants randomly assigned to the helping condition worked on a reaction time task of which they were told their performance could help their partner (a confederate) to escape an aversive consequence (i.e., an unspecified pain, verbal, mental, or physical stressor). Participants in the control condition worked on the same task, but were told that their performance would help them to escape their own aversive consequences. Participants in the helping conditions were again randomly assigned to receive either a rewarding consequence for helping (i.e., success on the task) or a punishing consequence for helping (i.e., failure on the task). After participants worked on the reaction time tasks, they were exposed to the stress-induction for one minute. At heightened cardiovascular reactivity, participants were told they would not have to give the speech after all. During this time, participants also learned that their help had been a success (help-reward) or that their help had not been a success (help-punishment). Compared to the control condition, cardiovascular recovery was faster in *both* helping conditions, independent of whether their help had been a success or not. Thus, in this study, effects of helping behavior on recovery were not mediated by positive emotion or reward.

## EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK: SELECTIVE INVESTMENT THEORY

If helping influences are independent of positive emotions, then what might account for a link between helping and health? Selective Investment Theory (SIT) (S. L. Brown, Brown, Schiavone, & Smith, 2007) was developed to explain the motivational basis of helping. In doing so, SIT suggests that social bonds between individuals help individuals suppress self-interest when necessary in order to promote and prioritize the well-being of another person. This means that helping behavior can occur, even when individuals do not perceive direct benefits to the self, such as the anticipation of positive emotions.

According to SIT, social bonds, the “glue of close relationships,” evolved to motivate individuals to suppress selfish tendencies in favor of promoting the well-being of another person (S. L. Brown et al. 2007). Because the act of helping another at a cost to one’s self (altruism) can be exploited, SIT also suggests that social bonds form only when it is evolutionarily adaptive to behave altruistically—conditions referred to as “fitness interdependence”. These conditions include any instance in which the survival and reproductive success of two or more individuals is positively correlated or linked. Evolutionary fates can be linked by shared genes, the potential to have a common offspring, common survival outcomes, and even reciprocal exchanges that create a state of shared dependence for resources or access to mates.

According to Brown et al. (2008a), the potential health benefits of helping others are attributed to the hormonal correlates of helping behavior under conditions of fitness interdependence. The hormone oxytocin, for example, has been implicated as the neuroendocrine basis of social bonding (Carter, 1998; Insel, 1993) and is experimentally linked to altruism under conditions of interdependence in humans (Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Urs, & Ernst, 2005) and non-humans (S. L. Brown & Brown, 2006; Carter, 1998). Further, oxytocin has been shown to be restorative in terms of physical health (Heaphy & Dutton, in press); not only does oxytocin down-regulate the stress hormone cortisol (Carter, 1998), but it also is associated with cellular repair, storage of cell nutrients, and cell growth.

## OTHER MECHANISMS

In this chapter, we have focused on two possibilities to explain the association between helping others and beneficial health outcomes. We proposed that (a) positive emotions may mediate the link between helping and these outcomes, and (b) conditions of fitness interdependence and social bonds precede helping that in turn, is directly linked to beneficial health outcomes.

Because there have been so few experimental studies, we cannot be certain of either of the previously described explanations. Additionally, there are other mechanisms, aside from positive emotions or social bonds, that could account for the link between helping others and beneficial health outcomes. Little to no research has examined the following possibilities as

mediators of the helping-health outcomes link. For example, a sense of mattering could account for the relationship between helping others and beneficial health outcomes. Sense of mattering is characterized by four feelings: (a) feeling that people notice and acknowledge us, (b) feeling that our actions are important to others, (c) feeling that people depend on us for their well-being, and (d) feeling that others are emotionally invested in us and are affected by our fate (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Mattering has been associated with beneficial health outcomes such as reduced depression. Pearlin (1999) first uncovered a relationship between experiencing a sense of mattering and reduced depression and Taylor and Turner (2001) examined the relationship over time. They investigated whether mattering would predict depression after controlling for a number of related constructs such as mastery, emotional resilience, and social contact. Their results showed that sense of mattering was uniquely associated with reduced depression. Thus, one possibility is that individuals help because it increases their sense of mattering, which then affects health outcomes.

A sense of belonging may also account for the health benefits of helping behavior. In a review of the research on this concept, Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that sense of belonging is a fundamental human motivation for which there is an evolutionary basis. The authors proposed that individuals' desires to feel like they belong can explain a broad number of empirical research findings related to well-being and social bonds. To support their argument, they described research highlighting the ease with which individuals form relationships and the difficulty with which individuals dissolve these relationships. The authors also described studies of cognition that show that information about close others is processed more carefully than information about acquaintances or strangers. Finally, they cited studies of emotion in which positive (e.g., happiness, contentment) and negative (e.g., anxiety, depression) emotions were clearly linked to relationship status, including belonging (e.g., being accepted or included) or not belonging (e.g., being rejected or excluded). Thus, sense of belonging is associated with health and well-being, and it is possible that this concept mediates the link between helping and positive health outcomes. For example, helping others may increase peoples' sense of belonging, a feeling which may cause them to experience various positive health outcomes.

Both the concepts of mattering and belonging are nicely illustrated in an episode from *The Andy Griffith Show*. In this episode, Aunt Bee (i.e., caretaker) must leave Andy and Opie to take care of an ill friend, but she worries the boys will not be able to survive without her. When she calls after a couple of days to tell them she will be back the next day, they hurry to clean the house. However, when they finish, Opie remarks to Andy how happy Aunt Bee will be to see that they can manage without her. Andy then realizes what a terrible mistake they have made, and tells Opie they now need to mess up the house in order for Bee to feel that she is needed ("The Andy Griffith Show," 1960). Andy, being the perceptive character that he is, realizes the importance of mattering in relationships. The example is consistent with Brown and colleagues' (2007) suggestion, "It may be

that the best way to support another person is to provide them with an opportunity to feel useful (S. L. Brown, Brown et al., 2007).”

Finally, self-efficacy is a third concept that could potentially mediate the link between helping and positive health outcomes. Research shows that self-efficacy is associated with a number of positive psychological health outcomes (Baumeister, 1991; Taylor & Turner, 2001). Also, some researchers have argued that volunteering may be beneficial because it increases self-efficacy among those who do it (Wilson & Musick, 1999).

Each of the constructs—sense of mattering, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy—could be the mechanism by which helping others produces physical and psychological health benefits. Each has been empirically linked to happiness, reduced depression, and subjective well-being (Baumeister, 1991; Taylor & Turner, 2001). The constructs are also consistent with mediators proposed by Midlarsky (1991), who argued that helping others may distract people from their problems, may increase their social contact and integration with others, may make them feel meaningful, and may increase their feelings of self-efficacy.

In this chapter, we have proposed several mechanisms that could explain the association between helping others and beneficial health outcomes. Because there have been so few experiments, it is impossible to determine whether the constructs are true mediators or are simply associated with helping and health outcomes. The problem brings us to a great issue in the helping literature to date. The studies on helping have too often explored helping as an outcome (i.e., dependent) variable, and not as an independent variable (S. L. Brown et al., 2003). If we want to explore helping as an independent variable, we need studies that manipulate helping. By conducting more experimental research, we can examine the effects of helping and potential mediators of the relationship between helping and health outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

We have outlined several possible ways in which helping others may be beneficial for the helper and offered explanations for why helping is linked to positive health outcomes. Although positive emotions have been suggested to mediate the link between helping and health benefits, preliminary experimental work (S. L. Brown, Brown et al., 2007) suggests that they are not the key. Instead, a promising theoretical framework, Selective Investment Theory (SIT), proposes a direct link between helping and positive health outcomes, with helping being preceded by a strong social bond. Thus far, the theory has been successful in explaining a number of empirical observations from both human and animal studies (S. L. Brown & Brown, 2006; Carter, 1998; Kosfeld et al., 2005). Finally, because so few experimental studies have ruled out alternative explanations such as sense of mattering, belonging, and self-efficacy, we cannot be certain of the precise mechanism by which helping is linked to positive health outcomes. These questions along with studies that examine the physiological consequences of helping others should be addressed by future research.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### How Does Helping Make You Feel?

In this chapter, we provided evidence that there are positive health benefits to helping others. We told you about studies that linked helping behavior to positive physical health outcomes such as reduced morbidity and mortality. We described experiments showing that helping others (a) produces positive emotional states in the helper, and (b) produces positive physiological changes in the body.

But are people aware of such effects of their helping behavior? We think that the answer is probably no. Most likely, this is because people typically do not stop to think about and reflect on how helping others makes them feel. Now that you know about the research, we would like you to try the following personal mini-experiment.

Pick two days to record a diary of your thoughts and feelings. One of the days should be a day in which you will engage in some sort of helping behavior—ideally this would be a planned helping activity (it could be anything from helping out a friend to formal volunteering). The other day should be a day in which you do not engage in any helping behavior. Depending on some of you, this could be difficult, but try your best. Make sure to spread the two days out by at least two weeks or more. During each day, you should record the emotions you are experiencing and thoughts you are having, *throughout the day*. Allow yourself to be vague in expressing your thoughts and emotions. Don't try to focus on your activities of the day, just write freely—about anything. You should record your emotions and thoughts 5–7 times each day and don't forget to label the days! One of the first times should be in the morning when you wake up, and then every 3–4 hours or so until you go to bed.

A couple of months later, you should take out both diaries and see if you can pick up differences in your overall mood and your thoughts. The differences may be subtle—but what things did you choose to write about on the day you engaged in helping behavior versus the day you did not? What sort of “mood” does your writing have on the day you helped versus the day you did not?

By completing this exercise, you may gain better insight into how helping behavior influences your moods and thoughts. You along with most other people have probably never reflected on how their helping activities influence their emotions and thoughts. It's possible that by completing this reflecting exercise, you will realize just how good helping others is for you. Then perhaps you can use it to your advantage—seeking out other opportunities to help—so that you can experience the benefits!

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# Emotional Intelligence: Living Intelligently with Emotions

Susan A. David and Nassim Ebrahimi

Sarah is a successful businesswoman who travels often for executive meetings. Every year, the international company she works for holds an annual conference in New York City where all the executives present their annual progress reports. Sarah has spent months preparing for this important day. Once at the airport, she finds out that mechanical problems have delayed her early morning flight. She knows that if she does not board a flight soon, she will miss the meeting that afternoon. Her only option is to change airlines and hope that her checked luggage is transferred correctly, but all other flights are full.

Jack and Tim have been friends since college and are avid campers. Since their freshman year in college, they have been taking an annual camping and hiking trip together in the Appalachian Mountains. This year is the 10th anniversary of their trip, and Jack has decided to purchase all new camping equipment in its honor. He spends months researching the details of the new gear, and the area of the Appalachian Trail they will explore. Jack and Tim agree on the date and request time off work. One week before the trip, Tim calls and tells Jack that he has decided to take his girlfriend on a cruise that week instead.

Mary has been working for a telecommunications company for one year and has applied to fill an internal vacancy. This new appointment will be in upper management at a higher salary. Several of Mary's co-workers have also applied for the position, including Richard whom Mary considers a close friend. On Monday morning Mary is called into the vice president's office and is informed that she has been selected for the promotion. However, she is asked not to let anyone know until the other candidates have been notified by management that the position has been filled. She leaves the vice president's office to attend her next appointment—a project-planning session that involves many of these other applicants.

John, a second grade elementary school teacher, has taught at a school for 2 years and is up for his annual review. In an early morning meeting he learns that his contract will not be renewed for the following year, but he must honor his current contract and finish the remaining month of classes. John is devastated. Ten minutes after the review, the bell rings to signal the start of the school day. John returns to his classroom and begins teaching.

Each of these scenarios demonstrates the prevalence of emotionally charged situations in everyday life. Many contexts are laden with emotions, and require cognitive and emotional skills to handle them. People are equipped to varying degrees with the abilities necessary to problem-solve in these types of situations. Emotional intelligence is the ability to *recognize*<sup>1</sup>, *use*, *understand*, and *manage* emotions effectively, both internally and in others. It is the set of problem-solving abilities that we use to resolve emotional challenges.

#### EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Historically there have been two competing Western approaches to explaining the role of emotions in life (Forgas, 2001; Forgas, 2002a; Keltner, Anderson, & Gonzaga, 2002; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The first, which we will call the *traditional perspective*, regards emotions as disorganizing and irrational, and as inferior to thinking (Forgas, 2001). This deficits-based view suggests that at the core, emotions disrupt our effectiveness and detract from our ability to come to good conclusions about what is a useful course of action. Questions like “did you decide that with your head or with your heart?” exemplify the idea that decisions *can* be devoid of emotions and that unemotional decisions are best.

The second approach, which we will call the *functionalist perspective*, regards emotions as fundamentally adaptive (Plutchik, 2001). This view, which dates back to Charles Darwin (1872–1965), holds that emotions play a vital evolutionary role—as a resource that helps us to communicate, and that provides information about our relationships and how well we are achieving our goals (Detweiler-Bedell & Salovey, 2002; Ekman, 2003). Feeling some anxiety, while not pleasant, serves as a timely reminder to prepare for an important test; experiencing joy while interacting with good friends highlights that we value these relationships and should guard against being neglectful of them.

Debates within psychology have reflected this tension between the traditional *deficits-based* and functional *resource-based* approaches to emotions. In fact, the purpose of emotion, its value, and its relationship to thinking have long been areas of scientific and theoretical concern (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Forgas, 2002a; Plutchik, 2001). Freud’s emphasis on the pathological nature of emotion (Mayer, 2001) and its ability to undermine rational thinking (Forgas, 2001), and the classic behaviorist perspective that emotions fall outside legitimate scientific endeavor (Plutchik, 2001; Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2002), are markers of psychology’s misgivings about the role of emotions.

From at least the early 1980s however, research began to show that emotions and cognitive and behavioral processes are interdependent (Clark, 2002). The finding that happy people make more positive judgments, and sad people make more negative ones (Forgas, 2002a) indicated that emotions may affect the interpretation of our own and others' behaviors. Mood was also shown to influence the types of memories we retrieve and how we solve problems (Fiedler & Bless, 2000; Forgas, 2002b; Forgas & Moylan, 1987; Mayer, 1995). For example, sad people are more likely to remember sad events in their lives or more negative words from a list whereas happy people are more likely to remember positive memories and words (Knight, Maines, & Robinson, 2002). Additionally, those in a positive mood are more likely to use creative problem-solving strategies (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). Similarly, neuroscientific studies demonstrated that sound social reasoning and decision-making are reliant on emotion (Damasio, 1994).

This evidence of the interdependence of emotion and thinking encouraged renewed discussion about the relevance and adaptive potential of emotion (Bless, 2002; Campos, Mumme, Kermoian, & Campos, 1994; David, 2004; Forgas, 2001; Stanton & Franz, 1999). It also provided a fertile context for new models accounting for the influence of mood on thought and social behavior, and on how individual differences in the integration of emotion and reasoning (i.e., emotional intelligence) could help psychologists to understand adaptive outcomes (Detweiler-Bedell & Salovey, 2002; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004a; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

At the same time, theorists also started to expand their views on what constituted an intelligence. For example, Howard Gardner, in his theory of multiple intelligences, began to write about the importance of personal intelligences, among other intelligences like spatial, logical-mathematical, musical, linguistic, and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (Gardner, 1999). According to his theory, the personal intelligences include interpersonal intelligence or the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of others, and intrapersonal intelligence, the ability to understand and appreciate one's own feelings, fears, and motivations.

In the late 1980s, John Mayer and Peter Salovey began to develop a theory of emotional intelligence. They suggested that emotional intelligence was a previously overlooked intelligence: that just as people could be intelligent with spatial and verbal information as measured by traditional cognitive intelligence tests, so could they be intelligent with emotional information (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000a; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000a). Organizing findings from separate bodies of research, they described emotional intelligence as a composite of skills involving the appraisal and expression of emotions in the self and in others, the regulation of emotion in the self and in others, and the use of emotion in adaptive ways (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). They proposed that life tasks are laden with emotional information, and that differences in the ability to process this information may influence individual success and well-being.

Mayer and Salovey's theory is consistent with the functional perspective of emotions and with Positive Psychology. Rather than viewing these core

human phenomena from a deficits-based perspective, emotions are viewed as helpful rather than harmful (Mayer, 2001; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 1999).

Emotional intelligence theory and its popularization through the 1995 publication of Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence*, has sparked widespread lay (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Gibbs, 1995) and scientific (Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2003; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004; Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002) discussion of the role of emotional skills in effectiveness. The concept has been explored empirically with regard to social relationships, gender, and psychological health, as well as in applied settings including the workplace and therapy (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004; Côté & Miners, 2006; David & Jackson, 2007; Eack, Hogarty, Greenwald, Hogarty, & Kehavan, 2007; Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 1999; Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Lopes, 2003).

## CURRENT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Since the popularization of emotional intelligence, a range of alternative definitions and associated measures has been proposed. These definitions and concepts can be divided into two main groups—*mixed* and *ability models* of emotional intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000a).

*Mixed models* are viewed as those describing emotional intelligence as broadly construed sets of personal characteristics that incorporate aspects of emotions and intelligence among other traits (Brackett et al., 2004; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000a). *Ability models* are those that hold emotional intelligence to be a narrowly defined, specific set of abilities that are fundamentally concerned with emotions and intelligence.

### Mixed Models of Emotional Intelligence

Reuven Bar-On's (2006) model of emotional intelligence focuses on emotional and social competence. He describes emotional intelligence as one's "common sense" and ability to cope in the world. Using a wide-encompassing definition, he regards emotional intelligence as an "array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (Bar-On, 1997, p. 16).

Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (BarOn EQ-i; 1997) was originally developed to assess the determinants of psychological well-being and was subsequently adapted as a measure of emotional intelligence. The instrument is comprised of 15 factors including Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Empathy, Social Responsibility, Reality Testing, Problem Solving, and Stress Tolerance that are intended to cluster around five composite scales: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Adaptability, Stress Management, and General Mood (Bar-On, 1997; cf. Palmer, Ramesh, Gignac, & Stough, 2003). The EQ-i is available as a self-report measure that asks

respondents to answer questions about how likely they are to think, feel, or act a particular way, and as a multi-rater or 360-degree feedback that asks for ratings about this likelihood from both the respondent and others.

In 1998, Goleman revised his mixed model of emotional intelligence presented in his 1995 book to take a workplace focus. Expanding on previous work, he and his colleagues identified items that were believed to comprehensively describe emotional competencies (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Sala, 2002). These competencies were grouped into four categories: (a) self-awareness—“knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions”; (b) self-management—“managing one’s internal states, impulses, and resources”; (c) social awareness—“how people handle relationships and awareness of others’ feelings, needs, and concerns”; and (d) social skills—“the skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others” (Sala, 2002).

The competencies are indexed by the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI; Boyatzis et al., 2000; Sala, 2002) which is administered in 360-degree format, garnering feedback from people in different roles throughout one’s life. Competency examples include Self-Confidence (Self-Awareness), Conscientiousness (Self-Management), Service Orientation (Social Awareness), and Teamwork and Collaboration (Social Skills).

### Criticisms of the Mixed Models of Emotional Intelligence

Although mixed models of emotional intelligence are popular, five interrelated concerns have been directed at them and their associated measures. We will briefly outline these concerns as they provide clarity on why we refer only to the Mayer–Salovey model and its related instrument, the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), for the remainder of the chapter.

First, mixed models have been criticized for assembling lists of dispositional, motivational, and situational traits and competencies in an often undifferentiated, overly inclusive, and atheoretical manner (Caruso, Mayer, & Salovey, 2002; MacCann, Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2003; Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2004; McCrae, 2000). For example, having a service orientation to one’s customers, being conscientious, and being self-confident, as measured in the ECI, may describe qualities that are desirable. However, these very different concepts do not necessarily integrate into a single “emotional intelligence” construct (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000a; McCrae, 2000). In fact, these variables may be so different that they may even conflict with one another. For example, increased self-confidence may lead to taking advantage of others as opposed to helping behaviors (Baumeister, 1997).

Second, when a psychological construct is positioned as a new concept, as is the case with emotional intelligence, it is important that it measures something new and distinctive, and that this discriminant validity is demonstrated theoretically and statistically. This prevents researchers from conducting redundant studies as a result of the same construct being described

with different labels. The mixed models of emotional intelligence contain variables that closely resemble those that have already been well-described and well-researched, including components of personality such as extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, affect, self-esteem and optimism (MacCann et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 2004; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000a; McCrae, 2000). For this reason, instruments based on mixed models of emotional intelligence may not predict anything new or different from existing psychological instruments that measure established concepts such as personality (MacCann et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 2004).

Third, although emotional intelligence assessed by mixed models may predict a variety of outcomes, these findings may be an artifact due to content overlap in the predictor and outcome measures. For example, since Goleman and colleagues incorporate questions about leadership competencies in the Social Skills cluster of the ECI, finding relationships between the ECI as a predictor variable and leadership as an outcome variable (unpublished study by Stagg & Gunter, 2000 cited in Sala, 2002) is unsurprising. It may not be that emotional intelligence measured with the ECI truly predicts leadership, but rather that similar questions have been asked twice—once in the predictor measure and once in the outcome measure, generating spurious results.

Fourth, despite the use of the label emotional intelligence, a number of the variables in these models target neither emotion nor contemporary notions of intelligence (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Caruso et al., 2002; MacCann et al., 2003; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000a). For example, the Problem-Solving and Reality Testing scales of the EQ-i and the Service Orientation and Organizational Awareness scales of the ECI are unrelated to emotion (MacCann et al., 2003). The Assertiveness, Self-Actualization, and Independence scales of the EQ-i, and the Self-Confidence, Leadership, and Change Catalyst scales of the ECI are not indices of intelligence. Using the term *emotional intelligence* to describe variables that do not address emotions or intelligence has led to criticisms of the construct validity of such measures (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; MacCann et al., 2003; Matthews et al., 2004; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2004a).

Last, using self-report or 360-degree measures to assess emotional intelligence is not likely to be an accurate measurement method. The reason for this can be understood by an analogy with cognitive intelligence: When psychologists want to assess people's cognitive intelligence they do not ask, for example, "How intelligent do you think you are?" or "How intelligent do you think Jane is?". Instead, they directly assess cognitive intelligence by having respondents perform tasks that engage them in problem-solving in the area of interest (e.g., mathematical or language ability). The research bears this direct performance-testing method out—people are not particularly accurate at judging their own or others' intelligence with only low to moderate relationships between these ratings and actual scores on cognitive intelligence tests (Paulhus, Lysy, & Yik, 1998). This is why self- and 360-degree reports are not used in the place of cognitive intelligence tests.

If we consider emotional intelligence a form of intelligence as denoted by the use of the label, then the same measurement issue applies. Indeed,

initial research shows only weak relationships between self- and other-reports of emotional intelligence and the MSCEIT, which is a performance test (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; David, 2005). Instead of measuring people's actual emotional intelligence abilities, such self- and other-judgments may index beliefs or desires about these abilities, including self-concepts, self-efficacy, preferred ways of behaving, or self-esteem (Ciarrochi, Chan, Caputi, & Roberts, 2001; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000b; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001; Salovey, Woolery, & Mayer, 2001). While these variables are interesting, they are not the construct of interest. That is, we are not aiming to measure people's opinions, perceptions, beliefs, or confidence about themselves or others. We are aiming to measure a defined set of skills—their emotional intelligence. Just as performance or ability tests are the gold standard in cognitive intelligence testing, it is likely that they are the most appropriate method of assessing emotional intelligence (Caruso et al., 2002; Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000a; Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b).

### The Mayer–Salovey Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

Emotions involve responses to stimuli that include feeling states, psychological changes, impulses to action, and goal-directed behavior (Mansstead & Fischer, 2000; Plutchik, 2001; Russell, 2003). Intelligence involves the ability to engage in problem-solving or abstract reasoning about the content at hand (Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000b). By definition, emotional intelligence concerns emotions *and* intelligence. Consistent with this, the Mayer–Salovey perspective integrates these two areas (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000a; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2004a) and centers on the ability to reason with and problem-solve about emotion in four domains: Perceiving Emotion, Using Emotion to Facilitate Thinking, Understanding Emotion, and Managing Emotion.

Emotions help us to communicate with others and also provide information on how we are doing in relation to our goals and the environment (Bowlby, 1969; Ekman, 2003; Izard, Ackerman, Schoff, & Fine, 2000; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2004a). Evidence of the universal quality and biological nature of core emotion processing skills demonstrates the importance of emotions (Ekman, 2003; Scherer, 2000; Scherer, Banse, & Wallbott, 2001; Slater & Quinn, 2001). For example, across cultures facial expressions representing the basic emotions are portrayed similarly (Ekman, 2003), as is true with vocal representations of emotion (Scherer et al., 2001).

The Perceiving Emotion branch of the MSCEIT indexes these core emotion-processing skills. Emotional messages are conveyed through facial expressions and vocal tone, as well as, posture and inanimate stimuli, such as landscapes, color, and designs (Mayer, DiPaolo, & Salovey, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Mayer and colleagues propose that people who accurately identify and express emotions have an advantage over those who do not (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 2000; Salovey et al., 2001).

They may be more skilled at responding sensitively and flexibly to environments and better at building supportive networks (Anderson & Phelps, 2000; Salovey et al., 1999; Salovey et al., 2000; Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002). The manager who is able to recognize by the look on her face that his employee is upset, is better placed to respond proactively and adaptively, compared with the manager who does not identify these emotional cues.

The second branch of the model, Using Emotion to Facilitate Thought, concerns the influences of emotions on effective problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making, and creativity (Brackett & Salovey, 2004; Salovey et al., 1999; Salovey et al., 2000; Salovey et al., 2002).

Emotions can enhance everyday cognitive activities in a number of interrelated ways (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 2000). First, they can redirect and help to prioritize our thinking, enabling us to focus on what is important (Mayer, 2001; Salovey et al., 2000; Salovey et al., 2002). When used in the appropriate context, emotions may guide decisions (DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000), and help us to adapt to the environment (Bless, 2002). For example, anxiety the day before an important presentation can encourage us to spend time preparing, in place of reading a magazine or going out with friends.

Second, positive and negative emotions facilitate distinct information-processing and problem-solving styles (Clore & Tamir, 2002; Fiedler & Bless, 2000; Isen et al., 1987). Positive emotions are associated with enhanced innovative ability, and creative solutions whereas negative emotions are related to more focused, systematic processing (Bless, 2002; Forgas, 2002b; Isen, 2002; Isen et al., 1987). Positive emotions may help an aspiring entrepreneur to come up with a new and exciting business idea; negative emotions may help him to evaluate whether his idea is marketable, and to think of and prepare for some of the criticisms that might be directed at the idea by potential investors.

Third, since emotions influence information-processing and judgment-formation (Forgas, 2001; Forgas, 2002b; Salovey & Birnbaum, 1989; Salovey et al., 2002), variations in emotion can provide multiple perspectives of the same situation (Mayer, 2001; Salovey et al., 2002). The ability to appreciate a situation or problem from different perspectives can help us to engage in deeper, more well-rounded and creative planning (Mayer, Gaschke, Braverman, & Evans, 1992; Mayer & Hanson, 1995; Salovey et al., 2002). If you have ever struggled to solve a problem or tackle a challenge and then had the answer become readily apparent when you least expected it, often during times of relaxation, then you will have experienced the perspective-taking that accompanies changes in emotional state.

Last, recalling past emotional experiences can aid current decision-making and reasoning (Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 2000). For example, generating emotions you have experienced in previous work situations, can help you to understand, and apply these in the present context (Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The ability to recreate emotions in real time may assist us when making life decisions, such as whether to take a job or to engage in prosocial empathetic behaviors (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

An awareness of the effects of emotions on thought and the ability to harness these effects are proposed as core characteristics of the emotionally intelligent individual (Forgas, 2001; Salovey, Hsee, & Mayer, 1993).

Some emotions are a combination of other emotions (Izard et al., 2000). Joy and acceptance may unite in love (Mayer, 2001) and joy and sorrow in wistfulness (Salovey et al., 2000). These combinations may be subtle, complex, or seemingly contradictory (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 2002) as with shame-anger or love-hate combinations (Izard et al., 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996). Emotion terms can be mentally represented as vague groupings, organized around abstract prototypes (Russell, 1991; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). For instance, sadness may be conceptualized as the best example of the depression, despair, sorrow, and hopelessness emotions family (Shaver et al., 1987).

Emotions are also ordered (Izard et al., 2000). There is some predictability and coherence regarding what stimuli will provoke particular emotions and how these emotions may progress or change over time (Izard et al., 2000; Plutchik, 2001). Emotions may have common underlying causes concerning the individual's relationship with others and the physical environment (Ekman, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus, 2000). Anger, for example, tends to arise in response to interference when we are trying to pursue our goals (Ekman, 2003; Izard et al., 2000; Plutchik, 2001; Shaver et al., 1987) or when we believe that we are being physically or psychologically harmed (Ekman, 2003; Shaver et al., 1987). It often reflects a sense of injustice at the interference or belief of harm (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Shaver et al., 1987). Additionally, unabated anger can transition into rage (Plutchik, 1997, 2003).

The third branch of the Mayer–Salovey model, Understanding Emotion, centers on the ability to analyze and appreciate emotional information (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 2000; Salovey et al., 2002). It involves the capacity to label feelings, recognize emotion families, understand the causes of emotions and the meanings that they convey, and have insight into how they will progress or change (Brackett & Salovey, 2004; Mayer, 2001; Salovey et al., 2000; Salovey et al., 2002). Labeling emotions, and appreciating their features, causes, and transitions are skills that develop normally over time (Fitness, 2001; Harris, 1993; Izard, 2001; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Pons, Lawson, Harris, & de Rosnay, 2003). However, there are individual differences (Harris, 1993; Pons et al., 2003) and those who are emotionally intelligent are said to appreciate this information with an advanced level of sophistication (Fitness, 2001).

Well-developed skills at Understanding Emotion may assist a colleague to understand how a team member who has recently been offered a better job and has resigned is experiencing an amalgam of emotions—*anxiety* about the future, *sadness* at the thought of leaving the rest of the team, and *excitement* about career possibilities. These skills may help a customer service agent to appreciate that a client who has been overcharged is feeling slightly frustrated but also hopeful that the issue can be quickly resolved, and enables the agent to predict that if resolution takes too long, the client is likely to start feeling angry and that this anger will intensify.

The ability to understand emotion involves cognitive processes like language and propositional thought (Anderson & Phelps, 2000; Brackett & Salovey, 2004; Izard, 2001; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2004a; Pons et al., 2003). Since this branch is the most cognitively saturated of the four emotional intelligence skills it most highly relates with cognitive intelligence (Mayer, 2001; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001).

Your ability to pinpoint what you or another person is really feeling, to accurately analyze what has caused this feeling, and to predict how these emotions will change over time is your Understanding Emotion skill.

Managing Emotion, the fourth branch of the model, concerns the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and others (Brackett & Salovey, 2004; Salovey et al., 2002). First, this involves being open to the information that comes with both pleasant and unpleasant emotions and moods (Mayer, 2001; Salovey et al., 2000). Since emotions convey information about our relationship with the environment (Lazarus, 1991; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2004a; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004b; Plutchik, 2001; Salovey et al., 2000), openness to these may help us to calibrate attempts to regulate our actions in a dynamic and adaptive manner. For example, a manager who is open to the concerns of his team when implementing a system change, is positioned to deal with these more effectively than had he simply ignored these emotions.

Second, this branch concerns the effective use of emotion management strategies to bring about or maintain optimal feelings in ourselves and others (Brackett & Salovey, 2004; Salovey et al., 2000). Individuals use a wide range of strategies to regulate their moods and emotions including exercise, eating, venting, distraction, and relaxation techniques (Larsen, 2000; Salovey et al., 2002; Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994). The theory of emotional intelligence is consistent with the view that intelligence involves flexible, contextually-appropriate responses, and is not prescriptive about which strategies should be used (Mayer, 2001). In general, however, some strategies may be more constructive than others (Gross, 2001; John & Gross, 2004; Salovey et al., 2002; Thayer, 2000). For example, reappraising one's emotions may be more beneficial to social, psychological, and cognitive functioning than suppressing emotional expression (Gross, 2001; John & Gross, 2004). For example, the person who is taken aback by something a friend has said and manages this by asking herself whether the friend really meant it, and whether there were other stressors that could have contributed to the friend's statement or her interpretation of it, is engaging in *reappraisal*. The person who becomes angry or upset and wants to address her concerns but instead manages her emotions by ignoring is engaging in *suppression*.

### Assessing the Mayer–Salovey Model with the MSCEIT

Ability or performance instruments are said to be the gold standard in intelligence research (Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b). These measures engage the respondent in mental processing and abstract reasoning tasks, and assess

their performance against set criteria (Carroll, 1993; Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2000b). The Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test Version 2 (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002a) is a performance measure that operationalizes Mayer and Salovey’s ability theory of emotional intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b). Its purpose is to assess the ability to reason with and about emotion in the four emotional intelligence domains (Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002b).

Each of the four skills is measured with two tasks. Perceiving Emotion involves the ability to accurately identify emotional signals in pictures. The *Faces Task* presents a series of faces and asks the respondent to identify the presence of different emotions in each. For example, the test-taker is asked to rate on a scale of 1 (no happiness) to 5 (extreme happiness), how much that feeling is being expressed. These ratings are applied to a range of emotions, such as happiness, fear, surprise, disgust, and excitement, for each stimulus. Similarly, the *Pictures Task* depicts a series of landscapes and abstract designs, and requires the respondent to rate how much of each feeling is expressed in the image.

“Using Emotion to Facilitate Thought” describes a person’s ability to consider emotions in their cognitive activities (Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000b; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b). The *Facilitation Task* assesses the respondent’s knowledge of how different moods interact to support thinking and reasoning (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b). For example, the person is asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (useful), how useful a specified mood, such as anger, might be when composing a military march (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002a). The *Sensations Task* requires the respondent to generate an emotion and then compare that emotion to a range of sensory modalities, such as light, color, and temperature (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b). For example, the test-taker is asked to imagine feeling guilty and to rate from 1 (not alike) to 5 (very much alike), how similar the feeling of guilt is to cold, blue, and sweet (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002a).

The third domain, Understanding Emotion, assesses the respondent’s understanding that emotions form complex and interrelated symbol sets and that particular emotional groups have a specific progression over time (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b; Mayer et al., 2004a). For the *Blends Task*, the respondent is required to disassemble complex emotions into their parts and conversely to assemble simple emotions into complex feelings (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b). For example, the test-taker is provided with a list of emotion sets and asked which emotion set combines to most closely resemble a feeling of concern (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002a). The *Changes Task* assesses the respondent’s ability to connect contexts with particular emotions (e.g., that a situation involving loss might make someone feel sad) and on the transition of emotions over time (e.g., that anger may change to rage).

Managing Emotion focuses on the flexible and adaptive management of emotions (Mayer, 2001). For the *Emotion Management Task*, the test-taker is required to rate the effectiveness of alternative actions in obtaining a specific emotion for individuals in hypothetical situations. In a sample

situation, a person is described as experiencing *anhedonia* which is the inability to experience pleasure relative to what used to be pleasurable or what other people find pleasurable. A series of four actions is listed including calling one's friends, and staying alone and trying to work out for oneself what is wrong. For each of the actions that the person could undertake, the respondent is asked to rate how effective these would be in alleviating the anhedonia, helping the person feel better. The *Emotional Relations Task* is similar to the *Emotional Management Task*, but is concerned with regulating emotions in situations involving others rather than regulating one's own emotions.

### The Ability Model in Action

We return to one of the vignettes from the beginning of this chapter to show how each of the emotional skills described in the Mayer–Salovey ability model would relate to it. Mary, who just received the news of her promotion, is now on her way to a meeting with the rest of her co-workers. She has been asked not to tell the other applicants that she has been selected until they have been notified in person. As she enters the meeting room she sees her friend Richard, who had mentioned his certainty at being offered the job. Richard is relaxed and jovial as he recounts a story from the previous day. Mary's ability to accurately identify what Richard is feeling based on his facial expression and body language is a marker of her Perceiving or Recognizing Emotion skill.

The agenda for this meeting is to make some key decisions about the project, including identifying a budget and timeline. Mary is overjoyed by the news of her promotion and understands that the positive emotions she is experiencing may affect her judgment and thinking, making her more optimistic about meeting project deadlines than might be appropriate. Her knowledge of how her emotions may impact on her thinking is an index of her Using Emotion ability.

Mary is experiencing happiness, excitement, nervousness, pride, and empathy for the other applicants. She surmises that when Richard finds out about her promotion he is likely to feel rejection, disappointment, and frustration because it is the second time his application has been unsuccessful; and yet feel genuinely pleased for Mary. She also forecasts that Richard will probably feel despondent for the next few weeks and may be quieter than usual.

Her ability to appreciate how complex and even seemingly contradictory emotions can occur simultaneously, to identify their causes, and to predict how they are likely to change over time, is a marker of Mary's Understanding Emotion ability.

As they begin to discuss the project, Mary is careful to conceal her happiness out of sensitivity to management and the feelings of her co-workers. While there is a time for celebration, this is not it. Right now, she needs to harness rather than deflate the team's motivation to ensure the project's success. Mary acts as if nothing has happened and conducts the meeting as

scheduled. Her ability to temporarily moderate her joy and to effectively harness her own and the team's emotions is indexed by the Managing Emotions branch of the model.

### Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important

Emotional intelligence, as assessed by the MSCEIT, is related to a range of demographic variables and important life outcomes. Studies have explored how these abilities are associated with psychological health, social relationships, gender, and workplace performance (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Côté & Miners, 2006; Côté, Miners, & Moon, 2006; David, 2005; Lopes, Brackett, Nezlek, Schütz, Sellin, & Salovey, 2004). Recent research has also investigated whether these abilities can be developed (Chang, 2006; Eack et al., 2007). We review a selection of these findings below.

### Emotional Intelligence Abilities, and Coping and Psychological Health

Since emotional intelligence involves effectively reasoning with and about affective phenomena (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), and adaptive coping and psychological health are partly dependent on the successful use and orchestration of these phenomena (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Salovey et al., 1999; Summerfeldt & Endler, 1996), relationships between emotional intelligence, and coping and psychological health would be theoretically congruent. These expectations have been proposed in the academic literature (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Salovey et al., 1999; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Emotionally intelligent individuals should have a greater capacity to navigate emotional information and to integrate this in a coherent manner with their behaviors, thoughts, goals (Salovey et al., 1999), past experiences, and their current situation. This may assist them in responding to, rather than avoiding, stressors. Their skills, particularly those that center on problem-solving about emotion management, may help them to allocate an appropriate amount of attention to emotions and moods, and to achieve mood clarity (David, 2004; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 1999; Salovey et al., 2000). They should demonstrate lower levels of dwelling on emotions or rumination (Salovey et al., 1999).

Emotionally intelligent individuals should also be less suppressive of emotions. That is, their reasoning skills should assist them in being adequately open to distressing emotions, achieving an effective and timely closure of these, and implementing effective emotion management strategies that support the resolution of the distress. This resolution should obviate the need to suppress emotional expression. Additionally, they should be able to effectively reason about how to create and maintain positive emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) in a manner that is congruent with their longer-term goals (Salovey et al., 2000).

Overall, these skills should confer benefits that include less maladaptive coping, greater levels of well-being, greater levels of perceived control over

mood experience, and lower levels of psychological morbidity (Ciarrochi et al., 2001; Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000a; Salovey et al., 1999; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). A growing body of research supports these hypotheses.

In exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and coping, we found that individuals with higher emotional intelligence scores across student and community samples were less likely to use avoidance coping strategies like denial (“I said to myself this isn’t real”), mental disengagement (“I turn to work or other substitute activities to take my mind off things”), and behavioral disengagement (“I admit to myself that I can’t deal with it and quit trying”) (David, 2005). Other studies have similarly found that higher emotional intelligence is associated with a lower likelihood of using avoidant coping styles (Gohm, Corser, & Dalsky, 2005).

Rumination, which can be viewed as a misguided coping style (Summerfeldt & Endler, 1996), is defined by the tendency to focus passively and repetitively on one’s negative emotions and the meaning of these (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991). Individuals who are experiencing negative emotions may ruminate in an attempt to understand their stressors, and to regulate their negative affect (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993). Paradoxically, these attempts to attend to the source of their distress may perpetuate their moods and impede adjustment (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993; Summerfeldt & Endler, 1996). In an initial investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence and rumination, participants with higher scores on the Managing Emotion subscale of the MSCEIT were less likely to have a ruminative response style 6 months later (David, 2005).

Brackett and Mayer (2003), using the Ryff (1989) well-being scales indexing the dimensions of Self-acceptance, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, Positive Relations with Others, Personal Growth, and Autonomy, found that those with higher emotional intelligence scores experienced greater psychological well-being. In a community sample David and Jackson (2007) found that people with higher levels of emotional intelligence were less likely to experience psychological morbidity including fewer psychological symptoms, lower levels of depression severity and depression-related impairment, and less anxiety. These results remained significant after controlling for personality and cognitive intelligence. Others have found similar relationships: respondents with higher emotional intelligence had fewer depressive symptoms and a lower tendency to experience anxiety (Head cited in Brackett & Salovey, 2004).

Although work on emotional intelligence and coping and psychological health is at an early stage, these results suggest that emotional abilities may play a role in such outcomes.

### Emotional Intelligence Abilities, and Social and Behavioral Competence

Studies on the relationships of emotional intelligence to social and behavioral outcomes present an emerging picture of individuals with relatively higher emotional intelligence. Socially, they have fewer negative peer

interactions and more positive ones, as well as fewer incidents of behavioral deviance like vandalism and physical fights (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2004; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003). They attempt to convey an interpersonal impression of being likeable, competent, and worthy, and are less likely to try to present themselves as helpless and requiring nurturance (Lopes et al., 2004). In their intimate relationships too, they are less likely to endorse an attachment style characterized by low self-worth and an anxious seeking of acceptance.

People with relatively higher emotional intelligence use less drugs and alcohol (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2004). They are also likely to have higher academic performance (Ashkanasy & Dasborough, 2003; Barchard, 2003; Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2004) and to have greater self-esteem on the school abilities and self-regard dimensions (Lopes et al., 2004).

### Emotional Intelligence Ability and Gender

Research on gender differences in emotional skills in general, but not the emotional intelligence construct per se, shows good evidence that women outperform men in a variety of emotion-related skills (Manstead, 1992; Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b). Women are more facially and gesturally expressive (Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2000; Noller & Ruzzene, 1991) and in experimental studies their facial expressions are more accurately identified by observers (Hall et al., 2000; Manstead, 1992). They are more adept at interpreting posed and intentional non-verbal expressions, particularly those communicated through the face (Hall et al., 2000; Manstead, 1992; Thayer & Johnsen, 2000). Women also represent emotional experience with greater complexity and differentiation than do men (Barrett, Lane, Sechrest, & Schwartz, 2000). As compared to men, women also appear to use less emotional suppression with its attendant cognitive, social, and well-being costs (Gross, 2001; Gross & John, 2003; John & Gross, 2004).

There is initial support that this female advantage in general emotional skills extends to emotional intelligence. In the normative sample described in the MSCEIT User's Manual (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2002b), women scored significantly higher than men on overall emotional intelligence and on all of the subscales. This finding, at least in relation to overall emotional intelligence, has been replicated in several published reports (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2004; Schulte, Ree, & Carretta, 2004).

### The Development of Emotional Intelligence

Does emotional intelligence develop over time and can these abilities be improved? Early research on these questions has focused on two issues: (a) whether emotional intelligence scores increase as people get older; and (b) whether emotional intelligence scores increase with structured interventions.

The MSCEIT User Manual reports that those in the 18 to 24 age category of the normative sample scored significantly lower than older groups on overall emotional intelligence and on the Using Emotion to Facilitate Thought, Understanding Emotion, and Managing Emotion, subscales, but not the Perceiving Emotion subscale. Mayer and colleagues suggest that these findings may demonstrate age-associated increases that are consistent with the age- and experience-related development of cognitive intelligence. This consistency with cognitive intelligence is said to lend support to the view of emotional intelligence as a class of intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, et al., 2000a; Mayer et al., 2001).

Other studies have also investigated age-related changes in emotional intelligence. Two used undergraduate samples with a limited age range. The first found no differences across 4 years of college students (Gohm cited in Gohm & Clore, 2002). The second (Day & Carroll, 2004) found that increases in age were weakly associated with decreases in Perceiving Emotion, but that age was unrelated to the three other scales: Using Emotion, Understanding Emotion, and Managing Emotion. The relationship of age to overall emotional intelligence was not reported. In a more heterogeneous sample with a wider age range (David, 2005) overall emotional intelligence was unrelated to age (17–80 years, *mean* = 30.89). As these findings are inconsistent they do not enable conclusions on whether emotional intelligence increases with age.

Initial research on the development of emotional intelligence as a result of structured interventions is promising. Chang (2006) designed a semester-long, classroom-based intervention that challenged college students to learn and apply the principles of emotional intelligence, self-modification theory, and rational emotive theory to personally designated self-change projects. She found post-intervention increases in the Strategic Area of emotional intelligence which incorporates the Understanding Emotion and Managing Emotion subscales. There were no increases in the Experiential Area which incorporates the Perceiving Emotion and Using Emotion subscales. This latter result is unsurprising since the intervention was less directly targeted to this area.

Eack and colleagues (2007) also used an intervention to improve emotional intelligence. They were interested addressing the social-cognitive deficits that are commonly reported in those with schizophrenia through Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET). CET incorporates computer exercises that target attention, memory, and problem-solving, and group exercises that aim to enhance perspective-taking skills, interpretation of non-verbal cues, management of emotions, and appraisal of the social context. After the year of treatment, clients receiving CET showed significant improvements in emotional intelligence scores.

### Emotional Intelligence Ability and the Workplace

There is much interest in whether people with higher levels of emotional intelligence make better leaders and colleagues, demonstrate a greater

tolerance of stress, and/or have superior work performance. A body of research is starting to address these issues.

In one study (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, & Salovey, 2006) individuals with greater emotional intelligence were given more merit based increases, had a higher company rank, were more sociable, and had fewer negative personal interactions. They also received higher peer and supervisor ratings for stress tolerance, leadership potential, and for their contribution to a positive work environment. The researchers controlled for age, gender, level of education, verbal ability, personality traits, positive and negative affect, and emotional approach coping in a series of analyses. The relationships remained significant, indicating that the results were indeed due to the contribution of emotional intelligence.

Other studies have similarly demonstrated that emotional intelligence is associated with workplace outcomes including higher ratings of supervisor-related job performance, leadership effectiveness, achieving business objectives, cultivating productive working relationships, and exemplifying personal drive and integrity (Janovics & Christiansen, 2002; Kerr et al., 2006; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005).

Last, Côté and Miners (2006) found some support for the hypothesis that emotional intelligence could compensate for lower levels of cognitive intelligence. In their study, relationships between emotional intelligence and supervisor-rated task performance as well as aspects of organizational citizenship behavior were stronger in the context of lower cognitive intelligence.

## CONCLUSION

The Mayer–Salovey model of emotional intelligence is consistent with the functional view of emotions. Rather than being viewed as disorganizing and disruptive, emotions are regarded as a resource that facilitates our effectiveness.

The vignettes presented at the beginning of the chapter highlight the ubiquity of emotions and emotional challenges in everyday life. Although each of the characters will try to problem-solve about their and others' emotions in the contexts described, it is likely that each will bring differing levels of emotional skills to bear on their respective situations. Each will identify the emotions involved with different levels of accuracy (*recognize*). Each will have a differentially developed appreciation of how these emotions impact on thinking (*use*). Each will have different skills in pinpointing what they and others are feeling, what has caused these feelings, and how they will progress over time (*understand*). Each will manage these emotions with varying levels of flexibility and adaptability (*manage*). Overall, these skills will alter how successfully they navigate their situations.

Research with the MSCEIT is presenting an emerging picture of emotionally intelligent individuals. They are less likely to use avoidance coping, suffer from fewer psychological health issues, and experience greater life

satisfaction. They have better peer interactions, use less drugs and alcohol, have higher academic performance, and have greater self-esteem. In the workplace, they enjoy greater merit-based increases in salary, and higher company rank. They are more social, have fewer negative personal interactions, and receive higher ratings from their peers and supervisors for their contribution to a positive work environment, tolerance of stress, and leadership potential.

Ongoing research is focused on expanding and replicating these findings, on investigating the mechanisms underpinning the relationships, and developing interventions to increase emotional intelligence.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

#### Using the RUUM Model of Emotional Effectiveness

In this chapter we have highlighted how being skilled at navigating our and others' emotions can impact on our effectiveness. There is no single, correct way to deal with emotions that applies to all contexts. In fact, a key aspect of emotional intelligence is the capacity to respond flexibly and appropriately to meet the demands of the situation. However, research does show that some characteristic ways of dealing with emotions are more adaptive than others.

**Principle 1: “Go To” Emotions:** Suppressing or ignoring your and others' emotions is generally not effective. For example, if you are upset about something, pretending that you aren't upset in the hope that the feeling will go away tends not to work. Suppression is associated with lower levels of well-being, poorer problem-solving capacity, and a negative impact on interpersonal relationships. Instead of being closed to emotions and their messages, it is far more effective to be open to emotions or “emotions friendly.”

**Principle 2: “Go Through” Emotions:** Ruminating or dwelling on your and others' emotions is also not effective. Focusing passively and repetitively on issues, and overthinking them, tends to make things worse. Despite rumination appearing to be opposite to suppression, it is associated with strikingly similar outcomes: lower levels of well-being, poorer problem solving capacity, and a negative impact on interpersonal relationships. Instead of dwelling on emotions, it is far more adaptive to move to a plan of action and closure.

Together, the research on suppression and rumination suggests that dealing with emotions effectively involves both “*Going to*” emotions—being open to them and their messages, and “*Going through*” emotions—moving to action and closure. The Mayer–Salovey model of emotional intelligence is a useful framework to help us to do just this.<sup>1</sup>

Think of an emotionally challenging situation that you are facing. Examples include a conflict, an important upcoming event, or a worry, and ask yourself the questions in Table 7.1.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 7.1**  
**Using the RUUM Model of Emotional Effectiveness**

Mayer–Salovey	Ask Yourself:	These Questions Assist with:
Recognize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How am I feeling?</li> <li>● How are the other parties feeling?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Going to” emotions and being emotion-friendly</li> <li>● Perspective-taking</li> </ul>
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How does the way I feel affect my thinking and behaviors?</li> <li>● How do the other parties’ feelings affect their thinking and behaviors?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Appreciating the impact of emotions on thinking and actions               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Negative emotions are more likely to be associated with defensiveness and a critical orientation</li> <li>○ Positive emotions are more likely to be associated with an open, accepting and “big-picture” orientation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why am I feeling like this?</li> <li>● Why are the others feeling the way they are?</li> <li>● How are these emotions likely to progress over time?</li> <li>● How do I want them to progress?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Getting a deeper appreciation of the emotions involved</li> <li>● Understanding the causes and likely consequences of the emotions</li> <li>● Moving toward resolution</li> </ul>
Manage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How can I manage this situation actively and directly, to achieve optimal short- and long-term outcomes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Developing strategies</li> <li>● Active coping</li> <li>● “Going through” emotions</li> </ul>

## NOTES

1. Mayer and colleagues refer to the first branch of their model as the capacity to perceive emotions or emotional perception (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey et al., 2002). For practical reasons, including potential confusion with the Perception preference of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI; Myers & McCaulley, 1985), we refer to the capacity to recognize emotions or emotion recognition.

2. Based on Caruso & Wolfe (2001, 2002) and David (2005).

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# Allophilia: Beyond Tolerance

Todd L. Pittinsky and Laura Maruskin

What words do we have for the feelings a person of one group might have about another group—be it ethnic, religious, national, class, gender, generation, or any other? Prejudice, discrimination, racism, nationalism, separatism, sexism, ageism, anti-Semitism, homophobia—it amounts to a pretty negative vocabulary. But all these *-isms* are not the whole picture. People *do* have positive feelings about other groups. There are many Americans who feel fond of Arab peoples and their cultures, and vice versa. There are many Christians who feel genuine kinship with Jews. There are many teenagers who love to get to know elderly people. But under what circumstances does this occur, and with what results?

Several years ago, when researchers began to investigate intergroup attitudes—the attitudes people in one group have about other groups—we realized we needed a term for the positive attitudes we were observing. We searched dictionaries, libraries, and the Internet, but all we found were terms for various prejudices and hatreds. *Tolerance* was the closest we came to a positive term, but tolerance seemed too temperate—tolerating the “other” did not seem to really capture liking the other. So we began using the term *allophilia*, derived from the Greek words for “liking or love of the other.” We began studying allophilia, and found that it represents an important positive dimension in the relation among groups.

In the pages that follow, we begin by presenting the two-dimensional model of intergroup attitudes. Here, we consider positive intergroup attitudes as a predictor of positive behavior toward a particular group. Next, we consider the limitations of efforts to improve intergroup relations by reducing negative intergroup attitudes and we suggest the promotion of

allophilia as an additional approach. Finally, we consider a tool for measuring allophilia.

Keep in mind that we are talking about an individual's attitude toward a group, not toward another individual, and that we are talking about a positive attitude, not the mere lack of a negative attitude (tolerance).

## DIMENSIONS OF INTERGROUP ATTITUDES

The key to understanding allophilia is having an accurate picture of the relationship between positive and negative intergroup attitudes. When two words are constructed as opposites, such as "liking" and "disliking," or "trust" and "mistrust," researchers often treat the concepts themselves as opposites—that is, as opposite ends of a single dimension or continuum (Cacioppo & Bernston, 1994). This in turn implies that a reduction in one will necessarily cause an increase in the other—less hate means more love, less distrust means more trust.

It sounds sensible but it is not always true. Sometimes the two concepts turn out to have a two-dimensional relationship. Many consider trust and distrust as such a pair. Long viewed as two ends of a single continuum (e.g., Bigley & Pearce, 1998), some researchers argue that they are two distinct constructs, best described by a two-dimensional model (Kramer, 1996; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Saunders & Thornhill, 2004). That is, in any relationship between people or groups, you need to observe and measure both trust and distrust.

An important aspect of a two-dimensional model is that the two dimensions can change independently. Think of debt and income. They can go up and down independently of each other. Getting a raise can help you lower your debt, but it does not lower your debt all by itself. If you are a gambling addict or a shopaholic or medically unlucky and uninsured, your income can go up and your debt can go up at the same time. And—this will be a key point later on—to improve your financial state, you may need to increase your income *and* reduce your debt, which are two different tasks accomplished in two different ways.

Getting back to allophilia, our research is showing that positive and negative attitudes toward members of "other" groups are just such a pair. A change in the level of one does not necessarily bring about a change in the level of the other. Research finds that, while allophilia and prejudice are generally negatively related as one would expect, there are conditions under which they are positively related (Maruskin, Pittinsky, & Montoya, 2007). As we will see, allophilia and prejudice can also have outcomes that are not simply the opposites of each other. And as with income and debt, you can experience both at once. Katz and Hass (1988) explored racial ambivalence and found that whites often have both positive and negative attitudes toward blacks. All of this suggests two important conclusions:

- Allophilia and prejudice must *both* be studied and measured in order to fully comprehend intergroup attitudes and relations.

- Reducing one group's prejudice toward another group will not necessarily lead to positive feelings for that group.

## THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF INTERGROUP ATTITUDES

The Two-Dimensional Model of Intergroup Attitudes (TDMIA; Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2007b; Pittinsky & Simon, 2007) emphasizes the distinct and independent positive and negative components of attitudes toward other groups. It provides a novel perspective on intergroup attitudes and raises important questions about how we evaluate other groups and how attitudes among groups can be changed. The TDMIA describes the basic, testable, measurable reality on which the allophilia model is built. It has three tenets:

### Tenets 1: Two-Dimensionality

There are two dimensions of intergroup attitudes—the positive (allophilia) and the negative (prejudice)—which are at least partially independent. (Their independence is more or less pronounced in different contexts.) As noted previously, this implies that reducing negative intergroup attitudes is not synonymous with promoting positive intergroup attitudes. This tenet is paralleled by the aforementioned research on such pairs as trust and distrust. It suggests that positive intergroup relations can involve the reduction of negative intergroup attitudes, the promotion of positive intergroup attitudes, or *both*. The second and third tenets of the TDMIA flow from the first.

### Tenets 2: Distinct Antecedents

Positive and negative intergroup attitudes, being independent dimensions, have distinct antecedents. General support for this claim can be found in classic work on operant conditioning—the manipulation of consequences to modify behavior. Lewin (1951) posited that experiencing another person as being beneficial to one is an important basis for feeling attraction to that person; whereas experiencing someone as harmful to one is an important basis for feeling repulsion toward that person. Indeed, a wealth of research has found that these basic processes (benefit/attraction, harm/repulsion) are distinct and independent. That is, feeling that a person is not as harmful as one thought and therefore feeling less repulsion toward him or her will not be a particularly strong cause for feeling attraction. That would require feeling that the person is more beneficial than one thought. All of this suggests that the perception of some benefit from another group would be an important basis for positive attitudes toward that group. The benefit need not be material; it could be a social or psychological benefit, such as perceived acceptance (Pittinsky & Montoya, 2007).

### Tenet 3: Distinct Outcomes

Positive and negative intergroup attitudes have distinct influences on intergroup relations; they are associated with different behaviors to different degrees. Supporting this claim, research indicates that positive intergroup attitudes predict positive intergroup relations better than low levels of negative intergroup attitudes do (e.g., Ho & Jackson, 2001; Pittinsky et al., 2007b). Imagine that you want to know whether group A is likely to support a government policy designed to give group B a helping hand. The fact that group A has little or no prejudice toward group B is not as good an indicator as one might think. The fact that group A has high or low levels of allophilia toward group B is a better indicator of whether group A would support such a policy. Pittinsky and Ratcliff (2007) found that allophilia also predicts more personalized forms of active support better than negative intergroup attitudes do. (An example of a personalized form of active support would be willingness to personally tutor a recent immigrant in the English language.) In other words, positive intergroup behaviors are predicted better by how much a person *likes* the other group than by how much a person *does not dislike* the other group.

Research on allophilia has further found that an attitude held for a particular group is a stronger predictor of positive behavior toward that group than are more general pro-social and altruistic orientations (Pittinsky et al., 2007b). In other words, if you are wondering whether I am likely to take or support actions helpful to Cambodian immigrants, my positive feelings toward that group will be a better predictor than my overall love of humankind. Allophilia has also been found to predict positive intergroup behaviors better than sympathetic liking does (Pittinsky et al., 2007b).

### IMPROVING INTERGROUP RELATIONS

Changing people's attitudes toward members of other groups can be extremely difficult. Gordon Allport (1954) likened understanding prejudice and counteracting it to understanding and splitting the atom: "It required years of labor and billions of dollars to gain the secret of the atom," he observed. "It will take a still greater investment to gain the secrets of man's irrational nature. It is easier, someone has said, to smash an atom than a prejudice" (p. xvii). Countless attempts have been made to combat the prejudices that pervade our society. Prejudice reduction was a central focus of the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Goldzweig, 2003), and social psychologists, politicians, and political activists are still trying. Much effort has been allocated to prejudice-reduction programs and to research on hate. Various international organizations have been created to deal with racism and other negative intergroup attitudes (e.g., the European Network against Racism, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia, and the UN World Conference against Racism).

All of this reflects a long-held assumption that positive and negative intergroup attitudes are opposite poles of the same dimension and that

reducing prejudice will, in and of itself, bring about positive relations between groups that have been at odds. This assumption is challenged by allophilia research and theory, which posit that positive attitudes can be distinct and independent from negative attitudes and that the task of creating or increasing positive attitudes is distinct from the task of reducing or eliminating negative attitudes.

A key contribution of the TDMIA is that once we acknowledge positive and negative intergroup attitudes as two distinct and independent dimensions, we can address them each individually, moving beyond tolerance (the successful elimination of prejudice) to allophilia.

## MEASURING ALLOPHILIA

Phillips and Ziller (1997) noted that most intergroup research takes “a negative approach to the study of interpersonal relations ... [which is then] reflected in the nature of the resulting knowledge” (p. 420). Research on allophilia addresses this relative dearth of research on the positive dimension of intergroup attitudes. A key step is that we have developed and validated a tool to measure allophilia (the *Allophilia Scale*) (Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2007a), which is shown in Table 8.1.

**Table 8.1**  
**The Allophilia Scale: Allophilia Items and the Five Factors**

	Item	Factor
1.	In general, I have positive attitudes about African Americans.	Affection
2.	I respect African Americans.	Affection
3.	I like African Americans.	Affection
4.	I feel positively toward African Americans.	Affection
5.	I am at ease around African Americans.	Comfort
6.	I am comfortable when I hang out with African Americans.	Comfort
7.	I feel like I can be myself around African Americans.	Comfort
8.	I feel a sense of belonging with African Americans.	Kinship
9.	I feel a kinship with African Americans.	Kinship
10.	I would like to be more like African Americans.	Kinship
11.	I am truly interested in understanding the points of view of African Americans.	Engagement
12.	I am motivated to get to know African Americans better.	Engagement
13.	To enrich my life, I would try to make more friends who are African Americans.	Engagement
14.	I am interested in hearing about the experiences of African Americans.	Engagement
15.	I am impressed by African Americans.	Enthusiasm
16.	I feel inspired by African Americans.	Enthusiasm
17.	I am enthusiastic about African Americans.	Enthusiasm

The Allophilia Scale was developed through a series of studies. Items were generated and selected using a “snowball” sampling method (Pitinsky et al., 2007a, Study 1). That means that participants were asked to list positive thoughts and feelings they would have toward members of a specific group or ways they would behave positively toward that group. The participants were not choosing these items from a list; they could say whatever they chose. The surveys yielded thousands of items which were then grouped according to the themes that arose naturally from them. After these items had been used in many different scale-development studies, they were boiled down to a final list of 17 items, grouped into five distinct factors: affection (having positive feelings toward members of the other group), comfort (feeling at ease with members of the other group), kinship (believing there is a close personal connection with members of the other group), engagement (seeking interactions with members of the other group), and enthusiasm (feeling impressed and inspired by members of the other group). This final list forms the Allophilia Scale.

Research using the scale indicates that it can be used to assess positive attitudes toward members of many different kinds of groups, including ethnic groups, religious groups, and even students at different universities.

## CONCLUSION

The study of allophilia broadens the scope of research on intergroup relations by specifically examining a second, less-theorized, less-researched dimension of intergroup attitudes—the positive or allophilia dimension. Although research on allophilia is still in its earliest stages, it has already produced findings of theoretical and practical importance:

- The relationship between allophilia and prejudice requires a two-dimensional model.
- Allophilia is particularly important for predicting positive behavior toward members of other groups.
- Strategies to create or increase allophilia should complement strategies to eliminate or reduce prejudice.

We all know that discrimination and hatred between groups can be deadly dangerous. But how much do we know about the promise and potential of the affection, enthusiasm, and kinship people can feel for members of other groups? The allophilia construct and related research on the Two-Dimensional Model of Intergroup Attitudes (TDMIA) suggest that we should work at least as hard to promote these positive attitudes between groups as we do to reduce prejudice and hatred.

To make a weed-choked garden blossom, one needs to pull the weeds *and* to plant and nurture seeds. For at least 50 years, in the context of relations among groups, much attention has been paid to the weeds. Allophilia research and theory turn our attention to the seeds.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

### Thinking About Liking Others

*A Thought Experiment Using the Allophilia Scale:* The term allophilia refers to liking (i.e., affection, comfort, kinship, engagement, and enthusiasm) for a specific group. A person can have allophilia for any number of different religious groups (e.g., Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists), different ethnic groups (e.g., Asian Americans, Latin Americans, African Americans, Caucasians), or different geographical groups (e.g., Southerners or New Englanders in the United States), to name only a few possibilities.

Read over the items of the Allophilia Scale (see Table 8.1, where it is applied to African Americans). Think about each of the five factors. Now think about different groups of people that you encounter—religious, ethnic, geographical, generational, and so on. For which groups do you experience allophilia?

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# Re-envisioning Men's Emotional Lives: Stereotypes, Struggles, and Strengths

Y. Joel Wong and Aaron B. Rochlen

Is it ok for men to cry? Is it possible for men to learn how to talk about their feelings? Do women and men express emotion differently?

**F**rom self-help books to music to movies to everyday conversations, the topic of men's emotional lives has been frequently debated, discussed, and analyzed in popular European American culture in recent decades. Questions about men's emotional lives are often linked to gender issues surrounding what it means to be a male person. A central thesis of this chapter is that our theories about masculinity influence our understanding of men's emotional lives. Theories about masculinity attempt to answer questions such as why men behave the way they do, what meanings we ascribe to men's behavior, and whether and why women and men are different from one another.

In this chapter, we review three theoretical perspectives on masculinity and their implications for men's emotional lives. We begin with essentialist approaches to masculinity, the dominant view adopted by popular self-help books on relationship and gender issues. Essentialist perspectives focus on differences between women's and men's emotional lives and tend to encourage the acceptance of men's emotional behavior rather than attempts to change it. Next we discuss how gender role socialization approaches address some of the limitations of essentialist approaches by drawing attention to social influences on men's behavior as well as the negative aspects of men's emotional lives. In addition, we present social constructionist approaches to masculinity with an emphasis on how they can provide a sophisticated conceptualization of masculinity that incorporates a more

contextual view of men's emotional lives. We also consider how social constructionist approaches can potentially contribute to a more positive, strengths-based perspective on men's emotional lives. We conclude with several personal experiments that enable readers to apply some of the main ideas expressed in this chapter to their lives.

Before continuing, some clarifications and caveats are needed. We use the term "masculinity" to refer to psychological and behavioral characteristics that are associated with the biological category of "male." Further, the three theoretical perspectives on masculinity presented in this chapter are by no means the only ones available for understanding's men's emotional lives (for other theoretical approaches, see Addis & Cohane, 2005; Smiler, 2004). In addition, each of the three perspectives should be viewed as a cluster of related theories rather than as a distinct theory.

### ESSENTIALIST APPROACHES TO MASCULINITY

To expect a man who is in his cave instantly to become open, responsive, and loving is as unrealistic as expecting a woman who is upset immediately to calm down and make complete sense. It is a mistake to expect a man to always be in touch with his loving feelings just as it is a mistake to expect a woman's feelings to always be rational and logical. (Gray, 2003, p. 30)

Arguably the most popular viewpoint adopted by authors of popular relationship self-help books, essentialist theories view specific attributes as fixed and unchanging characteristics of a category or a social group (Whitehead, 2002). As illustrated in the excerpt above, from the popular self-help book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: The Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex* (Gray, 2003), essentialist perspectives on masculinity treat men as possessing universal and fixed attributes that are difficult to change. Moreover, essentialist approaches to masculinity tend to emphasize differences between women and men, often treating them as polar opposites on a variety of attributes. It is easy to identify essentialist arguments in everyday conversations. Statements that begin with the phrase "Men are naturally ..." or "Men are wired to be ..." tend to appeal to essentialist perspectives on masculinity.

Peppered with humor (e.g., Pease & Pease, 2001, 2004), eye-catching titles (e.g., *Why men don't iron*, Moir & Moir, 1999), and colorful metaphors (e.g., the notion that women and men originate from different planets in *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, Gray, 2003), relationship self-help books appear to have been remarkably successful in propagating essentialist beliefs about masculinity, based on their book sales. For example, Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* was on the *New York Times* best seller list for 222 weeks after it was first published in 1992 (Crawford, 2004).

A recurrent theme in the above relationship self-help books is that men are either innately unemotional or have difficulty expressing feelings, whereas women are emotional or have a preference for expressing feelings. A variety of theories have been used to support essentialist approaches to masculinity, the most popular of which are biological and psychoevolutionary theories.

Biological theories attribute differences between women's and men's behavior to biological processes associated with the brain and/or hormones. In his self-help book *What Could He Be Thinking?* Michael Gurian (2003) devotes a chapter to describing how sex differences in biological processes support his assertion that women "want something from emotional life that the male brain, quite often, makes difficult to impossible" (p. 82). For instance, Gurian (2003) claims that men's *corpus callosum* (the bundle of nerves connecting the right and left hemispheres of the brain) is about 25% smaller than that of women's, accounting for men's greater difficulty communicating emotion compared to women. In contrast to biological theories, psychoevolutionary theories explain differences between the sexes as arising from a process of natural selection over thousands of years resulting in differences in gene pools. For example, Allan and Barbara Pease (2004) attribute men's alleged propensity to talk less than women to their ancient ancestors' tendency to remain silent when they went hunting or fishing in order not to alert their prey.

Essentialist approaches to masculinity present several important implications for understanding men's emotional lives. Because men's alleged lack of emotion or struggle with emotional expression is seen as a characteristic that is inevitable and unchanging, women and men are exhorted to accept it (Gray, 2003; Gurian, 2003; Pease & Pease, 2001). For instance, Gray (2003) counsels women to accept rather than criticize men's need to avoid talking about their feelings as a strategy for maintaining healthy romantic relationships.

Undoubtedly, the appeal of essentialist perspectives on masculinity lies in its simplicity. By explaining men's emotional behavior in terms of sex differences in one or a few innate attributes, essentialist theories provide simple answers to questions such as "Why does my boyfriend refuse to share his feelings about his latest job loss?" However, as enticing as essentialist perspectives on masculinity might be to consumers of relationship self-help books, they have been generally rejected by most scholars in the social sciences outside the field of psychology (e.g., Connell, 2005) and by many psychologists (e.g., Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

Several criticisms of essentialist approaches to masculinity have been leveled by these scholars. First, they point out that sex differences in emotion have been exaggerated and are not conclusively supported by research evidence. After reviewing the research on sex differences in emotion, Wester, Vogel, Pressly, and Heesacker (2002) concluded that women and men's emotionality are more similar than they are different. Further, differences that emerge tend to be confined to specific contexts and were small in magnitude. Interestingly, a recent study found no significant differences between men's and women's daily word usage in real-world settings, casting doubts on the pervasive stereotype that women are more talkative than men (Mehl, Vazire, Ramirez-Esparza, Slatcher, & Pennebaker, 2007).

Second, several scholars have criticized the emphasis on sex differences in emotion for creating stereotypes about men and women as being drastically different in their emotional behaviors (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Wester et al., 2002). These stereotypes may create artificial constraints in women

and men's emotional lives by exerting pressure to conform to them. Consequently, individuals who do not conform to these stereotypes may be viewed negatively by others (Shields, 2002). For example, a man who is emotionally expressive might be perceived as weak or "not masculine."

Third, researchers who have examined the biological bases of sex differences in psychological attributes have found that these differences are much more modest than those claimed by relationship self-help authors (Hamberg, 2005; Hines, 2004). In a review of the literature on biologically-based sex differences in psychological attributes, Whitehead (2002) concluded that the evidence is "neither convincing nor conclusive, not even coherent" (p. 11). For example, the claim that there are sex differences in the size of the *corpus callosum*, which purportedly explains men's relative difficulty with emotional communication (Gurian, 2003), has been refuted in several recent research reviews (Hamberg, 2005; Morton & Rafto, 2006). Ironically, in one of the few areas of research that has uncovered fairly consistent findings of biologically-based sex differences in emotion, the research contradicts the stereotype about sex differences: overall, men tend to show more physiological signs of emotion than women (see Wester et al., 2002 for an overview). Similarly, relationship self-help authors who rely on psychoevolutionary theories tend to overstate the influence of genetics on sex differences in human behavior. Researchers who appeal to evolutionary theories are careful to explain that genetics do not have a deterministic influence on human behavior (e.g., Workman & Reader, 2004). They argue that genetic differences merely *predispose* but do not *cause* women and men to behave differently.

## GENDER ROLE SOCIALIZATION APPROACHES TO MASCULINITY

In contrast to the focus of essentialist theories on men's innate attributes, gender role socialization approaches emphasize the influence of social forces such as the media, parents, and peers on men's emotional lives. Currently the dominant theoretical approach adopted by psychologists who research masculinity issues (Addis & Cohane, 2005), gender role socialization theories propose that women and men learn gendered behaviors and beliefs from their environment through repeated rewards, punishments, and modeling (Levant & Pollack, 1995). Masculine gender roles are behaviors that are consistent with societal messages about masculinity. Included in these societal messages is the idea that being emotional is a sign of femininity and weakness, and is hence incompatible with being masculine (O'Neil, 1981). Consequently, men who are emotionally inexpressive are viewed as conforming to societal gender expectations whereas men who are emotionally expressive are believed to be violating these expectations.

The process of emotional gender role socialization is theorized to begin in childhood. A boy who is labeled "sissy" by his friends for crying might internalize the belief that crying is inconsistent with being a boy and thus avoid crying in future. Hence he might learn that there are strictly delineated gendered behaviors differentiating boys from girls (Good & Sherrod, 2001).

Similarly, a boy who is raised by a father who is adept at providing for his material needs but inattentive to his emotional concerns might learn that men should focus on fixing problems rather than dealing with emotions. Support for gender role socialization approaches to masculinity can be found in Levant's (2001) review of research on boys and girls' emotional behaviors. Levant's review found that although male infants are more emotionally reactive and expressive than their female counterparts, girls become more verbally expressive than boys by about two years old and more facially expressive by six years. Further evidence for the emotional socialization of boys and girls is provided by Brody's (2000) review of research indicating that boys who are less popular tend to be perceived by their peers as those who cry easily, and that parents of preschoolers and young school-aged children encourage the expression of sadness and fear to their daughters but not to their sons.

It is important to note that scholars who study men's behavior from a gender role socialization perspective view emotional inexpressiveness as merely one of several masculine norms. For example, Mahalik and colleagues (Mahalik, Locke, et al., 2003) proposed a set of 11 masculine norms that exist in the dominant U.S. culture: winning (the importance of competition and success), emotional control, risk taking, violence, dominance (the notion that men must be in charge), playboy (frequent sexual encounters), self-reliance, primacy of work (work is critical to men's identity), power over women, disdain for homosexuals, and pursuit of status. Because men have unique socialization histories due to different environments and role models in their lives, men are likely to vary in the extent to which they conform to each of the above norms. For instance, it is possible for some men not to conform to the masculine norm of emotional control but to exhibit behavior consistent with the masculine norm of dominance.

Among gender role socialization approaches, theories that stress the negative consequences of men's adherence to masculine norms have been the dominant framework used by psychologists studying men's issues during the past two decades. Specifically, gender role conflict theory has been the most popular theoretical approach used in psychological research on masculinity. To date, over 250 research studies on men and masculinity have been conducted using this theory (O'Neil, 2007).

Defined as a "psychological state in which gender roles have negative consequences or impact on the person or others" (O'Neil, 1981, p. 203), gender role conflict is posited to reflect less mature masculine identity in that men adhere to inflexible masculine role norms. O'Neil, Good, and Holmes (1995) proposed that men typically experience gender role conflict in six different contexts; when they (a) deviate from or defy masculine gender role norms; (b) fail to meet masculine gender role norms; (c) experience discrepancies between their real and ideal self-concepts based on masculine gender role stereotypes; (d) personally devalue, restrict, or violate themselves; (e) encounter personal devaluations, restrictions, or violations from others; and (f) personally devalue, restrict, or violate others because of masculine gender role stereotypes. In sum, O'Neil and his colleagues theorized that traditional gender role socialization provides

contradictory and unrealistic messages resulting in considerable intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict (O'Neil et al., 1995).

Applied to the issue of men's emotional lives, gender role conflict theory treats men's lack of emotional expressiveness as a problem that restricts their ability to express themselves freely and reach their full human potential (O'Neil et al., 1995). For example, men who struggle with expressing feelings might lack opportunities to engage in intimate exchanges with their family members and romantic partners (O'Neil, 1981), or might channel their tender feelings into non-relational sexual activities (Levant, 2001). Consistent with these notions, research based on gender role conflict theory has shown that men's difficulty expressing emotions is associated with numerous problems including anxiety symptoms (Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006), a negative view of help-seeking (Robertson & Fitzgerald, 1992), hostile and rigid interpersonal behavior (Mahalik, 2000), and lower relationship satisfaction as reported by men's female partners (Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004).

There are several strengths related to gender role socialization theories. First, in contrast to essentialist perspectives on masculinity, gender role socialization approaches challenge the status quo with regard to men's emotional lives. Instead of accepting men's emotional inexpressiveness as a naturally occurring attribute, gender role socialization approaches invite men to examine how and why they conform to the masculine norm of emotional inexpressiveness. Gender role socialization theories that focus on the dysfunctional aspects of masculinity (e.g., gender role conflict theory) also draw attention to the need for men who struggle with expressing feelings to change rather than blame their inexpressiveness on innate attributes.

Second, gender role socialization perspectives meaningfully address differences in emotional behavior among men (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Instead of focusing on sex differences in emotion, gender role socialization theories suggest that some men are more emotionally expressive whereas others are more inexpressive, depending on their different emotional socialization experiences and the types of masculine norms they endorse. By focusing on differences among men rather than differences between the sexes, gender role socialization approaches potentially avoid stereotyping women and men as being drastically different in their emotional lives.

Third, a focus on masculine gender roles lends itself well to educating men to learn how to be more emotionally expressive. Just as some men were taught by their parents, peers, and teachers to restrict their emotion, gender role socialization theories propose that these men are also capable of learning how to identify and express their emotions (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). Theories of gender role socialization have been applied to several psychoeducation programs designed to educate men about emotions and to help them identify and express their feelings (e.g., Robertson & Freeman, 1995).

Further, some researchers have examined the potential benefits of various clinical interventions that encourage men to engage their emotions. For instance, Wong (2006a) found that men who wrote about how their lives would be different if they had the best possible emotional

connectedness with their romantic partners reported reductions in psychological distress compared to men who wrote about other topics. In addition, some psychotherapists have utilized gender role socialization perspectives to help their male clients connect with and express emotion (e.g., Englar-Carlson & Shepard, 2005; Levant, 2001). For example, Levant (2001) describes a five-step therapeutic program for helping men who struggle with identifying emotion become better at doing so. In the program, men (a) learn about the origins and nature of their difficulty identifying feelings; (b) develop a vocabulary of emotion words (e.g., *sad*, *angry*, *worried*); (c) learn to read the emotions of others; (d) keep a record of one's emotional experiences; and (e) practice identifying emotions.

Despite the robustness of gender role socialization approaches, they have been criticized for providing an incomplete analysis of masculinity. Gender role socialization theories do not sufficiently take into account the role of cultural variability in masculine norms because the majority of gender role socialization research has been conducted with white men (Good & Sherrod, 2001). Although some researchers have studied cross-cultural differences in men's emotional behavior from a gender role socialization standpoint (e.g., Levant, Richmond, et al., 2003), there is insufficient acknowledgment that the masculine norm of emotional control may merely be a product of contemporary European American culture that may be less applicable in other cultures.

In addition, gender role socialization approaches implicitly treat masculinity as stable, internal attributes within individuals without sufficiently taking into account differences that might occur across situations (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Smiler, 2004). Put another way, to state that a man has been socialized to be emotionally inexpressive does not explain why he might be more expressive in some situations (e.g., in a pub watching a football game) than in others (e.g., when talking with his colleagues at work).

More recently, the advent of the positive psychology initiative (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has presented criticisms of gender role socialization theories from a different angle. Positive psychology aims to alter mainstream psychology's emphasis on human weaknesses and diseases by advocating a greater focus on positive human qualities. Recently, some scholars have begun to consider the applications of positive psychology to the study of masculinity by expressing concern that current theorizing about masculinity overemphasizes its negative aspects and neglects positive features of masculinity (Kiselica, Englar-Carlson, & Horne, 2008). For example, the focus on problems associated with masculine inexpressiveness might not adequately take into account situations where men are expressive or where it might be beneficial to conceal one's emotion (Wong & Rochlen, 2005).

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACHES TO MASCULINITY

Many of the criticisms of gender roles socialization theories can be meaningfully addressed by social constructionist approaches to masculinity.

Presently the most popular approach adopted by masculinity scholars in the social sciences other than psychology (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2005), social constructionism is a postmodern philosophical ideology that challenges the possibility of uncovering universal, transhistorical truth and objective knowledge (Burr, 2003). Social constructionist and gender role socialization perspectives share a common emphasis on the importance of social factors in shaping men's gendered behaviors and a rejection of essentialist beliefs about masculinity and emotion. However social constructionist approaches differ from gender role socialization approaches in a number of important ways. In contrast to gender role socialization approaches, social constructionist approaches emphasize a much more contextual view that treats masculinity as flexible and fluid. This fluidity is expressed in two different ways.

At the macro level, some social constructionist scholars focus on the way masculinity is defined by cultural, historical, socioeconomic, and institutional forces. A fundamental assumption is that masculinity does not exist in one particular form, but is expressed in multiple forms. Social constructionists use the term "masculinities" to describe the diverse meanings of masculinity that exist in different social groups—for example, gay masculinity (Connell, 2005), Asian American masculinity (Chua & Fujino, 1999), and African American masculinity (Hammond & Mattis, 2005)—and across different historical periods (cf. Stearns, 1994). Social constructionists are concerned that stereotypes of European American men have been treated as universal and enduring markers of masculinity. Consequently, the image of the inexpressive man may merely be a norm in middle-class, heterosexual, European American culture that might be less applicable in other cultures.

Some social constructionist scholars go beyond the issue of cross-cultural differences in masculine norms to challenge the idea that there are consistent messages about masculine norms within a particular culture (cf. Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Citing examples of popular movies that celebrate men's emotional expressiveness, such as *Jerry Maguire*, as well as favorable perceptions of American male politicians—for example, Bill Clinton—who can connect with their emotion in public, Shields (2002) pointed out that since the 1980s, societal messages about masculine inexpressiveness have been accompanied by a celebration of masculine emotion. It can therefore be argued that within a given culture, there is a proliferation of different and sometimes contradictory norms about men's emotion (e.g., the inexpressive man versus the expressive man).

At the micro level, the flexible nature of masculinity is seen in the varied ways masculinities are expressed in day-to-day social interactions (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). By providing a context for masculinity, social constructionism challenge the notion that masculinity resides in individuals by demonstrating that men do not express a consistent form of masculinity in all situations (Smiler, 2004). Wetherell and Edley (1999) argued that men do not permanently adhere to any particular masculine norm but are constantly choosing from a variety of masculine norms to apply in specific situations. Consequently, labels such as *inexpressive*, *expressive*, *emotional*, and

*unemotional* are overgeneralized descriptions of men's emotional lives. Instead, men are viewed as choosing to express or suppress their feelings based on their perceptions of what masculine norms apply in specific situations. Some men might believe that it is permissible to shed tears of joy at a sports event but not in a workplace setting. For example, in a study of masculinity and emotional expressiveness among English men, Walton, Coyle, and Lyons (2004) found that the participants in their study preferred to conceal their emotions in many social contexts but cited death, a soccer game, and a nightclub scenario as situations that permitted the expression of grief, joy, and anger, respectively.

A distinctive contribution of social constructionist approaches to masculinity is the idea that masculinity is actively constructed in social situations (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Kimmel et al., 2005). Put another way, men are viewed as actively making meanings of masculinity in specific social situations rather than being passively influenced by social forces such as the media, parents, and peers. This core feature of social constructionism is captured in the notion that gender, femininity, and masculinity are practices that are *performed* in social situations (Connell, 2005).

Social constructionists pay particular attention to the way women and men use language in the performance of gender. From a social constructionist perspective, language is viewed as actively infusing social situations with meaning, rather than merely a reflection of an individual's thoughts and feelings (Burr, 2003). For example, the use of the term "opposite sex" in everyday conversations about women and men conveys and reinforces the stereotype that women and men are polar opposites on a number of attributes (e.g., emotional versus nonemotional).

A second example of the meaning-making function of language can be in the type of words used to describe emotions. Shields (2002) observed out that in daily interactions, individuals often use emotional euphemisms in addition to specific emotion words to describe emotional experiences. These emotional euphemisms are words and phrases that describe behavior motivated by emotion but do not strictly refer to emotion, for example, "he took some shots at her." A focus on men's use of emotional euphemisms to express themselves might help broaden our understanding of men's emotional lives by identifying ways in which men disclose feelings that might otherwise go undetected based on a narrow focus on emotion words (e.g., sad, happy, fear).

Another important characteristic of social constructionist approaches is the emphasis on the social construction of labels used to describe human functioning (Gergen, 1999). Instead of assuming that terms such as "masculinity" and "emotions" have objective meanings, social constructionists investigate the social consensus surrounding the meanings attached to these terms. For example, rather than being concerned with whether men or women are more emotional, social constructionists might question the meaning of "emotional expressiveness" and examine the values that are protected or neglected by this meaning. In this regard, it can be argued that in European American culture, the term "emotional expressiveness" is value-laden in that it tends to be associated with tender feelings such as

sadness and empathy rather than with emotions that are associated with stereotypically negative features of masculinity, for example, aggression, hostility, and rage (cf. Shields, 2002). Hence, a focus on masculine inexpressiveness (interpreted as men's difficulty expressing tender feelings) might actually draw attention away from aspects of men's emotional behavior that are destructive and problematic.

It can also be argued that in European American culture, the term "emotional expressiveness" is socially constructed in such a way that individuals tend to look for evidence of expressiveness by focusing on the extent to which people *talk* about emotion (cf. Shields, 2002). In so doing, other forms of emotional expression that men engage in might be overlooked. Indeed, there is research evidence indicating that men vary their level of emotional expressiveness depending on their mode of expression (Wong & Rochlen, 2005). For example, men express more negative feelings in their writings than when talking to a psychotherapist whereas women express more negative feelings when talking to a psychotherapist than in their writings (Donnelly & Murray, 1991).

Hence, the stereotype of the inexpressive man (viewed as someone who rarely *talks* about his feelings) does not sufficiently take into account the diverse forms of emotional expression in which men engage. As exemplified in the following excerpt from an email written by a 53-year-old European American man to his children, some men might be very comfortable expressing their tender feelings in written/electronic form. (Note that the names of the individuals mentioned in the email have been changed to protect their identities.)

Well it is been some time since I wrote to you guys letting you know how much I appreciate you. As I listen to people at work talk about kids, talk to your Mom ... I can't help but be very thankful for how you guys fared for yourselves. I can't express how much I love you. I am very grateful for how you all managed to finish school, stay out of trouble and marry great spouses. I am sure some of this need to express stems from Alice being so close to having the baby, Kevin and Sandra's baby on the way, and Jesse—how you pulled the plug on a career to start a new one. I think about these things daily when I run or work out. Sometimes I beam too much about my kids, but you guys make me proud to be a father. I will treat your offspring the same way my parents treated their grandchildren—with love and some discipline. I know my mother spends a great deal of time praying for her children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. That seems to be a common thread as we age. Enjoy your weekend and we always look forward to seeing you guys. I do wish we lived a bit closer to all of you. That is one thing in life that would be a bit sweeter—living an hour or so away.

In sum, social constructionist approaches to masculinity provide a sophisticated portrait of men's emotional lives by proposing that there are no enduring, universal masculine traits prescribing how men experience, identify, and express emotion, but rather a variety of ways in which masculinity and emotional behavior can be constructed in different cultures, historical contexts, and social situations.

## TOWARD A STRENGTHS-BASED PERSPECTIVE ON MEN'S EMOTIONAL LIVES

The social constructionist focus on the contextual nature of men's masculinity and emotional behavior provides potential points of convergence with recent emphases on human strengths and positive human functioning initiated by positive psychology scholarship (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In this regard, we can draw inspiration from psychotherapies influenced by social constructionist principles to construct a more positive view of men's emotional lives. Social constructionist therapeutic approaches that emphasize human strengths and positive human functioning have become increasingly popular over the past two decades (de Shazer, 1991; Gutterman, 1994; Wong, 2006b).

One particular social constructionist therapeutic approach, solution-focused therapy, might be especially applicable in constructing a strengths-based approach to understanding men's emotional lives. Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) is based on several social constructionist principles alluded to in this chapter, such as a rejection of essentialist perspectives on human functioning and the importance of language in constructing clients' subjective realities (de Shazer & Berg, 1992). In SFT, instead of analyzing the causes of clients' problems, the focus of therapy is on identifying solutions by changing the meanings clients ascribe to their lives (de Shazer, 1991).

An important solution-focused intervention is the identification of situations where clients' problems do not exist or are less intense. The focus on these situations, referred to as "exceptions," is based on the assumption that clients cannot possibly experience problems at the same level of intensity at all times. In working with a client whose presenting problem is depression, the therapist might ask, "When was the most recent time that you felt less depressed?" The identification of exceptions enables the therapist and the client to explore positive ingredients for change within these situations. Consequently, clients are encouraged to repeat and increase these successful exceptions in their lives.

The principle of identifying exceptions in SFT can be integrated with social constructionist perspectives on masculinity to provide a strengths-based conceptualization of men who are perceived as having difficulties expressing emotion. Working on the social constructionist principles that no man can be consistently inexpressive and that one's emotional behavior will vary according to perceptions of situational demands, one can ask the following "exception questions" to construct a more affirming picture of men's emotional life:

1. When was the most recent occasion that you were able to express tender feelings such as sadness, gratitude, and empathy?
2. What situations enable you to be more comfortable expressing your feelings?
3. To whom are you comfortable expressing your feelings? What makes it easy to express your feelings to this person?
4. With whom do you feel emotionally connected (other than your spouse/partner)? What aspects of your friendship/relationship with this person foster emotional connectedness?

5. What forms of emotional expression (e.g., talking versus writing/emailing) are you most comfortable with?
6. What types of feelings are you most comfortable expressing to others (e.g., sadness, anger, frustration, joy, gratitude, awe, etc.)?

The discussion of “exception questions” might help challenge the stereotype of the inexpressive man as well as help men who perceive themselves (or who are perceived by others) as struggling with emotional expression identify and amplify positive ingredients of change in their emotional lives.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we reviewed three major theoretical approaches to understanding men’s emotional lives: (a) essentialist approaches, (b) gender role socialization approaches, and (c) social constructionist approaches. We described the limitations of essentialist and gender role socialization theories as well as how social constructionist perspectives address some of these limitations. We believe that social constructionist approaches to masculinity provide a more complex portrait of men that challenges stereotypes (e.g., men are unemotional but women are emotional), adequately consider how men alter their emotional behavior in different situations, and critically examine the social construction of labels such as “emotional” and “emotional expressiveness.”

Nevertheless, despite its growing prominence in masculinity scholarship in the past decade, social constructionist approaches to masculinity remain relatively unknown outside academic circles and have not been widely translated into practical applications relevant to the lives of women and men. It is our hope that the ideas expressed in this chapter, especially our description of solution-focused “exception questions,” can be a tentative step toward applying social constructionist principles in practical ways that help us better understand and improve men’s emotional lives.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Just Like a Man? Don’t Be So Sure

Here we provide some tentative and non-exhaustive suggestions for how some of the central ideas about men’s emotional lives expressed in this chapter can be applied or discussed in practical ways.

**Emotional Life Interview:** Interview a man who perceives himself (or is perceived by others) as having difficulty expressing emotion. Use the above strengths-based “exception questions” described in the preceding section as a guide in your interview on his emotional life. After the interview, reflect on what you have learned from the experience of the interview and how the information collected might help you better understand men’s emotional lives.

**Movie Assessment:** The theme of men’s emotional lives is frequently portrayed in movies and other media outlets. Some movies portray men as emotionally stoic whereas others depict men with destructive forms of emotional expression, e.g., uncontrollable rage and hostility. Some movies celebrate

positive forms of men's emotional behavior while others incorporate the theme of emotional redemption in which the male protagonist learns how to be emotionally authentic or connect emotionally with others through a series of challenging life experiences.

The following is a list of movies that serve as useful case studies of men's emotional lives: *About Schmidt*, *American Beauty*, *Anger Management*, *Casino Royale*, *Fight Club*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Lost in Translation*, *Mission: Impossible III*, *Mystic River*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *The Replacements*, *The Royal Tennenbaums*, and *What Women Want*. Analyze one of these movies, paying attention to how men's emotional lives are portrayed. Identify examples where men's emotional behavior is presented in a positive light and examples where it is cast in a negative light. Examine what messages these movies convey about what is considered "ideal" or "expected" masculine emotional behavior.

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# About the Editor and Contributors

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# Positive Psychology

# Positive Psychology

*Exploring the Best in People*

Volume 3

Growing in the Face of Adversity

Edited by

SHANE J. LOPEZ

Foreword by

SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY

*Praeger Perspectives*

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# Growth through Loss and Adversity: A Choice Worth Making

Robert J. Fazio, Tayyab Rashid, and H'Sien Hayward

“Do you want to come home first and rest before you leave?”

“No dad, I need to get back to school. I am already behind since I missed the University Counseling Center’s orientation.”

“Okay. Do you want to get something to eat? You look hungry. You know you need to eat otherwise you can’t function.”

“No, I’ll get something on the way. I need to get back to school, I have set up meetings with clients.”

“Are you sure you are okay to drive all the way back, we are all upset today.”

“Dad, I am leaving now.”

“Alright, thanks for being here.” (My dad hugs me and gives me a kiss on the cheek).

“Of course, I am glad I came. Now let me go old man. I am proud of you dad. You did great for Bill. I love you.”

“I love you too. We’ll call you from the car on the way down. Make sure you eat.”

“Got it big Ron, bye, bye.”

(Late August 2001, Haworth, New Jersey)

**W**e know the day will come when we sit and try to remember the last words we spoke in our loved one’s presence. What I didn’t know was my last conversation with my dad would be at my father’s best friend’s funeral. The conversation reflects the first time my father asked for my help with public speaking, the first time my father heard me say that I am proud of him, the first time my father would sit next to me in church crying and holding my hand, and the last time I would see him. Ever.

## STORIES OF GROWTH

## Robert Fazio's Story of Growth

It all started for me in the winter of 2000 when I heard my mother yell for my father to pick up the phone. I could tell from the horror in my mother's voice that something terrible had happened. I ran upstairs to see my father watching the television set and crying. My father was not an outwardly emotional guy, so this took me by surprise. He took a deep breath and told my family that our life-long friend Craig had been murdered while he was at work. Craig was only 29 years old, and his life was taken along with six other innocent colleagues on December 26, 2000. Craig was the son of my dad's best friend Bill.

Bill, like any other loving parent, was grief stricken by the loss of his son. Unfortunately, it seemed as if Bill's immune system became worn down and cancer surfaced. Bill passed away on August 27, 2001, and was buried August 31 on his birthday. Thank goodness I came home for Bill's funeral because that would be the last time I'd see my father.

My father died at the World Trade Center on Tuesday, September 11. There is not a day that goes by that I do not wish that he were here with us. The unfortunate reality is that our loved ones are somewhere else right now and we are here. So what should we do, and how can we go on? What I learned about my father after September 11 was that he was a person who reached beyond himself and made a difference in the world. He was a lifeline out of a disaster, literally holding the door for others. His heroism, as well as the heroism of many of your loved ones, is what has inspired me, my family, and my friends to try to follow dad's example and make a difference in people's lives. We have already begun to hold the door for others.

When I take the time to reflect upon what allowed me to honor the feelings of losing my dad, it is evident that I strive to live my life the way he lost his. I have a deep passion to put others first, especially in turbulent times. Interestingly enough, the best way to put others first is to first focus on you. What I mean by this is that to help others help themselves, you need to be healthy, strong, resilient, and emotionally intelligent. You need to be able to find a way to find the positive aspects in life when it seems that there are none.

I was fortunate to be very interested in studying Emotional Intelligence (EI) prior to September 11.\* Throughout my training, as I worked with clients, I always felt strongly about practicing what you preach. When I would work with clients and invite them to practice behaviors and skills related to EI, I would do the same. This approach provided me with the

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\*Throughout the stories of growth the authors will refer to the OTHERS(S) model. We will go into more depth about the model and its purpose later in the chapter. There are eight resources that make up the OTHERS(S) model, each of which are found in the literature to buffer trauma and lead to personal growth. I can connect my growth to each of the eight resources. However, here I will focus on EI.

strength, balance, and energy to manage the fallout from my father's death, as well as to maintain the pursuit of my dreams.

I remember the trip home from Richmond, Virginia, on September 12. I wasn't able to get home on the 11th due to highways, air traffic, and trains being shut down in certain areas. I can recall being on the way home and feeling extreme sadness and concern related to my dad being missing.

I learned two things very quickly: I was going to need to be aware of the extreme feelings associated with the trauma of 9/11 and find the strength to rally and look for my dad on the streets of New York City. Personally, I attribute my ability to manage my feelings through positive thinking to my understanding of EI. The concepts that I had been studying and helping others learn proved to be a huge resource for me as I cried at night while thinking that my dad would be gone forever along with thousands of other Americans, and I hit the streets during the day determined to find him.

I remember when I first returned to school after looking for my dad. I returned to my group therapy class and had a conversation with Dr. Craig Anderson, who was the leader of the Virginia Commonwealth University group therapy program at the time. Dr. Anderson was very warm and supportive. He asked me whether there was anything he could help me with. I can remember telling him there was one thing I was struggling with. I said "Craig, I am just not sure if the strength is in the crying and showing I am feeling the pain, or if the strength is in the not crying and showing that I am okay and will be able to grow through the experience." What he said to me next will seem quite simple, but it added a great deal of value to my life and has been a strong foundation for the philosophies associated with our non-profit work. Craig paused for a moment and said, "Rob, it is both." You know what, he was exactly right. To this day I share that story with people to illustrate how important it is to understand your feelings and experience and also take steps toward vulnerability, self-reliance, and strength.

### Tayyab Rashid's Story of Growth

In the fall of 1999, within eighteen days, I lost both of my parents in Pakistan some 8,000 miles away from the graduate school where I was a second-year student. I had visited them in the summer and was hesitant to return, but the proverbial assurance *insallah* (God willing) of my older siblings that all will be fine, brought me back to the United States.

Gripped by shock and grief, I was also angry with myself for being naively optimistic. I coated my emotions and thoughts with pessimism and isolated myself from my wife and friends. My beliefs were shattered, and any sense of meaning in life seemed a delusion. Pessimism took hold of my life. Laughter, smiles, and hugs felt foreign. My spiritual muscles atrophied as all pervasive grief took its toll on my body, and I became ill and depressed.

Among other things, my doctor suggested I should work out. Initially, I ignored his advice, but then my wife almost dragged me to a nearby gym. My muscles found some relief. However, I was still angry and was upset one day when I found someone monopolizing the exercise machine I wanted to use. Pacing with anger and entitlement, I decided to leave the gym. I was

about to walk out when a yoga class in progress caught my attention. Without much thinking, I walked into middle of the class, disrupting the flow. The teacher gently handed me a mat and asked whether I could squeeze in between two women who were obviously unhappy about the disruption. Nevertheless, the encouragement of the teacher helped me to complete the class, and it turned out to be emotionally and spiritually uplifting.

I returned to the next class and the next until it became a routine and then an automatic ritual. The yoga postures, deep breathing, and *Shavasana* (relaxation) helped me slowly let go of the grief, guilt, and pessimism that I was holding onto tightly. Indeed, it did not jolt me into instant happiness, but let me recede inwards—the more I reflected, the less I felt the need to blame myself or anyone else for the death of my folks. I started picking up the shattered pieces and rather than reassembling them, I tried to see what shape they now formed. I saw that after all, like autumn leaves, finality is an inevitable reality. More importantly, I realized that this reality doesn't have to be distilled in pessimism. As yoga connected my body with my soul, the *American Psychologist* issue of January 2000 (a special on Positive Psychology) bridged my thinking to optimistic avenues. My inner dialogues started reassuring me that the finality of life, although sad and inevitable, nonetheless can be evolved into some meaning. This realization brought an inner coherence. Ever since, I have been sharing this coherence through optimism, yoga, meditation, and positive psychology. I have been searching for that meaning, and this journey has been truly transforming.

### H'Sien Hayward's Story of Growth

We were like a photograph and its negative—Rishi, my big brother, was tall for his age, I was short; he was athletic, I was academic; he was extroverted and social, I was shy. He was, throughout my childhood, the most important person in my life. We were only 18 months apart in age, and I wanted to be just like him. I was a tomboy, wore his hand-me-down clothes, and even had my hair cut short like his. People would often mistake us for twins (they thought I was a little boy), and I remember feeling so proud. He was my protector. He would not let older kids pick on me at recess, checked on me first if fighting broke out, and at bedtime, would listen to all of my worries and tell me that everything was going to be okay so I could fall asleep.

And then he was gone. In one day, one afternoon really, when he was 10 and I nine, Rishi was killed in an accident and I never saw him again. I was not there when he died, and I did not see his body before he was cremated. He was not there to dig trenches in the driveway with me after it rained, or to sit next to me on the school bus, and his bed remained empty at night.

My memory of the moment when I was told he was dead is so clear it seems like someone drew it on the inside of my skull with a permanent marker. In the memory I am sitting on the burgundy futon couch watching Liz, an adult friend of our family, put down the phone and walk toward me. She had been talking to my parents who were at the hospital with Rishi because he had been hurt in a tractor accident earlier that day. I knew he

would be fine because he was always fine. He was rambunctious and outdoorsy and loved being around large farm machinery, and he always came home with big scrapes and bruises and even bigger stories about how he got the scrapes and bruises. And then I saw the expression on Liz's face. In the second before she spoke, I remember everything in the room, and everything in the world, slowing down. It was like right before a car crash when everything around you seems to slow down and become very quiet. I didn't know then that that was what a car crash was like, but I would find out later.

Because I was a child, logic and causality got all twisted up. I didn't know whether something I had done, or had not done, had caused him to die. I remember feeling terribly, terribly alone in the world. It was as if a big part of me had died with him; I didn't know who I was when I wasn't Rishi's little sister. I rebelled the year after his death: I dyed my hair green and then pink, hung out with the older "bad kids" at recess, shoplifted, and tried smoking cigarettes. But what I remember most clearly from that time was a deep sense of existential embarrassment; that is, I felt profoundly embarrassed to be alive because I was sure that everyone would have preferred it to be me that died. Accompanying this was a world-sized sense of anxiety that I somehow had to prove my worth or my right to exist, so after my rebellion phase, I got to work. I became a competitive four-sport athlete, got perfect grades, and became extroverted—I was prom queen and dated the quarterback (or the starting center, or the pitcher, depending on the season).

Seven years after my brother's death, when I was sixteen, I was in a near-fatal automobile accident that left me in a coma and paralyzed from the chest down. Several friends and I were driving to the beach to celebrate winning the state track championship. I was riding in the back seat as we came down a winding mountain road, and the last thing I remember is begging the driver to slow down. When I woke up from the coma, my parents, paragons of resilience, banded together and surrounded me with love and hope. Though they had divorced after my brother's death, they had remained a unified supportive force when it came to me. The example they provided, of finding good even in things that seemed very bad, sustained me through four months of hospitalization, four more months of outpatient physical therapy, and when I returned to my senior year of high school in a wheelchair. Contrary to the recurrent bouts of depression and pernicious suicidal ideation that I was told to expect upon awakening from the coma, life had never been more beautiful, nor I more grateful. Having experienced my brother's accident and subsequent death made life, whether spent standing or sitting, feel precious.

Now, after almost 14 years of using a wheelchair, and 20 since my brother's death, I maintain a deep inner commitment to helping others whose lives have been touched by severe loss or adversity to find the beauty in these challenges. As a sophomore at Stanford University I was exposed to the power of scientific inquiry to systematically challenge and offer alternatives to prevailing perceptions of life experience, and have now returned to academic study at Harvard to complete a doctoral degree in clinical

psychology. Psychological science, in my belief, is one of the most powerful tools I can use to understand why some rise and others fall when tragedy hits. As a doctoral student and afterward, as a scholar, I hope to contribute to a base of knowledge that may ultimately help enhance resilience and increase well-being for people who are living with great challenges.

The resources that supported me in my personal experience of growth through loss and adversity, including hope, meaning, and relationships with others, are among those that a growing body of research has identified as important for understanding the full range of potential responses to loss and adversity.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years we have met many people who have lost loved ones or faced adversity related to the September 11, 2001, attacks, the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, cancer and other chronic illnesses, physical disabilities, and accidents. What we bring to you in the following chapter is based on our personal experience with tragic and unexpected loss, our professional work and research, and insights from our colleagues. We want to keep everything very real and very practical. All three of us have experienced sudden loss, trauma, and adversity, and each of us is dedicated to integrating our personal and professional experiences to present you with insights and practical life strategies. As we sit down to put our final touches on this chapter, it was just reported that thirty-two people were killed at Virginia Tech University in a shooting incident. This occurrence brings to our minds the unfortunate truth that we are all vulnerable. This is precisely why it is so important for us to put more resources into helping people respond to loss and adversity. One of the authors is on his way to the Virginia Tech campus to apply what we have learned from our first-hand experiences in working with trauma and adversity.

We share this experience in this chapter in several ways. First, we review growth-related concepts and survey major themes suggested by relevant literature. Second, we present our model, OTHERS(S), which we have used effectively to help people face trauma and adversity. Interventions based on this model are also explained. Finally, we highlight some future directions.

Positive outcomes after trauma and suffering are an age-old theme in philosophy, religion, and literature. However, psychology has traditionally focused on the course of disease and the maladaptive behavior observed in individuals. Both conceptual work and empirical studies in the area of bereavement, for example, have tended to focus on the negative outcomes experienced by those suffering loss.

The relatively recent emergence of positive psychology as a field of scientific inquiry has served as a catalyst however, and posttraumatic growth and benefit literature has burgeoned over the past few years. A growing number of studies have been conducted that document the benefits of trauma and loss (e.g., Affeck & Tennen, 1996; Fazio & Fazio, 2005; Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; McMillen, 1999; Park, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Zoellner & Maercker, 2005). These

studies have empirically examined positive changes following adversities such as breast cancer, bone marrow transplants, HIV and AIDS, rape and sexual assaults, military encounters, airplane crashes, hurricanes, terrorist attacks, shootings, injuries, and bereavement.

Broadly, there is converging evidence that among other correlates trauma is linked with growth—often conceptualized as insight into the meaning of life and importance of relationships. This growth often helps mitigate the feelings of loss or helplessness. Thus, there has been a shift, and a growing number of studies have focused outside the mainstream disease-oriented framework to describe how negative outcomes of loss and trauma can be prevented and how people can cope successfully (Basic Behavioral Science Task Force of the National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1996). It has also been noted that negative symptoms following a traumatic event and growth are not mutually exclusive (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006); that is, posttraumatic growth (PTG; a term mostly used to reflect growth following trauma and loss) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be continuous dimensions rather than distinct, independent constructs. Therefore, focusing on growth following a traumatic event or loss may be a way to help people manage their distress.

The terms that have been used to describe growth following a tragic event include PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995), stress-related growth (Park, 1998), and adversarial growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004). We use the term “growth through loss and adversity” (GTLA) to describe the positive changes that people experience related to a perceived challenging event. We use this term because we believe that negative events can serve as springboards to positive change. We also believe that a person’s perception of the event, as well as their personality and existing social and personal resources, are strong predictors of one’s growth.

## BACKGROUND ON GTLA

Research has revealed a number of facets of growth following trauma and loss (Afeck & Tennen, 1996; McMillan, 1999; Park, 1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996), and a recent meta-analysis by Linley and Joseph (2004) of thirty-nine empirical studies suggested several noteworthy themes. First, emotional social support was positively associated with growth. Second, greater levels of perceived threat and harm were associated with higher levels of growth. However, a linear relationship among degree of loss, trauma and adversity, and growth was not found. Benefits were stronger at intermediate, rather than high or low levels of exposure. Third, in terms of cognitive appraisal variables, awareness and controllability of the event were generally associated with higher levels of adversarial growth. Fourth, women reported more growth than men, and younger respondents were more likely to report growth once a given level of developmental maturation was achieved (i.e., older adolescents were more likely to report growth). However, it could be argued that temporal proximity to one’s death makes older people more likely to be concerned about the imminence of their mortality, and thus less likely to report growth.

Fifth, in terms of the Big Five constellation of personality traits, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were all positively related to growth, while neuroticism was negatively associated. Similarly, self-efficacy and hardiness were both associated with growth, although sense of coherence was not. Those with higher self-esteem and more optimism were more likely to report growth. Finally, problem-focused coping, positive reinterpretation, and positive religious coping were also positively associated with growth. In terms of the temporal course of growth, Linley and Joseph (2004) found that passage of time was unlikely to influence growth, unless intervening events and processes mediated growth, and growth tends to stabilize over time.

Helgeson et al. (2006) also examined the correlates of GTLA. Their review of eighty-seven cross-sectional studies concurred with many of the findings of Linley and Joseph (2004). Importantly, they suggested that growth from trauma and adversity may be an outcome of interest in its own right and one that reflects the positive outcomes from trauma rather than a mere lack of distress. However, they also found that growth and benefit-finding were related to more intrusive and avoidant thoughts about the illness. One explanation may be that experiencing intrusive thoughts about a stressor is a sign that people are working through the implications of the stressor for their lives, and those implications could lead to growth. In fact, a period of contemplation and consideration of the stressor may be necessary for growth to occur. Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine that true growth can occur within days of a traumatic event. It appears that benefit-finding is more likely to be related to a good outcome when a longer time has elapsed since the trauma. However, considering that all people respond to situations differently, it is possible that a person may experience aspects of growth, such as a new perspective, shortly after an event.

## GTLA RELATED TO DISABILITIES

Disability is not the experience of a small number of people. Either due to a personal condition or that of a loved one, disability is an experience that touches most people at some point during their lives. In the contemporary United States, some 54 million individuals—almost 20% of the population—have one or more physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2006), and half of these are severe, affecting the ability to perform basic life functions, such as walking, seeing, or hearing (CDC, 2006; Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Due to post-World War II advances in life expectancy and survivorship, individuals living with disabilities, regardless of which definition is used, now comprise the single largest minority group ever identified in the United States (Campbell, 1996a, 1996b). In fact, disability is truly an equal opportunity minority—anyone can join, at any time, regardless of ethnicity, age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Further, on the horizon are the anticipated effects of the aging of the baby boomer generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, which will result in unprecedented numbers of people with disabilities living in the nation (Administration on Aging, 2001; Campbell,

1996b). According to the National Coalition on Disability and Aging (2004), there are approximately 75 to 85 million Americans—or one-third of the nation—who are aging with long-term disabilities or aging into disability for the first time in later life (Campbell, 1996b). Despite the increasing prevalence of people with disabilities and the challenges they face, remarkably little empirical research exists regarding the cognitive and emotional impact of disability across the lifespan.

Research regarding the impact of disability and other forms of health-related adversity, like the traditional research on trauma outcomes, emphasizes loss. Theories of disability emphasize loss and decline, and common stereotypes of living with physical challenges are largely negative (Wright, 1983). Although these events often do produce predictable maladaptive responses that foster further problems (e.g., chronic depression), particularly in the early stages, there is also evidence in the literature that indicates otherwise. For example, a number of researchers have documented that people with a severe chronic illness report a level of quality of life (QOL) neither inferior nor better than that of less severely ill patients or healthy people (Cassileth et al., 1984), and even patients with a life-threatening disease or disability were found to report a stable QOL (Andrykowski, Brady, & Hunt, 1993). Additionally, health care providers and significant others tend to underestimate patients' level of contentment compared with patients' reports of their own level of contentment (Sprangers & Aaronson, 1992).

Spinal cord injury (SCI), a disability acquired through traumatic onset, has received increased attention in recent years as a significant portion of the American population has been impacted. More than 250,000 individuals with SCI are now living in the United States, and according to the Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis (1995), another person will join their ranks every hour of every day. Schulz and Decker (1985), in a study of adults with SCI, found that despite the obvious impact of their injuries, participants saw themselves on average as being better off than most people, with or without a disability. Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman (1978) compared differences in life satisfaction among lottery winners, control participants, and participants with paraplegia and reported that because happiness is relative to the context of previous experience, people who won the lottery eventually became no happier than people with paraplegia. Diener and Diener (1996) reviewed studies that indicated that all American socioeconomic groups score above neutral life satisfaction, as do people with this severe disability. Finally, Silver (1982) reported that individuals with SCI were very unhappy immediately following their injury, but that 58% stated that happiness was their strongest emotion by the third week after their injuries.

Janoff-Bulman and Berger (2000) pointed out that people do not make such changes “in spite of their losses and sense of vulnerability, but because of them” (p. 39). From this perspective it seems reasonable to look at the ways that disability may create conditions that foster coping and personal growth. Rather than being a universally negative experience, disability may deepen individuals' understanding of life and be interpreted positively. Thus, reports of increased depression and greater awareness of death do not necessarily contradict reports of increased appreciation of life. Rather, mature

schemas may be more complex and contain multiple, once seemingly exclusive, views simultaneously. Indeed, research on the complexity of schemas suggests that mature schemas are more complex than immature schemas (Linville, 1982, 1987; Linville & Jones, 1980). Likewise, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) referred to this outcome of PTG as wisdom, and describe it as an appreciation for paradox. Collins, Taylor, and Skokan (1990) asked fifty-five cancer patients about the changes in their lives, and their findings exemplify this phenomenon. The patients reported negative changes in their views of their world and themselves, while at the same time they reinterpreted their experiences positively (perceived benefits, reordered priorities).

### How Does Growth Occur: Insights from Theoretical Models

Literature summarized previously clearly indicates that trauma and adversity is strongly correlated with growth. Two models of growth following trauma and loss are most prominent in explaining the mechanism of growth (Schaefer & Moos, 1992; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004). According to Schaefer and Moos (1992), environmental and personal systems shape the life crisis experience and its aftermath. They influence cognitive appraisal processes and coping responses, which in turn, affect the outcome of crises. Feedback loops link all components of the model, thus influencing one another. The personal system includes sociodemographic characteristics and personal resources such as self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, self-confidence, easy-going disposition, motivation, health status, and prior crisis experience. Environmental factors include personal relationships, support from family, friends, and social environment as well as financial resources and other aspects of the living situation. Event-related factors include the effects of the severity, duration, and timing of the life crisis and its scope on the individual.

In Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995, 2004) model, which has been revised recently, the growth process is conceptualized as follows: A traumatic event, which is an event of seismic proportions, shakes or disintegrates some important elements of an individual's salient goals and worldviews. It is a challenge to higher-order goals, higher-order beliefs, and the ability to manage emotional distress. Consequently, the individual initiates a process of recurrent rumination and tries to reduce distress. Initially, rumination is more automatic than deliberate characterized by frequent thinking about the trauma and related issues. After the first coping success (reduction of emotional distress, disengagement from unreachable goals), rumination transforms into more explicit thinking about the trauma and its impact on one's life. In its adaptive form, rumination leads to cognitive processing (analyzing the new situation, searching for meaning, and re-appraisal) and is supposed to play an important role in the development of growth. PTG is conceived as a multidimensional construct, which includes beliefs, goals, behaviors, and identity as well as the development of a life narrative and wisdom.

In addition, growth has also been conceptualized as a coping strategy (Afeck & Tennen, 1996), as a process of searching for and making meaning (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 2004; Park & Folkman, 1997), as an

interpretive process (Phillip, 1999), and as a form of self-enhancing appraisal or positive illusions (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000). Although models of growth from trauma and adversity have made significant theoretical and research headway, they have not encompassed some important components. For example, Zoellner and Maercker (2005) suggested that these models have usually concentrated on cognitive factors, coping strategies, or personality differences, but emotions might play a greater role than assumed so far; that is, there is a possibility of overestimating the role of cognitive factors and underestimating the role of emotions, particularly of positive emotions. Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, and Larkin (2003) have recently shown that in college students who were assessed in early 2001 and again shortly after September 11, 2001, positive emotions in the aftermath of crisis fully accounted for the relation between pre-crisis resilience (personality trait) and post-crisis growth, conceptualized as increases in life satisfaction, optimism, and tranquility. Given that trauma and loss have numerous causes and consequences, it may be difficult to restrict growth within the confines of a single unifying theoretical model. Moreover, in increasingly pluralistic cultures, a single model may be inadequate. Therefore, we view diversity of theoretical notions about growth as an encouraging sign.

#### HOW DO WE FACILITATE GTLA?

Based on personal experiences and that of others who have lived with trauma and loss we have designed the OTHERS(S) model to promote growth. We have empirically tested this model (Fazio & Fazio, 2005) and have used it as a guide for personal, professional, and community interventions.

#### The OTHERS(S) Model

We have identified eight core resources that allow people to manage loss and adversity in a healthy manner and lead people to grow. The basis for the eight core resources are three foundational resources that allow people to enhance the necessary life skills associated with the OTHERS(S) model (see Figure 1.1). The OTHERS(S) model is an acronym for the eight resources that promote growth through adversity: Optimism, True meaning, Humor, EI, Resilience, Spirituality, Self-confidence and Others (relationships).

The OTHERS(S) model is strength-based and focuses on practical skills, empowerment, education, relationships, and most importantly growth by fostering positive emotions and strengths—a noteworthy element missing in previous models. We believe that building strengths is a valid and effective way of dealing with trauma and loss. Strengths serve us best not when life is easy, but when life is difficult. During challenging times, helping people to discover their strengths such as optimism, hope, humor, social and EI, resilience, meaning, and spirituality takes added importance. Zoellner and Maercker (2005) noted that for too long, clinicians largely have short-changed trauma survivors by focusing predominately on reducing



Figure 1.1. The OTHERS(S) Model for Personal Growth and Relationships. Source: Fazio & Fazio, 2006.

symptoms of trauma, and that they may have failed to support clients as they reflected upon their basic beliefs more generally.

The OTHERS(S) model also focuses on the process of connecting, caring, and challenging before, during, and after teaching the key messages and skills. The motivation driving the use of the OTHERS(S) model is not solely to reduce symptoms or return people to their normal levels of functioning. The goal is to help people learn that they can grow as a result of their experiences even if the experience is traumatic. In this model, we encourage people to gain insight and take action to leverage their strengths to develop their personal resources. When possibilities of growth are as salient as attention to pain, grievance, and suffering, clinicians and counselors can help clients to explicitly explore the benefits from adversity and trauma. Therefore, we emphasize healing and growth as well as pain and suffering. We view pain and struggle as a valid aspect of the healing process for many individuals, and we invite people to understand their pain and use it for growth. We believe in helping people understand themselves and their specific situation rather than encouraging them to move on. Therefore, much of the work is focused on self-understanding and building relationships.

Table 1.1 presents the descriptions, key messages, and skills needed to foster these resources. These are divided into three components:

- (a) The foundational resources (self-connect [self-understanding], self-care, and self-challenge) are for self-development or growth. They are an

**Table 1.1**  
**Foundational, Relational, and Core Resources of the OTHERS(S) Model**

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**Foundational Resources**

Self-Connect	<p>Definition: self-awareness and understanding others. Self-connecting facilitates trust between you and others, and encourages you to bond with people on a deeper level.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Journal writing</i>. Become aware of your personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.</p>
Self-Care	<p>Definition: Being compassionate to yourself and others. Taking steps toward health.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Reflection</i>. Listen to and accommodate your physical and emotional needs. You can better equip yourself to not only maintain ground through difficult times, but also thrive despite challenging obstacles.</p>
Self-Challenge	<p>Definition: Self-challenge. Emphasize finding your inner strength, even in the most painful and challenging times of your life.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Challenge affirmations</i>. Think about how you can achieve your personal goals and provide specific reasons for your success.</p>

**Relational Recourses (when you are the helper)**

Connect	<p>Establish and deepen relationships with the person you are helping grow. This process is the beginning of letting the other person know you are on the “same team.”</p>
Care	<p>Express empathy and let the person know that you are genuinely interested in their healing and growth</p>
Challenge	<p>Connect, Care, and then Challenge the person toward growth. Leverage your relationship and collaborate with the person to identify specific growth opportunities, commitments, and action steps.</p>

**Core Resources (OTHERS[S])**

Optimism/Hope	<p>Definition: Ability to develop and maintain a positive attitude and hope even during challenging times.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Find the positive and refocusing</i>.</p>
True Meaning	<p>Definition: Ability to make meaning of losses/adversity and finding purpose for the future.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Self-questioning</i>. Ask yourself positive and purposeful questions.</p>
Humor	<p>Definition: Ability to laugh and use humor to lighten the load of loss and adversity.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Find the lighter side</i>. Strike a balance between taking things seriously enough and not taking them too seriously.</p>

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(continued)

**Table 1.1** (*continued*)

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Emotional Intelligence (EI)	<p>Definition: Ability to be aware of your emotions, connect with people, read emotions in others, and communicate your emotions to others. EI also involves the successful integration of thought and feeling.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Emotion coaching</i>. Become aware of your emotions, understand them, and then channel them into positive responses to adversity.</p>
Resilience	<p>Definition: Ability to adapt, bounce back, and respond with strength to adversity, loss, and challenge.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Self-talk</i>. Communicate with yourself and teach yourself to be adaptive.</p>
Spirituality	<p>Definition: This resource can only be defined by you, as it is the most personal of all resources. An example of a personal definition is: the level of connectedness to people and the surrounding world. Spirituality may be defined as the inner spirit and passion for relationships with others or having an instant connection related to important dates, common experiences, and serendipity. Some people view spirituality as an appreciation for something greater than themselves.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Leveraging your spirit</i>. Personally define the passion within you that encourages you to thrive. An example of this could be <i>the connectedness I share with others</i>.</p>
Self-confidence	<p>Definition: Belief in yourself and your personal resources.</p> <p>Key Skill: “<i>Canning the T.</i>” Think about how you “can” accomplish something. Instead of saying “I can’t”, think about a smaller step toward your goal and figure out what you “can” do in the present and grow from there. “Can’t is can with a T. Therefore, you have to can the T.”</p>
OTHERS(S)	<p>Definition: OTHERS(S) ties all personal resources together and emphasizes relationships. It is the ability to build relationships in your social-network, and heal through helping others.</p> <p>Key Skill: <i>Hold the Door for Others</i>. By reaching out and connecting with others, people can often heal and grow through loss. Volunteer to help someone in any way you can.</p>

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essential platform needed to develop the resources for GTLA. Whether people are working on themselves or they are helping other people, the foundational resources need to be developed. They serve as the drivers that help us develop the core resources listed later. The foundational

resources allow us to enhance our understanding of ourselves, increase our emotional and physical health, and empower us to leverage our strengths to grow. It is similar to when you build a house. A strong foundation is needed to support the essential components of the home, such as doors and windows.

- (b) The relational resources (connect, care, and challenge) focus on the process of helping a person enhance the eight core resources in the OTHERS(S) model. In other words, when a practitioner or Growth Consultant (GC) is working with a person, connect, care, and challenge are the processes that allow for people to collaborate. The objective is to work together and enhance the OTHERS(S) resources.
- (c) The core resources are optimism/hope, true-meaning, humor, EI, resilience, spirituality, self-confidence, and OTHERS(S). The core resources are what are essential for individuals to buffer the effects of trauma and lead us toward growth. These resources relate to our relationships with others, and how we interact and respond to loss and adversity. In essence, these resources are very visible in our everyday interactions with people.

### Assessment of Resources

An essential component of healing and growing through loss and adversity is self-understanding. To gain a better understanding of where individuals' strengths and areas of development are related to the OTHERS(S) model, we created a self-awareness tool, The Others(s) Resources Competency Indicator (ORCI), which is currently going through the validation process. It is designed to help individuals gain greater insight into themselves and to help them focus their plans for growth. The ORCI can be downloaded at no cost, just like all of our resources, at [www.holdthEDOOR.com/resources](http://www.holdthEDOOR.com/resources).

### Support for the OTHERS(S) Model

Approximately two years following the events of September 11, Hold the Door for Others (HTDFO) surveyed over 240 people who lost loved ones on September 11. We asked people to respond to a series of questionnaires as well as five questions that can be found in Table 1.2.

Our findings further verify that loss and adversity can actually serve as a spark for positive changes. Specifically, common themes that emerged are presented in Table 1.2. In addition, we concluded that resilience and EI were significant predictors of PTG within people who lost loved ones on September 11 (Fazio, Strunk, & Danish, 2004).

We used these themes as well as additional research and experience to enhance the OTHERS(S) model and design individual and community interventions. Our interventions range from interactive CD-ROMS, to speaking engagements, to workbooks, to day-long events, such as our annual Hold the Door Day. Our team members have delivered our

**Table 1.2**  
**September 11 Themes Related to GTLA**

Question	Percentage of Responses and Theme
1) What helps you the most as you live with your loss?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 55% of the responses included a reference to social support (e.g. support from friends and family) was what helped them the most as they began to live with their loss.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Of this 55%, 11% of the responses included a reference to having a support network of people who have experienced loss was the most helpful.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● 26% of the responses included a mention of spirituality (e.g., faith, connection with loved one, belief of person being in heaven).</li> <li>● 11% of the responses referred to other types of support such as therapy or support from strangers as being the most helpful.</li> <li>● 9% of the responses included doing a journaling exercise.</li> </ul>
2) What is the most challenging aspect of your loss to date?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 66% of the responses included a reference to the fact that the suddenness of the loss was the most challenging aspect.</li> <li>● 30% of the responses included a reference to the difficulty of resuming life (e.g., creating a ‘new’ life, facing each day without loved one).</li> <li>● 20% of the responses included a reference to managing the feelings associated with the loss (e.g., pain, grief, loneliness, anxiety).</li> </ul>
3) Did anything good come from your loss? If yes, then what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 52% of the responses included a reference to <i>personal growth</i> (e.g., greater self-reliance, increased independence, increased resiliency).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Of these responses 40% of them were focused on a heightened appreciation of others (e.g., family, friends, enhanced relationships).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4) How have you grown personally since September 11?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 41% of the responses included a reference to an enhanced sense of appreciation for life such as compassion, and tolerance of others.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “I have a better sense of perspective. I can better see the big picture. I try not to get hung up on the little things.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>● 29% of the responses included a reference to <i>personal growth</i> (i.e. stronger will or determination, resiliency).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “I’m doing things I never thought I’d be capable of/doing things I never saw myself doing.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

(continued)

**Table 1.2** (*continued*)

Question	Percentage of Responses and Theme
5) What can you offer others that may be helpful if they experience a traumatic loss like the families of September 11?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 49% of the responses included a reference to <i>reaching out to others and getting support</i>.</li> <li>● 24% of the responses included a reference to getting help such as group or individual therapy or support groups.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Tell people how they can help you/don’t be afraid to ask for help.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: Fazio & Fazio, 2006.

interventions in a variety of diverse settings. An example of our outreach efforts includes using the OTHERS(S) model to train children affected by Hurricane Katrina to be peer listeners. In the spring of 2005, team members traveled to Thailand and trained mental health professionals to use the OTHERS(S) model in dealing with the aftermath of the Southeast Asian tsunami (Hayward, 2005). More recently, team members were involved in prevention efforts to support victims of the fatal mass shooting at Virginia Tech University. A component of our interventions include the use of workbooks to reinforce key learnings and provide opportunities for future growth. The workbooks include lessons, self-reflection exercises, and an emphasis on taking action toward developing the resources associated with the OTHERS(S) model (Fazio, Van Raalte, & Burke, 2002; Fazio & Fazio, 2006).

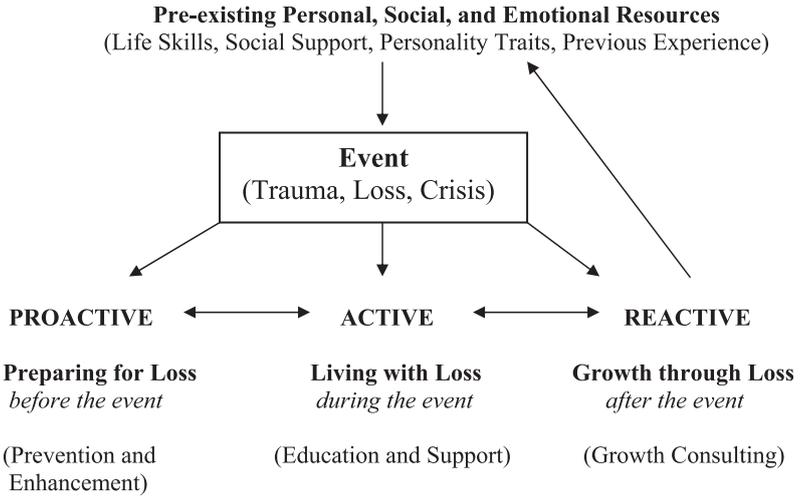
### Life Developmental Intervention

The OTHERS(S) model provides a vision of what is essential for individuals when they encounter adversity or trauma. However, the timing of intervention is just as significant as the intervention itself. We believe in strength-based interventions that take into account areas of growth and development. We strongly advocate for an approach that includes interventions that can be used before, during, and after an event. We define these time periods as proactive, active, and reactive stages of intervention (see Figure 1.2). We believe that applying the lessons and skills associated with the OTHERS(S) model are beneficial before an event happens, as soon as it happens, and after it happens. This approach is rooted in a life development intervention framework (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993).

## THE PROCESS AND POTENTIAL MECHANISM OF GROWTH

### Using Stories to Facilitate Growth

There are many routes to growth following trauma and adversity. A cornerstone of the OTHERS(S) model of growth is sharing the trauma. We believe that sharing trauma and troubles is arguably a basic human



**Figure 1.2. Timing of Growth through Loss and Adversity Interventions.**  
*Source: Fazio & Fazio, 2005.*

motivation. There are many ways of sharing trauma (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997; Nolen-Hoekesma & Davis, 2004; Taylor, 1989). In addition to connecting with significant others, we have successfully employed the strategy of sharing the stories as we did at the onset of this chapter. We believe that sharing your story is perhaps the most robust mechanism of change in our model as it helps individuals to coherently integrate all themes of the OTHERS(S) model in a personalized narrative which, over time, can be used as an evolving vehicle of dynamic growth.

In the psychological literature, it has long been believed that not talking about trauma eventually was unhealthy (Greenberg & Stone, 1992). More recently, measuring variables like blood pressure, muscle tension, and skin conductance, James Pennebaker (1989), who has conducted extensive research on benefits of writing about trauma, demonstrated that holding back or inhibiting one’s thoughts and emotions exacerbates stress (Paez, Valesco, & Gonzalez, 1999). Pennebaker (1989) maintained that not sharing or talking about important psychological events constrains thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and is a form of inhibition. This inhibition in turn causes psychosomatic processes and leads to long-term health problems. Reducing this inhibition, by informal confiding and confiding in professionals through psychotherapy, has shown to reduce illness and stress (Mumford, Schlesinger, Glass, Patrick, & Cuerdon, 1998).

According to Gestalt psychology, when individuals experience trauma, they temporarily become disconnected with their core self or identity (Melnick & Nevis, 1998). This disconnection is exacerbated by the inhibition of the thoughts and feelings, which naturally come with the trauma. We inherently need to integrate the many dimensions and facets of a single event

into a more coherent whole (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1973). The complicated and unpredictable world around us makes us anxious for not ascertaining completion and understanding of simple cause-and-effect explanation for traumatic events. We are inclined to search for meaning and emotional and logical closure of events, to attain a sense of control and predictability over our lives. However, when events are incomplete, as traumas often are, we tend to ruminate, talk, and even dream about traumas. The more we attempt to suppress these thoughts, paradoxically, the more frequently they intrusively return to mind. Our mind, which is naturally designed to move toward completion, thus often remains preoccupied to figure out why this trauma happened. This distressing nature of intrusive ruminations produces anxiety than can lead to autonomic arousal.

Research in narrative psychology suggests that we make sense of our lives by putting them into story like format (Neimeyer & Stewart, 2000). We use a self-narrative to account for the critical events in our lives (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; McAdams, 1996). Using the core themes of the OTHERS(S) model, we have helped our clients construct a story about trauma and adversity. Much like Niederhoffer and Pennebaker (2002), in most cases the experience of constructing the story has facilitated a sense of resolution that has enabled a sense of predictability and control over our clients' lives—and allowed them to be in synch with their core selves, a connection disrupted by emotional upheaval. We believe that through language, we give structure to our experiences. Thus, we can create a coherent narrative, which can be summarized, and then stored efficiently. Greenberg, Stone, and Wortman (1996) noted that words and expressions we use to describe the trauma and adversity provide frames to organize our thoughts and feelings surrounding the traumatic events. In addition, writing about trauma spurs our self-regulation. Self-regulation occurs as we see an increased sense of control over our emotional reactions.

Consistent with the importance of connecting with others, we have noted that an important significance of writing the story of growth is its power to connect with others because not being able to or not willing to share our trauma with others disconnects us from our social networks. Whether it is embarrassment, shame, guilt, or fear of appearing vulnerable that prevents us from disclosing, it mostly keeps our trauma in the dark. Research suggests that not disclosing encourages obsessive preoccupation and rumination about the trauma (Wegner, Lane, & Dimitri, 1994). Suppressing traumatic and troublesome thoughts and feelings on a daily basis is a heavy emotional and cognitive burden, which makes it difficult for us to organize thoughts about the event and to make sense of what has happened. In addition, it does not allow others to offer sympathy, empathy, and support, which often are much needed. Decades of accumulated research have suggested that close social ties are the most robust predictors of our happiness and well-being. Sharing a narrative about trauma helps others to understand our inner strife and suffering. By forming a narrative, we are able to translate our life story into a language that is both understandable and communicable. Once constructed, this story not only helps us to better understand the causes and consequences of the trauma, but it

also allows us to communicate it with others who may be encouraged to share their traumas.

Keeping this in mind, a core component of HTDFO interventions include an aspect of self-reflection, which includes telling your personal story. We encourage people to share their story in any way they feel is healing. Often times this is done through writing, however, many people tell their story through conversations, drawing, music, and other vehicles. The HTDFO team has created a collection of stories from people who faced a variety of adverse events. The authors of each story connect their experience to resources in the OTHERS(S) model they feel helped them grow. We have found that these stories serve as a tremendous source of inspiration for people who experience trauma, loss, or adversity. The stories seem to instill hope and provide people with specific strategies and a potential road map toward growth. The stories also have a strong positive impact in that they connect people to one another and help people build, deepen, and maintain relationships.

Empirical studies have documented benefits of writing about trauma. Writing about traumatic experiences and adjustment to life can have remarkable health benefits. For example, writing about traumatic events has been linked with heightened immune function (Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, & Schneiderman, 1994; Patrie, Booth, Pennebaker, & Davidson, 1995), greater congruity in brain wave activity across the cerebral hemisphere (Pennebaker & Susman, 1988), and reduced health problems (Greenberg & Stone, 1992). In addition, writing about traumatic events has been associated with finding employment after being laid off (Spera, Buhrfeind, & Pennebaker, 1994). Greenberg et al. (1996) found that even writing about an imagined trauma one time for 20 minutes provided health benefits. McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) reported that individuals who were able to view their stories as having happy endings—stories that move from tragedy to redemption—were more likely to experience generativity in their lives. Salovey, Rothman, and Rodin's (1998) finding suggested a two-step, multidimensional approach to explain the effects of disclosure. First, confiding traumas reduces the physiological arousal associated with inhibition and second, it increases one's ability to understand and integrate the experience.

### Important Clinical Considerations in Facilitating Growth

The process of growth in the face of trauma and adversity is quite challenging. Zoellner and Maercker (2005) suggested that therapists and individuals who offer trauma- and adversity-related counseling should have an understanding of how the process of working through the impact of trauma is linked to the potential revision of the trauma affected thoughts and emotions. Often a return to an old, innocent pretrauma state is not possible. Outside of the therapeutic context, clients may have been given advice by friends to see the positive or concentrate on the good things when they talked about the negative impact of trauma. Such hasty advice is usually not helpful because it is often linked to the denial or avoidance of

suffering. A professional abstinence from naïve use of positive thinking should be accompanied by an open-minded attitude on the side of the therapist allowing patients to find their own specific meaning, interpretations, ways of coping, and recovery. Perceptions of growth should be supported and encouraged when they occur, and clinicians can promote the active use of this growth perspective in patient's daily life. Clinicians and counselors ought to, however, remember that the absence of growth should not be regarded as failure. They should be particularly careful not to suggest that clients must grow from their experience. Such suggestions may minimize the clients' experience.

It is essential that individuals who offer professional support are very aware of the needed competencies. Fazio and Fazio (2005) used the term GC to describe anyone who is working with a client or delivering a community intervention where the ultimate goal is growth. The drive behind identifying competencies and processes associated with an effective GC was the lack of focus on how people can empower others to grow while honoring their pain.

Subtle shifts in how a person perceives working with an individual can have a large impact on the process and outcome. People are able to break down more barriers when they think of themselves as GCs rather than counselors, clinicians, or therapists. In addition, people feel less of a stigma when working with a GC as opposed to a psychologist or therapist. It is also essential that anyone working with this population not only know what the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, acute stress disorder, depressive disorders, and bereavement are, but also know how to probe for the criteria. Bonnano and Mancini (2006) provided suggestions for interventions, which include treating the traumatic symptoms first. Working with people while there are challenges related to trauma and bereavement can be complicated. The most effective GCs are active learners and seek consultation from a diverse range of thought leaders and practitioners.

It is imperative that clinicians listen carefully to the language and psychological responses of clients and judiciously joins with the client in this form of communication. Clinicians listen not to solve problems necessarily. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) suggested that clients might experience highly meaningful changes, but rarely perceive these changes as expressions of growth. Listening in such situations becomes even more important as mindful listening allows clinicians to notice and help clients label the change as growth. However, the clinicians must be careful and avoid offering mechanistic offering of empty platitudes that tell the clients, for example, what wonderful opportunities of growth has trauma, loss, or adversity brought.

In the aftermath of trauma, clients generally rely on framework available to them within their immediate cultural, religious, and social milieus to make sense of trauma. Clinicians ought to feel comfortable and willing to help their clients' process cognitive appraisal within their cultural background.

When working with the clients in therapy, a clinician should be mindful that for some clients, with growth, also comes a paradox such as, I am more vulnerable, yet stronger (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Similarly, clients may report discovering both the worst and best in others. That is, trauma, loss, and adversity may prove to be a litmus test that uncovers real

friends or whom clients can count on. Clinicians need to provide a safe space and comfortable pace in which clients discern all dimensions of trauma, loss, and adversity deeply to extract personal meaning from it.

Clinical care and sensitivity warrants focus on growth and should be viewed relatively separate from pain, trauma, and adversity; that is, a client who reports growth may equally be experiencing significant distress. Growth may eventually yield more meaning, fulfillment, and increased well-being, but may not completely alleviate the pain of trauma, loss, and adversity. Indeed, in some cases, such a pain may serve as a painful reminder as to what has been lost.

We believe growth is deeply experiential, not merely intellectual, although there are elements of emotional and cognitive intelligence. Therefore, clinicians should honor compelling affective or experiential flavor to it and must be attuned to the clients when clients may be in a predominately affective state. In such a state, rushing a client to reconstruct schema, inviting them to think deliberately about painful feeling may, at best, be avoided.

## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

We would like to offer some thoughts on the future of GTLA. Clearly, it is a worthwhile concept to be further explored. Our hope is that GTLA becomes more integrated into clinical practice. We believe that it will enrich the clinical repertoire and broaden practitioners' perspective. The result will be that clinicians and counselors will readily recognize that a client's struggle to understand trauma and adversity solely does not rely on perceived deficits and losses but also potential gains and growth. In terms of empirical exploration, we would suggest that studying growth by heavily relying on self-report measures, most of which assess negative responses should be avoided and measures that assess both positive and negative changes should be preferred. In the absence of pre-event data, which makes it difficult for self-reported changes to be verified, third party reports and objective measures such as health status, concrete work related performance could reliably validate change. Collateral assessment of related behavioral and physiological indices and moderators could be included to examine the benefits of growth holistically. In this regard assessment approach such as multitrait-multimethod (Campbell & Fiske, 1959) can be employed. Furthermore, our assessment approach should head towards the goal of uncovering the actual life changes or markers people achieve as a result of growth.

We are hopeful that strides toward an emphasis on honoring people's experience, while finding opportunities for growth, will have a positive impact in people's lives. In this chapter, we covered the current literature related to GTLA, the practical implications of GTLA, and our experiences. What we didn't explicitly cover is the most essential factor associated with growth no matter what the experience. This factor is the power of human interaction. As people in the field of GTLA, we often have the gift of interacting with people with whom we instantly connect with because our experiences create an instant bond. We encourage people to keep their hearts open and minds focused on growth. Human interaction is what heals and facilitates growth.

Sometimes it the simple act of saying “Hi” with an openness to learn and care is what opens the door and invites people to grow. Unfortunately, we are all reminded of the adversity that we are likely to face within our lives. Fortunately, we are also reminded of the strength and resilience that we possess. We can learn from the courageous steps people take following the loss of a loved one. Some people decide to go back to their studies or work right after an adverse event or loss and others take a different pathway. Everyone will make millions of choices that will affect their lives and the lives of others. We ask that you choose and invite others to choose growth, trust us, *it’s a choice worth making.*

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

### Exercising to Grow

***Gaining Insight Prior to Taking Action:*** In this chapter, we have emphasized the importance of the foundational resource *Self-Connect*. This resource is the foundation for GTLA. We would like you to spend some time gaining insight. Please take some time and visit [www.holdthEDOOR.com](http://www.holdthEDOOR.com), click on Resources, and then select Self-Awareness Tool (click on the door icon). This link will allow you to download a self-development tool designed to help you better understand your strengths and areas in need of growth. We have found the tool to be useful in helping people create visions for themselves. Please know, however, that scientific studies to test the reliability and validity of this tool have not yet been conducted. However, the authors plan to establish psychometric properties of this tool.

***Complete the ORCI:*** Follow the directions at the top of the resources Web page and fill out the online survey (ORCI) by inputting your responses directly into the spreadsheet column labeled Time 1. For each of the survey items you will be specifying the degree to which the statement describes you. After you have completed the survey, you can click on the tabs at the bottom of the page for a snapshot of your strengths and weaknesses in relation to the OTHERS(S) model.

***Discover Your Strengths and Areas of Growth:*** Review the percentages provided in the snapshot and identify your top three strengths. Take time to reflect on these areas as they may very well be the strengths that have enabled you to grow from loss and adversity, and will likely continue to do so.

***Put Your Insights into Actions:*** Select one area that you are interested in developing further. It does not need to be the item with the lowest percentage. It needs to be a resource that you feel invested in working on.

- Click on the Personal Growth Guide link, [http://www.holdthEDOOR.com/images/Final\\_Growth\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.holdthEDOOR.com/images/Final_Growth_Guide.pdf), for suggestions to guide your personal development related to each item.
- Create a growth action plan with specific growth steps for yourself by focusing on one of the OTHERS(S) resources at a time (you can find tips and a worksheet on creating growth steps on page 48 of the *Finding Your Way through Sudden Loss and Adversity* workbook, available on our Web site at: [http://www.holdthEDOOR.com/images/Final\\_finding\\_your\\_way.pdf](http://www.holdthEDOOR.com/images/Final_finding_your_way.pdf)).

- Share your growth plan with someone you trust and ask them for feedback and support as you continue to grow and work on new resources.

**Engage Others:** This is the *most important step*. Share your plan with someone you trust and involve them in the process. Seek honest feedback on how you are progressing and thank them for the help. Ask people you trust two questions to get their honest feedback:

- “What is one thing I am doing that is nurturing my growth?”
- “What is one thing I am doing that is hindering my growth?”

Invite them to go through the process as well and help them with their growth plan. Remember, this model will be helpful regardless of the adverse situation. You will then be creating a pattern of helping others help themselves to grow. In other words, you will be Holding the Door for Others.

**Self-Reflection:** Once you are ready, take the time to reflect upon and write your story of growth. Start with your experience of loss and adversity and create a story that evolves into your story of growth. Examples of stories of growth, and helpful hints on writing your story, can be found on pages 91–142 of the resource *Finding Your Way through Sudden Loss and Adversity* (link provided under “Put Your Insights into Actions” section).

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# Personal Growth after Relationship Breakups

Margit I. Berman, Ty Tashiro, and Patricia A. Frazier

Love can hurt. If you haven't had your heart broken already, chances are good that you probably will, someday. After a painful breakup, you may feel like a loser. But along with sometimes-intense negative emotions, relationship breakups can offer opportunities to learn more about yourself and to improve your future relationships. Our hope is that this chapter will help you understand not only the pain involved in breakups, but also how you can grow stronger, perhaps even benefiting from the experience.

## BREAKUPS CAN BE TRAUMATIC

Sure, breakups can hurt, but in the grand scheme of things they are not really very important, right? Wrong. In a well-conducted study investigating the most potent environmental stressors associated with adolescents' first major depressive disorder episode, romantic relationship breakups were the *strongest* predictor (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999). And, in our research, when we asked students to indicate whether they had experienced various traumatic events, bereavement and breakups were the most commonly endorsed events (e.g., Frazier et al., 2005). You might think that losing a loved one through death would be more traumatic than losing a relationship through a breakup. But that's not necessarily so. When we compare students who nominated either bereavement or a breakup as their worst traumatic experience we find no differences in their symptoms of posttraumatic stress (Frazier, Berg, & Sherr, 2007). In fact, in one study where students answered questions about a life event that was still distressing to them, breakups caused *more* current distress than did bereavement

(Frazier, Keenan, Anders, Perera, & Shallcross, 2007). These findings are not limited to college students: In a study of 894 adult community women, relationship dissolution was one of the events most often nominated as the worst lifetime event (Frazier & Hurliman, 1998). Moreover, relationship dissolution was even more likely to lead to symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder than was sudden bereavement.

In our research we have explored the negative and positive changes that can occur in people's lives specifically following a breakup. In one of our first studies, we began with two simple questions, "How often do people experience positive and negative life changes?" and "What types of positive and negative life changes are most common?" Responses from undergraduate students who had recently experienced a breakup revealed that there were three common types of negative life changes after a breakup: (a) loss of friendships, (b) finding it harder to trust others, and (c) experiencing lower self-esteem (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Other studies examining negative change after divorce find similar types of negative changes, but typically divorces also result in negative financial changes and complications with handling division of responsibilities with children (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Another general negative change not captured above is the loss of routine with an ex-partner (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). Although seemingly mundane, the loss of small shared routines like reading the paper or driving to work together can be some of the most difficult aspects of the loss of an intimate relationship.

### STILL, BREAKUPS CAN BE GOOD FOR YOU

Although negative emotions and substantial distress are common following the end of a romantic relationship, both positive emotions and positive experiences of growth and self-improvement also occur and may be quite common. Some researchers have found that positive emotions are less common and less intense than negative ones after a breakup (Choo, Levine, & Hatfield, 1996; Sprecher, 1994), but positive emotions are nevertheless often reported. Relief that the relationship is over and ongoing feelings of love, closeness, and friendship with the ex-partner are particularly common, but other positive emotions have been rarely assessed. In fact, one recent study that assessed a broader-than-usual range of emotions found that, when asked about the full range of their emotions since the breakup, most participants actually reported feeling *more* positive emotions than negative ones (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007).

As nice as it might be to feel happy and full of well-being after a breakup, this might not be the only, or even the best, possible positive outcome. Even a person who is feeling substantial emotional pain may become a better person as a result of having experienced a painful breakup, perhaps developing skills they can use to make future relationships better. In the study mentioned previously, in which we asked college students who had gone through breakups to tell us what kinds of changes had happened in their lives as a result of the breakup, every participant described at least one positive change (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Students most commonly

reported that they were better able to regulate their own emotions, that they had more self-confidence, that they were better able to choose good partners, that they were wiser in general about relationships, or that their friendships had been strengthened by the experience. In fact, students saw many more positive changes in their lives since the breakup than negative ones: On average, students reported five positive changes from the breakup for every negative change they reported (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003; Tashiro, Frazier, & Berman, 2005). Another recent study found that 71% of participants who had experienced a breakup reported a level of growth above the midpoint on a scale of relationship-breakup-related growth that ranged from “no [growth] at all” to “extremely” strong experience of growth (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). Perhaps this accounts for why more participants in this study judged the breakup as having an *overall* positive impact on their lives than a neutral or negative impact. Finally, in two groups of individuals who said that a breakup was their worst lifetime event, between 49% and 77% also said that something positive came out of the experience (Frazier, Berg, & Sherr, 2007). Thus, reports of growth following relationship breakups appear to be quite common.

#### HOW DOES GROWTH OCCUR AFTER A BREAKUP?

But how do breakups lead to positive outcomes and experiences of growth? In a previous paper, we theorized that there are at least two pathways (and slight variations thereof) that people may travel to find positive outcomes and growth following the end of a romantic relationship (Tashiro, Frazier, & Berman, 2005). We called the first the “crisis/growth” pathway. For individuals following this path, having their romantic relationship end is a painful or even traumatic experience with long-term effects. Perhaps the relationship ended because of a betrayal or infidelity, or perhaps the loss took the individual by surprise. Nevertheless, despite an intensely painful breakup, some people are able to capitalize on the growth opportunity presented by this stressful event to become stronger, better people in various ways. They emerge from the breakup better than they were before, and stronger. A variation on this pathway, perhaps even more commonly experienced, could be called the “crisis/resilience” pathway. On this pathway, the breakup is stressful and painful, but people get by it and return to being as healthy as they were before the breakup (or before the relationship began). Perhaps they get no lasting benefit or wisdom from the experience, but they are not lastingly harmed by it, either. The idea of a crisis/resilience pathway will not be discussed further here, as it does not imply benefit or positive outcomes resulting from breakups. However, if you are currently experiencing the pain of an unwanted romantic dissolution, being aware of the existence of this pathway may offer some comfort that the pain will indeed end and you will get “back to your old self.”

We call the second main pathway the “stress relief” pathway. In contrast to the crisis/growth pathway, for persons traveling this pathway the breakup may not be stressful at all. Instead, the breakup may represent the

end of a miserable or even abusive relationship and the beginning of a clearly better life without the ex-partner. Relationship dissolution is different from many stressful events in that at least half of the people who experience it *deliberately choose* to break up. People who choose or agree to end the relationship may see the relationship, not the breakup, as stressful, and they expect to gain benefit from ending an unsatisfying relationship. One recent study found if people reported that they had experienced little positive change or personal growth as a result of being in a relationship with their partner, they reported that they had experienced more growth when they broke up, partly because the breakup of these low-quality relationships led them to rediscover themselves, did not make them feel as if they had lost an important part of themselves, and generally made them feel good (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007).

### WHO BENEFITS FROM A BREAKUP?

Given the possibility of positive life change following a breakup, you may wonder who is most likely to report such positive changes. Although every participant in our first study (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003) reported at least some growth following his or her breakup, there was substantial variability in the amount of growth reported, and some people reported more growth than others. Several factors have been examined as potential sources of variability in these growth experiences, including who initiated the breakup, gender, personality factors, and explanations for why the breakup occurred. These factors are discussed in turn subsequently.

Although one study we mentioned previously (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007) found more growth for people who experienced the stress relief of ending a bad relationship, beyond the relationship realm, researchers have frequently found that people who experience *more* severe life events actually report growing more from them than people who experience less stressful events (e.g., Armeli, Gunthert, & Cohen, 2001). This leads to a question: In a relationship breakup, should we expect more growth from the person who initiated the breakup and who thus may experience stress-relief growth? Or should we expect more growth from the person who did not initiate the breakup, and who thus may be experiencing a more painful event at the beginning of the crisis/growth pathway? The answer to this question is still unclear. Some researchers have found that initiators report more growth from the breakup (Helgeson, 1994), whereas others, including us, have found no differences in growth with regard to who initiated the breakup (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Perhaps being aware the breakup is coming or experiencing stress-relief may allow initiators, in some instances, to grow more from the experience, whereas in other instances an unwanted breakup spurs personal exploration and improvement.

A more consistent finding concerns gender differences in reports of growth following a breakup. Several researchers have found that women report more growth and more positive emotions in the aftermath of a breakup than men do (Helgeson, 1994; Sprecher, 1994; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Theorists have speculated that this may be because women have

better developed networks of social support outside of romantic relationships than men do, or because women more frequently initiate breakups. However, research that tries to explain *why* women may report more positives from breakups is inconsistent (Tashiro & Frazier, 2001).

More agreeable people also report experiencing more growth after a breakup, as do people who thought the breakup was a result of environmental forces on their relationship (e.g., having to work long hours, or having a parent who disapproved of the relationship) rather than seeing the relationship, the partner, or one's own faults as the reason for the breakup. However, we still do not fully understand why an agreeable personality or a tendency to see the environment as at fault for the breakup might lead to growth (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

### BREAKUPS COMPARED WITH OTHER RELATIONSHIP EVENTS

If breakups lead to growth by relieving the stress of a bad relationship or, on the other hand, by initiating a painful, stressful period of self-examination and positive change, we wondered how the life changes that people report following breakups might compare with the changes people report after other relationship events, including both other stressful events like cheating on a romantic partner or being a victim of a partner's infidelity, as well as positive events, like being involved in a happy, close, monogamous romantic relationship.

To explore these differences, we surveyed psychology students who were either currently involved in a romantic relationship or had broken up with a romantic partner sometime in the past year (Berman, Heim, Horns, & Valverde, 2007). Sixteen percent were victims of romantic relationship infidelity in their current or last relationship; 18% had cheated on their current or last partner, 19% had broken up from relationships that were monogamous, and 47% were currently involved in monogamous relationships. To assess changes that had occurred in their lives as a result of their relationship experiences, we asked people about both positive and negative changes that occurred in their lives as a result of the particular relationship event they had experienced. Specifically, we asked whether twenty-two life domains had changed for the better or worse as a result of either discovering a partner's infidelity, breaking up with a partner, cheating on a partner, or just being in a romantic relationship. The twenty-two life domains tapped changes in relationships (e.g., relationships with romantic partner and with other romantic partners, changes in sex life, changes in ability to communicate), changes in the self (e.g., in physical health, ability to work, and judgment about people), changes in life philosophy or spirituality (e.g., changes in sense of closeness to God or spiritual well-being), and relationship-relevant beliefs that might change in a negative direction following a painful relationship event (e.g., ability to trust and beliefs about people's honesty).

As in other research discussed previously, we found that individuals who had broken up from monogamous relationships commonly reported positive changes from this experience: the average number of positive changes participants who had broken up reported was six, and some participants reported

as many as twenty positive changes as a result of the breakup. The most commonly endorsed positive change since the breakup was a greater sense of personal control over life (reported by 48% of participants). And, as in other research, people who had broken up with partners reported more positive changes than negative ones from the experience; the mean number of negative changes from the breakup was four, with negative changes in the relationship with the (now-ex) romantic partner the most commonly reported negative change (63% endorsed negative change in this area).

Nevertheless, 16% of participants who had broken up reported no positive changes at all from the breakup, and 7% similarly reported no negative changes (another 43% reported only one or two negative changes from the breakup). Mostly, our participants seemed to feel that the breakup had had little impact on their lives: The mean number of items to which participants reported “no change” was eleven, and a majority of participants endorsed no change from the breakup in fully fifteen of the twenty-two areas we assessed. Although we might ideally wish for wisdom and a better life to emerge from the ashes of a failed romantic relationship, the message of these participants appears to be, “Eh, it wasn’t such an important production. Life goes on.” For these participants, the breakup appears not to have led to growth so much as resilience; whatever pathway the participants find themselves traveling on, for most, the breakup seems to have been a relatively minor bump in the road.

The relatively minor impact of monogamous relationship breakup presents a contrast to the experience of infidelity in the context of a dating relationship. We found evidence that being a victim of infidelity was more stressful than simply breaking up from a monogamous relationship where no infidelity was involved.\* For example, victims of infidelity reported significantly more symptoms of posttraumatic stress as a result of their experiences than did people who had experienced the breakup of a monogamous relationship. And, as is common following more serious stressful events, victims of dating infidelity reported significantly more positive changes from their experience than did individuals who broke up from monogamous relationships. In fact, victims of infidelity report a mean of nine positive changes in their lives from the infidelity (versus six for those who had experienced the breakup of a monogamous relationship). Positive life changes reported by a majority of victims included the following: my ability to recognize my strengths (reported by 59% of participants), my ability to be assertive (59%), my relationship with other romantic partners other than the cheating partner (54%), my ability to take care of myself (53%), my relationship with my friends (53%), and my sense of personal control over life (51%), suggesting that dealing with infidelity can lead to improvements in the self and in other relationships. Like those who had broken up from monogamous relationships, infidelity victims reported more positive

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\*Most of the victims (67%) and many of the cheaters (43%) had broken up with their partner, and thus experienced relationship breakup as well as the infidelity. The remainder were still involved with the partner at the time of the betrayal.

changes than negatives; infidelity victims reported a mean of four negative changes from the experience, just as those who had broken up from monogamous relationships did, but there were only, on average, eight areas of their lives (that we assessed) that remained unchanged (versus eleven for those who had broken up from monogamous relationships). Also, victims who broke up with their cheating partners (as most did) reported significantly more positive changes from the experience than victims who stayed with their cheating partners. Being a victim of infidelity, and then breaking up with your cheating partner, may thus be a prototypical example of movement down the crisis/growth pathway, where a very stressful, painful, and surprising loss of a romantic relationship can lead to a stronger sense of self and closer relationships with others.

We also compared the changes reported after a romantic relationship dissolution with the changes experienced from being embedded in a romantic relationship itself. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people currently involved (and perhaps passionately in love with) partners reported a mean of eleven positive changes that had occurred in their lives as a result of being involved with their partner, and only one negative change (in fact, 47% of the monogamously involved participants endorsed no negative changes at all). The most commonly reported positive changes from being involved with a romantic partner included improvements in the following: my sex life (reported by 80% of participants), my relationship with my romantic partner (76%), my sense of my own worth (69%), my relationship with other romantic partners (an intriguing benefit reported by 67% of those currently involved in monogamous relationships), my ability to recognize my strengths (63%), my mental health (62%), my ability to communicate (57%), my ability to trust (56%), my sense of purpose in life (56%), and my ability to be assertive (54%).

### BREAKUPS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REDISCOVERY OF THE SELF?

One intriguing aspect of the positive changes reported by those in love and those who had experienced a lovers' betrayal (and in most cases a subsequent breakup) was how similar many of the changes reported were. A majority of both groups said that their ability to recognize their own strengths and to be assertive had improved as a result of their very different experiences; most people in both groups also cited improved relationships with "other romantic partners" as a positive change, albeit probably for quite different reasons. How could it be that being in love and being badly hurt in love could both improve your life in such similar ways?

To answer this question, we turned to researchers who study why we fall in love. Elaine and Arthur Aron (1996), a married couple who also study love, suggested that people fall in love because they want to expand themselves. They posit that this need for self-expansion is a basic human motivation and includes not only love, but all desires to influence or hold power over others, to possess things, to take in information and become more cognitively complex via learning, and in general to make things and people outside oneself part of oneself and one's own identity. In their view,

however, love allows us to expand by including our lovers into ourselves, and love is one of the primary means human beings have available to themselves to satisfy their need for self-expansion. From this point of view, it is unsurprising why people report benefits from being in love, because love allows us to grow and expand ourselves in a variety of ways, just as people report when they describe the benefits being in love has brought them.

Falling in love may have wonderful benefits, but it is not the only way people can expand themselves. Some researchers have observed that a bad love relationship can actually restrict and confine the self, and breaking up under these circumstances should lead to a rediscovery of the self and new opportunities for growth via self-expansion. One study found that people who were in relationships that were poor in terms of how much self-expansiveness they allowed reported more growth when they broke up, partly because of the increased self-discovery that breaking up allowed (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). This perspective provides a valuable way of conceptualizing growth following relationship dissolution, as it points a pathway to growth and life improvement for those who are experiencing painful relationship stressors, a topic we will reconsider when we discuss how growth can be nurtured and promoted in the aftermath of a breakup.

#### POSITIVE CHANGES CAN HELP YOU COPE WITH NEGATIVE CHANGES

Learning how to cope with the loss of a romantic relationship requires a balanced consideration of both the positive and negative life changes that can occur as a result of the breakup. As we have already seen, most people—even those who experience tremendous personal growth—also report negative life changes associated with breakups, such as feeling less trusting or losing friendships (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Following a breakup, you may wonder, how will my life change because of this? How can I get some good out of this experience? How will the positive and negative changes I am experiencing affect me? In this section, we will consider how growth and negative changes after a breakup work together, how both positive and negative changes can be beneficial in the long run, and how to cope most adaptively with a breakup to maximize positive life change.

How do you accept negative life changes without becoming overwhelmed with depression or anxiety? You could try to just ignore them or minimize them as much as possible, which could bring some short-term emotional relief. However, in many cases, the negative life changes you perceive may reflect an *accurate* evaluation of problems with the old relationship or real difficulties presented by the breakup process (Tashiro, Frazier, & Steger, 2007). For example, being a trusting person is considered a good thing in many Western cultures, and being labeled “untrusting” by others is not desirable (Peterson & Seligman, 2001). Thus, you may perceive “feeling less trusting” as a negative change in the aftermath of a breakup. However, if your relationship ended because of your ex-partner’s lies about engaging in infidelity, then there is good reason to feel less trusting of romantic partners. It is possible to be too trusting, and seemingly negative changes in the aftermath of a breakup may represent an adaptive loss of

naïveté. In sum, denying or minimizing negative life changes may prevent you from being able to accurately evaluate unpleasant and distressing, but nevertheless important, relationship information. Fully appreciating the “negative” as well as positive changes in your life following a breakup may help you to grow from the experience and avoid similar negative experiences in the future.

Nonetheless, it is important not to pay so much attention to the negative effects of the breakup that you ignore beneficial outcomes. Simply noticing positive life changes can be one way to alleviate some of the distress typically associated with negative life changes. In other words, just thinking “The breakup was a bad thing, but at least some good came out of it,” may make you feel better. Research into the interaction between positive and negative life changes and distress is still preliminary, but in at least one study, we found that positive life changes reduced the adverse consequences of negative life changes among individuals who had experienced a recent breakup (Tashiro, Frazier, & Steger, 2007). Specifically, we found that individuals who reported many negative life changes after a breakup, but also reported many positive changes, did not experience the lowered self-esteem and depression experienced by people who reported many negative life changes without many positive life changes. In other words, people who reported a lot of negative changes following the breakup were doing fine as long as they also reported a lot of positive changes.

Our more recent research in this area has focused on why negative life changes are associated with distress and why positive life changes might counteract the adverse effects of negative life changes (Tashiro et al., 2007). One explanation for this pattern of results comes from research on self-esteem. Numerous studies have found that our sense of self-worth is closely tied to our romantic relationships (Brennen & Bosson, 1998). We are motivated to maintain high self-esteem, and when a romantic relationship breakup occurs, it can threaten our self-esteem in a variety of ways. Next, we discuss two different ways that breakups can decrease your self-esteem and then cover two unhelpful strategies people use to restore their feelings of self-worth and why finding positive changes may be a healthy means of restoring self-esteem.

To begin, consider the person who did not initiate the breakup, the person who was “dumped.” If you have been in this position, you may have spent much time trying to figure out what was so “unlikable” about you that your ex-partner would want to end your relationship. How do you regain your self-esteem after someone who knew you so well decides that he or she doesn’t want to be with you anymore?

A second self-esteem threat may affect both initiators and noninitiators, but is a bit less obvious. Most people repeatedly think about their ex-partner and past relationship, even if they are happy to be out of the relationship. These thoughts can be about negative aspects of the past relationship (e.g., I resent my ex-partner), but often include positive thoughts as well (e.g., I had a lot of good times with my ex-partner). In fact, people more frequently recall positive information than negative information about their previous relationships, even when those previous relationships were

unhealthy (Tashiro & Boles, 2006). Unfortunately, in this situation, your positive thoughts about the past relationship are inconsistent with the fact that you are no longer in the relationship. When people sense such an inconsistency, it creates an unpleasant state psychologists call “cognitive dissonance.” Such dissonance can threaten self-esteem, because people wonder why a smart, rational person would end a relationship that was actually a good one.

To cope with this dissonance, individuals can either change their thoughts to be in line with their current behavior, or they can change their behavior to be consistent with their thoughts. To bring their thoughts in line with the reality of no longer being involved with the ex-partner, people can engage in a process called “downward social comparison,” where they think about how much better off they are than other people who had a recent breakup or how much better off they are than their ex-partner. To bring their behavior more in line with favorable memories of the past relationships, people can temporarily (sometimes just for one night) get back together with the ex-partner. We have found that 40% of individuals have had sexual encounters with their ex-partners despite the overwhelming majority of participants reporting that this is an “extremely poor choice” (Tashiro & Boles, 2006).

Although downward social comparison or getting back together with an ex-partner may help you feel better in the short term, neither self-esteem restoration strategy seems to promote a healthy form of personal growth. Finding and strengthening positive life changes, on the other hand, can restore your global level of self-esteem and may also carry adaptive benefits for future relationships. Balancing the negatives (e.g., I find it harder to trust) with positive changes (e.g., I’ll choose someone more trustworthy next time) can also restore self-esteem and provide a more realistic perspective on future relationships. As is generally the case with positive psychology, the goal is not to feel positive all of the time at the expense of being accurate about difficult things in life (Seligman & Peterson, 2000). Rather, a positive psychology approach to coping with a life stressor is about having a *balanced* perspective that includes thinking through negative aspects of losing an important close relationship and also thinking positively about how one can learn and grow from the experience.

In sum, negative life changes following relationship dissolution are very common and distressing, and coping in a healthy way with relationship change is hard work. You may need to face real negative changes in your life following the breakup, or admit and address personal flaws that contributed to your breakup, which can lead to self-doubt. Although finding positive life changes can also be difficult (e.g., as you work to improve your other friendships or break bad relationship patterns), positive changes can counteract the distressing effects of negative life changes by restoring your self-esteem. Although balancing the negatives with positives is not the only way to restore self-esteem following a breakup, developing a balanced perspective that considers both positive and negative life changes is effort well spent, as it creates greater possibilities for more gratifying relationships and personal strengths in the future.

## FINDING AND PROMOTING GROWTH AFTER A BREAKUP

If you or someone you know is experiencing a painful and unwanted breakup, you may have read the previous section with a cynical eye. You may be wondering how it is possible to balance positives with negatives, or even to perceive positives at all. “What positives?” you may be thinking. “This breakup was so bad. I got nothing out of it but heartbreak.” Little research has been done on how to promote growth and positive change after a breakup, but the experiences of people who do report substantial growth, as well as research on human motivation in love, each provide some landmarks to follow as you travel a pathway between the end of your relationship and a better life as an individual and a future relationship partner. These are discussed in the following section.

### Social Support as a Growth Promoter

As we discussed previously, women tend to report more growth following stressful events, including breakups and divorce, than men do. Theorists have speculated that this may be because women have better-developed social support networks and more close confidantes and intimate friends they can turn to after the breakup, whereas men may not confide in or feel close to anyone except their ex-partner (Cotton, 1999). Although it is not clear that this is why women report more growth after a relationship breakup (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), we do know that having more social support is related to reporting more growth after stressful events in general, for both men and women (e.g., Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger, & Long, 2004; Park et al., 1996). Research on divorce suggests that large social support networks of peers and family are also an important resource promoting growth following divorce (Cotton, 1999; DeGarmo & Forgatch, 1999), but receiving social support can be unhelpful if it comes with strings attached or from people who disapproved of the divorce.

Although individuals who have more support generally report more growth, the effects of social support can depend on the gender of the person receiving support. Research on divorce suggests that after divorce, women strengthen their ties with their extended family and friends, and ask for help from this network of kin with concrete, practical problems—like finances or day care—arising from the divorce. Women who get this kind of concrete, practical help after divorce report increased well-being (Gerstel, 1988; Reissman, 1990). Divorced men also report increased reliance on family for support; however, the support men report seeking tends to be social and emotional rather than concrete and practical, and, for men, this increased social/emotional support is associated with increased *depression* rather than improved well-being (Gerstel, 1988). For men, the embarrassment and stigma of needing practical or emotional support following divorce or relationship breakup—the sense that needing support means he isn’t a “real man”—may account for the negative relationship between social support and growth or well-being that has been reported for men (Stewart et al., 1997). However, both men and women likely could benefit

from increased reliance on social support networks. One study that consisted of in-depth interviews with divorcees provides some interesting qualitative data about the possible benefits of social support, especially for men: Divorced men in Reissman's (1990) sample reported learning the importance of good communication skills and reported that the divorce served as an impetus to actively improve these skills by seeking out communication "mentorship," either from a nonsexual female friend or confidante or from involvement in psychotherapy. Some men in her sample described therapy as "the only good thing" to come out of divorce. Such "growth mentorship" might be a particularly potent way to experience positive change following stress: One study of breast cancer survivors (Weiss, 2004) found that rates of growth were higher among breast cancer survivors who had contact with other women who had survived breast cancer and also experienced growth (a "growth mentor").

One perhaps surprising source of social support for many people following a breakup is the ex-partner. As we have mentioned, many of our research participants report engaging in sexual activities with ex-partners, and most report that they regretted this. However, the relationship may nevertheless remain important. In our previously described sample of students with a variety of relationship experiences, 55% of the participants who had broken up from monogamous relationships reported that they had had some contact with their ex-partner in the past month (Berman, Heim, Horns, & Valverde, 2007). In many cases, this contact was more than just incidental; in fact, those who retained any contact with their ex-partners reported spending a mean of 88 minutes a day with them. You might guess that staying in such close contact with an ex-partner would be maladaptive, but at least for divorcees, research suggests that a continued friendship with the ex-spouse may be adaptive: 33% of one sample of community divorcees chose to maintain regular contact with their ex-spouses for the purpose of keeping up a friendship (Masheter, 1997). Doing so was associated with less preoccupation with the ex-spouse, which in turn was associated with increased well-being.

In sum, good advice for maximizing positive outcomes after a breakup is to increase your reliance on caring members of your social network, avoiding making requests of those individuals who offer help with "strings attached" or otherwise make you feel badly for asking for help. People who ask others for help with concrete needs (perhaps needs the ex-partner used to fulfill, such as giving you a ride to work or bringing groceries when you were ill) as well as with social or emotional needs seem to reap the most benefits. In addition, you may want to seek "growth mentorship" from a friend who can help you learn from your relationship experiences. For men in particular, it is important to buck stereotypes and take care of yourself by reaching out to others in the aftermath of a breakup. And both men and women may wish to cautiously consider an ongoing non-sexual friendship with the ex-partner. In addition, most people find professional psychotherapy very useful and beneficial as a means of growth, and psychotherapists can assist with growing from difficult experiences in ways that friends cannot. In particular, if your distress is serious or long-lasting; if the breakup led

you to realize that you need to develop communication, relationship, or personal psychological skills you do not have; or if you require more support from your friends than you can offer them in return, you may wish to seek psychotherapy. Friends can offer valuable support at difficult times, but it is important not to treat them as full-time therapists.

### Your View of the Situation as a Growth Promoter

Some research suggests that how you think about the situation surrounding your breakup may affect your ability to grow from it. We have already discussed the importance of being able to balance your awareness of negative outcomes with a growing appreciation for the benefits of the breakup. Looking on the bright side of the breakup and searching for benefits you may not have initially noticed, as well as being optimistic in general, are all broadly associated with being able to actually find benefits (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006). Although this may seem obvious, we have noticed that people suffering over a painful life event like a breakup often overlook the importance of attending to positive aspects of life.

Another area where you may wish to direct your attention is to ways you can control your reactions to the breakup in the present moment. If you did not initiate the breakup, you may wish you could control the past; specifically, you may wish you could somehow restore the relationship, or make your ex-partner want to be with you again. No matter who initiated the breakup, you may wish that you could control the factors that caused the relationship to end. But research suggests that most efforts to exert control over the past are not adaptive, especially if you are trying to control things that are not really controllable (such as your ex-partner's affections). Instead, research suggests that the people who best cope with stressors, including breakups (Frazier, Keenan, Anders, Perera, & Shallcross, 2007), are those who have a strong sense of control over aspects of the situation that are happening *in the present*, such as your ability to recover from the breakup successfully (Frazier, Berman, & Steward, 2002). Gaining this sense of control may be partly dependent on doing things to take care of yourself and make the best of the situation, but may also be partly dependent on noticing the things you are already doing to improve your life and move beyond the breakup.

Finally, another area where your point of view about the breakup may impact your ability to grow from the experience concerns why you believe the breakup occurred (which researchers call your "attributions" for the breakup). In our research, we have found that people who attributed the breakup to environmental factors outside of the relationship (such as long work hours or disapproving family members) also reported that they had grown more from the breakup (Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). In research on divorce, on the other hand, blaming the divorce either on yourself or on environmental factors is associated with poorer post-divorce adjustment and greater attachment to the ex-spouse, whereas attributing the causes of the divorce to the relationship itself (rather than to either partner) was associated with feeling that the divorce had caused improvements in one's

life and was generally a good idea (Amato & Previti, 2003). Although these findings may seem contradictory (and indeed present a mixed picture with respect to environmental attributions), they do suggest that it is important to avoid blaming yourself or your ex-partner to promote your well-being. Also, the variable results with respect to environmental attributions may reflect an important reality: Realizing that there were controllable outside factors that damaged what was otherwise a good relationship may indeed be painful and distressing (and may make it more difficult to give up the ex-partner). However, they may also point to an important route to growth: If working long hours and not making enough time for your partner ended your relationship, you may begin to realize the importance of balance between work and social needs. To maximize the benefits of such honest examination of environmental factors affecting the breakup, it may be most adaptive to avoid dwelling on the past and instead make changing these environmental factors a part of your personal growth in the present. In the case of long work hours causing a breakup, for example, you might choose to make work–life balance a priority, by spending more time with family or friends.

### Self-Expansion and Rediscovering the Self

We mentioned previously in this chapter the idea of love relationships as a route to self-expansion. Self-expansion can be thought of as a synonym for personal growth; it includes most of the experiences that make us feel as if we are growing, such as gaining knowledge, becoming close to others, increasing our personal influence, and increasing our involvement with the world. Also, consider just the literal meaning of the word “growth”; it implies the self getting bigger and expanding. We noted that one recent study found that people who had been in relationships that were not very self-expanding (i.e., relationships that were poor because the partner constricted, rather than expanded, the participants’ selves) reported more growth when they broke up, partly because of the increased self-discovery that breaking up allowed (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). Other research has found that when a highly self-expanding romantic relationship ends, people’s self-concept suffers (Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis, & Kunak, 2006).

Love is a major and important route to self-expansion, but it is not the only route (Aron & Aron, 1996). In fact, getting to know a romantic partner and becoming close to him or her has definite limits as a self-expanding activity. Lovers in long-term close relationships know that you eventually do successfully include your lover in your own self-concept quite fully, feeling your partner’s pain as your own, for example, or feeling pride in your partner’s accomplishments just as you would in your own. Once you’ve fully included your partner in your self, theorists point out that you cannot expand yourself more by becoming even closer. So how do long-term partners continue to use the relationship as a self-expanding tool? Theorists suggest that they do this by engaging in self-expanding activities together, thereby associating the relationship with the feelings of self-expansion they get when they engage in novel, exciting activities (Aron & Aron, 1996).

Indeed, research shows that when partners engage in even a very brief exciting activity together, they feel a rush of love and closeness for one another (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000; Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993), presumably because of the feelings of self-expansion.

Partners leaving unsatisfying, self-constricting relationships appear to grow in part by rediscovering the self that was minimized and constricted in their relationship; they endorse items such as “I have done the things I once enjoyed that I could not do while I was in my relationship,” “I have regained my identity,” and “I have reclaimed lost parts of myself that I could not express while with my partner” (Lewandowski & Bizzoco, 2007). Presumably people leaving such unsatisfying relationships have found it easier to expand themselves on their own. But we would argue that this process of self-discovery and independent expansion of self is important for anyone experiencing a romantic relationship breakup, and perhaps even more important (albeit also more difficult) for individuals who experienced the lost relationship as highly self-expanding. If the motivation for love in the first place is to grow and expand yourself, then engaging in novel, exciting, self-expanding growth activities on your own, whether rock climbing, whitewater rafting, oil painting, or learning Japanese, should do much to assuage the pain of loss. In addition, such activities bolster a sense of mastery and self-worth and may enable self-discovery and a comforting realization that the relationship was not ideal (e.g., “People in my new poetry workshop tell me I should submit my sonnets to a literary magazine, but my partner never appreciated those love poems I wrote for us.”)

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have discussed theory, research, and practical considerations relevant to personal growth and positive outcomes following romantic relationship dissolution. We began by acknowledging that romantic relationship breakups are often intensely painful, even when the relationship was not years in length or sanctioned by marriage or another serious commitment. We discussed the negative outcomes and consequences and serious emotional pain that can follow a breakup and noted how these experiences are both common and important to acknowledge. However, we also discussed another side to breakup experiences: the possibility that breakups can lead to positive outcomes and personal growth for the former partners. We discussed the pathways ex-partners may travel as they seek to grow from the pain of an unhappy relationship and/or a subsequent breakup, including the stress-relief and crisis-growth pathways. We noted that growth and positive outcomes are very common, and often even outnumber negative outcomes following romantic relationship breakups, and we discussed how breaking up compares to other positive and stressful relationship events in terms of growth outcomes. We discussed who finds growth most easily and speculated about why. Finally, we discussed ways to maximize personal growth and minimize negative outcomes following a breakup, including balancing your awareness of the positive and negatives, seeking social support, developing a new point of view about the breakup,

and expanding and rediscovering yourself as an independent person. We conclude this chapter with some mini-experiments: three exercises you can try on your own to expand your social network and your self-concept, whether you are healing from a breakup, in a relationship, or happily single and on your own.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Expanding Your Independent Self

In this chapter, we have discussed how people who break up with romantic partners can sometimes grow or benefit from the experience. We encourage you to support your friends and family as they grow and change during stressful experiences, including breakups, and also encourage you to use two useful tools to support your own growth during stressful times: independent self-expansion and seeking social support.

***Supporting Friends' Stress-Related Growth:*** Think of a friend who is going through a stressful time, either because of the end of a romantic relationship or for other reasons. Ask your friend to tell you what changes s/he has noticed in his or her life since the stressful event. Make particular note of any positive changes your friend mentions and be sure to acknowledge those as well as empathizing with any negative changes your friend might report. As we have discussed, feeling intense pain and sadness following a breakup or many other types of stressful events is quite common! If your friend mentions no positive changes, gently ask your friend whether s/he has noticed any positive changes in his/her life as a result of going through this painful experience. Finally, offer your friend some concrete social support (which research suggests is beneficial following a relationship breakup as well as other kinds of stress). Did your friend mention any specific aspect of life that is more difficult since the breakup or other stressor, like missing an ex-partner's daily ride to work or daily lunches? Offer to help in a concrete way with this negative change. Perhaps you can meet your friend for lunch or offer a ride to work. Offering such support will benefit your friends, but research suggests that offering social support to others has health and psychological benefits for the helper, as well (Schwartz & Sendor, 1999; Schwartz et al., 2003).

***Discovering and Expanding Your Social Support Network:*** Try using the Social Network Map (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990), available online at <http://msass.case.edu/downloads/etracy/networkmap.pdf>, to better understand your own current social network. Do you have adequate social support to meet your needs? Are there holes in your map where your level of support is less than adequate? Think of two small tasks you could accomplish this week to strengthen at least one existing social tie, and create one new social tie. Perhaps you could call a friend you haven't seen recently, choose to have a more personal, self-disclosing conversation with a new friend than you have previously had (research suggests that people feel closer to and prefer those who self-disclose about personal topics to them, as long as this is done slowly, so that each person reciprocates the self-disclosure), or attend a meeting of a new organization in your community. Put your chosen tasks on your planner, and evaluate their effects when you have completed them. Did you enjoy reaching out socially? Did you find it helpful in handling stress this week?

**Independent Self-Expansion:** Research shows that people experience self-expansion when they engage in activities that they consider exciting and new or novel. Make a list of ten activities that you find exciting and novel. Include at least one activity that you engage in frequently, one that you have never tried, one that is inexpensive, one that would be a “special treat,” one that you can do alone, and one that you can do with someone you know. Pick out at least one activity to try this week, and notice how this makes you feel. If you engage in the activity with others, do you feel more connected and closer to them afterwards? We encourage you to add self-expanding activities to your life on a regular basis, as such activities help you grow and develop whether you have a partner or not.

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# Romantic Conflict and Its Resolution

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**B**rian and Jennifer have been married for five years and experience conflict at least four times a week. They often argue about financial issues and when they should start a family. Rashid and Latoya have been living together for a year and have conflict about once a week. They often argue about chores around the home and whether or not they will marry. Emilio and Maria have only been dating six months and experience conflict about once or twice a month. They argue about spending time together and where they will go during the weekend. These couples are quite different but have one thing in common: They all experience some degree of conflict during the course of their relationships.

Many questions can be asked about conflict. For example, what exactly is conflict, and how is it measured? Are there constructive ways to handle conflict? These and other questions will be addressed in the current chapter. Although the focus of most of the research and thus the focus of this chapter is on heterosexual relationships, many of the issues discussed are equally applicable to gay and lesbian relationships.

Conflict has been defined as “an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another” (Peterson, 1983, p. 365). What does this really mean? Suppose Matt has been dating Ashley for one year at the time he got accepted to graduate school 1,000 miles away and plans to move in two months. He wants Ashley to move away with him, however, she has a job that she really likes and wants to stay close to her family. She loves Matt and wants him to stay in their hometown with her. In this scenario, Matt’s desire to have Ashley move with him so that he can attend graduate school interferes with Ashley’s goals of staying near her family and keeping her job. On a similar

note, Ashley's desire for Matt to stay nearby interferes with his goal of moving away to graduate school.

When discussing conflict it is important to make the distinction between the structure of conflict and the process of conflict. The *structure* of the conflict refers to the actual conflict of interest or the *issue* that is causing the couple to experience conflict (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). For example, with Ashley and Matt, the structure of the conflict was that Matt wanted Ashley to move away with him, but Ashley wanted to stay in their hometown. The *process* of conflict includes the interaction that takes place between the partners. Thus, Ashley may avoid discussing the issue with Matt, whereas Matt may attempt to persuade Ashley to change her mind. These strategies are part of the process of the conflict experienced by the couple.

## CONFLICT THEORIES

There are many theories about why conflict occurs. Michael and Christy argue the same issues over and over, usually trailing off without a definite solution. Why do they continue such exchanges when they are so clearly unproductive? One answer is to assume they must get something positive out of it. According to learning theories (Bandura, 1977), Michael and Christy repeat the same argument because they are rewarded or reinforced for doing so. The exact source of the reward may require deep knowledge of the couple. For example, arguing, as long as it isn't too disruptive, may actually make the partners feel connected and close to each other. This may be one way in which they show they are important to each other. Or it may just be fun, what a couple of wise psychologists have called "recreational bickering."

Christy invests a lot of time in her relationship with Michael. She is willing to adjust her schedule whenever Michael wants to spend time with her. Michael, on the other hand, is not willing to do the same for Christy. He rarely changes his plans so that he can spend time with Christy. Over time, Christy begins to feel that the costs of being in the relationship are greater than the rewards she is receiving. The unequal nature of the relationship is often a source of conflict in the relationship. This pattern of conflict may be best explained by Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) social exchange theory (loosely based on learning theories). This theory proposes that people experience both rewards and costs in their close relationships. In addition, the comparison of these costs and rewards influences how satisfied individuals are with their relationships. Conflict occurs when an individual perceives that the rewards received are too low and that the partner resists attempts to increase those rewards. Thus, Christy and Michael experience conflict because Christy does not feel that she is getting as much out of the relationship as she is putting into the relationship. Also, Michael is unwilling to change so that Christy will experience more rewards from the relationship.

Another explanation for Michael and Christy's conflict behavior may lie in how they interpret the situation or the other person. Perhaps Michael

concludes that Christy will eventually give in to his point of view if he continues to argue his side. Perhaps Christy walks away from the argument because she knows that Michael is bothered by her silence. Attribution theory proposes that people behave as they do in conflict situations because of the conclusions they draw about the other person and the situation (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Michael and Christy may behave in certain ways during conflict because of how each believes the other will behave and why they will behave that way.

The attributions individuals make in conflict situations affect how they define conflicts, interpret each other's behavior, and select strategies for dealing with the conflict (Sillars, 1980). Sillars further explained that making attributions toward the other person (such as blaming the partner) was negatively related to the use of collaborative conflict strategies such as working together. For example, roommates were more likely to use strategies of working against each other when attributing conflict to or blaming their roommate. These findings could likely generalize to romantic partners in that the interpretations that individuals make when in conflict with their romantic partners affect how they deal with the conflict. More specifically, attributions that involve blaming the partner seem to be associated with less constructive ways of dealing with and resolving the conflict.

## BEHAVIORAL THEORIES OF CONFLICT STRATEGIES

There are several different ways that Michael and Christy might behave when attempting to resolve conflict in their relationships. For example, Michael might avoid discussing the issue, whereas Christy demands that he listen to her viewpoint. Or perhaps Christy pushes Michael to give in to her side until he eventually does give in. These different ways, or strategies, can influence other parts of the relationship as well. Behavioral theories of conflict strategy (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000; Peterson, 1983) suggest that the way individuals handle conflict in their relationships can influence relationship satisfaction.

Behavioral theories suggest that the conflict strategy a person employs is more important to overall relationship satisfaction than the frequency of conflict (Holmes & Murray, 1996). In fact, the behavioral strategy used is one of the strongest predictors of satisfaction in romantic relationships (Cramer, 2004). How often conflict occurs is important, yet despite the relationship between conflict frequency and satisfaction (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997), the relationship between type of strategy used and satisfaction appears to be stronger. Therefore, even if Michael and Christy argue seven days a week, as long as they are using good conflict resolution strategies, they may still be quite satisfied with the relationship. Behavioral theories also suggest that communication is tightly connected to conflict, and indeed many conflict strategies are communication-based strategies.

Conflict in romantic relationships may include a variety of behaviors ranging from verbal disagreements, to the silent treatment, to physical assault. Couples vary in the strategies they use when faced with conflict,

and the same couple may approach a conflict issue such as money differently from another issue such as decisions about marriage. Several different strategies have been identified, and researchers have examined how these strategies relate to other relational aspects such as satisfaction.

According to Peterson (1983), there are five primary conflict strategies. These strategies include separation, domination, compromise, integrative agreement, and structural improvement. When couples use the *separation* strategy, they withdraw from the situation and do not deal immediately with the issue. These individuals may use separation from the partner as time to “cool off” and rethink the issue. This strategy may be useful if couples use distance productively by thinking about ways to solve the problem. However, withdrawal in itself does not resolve conflict and thus can be damaging to the relationship if the individuals do not come back to the issue in an attempt to resolve it. *Domination* is a strategy in which one partner uses power to persuade the other to choose the partner’s side of the issue. Thus, one partner is motivated by self-interest and attempts to persuade the other to give in to the partner’s wishes rather than trying to reach a compromise.

Peterson (1983) identified *compromise* as a strategy in which couples attempt to find a solution that is acceptable to both partners. Each partner must be willing to give a little to reach this solution. *Integrative agreements*, on the other hand, satisfy both partners’ expectations. Peterson explained that this strategy is actually rare, because it is very difficult to resolve complex arguments in a way that will satisfy two complex people. For example, if the wife really wants children, but the husband does not, it may be quite difficult to find a solution that satisfies both of their desires. Finally, *structural improvement* is a strategy that may be used after a couple encounters a serious conflict. This strategy goes beyond reaching a mutual agreement and instead affects how partners treat one another more generally. This strategy may influence couples to use open communication and new levels of intimacy. However, if the couple finds qualities in each other that they had not previously realized and do not like, they may actually separate.

Lulofs and Cahn (2000) also discussed five strategies that included avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration. *Avoidance* is defined as not dealing with the conflict issue at all. Some examples of this strategy include using the silent treatment, avoiding issues, and physically removing oneself from the partner. *Accommodation*, on the other hand, is characterized by smoothing over disagreements and giving in. The strategy of *competition* includes one partner, often driven by selfish motives, dominating and coercing the other to agree with the partner. *Compromise* is characterized by finding a middle ground in which no one wins or loses. Finally, *collaboration* involves problem solving in which the choices meet the expectations of both partners.

Yet another approach to conflict was proposed by Rusbult and colleagues (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). They suggested four ways in which individuals could respond to conflict or dissatisfaction with their relationship. Two of these ways are considered to be constructive and the other two destructive to the relationship. These

four strategies can also be examined on an activity/passivity dimension. *Voice* is an active, constructive strategy for dealing with conflict. This strategy involves discussing the issue in attempts to resolve the conflict. *Loyalty*, another constructive strategy, is passive. Individuals using this strategy neglect to talk over the conflict issue and stand by the partner no matter what.

*Exit* is an active, destructive strategy for dealing with conflict. Individuals using this style do not attempt to resolve the conflict, but rather leave the relationship. Finally, *neglect* is a passive, destructive strategy. Individuals using this strategy avoid discussing the issue, but remain in the relationship. This strategy is destructive because although the partners stay in the relationship physically, they do not seem to be emotionally involved. Rusbult et al. (1986) found that exit and neglect were both related to relationship dissatisfaction, with exit representing the more extreme dissatisfaction.

While there is disagreement about the number of major strategies used to deal with conflict, there seems to be some general agreement about these strategies. For example, each conceptualization proposes some strategies that are constructive for the relationship and other strategies that are destructive to the relationship. Also, each of the major conceptualizations emphasizes how individuals communicate with their partners. Finally, in most cases, satisfied and dissatisfied couples can be distinguished based on the strategies they employ.

Even though Michael and Christy have many conflicts in their relationship, they can usually resolve the conflict by communicating about the problem. Conflict is a normal part of their relationship that strengthens rather than harms their relationship. Similar to behavioral theories, Ruben's (1978) systems theory holds that conflict results from a breakdown in communication. Ruben explained that conflict is an inevitable, continual part of relationships. Conflict is not a disruption of the normal progression of the relationship, but rather it is a normal part of relationships. Conflict is necessary for the growth of the relationship. Conflict is believed to occur when one partner needs to adjust to the demands of the other partner or to the environment. Because conflict is a result of communication problems, the best way to resolve conflict is through communication. Communication is discussed further in the context of conflict resolution.

## PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS AND ROMANTIC CONFLICT

Gabriela has a great relationship with her parents. When she and her parents disagree, they discuss the issue openly and find a common ground. Will the way Gabriela handles conflict with her parents influence how she handles conflict with her romantic partner? There is some evidence to suggest that "yes," there is a relationship between conflict with parents and conflict with romantic partners. Relationship conflict also seems to change somewhat in frequency as individuals move from childhood to adolescence to college. For example, Furman and Buhrmester (1992) found that in childhood and early adolescence, adolescent research participants reported

greatest conflict with siblings, followed by conflict with their parents, but by college they reported equal conflict between themselves and siblings, parents, and romantic partners. Because romantic conflict appears during late adolescence and college, it seems plausible that these earlier family relationships influence romantic conflict.

Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998) studied how conflict in family relationships was related to conflict in romantic relationships. Specifically, they examined parents (e.g. mother to father), mother-adolescent, father-adolescent, and between siblings to determine which family relationships were most influential for romantic conflict. Three conflict styles were examined: compromise, attack, and avoid. *Compromise* included apologies and "working together to solve the problem" (p. 736). *Attack* involved becoming hostile, and *avoid* included denying that the problem was present. Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring found that use of compromise in one family relationship was related to using compromise in the other family relationships, as well as in romantic relationships. The same pattern was found for attack and avoidance. Also, for individuals who reported using compromise, attack and avoid scores were low, suggesting that they did not use these two strategies very often. The authors also found that how conflict was handled between the parent and adolescent was more important in influencing romantic conflict than how the parents handled conflict between themselves.

It did not seem to matter what the parents said or did to each other in conflict situations, but rather how the parent handled conflict with the adolescent (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). For example, if Jeff and his father attack one another during conflict, Jeff may attack his romantic partner during conflict. If Sara and her mother avoid discussing conflict issues, Sara may avoid talking to her romantic partner about conflict. Additionally, how an adolescent and his or her sibling handle conflict influences what conflict strategy he or she will use with a romantic partner.

For example, adolescents in grades 10 to 12 were asked to report on their relationships with their parents and peers (Crockett & Randall, 2006). Seven years later, the researchers asked the participants to report on relationship quality as well as conflict with their romantic partners. The results from this prospective study suggest that family relationships were more influential to later romantic relationships than peer relationships. Specifically, family relationships predicted relationship satisfaction as well as conflict behaviors in adult romantic relationships. Individuals who said that they had good family relationships also reported good relationship quality with their romantic partners. In addition, those individuals with good family relationships reported less conflict with their romantic partner (and more use of discussion when faced with conflict) than those individuals who did not have good family relationships (who were more likely to use physical conflict or threats with their romantic partners).

Generally, good family relationships are related to good romantic relationships characterized by the use of effective conflict strategies such as discussing the issue. However, for individuals with poor family relationships, later romantic relationships may include use of ineffective conflict strategies

such as threats, attacks, or avoidance. Does this mean we are meant to handle conflict with our romantic partner exactly as we did with our parents? No, there are other factors to consider, including gender issues and the type of relationship a person is in.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CONFLICT

Eric, Jason, and Jerome each seem to avoid discussing conflict issues with their romantic partners. Jessica, Dakesha, and Laura each push their partners to see their points of view when faced with conflict with their partners. Most studies examining conflict have addressed the influence of gender on the choice of conflict strategies. Research has found that women are more likely to use emotional strategies as well as negative strategies such as criticism and anger, whereas men are more likely to use avoidance or make excuses (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988).

Examination of gender differences is essential to understanding the process of conflict in premarital relationships (Lloyd, 1987). Men and women seem to respond differently to conflict issues in their relationships. Twenty-five couples that were seriously dating participated in a study examining gender differences in conflict and relationship quality. Results revealed that men found the stability of conflict issue to be most important to relationship quality, with stability of conflict related to low commitment and low levels of love. For women, on the other hand, greater number of conflicts was related to lower satisfaction and commitment. In addition, for women, quality of communication was related to number of conflicts as well as conflict resolution. For example, greater use of negotiation and less use of manipulation were related to fewer conflicts and more effective resolution.

Hojjat (2000) examined gender differences in use of conflict strategies as well as perceptions of partner's conflict strategy. Conflict management was measured on the dimensions of active/passive and positive/negative. An active/positive strategy included negotiation. An active/negative strategy included abuse and manipulation. A passive/positive strategy included sacrifice and empathy. Finally, a passive/negative strategy included avoidance or distancing self from the conflict situation. In two studies, couples rated their own conflict strategies as well as their perception of their partner's strategy. Hojjat found that women were more likely than men to assert themselves when trying to resolve conflict. Thus, women, compared with men, were more likely to use negative, active strategies. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to avoid direct conflict and use resolution strategies including avoidance when faced with conflict. For both men and women, negative strategies were related to low relationship satisfaction. However, positive strategies were not related to satisfaction.

Gender differences regarding the demand/withdraw pattern of conflict (i.e., one partner approaches conflict while the other withdraws) have been examined as well. Some research has shown that wives respond to conflict with demand, whereas husbands are more likely to withdraw (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). However,

other findings indicate that the important issue is “who seeks change” rather than gender (Klinetob & Smith, 1996). In other words, women who seek change from men partners may push, and the men may withdraw. And men who seek change from women partners may push, and the women may withdraw.

Interestingly, the current authors (Zacchilli, 2007; Zacchilli, C. Hendrick, & S. Hendrick, 2005; Zacchilli, S. Hendrick, & C. Hendrick, 2008) found gender differences in conflict that were inconsistent with previous research suggesting that women are more likely to use negative, active strategies, whereas men are more likely to avoid discussing conflict with their partners. For example, men reported using interactional reactivity (e.g., anger and verbal aggression), domination *and* submission more than women. Thus, men were more likely than women to report becoming verbally abusive, pushing the partner, and giving in to the partner when faced with conflict. It is interesting that men reported using both domination and submission. Men may have reported using submission not so much as a way to win the argument, but rather as a way to simply silence their partners. Another possibility is that these results could be due to sampling differences. No gender differences were found for compromise, separation, or avoidance. All these results suggest that gender is an important factor to consider when examining conflict in romantic relationships.

## CONFLICT AND TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP

Chung and Li have been seriously dating for a year. Ryan and Amy have been casually dating for six months. According to Braiker and Kelley (1979), different levels of a relationship (e.g., casual dating, serious dating) are characterized by different levels of interdependence—dependence on one another. The degree of interdependence a couple experiences is also related to a variety of other relational variables such as conflict, sexual intimacy, and love. The authors explained that often individuals enter into a relationship with different ideas about the roles they want in the relationship and the events they want to occur within the relationship. Early in the relationship, couples may not discuss these differences. However, as the relationship becomes more serious these conflicting interests become more apparent.

In related research, people who had recently broken up with their partners were asked about their relationship histories (Lloyd & Cate, 1985). The authors identified five relationship stages: casual relationship, a couple but not 100% committed to each other, 100% committed, uncertain about future of relationship, and certain relationship would end. Participants responded to interview questions and were asked to report on conflict, love, maintenance (e.g., communication, self-disclosure), and ambivalence (e.g., confusion, anxiety). The authors found that conflict differed across the five stages of relationships. Specifically, they found that conflict increased from “casual” to “a couple,” from “a couple” to “committed,”

and from “committed” to “uncertain about future of relationship.” There was no significant change in conflict from “uncertain about future of relationship” to “certain relationship would end.” The authors explained that conflict differed as a function of whether the relationship was increasing in interdependence (i.e., casual, a couple, committed) or decreasing in interdependence (i.e., uncertain about future of relationship, certain relationship would end).

In the authors’ research (Zacchilli, 2007; Zacchilli et al., 2005; Zacchilli et al., 2008), there were no differences in relationship status for the conflict strategies of avoidance, domination, or submission. Contrary to what we expected, serious daters reported using compromise more than casual daters. Also, casual daters reported using interactional reactivity and separation more than serious daters. Although these findings were not predicted, these differences do seem to make sense. Serious daters likely feel that there is a lot to lose due to the seriousness of the relationship, so they choose a constructive strategy such as compromise in an effort to protect the relationship. Casual daters, on the other hand, may not feel as strongly about protecting the relationship and view verbal abuse or separation as acceptable ways of dealing with conflict.

Although we have discussed theories and strategies of conflict as well as influences of gender and type of relationship on conflict, we have not yet explored how conflict in relationships is actually measured. The following section focuses on measurement.

## MEASURING CONFLICT

There are actually several measures available with each having a somewhat different goal. Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, and Sugarman’s (1996) Revised Conflict Tactics Scale is the most commonly used measure of conflict in romantic relationships. This measure focuses more on abusive marital relationships than on everyday conflict. For example, the scale includes measures of sexual coercion, injury, physical assault, psychological aggression, and negotiation. The Marital Agendas Protocol (Notarius & Vanzetti, 1983) assesses the degree to which issues such as children, money, and household tasks are sources of conflict in the couple’s relationship. This measure assesses conflict issues rather than how partners approach conflict.

Another measure, the Episode-Specific Conflict Tactics Scale (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988), includes three primary approaches to conflict (which don’t necessarily align with those discussed in the strategies section of this chapter): integrative, distributive, and avoidance. Integrative approaches include compromise and negotiation. Distributive approaches include sarcasm and criticism. And of course avoidance is just that—avoidance. With this measure, respondents are asked to think about a specific instance of conflict rather than how they approach conflict in general. Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, and Christensen’s (1996) Communication

Patterns Questionnaire measures communication related to disagreements in romantic relationships. This scale has most often been used to measure the demand/withdrawal pattern of conflict in marital couples. That is, one partner approaches conflict by demanding, while the other partner avoids or withdraws from conflict.

The authors of this chapter conducted research with the primary goal of developing a measure of *everyday* conflict experienced by individuals in dating relationships. Through a series of three studies involving college students as participants, we developed the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (Zacchilli, 2007; Zacchilli et al., 2005; Zacchilli et al., 2008). We found six strategies that couples use to handle conflict with their romantic partners. These strategies include the following: compromise, avoidance, interactional reactivity, domination, submission, and separation. The *compromise* strategy seems to involve working together to reach a solution to the conflict. *Avoidance* is not dealing with the conflict issue or denying that there is conflict. *Interactional reactivity* involves anger and verbal aggression. *Domination* is one partner's attempt to win the argument. *Submission* is one partner giving in to the other partner's wishes. *Separation* involves a cooling off period with plans to discuss the issue later. Several of these strategies are similar to those found in previous research discussed previously.

We (Zacchilli et al., 2008) found that these conflict strategies were related to a number of other relationship features such as satisfaction, respect, communication, love, and sexual attitudes. One general finding was that constructive conflict strategies were related to positive relational qualities such as satisfaction, whereas destructive strategies were related to negative relational qualities. For example, individuals who reported using compromise were likely to report high relationship satisfaction and respect for partner. These individuals were also willing to communicate about intimate topics including sex with their romantic partner. Individuals who avoided talking to their partner about conflict were also unwilling to discuss sexual issues with their partner. Similar to individuals who used compromise, individuals using avoidance also had respect for their partners. Individuals that reported using submission, domination, and interactional reactivity were dissatisfied, not committed to their relationships, and had little respect for their partners.

## APPLYING THE CONFLICT STRATEGIES

The following examples show how each of these strategies for handling conflict (compromise, avoidance, interactional reactivity, domination, submission, separation) might be enacted by romantic partners. This couple, Raquel and Jorge, has been dating for over a year and consider themselves "committed." They both attend college full time and work part time. Jorge is also part of an amateur cycle racing team, and he spends many hours every week riding with his team. Raquel, though she sees her friends at school or work, has much more available time and wants to spend it with

Jorge. But he is reluctant to cut down on his cycling. Their conversations typically go like this:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday. Neither do you. Let's go to the farmer's market in the morning and get a lot of good stuff and make dinner.... (Jorge interrupts her)

Jorge: You know I ride with the team every Saturday morning. I can't go with you to the farmer's market or anywhere ... (Raquel is silent)

They practice *compromise*:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday. I know that you'll be riding in the morning, so I'll go to the farmer's market and buy some fresh food for dinner on Saturday evening.

Jorge: That sounds great. I'll plan to start riding a little early and quit a little early. That way we can spend the afternoon together and make dinner together.

They practice *avoidance*:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday. I'm going to spend the day at my mother's.

Jorge: Okay.

They practice *interactional reactivity*:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday, and I don't see why for once you can't put me ahead of your stupid cycling buddies and spend the day with me!

Jorge: Why do you have to be so demanding? You know that I cycle every Saturday, no exceptions! You're such a ...

They practice *domination*:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday. We never get to spend a full weekend together, and I deserve to have you spend that time with me. Tell your cycling team you can't ride this Saturday.

Jorge: Don't tell me what to do. My cycling comes first on Saturdays. If you want us to stay together, don't push me to change my priorities.

They practice *submission*:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday, but I know you are cycling.

Jorge: Right.

or

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday, and I want to spend the day with you.

Jorge: Okay, I'll cancel my cycling.

They practice *separation*:

Raquel: I don't have to work on Saturday, and I want to spend the day with you.

Jorge: I've got to go to work. Bye.

Of course the conflict strategies can be mixed and matched (e.g., one person exhibits interactional reactivity, and the other person exhibits submission), and typically the conversation exchanges are much longer. But this short scene is played out millions of times a day by couples trying to work out issues in their relationships. What kinds of conflict strategies do you use in your relationships?

### CONFLICT AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Some conflict strategies are constructive and are related to healthy relationship qualities, whereas other strategies are destructive and harmful to the quality of the relationship (Canary & Cupach, 1988; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). For example, compromise is related positively to relationship satisfaction, commitment, self-disclosure, sexual communication, and even self-esteem (e.g., Zacchilli, 2007).

In recent research (Zacchilli, 2007; Zacchilli et al., 2008), compromise was found to partially explain the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction as well as sexual communication and satisfaction. Although previous research showed that good communication was related to relationship satisfaction (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Schaap, Buunk, & Kerkstra, 1988), the recent finding regarding compromise may indicate that communication alone may not be as important to relationship satisfaction as how an individual communicates during conflict. Therefore, even if Michael and Christy can talk to each other about almost any topic, if they cannot talk to each other constructively when faced with conflict, they may be dissatisfied. This finding demonstrates the importance of compromise as a conflict strategy and may clarify previous research that showed communication to be strongly related to or even predictive of relationship satisfaction. Compromise seems to be related to other positive relationship qualities as well. For example, both respecting one's partner and perceiving respect from one's partner were positively related to compromise. Therefore, individuals who reported using compromise as a conflict strategy were more likely to report respect for their partners and felt that their partners respected them. Interestingly, respect for partner was positively related to avoidance. Individuals who respected their partners may have avoided discussing conflict with their partners so they would not show disrespect for them. Respect for partner and perceived respect from partner were negatively related to interactional reactivity, domination, and submission. Thus, individuals who had little respect for their partners or perceived little respect from their partners were more likely to verbally abuse, push, and give in to their partners during conflict. It seems that constructive

strategies such as compromise are related to respect in the relationship, while destructive strategies are related to little respect.

In addition, compromise is also related to styles of loving in the relationship. Lee (1973, 1977) proposed a typology of six love styles based on historical and literature reviews as well as scientific evidence: Eros (passionate love), Ludus (game-playing love), Storge (friendship love), Mania (possessive/dependent love), Pragma (practical love), and Agape (selfless love). Individuals who used compromise reported having passionate (Eros) and selfless (Agape) love styles, as measured by the Love Attitudes Scale (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). Therefore, it seems that individuals with passionate and selfless love styles were more likely to find a middle ground when faced with conflict with their romantic partners.

Since compromise is related to so many positive relationship qualities, what prevents people from using compromise when faced with conflict? One explanation could be lack of motivation. Perhaps some people are unwilling to compromise with their partners during conflict. These individuals may have selfish motives that result in use of destructive strategies such as domination or interactional reactivity rather than constructive strategies such as compromise. Lack of social skills might be another explanation for not using compromise as a conflict strategy. Perhaps individuals who do not compromise are lacking those social skills necessary to communicate constructively with their partners during conflict. These individuals may have motivation to compromise but do not know how to do so.

## CONFLICT PREVENTION

One way to safeguard a relationship is to know what *not* to do. Noted scholar John Gottman (1993) proposed that there are four relational conflict behaviors that are particularly damaging and are “warning signs” that conflict strategies need to be changed. The first problem behavior is *criticism*, which is more than simple complaining and which involves attacking the partner rather than just questioning the behavior. The second problem behavior is *contempt*, which is dismissive and devaluing behavior toward the partner. The third problem behavior is *defensiveness*, which is an overall unwillingness to take responsibility for any problems. The fourth, and most potentially destructive behavior is *stonewalling*, which involves a complete withdrawal from the conflict incident and more generally from the partner. Besides simply avoiding these four behaviors of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, Gottman suggests using the conflict management strategies of calming down, validating one’s partner, trying to be nondefensive, and managing conflict more positively.

Another approach to conflict prevention is an educational one. For example, Robert and Angela have been married for five years and are considering divorce. Jay and LaKesha are engaged and plan to marry in a few months. The frequency of conflict in their relationship has increased, and they find it difficult to resolve these conflicts. Research evidence suggests that this couple and those like them could indeed benefit from an

educational program. One area that has received a great deal of attention is the area of conflict prevention (Kline, Pleasant, Whitton, & Markman, 2006). The purpose of conflict prevention is not to decrease relationship conflict per se but rather to teach couples to use more effective conflict strategies instead of destructive conflict strategies. One of the most successful prevention programs is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999). This program was initially designed to assist married couples but now has been extended to couples that are engaged. This program involves 12 hours of skills training, and happy couples as well as distressed couples can benefit from the training.

According to Stanley et al. (1999), PREP is a skills-based approach developed from cognitive-behavioral theory and therapy. The primary assumption of this approach is that couples can learn new ways to behave during conflict that can prevent future problems or eventual failure of the relationship. PREP focuses on helping couples to acknowledge and reduce negative conflict behaviors. Also, this program “focuses on helping couples learn to control their conflicts rather than having their conflicts control them” (p. 284) and teaches couples more constructive ways to handle conflict in their relationships. For example, one technique, the speaker-listener technique, helps the couple build good communication skills by increasing openness and decreasing negative feelings. Couples involved in PREP also learn to work through any unreasonable expectations that they might have regarding the relationship or partner as well as deal with commitment issues. Additionally, PREP teaches couples how to bring fun, friendship, and sensuality into their relationships.

PREP seems to be successful at teaching couples to use more constructive conflict strategies (Halford et al., 2003). This relationship education program has been successful with happy couples, distressed couples, and with engaged couples, newly married couples, and couples who have been married for a long time (Stanley et al., 1999). The success of PREP provides hope that fewer couples will end up divorced and that more couples will be able to find happiness and satisfaction in their relationships.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

When all is said and done, what most people want to know is how to handle the inevitable conflicts that arise in a romantic relationship. There are “good fights” and “bad fights,” and most of us want our conflict to be productive. The following list of suggestions for enhancing the mind-set, setting, and behaviors that form the context for conflict are derived from the research reviewed in this chapter.

### *The mind-set:*

Respect yourself and your partner. Do not use name-calling or hostile language.

Ask for what you want instead of criticizing what your partner does.

Never devalue or be dismissive—listen to your partner’s point-of-view.

Try not to be defensive—this is a lesson that can take a lifetime!

Focus on the current issue, not on every complaint you have ever had about the other.

If you or your partner is very emotional, give yourselves a cooling-off period or “time out” before continuing your discussion.

If one of both of you is under great stress, try to cut each other a LOT of slack.

Remember that your and their reactivity is likely due to the stress, not the current issue.

If you are the one under stress, TELL your partner. Don’t keep secrets.

*The setting:*

If one of you is very tired and/or hungry, put off the discussion.

If you’ve been drinking, declare conflict topics “off limits.”

Talk in a neutral place—the living room, on a walk, at a coffee shop.

A holiday or special occasion is NO day to have a conflict discussion.

*The behaviors:*

Look at your partner—eye contact is a form of connection.

Listen carefully; don’t be focused on what you are going to say next.

Don’t interrupt your partner unless you are agreeing with her or him.

Remember that compromise and creative problem-solving are always useful in conflict situations. And always remember that your goal needs to be “growing” the relationship, not “winning” the argument!

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the focus of this chapter was on romantic conflict and its resolution, conflict is an important part of all human relationships. In addition to romantic relationships, parent–child, work, sibling, and peer relationships involve some degree of conflict. Often how conflict is handled in one type of relationship influences how conflict is handled in other relationships. Conflict is also important in influencing wars among cultures, religions, and countries. Thus, the study of conflict is essential in understanding human relationships. It also important to note, as mentioned earlier, that although we have focused on conflict in heterosexual romantic relationships, most of the same dynamics and issues discussed are equally relevant to homosexual relationships (e.g., Peplau & Spaulding, 2000).

Conflict may occur for many reasons, such as elements of arguing that are rewarding to the participants and the reasons or attributions that partners make about each other’s behavior. Both conflict strategy and conflict frequency are important to the success of a relationship. Conflict theorists have proposed a number of strategies for handling conflict, with themes of compromise, dominance, and avoidance characterizing most of the conflict strategy theories. Communication is also an important aspect to the whole

process of conflict and conflict resolution. In addition, how conflict was handled in our family when we were growing up, whether we are a woman or a man, and the type of relationship we are in may all influence our approach to handling conflict.

The authors' research (e.g., Zacchilli et al., 2008) highlights the measurement of conflict as well as ways that conflict may be handled and conflict's role in how humans interact "relationally." Specifically, we found that constructive conflict strategies are related to positive relationship qualities, whereas destructive strategies are related to negative relationship qualities. There are many benefits to using constructive conflict strategies. One such benefit is greater relationship satisfaction. Similar relationship benefits may also be present in other types of relationships such as parent-child and sibling relationships. That is, parents and children who approach conflict constructively may also report communicating openly with one another and report high relationship quality.

Unfortunately, there are also many destructive conflict strategies that are related to many negative relationship qualities. As previously mentioned, destructive strategies such as domination, submission, avoidance, and interactional reactivity are related to poorer communication, poorer relationship satisfaction, lower commitment, and less respect for partner. Why do individuals continue to use strategies that are so destructive to the relationship? Perhaps they find that they can reach their short-term goals by using these strategies. For example, if Mario uses domination to convince Isabella to choose his side of the issue, he might believe he is successful in getting what he wants with little worry about the quality or success of the relationship. Likewise, if Linn always gives in to Matt during conflict to make him happy, she may feel successful in settling the conflict but may not be happy with how that impacts the relationship. Perhaps these destructive strategies seem effective in the short-term, but in reality these strategies are negatively influencing the relationship in the long-term.

Compromise and other constructive conflict strategies deserve much attention, both in future research and in applied settings. Some prevention programs seem effective in teaching couples how to identify bad conflict behaviors and replace those behaviors with more constructive ones (Halford et al., 2003; Stanley et al., 1999). In this chapter, we also mentioned important aspects of the mind-set, behaviors, and the setting that form the context for conflict. This list provides an excellent guide to follow as individuals face conflict in their romantic relationships, and the suggestions can likely be applied to other relationships as well.

An important aspect of a good relationship is how conflict is handled. The use of constructive strategies is related to numerous positive relationship qualities. However, the use of destructive strategies is harmful to the relationship and may eventually lead to termination of the relationship. If we could teach people to become experts in constructive conflict strategies, we could not only prevent many negative relational outcomes, but we might also help create a better social world.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Handling Conflict in Your Romantic Relationship

In this chapter, we have discussed strategies that individuals may use when faced with conflict. Think about recent conflicts you have experienced with your romantic partner or close friend. You may handle conflict in much the same way no matter who the other person might be. On the other hand, your conflict strategies may change, depending on the other person and the situation. The mini-experiments described below are designed to help you be more thoughtful about how you behave in conflictual situations.

**How Your Parents Handle Conflict:** Research suggests that how conflict is handled in your family of origin influences how you handle conflict with your romantic partner. If your parents have conflict, and most do, think about how they handle it. Do they use compromise, avoidance, or domination? Is it a problem-solving situation or a win-lose situation or something else? Think carefully about whether you and your sibling/s use any of these same strategies when in conflict with your parents or with each other. You might even want to talk to your sibling/s about the topic.

**Handling Conflict with Your Friends:** Pick a friend you trust—someone who will be honest with you. Talk to that person about how they handle conflict in their relationships. Also talk about their perceptions of how you behave when you are in conflict with them or with someone else. Analyze how you handle conflict with your close friend compared with how you handle it with family members.

**Planning for Conflict:** Conflict occurs often in romantic relationships. Assume that you and your partner will have a conflict eventually, and plan for it. Devise a present for your partner. Buy some small thing that your partner likes—a certain food, a special CD, and so on. Or write down on a piece of paper an action you could take that would please your partner such as running an errand, doing a chore, or giving a foot massage. Hide the present until the next time you and your partner have a conflict. Early on during the conflict, give your partner the present. See what happens.

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# Forgiveness Is a Matter of Choice: Forgiveness Education for Young Children

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**F**or a brief moment, take a trip with us to Belfast, Northern Ireland (NI). Do you see the beautiful Belfast Mountains that seem like plateaus until they gently slope downward toward the Irish Sea? If we ascend one of the mountains, on a day without low clouds or drizzle, we will be able to see Scotland. The countryside on the top of the mountains is pristine. The hearts of the people in Belfast also are beautiful, for the most part. Too many of the hearts are wounded by injustice and cruelty that have gripped the city and the country for centuries. Some people are angry and that anger comes rushing out in fierce ways. Here are three examples of what has occurred in that scenic corner of the world for the past five years: A prominent paramilitary leader ordered that his adolescent son be knee-capped (crippling by gun shot to the knees at close range). For many months, primary school girls were terrorized on their way to school by adults throwing rocks at them, trying to prevent them from going to a school in which different beliefs from their own were expressed. A teenage boy was crucified to a block of wood by other youths in what was reported as violence that continues to stem from what the locals call “The Troubles,” a struggle between Irish Catholics and British Protestants that has continued for at least 400 years. The contrast between the unspoiled pastures on the Belfast Mountains and the violence below is stark and troubling.

Is there no end to it? Will Belfast be boiling in its own anger for hundreds more years? Many say no; since the Good Friday peace accord was signed in April 1998, the violence has diminished. Yet, as we saw in our examples, the violence continues and startles. Money and social programs have poured into Belfast with good effect. Yet, hearts remain troubled. It is this point on which we wish to concentrate in this chapter: How

forgiveness education for children is a choice—a positive choice—that can change hearts that are troubled and angry because of experiences of deep hurt and injustice.

Forgiveness is one of very few ideas in this world that can become a reality in the human heart in such a way that the heart is repaired, and when the heart heals, it makes room for other people, particularly those who originally did the damage. We will be exploring the definition of forgiveness subsequently in this chapter; for now, let us see forgiveness as an act of lavish mercy toward someone who has been unjust. The unjust do not deserve mercy, do they? That was a trick question because a central quality of mercy is that it is unearned. No one, in the technical sense, *deserves* mercy, although all people, simply because they are people, are *worthy* to receive mercy from others whenever the merciful ones wish to give such an abundant gift.

All people are worthy of receiving mercy. This may be easy to say, but in practice, it is quite difficult to understand deeply and enact. Yet, this is exactly what people who forgive other people do: they struggle to see the inherent worth of the one who acted unfairly and to see the self as possessing that same worth. In some ways, the ongoing Troubles in NI are a metaphor for our own lives. How often do we harbor anger or seek revenge against those who have hurt us? Through forgiveness, can we begin to see, truly see and deeply understand, that those who have harmed us have inherent worth, not because of anything they do or don't do, but instead because of whom they are: precious people with built-in worth? Can we see the same inherent worth in others: a worth that transcends one's religion, or one's ethnicity, or one's wealth, social status, or anything else that can divide?

Our purpose in this chapter is to introduce you to a forgiveness curriculum that focuses on inherent worth within Belfast schools. The assumption that undergirds the curriculum is that children are capable of learning about forgiveness at young ages, at least as young as age six. In this chapter we will discuss “The Troubles,” a recent period of violence within Belfast that has its roots as far back as the medieval period. We next turn to the psychological impact of violence and trauma on the children, those we are trying to help with the forgiveness education programs. This will be followed by a discussion of the aforementioned forgiveness curriculum, with a specific focus on the program for first graders. We then turn to a more detailed description of inherent worth as the underlying cognitive principle for the forgiveness education programs and key connection to the burgeoning field of positive psychology. We end with a personal mini-experiment that we hope will help you to explore your own interest and capacity to offer forgiveness to others.

## THE VALUE OF FORGIVENESS EDUCATION: HARRIET'S TRANSFORMATION

Let us consider the value of forgiveness education, and inherent worth in particular. Ghandi, in his wisdom, instructed us that if such true peace is

ever to be achieved in the world, then we must begin with the children. It is our contention that as children learn about forgiveness, their hearts begin to soften and transform as they begin to understand inherent human worth, and that they eventually become quite expert at forgiving those who hurt them. As the children learn about forgiveness and learn how to forgive, we expect that their level of emotional health will improve because studies with adults have shown this to be true. As their emotional health improves, they may more readily enter into healthy relationships with others. Consider Harriet's story—a little girl in NI.

Harriet is a first grader in a particularly impoverished and violent area of Belfast, which is frequently beset by riots as Irish and British youth and adults clash with rocks and fists as they either mourn or commemorate the victory of William of Orange over James II at the Battle of the Boyne in the late seventeenth century. Harriet is seen as different than her peers since her family is particularly poor and her mother is a single parent. Harriet has developed a very low self-esteem, which could have negative consequences for her in later life.

Recently, her teacher introduced the class to the idea of inherent worth within the context of the forgiveness curriculum. The details of that lesson are in the section on *Forgiveness Education*. As Harriet understood that all people are worthy of respect and kindness, the light bulb went on for her. With eyes wide, she approached her teacher with several questions including “Does this mean that I am as good a person as Kevin, who lives in the big house on the corner?” Up until this point in her life, she was comparing herself with Kevin, unbeknownst to the teacher, and concluding that she was less of a person than Kevin because he lived in the Victorian home with the lace curtains. “Does this mean that I am as good as Katie, who has both parents living with her?” she asked the teacher. When her teacher lovingly smiled and said, “Yes, you are as worthy as Kevin and Katie,” it was as if a weight had dropped from her young and fragile shoulders. She needed to hear this. Without hearing this affirmation of her own worth, Harriet was likely to carry a sense of her own unworthiness into adulthood. We can only imagine her level of anger and mistrust that could have been directed at others in her adult world if this had not been corrected.

In Harriet's case, the forgiveness lessons served to affirm that she is worthy. For others, it serves as the lesson that people who are different from one's own group are worthy. Both are necessary if anger is to diminish and if peace will begin to grow in a community. Yet, what happened to Harriet is only a first step. She will need other lessons in later grades to discuss both forgiving and receiving forgiveness, to examine how forgiveness differs from such related concepts as reconciliation or excusing. She will need to diminish her anger and develop a plan to put her forgiveness education into action at home, at school, and within the larger community if she will ever forgive in the context of the societal conflict that has affected her in ways she cannot yet fathom.

It is important to note that the first-grade forgiveness curriculum is not about the centuries-old battle for supremacy between ethnic groups. Instead, it begins with a developmental perspective that the children's

world, what they are capable of understanding, is more centered on their own families, on their own neighborhoods, on themselves as persons. Only in later years will the forgiveness curriculum be developmentally advanced enough to have adolescent students consider “The Troubles” and other aspects of societal unrest in relation to their own forgiveness.

Let us now continue with our exploration of forgiveness education as a positive psychological step for the children of Belfast by discussing the underlying conflict, “The Troubles.”

## BACKGROUND OF “THE TROUBLES” IN NI

It is fair to say that NI is a land of considerable paradox. The bucolic and serene landscape that surrounds the city of Belfast is in stark contrast to the ongoing political and religious conflict—known as “The Troubles”—that continues to divide portions of the city. The contemporary manifestation of “The Troubles” is a continuation and extension of a centuries-old conflict fueled by issues of land ownership, governance, cultural and religious identity, and political representation. Before delving further into the topics of violence, conflict, and forgiveness, it is important to recognize that different groups in Ireland interpret the same historical act or event in different ways and with different meaning. Therefore, the following discussion is not intended to interpret or assign value to historical events.

The island of Ireland has known centuries of intergroup conflict and violence (Cairns & Darby, 1998; Darby, 1995; Muldoon, 2004; Power & Duffy, 2001). Violent conflicts have plagued Ireland from the time of the Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169, through the Bloody Sunday incident of 1972, and continue with current expressions of sectarian violence captured in the headlines of daily papers such as *The Belfast Telegraph*. Over many years, the impetus behind the intergroup conflicts has changed considerably as the demographic and political landscape of Ireland has likewise changed (see Darby, 1995; Fay, Morrissey, & Smyth, 1999; Muldoon, 2004).

The ongoing conflict associated with the political and geographic division of Ireland became increasingly violent through the 1960s with the civil rights movement in Ireland. The campaign for civil rights in NI, which was partly a response to the Protestant unionist majority abuse of power over the Catholic nationalist minority, quickly escalated into violence as the sectarian and politically divided enclaves throughout NI became war zones where paramilitary groups such as the IRA Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) implemented terrorist-like methods such as car bombings and kidnappings to express power and promote their cause (Darby, 1995; Gurwitsch et al., 2002; Muldoon, 2004). This period of intense intergroup fighting became known as “The Troubles” and was hallmarked by violent expressions of religious and political differences such as Bloody Sunday (January 30, 1972) and many others in towns and cities throughout NI. Although “The Troubles” have always encompassed a complex web of social realities, they are often conflated into a religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant groups (Muldoon, 2004).

The historical conflict between communities along political, religious, and cultural ideals in NI has created visible division and segmentation that persists today in Belfast (Jarman, 1999; Jarman, 2004a, 2004b; Rolston, 1991). Although specific geographic sections of cities such as Belfast are characteristically associated with ongoing sectarian violence, the ramifications of these violent acts impact the entire community. Bomb threats bring traffic to a halt, shut down schools and businesses, and send people scurrying for shelter. Violent beatings in public places such as pubs make headline news and disseminate general uneasiness and fear. Furthermore, in recent years, children have become both the victims and perpetrators of violent and destructive sectarian acts: five teenage boys were charged with the sectarian beating of another teenage boy who died from his injuries (“Five in court over youth’s murder,” 2006), two primary schools were attacked with petrol bombs in a sectarian act of arson and vandalism (“School arson attacks ‘sectarian,’” 2006), a teenager was shot in the leg in a “paramilitary style attack” (“Teenager stable after gun attack,” 2007). The aftermath of these violent acts reaches all citizens to some degree—whether directly through personal experience or indirectly through news media—and may make even “ordinary citizens” feel unsafe.

It should be noted that important strides toward peace have been made within the past decade in NI. On April 10, 1998, the “Good Friday Agreement”—also known as the Belfast Agreement—was ratified by members of a multiparty commission (The Agreement, 1998). The Agreement was the first of its kind in the history of Ireland and—among other conditions—called for the creation of a local, power-sharing government in NI, and the decommissioning of paramilitary organizations. The local parliamentary government in NI, also known as home rule, enjoyed short-lived success as it was suspended in October 2002, and NI once again was under direct rule from the Westminster parliament. Official talks have recently been renewed to discuss the future of home rule in NI (Agreement at St. Andrews, 2006), and elections were recently held to reestablish a local governing assembly.

The call for paramilitary dissolution and disarmament outlined in the Agreement has achieved some success as of late. In July 2005, after many months and years of negation, the IRA officially renounced violence as a means to their desired goals and vowed to disarm. The most recent report by the Independent Monitoring Commission—an organization created to monitor paramilitary activity—confirms that the IRA is continuing to dismantle the paramilitary function of the organization in accordance with their renunciation of violence and vow to disarm (Thirteenth report of the independent monitoring commission, 2007).

Unfortunately, official ceasefire agreements and peace accords have not entirely eradicated the interpersonal and intergroup violence that continues to afflict individuals and communities across NI (Jarman, 2004b). In fact, in the years following the Good Friday Agreement, perception of relations between Protestants and Catholics and optimism about the quality of relations in the future began to decrease (NILT, 2003). Enright, Gassin, and Knutson (2003) report that although sectarian violence and terrorist-like

threats and attacks are not as common today as they once were in NI, violence associated with “The Troubles” persists. Further reports from the Police Service of Northern Ireland indicate that incidents of bombing, personal attacks, and kidnappings increased significantly in the last decade (Enright et al., 2003). Despite governmental and grassroots efforts to ensure otherwise, “there remains a significant and enduring level of violence” throughout NI (Gallagher, 2004, p. 637).

## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA IN NI

James Garbarino (2001), a noted researcher in child development and advocate for abused and neglected children worldwide, maintains that violence poses considerable developmental challenges to children. He delineates two different types of traumatic danger—both acute and chronic—to children in urban war zones. These two forms of violence correspond roughly with Enright and colleagues’ (2003) distinction between terrorism (acute) and ongoing community violence (chronic) in NI. According to Garbarino, children exposed to acute violence are at greater risk of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its many symptoms, such as daydreaming, exaggerated startle responses, sleep disturbances, emotional numbing, hopeless outlooks, and even biochemical brain changes that can impair both academic and social behavior. Chronic violence, on the other hand, makes for long-term developmental difficulties, since children have difficulty assimilating their experiences with violence into their existing worldviews. Rather, this ever-present threat of violence can challenge life’s very meaning and lead to “persistent Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, alterations of personality, and major changes in patterns of behavior or articulations of ideological interpretations of the world that provide a framework for making sense of ongoing danger” (Garbarino, 2001, p. 368).

Garbarino (2001) explains that, since children’s meaning structures are most effectively established in early childhood, the challenge to meaning offered by violence is greater for young victims. In addition, children have less-developed cognitive skills and have had less time to build a solid, meaningful framework. As a result, children have more difficulty making sense of the world in light of chronic violence. For children for whom religious experience is important, violence can shatter conceptions of a benevolent God or Higher Power. Thus, children’s experience of chronic violence can serve to change dramatically their worldview and alter their deeply held values.

Research on the psychological impact of “The Troubles” on children in NI has provided contradictory results in different time periods. Initial research in the 1970s showed negative consequences for children (Muldoon, Trew, & Kilpatrick, 2000). These early works indicated that some children suffered behavior and psychosomatic problems (e.g., sleep problems, asthma, and stuttering) that were perhaps a result of the anxiety that accompanied community violence (Enright et al., 2003). Researchers in the 1980s, however, called into question these findings, perhaps partly because of subjective tendencies on the part of researchers to normalize the lives of

children in NI. This research maintained that “young people in Northern Ireland were coping quite well, despite the violence, and there was little evidence of psychological consequences from the conflict” (Gallagher, 2004, p. 632).

In Gallagher’s (2004) opinion, however, this 1980s research “overstated the normality and ordinariness of everyday life” (p. 632) in NI, which, in reality, “was all too obviously slipping into violent abnormality” (p. 636). This abnormality is captured with conclusions that “children’s prolonged exposure to conflict and reminders (via media and/or police presence) of violence exacerbated posttraumatic stress symptomatology, mood disorders, behavioral problems, and academic struggles” (Curran & Miller, 2001, cited in Enright et al., 2003, p. 52). Furthermore, Fletcher (1996) noted that those children exposed to community violence (or even those who simply heard about it) had higher levels of PTSD symptoms, depression, anxiety, anger, and sleep problems (cited in Holter, Martin, & Enright, 2006). In another study, Rudenberg, Jansen, & Fridjhon (2001) compared drawings of 8- to 12-year-old children from South Africa and West Belfast, NI—two areas then experiencing ongoing community violence. Boys in NI showed the highest levels of anxiety, anger, and aggression, responses that, when experienced over the long term, can have deleterious consequences. Other effects of violence include aggression, memory and concentration problems, isolation and withdrawal, and fears (Rudenberg et al., 2001).

Recent research on psychological effects of terrorism in areas other than NI—particularly Oklahoma City—has shown that “even indirect exposure to terrorist attacks is related to persistent post-traumatic stress symptomology” (Enright et al., 2003, p. 52). That is, even those children who did not personally know a victim of the bombing, but instead only saw media coverage of the event, reported similar symptoms to those directly involved. If the threat of terrorism continues in areas such as NI, Enright and colleagues conclude that many children will remain at risk for any number of psychological difficulties. They note a study by Thabet et al. (2002), who concluded that Palestinian children exposed indirectly to violence showed greater anxiety levels than children who were exposed directly to violence. Thus, not only can direct exposure to violence have an intense, negative effect upon children, but even the threat of or media attention to violence can have the same negative (and long-lasting) effect on children’s mental health and overall well-being. Garbarino (1993) also cautions that these stressful early experiences of violence could have a latent effect that emerges in adult years with various adjustment problems.

As one can see from the research described, the experience of violence—both acute and chronic—has a negative impact on the psychological and overall well-being of children. Exacerbating this impact is the fact that the parents and teachers who are raising these children carry their own psychological baggage from their experience of “The Troubles.” Children can actually absorb the hurts, anxieties, and prejudices caused by the experience of violence by the older generation (Connolly, Smith, & Kelly, 2002).

Unless an intervention occurs, this intergenerational transmission of negative psychological effects of violence, combined with the present experience of the same, may exacerbate interpersonal and intergroup conflict for yet another generation—and a society—through a vicious cycle of violence, anger, and revenge. We believe that such an intervention—namely, a forgiveness education intervention—will not only help stop this dreadful cycle, but also build on individual strengths and assets to promote positive functioning and interaction among the youngest generation of NI's population.

## FORGIVENESS EDUCATION—A POSITIVE CHOICE

It is clear that direct and indirect exposure to chronic and acute community violence can have lasting, deleterious effects on members of a community, especially young children. As we discussed briefly, no solitary ceasefire agreement or single political accord can adequately defuse or successfully ameliorate the consequences of intergenerational conflict and discord. Therefore, social scientists and peace workers must advocate programs that provide individuals within these communities an opportunity to address the deep distress and trauma caused by decades of strife and violence, and promote skills for healthy relationships and human thriving. Forgiveness education represents a unique response to the needs of postaccord communities through the dual approach of therapeutic effect (intervention) and prosocial skill development (prevention).

## DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is an ancient concept. Although the word “forgiveness” is not universal, essential components of forgiveness—such as kindness, compassion, benevolence, and others—can be found in nearly all philosophical or religious traditions. It is important to recognize that the concept of forgiveness is not exclusively religious, yet some of the most robust images of forgiveness are found within the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity (Enright, Eastin, Golden, & Sarinopoulos, 1992).

Despite its ancient foundation in religious and philosophical traditions, the psychological study of interpersonal forgiveness is quite new. Before the early 1980s, the concept of forgiveness was noticeably absent from scholarly discourse and empirical studies. Then, in the mid-1980s, a group of scholars independently began to explore the psychological construct of forgiveness (see Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Smedes, 1984; Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990). The early theoretical exploration of forgiveness inspired rapid growth in the field and great diversity regarding application and assessment of interpersonal forgiveness. Currently, there is no clear consensus among scholars regarding *the* definition or operational model of forgiveness. However, many scholars agree on certain key features of forgiveness: that forgiveness is not the same thing as restoring a relationship (reconciliation); that forgiveness involves the cessation of negative thoughts, feelings, and actions; that forgiveness is not the same as forgetting or

excusing; and that forgiveness begins with a deep hurt or injustice (Coyle & Enright, 1998; Enright, 2001; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000).

The definition that guides our current work on forgiveness education programs for young children was developed by Enright (2001) and includes the unique caveat that the subsiding negative thoughts, feelings, and actions are gradually replaced by positive expressions such as compassion and benevolence:

When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts. (p. 25)

This definition of forgiveness is unique in that it emphasizes transformation from negative to positive in three general categories: cognition, affect, and behavior. The process of forgiveness is expressed as movement from anger and resentment to compassion and benevolence (see Table 4.1). This transformation through forgiveness is a paradox. When we forgive, we extend kindness and compassion to the offender that was not extended to us.

A central tenet to our understanding of forgiveness is that forgiveness is always a personal choice. Because interpersonal forgiveness is a personal response of mercy to someone who has deeply hurt us, it is something we must choose freely. Since forgiveness is a personal choice, and we do not need permission to forgive, it can be an empowering experience. Furthermore, forgiveness as a matter of personal choice is a proactive response to unjust hurt that is not dependant on an apology or gesture of repentance from the offender. Waiting for the offender to apologize or repent places control once again in the hands of the one who has hurt us. Conversely, it can be empowering and liberating to know that your personal health and well-being are not contingent upon the consent or participation of someone who has caused you deep hurt.

## FORGIVENESS EDUCATION—THE ADVENTURE OF FORGIVENESS

Research on forgiveness therapy and interventions has burgeoned in recent years, and the cumulative results of this growing body of research affirm the versatility and effectiveness of forgiveness programs for a variety of individuals who experience deep and unjust hurt (see, for example, Baskin & Enright, 2004; Harris et al., 2006; Wade & Worthington, 2005). Forgiveness education programs for young children are currently being developed and evaluated by Enright and colleagues and represent an innovative and effective extension of the *classic* forgiveness intervention model.

Currently, there are five forgiveness education programs being implemented in schools across the United States and in Belfast—one for each grade, first through fifth. These five forgiveness education programs

**Table 4.1**  
**The Enright Process Model of Forgiveness**

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**The Phases and Units of Forgiving and the Issues Involved**

UNCOVERING PHASE

1. Examination of psychological defenses and the issues involved
2. Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbor, the anger
3. Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate
4. Awareness of depleted emotional energy
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense
6. Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer
7. Realization that oneself may be permanently and adversely changed by the injury
8. Insight into a possibly altered “just world” view

DECISION PHASE

9. A change in heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option
11. Commitment to forgive the offender

WORK PHASE

12. Reframing, though role-taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context
13. Empathy and compassion toward the offender
14. Bearing/accepting the pain
15. Giving a moral gift to the offender

DEEPENING PHASE

16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and in the forgiveness process
  17. Realization that self has needed others’ forgiveness in the past
  18. Insight that one is not alone (universality, support)
  19. Realization that self may have new purpose in life because of the injury
  20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release
- 

*Source:* Reproduced with permission from Enright and Fitzgibbons, 2000.

represent a cohesive elementary school series designed to be incrementally more advanced yet developmentally appropriate. *The Adventure of Forgiveness* (Knutson & Enright, 2002) curriculum is designed for first grade students and is based on the Enright (2001) model (see Table 4.1). Classroom teachers are invited to attend a one-day workshop on interpersonal forgiveness and forgiveness education and are trained to implement the forgiveness curriculum in their classes.

*The Adventure of Forgiveness* curriculum consists of seventeen lessons and is organized into three parts. Part one (lessons 1–7) introduces and encourages the students to practice the five basic building blocks of forgiveness: reframing and perspective taking for inherent worth, moral love,

kindness, respect, and generosity. Part two (lessons 8–12) utilizes stories and story characters to provide the children concrete examples of how the five basic building blocks work together when forgiving someone. Finally, in part three (lessons 13–17) children are able to practice the five building blocks of forgiveness by forgiving someone in their life—only if they choose to do so. Teachers provide a supportive environment for students to practice forgiveness, but do not require that each child forgive someone. Just as with adult forgiveness therapy and intervention, forgiveness is a personal choice for each child and cannot be mandated by teachers or parents. As children progress through the curriculum, they gain a deeper understanding of what skills are associated with forgiveness, what forgiveness is and is not, and how they might forgive someone who has hurt them.

It is interesting to note that although most of the children who participate in forgiveness education in Belfast live in *flashpoint* or *interface* areas that are prone to sectarian and community violence, few if any mention these expressions of “The Troubles” as a source of deep hurt during the forgiveness activities. They are undoubtedly impacted by sectarian and community violence (see, for example, Connolly, Smith, & Kelly, 2002), but tend to focus their expressions of forgiveness on more developmentally normative experiences of hurt such as fighting with a sibling, quarrels with friends or schoolmates, or squabbles with neighborhood peers. The children’s age-appropriate expressions of deep hurt work just fine for the forgiveness activities and will hopefully begin to prepare their hearts and minds to address the larger issues and effects of “The Troubles” as they grow and develop.

Here we describe one lesson sequence to highlight how children develop an important forgiveness skill—perspective taking. In lessons one and two in *The Adventure of Forgiveness*, teachers use the book *Horton Hears a Who* by Dr. Seuss to explore with their students the concept of inherent human worth. As the teacher reads the book to the class, the students hear about a kindly elephant by the name of Horton who cares for a group of people called “Whos.” These Whos are so tiny that their entire village can fit on a tiny speck of dust. The Whos are so small that none of the other jungle animals can hear or see them, so Horton decides that he must protect them, since “a person’s a person, no matter how small.” Even when the kangaroos, monkeys, and other jungle animals believe that Horton is a bit crazy for believing that anything worth protecting could actually fit on a tiny speck of dust, he continues to protect the Whos and maintains that “a person’s a person, no matter how small.” Finally, when it looks as though Horton will no longer be able to protect the Whos from all the jungle animals who conspire to “boil them in Beezelnut oil,” it is the smallest Who in the whole village that is able shout loud enough for all the jungle animals to hear that the Whos really do exist. Horton’s persistence and the efforts of the smallest Who in Who-ville ultimately convince the entire jungle that “a person’s a person, no matter how small.”

Horton is indeed an unlikely hero, but his simple message throughout the book has two profound implications: (a) all people have value, no matter how small they may be, and (b) even the smallest among us can make a

very big difference. The classroom teacher guides the students to this deep understanding through a series of simple questions about the text: What do you think the story is about? What do you think Horton means when he says “a person’s a person, no matter how small?” If size does not matter, what else does not matter when deciding if a person is worthwhile? This series of comprehension questions is followed by an extension exercise where each student is given his or her very own stuffed Horton toy. The students then consult Horton as the teacher challenges them to think about other characteristics, other than size, that do not matter when considering whether someone is worthwhile. What if someone is tall or short, good at sports or is clumsy, lives in a big or small house, is the same as we are or is different? Again, this discussion is followed by a practical exercise where the children place props—hats, glasses, jackets—on their Horton toys. The teacher asks them to determine whether these “outside” things change who Horton is on the inside. Through the fun and engaging story of Horton and the Whos, the children are able to engage in a relatively complex discussion of inherent human worth.

Teachers of *The Adventure of Forgiveness* sequence continue to facilitate their students’ exploration and practice of the five basic building blocks of forgiveness through the medium of story and play. It should be noted here that there is an important difference between learning *about* forgiveness and actually *practicing* forgiveness. We take great care in making this distinction clear for the teachers in our training workshops, and we have teachers explain this distinction to the students throughout the lesson sequence. Everyone can learn about forgiveness—about the different skills we need to be a forgiving person—but only the individual can choose to forgive. Remember, forgiveness is a personal choice, no matter how small you are!

### Outcomes

In addition to the anecdotal evidence we shared at the beginning of the chapter about Harriet’s deeper understanding of her own inherent worth and the worth of others, we have also been collecting quantitative empirical data to assess the effectiveness of each forgiveness program from first to fifth grade. Overall, the data are encouraging and indicate that children who participate in forgiveness education programs demonstrate statistically significant decreases in anger and depression compared with children who do not participate in forgiveness education programs (Enright, Knutson-Enright, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2006). The reduction of negative emotional variables such as anger and depression clearly demonstrates the important therapeutic benefits of forgiveness education.

We are also interested in the positive, prosocial, or preventive effects of forgiveness education for children. Our research confirms that children who participate in forgiveness demonstrate increased levels of interpersonal forgiveness—with its focus on human worth, benevolence, kindness, and so on—than children who do not participate in forgiveness (Enright et al., 2006). These findings provide initial support for the claim that forgiveness

education programs may play a key role in facilitating healthy development and human thriving by challenging and supporting students as they practice a variety of prosocial skills such as perspective taking, compassion, generosity, and forgiveness. Further research is needed to articulate more precisely the long-term positive outcomes of forgiveness education for children as they develop into adolescents, adults, parents, neighbors, coworkers, and so on.

## FORGIVENESS EDUCATION AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Forgiveness education for young children is based on the central theme of inherent human worth. It provides children the skills needed to overcome the inevitable hurt and disappointment that are part of our human condition. However, forgiveness education does not stop at the negative or pathological experiences (mental illness, anger, depression) of our human condition. Forgiveness education challenges students to adopt a worldview that focuses on the value of others (even those who might hurt us), the idea of thriving through adversity, and finding new meaning—not despair and hopelessness—when we do experience deep hurt.

Positive psychology is an overarching umbrella term for research and theory about what makes life worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The movement “embraces a number of quite different theoretical approaches ... and we must find a way to integrate the efforts of scholars with rather different theoretical orientations” (Leontiev, 2006, p. 50). Still, positive psychology holds great promise, especially if unified theoretical models can be conceived.

Among all of the developments in the field of positive psychology in the last decade, four have particular relevance to the study of forgiveness. The first is Barbara Fredrickson’s (2006) “broaden and build” theory of positive emotions, the second is the theory of emotional intelligence, the third is the intersection of intervention and prevention, and the fourth is Martin Seligman’s conception of happiness, particularly the meaningful life.

Barbara Fredrickson’s broaden and build theory of positive emotions has important implications for forgiveness. Fredrickson (2006) notes that, traditionally, emotional research has focused on negative emotions, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and the like. She cites various studies that demonstrate how negative emotions narrow people’s attention (e.g., the “fight or flight” response evoked by the perception of danger that might guide a person to focus on an offender’s weapon rather than his style of dress). She then catalogs several studies that show how positive emotional states actually serve to broaden an individual’s attention and allow that person to focus more on, among other things, creativity and problem solving.

Fredrickson’s research also demonstrates that positive emotions can serve to undo lingering negative emotions. Often, this “undoing” helps people place hurtful events in a broader context that ameliorates their negative effects. Furthermore, her research shows that evidence of the undo effect “suggests that people might improve their psychological well-being, and perhaps also their physical health, by cultivating experiences of positive

emotions at opportune moments to cope with negative emotions” (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 94). The positive effects of positive emotions continue. Not only does positive emotion cancel out negative emotion, but it also builds psychological resilience. That is, “frequent experiences of positive emotions produce increments in personal resources” (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 95). Thus, the relationship between positive emotions and positive meaning is reciprocal. The pattern of accumulation and compounding is set in motion: Positive emotion helps one cope with adversity, which leads to enhanced emotional well-being, which leads to more effective coping with later adversity, which spirals upward in a cycle that builds resilience and brings health to the individual.

How does the broaden and build theory of positive emotion apply to forgiveness? During the process of forgiveness outlined earlier, the individual, as a result of seeing the offender in a new light, begins to replace negative emotions with more positive emotions, such as warmth or even unconditional love. According to Fredrickson, the positive emotions undo the effects of the negative emotions and serve to increase the individual’s well-being. Even more, this experience of positive emotion should lead to greater psychological resources that the person can draw upon when dealing with the next injustice. The role of positive emotion, then, is a key to forgiveness and the experience of health and well-being.

To take advantage of the implications of the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, one must be able to recognize and manage emotions. As a result, another important area of positive psychology is the study of emotional intelligence, which is comprised of perceiving emotions (being aware of emotions in self and others), using emotions to help facilitate thought (knowing which emotions to use for different activities, such as reasoning, problem solving, etc.), understanding emotions (being able to label and recognize relationships among different emotions), and managing emotions in self and others (Grewal & Salovey, 2006). Emotional intelligence is conceived as a set of skills—which can be improved through training—rather than a set of fixed personality traits (Grewal & Salovey).

Emotional intelligence has important implications for forgiveness. Since a large component of forgiveness is uncovering negative emotions and replacing them with positive emotions, an awareness of emotions and the ability to talk about them and distinguish among them is important. Thus, the process of forgiveness is intertwined with emotional intelligence. A higher emotional intelligence potentially aids the forgiveness process, if the individual is skilled in identifying, understanding, and managing different emotions. At the same time, forgiveness develops emotional intelligence in people, since it educates them in identifying and understanding negative emotions (uncovering phase) and in developing the ability to substitute positive emotions in their place, which happens as one reframes the offender as a human being who possesses inherent worth (work phase).

Another focus of positive psychology is on prevention. On this note, Martin Seligman employs the metaphor of firefighting (Seligman, 2006). Until recently, most of psychology’s energies were placed in fire extinguishing (i.e., intervening when problems had already manifested themselves

and gotten out of hand). The positive psychology movement, however, has shifted the focus to fire prevention (i.e., preventing problems by focusing on developing positive attributes in people). Although both fire extinguishing and fire prevention are important, investment in the latter will prevent more of the former. Forgiveness is the perfect bridge between these two ideas. People experience hurt, and sometimes the wounds are already deep. Prevention in this case is impossible—the deed has already been done. With forgiveness intervention, however, the negative effects of the injustice can be reversed. As the person journeys through this process, not only are the effects ameliorated, but the intervention itself leads to health and well-being—preventive qualities in themselves.

The fourth development in positive psychology that relates to forgiveness is the meaningful life. Martin Seligman identified three distinct components of happiness: the pleasant life (positive emotions), the engaged life (engagement with the world), and the meaningful life (finding meaning in one's circumstances) (Seligman et al., 2005). Most germane to the exploration of forgiveness is Seligman's concept of the meaningful life. According to Seligman (2006), meaning:

consists in attachment to something larger than you are. And the larger thing to which you can credibly attach yourself, the more meaning your life has. I believe that we are moral animals, that we are biologically demanding of meaning. The meaningful life is something over and above the pleasant life or the engaged life. With just those two, we often wake up with the gnawing fear that we're fidgeting unto death. Meaning is the antidote to that fear. The third happy life, the meaningful life, consists of identifying your signature strengths and then using them to belong to and in the service of something that your believe is larger than you are. (p. 235)

How is the meaningful life related to forgiveness? In the process of forgiveness outlined earlier, the final phase is comprised partly of attaining a sense of meaning in the suffering. Victor Frankl, a psychologist who experienced firsthand the atrocities that the Nazis committed against the Jews in World War II, insisted that, although one cannot change the past, one can change one's attitude about it and find meaning in the (sometimes horrible) events that one has experienced. For example, in Freedman and Enright's (1996) forgiveness intervention with women who survived incest, some of the women who traversed the path of forgiveness found meaning in their suffering to the point that they recognized a new purpose for their lives: to help other women who survived incest to experience that very same freedom and healing. Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005) believe that interventions that target meaning will "prove most fruitful" in helping people live the good life (p. 37). Forgiveness is one of those interventions.

## CONCLUSION

We have shared with you our stories from Belfast in part to help illustrate the point that deep-seeded anger and resentment—passed on from

generation to generation—can have lasting deleterious effects on personal health and well-being and interpersonal relationships. More importantly, we have shared with you our stories from NI, stories like those of Harriet and so many other young school children, to illustrate further the positive effects of choosing forgiveness as a response to deep hurt and interpersonal discord. Perhaps, in some ways, our stories from the city of Belfast can be a metaphor for our own lives at times. Even when everything around us is seemingly serene and peaceful, like the beautiful countryside of NI, anger and resentment stemming from deep hurt can be brewing deep within the flashpoint areas of our hearts and minds. These feelings of anger and resentment can then spill over into the streets of our lives and affect the quality of our relationships—with family and stranger alike—in negative and sometimes unsuspecting ways.

How often do we respond to those who have hurt us with the paradoxical expression of kindness or compassion? Do we think, act, and feel with anger and resentment because that is the only option we know? It may seem, then, that the only option for dealing with unjust hurt is a response in anger or revenge. And much of the world will support us in choosing anger over compassion and revenge over forgiveness. Yet, the reality is that there are many alternatives to harboring anger and acting in revenge. As we have discussed throughout this chapter, interpersonal forgiveness is one positive choice for effectively ameliorating the negative outcomes of deep hurt and injustice and promoting interpersonal skills associated with the good life. Forgiveness interventions have proven effective with people all across the age spectrum—from the very young to the very old—dealing with a vast array of interpersonal hurts.

As we have seen with young school children in Belfast, forgiveness education is both accessible and effective. We do not have to be experts at forgiveness to begin experiencing the positive benefits stemming from a life perspective based on inherent human worth. Imagine with us the changing landscape of NI or the changing landscape of our own lives, when we respond to hurts and injustices with forgiveness. Perhaps then there will be convergence between the peace we experience within and the peace that is yet to be in the world.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Discovering and Capitalizing on Forgiveness

In this chapter we discussed how forgiveness is a matter of choice. A central component of forgiveness is “seeing with new eyes” the inherent human worth in all humans, even for those who have hurt us. We invite you at this time to complete the following activity and consider how choosing forgiveness might begin the journey toward health and well-being.

*Personal Reflections:* Find some time in a quiet location to reflect on significant events in your life. Ask yourself if some of these impacting events were negative experiences of unjust hurt at the hands of a trusted friend, a close family member, or someone previously unknown to you. Does this

experience cause you to feel angry? On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest, how prominent is this experience in your mind? Do you expend more energy thinking about this incident than on things you enjoy doing?

**Commitment to Forgiveness:** After this focusing activity, consider forgiveness as an option. Perhaps other coping mechanisms or strategies haven't worked in the past. Can you make a commitment to at least consider forgiveness as a way through a deep hurt? Make this commitment real by writing it down on a small piece of paper that you can carry with you. It can be as simple as writing "Today I choose to forgive."

**Discovering Forgiveness:** In a journal or on another piece of paper, write down ten characteristics you believe are necessary to be considered a good person. When you are ready, on the other side of the paper, reflect on how you can see one of these characteristics in the person who hurt you. Although this activity may be difficult, you are actually doing the work of forgiveness and offering the offender a moral gift simply by thinking good or positive thoughts about them. Try to focus on this one positive thought rather than the many negative thoughts associated with the deep hurt. Each day, try to incorporate one more positive thought from the list. Notice how your emotions and actions change as you begin to think about and see other people with the eyes of forgiveness.

**Asking Others:** When you are ready, ask a trusted friend or family member whether they have forgiven someone before. Ask them what they found particularly fulfilling or challenging. How is this different from your own experience?

**Getting to Know Your Own Forgiveness:** If appropriate, share your experience of forgiveness with a trusted friend or family member, and ask for their thoughts or feedback. Make a special note to mention how things have changed, positively or negatively, since you have made a choice to forgive.

**Use Forgiveness Language:** You may now begin to notice that your thoughts, feelings, and actions are changing from preoccupation with the negative to an increased focus on the positive—perhaps throughout many relationships in your life. Articulate these changes with the language of forgiveness.

**Capitalizing on Forgiveness:** There are many resources and strategies available for capitalizing on and incorporating forgiveness into your life. For more information on interpersonal forgiveness, references for a forgiveness therapist in your area, or information on forgiveness education programs for young children, please consult the following resources:

- Contact Dr. Robert Enright at [rd.enright@yahoo.com](mailto:rd.enright@yahoo.com).
- Visit the International Forgiveness Institute at [www.forgiveness-institute.org](http://www.forgiveness-institute.org).
- Read *Forgiveness Is a Choice* by Dr. Robert Enright (2001).

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# The Self-Determination of Adolescents with Intellectual Disability

Michael L. Wehmeyer and Karrie A. Shogren

**H**istorically, ideas of well-being, contentment, satisfaction, hope, and happiness were not associated with the experience of a cognitive impairment, nor has science and society traditionally focused on these as outcomes for people with intellectual disability.\* Instead, many people see the lives of adolescents with intellectual disability unfolding as has William's life.

William was about to graduate from high school—only two weeks to go! But, while his classmates were counting down the days until graduation and discussing their plans for college or for starting a new job after high school, William was not as excited. In fact, he was a little worried about what was going to happen after high school. Sure, every year his “transition to adult life” was discussed at his Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting, a meeting required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law that provides direction on how schools must educate

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\*Terms referring to people with global cognitive impairments have changed over time as previously used terms became stigmatizing and became associated with negative and pejorative stereotypes. Clinical or medical terms such as “idiot” gave way to, at the time, less stigmatizing terms, such as feeble-minded, then mentally retarded. In the last forty years, the emphasis in ‘labeling’ has shifted from describing the person (e.g., mentally retarded) to the use of “people first” language (e.g., people with mental retardation). Today, like its predecessors, the term mental retardation has acquired such stigma and is associated with such negative stereotypes that it is being replaced by the term intellectual disability, which for now at least is not as stigmatizing. In this chapter, we will refer to adolescents with intellectual disability as describing young people with global cognitive impairments who need limited support (as opposed to more extensive and pervasive supports) to function successfully across multiple life domains. In past years, these young people might have been referred to as having “mild” mental retardation.

students with disabilities like William. But, during these meetings William felt like all the adults talked about him, without really asking him about his ideas. Or sometimes when they did ask what he wanted to do with his future, William felt like no one really listened to what he said. So William had stopped volunteering his opinion—it seemed easier to just let everyone else make the decisions. And, really, everything seemed to be taken care of. William had a place to live after graduation. His parents were remodeling and redecorating his room as a graduation present so he would feel more like an adult. They had picked out a new paint color for the walls and a new desk that they thought William would like. And, even though William often thought about how he might like to have his own apartment after graduation—after all that was all his peers talked about—he wasn't really sure to go about getting one.

William had also thought about a job. He really liked computers, and there was a computer store a few blocks from his house where he thought it might be fun to work. But, he had not been able to take a computer class at his high school; during his IEP meeting, his team had decided it was more important for William to take a different class. And, William's teacher and parents had found a job opening at the convenience store down the block from his house, sweeping and straightening stock on the shelves. William's parents said it would be easy for them to take him back and forth to this job and that the job would give him something to do. William's teacher even picked up an application form from the convenience store and filled it out for him. His parents were going to take him to talk to the store manager next week. But, William was not very enthusiastic about the job. To be honest, he thought that stocking shelves sounded boring. When he tried to talk to his teacher about this, she told him how difficult it was to find good jobs for students with disabilities and that he should be happy that this job was so convenient for him and his parents. Plus, William wasn't sure how to go about exploring the possibility of working at the computer store; in fact, he wasn't even sure what types of jobs they had. Plus, the computer store was in the opposite direction of his parent's jobs, and he wasn't sure how he could get to the computer store. William had never learned to use the bus system that ran near his house.

William was also worried about his friends. He really liked sitting with a few guys at lunch and going to baseball games after school. But, he rarely made plans to do anything outside of school activities. This was another reason he was a little worried about high school ending ... the future seemed empty.

Perceptions of people with intellectual disability as incapable and dependent, as illustrated by William's example, are not surprising, given the perceptions about and experiences of people with intellectual disability perpetuated over the past centuries. Since the early 1900s, intellectual disability has been associated with a variety of negative stereotypes. In the early part of the twentieth century, people with intellectual disability (then referred to as feeble-minded, morons, or imbeciles) were perceived as menaces to society—responsible for many of society's problems, including crime, prostitution, and pauperism—or were seen as subhuman

(“vegetables”) or as economic burdens to society. By midcentury, the stereotypes associated with intellectual disability had become more charitable but were still stigmatizing. The earlier stereotypes of menace and burden were, post–World War II, replaced by perceptions of people with intellectual disability as victims of their disability and as objects of charity and pity. The ever present poster-child images and the constant requests to “help the retarded” delivered the message that people with intellectual disability were not menaces or subhuman, but were dependent beings, worthy of charity but not capable of independence and self-direction.

These stereotypical perceptions not only lower the expectations people have for students with intellectual disability, they also impact an adolescent’s developing sense of self—not to mention that adolescent’s subjective well-being, perceptions of control and efficacy, hope, optimism, and happiness. Furthermore, because researchers and practitioners shared these widely held beliefs and expectations, they did not conduct research about well-being, hope, or optimism with this population.

Spurred by civil rights movements for people with disability, such as the self-help and independent living movement (Driedger, 1989; Shapiro, 1993), and by changing understandings of disability itself that emphasize the fit or interaction between the person and his or her context (Luckasson et al., 1992), there has been a growing strengths-based emphasis in the field. For example, we recently examined the degree to which research published in the intellectual disability field over the past 30 years has emphasized the strengths and capacities of people with intellectual disabilities. We found that there has been a shift toward research utilizing a strengths-based perspective in recent years, with a much larger proportion of research published in the most recent decade adopting a strengths-based perspective. However, even though progress has been made, strengths-based research still represented a minority of scholarship in the field (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Buchanan, & Lopez, 2006).

## CHANGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF DISABILITY

The movement toward a strengths-based perspective in the field of intellectual disability is a function of several factors, including the changing way in which disability itself is understood. As noted, historic models of disability have focused on deficits, and through most of the twentieth century disability was seen as a problem or fault residing *within* the person. In such conceptualizations, disability was attributed to deficit and disease; people with disabilities were seen as broken, diseased, atypical, or aberrant. Such understandings of “disability” led almost inevitably to the negative societal perceptions we described earlier, as well as responses to people with disability emphasizing segregation, institutionalization, and stigma.

During the post–World War II years, however, societal responses to disability began to change, in part due to the infusion of World War II veterans with disabilities into societies that felt an obligation to repay them through rehabilitation instead of segregation. This spurred advances both

in social policy pertaining to disability and in medical procedures to treat disability. This had obvious benefits, but also negative consequences as disability was viewed more solidly within a medical model of disease. People with disabilities were viewed as objects to be fixed, cured, rehabilitated and, at the same time pitied. They came to be viewed as “victims” of their disability, worthy of charity. These understandings of disability impacted people across disability categories, and, within this stereotype, people with intellectual disabilities came to be viewed as “holy innocents” or “eternal children,” and thus not responsible for their own actions.

These advances in science and changing societal perceptions, however, also encouraged parents to demand to participate in decisions that impacted their children and to reject the often-pessimistic forecasts of professionals, as well as the treatment options associated with those forecasts, most notably segregation and institutionalization. Specifically, parents and family members began to advocate for services that would enable their children to remain at home with them, to attend their community schools, and, as their children grew up, to live and work in their communities. This movement eventually gained political clout, and during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s radically changed the face of disability services. Nevertheless, by and large these social advances did not reconceptualize disability. Disability was still seen as aberrant, atypical, or pathological; as residing outside what was considered “normal” or typical; and as a characteristic, quality, or condition of the person. People with disabilities were still seen as broken or diseased. Terms like invalid, cripple, and handicapped, which were prevalent during this era, spoke to this understanding. Beyond the hope for a cure brought about by scientific advances, not much else changed about the way disability was understood.

The social advances introduced in the mid-twentieth century, however, did continue to progress even if conceptualizations of disability remained stagnant. As the focus of intervention moved from institutions to the community and as policies guaranteeing equal rights and access, like the Americans with Disabilities Act, were passed, people with disabilities became more visible in society. Thus, it became evident that new ways of conceptualizing disability were necessary. Conceptualizations that focused on deficits were both insufficient and inaccurate in capturing what was meant by “disability” in an era where people with disabilities were striving for and, increasingly, achieving outcomes valued by their nondisabled peers.

Toward the end of the 1900s, traditional conceptualizations of disability began to be replaced by conceptualizations that viewed disability not as residing within the person, but as function of the interaction between the person’s capacities and the context in which the person lives, learns, works, and plays. These conceptualizations focused on human functioning and capacity instead of disease and deficit. The World Health Organization’s *International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health* (ICF) and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities’ (AAIDD) 1992/2002 classification systems are examples of two such models. The ICF and AAIDD frameworks are “functional” classification systems because disability is seen as an outcome of the interaction between

a person's limitations and the environmental context in which that person must function.

Within such functional models, intellectual disability is not something that a person *has* or something that is a *characteristic of the person*, but is instead a *state of functioning* in which limitations in functional capacity and adaptive skills must be considered *within the context* of environments and supports. In their 1992 proposal for reconceptualizing intellectual disability, Luckasson et al. (1992) stated that intellectual disability "is a disability *only* as a result of this interaction" (p. 11); that is, *only* as a result of the interaction between the functional limitation and the social context, in this case the environments and communities in which people with intellectual disability live, learn, work and play.

By defining the *disability* as a function of the reciprocal interaction between the environment and the person's functional limitations, the focus of the "problem" shifts from a deficit within the person to the relationship between the person's functioning and the environment and, subsequently, to the identification and design of supports to address the person's functioning within that context. Supports refer to "resources and strategies that promote the interests and causes of individuals with or without disabilities; that enable them to access other resources, information and relationships inherent within integrated environments; and that result in their enhanced interdependence, productivity, community integration, and satisfaction" (p. 101).

The potential for this shift in conceptualizing disability to change the expectations for and perceptions of people with intellectual disability is significant. This functional, strengths-based understanding of disability asks people to consider not a person's deficits or impairments, but instead a person's strengths and supports needed to function successfully. The impact of moving to functional models of disability can be seen within the field, both in theory and treatment. For example, the AAIDD published the *Supports Intensity Scale* (Thompson et al., 2003), which quantifies the level of support a person needs to function independently in the community. This scale is increasingly being adopted by state and government disability service providers to determine eligibility for funding and services. In other words, states are abandoning the determination of eligibility for services based upon indicators of personal incompetence, like IQ or adaptive behavior, and adopting measures of support needs to determine such eligibility.

## EMPOWERMENT, INDEPENDENT LIVING, AND SELF-DETERMINATION

The changing understanding of disability, shifting social policy and practices, and growing civil rights movement led by people with disabilities emphasizing community integration and full inclusion have resulted in a reconceptualization of the field of disability. The field is no longer dominated by a medical model, and instead has moved toward an empowerment model. Empowerment is a term typically used in reference to actions that "enhance the possibilities for people to control their lives" (Rappaport, 1981, p. 15). Joanne Wilson, Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services

Administration and a person with a disability, wrote that empowerment “means, among other things, having decision-making power, access to information, the opportunity to make meaningful choices, understanding of rights and responsibilities, a sense of hope, raised self-esteem and control over the direction of one’s life” (Wilson, 2004, p. 1).

One challenge for an empowerment model within the disability field has been to identify the role of professionals in the “empowerment” process. To empower means to give power or authority or to enable or permit. The problem with this is that when one has the power to invest someone else with authority, one also has the power, presumably, to withhold granting that authority. Power and control remain, fundamentally, with the granter. Similarly, the act of “permitting” implies authority on the part of one person to allow another to do something, or not.

The way out of this difficulty is through efforts to *enable* people with disabilities to manage or direct in their own lives and, as a function of such actions, to become empowered to do so to an even greater extent. As such, within the disability field, interventions and supports have increasingly emphasized self-help, self-direction, and self-regulation of behavior. This has led to an increased focus within the field of disability and, specifically within the field of special education, on providing instruction, experiences, and opportunities that promote and enhance the self-determination of youth with disabilities, so that instead of life experiences unfolding like those of William, young people with intellectual disability can achieve outcomes more like Ellen.

Ellen is also about to graduate from high school. But, unlike William, Ellen is very excited about her life after high school. Ellen’s teachers and parents have worked to actively involve Ellen in planning for her transition to adult life. Her teachers have supported her exploration of different career options and have incorporated her preferences and interests into her IEP. Ellen has played a significant role in her IEP meetings and has shared with her planning team her vision for life after high school. Her team used this vision to work with Ellen to build goals for her high school education. For example, Ellen is very interested in moving into her own apartment with a friend after graduation, although after much discussion she and her friend have decided to wait at least a year so they can save money, explore the various options for apartments in their community, and learn more about important skills for living in an apartment like making a budget, writing checks, and cooking safely. Since Ellen has decided to remain at home for at least a year, her parents—as a graduation present—are going to remodel Ellen’s room to support her to feel more like an adult. Ellen went to the paint store and picked out her favorite color—sky blue—for the walls, and went with her friend Dorothy to pick out new furniture, including a new desk where she can keep her checkbook and calculator. Ellen’s parents recently took her to the bank to open her first checking account. Before they went, Ellen worked with her father to make a list of questions she needed to ask about the different types of accounts, and then used this list to learn about the different account options. She, after consulting with her father, decided what the best type of account would be for her,

communicated this to the bank representative, filled out this paperwork, and picked out a background pattern for her checks. Ellen had never felt more like an adult!

Ellen also really likes animals. Her teacher helped set up a job shadowing experience at a local veterinarian's office during her last year of high school. Ellen has applied for a part-time job at this veterinarian's office for after graduation and has an interview next week. Ellen also applied at another veterinarian's office across town, just in case. Ellen and her teacher have been working together to think about what questions Ellen might be asked during her interviews and the best ways to answer these questions. Ellen sometimes gets nervous when she is talking to people she does not know well, but she has learned that practicing what she might say helps her stay calm when she is talking to new people. Ellen has also been exploring classes at a local community college; she thinks she might want to continue her education and perhaps become a veterinarian's assistant. She even had a meeting with the Office for Students with Disabilities at the community college to see what supports they might be able to provide her should she decide to enroll. She is planning on enrolling in one class in the fall.

Ellen has also been working on learning to use public transportation; it was a little confusing at first to transfer between buses, but she has learned the bus schedule and has a list of the bus numbers and where they go just in case she forgets. Now Ellen frequently takes the bus to the local movie theater to meet her friends and watch a movie—one of Ellen's favorite ways to spend a Saturday afternoon. Ellen and her friends are already making plans about how to keep in touch after graduation and continue to do fun activities. Ellen is also planning on taking the bus to her job interview and to her class at the community college so she does not have to wait on her parents to take her. As Ellen thinks about graduation she is really excited. It seems like there are going to be so many new adventures to pursue!

## WHAT IS SELF-DETERMINATION?

The meaning of the psychological construct “self-determination” has its beginnings in the philosophical doctrine of *determinism*. Determinism states that actions are *caused* by events or natural laws that come before and cause the occurrence of the action. The underlying meaning of the self-determination construct, then, is that self-determined people cause things to happen in their lives. People who are self-determined are people who make or cause things to happen in their own lives. They act based on their own will, preferences, choices, and interests instead of being forced to act by others or by circumstances.

People who are self-determined *act* in ways that enable them to solve problems in their lives, set and attain goals, make decisions, advocate on their own behalf, and generally improve the quality of their lives. In our own research, we have defined self-determination as “volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to maintain or improve one's quality of life” (Wehmeyer, 2005, p. 117). The ideas of

“volitional action” and “causal agent” are central to understanding what is meant by being self-determined. By acting volitionally, we mean that people who are self-determined act based upon their preferences and interests and not based upon coercion or someone else’s preferences and interests. There’s more to being self-determined, however, than simply doing what you want rather than what someone else wants you to do. The word *volition* is defined as the exercise of the capability of a person to make a *conscious* choice or decision with *intention*. Acting volitionally implies that one does so consciously and with intention. Self-determined behavior is not just acting to gratify instant needs or acting recklessly for short-term pleasure, it is acting consciously and with intention based upon one’s preferences and interests to choose, make decisions, advocate, and self-govern and self-regulate one’s behavior in pursuit of one’s goals.

The second part of our definition implies that self-determined people are causal agents in their lives. As mentioned previously, the noun *determination* in the term *self-determination* originates from the belief that all events—including human behavior—are in some way *caused* (e.g., determined). Obviously, causes of human behavior are varied, from genes to environment; the meaning of *self-determination* (or self-determinism) is that one’s actions are *caused* by oneself as opposed to something or someone else (e.g., other-determination). Self-determination therefore refers to self-caused action.

People who are self-determined are causal agents in their lives. The adjective “causal” means to express or indicate cause, showing the interaction of cause and effect. The term “agent” is a noun that refers to one who acts or has the authority to act. Self-determined people act “with authority” to make or cause something to happen in their lives. Causal agency implies more, however, than just causing action; it implies that the individual who makes or causes things to happen in his or her life does so with an eye toward *causing* an effect to accomplish a specific end or to cause or create change; in other words, they act volitionally and intentionally.

People too often equate self-determination with physically acting independently, without help, and with “controlling” one’s own life. People with intellectual disability often have limitations to their capacity to solve difficult problems or make complex decisions and in many meaningful ways, to “control” their lives. The important point to understand, though, is that being self-determined is *not* about doing things independently, nor is it equivalent to the psychological notion of control, which implies having regulatory power over outcomes (although we would note that people who are self-determined are more likely capable of exerting control in their lives and, thus, the linkage to the idea of empowerment as turning over control). Instead, being self-determined is about making things happen in one’s life by acting volitionally and being a causal agent in one’s life. For example, when Ellen was opening her checking account, she received support from her father to develop a list of questions she needed to ask and to make the final decision about the best account for her. However, Ellen was clearly acting as a causal agent in her life. She was driving the process of asking questions, she was actively involved in the process of deciding on

the best type of bank account for her, and she was acting with the intent to achieve her goal to live independently.

Self-determination, then, as a psychological construct, refers to self-caused (vs. other-caused) action—to people acting volitionally, based on their own will. Volition is the capability of conscious choice, decision, and *intention*. Self-determined behavior is volitional, intentional, and self-caused or self-initiated action.

## SELF-DETERMINATION AND STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Promoting the self-determination of students with disabilities became a focal point in special education practices in the early 1990s as a function of the previously discussed changes in the disability field, along with the establishment of requirements within federal education law, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, that all students with disabilities have educational goals and objectives established to ensure that the student could successfully transition from secondary education to adulthood and that those transition-related goals be based on student needs, taking into account student interests and preferences.

### Importance of Self-Determination to Special Education Practices

The proposition that promoting self-determination is an important outcome if youth with intellectual disability are to achieve more positive adult outcomes presumes that students with disabilities are all too often not supported to develop the skills associated with self-determined behavior, and that self-determination and positive adult outcomes are linked. With regard to the former, there is now a growing literature base that has documented that youth and adults with intellectual disability are not very self-determined (Wehmeyer, 2001; Wehmeyer & Metzler, 1995).

There are also a few studies that provide evidence of the relationship between self-determination and more positive outcomes for youths' transitions to adulthood. Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) measured the self-determination of eighty students with learning disabilities or intellectual disability and then examined their adult outcomes one year after they left high school. Students in the high self-determination group were more than twice as likely as youth in the low self-determination group to be employed and earned, on average, more. Wehmeyer and Palmer (2003) conducted a second follow-up study, examining adult status of ninety-four students with cognitive disabilities one and three years' postgraduation. One year after high school, students in the high self-determination group were disproportionately likely to have moved from where they were living during high school, and by the third year they were still disproportionately likely to live somewhere other than their high school home and were significantly more likely to live independently. For employed students, those scoring higher in self-determination made statistically significant and practically meaningful advances in obtaining job benefits, including vacation, sick leave, and

health insurance, an outcome not shared by their peers in the low self-determination group.

## PROMOTING THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF YOUTH WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

It is a given that students with intellectual disability will acquire fewer skills that enable them to act as the causal agent in their lives. Still, there is an emerging literature base documenting that students with intellectual disability can acquire knowledge and skills that enable them to act in a more self-determined manner. Even when cognitive limitations limit independent performance of complex, cognitively-based tasks, like decision making or problem solving, there are portions of these tasks in which students with intellectual disability can participate, thus making them *more* self-determined. Ellen's teachers emphasized skills, like problem solving and goal setting, which would enable her to become more self-determined. Remember how Ellen made a list of questions to ask at the bank, how she practiced answering interview questions before her interview at the veterinarian's office, and how she took a copy of the bus schedule with her when she used the bus? All of these strategies were developed by Ellen, her parents, and her teachers for addressing different problems that Ellen had encountered, like forgetting what questions to ask in new situations, feeling nervous when talking to someone new, and forgetting her bus number. Early in her high school career, Ellen's teachers taught her a strategy for identifying and coming up with solutions to problems. During the first month of her freshman year, Ellen consistently arrived late to her second-period class. When her teacher asked her what the problem was, Ellen said there was not enough time to get from class to class because the bells were too close together. But the teacher told Ellen that it might take a little more work to figure out what the problem actually was—the first step of the problem-solving strategy. At first Ellen was confused, she knew what the problem was; it was that there was not enough time between the two bells. But, Ellen's teachers worked with her to identify other factors that may be making her late. For example, after first period Ellen always stopped at a friend's locker to talk, but since Ellen's class was on the other side of the building, this "chat time" was taking up all the time she had to walk to her next class. The real problem was that Ellen did not have enough time to talk to her friend *and* get to class on time. So, after identifying the real problem, Ellen's teachers worked with her to identify solutions to the problem—the second step of the problem-solving strategy. They talked with Ellen about how important it was to get to class on time, and that perhaps another time to talk with her friend could be identified. After thinking about it, Ellen said that she and her friend always walked to fifth period together, and she could probably just wave to her friend on her way to second period and save "chat time" for the walk to fifth period. Ellen tried this for a few days, and the problem of being late was solved! This was the last step of the problem solving strategy Ellen learned—asking whether the solution worked.

Ellen's teachers also helped her to learn to apply this strategy to new situations. For example, when Ellen was learning to use public transportation, she kept getting confused about which bus to take when she had to transfer buses. Ellen recognized that the problem was that she had a hard time remembering the correct bus number, especially when there were several buses lined up. Ellen knew she had to come up with a potential solution to this problem because she hated getting on the wrong bus and having to ask the driver for help, and decided to ask her parents for support in identifying a solution. Ellen brainstormed with her parents, and they decided to make a list with the different bus numbers and where they went (for example: Bus 1 goes to the movie theatre; Bus 8 goes to the veterinarian's office; Bus 10 goes home). Ellen kept this list in her purse and checked it when she had to transfer buses. At first Ellen still got on the wrong bus a few of times. She was waiting until she got off the first bus to look at her list and she did not have enough time to match the right bus number with her planned destination. But, after brainstorming with her parents again, she decided it might be a good idea to look at the list before she got off the first bus, so she would know what number she was looking for and could head straight to that bus. Problem solved!

The following sections provide an overview of interventions and instructional areas that have been used to promote the self-determination of students with intellectual disability.

### Involvement in Problem Solving and Decision Making

Solving problems and making decisions are tasks that often require complex thinking skills. However, each of these tasks can be broken down into smaller steps, and students with intellectual disability (and students without) can learn skills that enable them to more independently complete each step and, thus, enhance their involvement in problem solving, as illustrated in the earlier example of Ellen learning problem-solving skills. A similar strategy can be used to support students in the process of making decisions. Decision making involves the identification of options available for consideration, the identification of consequences from each option, an assessment of the risk associated with each consequence, an examination of how each option meets personal preferences, interests, and needs, and a judgment about which option is best. Students with intellectual disability like Ellen can be taught, through role modeling and other strategies, to contribute to the process of generating options for consideration and can increase their knowledge about consequences associated with options through personal experiences and instruction. All people have preferences and as such all people can become more involved in the process of comparing decision-options with personal preferences. Finally, decision making ends with making a choice, and youth with intellectual disability can be involved in that step as well.

### Self-Directed Learning or Self-Management Strategies

Student-directed learning strategies, alternatively referred to as self-regulated learning or self-management strategies, involve teaching students to modify and regulate their own behavior. Such strategies help students to regulate their own behavior and allow students to become active participants in their own learning. There is much research evidence showing that students with intellectual disability can learn and use self-directed learning strategies to promote independence and improved school and task performance (Agran, 1997; Agran, King-Sears, Wehmeyer, & Copeland, 2003). There are many such strategies, but the primary ones include the following:

- *Antecedent cue regulation*: Teaching students to independently perform a task by following a set of pictures or other visual or auditory cues.
- *Self-instruction*: Teaching students to make task-specific statements out loud prior to their performance of a task.
- *Self-monitoring*: Teaching a student to observe and record his or her performance of a target behavior or action.
- *Self-evaluation*: Teaching students to compare the behavior being monitored with the student's desired goal.
- *Self-reinforcement*: Teaching students to provide reinforcement to themselves upon successful completion of a task.

These strategies are typically used in combination. For example, Ellen learned to be more independent in performing tasks at the veterinarian's office through a simple self-instruction strategy called the "did-next-now" strategy. Ellen sometimes struggled with tasks that had multiple steps, like cleaning out the examination rooms. But, the "did-next-now" strategy taught her to, first, state what step she had just completed (I wiped off the examination table); second to state what step she needed to complete next (Next, I need to sweep the floor); and third, to direct herself to perform the response (I better get started!). Then, Ellen put a checkmark on a graph sheet next to a picture of a clean examination room (self-monitoring) when she was finished. Ellen knew she needed five checks because there were five examination rooms to clean.

The ways students can combine and use self-management strategies are almost limitless. For example, you could substitute teaching a student to perform a task by looking at a picture sequence (antecedent cue regulation) in the previous sequence if the student cannot adequately self-instruct (Agran et al., 2003). It is also important to consider the potential for technology to promote greater independence and self-regulated learning for students with intellectual disability. Readily available technologies such as handheld personal computers are being used to promote independent performance and to decrease a person's reliance on others to perform task, and thus enhancing self-determination (Wehmeyer, Smith, Palmer, Davies & Stock, 2004). For example, pictures of each step of the task described

could be programmed into a handheld computer that Ellen could then use to self-direct her completion of the task.

### Participation in Educational/Rehabilitation Goal Setting and Planning

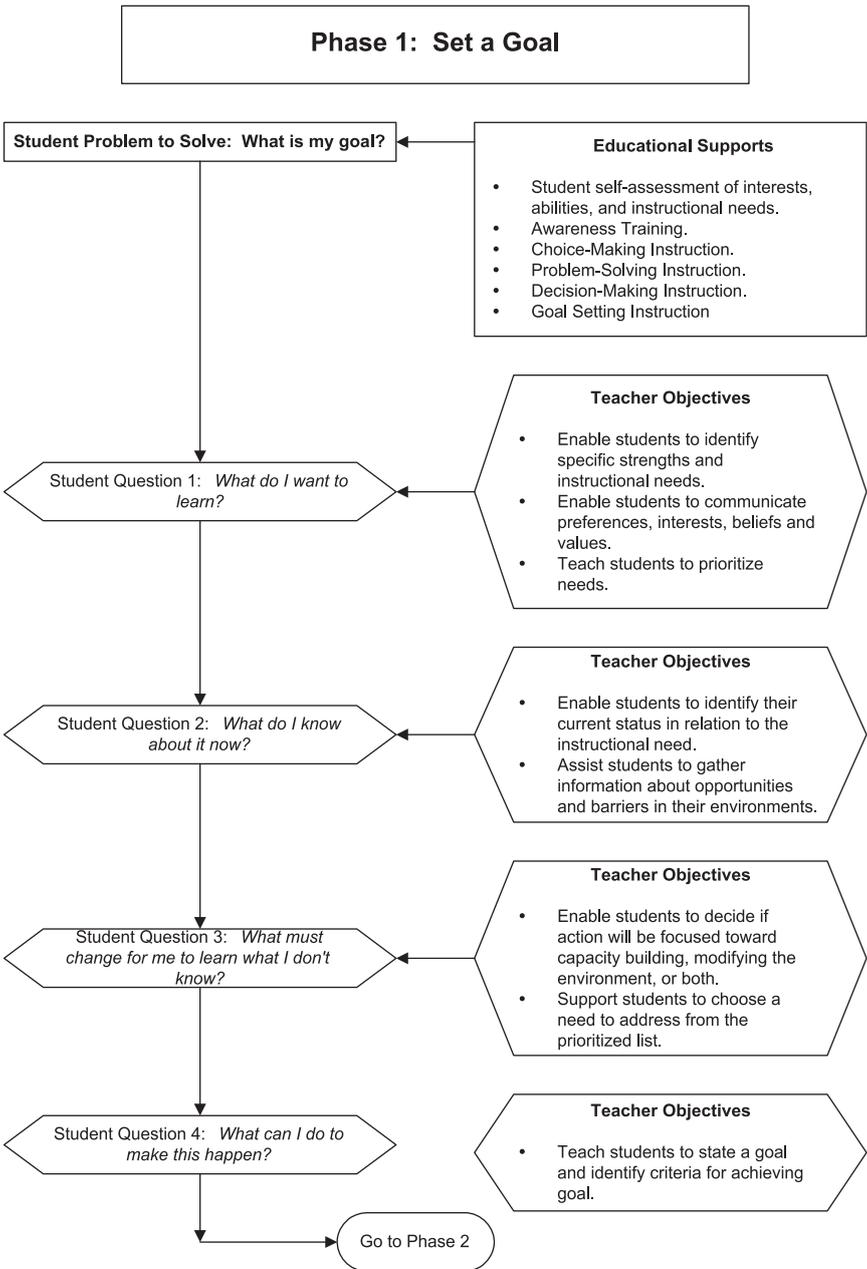
Self-determined behavior is goal directed. Students with intellectual disability can, and should, participate in the goal-setting process. The process of promoting goal-setting skills involves working with students to help them learn to: (a) identify and define a goal clearly and concretely, (b) develop a series of objectives or tasks to achieve the goal, and (c) specify the actions necessary to achieve the desired outcome. At each step, students must make choices and decisions about what goals they wish to pursue and what actions they wish to take to achieve their goals. Goal-setting activities can be easily incorporated into a variety of educational activities and instructional domains, as well as in educational planning activities, like how Ellen's teachers involved her in the process of setting goals for her life after school.

Research has suggested some strategies to follow to make goals both meaningful and attainable for students with intellectual disability. First, goals should be challenging. If they are too easy, there is no motivation to do the work to attain them, nor is there a feeling of accomplishment after achieving them. Second, while it is preferable for students to set their own goals, if this is not possible and goals need to be set by teachers, then the student's preferences and interests should be incorporated into the goal to increase the student's motivation to pursue the goal.

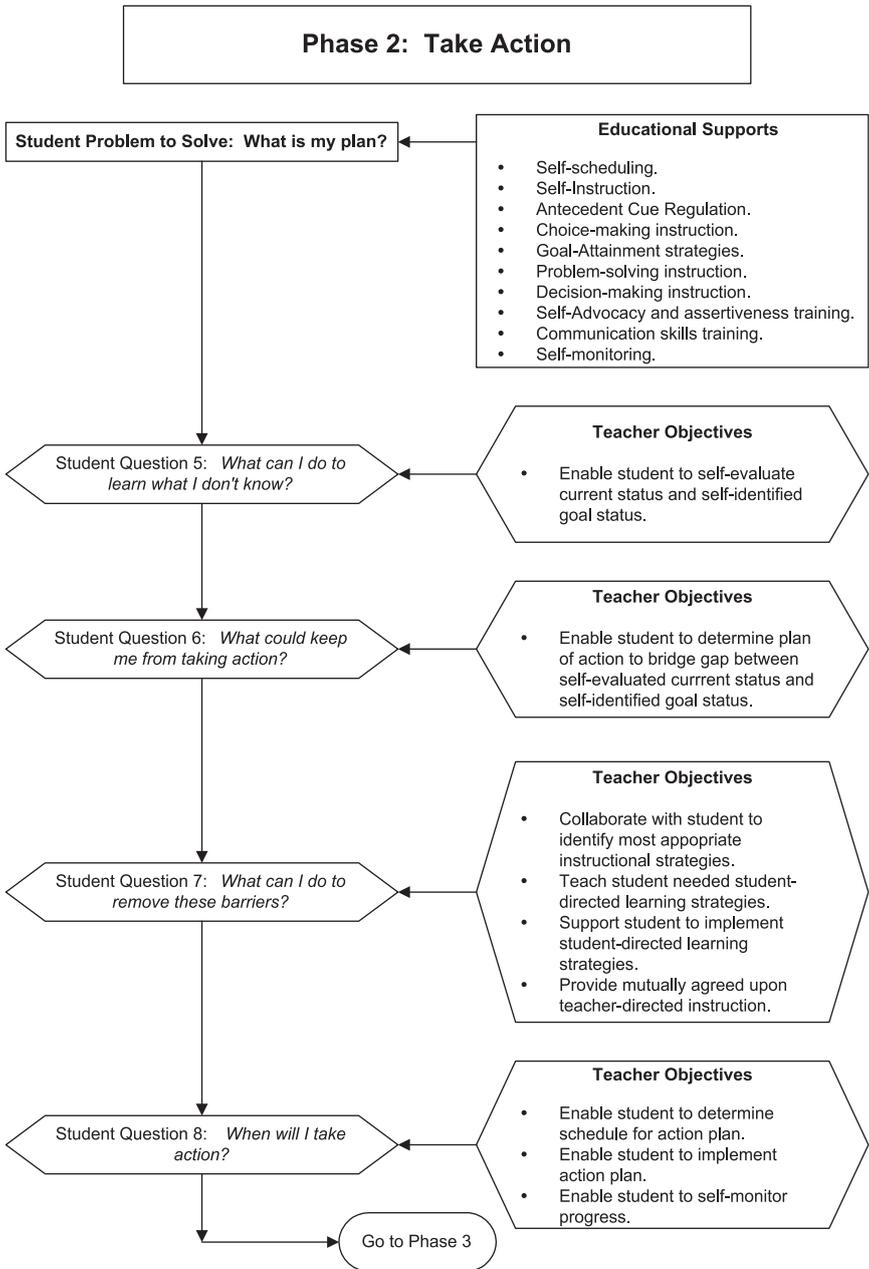
### Instructional Models to Promote Self-Determination

The Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) (Wehmer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, & Martin, 2000) is a model of teaching based on the component elements of self-determination, the process of self-regulated problem solving, and research on student-directed learning. Implementation of the model consists of a three-phase instructional process depicted in Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3. Each instructional phase presents a problem to be solved by the student. The student solves each problem by posing and answering a series of four *Student Questions* per phase that students learn, modify to make their own, and apply to reach self-selected goals. Each question is linked to a set of *Teacher Objectives*. Each instructional phase includes a list of *Educational Supports* teachers can use to enable students to self-direct learning. In each instructional phase, the student is the primary agent for choices, decisions, and actions, even when eventual actions are teacher-directed.

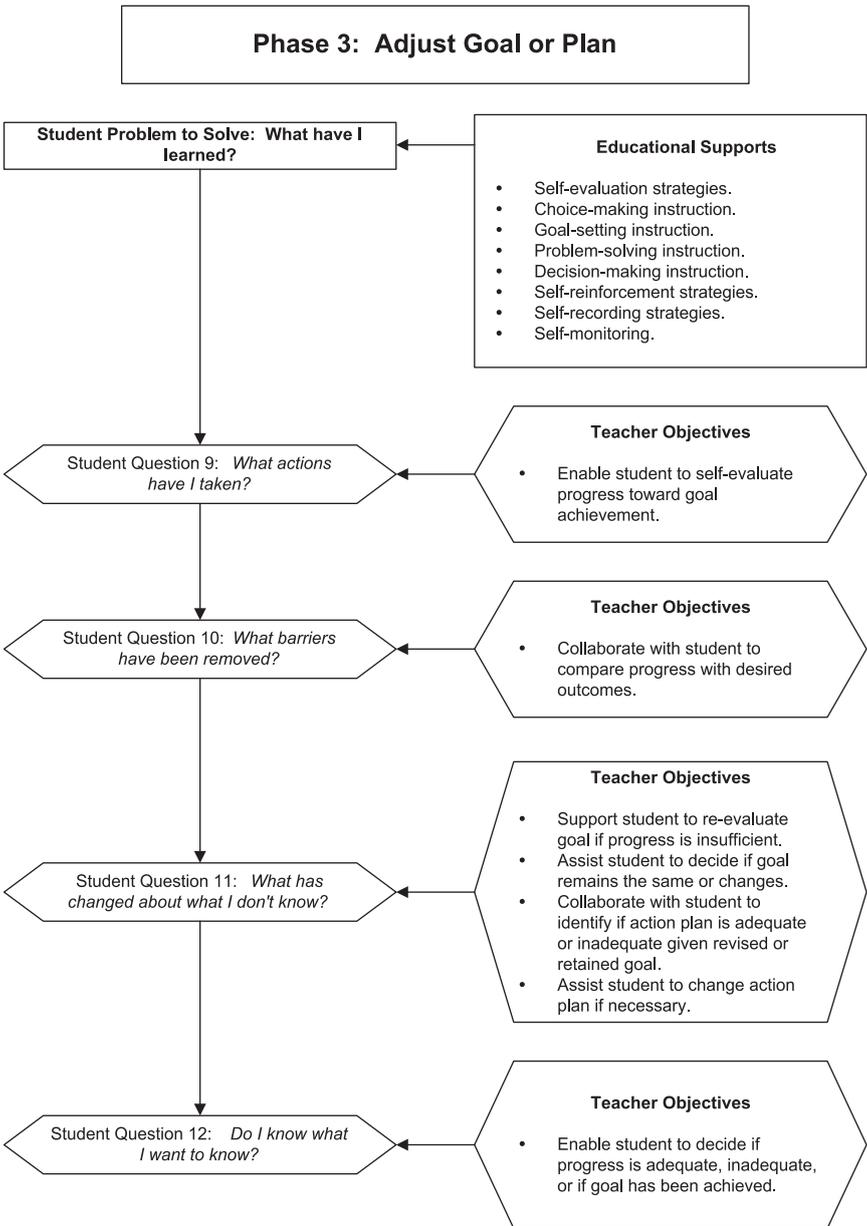
The *Student Questions* in the model are written to direct the student through a problem-solving sequence in each instructional phase. To answer the questions in this sequence, students must regulate their own problem solving by setting goals to meet needs, developing plans to meet those goals, and adjusting actions to implement and complete the plans. Thus,



**Figure 5.1. Phase 1 of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction**  
*Source: Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998; used with permission.*



**Figure 5.2. Phase 2 of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction**  
*Source: Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998; used with permission.*



**Figure 5.3. Phase 3 of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction**

*Source:* Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998; used with permission.

each instructional phase poses a problem the student must solve (What is my goal? What is my plan? and What have I learned?) by solving a series of problems posed by the questions in each phase. The four questions differ in each phase, but represent identical steps in the problem-solving

sequence: (a) identify the problem, (b) identify potential solutions to the problem, (c) identify barriers to solving the problem, and (d) identify consequences of each solution. These steps are fundamental steps in any problem-solving process and form a means-end problem-solving sequence represented by the *Student Questions* in each phase and enable the student to solve the problem posed in each instructional phase. The solutions to the problems in each phase lead to the problem-solving sequence in the next phase. The *Student Questions* are written in first-person voice in a relatively simple format to be used as the starting point for a discussion between the teacher and the student. Some students will learn and use all twelve questions as they are written. Other students will need to have the questions rephrased to be more understandable. Still other students, due to the intensity of their instructional needs, may have the teacher paraphrase the questions for them.

The *Teacher Objectives* within the model are just that—the objectives a teacher will be trying to accomplish by implementing the model. In each instructional phase, the objectives are linked directly to the *Student Questions*. These objectives can be met by using strategies provided in the *Educational Supports* section of the model. The emphasis in the model on the use of educational supports that are student directed provides another means of teaching students to teach themselves. As important as this is, however, not every instructional strategy implemented will be student directed. There are circumstances in which the most effective instructional method or strategy to achieve a particular educational outcome will be a teacher-directed strategy. Students who are considering what plan of action to implement to achieve a self-selected goal can recognize that teachers have expertise in instructional strategies and take full advantage of that expertise.

Wehmeyer et al. (2000) conducted a field test of the SDLMI with twenty-one teachers responsible for the instruction of adolescents receiving special education services in two states who identified a total of forty students with intellectual and other disabilities. The field test indicated that the model was effective in enabling students to attain educationally valued goals. In addition, there were significant differences in preintervention and postintervention scores on self-determination, with postintervention scores more positive than preintervention scores. Agran, Blanchard, and Wehmeyer (2000) conducted a study using a single subject design to examine the efficacy of the SDLMI for adolescents with intellectual disability. Students collaborated with their teachers to implement the first phase of the model to identify one goal as a target behavior. Prior to implementing Phase 2 of the model, teachers and researchers collected baseline data on student performance of these goals before they learned to use the SDLMI. At intervals after baseline data was collected, teachers used the model with students and data collection continued through the end of instructional activities and into a maintenance phase. As before, the model enabled teachers to teach students educationally valued goals. A total of seventeen participants achieved their personal goals at or above the teacher-rated expected outcome levels. Only two students were rated as indicating no progress on the goal.

## CONCLUSIONS

In every school in this country, a few children succeed regardless of the instruction they receive. Teachers identify these students early, because they have purpose in their lives. They know what they like, what they can do, what they want and how to get it. They are self-determined. (Mithaug, 1991, p. 1)

Mithaug's observation that some students are going to succeed, more or less independent of what is done to or for them, has not often been considered relevant for students with intellectual disability, but research and practice are now proving otherwise. Promoting self-determination in students with intellectual disability has the potential to enable such students to become causal agents in their lives—to be individuals who, as Mithaug described, have purpose and have the skills to get achieve this purpose. As research and practice continues to move toward strengths-based understandings of disability that focus on what students with disabilities *can* do and on the supports they need to succeed in their communities, more students will, like Ellen, be able to become self-determined individuals who feel empowered to play an active role in their lives, and fewer students will, like William, become dependent on others and scared and unsure about how to get the things that they want and need.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### **Thinking about Self-Determination and People with Intellectual Disability**

In this chapter, we discussed self-determination for students with intellectual disability. We encourage you to think about the role that self-determination plays in your life, as well as your perceptions of people with intellectual disability and their ability to be self-determining.

***Thinking about Self-Determination:*** Review how self-determination has been defined in this chapter. Do you act as a causal agent in your life? Make a list of the different ways that you use self-determined behavior to get the things you want and need. What skills associated with self-determination (e.g., goal setting, problem solving, decision making) are your strengths? How important are these skills in getting the things you want and need?

***Thinking about People with Intellectual Disability:*** Stereotypes have negatively affected the lives of people with disabilities. What stereotypes of disability do you see in your community? Make a list of some of these stereotypes and the way that you think they impact the lives of people with intellectual disability in your community. Then think about your own understanding of disability—did anything in this chapter surprise you? Did learning more about how people with disabilities can become more self-determined through the examples in this chapter change the way you think people with intellectual disability?

***Understanding the Importance of Self-Determination:*** Imagine you were experiencing the stereotypes you listed in the previous activity. Then go back to the list of the skills you created for the first activity. What impact do you think experiencing these stereotypes would have on your ability to develop

and use these skills? Would your experience be more like Ellen's or William's? Generate a couple of practical ideas for how we can start to challenge negative stereotypes and support more students to have experiences like Ellen. What could you do personally, and what can we do as a society? Talk to a few of your friends and family members about your ideas and how to implement them.

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# Overcoming Stereotype Threat

Joshua Aronson and Leoandra Rogers

## UNDERSTANDING STEREOTYPE THREAT

*Stereotype threat* is the apprehension individuals experience when confronted with a personally relevant stereotype that threatens their social identity or self-esteem. Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson coined the term in 1995, proposing that the phenomenon could help explain group differences on standardized tests and in school. In a seminal magazine article, Steele (1992) had earlier mused that part of what holds black students back academically is the stigma of racial inferiority. The stereotype threat research of Steele and Aronson (1995) tested this reasoning in a series of laboratory experiments.

Stereotype threat is predicated on the notion that people often fear behaving in a way that fits the negative cultural image associated with a group stereotype, thereby making the stereotype appear self-characteristic both to themselves and to others. This largely unconscious fear elicits anxiety and other counterproductive responses that can severely interfere with one's thinking and performance in evaluative situations. The theory holds that one need not believe a stereotype is true to be threatened by it; one need only be aware that the stereotype exists and that, as a member of the group targeted by the stereotype, other people's evaluations may be influenced by it. It is important to note that stereotype threat does not affect all individuals in the same way; people differ considerably in their responses to potentially threatening situations—as a function both of enduring individual differences and of the more transient mindsets they bring to such situations or adopt once in them.

Steele and Aronson's research tested the stereotype threat hypothesis in a series of social psychology experiments investigating the verbal standardized test performance of African American college students. The evaluative nature of intelligence testing coupled with the longstanding stereotype depicting African Americans as intellectually inferior made this a prime context in which to examine stereotype threat, and most stereotype threat studies have followed in this tradition. African American and white college students were given a difficult section of a verbal Graduate Record Examination. Half of the participants were led to believe that the purpose of the test was to measure their intellectual ability; the others were led to believe that the test was merely a nonevaluative laboratory exercise. Everything else about the situation was identical for the two groups, including the items on the test, the room they took the test in, the experimenter, and so on. The results were striking. African American students who believed the test was being used to diagnose their abilities performed significantly worse than their peers in the nondiagnostic group. The difference in the way the test was described had no significant effect on the white test takers; they performed equally well in both situations. These findings were replicated in additional studies by asking half of the participants to merely indicate their race on a questionnaire just prior to taking a test that was presented as nondiagnostic of ability. African Americans instructed to specify their race performed worse than all others taking the test, and again, indicating race made no difference to the white participants (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This finding demonstrates how, for targets of negative stereotypes, an otherwise nonevaluative situation can be rendered threatening by the implied relevance of race.

Because the tests in these experiments were identical in both conditions and the students were assigned randomly, these results offered strong support to the stereotype threat hypothesis; suppressed or improved test scores among the African American students resulted directly from the nature of the social context in which the test was presented rather than the individuals' intellectual ability or preparation. Further experimentation suggested that making intelligence or race salient activates the intellectual inferiority stereotype and other stereotypes associated with African Americans, which in turn, arouses anxiety and depletes cognitive resources, which directly disrupts performance. These initial experiments gained great attention within the field of psychology and spurred extensive research—some two hundred published studies—further testing the theory and its implications for human performance across a range of groups for whom stereotypes allege lower abilities.

Stereotype threat can, in theory, befall virtually anyone for whom a negative stereotype exists or for whom an allegedly "superior" comparison group exists and is made salient. Consider the following situations: an elderly woman cannot find her purse and becomes distracted and anxious that her memory lapse indicates, or will be seen to indicate, senility; a Latino student avoids engaging in class discussions because he is wary that his accent will identify him as intellectually inferior in the eyes of his classmates; a white boy feels mathematically incompetent when Asian classmates

are present and avoids taking advanced courses if too many Asians are enrolled—and so on. These instances exemplify the psychological impact of stereotype threat, as well as the physiological and behavioral responses evoked by the activation of relevant stereotypes and all have been conceptually validated by experiments. When elderly participants in one study were made cognizant of the stereotype of forgetfulness, they performed worse on memory tasks (Hess, Auman, Colcombe, & Rahhal, 2003). White college students scored worse on a miniature golf game described as a test of their “natural athletic ability” but played better when told it was a measure of their “kinesthetic intelligence.” African Americans showed just the reverse pattern, playing better golf when the game was framed as a test of athleticism (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999; see also Baker & Horton, 2003). In the academic sphere, Steele and Aronson’s (1995) test-taking experiments with African American students have been replicated with Latino students (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002), with students of low socioeconomic status (Croizet & Claire, 1998), and with white men, whose mathematics test performance was impaired by an explicit comparison to Asians (Aronson et al., 1999). Gender stereotypes have been likewise shown to suppress women’s test performance in male-dominated fields, suggesting the relevance of stereotype threat to sex differences in mathematics and science achievement (Bell, Spencer, Iserman, & Logel, 2003; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999) and in the gender gap in political knowledge (McGlone, Aronson, & Kobrynowicz, 2006).

One of the most frequently cited social psychology articles in the past decade, Steele and Aronson’s 1995 paper has earned the designation of a “modern classic” in the psychological literature and is frequently cited in textbooks on education, sociology, and organizational behavior. Moreover, stereotype threat has transcended academic discussions, garnered significant popularity in the media, and was cited in two Supreme Court cases on affirmative action. It was even mentioned in a major motion picture, *The Perfect Score*, which was released in 2004.

Because of this popularity, its clear relevance to the politically charged issues such as the black-white test-score gap (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), and its implicit challenge to the validity of standardized tests, the stereotype threat construct has also generated controversy. The challenges have emanated most forcibly from theorists who favor a genetic explanation for racial disparities in achievement (Murray, 2005), from researchers employed by the Educational Testing Service (e.g., Stricker & Ward, 2004) and testing researchers funded by the testing industry (e.g., Sackett, 2003). By and large, such critics tend to grant validity to the experimental results, but downplay the significance of stereotype threat in performance gaps in the real world. Mounting evidence now confirms that stereotype threat indeed contributes to test score gaps in college grade point average (GPA; Massey & Fischer, 2005), test score gaps in middle school (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003); test score gaps on standardized tests such as the Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus exam (Danaher & Crandall, in press; Stricker & Ward, 2004), and test score gaps in high-level college mathematics courses (Good, Aronson, & Harder, in press). The most valid of these critiques is that the press coverage and some textbook accounts

frequently conveyed the idea that stereotype threat accounts for the entire test score gap—and that by reducing stereotype threat one eliminates the test score gap. Clearly this is not the case; myriad factors contribute to achievement gaps. What can be said with confidence, however, is that stereotype threat accounts for a portion of the test score gap—that which remains when background factors such as parental education, socioeconomic status, and the quality of schools attended are statistically equated (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003).

### Individual Differences in Stereotype Threat

As noted, stereotype threat can pose a problem for anyone, but research reveals that not everyone experiences it in the same way or to the same degree; there are important individual differences that influence its impact. Steele (1997) proposed *identification*—the degree to which one cares about the domain or about his or her social identity—as an essential factor in stereotype threat, arguing that the impact of a stereotype will be negligible if a person cares little about the task domain or the relevant social identity. For instance, a woman whose central identity is rooted in her gender: A threat to this social identity is likely to raise more anxiety in situations where women face suspicions of inferiority (e.g., an advanced math class). Likewise, an elderly man who prides himself on his keen memory may find it extremely difficult to cope with the threat of being viewed as senile. Research by Schmader (2002) revealed that indeed, women who identified more strongly with being a woman (considering it a central part of their identity) were more susceptible to stereotype threat and demonstrated more extreme declines in performance. Similarly, Aronson and his colleagues (1999) demonstrated the importance of *domain identification*, finding that students who cared about mathematics a great deal were more apt to underperform on a math test under stereotype threat than were equally talented students who indicated caring significantly less about doing well in math. Related to this notion of centrality is *salience*, or accessibility of the social identity: the more salient the identity the more vulnerable one is to the threat (Aronson & Good, 2002; Keller, 2002).

Individuals can also vary in the degree to which they are aware of the existence of a given stereotype. Pinel (1999) refers to this awareness of negative stereotypes as *stigma consciousness*, which describes an individual's sensitivity to and acute awareness of social stereotypes. Applying the stigma consciousness measure to stereotype threat, Brown and Pinel (2003) found that under stereotype threat conditions, women with high levels of stigma consciousness performed worse on a math performance task than did their female counterparts who measured lower in stigma consciousness. Aronson and Good (2000) developed a similar measure of sensitivity they termed *stereotype vulnerability*, which measures how much students expect and are bothered by others' stereotypic expectations of lower academic ability. Greater stereotype vulnerability has been found to predict lower scores on standardized tests (Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004).

## COPING WITH STEREOTYPE THREAT

As inherently social beings, most people are motivated to maintain a positive image—both in their own eyes and in the eyes of others—and when this image is threatened, people are highly motivated to protect or repair that self-image. In many cases, the protections and reparations serve to protect self-esteem and are therefore adaptive. For example, if an individual responds to stereotype threat by working hard to build skill and pursue new challenges beyond his or her comfort zone, this is an adaptive response and, in such cases, stereotype threat can be viewed as a useful motivator. Sometimes, however, individuals engage in self-image protective behaviors that are seemingly productive in the immediate context but are counterproductive for long-term development, and in such cases stereotype threat can lead to lasting negative consequences. For example, one documented response to stereotype threat is disengagement with the task or stigmatized social identity (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although dissociating from the social identity may prove beneficial in the short run, reducing the impact of stereotype threat on self-esteem (McFarland, Lev-Arey, & Ziegart, 2003), the lasting impact of such a coping strategy can be harmful to one's overall sense of self in that one loses important connections to one's group. Similarly, in an attempt to maintain self-esteem, individuals may opt to psychologically disengage from the threatened domain, devaluing its importance in defining the self (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998). In such cases, individuals are likely to reduce the effort they invest into the task, as it is no longer viewed as significant or important to the self. Thus, psychological disengagement, and its likely corresponding withdrawal of effort, can contribute to a lack of interest in schooling and long-term academic failure (Major et al., 1998; Oyserman & Swim, 2001).

Another counterproductive response that individuals facing threatening stereotypes will often select is self-handicapping—a response in which individuals adopt strategies that deliberately interfere with their success (e.g., not studying prior to an exam), enabling them to attribute failure to low effort rather than low ability (Keller, 2002; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stone, 2002). Likewise, stigmatized individuals often discount important feedback regarding their performance, refusing to admit their lack of knowledge or understanding (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 2000; Crocker & Major, 1989). Cohen and his colleagues (2000) found that in comparison to a control group, individuals in the stereotype threat condition often discounted or ignored the feedback they were given to improve their performance on a subsequent task. In a similar manner, some individuals will simply avoid new or challenging tasks that offer the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skill to avoid the risk of appearing incompetent, thus protecting their self-esteem (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Such adaptations are likely to protect self-esteem in the short-term, but they virtually guarantee that competence in the domain will stagnate rather than grow. Thus, over the long-term, some of the psychological

protections that stereotype threat may engender can stunt intellectual growth just as surely as poverty or other structural barriers.

Although one might desire to reduce stereotype threat in the real world by making situational changes proven to work in the laboratory—eliminating known stereotype threat triggers such as ability evaluation, social comparison, or the salience of race or gender—doing so in the real world is often impractical and sometimes impossible. Researchers have therefore identified a number of promising avenues for helping individuals adaptively cope with the stereotype threat situations that they will inevitably encounter. The goal in focusing on coping strategies is neither to deny the existence of destructive stereotypes nor the structural forces that give rise to them; rather, an individual-centered, empowerment approach acknowledges the reality of stereotypes and focuses on adaptive strategies that allow individuals to protect their self-esteem without compromising their motivation and development—long-term. Moreover, such adaptive coping strategies help individuals assume a position of control, reducing the sense of victimization that can leave one feeling helpless and at the mercy of an admittedly unjust social system.

### Knowledge Is Power

Because stereotype threat functions largely at the unconscious level, its effects often disrupt performance without the individual's awareness, thus precluding one's ability to counteract it. However, teaching individuals about stereotype threat—how it operates and its potential to undermine performance—has been shown to significantly attenuate its effects (Aronson & Williams, 2004; Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005; McGlone & Aronson, 2007). For example, research by Johns, Schmader, and Martens (2005) found that providing a group of women with a short lesson on stereotype threat prior to testing their math abilities in a stereotype threat situation eliminated the stereotype threat effect. Thus, the most straightforward line of defense against stereotype threat is to equip individuals with an informed understanding of how it functions and its potential to disturb performance. This knowledge appears to help by providing a situational explanation for their difficulties, thus enabling them to resist attributing these difficulties to more self-threatening causes—namely limited intellectual ability.

The research on teaching or forewarning people about stereotype threat further suggests that such a technique can backfire if test takers try to suppress their thoughts about the stereotype—which can paradoxically cause a rebound effect and make the stereotype loom larger in consciousness (e.g., Crosby, 1984; McGlone & Aronson, 2007). Two specific strategies appear particularly helpful in helping stereotype-threat-aware students reduce anxiety in threatening situations—deliberately refocusing one's thoughts upon the task at hand, and what is called a *replacement* strategy, wherein individuals focus upon an identity that predicts high performance (i.e., "I'm a good student"; McGlone & Aronson, 2006, 2007).

### Theories of Intelligence

Another helpful strategy is derived from Carol Dweck's research on implicit theories of intelligence. Dweck (e.g., 1999) has demonstrated in numerous studies that individuals who hold a *malleable* theory of intelligence (the belief that intelligence can grow and increases with sustained intellectual effort) are more academically resilient than those who conceive of intelligence as a *fixed* entity. Applying this theory to alleviate the effects of stereotype threat revealed that encouraging African American students to conceive of intelligence as malleable boosted their engagement, enjoyment, and GPAs (Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2002). These findings were replicated with middle school students as well; students who were taught to believe in the malleability of intelligence scored higher on their statewide exams. Indeed, the intervention completely eliminated the gender gap on the mathematics test among students in the intervention (Good et al., 2003). These findings underscore the powerful role that conceptions of intelligence can play in performance and the value of teaching students adaptive conceptions of their abilities as a means to surmount difficulties arising from stereotype threat.

### Attribution Retraining

In a related approach, exposure to role models who succeed despite belonging to the stereotyped group holds promise for reducing the effects of stereotype threat. Experiments show that when women or minority are presented as experts, test-takers exposed to them perform better in otherwise stereotype threatening conditions (e.g., Marx & Roman, 2002). Role models appear to be particularly helpful when they stress that some degree of early struggle is normal, and that they overcame difficulty simply by trying. This helps because it "retrains" people to acknowledge the situational nature of social or academic difficulty, thus helping people discount the stereotype's implication of low ability. With this reorientation, the normal setbacks need not be attributed to internal and stable limitations if similar others experience difficulty and eventual success. This knowledge seems to reduce anxiety and boosts motivation when the student encounters challenges. In one study, this boosted test scores significantly over a control group that did not get this message (Good et al., 2003).

### Multiple Identities

"Self-complexity" describes the fact that individuals possess a diversity of social identities (Shih, 2004, p.179). In a stereotype threat situation, individuals typically face a threat to one specific identity, one of the many they embody (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Shih, 2004). As an empowerment strategy, research suggests the importance of recognizing one's multiple selves as a means of overcoming the negative influence of stereotypes. The ability to de-emphasize the identity under scrutiny while emphasizing

the strengths of other important identifications can reduce the impact of stereotype threat (Crocker & Major, 1989; Shih, 2004). In fact, individuals who view themselves as more integrated—capable of perceiving themselves as encompassing several identities—are less likely to succumb to stereotype threat (Oyserman & Swim, 2001). This “social identity switching” (Crocker & Quinn, 2000) is a viable strategy for combating stereotype threat. In a recent study, for example, McGlone and Aronson (2006) gave female and male college students from a selective liberal arts college a difficult spatial reasoning test, one that typically shows a large sex difference favoring men. Immediately prior to taking the test, students filled out a brief questionnaire designed to activate, depending on the experimental condition they were in, a different social identity. Some of the test takers were asked questions that prompted them to think of their gender group, others the part of the country they lived in, and a third group, the fact that they were students at a highly selective liberal arts college. In the condition that activated gender identity, the men scored much better than the women, and better than the men in the two other groups. Reminded of their gender, the women in this group performed the worst. But this gap closed almost completely in the condition where the test takers were reminded of their identity as highly selected college students; the women’s scores rose dramatically, matching that of the male test takers in the study. Other experiments suggest that in situations where men and women perform together, and thus where gender is made salient, women are at a disadvantage because gender salience prompts a helpful identity for men and a disruptive stereotype for women (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000). In a particularly elegant demonstration of the effects of identity salience, Margaret Shih and her colleagues found that Asian women performed best on a math test when subtly reminded of their ethnicity, and performed worst when reminded of their sex (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). Thus, focusing on one’s positive achieved or ascribed identities can be a powerful means of combating threat.

### Self-Affirmation

A number of studies suggest that affirming core aspects of students’ self-worth—for example, by having them write about important self-defining talents, values, or relationships—reduces the effects of stereotype threat. This has been demonstrated with women taking math tests in the laboratory (Martens, Johns, Greenberg, & Schimel, 2006) and minority middle school students in a field study. The theory is that if stereotypes undermine achievement by threatening the self-concept, procedures that shore up the self-concept (e.g., value affirmations) should boost performance by protecting students from the threat. In the middle school study, the affirmation procedure reduced the GPA gap between African Americans and whites by forty percent (Cohen, Garcia, & Master, 2006). These self-affirmations typically do not raise self-esteem; rather, they remind the student of what matters to them, which has the affect of making them less susceptible to self-esteem threats—including stereotype threats alleging intellectual inferiority.

## Trust and Cooperation

Beyond these individual level strategies, research regarding the modification of the social environment to reduce stereotype threat is also promising. Steele (1997) proposed mistrust as a key mechanism in the stereotype threat process. That is, individuals most likely to suffer the deleterious effects of stereotype threat present an uncertainty regarding the social context making them more vulnerable to self-doubt and uncertainty, and ultimately stereotype threat. Interventions that successfully reduce mistrust between students and teachers have been found to lift the motivation and grades of students. For example, when white teachers give feedback to students of color, the student may wonder whether the feedback is tainted by prejudice, especially, but not exclusively, if the feedback is negative, such as when an essay is criticized. In such cases, the student, aware of racial stereotypes, may see the feedback as biased, and therefore may not be particularly motivated to accept the feedback and learn from it. But if the feedback to students is presented in a way that makes clear that the criticism stems from high standards and positive expectations rather than prejudice, some of the mistrust can be prevented. Cohen (e.g., Cohen & Steele, 2002) found that the most effective way of giving feedback is to stress both high standards and a conviction that the student can meet those standards. In such cases, mistrust is lowest and motivation is highest.

Stereotype threat is likely to be most acute in highly competitive environments, where students vie for high grades, teacher admiration, and social status. Although there is no direct evidence that stereotype threat is reduced in cooperative learning environments, the fact that minority students fare better in cooperative than in competitive classrooms strongly suggests that this is the case (Aronson, 2004). Minority students working in environments where students collaborate—work interdependently, provide mutual support, and utilize each other’s strengths—tend to like one another better, have higher self-esteem, and show less prejudice, as well as show significantly superior academic achievement (e.g., Aronson & Patnoe, 1997).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

A long history of research in social psychology underscores that in explaining other people’s behavior, we show a consistent bias. We tend to see behavior as a product of enduring dispositions of the people and we tend not to adequately credit the situation. Thus, acts of kindness lead us to infer that the actor is kind; hostile behavior makes us think the actor is consistently hostile, and so on. This human tendency for “dispositionism” extends to judging human intelligence, as well, inasmuch as poor performances often are casually attributed to low intelligence, laziness, or other personality-linked causes, despite the fact that situational factors can clearly facilitate or inhibit intellectual performance leading “smart” people to do stupid things, and enabling “stupid” people moments of brilliance. This is especially true when, as with stereotype threat, the situational constraints are psychological, and thus cannot be directly observed. The research on

**Table 6.1**  
**A List of Social Identities and Strengths**

<b>Social Identities</b>	<b>Strengths</b>
Mother	Organized; loving
Teacher	Creative; caring
Athlete	Physically strong;
Woman	healthy; fearless
	Confident; passionate

stereotype threat makes clear that intellectual ability is not the stable “thing in the head” that it has traditionally been thought to be. Rather, like many human traits, what we see as intelligence is a function of both internal and external forces. An understanding of the nature of intelligence, its fragility and malleability, we hope we have illustrated, can be empowering for those who want to increase their own intelligence—or the intelligence of those around them.

### **PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT**

#### **Multiple Identities, Multiple Strengths**

In this chapter we have discussed the nature and implications of stereotype threat. Now, we encourage you to learn about this phenomenon on a personal level to better equip yourself for potentially challenging social situations.

On a clean sheet of paper, draw a line down the center to create two columns. In the first column begin to list all of the various social identities—the “hats”—that you wear on a regular basis. To assist in your brainstorm efforts, consider the range of social contexts you frequent, the variety people you engage with, and the activities that you participate in. Here are few social categories to get you started: family, work, friends, religion, ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality, athletics. Once you have exhausted your titles move to the second column. In this column list the strengths that you exhibit while embodying that identity. You can also solicit information from friends or relatives to get a sense of how others envision you and your strengths. Your final list may resemble Table 6.1.

Now, take a few moments to read over your list of social identities and the corresponding strengths. Note the diversity of traits that you exhibit across your multiple identities. As in the sample list above you might find that you describe yourself as loving in your role as mother, yet fearless or aggressive as an athlete. The vast variation that exists within a single individual is a built-in strength for combating threats to the self.

As you reflect on your own multiple strengths, understand that each of these social roles represent you, and your greatest strength is in drawing upon each of your identities at the aggregate level recognizing that the whole is greater the sum of each part. At the same time, hopefully you can now visualize how a threat to one identity does not preclude the value of the others. Harnessing the potential of your multiple selves is a powerful tool in overcoming stereotype threat and thriving in the face of adversity.

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# Career Flexibility for a Lifetime of Work

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**D**uring the first career development course I took, the professor remarked that “rigid” might be a one-word definition for the concept of mental illness—leading the class to conclude that mental health depends on flexibility. Such a conclusion draws on the conventional wisdom that when an object that is rigid or stiff experiences some kind of shock, it breaks more easily than an object that is fluid, or flexible. Swing a stick at an icicle and it will crack. Swing a stick through a falling stream of water and, after the splash, what is left is a steady persistent stream of water.

One might say that a *rigid* spirit in the approach to one’s worklife might result in a *broken* spirit when encountering one of life’s hardships, such as an unexpected job loss or being denied entry into a profession. A flexible approach to one’s worklife, however, might more often result in steady persistence in the face of a similar hardship. One study defines flexibility in thinking as including an *awareness* of options and alternatives, a *willingness* to adapt, and the *competence* to adapt, in any given situation (Martin & Rubin, 1995). Another definition emphasizes not just the ability to adapt, but also an ability to learn from experience in order to adapt (Karoly, 1991). Along with a benefit to mental health (Rothermund & Brandstädter, 2003), flexibility complements the process of striving toward goals by fostering a willingness “to set and reset personal objectives as circumstances and new learning warrant” (Karoly, p. 731).

This chapter explores the value of a flexible approach to one’s career, used here synonymously with the term “worklife”—with work being defined as *effort that is not solely for pleasure and is meant to produce an outcome that benefits the self or others* (adapted from Brown, 2003). Work is a life-long endeavor that is not bound by the world of paid employment,

but reflects the ways that a person uses effort to contribute or produce or create or fix or care for others. Career flexibility, almost by definition, will appear different under different circumstances. A fifth grader demonstrates a sense of flexibility when he considers multiple answers to the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” A high school junior who never considered college could feel curious excitement when a teacher explains that her math skills might qualify her for a scholarship. Career flexibility benefits the young adult by relieving the pressure to choose *the right college* or *the right major* or *the right job*, because flexibility increases confidence that he has multiple good options and that he has some room to change his mind. A “stay-at-home mom” approaches life flexibly when she imagines steps for returning to school or starting her own business, whether she chooses to pursue these options or not. Every person, whether age twenty or forty or sixty or *eighty*, whether employed or not, can benefit from a question such as, “What is the work I have to do?” or “What might be next for me in my worklife?” Career flexibility gives people a way to consider such questions according to their own state in life.

For many, this concept of career flexibility as an adaptive response to *options and alternatives* might immediately result in a sense of conflict. Sometimes because of cultural factors (Leong & Hardin, 2002), the stress associated with a lifetime of economic hardship (Blustein et al., 2002), and/or the results of discrimination (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006), one might reasonably feel skeptical or even misunderstood at the suggestion that she has options when it comes to her worklife. To a struggling single mother, options might appear so limited that there seems no need for further discussion. To a 55-year-old whose skills are no longer in demand, the thought of retraining to increase options can appear frightening, if not impossible. To a student who places a high priority on the needs of siblings, parents, and grandparents when choosing a field of study, encouragement from a professor to consider developing his artistic talent may create a sense of role conflict. It is an injustice for the larger culture to overlook the ways work fits into the context of a person’s life, including economic resources, values, abilities or disabilities, family roles, and self-concept (Richardson, 1993).

An equal or greater injustice could occur at the individual level, however, if attention to context meant overlooking potential. Realizing factors that limit a person’s options for meaningful work does not have to mean accepting his circumstance as an unchanging fact. Rather, it could include a creative and hopeful willingness to explore multiple possibilities in the near and distant future, based on the person’s strengths and supports (Blustein et al., 2002; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006; Eisenberg & Ota Wong, 2002). For individuals who find themselves in circumstances limited by context, such a flexible approach might lead to a range of possible outcomes. At the most personal level, one might develop a sense of personal meaning from within the available options (Heslin, 2005; Savickas, 2005), as when a school bus driver views her career choice as successful because she helps children. At a broader level, one might work to overcome barriers by accessing individual strengths and outside supports, which contribute to a sense of resiliency (Walsh, Galassi, Murphy, & Park-Taylor, 2002), as

when the same school bus driver accepts encouragement from a teacher and strives to become a paraprofessional and help children more directly in the classroom. Everyone deserves hope for success, both those who feel able to pursue clear and desirable goals in the near future and those whose options seem especially limited.

## VOCATIONAL ROOTS

Managing one's worklife can be thought of as managing choices—understanding available choices, defining and increasing the number of good choices, and eventually choosing. Choice of career was not always such a widespread concern. Changes brought on by the industrial revolution resulted in the need for more specialized work and the freedom for increasing numbers of people to consider more career choices than ever before (Savickas & Baker, 2005). The theory of career choice that emerged at that time continues to have a lasting influence today. Simply put, it became accepted that choosing an appropriate career included knowledge of self, knowledge of the world of work, and the accurate integration of these two sets of information (Parsons, 1909, as cited in Brown & Brooks, 1996). Such an active approach to the choice of occupation would result in a better fit for the employee and the employer than by leaving one's choice mostly to chance (Brown & Brooks, 1996).

When viewed through this lens, one might see career choice as an exercise in finding the best fit or match between traits of the individual (e.g., skills and personality) and characteristics associated with certain occupations (e.g., the required tasks and the environment). A great deal of research has demonstrated the relevance of this concept (Dawis, 1996; Holland, 1992), which represents one of the dominant views of how people make decisions about their future work lives—they hope to do what they like to do. Primarily, vocational interest patterns have been viewed as a personality type that can be matched to a type of environment, thereby increasing the likelihood of satisfaction at work (Holland, 1992). For instance, a person who has a preference for solving problems by making observations and gathering information in a systematic or scientific fashion might be expected to find satisfaction and success in a research or laboratory setting. Those who seek counseling when attempting to choose an educational path or a type of work frequently receive such information about their interests in the form of a Holland code (named for the theory's creator, John Holland), which typically includes two to three out of six primary interest categories. Someone whose path fits the description above would be said to have an *Investigative* interest type and would be expected to fit into a science or *Investigative* atmosphere, and "P" (for Investigative) would be one of the letters in her Holland code. An important variation on this concept of person-environment fit includes the realization that the quality of the choice depends on *both* the ability of the work to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the worker *and* the ability of the worker to meet the needs of the organization to which he contributes (Dawis, 1996).

Whereas matching interests with environments works to identify and name some realities about the person and the work environment, developmental theories proposed that one's internal or subjective experience of the self (one's self-concept) is the main factor contributing to one's choice of occupation (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). As his self-concept changes across the life span, he will make changes to his worklife and will vary his participation in roles outside of his job, all of which shapes the story of his life. In addition, before adult career change became common, a person was expected to progress through predictable stages across the lifespan in regard to worklife. Just as one might assess the maturity of an adolescent based on how she progresses toward adulthood, one might also specify her level of *career maturity* based on how well she accomplishes tasks that contribute to worklife (e.g., school performance, summer work, talking to adults about different jobs).

### THE NEED FOR A BROADER VIEW

Vocational psychology theories introduce concepts that are highly influential in their effect on the understanding of career choice and development, but these theories are somewhat limited in some important ways. First, these theories have been criticized for predominantly focusing their attention on the career experience of healthy, white, middle-class men (Blustein et al., 2002; Richardson, 1993). Although relevant in many ways to women and other groups such as racial/ethnic minorities and the economically disadvantaged, these theories gave little attention to concerns that limited the career goals of people in these groups. For instance, linking career satisfaction to interests or self-concept is valid, but may seem irrelevant to a person who experiences many barriers, whether they be financial, discriminatory, or reflective of cultural values.

Secondly, in the past 100 years, what Parsons (1909) described simply as factors involved in a "wise choice" has come to be viewed by many as a puzzle to be solved that has one best answer. When combined with a developmental perspective that emphasizes tasks to be accomplished in particular stages of life, the reaction has included not simply the need to find the right fit, but pressure to implement the right fit according to some orderly time frame throughout one's life. For many, this perspective has resulted in questions to the young such as, "Have you decided what you want to do with your life?" or "Shouldn't you have chosen a major by now?" Worse yet might be the exasperation of parents when, several years into a career, a young woman decides to switch fields—"We spent all that money on college and you won't be using your major anymore?" A similar reaction might be that of friends who remark, "Is he changing jobs *again*?" In fact, career paths have become less predictable because of economic and organizational change, and so a standard of passing certain benchmarks at particular times in life is useful only when it includes an understanding of the qualities adults need to adapt to career change (Super & Knasel, 1981), which is now the rule instead of the exception.

Although change may be the rule, it is not always welcome. Individuals enduring unexpected career transition provide a useful perspective on such unwelcome change and some of their stories are included here, as gathered during in-depth interviews (Ebberwein, 2000). For many, factors that force a change in one's plans appear inherently negative—as detours to what otherwise might have been a smooth course of action (O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987). This tendency is illustrated well by Joe, a white man, who was age 51 when laid off after 20 years with a local printing company. He described his early reaction to change this way:

When work started getting real slow, you started getting that feeling that you don't want to do anymore than you have to. And I think that really affected me as far as—I should have a job by now, but I don't. Not because I haven't done what I *need* to do. I haven't done what I *could* do—extra.

In hindsight, Joe attributed his lack of progress to his anger and sadness as things began to change at work. Less work to do was not simply a “bad change,” but for Joe, it was unfair and essentially intolerable. It was personal. Joe's disappointment is not difficult to understand, and he acknowledged later a need for someone to pay attention to that emotion and its effect on his whole life: “It's almost like you need some counseling for you, counseling as a couple and then some type of motivation, kind of grouped into one.”

Of course, Joe's emotions in response to change were not the only factor limiting his progress—contextual factors played a role as well (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). In his case, the skill used in his occupation (drum scanning) was being replaced through changes in technology (desktop/flatbed scanning). Whether it was his context or his emotion that contributed more to his initially slow reaction, what Joe understood was that his disappointment in response to change did not coincide with motivation to act. Instead, he waited to act despite multiple changes he experienced.

## A BROADER VIEW

For someone enduring a difficult job loss, as Joe was, disappointment that reflects the idea, “This change *should not* have happened to me” is not the same as disappointment reflecting the idea, “*I wish* this change had not happened to me.” The former view depicts unexpected change as some failure or hardship that is out of the ordinary and unfair, while the latter allows for the possibility that change and transition are inevitable, and even natural (O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987). Career flexibility relies on this expectation of change, and it promotes anticipation and preparation, as opposed to avoidance or fear.

Career flexibility is not a theory of choosing careers or of career development. It is a “common thread” among a number of career-theory concepts that could be said to promote an active, responsive, and forward-looking

approach to work. Since holding multiple positions across the lifespan is now the norm (Cairo, Kritis, & Myers, 1996; Kinicki & Latack, 1990), it could be said that career flexibility—*the awareness, willingness, and competence to adapt to career options and alternatives*—is a necessary stance in generating a healthy worklife. And a healthy (or unhealthy) worklife greatly impacts whether one has a healthy life in general, both physically and mentally (Heslin, 2005; Menaghan, & Merves, 1984; Schulteiss, 2000; Williams & Johansen, 1985). For instance, high-strain jobs—those with a high degree of responsibility but little decision-making authority—have been related to depression and increased use of sick leave. Conversely, a number of studies show the positive health benefits of feeling engaged with work and work responsibilities, even apparently stressful ones (e.g., Nelson & Simmons, 2003). In other words, work interacts with other important parts of a person's life and contributes to or detracts from overall health and satisfaction, thus making it optimal to plan from one's youth for a worklife that provides some sense of personal meaning.

#### ANTICIPATING A WORKLIFE

Having come to know some Catholic sisters who work as nurses, teachers, administrators, and office workers, four-year-old Grace announced, "I want to be a nun." When asked why, she responded, "Because nuns can be anything they want to be." At four years old, Grace knows one thing for sure about her career future—she wants options. This chapter argues that as Grace matures, she will benefit from knowing that she has multiple good options. Furthermore, and somewhat different from the traditional view of career choice, she will especially benefit from a view that work provides an opportunity to pursue a *series* of options, not a challenge to pinpoint the correct option (Savickas, 2005).

If answers to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" are any indication, most children picture different options for themselves over the years. As the child matures toward young adulthood, however, he is often pressured to choose an option and stick with it (Osipow, 1986). The concept of *finding the right fit* becomes entrenched in the wishes and the language of many young people as they anticipate making a choice, or in the voices of their loved ones who desire a swift and stable resolution to questions surrounding the future. A hope for certainty is often more comfortable than flexibility. Of course, society's norms require a commitment to some type of work (or a track in high school or a major in college), but a flexible approach depends on the ability to resist the temptation to search for the perfect match and, rather, to trust that multiple satisfying matches exist (Super et al., 1996).

One's transition from school to work typically represents the first attempt to pursue a satisfying career option. Depending on personal circumstances and the ever-changing world of work, individuals choose various paths to prepare for this transition. For some who do not complete high school, work begins in the mid- to late-teens, most often in low-skill

and low-pay jobs (Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003). For most, work will begin after graduating from high school, after completing some college courses or vocational training, or after earning a degree that can range from an associates to a doctorate, extending the possible start of one's "career" well into the twenties. In addition to formal education, these paths might include on-the-job training, apprentice programs, military training, or some combination of these (Brown, 2003). Such school-to-work decisions reflect one's vision and expectations for the future, which are based on a large number of internal and external factors. Some of these factors include interests, values, personality, abilities or disabilities, gender, ethnicity, family socioeconomic status, parents' work history, access to education, expectations or experiences of discrimination, changing trends in the world of work, and beliefs about the self. Awareness of how these factors impact the student personally is essential to her awareness of career options, and awareness of options is the first component of career flexibility, as defined earlier.

Young people benefit greatly from schools that foster awareness of options in their attempts to prepare students for the workforce. Ideally beginning in elementary school and culminating in high school, students would be encouraged to develop self-knowledge, to explore educational and work opportunities, and to learn career planning skills. An example of each of these skills might include an awareness of how one's feelings and behaviors impact others in interpersonal situations (self-knowledge), the ability to find useful information about what people do in different jobs (exploration), and an awareness of how work and family roles interact (planning; Kobylarz, 1996, as cited in Brown, 2003).

Ideally, one's unique preferences and expectations of success will dictate his school-to-work decisions. An example might include a student who decides to leave high school because his summer job as a carpenter's assistant led to an apprenticeship. Another example might be a student who feels especially confident in her choice to pursue medical school, and who persists from high school to college and through medical school before ever entering the full-time work force. For both students, decisions reflect a desire to take their chosen path and a belief in their abilities to perform successfully, also known as *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 2001). In regard to career choice, self-efficacy leads to setting higher goals and then appears to help a person maintain effort, thereby increasing the likelihood of higher performance (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). For some, self-efficacy contributes more to career choice than vocational interests, as in the case of Asian American college students, who tend to base their career choice more on an expectation of success in a field than on their interest in that field (Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999).

For many young people, however, contextual factors largely dictate the school-to-work transition, often despite hopeful aspirations (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). For instance, urban youth, comprised largely of low-income and minority families, are less likely to complete high school, are less academically prepared for entering college or the work force, and have fewer community resources available to help them overcome such

barriers (Kenny et al., 2003). Context seems to affect self-efficacy as well. As one might expect, a person with low confidence in her abilities limits the vision she has for her worklife. It has been shown that school-aged girls limit their hopes for certain careers, like math and science, based on the perception that they will not be able to succeed. This perception exists regardless of the presence of aptitude for math and science, and it has the potential to create a self-fulfilling prophecy—whereby performance actually suffers because discomfort with the subject interferes with learning (Betz, 2004).

For individuals experiencing such barriers to a successful school-to-work transition as context and low self-efficacy, quality relationships appear to be a highly consistent factor in helping to overcome such barriers. For women, strong attachment relationships to mother and father result in higher confidence in the ability to accomplish career-planning tasks (career self-efficacy) and higher career aspirations (O'Brien, Friedman, Tipton, & Linn, 2000). Strong attachment relationships appear to contribute to one's sense of security for career development tasks such as risk taking and exploration (Schulteiss, 2000). For women in general, and for Mexican American women in particular, support from parents and teachers leads to higher career aspirations (McWhirter, Hackett, & Bandalos, 1998; Quimby & O'Brien, 2004). Social support and kinship support relate to adaptive attitudes toward school and work among racially diverse urban youth (Kenny et al., 2003), and to self-reliance and school performance among African American adolescents (Carter & Cook, 1992, as cited in Kenny, et al.). These findings point to the benefit to youth of drawing on support from significant relationships, but they also point to society's responsibility to ensure that youth have supportive relationships in place that can contribute to their career development.

Despite the obvious importance of encouraging individuals to overcome barriers to a satisfying worklife, career flexibility does not coincide with a "sky is the limit" view of careers. Although a positive view of work accepts that each person has available a number of potentially satisfying occupations (Super et al., 1996), the type of optimism that suggests a person "can be anything he puts his mind to" might easily lead to frustration, and in some cases, a sense of failure (Osipow, 1986). Some limiting factors, such as intelligence, physical stature, and/or particular sets of skills, offer practical means of narrowing one's vision of future work. Career flexibility trusts that options will be available, not that *any* option will be available, and choosing a direction that considers these limits to abilities reflects a sense of realism (Gottfredson, 1996). To acknowledge this limit to career flexibility requires some mental flexibility—a willingness to balance realistic optimism that some very good options might be available with a willingness to accept real limiting factors.

With such a complex set of factors to consider, career flexibility must not be seen as a formula for decision-making, but as a set of skills and attitudes that prepare an individual to negotiate and construct his career (Savickas, 2005). For individuals anticipating their careers, the aspects of flexibility already discussed—self-awareness, self-efficacy, and the ability to

make informed and realistic choices—are insufficient without an awareness that individuals change and the world of work changes. As mentioned before, the world understandably requires young people to commit to a course of action (e.g., work now versus more education; a science major versus an education major), but commitment has too often been viewed as finality or closure (Krieshok, 2001). Having made a decision about one's first job or having chosen a major, students often adopt a proverbial sigh of relief, as if to say, "Whew, I'm glad that's over." Flexibility frames career decision-making more as a beginning than an ending and promotes a story about the future that might begin in one of these ways: "Maybe this decision could lead to ...," or "If something important changes, I think I will look into...."

### NO REST FOR THE DECIDED

If career decision-making is an ongoing process rather than a one-time commitment, then school-to-work is only the first transition in an adult's worklife, and not necessarily the most important. This reality points to the benefit for an adult of maintaining career flexibility as defined before—the awareness, willingness, and competence to adapt to career options and alternatives. Circumstances that prompt change might include growing dissatisfaction at work, a decrease in the demand for one's skills, unexpected job loss, an offer to work elsewhere, or simply the desire to explore alternatives.

The need for flexibility is heightened as one's options in the world of work begin to change. For instance, job satisfaction partly reflects how personal needs fit those of the current work setting (Dawis, 1996). As long as most of the important needs of the employee and the employer are being satisfied, the current working relationship remains a viable option. As either the employee or the employer experiences dissatisfaction, and as that dissatisfaction grows, the employee needs to acknowledge that her current work situation is becoming *less* of a viable option. Depending on the type of change that has led to dissatisfaction, she might attempt to be open to it (Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen, 2004), as in learning to use a new computer system; she might request that the organization make a change, perhaps by increasing her salary; or she might consider work options outside the company. To respond to change in this circumstance provides an opportunity for growth. To not respond welcomes a crisis (O'Connor & Wolfe, 1987). Two examples illustrate the difference. Jack was disappointed by a demotion from a sales manager position in newspaper advertising. He reported accepting the demotion and continuing to do his best work, but he also decided it was time to make a change:

So I went ahead and went back to school and finished my degree and that opened the door of my dream, which is to sell pharmaceuticals. And you can't do it without a bachelor's degree.... I finished my degree about a week and a half before I was let go. So it was just so fortuitous, I couldn't have

written it better. But it was difficult, very difficult. It was like, okay I've been kicked in the teeth here, I'm just going to keep plugging away and there'll be light at the end of the tunnel.

Bill's reaction to changes in his work place was different. After spending 34 years with the same company, he appeared less comfortable considering his options despite his experience of rising discontent.

I got the feeling that I was probably going to lose my job. We went through—one, two, three—we were on our third manager in less than two years. Things were kind of unstable. I was pretty well paid. I had the feeling that I was probably going to lose my job early this year when they cut me out of staff meetings. The new manager would say, "I'm going to have a meeting. Bill, take all the calls on the sales floor."

Later, he added:

In this day and age I would advise anybody whose out there, if you can, get some computer training. I should have done that years ago. My wife and I talked about buying a computer five or six years ago. Unfortunately we kept putting it off. Now when I really need that expertise, I don't have it.

Whereas Jack made decisions and acted on them when he became dissatisfied with changes in his worklife, Bill did not. Part of Bill's regret over his inaction related to his awareness that his skills were outdated, a common perception of those who experience unexpected job loss (Eggerwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser, 2004), and an example of how context affects one's sense of options. Awareness of one's personal context matters—both in the ways context aids career planning (e.g., support) and in the way it limits career planning (e.g., barriers and perceived barriers). Barriers and supports each have a significant impact on expectations for work, with support *increasing* one's goal-directed activity and perceived barriers *decreasing* that activity (Kenny et al., 2003; Lent et al., 2000). Kimberly, a 34-year-old married African American mother of two, illustrates important contextual issues—both barriers and supports—that face adults in transition. She was looking for work after her office assistant job was eliminated due to the relocation of her boss to another city:

That guy I talked to last time, he gave me a whole list of jobs that he pulled off the computer and I didn't really see one that I qualified for. A lot of them I *did* qualify for, but the location was just too far.... And that's another thing. See, transportation can be a stumbling block for me because a lot of these jobs, they say, "Well, how would you be getting to work," and I say, "The bus." But a bus can be late a lot of the time, especially in the winter. And they don't want to hear, "Well the bus was late" or "The bus didn't come." Now, luckily, this last job I had, they were flexible because the bus that I caught to get to work—I was supposed to be there at 8:00—it didn't get me there until 10 after eight, and they always worked with me. And they always said, "We won't dock you." And they always told me to put down 8:00 on my time card. My boss was real cool.... But me

and my husband are trying to get a car. That way I won't have to worry about it. Cause that can be a problem too when you have to get the bus—and I got two kids. The older one's fourteen and the little one's six, and she sees a therapist and the doctor every month. And it's not the same time every month, so occasionally I have to leave to take her to the doctor. But I usually let them know ahead of time so that when I go to an interview I can say "Well I have this, this, and this, but it's not really a problem, because if it came to a point where I couldn't do it then my husband could do it." You know, if it came to my job, because I ain't gonna risk my job. It's kind of like, I'm caught in the middle with personal things.

Professionals who do not attend to contextual barriers represent a real stumbling block for the disenfranchised (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005)—a scenario Kimberly encountered with the first staff member she met. She described transportation barriers that were a result of her financial circumstance, as well as barriers related to work-family balance. With awareness of her barriers, she appeared fairly balanced in her approach to job search activity, perhaps because of the support she perceived:

Well, my husband, he just tells me, "Do what you need to do. But I'm here to help you and support you." And he knew it was coming, cause every time something happened I would tell him. So he knew, but he was like me, he didn't know when.... And my family, my mother and my brother, they knew. I told everybody, so they're just keeping me informed. Like I said, my brother lets me know if they have any openings down [at the city] and my mom has been keeping the lookout too.... And as far as anybody else, like friends and stuff, they kind of been like "Well, what are you going to do now?" And when I tell them, they say, "That sounds good, and if you found that job you can find another one."

Kimberly described the support available to her as a comfort and a source of confidence. It helped to know that she had people showing concern and keeping her informed about possible opportunities—the kind of networking that contributes to a good job search (Bolles, 2004).

Individuals with career awareness ideally understand their contextual barriers and their supports for overcoming them. They also need awareness of that well-established career perspective, knowledge of self and knowledge of how to position oneself in the world of work. In the current occupational atmosphere, vocational interests and self-concept are not viewed as definitive realities used to make the *right* choice (Savickas, 2005). Rather, they might be viewed as evolving aspects of the self that reflect some of the meaning and purpose a person tries to express through his worklife. At times, a flexible approach results in a change in vocational identity—the enduring view of one's interests, talents, and goals—through additional experiences or training opportunities (Holland, Johnston, & Asama, 1993, as cited in Robitschek, 2003). For example, an adult who changes occupations after acquiring a new set of skills experiences a change in vocational identity.

Openness to changing one's vocational identity could be considered a personality strength (Robitschek, 2003), but it does not always require the

addition of skills or a change in interests. Sometimes it simply requires a greater awareness of ways to fit into the world of work. As a vocational rehabilitation counselor, I once interviewed a man who sought a new work-life after a career in the military. His vocational identity was basically as a serviceman. He held the belief that, with his military career over, he had little to offer and was “starting over.” When asked about his experience in the military, he reported that he had worked as a mechanic rebuilding helicopters. His general military training and his specific career within the military provided him with a wealth of transferable skills to apply in a new work setting (Bolles, 2004), if only he could learn to re-label his identity from “ex-military” to something like “master mechanic” or “expert troubleshooter”—identities that are highly relevant yet transferable across multiple occupations. Willingness to change his vocational identity by way of more training or education might well benefit a client such as this one, but an expanded and realistic view of his current skills and traits might also result in good options to pursue now.

In addition to an accurate view of the self, awareness of realistic options requires accurate information about occupations and the world of work. Good information has been shown to benefit adults in career transition, as it allows them to take effective and timely action toward new work (Ebbertwein et al., 2004). Workers gather information in a variety of ways, such as recalling their own past experiences, researching occupations, asking others about their work, reading about training or the job market, and working part-time jobs. Just how well an individual gathers career-relevant information depends partly on her view of change and her concern for the future. With the perspective that change and transition are to be expected, an adult might be more likely to develop a forward-looking and planful approach to her career future, which in turn might motivate willingness and competence to adapt. The concept of career adaptability—understood as concern, curiosity, control, and confidence (Savickas, 2005)—aids greatly in the understanding of how willingness and competence to adapt are manifested in career flexible behavior.

Career concern promotes readiness for change, which need not wait for dissatisfaction at work or unexpected job loss. To prepare for such change opportunities, it helps to know what actually contributes to effective decision-making. When asked, a person will likely tell a story about why she chose to pursue this major or that job, but evidence shows that deciding might be more intuitive than conscious, and more difficult to grasp than previously believed. Moreover, analyzing the reasons for decisions while making them might hinder rather than help the process (Krieshok, 2001). This understanding does not negate the need for a decision-making process. The process remains important, but if intuition plays a greater role than consciousness, then effective decision-making will benefit more from a variety of work relevant experiences than from a series of inventory results geared toward decidedness. A student might explain, “I’m going to be a police detective for these reasons: my dad is a police detective; I expect to be able to stay in my home town; and my guidance counselor agrees that I will like it.” Each of these reasons might be valid, but most likely reasons

lie at the “gut” level, ideally based on exposure to the life and the tasks and the environment of a police detective, that prompt the individual to accept this course as “a good fit.” If adults can expect that change is inevitable, then successful decision-making depends on a willingness to engage the world in ways that promote flexibility in the face of change, possibly resulting in an expansion of skills and interests (Krieshok, 2001), but surely resulting in an expansion of knowledge.

Someone who purposefully engages her surroundings to promote options does so with a sense of curiosity—an interest in what she might learn from people, places, and events in her everyday life. Examples might include asking questions about another’s work, taking an elective class very different from one’s major field of study, volunteering at a community center, or keeping a file of future work possibilities. This activity is not simply a “check-list behavior” that will answer the question, “What career path should I take next?” Instead, *engagement* is an open-minded and purposeful activity intended to produce no particular result in itself, but to contribute to an overall experience of work possibilities that will intuitively inform decision-making over time (Krieshok, Black, & McKay, in review). Engagement is like intuition’s “food for thought,” and such behavior contributes information and realism to the decision-making process (Savickas, 2005).

Curiosity also benefits those open to experiences that arise by chance—a circumstance that has been coined *planned happenstance* (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). Planned happenstance reflects the expectation that an open stance to people and situations can transform unplanned experiences into opportunities for learning about oneself and the world of work. The openness-to-experience characteristic of engagement and planned happenstance helps people refrain from making career decisions prematurely because “all the data are not in.... The person has an opportunity to be curious, to be guided by ‘what would happen if’ questions and to explore options, not to be bound by a plan before it is formulated” (Mitchell et al., 1999, p. 117).

Some willingness to be curious is optimal for individuals to benefit from engagement, but engagement also depends on time and resources. Barriers such as poverty, lack of transportation, or parenting responsibilities limit opportunities for engagement, but they do not eliminate them. An urban high school student is engaged when he responds to support from an important family member and participates in classes, does homework, and imagines a future leadership position at work (Kenny et al., 2003). A non-traditional college woman who accepts the support and encouragement of a female faculty member (Quimby & O’Brien, 2004) is engaged. A man recently out of prison is engaged when he talks about his work aspirations at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting or after church. An unemployed mom who accepts outreach from a career counseling agency practices engagement when she imagines the possibility of returning to college, as illustrated by another look at Kimberly’s story:

When I went down there to see if I was still certified to get benefits, they told me I was a profile case which meant I could come over here to Project

Refocus and see if they could help me find a job. So that's how I ended up here. Um, and you know when I first came here for the orientation, I did that and then came back for my assessment that Thursday and they asked me what was my immediate goals for right now. So I told them my immediate goal was to find employment. That's my immediate goal. And I've been thinking about going down to the Full Employment Council, cause I heard they have programs, but they want you to go to school and all that, but I really don't want to be going to school right now. I need to be working. That's what I was telling my counselor, cause she was talking about me going back to college, cause I do have some college, but right now I don't really want to go back to school. *I take that back.* I do want to go back to school, but maybe when she (her six-year-old) gets a little older and the other one (her 14-year-old) is out of the house or whatever. Because right now, if I did try to work and go back to school, I probably couldn't do it. It would probably be hard, because my husband works evenings and I probably wouldn't be able to do it.

Simply accepting the opportunity for job search help led her to discuss her options and develop her thought process from "I just need work now" to considering a return to college in four to five years.

A curious approach to worklife does not ignore organized and logical processes of decision-making such as "pro and con" lists or completing interest inventories. It simply acknowledges that creating a good fit requires more than matching interests with environments and treats such processes as *one part* of adaptive decision-making rather than a formula for it. Like a writer who trusts that the next story will come if he keeps reading and writing, the engaged, curious decision-maker trusts that his career story will unfold and feels anticipation about the possibilities.

Career awareness and willingness to adapt aid career flexibility only to the degree that one is competent to adapt. Competence to adapt to career change depends partly on factors already discussed (e.g., willingness to engage in personal development), but it also depends on one's sense of control over his career future and one's confidence that effort will result in success. The adult with a sense of control expects that how she uses knowledge of self and the world of work is up to her. She gets to choose. In the past, control over decision-making had its greatest influence at the time of one's initial career choice, with less freedom after entering an organization. Today, control is a hallmark of the modern career, with young people being encouraged to "own" their careers—to construct their own futures (Savickas, 2005). Control as a source of career flexibility should not be confused strictly with the amount of influence one has over his choice, but more as the amount of responsibility one takes for choosing. For instance, the value for independence characteristic of Western culture might propose that an individual make a career choice based largely on one's sense of fulfillment or happiness. This value would not ordinarily be shared by someone from a culture that places a higher value on interdependence than on independence. Placing family above personal aspirations, a Chinese American college student might limit his career options

to those his parents and grandparents view as acceptable and admirable (Leong & Hardin, 2002; Tang et al., 1999). Within his value structure, he exhibits career control by accepting the input of others into the options deemed acceptable; by ultimately making a choice from within that range of options; and by shaping the chosen career in a way that creates unique personal meaning.

The kinds of contextual barriers people encounter represent another reason not to equate career control with the amount of influence one has over career choice. For those encountering financial, educational, or discrimination barriers, they are likely aware of how such factors influence their career choices, but choosing intentionally within the range of options available at any one time improves one's sense of control over leaving such decisions to chance alone (Savickas, 2005). Kimberly, who was discussed previously, expressed this insight when she concluded:

I can go get a job at McDonald's. But I know that's not what I want to do. If it's just having money, I know that's not what I want to do. So there's no need for me to go get just any job just to be working, cause I know I won't be anywhere long if I just go do that.

Kimberly understands her limitations well—transportation, family responsibilities, and her level of education. Knowing her limitations, she chose to file for unemployment and be purposeful about her search, rather than take the first job she could secure. Responding to financial pressure and no sense of control, Katie—a divorced mother of three grown children, who noted her age as “over 55”—reacted to her job loss differently:

I panicked. I panicked and went and got as many jobs as I could because I was so scared.... I had viewed these jobs as like quick fixes, but they really weren't quick fixes, because I had to take two of these jobs to survive. So basically since '95, I've been floating from one job to another until I'd get burnt out. I mean being with two jobs I would get so tired, I'd be exhausted. And I have not found the time or whatever it is, maybe it's still a mental block, to get the skills and focus again on what I'm all about.

Having now sought career counseling help, she reflected in hindsight:

What I should have done, being so exhausted from the '95 situation, um, I should have taken unemployment, and backed off from this. But instead I went into kind of a panic, going “what am I going to do?” I had worked at this job for so many years, I was going to retire from it, and all of a sudden I'm out on the street, zip. It was scary. Really scary.

Support is a well-established benefit to those experiencing multiple barriers (Blustein et al., 2002; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006; Eisenberg & Ota Wong, 2002), and these examples suggest that one of its functions might be to increase the job seeker's career control by adding to her sense of security and decreasing her sense of pressure. Individuals with support,

by way of a working spouse, job change assistance, or some financial buffer, feel more able to choose intentionally during a career transition (Ebberwein et al., 2004).

Confidence in one's ability to accomplish career choice tasks, or career self-efficacy (Betz, 2004), contributes to competence in several ways. As described before, self-efficacy leads to setting higher goals and helps maintain effort, and subsequently increases the likelihood of higher performance (Lent et al., 1996). Competence to adapt depends on self-efficacy, and it also depends on *hope*, which can be thought of as the motivation to pursue a goal based on an expectation of success and realistic plans for achieving it (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991). Whereas self-efficacy provides a starting point—"I can achieve that goal," hope extends one's sense of competence to a perspective such as, "I *will* achieve that goal, and this is how." "High hoppers" are more likely to feel better about their efforts, which reinforces their motivated and planful behavior (Lopez, Snyder, & Teramoto Pedrotti, 2003). When faced with career change then, a person with *work hope*—someone who directs positive attention toward work, has work goals, and has motivation and plans to pursue the goals (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006), might more likely feel encouraged in regard to the transition, as illustrated by the following example. After only a few months in a new position, Jane, a 30-year-old married white woman, learned she would be part of a massive layoff. She decided she wanted to pursue a previous interest in financial analysis:

I went home that night and ... I knew we were going to be getting severance checks, although not exactly for how much. So I talked to my husband, sat down, worked a few things out, and he said, "Well if you don't go to school, I think you're a fool." Which is what I wanted to hear. So from that night on, I was not too upset. Then as soon as I figured out when my last day was, for sure, I went and had a meeting at the university to learn what they would transfer from the community colleges and what I would need to take and all that kind of stuff. So by the time I was at my last day of work, I was at the point where I could enroll and was ready to go. Let's see, my last day was May 28, and I started classes on June 7. On the day I finally didn't have to get up and go to work there, it was like a huge relief. I'm done. I don't have to do this anymore. I don't have to deal with it. To me, it was just a huge relief and nothing else.

Jane's perspective on her career future was truly hopeful, in that she was motivated to pursue her career choice and determined a realistic path for achieving it.

In trying to understand and promote career flexibility, self-efficacy and hope are especially useful constructs, because they are personal and internal, and they are relevant to the advantaged and the disadvantaged (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006). These traits are more within the control of the individual compared with contextual factors. For individuals who are marginalized, the belief that "I can, and I will, and this is how," is hopeful and therefore beneficial, particularly in the presence of barriers.

## WORK IN LIFE

Author and columnist Anna Quindlen has said, “You cannot really be first-rate at your work if your work is all you are. So ... the best advice I could give anyone is pretty simple: Get a life. A real life, not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, the bigger paycheck, the large house ...” (Heslin, 2005, p. 386). To conclude that happiness is the primary goal of work is a mistake if it causes other significant areas of life to suffer. Happiness can be thought of as a by-product of living well (Frankl, 1984). If career flexibility contributes to a successful worklife but detracts from living well—it ceases to be useful. Strategies for how to balance work and family (Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007), developing noncareer roles for life outside of work (Super et al. 1996), and looking ahead to retirement years (Wang, 2007) all require a sense of balance and flexibility with continued awareness of one’s unique context. To the degree that one’s basic needs are met, work is best when it fits well into one’s other life roles.

## SUMMARY

With an objective look at personality and vocational interests, an individual understands one part of a rich and complex story about his career future. It is only when he is able to place that information into the context of his unique life, including his history, his values, his hopes, his potential, and his limitations—environmental and hereditary—that he sees a plot that is unique and meaningful to him. With one’s personality and purpose in view, the flexible career planner pulls accurate information about the world of work into sight and attempts to create good options, always aware that in today’s work world, each option is subject to change and so might last for a long time or a short time. For this reason, gaining accurate information is a life-long process. Each person can always learn more about herself and the world around her. A future orientation such as this, which anticipates change as inevitable if not normal, promotes a readiness for change and a healthy awareness of options. It does not promote a never-ending job search, but might result in a person keeping a file titled “Career Options” with handwritten ideas, articles, letters, or contacts. It might prompt a person to ask questions or periodically scan professional magazines or the Internet to learn about other occupations. These behaviors prompt the career flexible person to think beyond the current position, a stance that positions her well for a change in vocational identity, whether purely by choice or in the face of dissatisfaction or job loss. For someone who perceives many career barriers, this behavior might expose her to possibilities she had not previously considered. Curiosity encourages each commitment to be followed by a voice that wonders, “What might this work lead to,” not necessarily with the goal of changing work, but with the goal of wondering or daydreaming about possible futures.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Career Flexibility

This chapter has emphasized the importance of anticipating change as a normal part of one's worklife. Readiness for change is partly a belief that you will make good decisions when the time comes to adapt. Following are suggestions that might add to your belief that you can make such decisions effectively.

**Explore:** Write down the names of two or three occupations that appeal to you, regardless of how realistic the occupation seems to you at this time. Also, do not feel a need to explain why each occupation is of interest. Attempt to learn something about each of these occupations. Ideally, you might talk to someone who works in the field or who would know some facts about it (e.g., someone who trains or prepares people for the field of interest). As an alternative, you might read government publications that provide details about occupations. *The Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides such details and can be found at libraries or on the Internet ([www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco)). Career InfoNet ([www.careerinfonet.org](http://www.careerinfonet.org)) also offers useful information about the work people do. Videos at Career InfoNet show people performing various kinds of work and describe skills and training typically expected. Some commercial career websites also have "job profile" sections with descriptions of various occupations. After using one of these sources of information, make a few notes (or mental notes) about the information that strikes you as important. This information might increase or decrease your attraction to this particular work. It might also pique your curiosity about some other work.

**Imagine Your Future(s):** If you have gathered information about one or more occupations of interest, as in the previous suggestion, picture yourself using the abilities in the atmosphere that is common to this occupation. You might even say out loud or write down a description of the work from the first person point of view. For instance, using words from a description of "Home Health Aides" found at Career InfoNet, one would say, "I provide patients and families with support in areas such as caring for infants, preparing healthy meals, living independently, or adapting to disability or illness." What is your reaction to describing your worklife in this way? Can you picture yourself contributing in these ways at work every day?

**Seek Feedback:** Think of a person in your life who truly shows an interest in you—not necessarily a person who tells you what you want to hear, but a person who surely wants good things for you. If you cannot think of such a person, consider seeking out a caring person at school, at work, or in your extended family. Ask questions such as, "Can you picture me doing ... for work in the future," or "What would you think if I told you I am considering work as a ...?" Ask for some details about the opinions you receive. Take the opportunity to ask about her worklife. What makes it rewarding? What makes it challenging? Is she planning to stay in the field or make a change? Ask if you can seek feedback again in the future. Consider asking for feedback from others as well.

Whether you use the information you gather in practical ways in the near future, or store it away for future reference, you will have added to your overall perspective on yourself and/or the world of work.

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# Emotional Storytelling after Stressful Experiences

Melanie A. Greenberg

I write because it makes sense of my experience.

I write because I love words, language, images, expression.

I write because it is not enough just to live life.

I write to relive the joy and sorrow, sometimes making sense of the senseless.

Sometimes I write just to say, “I was here and THAT happened to ME,  
and this is who I was, who I am, who I am becoming.”

Witness, yes. To my own truth,  
and to the experience of others.

I write because the multicolored passion,  
the fire and ice, rage and joy cannot be silenced  
within the life of one woman,  
one frightened girl-child,  
one shining warrior.

(“I Write Because” by Karen Usatine, from Bray, 2004, pp. 71–72)

**T**hese words, written by a woman who entered a writing group run by Sharon Bray while in the midst of undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer, profoundly capture the intense need for emotional storytelling that many people experience in the wake of traumatic or stressful events. Despite the pain involved in reliving difficult experiences, many people seek to tell their stories, to be a witness to their own experiences and those of others, to make sense of these experiences and integrate them into an evolving life story. Scientific literature shows that such authentic expression can facilitate personal and social processes involved in recovery and growth.

As a researcher who has studied emotional storytelling and expression for more than 20 years, I, with the help of my colleagues, have accumulated a large body of evidence demonstrating that emotional storytelling can have long-lasting, beneficial effects on physical and mental health. On the other hand, effects are not always consistent, and it is clear that some people benefit more than others. The major focus of my career has been on trying to understand the psychological and social processes linking personal expression to recovery from stress and trauma, the circumstances that can best facilitate health-promoting emotional storytelling, and the types of people or stressors for which this approach is best suited.

In this chapter, I will share what I have learned about such processes. The more we know about the benefits of telling one's emotional story in the wake of stressful events, the better equipped we are to harness these processes to promote our own and other people's healing and growth following life stress, and to fight tendencies towards helplessness, bitterness, or despair that traumas may provoke.

Putting a traumatic event into words can transform the event and add new, potentially hopeful meanings to it, so that our stressful experiences can become a source of personal empowerment and inspiration to live a fuller, more meaningful life, help relieve the suffering of others, or bring about positive changes in social institutions. In the first section, I discuss a public figure that stands out as example of a heroic emotional storyteller; whose writing conveys deep emotion, even in the darkest of circumstances, and whose accounts are imbued with collective moral imperatives as well as personal meanings. This individual's stories convey fundamental lessons about our shared humanity and about the importance of fighting to uphold certain basic values. It is interesting that it took this individual 10 years after he had suffered devastating, extreme trauma to be able to tell his story in this way.

#### DR. ELIE WIESEL: A HEROIC EMOTIONAL STORYTELLER

Elie Wiesel, a Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor of Eastern European descent is an internationally recognized writer, teacher, and scholar, who dedicated his life to raising awareness about the Holocaust and about the importance of actively speaking up against human rights violations and genocide, wherever in the world these may occur. In 1986, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to human rights, and he has been an inspiration to other leading humanitarian figures, including Oprah Winfrey, whose moving visit with Dr. Wiesel in Auschwitz was broadcast on her program in 2006. Dr. Wiesel's novel, *Night* (1977), is an autobiographical account of his deportation in 1944 as a young boy to the concentration camp, Auschwitz-Berkenau, along with his whole family. His mother and younger sister were taken away upon arrival and he never saw them again. He remained with his father until the latter, too, died in Berkenau several years later.

*Night* has become the defining chronicle of the inhumanity and evil of the Holocaust. In the following excerpt, Dr. Wiesel describes his difficulty in

finding words to describe such horrors and the motivation to bear witness that finally gave him the courage to write about his Holocaust experiences.

Convinced that this period in history would be judged one day, I knew that I must bear witness.... Was there a way to describe the last journey in sealed cattle cars, the last voyage toward the unknown? Or the discovery of a demented and glacial universe where to be inhuman was human, where disciplined, educated men in uniform came to kill, and innocent children and weary old men came to die? Or the countless separations on a single fiery night, the tearing apart of entire families, entire communities?

Only those who experienced Auschwitz know what it was. Others will never know.... But would they at least understand? ... having lived through this experience, one could not keep silent no matter how difficult, if not impossible, it was to speak.... The witness has forced himself to testify. For the youth of today, for the children who will be born tomorrow. He does not want his past to become their future. (From Preface to Wiesel, 1977)

Despite the difficulty in finding words to describe these unimaginable experiences, Dr. Wiesel felt a moral obligation to testify and bear witness on behalf of his own family members and other victims and survivors. He wrote to convey the horrors of Auschwitz to those who had not experienced it, and to motivate societies to actively oppose human rights violations so that future generations could be protected from such a fate. It is not in the traumatic events themselves that Dr. Wiesel finds meaning, but in the potential power of his words to evoke outrage and empathy, thereby motivating others to act to prevent a recurrence.

This, then, is one of the potential benefits of emotional storytelling after stressful experiences. It can transform one's experience from a personal tragedy to a collective moral account. In their potential ability to touch the humanity and hearts of other people, to provoke moral indignation, instill compassion, and inspire action, words can provide the writer with a sense of purpose and potential control over future events that can counteract the helplessness and loss of meaning, which characterize the experience of victimization.

It is also important to realize that it took Dr. Wiesel 10 years after he was rescued from Auschwitz to be able to write the first, Yiddish version of *Night*. Were he to try to write immediately after such a devastating experience, it is unlikely that he would be able to produce such an organized, dignified, purposeful account of the atrocities. Rather, his story may have been disorganized, bewildered, and filled with horrific images and intense, overwhelming affect. In the next two sections, I describe what theory and research say about how the mind processes traumatic memories, to highlight the potential power of emotional storytelling to facilitate cognitive resolution.

## HOW THE BRAIN STORES TRAUMATIC MEMORIES AND THE EFFECTS OF NARRATIVE

The incongruity and emotional intensity of trauma memories can lead the traumatized individual to repeatedly reexperience the events and associated

affect at unexpected or inappropriate times, thereby prolonging the emotional stress and interfering with normal life activities. Some individuals try to avoid the pain of reexperiencing by cognitive avoidance, deliberately blocking their thoughts and feelings about the trauma, or behavioral avoidance, avoiding situations and people that may trigger the memories (Horowitz, 1986). Some degree of reexperiencing is a normal stress response, resulting from the trauma being stored in active, short-term memory until it can be reconciled with other experiences and perceptions and cognitively filed away in long-term memory. However, for some people, the intensity of affect associated with the memory or excessive use of avoidance interfere with the mind's ability to integrate the trauma into long-term memory storage and reduce its chronic intrusiveness. These people then, may repeatedly and uncontrollably experience thoughts, images, and emotions associated with the trauma, such that this becomes a chronic source of stress and interferes with ongoing relationships and activities.

Some theorists suggest that unprocessed traumatic events are stored in memory in a fragmented, disorganized way, consisting of brief, horrific images, such as of body parts flying in the air following a bomb blast, or sudden feelings of terror or overwhelming sadness that are not linked to any current experience, or the person unconsciously reenacting the trauma, such as an abused child marrying an abusive spouse (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991). This fragmentation may be due to the fact that extreme emotional arousal at the time of the event may interfere with memory processing and organization by the hippocampus, the brain structure responsible for memory (van der Kolk, 1994).

Individuals with posttraumatic stress symptoms may need professional help to deliberately confront and stay with these frightening memories and images until the affect abates somewhat and the individual can think clearly enough to make sense of them and organize them into a coherent story. Converting the memory pieces into an organized, emotional narrative allows the individual to match and integrate this information with other knowledge and experiences, potentially resulting in new meanings that resolve the incongruity.

Emotional storytelling then, serves to integrate the memory of the trauma more explicitly with other experiences and views of self, thereby enhancing the individual's ability to cope with it. When trauma reminders trigger feelings of victimization and helplessness, the individual is now able to counterbalance this perspective with memories of other situations in which she acted competently and effectively to deal with stress. The memory of being betrayed or deceived by an abuser might be counterbalanced by memories of other loving and supportive relationships. Emotional storytelling then, should promote cognitive integration and acceptance of the trauma and enhance the individual's repertoire of coping strategies to deal with the painful affect. Trauma is placed in context as one experience within an individual's life, rather than being the sole defining feature of that life.

In the next section, I describe another way in which traumas affect our views of self and world; specifically, how traumas can shatter a person's basic assumptions about oneself and the world, thereby making these events

more difficult to make sense out of and reconcile with other information and memories.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF TRAUMA AND THE POWER OF NARRATIVE

Traumatic or highly stressful events force us to confront physical and psychological danger and loss, often highlighting our own limitations and vulnerabilities or those of our family members, communities, and the societal institutions in which we have placed our faith. They also may call into question our basic assumptions about the world or our spiritual beliefs. In Ronnie Janoff-Bulman's (1992) book, *Shattered Assumptions*, she describes three types of assumptions that are shattered by traumas, particularly those that involve interpersonal violence, exploitation, or indifference. These assumptions are that the world is meaningful, that the world is benevolent, and that the self is worthy. When innocent people are victimized, whether by a deliberate aggressor (e.g., in the mass college shootings at Virginia Tech), as an unintended consequence of another person's carelessness (e.g., in a drunk driving accident), or by forces of nature and human indifference (e.g., in the aftermath to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita), there is often a senselessness to this suffering that defies meaningful explanation. Furthermore, these events challenge our sense of safety and invulnerability in the world and our faith in the goodness of human nature. In trying to make sense of experiences of victimization or loss, the survivor might conclude that these outcomes were deserved; that his own actions brought them about. In some cases, such as rape, spousal battery, or child abuse, the perpetrator may actually tell the victim that this was all her own fault or was brought about by her personal inadequacy and lack of worth.

Telling one's emotional story may serve as a way of confronting these potential negative meanings, of laying out the facts and evaluating the evidence for and against them. In the course of the narrative, alternative, more positive meanings may emerge. In comparing a traumatic event, such as a rape or act of terrorism, with other knowledge and experiences, the individual may come to see it as an incongruous experience in a life characterized by loving connection to others or by meaningful progression toward personal goals. For some, the meaning of a trauma may be in not letting this event define the self or the course of one's life and in not becoming a victim of it. Other narratives may serve to reaffirm the individual's faith in human nature or in a higher power, despite this event. For example, the trauma may be interpreted as a lesson from God or as a message from God to turn one's life around. The individual may interpret his survival as a blessing from God or as due to the heroism or competent efforts of others. For example, a cancer survivor may have faith in the power of her medical team to combat the disease. For some people, such as the woman who wrote the poem at the beginning of this chapter, there may be positive meaning just in her ability to survive and speak her own truth. Alternatively, the unfolding narrative may inevitably point toward a new possible value-driven direction and purpose in life; one that provides a counterpoint

to the purposeless or betrayal of values embodied by the trauma. This theme is evident in Dr. Wiesel's narrative and in Oprah Winfrey's deliberate public disclosure of her sexual abuse at the age of nine, as a way of empowering both herself and others to resist abuse.

Telling our emotional stories then gives authentic voice to these inner struggles, allows us to bear witness to our own suffering and that of others, and can help us to reconnect with and respect our own reactions, without judging them. The act of sharing one's story with a real or imagined compassionate other also has the potential to strengthen relational bonds, thereby providing an antidote to feelings of loss, alienation, or victimization evoked by stressful events. In imagining another person listening empathically to her story or being deeply affected by it, the writer is able to restore her faith in human benevolence and interconnectedness. This need to tell one's story as a way of maintaining connection with others may explain why people write letters to geographically distant friends and family members or why Internet chat rooms have gained such explosive popularity. Telling one's emotional story often has an explicit or implicit social component, as I discuss in the next section. We tell our emotional stories to evoke affirming reactions from others that help to rebuild the assumptions of self-worth and human benevolence that have been challenged by stressful events.

#### IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT INTERPERSONAL ASPECTS OF STORYTELLING

For many people, the reactions of the real or imagined audience are what give meaning to their stories; the desired reactions are as individual as the events themselves. For a victim of incest whose experience of reality may have been constantly challenged by her oppressor or other family members, the experience of telling her story and being believed and affirmed may be a prerequisite for emotional healing. For the cancer patient telling her family about her diagnosis, the empathic connection and support she receives from her loved ones may be a source of shared strength that is needed to face the future with cancer. For the family of a murder victim, testifying about what suffering the murderer's actions have caused and what value the life had that was wiped out may serve to provoke moral outrage in the listener and motivate actions against past or future aggressors. For a patient with chronic pain or fatigue who feels that others do not understand the disabling nature of her illness, her personal narrative may be a way to validate her own experience, and convince others of the reality of her pain. For the individual who has been rejected by a former spouse or lover, the imagined outcome of emotional storytelling may be for the lover to be overcome by remorse or regret and, perhaps, to return to the relationship. For the gay youth who is in the closet or the African American who encounters racial prejudice, writing or telling his emotional story may convey the wish to be understood in his shared humanity, and, ultimately, accepted and embraced, rather than being excluded by a prejudiced society.

For all of these individuals, writing their stories of stress may help them to view their own experiences through the eyes of an empathic other, thereby

implicitly lending validity to their experiences and reactions. Also, implicit in the stories may be a hope for a certain emotional reaction by others that can provide needed support and strength and promote healing and recovery. In recognizing these implicit interpersonal needs, individuals may be empowered to act in the world so as to bring about the desired relational outcomes. Writing down one's story in private may be the first step in an empowerment process that eventually involves confronting or confiding in others with whom one is in relationship or who have the power to do something about the situation.

If the stories are actually told to another, the reaction of the listener may influence the storyteller's emotions about the event. Empathic listening, acceptance, and support may promote emotional healing, whereas refusing to listen, minimizing the magnitude of the event, or judging the person's reactions may silence the speaker or lead him to question the validity of his own reactions, potentially interfering with the healing power of storytelling. My colleague, Stephen J. Lepore, calls these negative reactions "social constraints," and he and others have shown in several studies that for individuals with a high level of intrusive thoughts about stressful events, ranging from loss of a child to prostate cancer, perceiving socially constraining reactions by close others may lead to depressed mood in subsequent months (Lepore & Helgeson, 1998; Lepore, Silver, Wortman, & Wayment, 1996). Having a mentally unresolved stressful event and not being able to share one's emotional story with others and be heard may produce feelings of interpersonal alienation, anger, or helplessness that lead to depression.

Studies of the damaging effects of social constraints for those mentally struggling with unresolved stressful events suggest that emotional storytelling is an implicitly social process. In telling our stories, we may reconstruct an image of a self that is worthy, loved, or competent, or one that is innocent and not deserving of the stress that was imposed upon it. When others validate these perceptions, assumptions of safety and meaningfulness in the world begin to be rebuilt. In the next section, I discuss the importance of emotional and physical safety as a precondition for healing through emotional storytelling.

#### IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT AND SAFETY FOR EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING

Thomas Scheff (1979), an early emotions theorist, coined the term "optimal distancing" to describe the conditions under which reexperiencing the emotions associated with a stressor could result in a healing release of pent up physical and psychological energy. He contrasted this with "underdistancing" in which the individual feels retraumatized and overwhelmed by intense, raw emotions, as if the event is actually reoccurring, and "overdistanced responding" in which the person retells about the event in an overly intellectual manner without accessing authentic emotions. Telling one's emotional story at "optimal distance" means that a person's awareness is divided between experiencing the affects associated with

the trauma, while at the same time noting a “context of present safety.” Although these definitions are vague in relation to the specific environmental stimuli required to create such a safe context, they do highlight four important factors that can be empirically tested: (a) the person has to have experienced an emotionally unresolved stressor, (b) the person has to intensely or authentically experience the emotions associated with the event, (c) he has to be able to divert attention from the memory to the current context, and to realize that there is no imminent threat, (d) she has to perceive a sense of control or mastery over the affect, in other words, to perceive she is able to handle it without being overwhelmed or going crazy.

The implication of the distancing discussion is that emotional storytelling is not universally beneficial. Some people may not be able to handle the intense emotion and may be retraumatized; others may be unwilling to engage and be present sufficiently to benefit. For some, the context may not feel safe because they are socially isolated, or have too many other ongoing responsibilities that strong emotions may interfere with, or because the people around them may not be able to tolerate their painful emotions. Perhaps they feel threatened or unsafe themselves, becoming angry, dismissing and minimizing the feelings, or judging the person negatively.

The value of psychotherapy may be, at least partially, that it provides a safe context in which to tell one’s emotional story. The professional qualifications and warm, empathic manner of the therapist and the fact that the client does not have to interact with the therapist in his daily life, make this a potentially ideal context for facing painful thoughts and feelings associated with past and ongoing stressors. Unfortunately, because of the social stigma associated with mental health problems or because of financial constraints, many people with unresolved stressors will not pass through a therapist’s door. The question then becomes: Is there a way to help people tell healing emotional stories outside of the therapeutic context? Can we recreate the conditions of “present safety” in a brief, inexpensive intervention, and for which types of people and stressful events might such an approach be best suited?

## THE EXPRESSIVE WRITING PARADIGM

James Pennebaker and colleagues (e.g., Pennebaker & Beall, 1986) pioneered an innovative expressive writing paradigm, which has stimulated hundreds of subsequent research studies and inspired many storytelling workshops and courses in the public domain as well. In the original study, healthy college students who were assigned to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings associated with the most traumatic events of their lives evidenced beneficial health effects, relative to control participants who wrote about nonemotional events, such as their plans for the day, and participants who were assigned to write just the facts about a stressful event or trauma. Specifically, the first group reported fewer illnesses, such as headaches or colds, and visited the student health center less often during the following months, compared with the other participants. A fourth group

who were told to write just about their feelings surrounding the trauma, without mentioning facts, also reported fewer illnesses, but did not show a decrease in healthcare utilization.

The authors concluded that emotional storytelling may have enduring health benefits. Furthermore, they interpreted the results as highlighting the importance of accessing feelings about the stressor and creating a narrative that integrated the facts of the event with associated thoughts and feelings. In addition, they claimed that most individuals deliberately hold back from open expression of their thoughts and feelings associated with past traumas, either because of fear of being overwhelmed or for fear of being socially stigmatized, criticized, or rejected. Over time, chronic emotional inhibition is presumed to be physiologically stressful and effortful, placing “wear and tear” on the body and impairing immunity and disease resistance. Therefore, providing people with the opportunity to write expressive narratives was designed to relieve the stress of chronic inhibition and provide generalized health benefits.

It should be noted also that Pennebaker’s expressive writing intervention was relatively brief, consisting of only 20 minutes per day of essay writing across four consecutive days. The reason for the brevity was because a control group was needed to show that the health benefits were not just due to time passing or to getting attention from the experimenter. Asking people to write about unemotional topics such as their plans for the day or the objects in a room for longer might lead them to become bored and drop out of the study. Brief psychotherapy, on the other hand, requires twelve to fifteen 50-minute sessions. Therefore, this expressive writing approach was initially designed for healthy college students without any physical health impairments or psychiatric diagnoses and worked well in this population, with many participants describing heartfelt thoughts and feelings associated with events such as bereavement, parental divorce, physical or mental illness of parents, date rape, relationship breakups, or loneliness in their narratives.

The original findings of reduced reports of physical symptoms and decreased health-care utilization were replicated in healthy populations writing about diverse stressors, or specific stressors such as job loss, medical school entry examinations, or adjustment to college, and some studies also found psychological or behavioral benefits, such as reduced absenteeism, improved grades, faster reemployment, improved self-esteem, reduced depression and so on. Some studies even found improvements in indicators of immunity, such as T-cell counts, immune response to vaccine, or Epstein-Barr virus antigens in writing groups, relative to controls (Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, & Schneiderman, 1994; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Petrie, Booth, Pennebaker, Davison, & Thomas, 1995).

In 1998, Josh Smyth published a metaanalysis, in other words, a review using statistical methods to estimate how large an effect expressive writing had compared with a control condition, aggregating across studies in healthy populations. The study estimated that, on average, the expressive writing group had a 23% improvement in outcome over the control group. People who participated in the expressive writing treatment condition were 23% less likely than controls to visit a doctor, catch the flu, and so on

(Smyth, 1998). This effect size in healthy populations was relatively large, and comparable to effects found in other behavioral and educational interventions focused on improving health. Furthermore, expressive writing was deemed to significantly improve four different types of outcomes: reported physical health, psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and adaptive behavior.

The body of research suggested that expressive writing worked most of the time in healthy populations, yet it was unclear why it worked and for whom it might work best. Also, would the benefits of writing apply to other populations undergoing more serious traumas or chronic stressors? These issues became the focus of a great deal of research designed to extend the expressive writing intervention to medically ill or psychiatric populations. A recent metaanalysis (Frisina, Borod, & Lepore, 2004) summarizing the effects of expressive writing across nine studies using samples with mental or physical illness confirmed the efficacy of writing, yet calculated an effect size that was smaller than the one Smyth had reported for healthy populations. Overall, the intervention was more effective on physical than psychological health. Several studies have, however, found both physical and psychological benefits of writing in diverse medical populations, including patients with chronic pain and cancer.

In the previous section, I summarized the body of literature on expressive writing as a whole. In the next section, I explain how and why I became involved in studying emotional storytelling and describe some of the research studies that I have conducted in healthy, chronically stressed, and medically ill populations.

## WHY I BEGAN STUDYING EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING

When Pennebaker and Beall published their 1986 study, I was a new graduate student studying Clinical Psychology at Stony Brook University in New York. The idea of having to inhibit oneself from speaking one's true feelings as well as the topic of trauma were very close to my heart. I was born in South Africa, where I lived until the age of twenty-six when I came to graduate school in the United States. In 1986 South Africa, apartheid was at its peak and stories of horror were whispered in the hallways. The stories ranged from Steve Biko, a black activist leader, being tortured and killed by security police to student protesters being beaten by police on the steps of the main church in Cape Town. We also heard about black rage and suspected police informers being "necklaced," or set on fire with a rubber tire around their waists, in the black townships. Crime and violence were rampant and in the white cities, such as Johannesburg, people lived behind high walls and security gates and had big dogs to scare away potential burglars and rapists.

I use the phrase "whispered in the hallways" to describe how the experience of this societal trauma was incompletely shared and expressed by white South Africans for two reasons. First, as a police state, subject to a currently declared "state of emergency," there was no freedom of speech or press and

antigovernment protesters could be detained indefinitely without trial and were often subject to torture. The television news, broadcast by the government-run South African Broadcasting Corporation, presented a sanitized vision of South Africa, focusing on the natural bounty and riches of a country blessed by open spaces, sunshine, and known for its gold and diamond mines and ignoring the human suffering caused by apartheid. Second, white South Africans lived a life of comfort, with access to unspoiled natural beauty, protection from competition for resources, time for leisure, family and friends, all the while trying not to speak or think about the violence and repression in South Africa under apartheid and the potential danger that lay ahead for the society. At the time, my life was disrupted, also, by the emigration of my closest friends to places such as Sydney, Australia, and Toronto, Canada.

It was in this atmosphere that I decided to leave South Africa to study in a foreign country on the other side of the earth, potentially never to return. I saw the pain in my parents' eyes as they said goodbye, and I felt sadness and guilt at leaving them behind. Yet I did not speak of these struggles to my fellow graduate students, preoccupied as they were with finances and grades. My family and friends back home saw me as one of the lucky ones who got the opportunity to live in the richest, most secure country in the world, and to have a graduate education at an elite institution. My graduate school classmates lived in a different universe where the routine of life was taken for granted. Still, I missed my family and my homeland desperately; I missed the sunshine and fresh air, the rich smells and colors of the earth, and the more laid back lifestyle and sincere warmth of the people. Also, I worried about my family and what would happen to them in a society where the threat of violence hung constantly in the air. Yet I kept silent for the most part and did not talk of these things. Instead, I buried myself in work and tried to suppress the painful feelings.

It was at this time that I read Pennebaker and Beall's classic study and, struggling with my own emotional inhibition and all the conflicting feelings and sensory memories of home and family, I recognized the potential value of writing down or telling one's emotional story in relation to my own situation. It could provide an opportunity for emotional release and a structure for organizing my experiences in a more meaningful way, perhaps resulting in some new insight, guidance, or resolution. Here was a chance to turn my own painful experiences into a way to help and teach others by uncovering the healing aspects of emotional storytelling. I decided to make this topic the focus of my research for the foreseeable future. On one level, I wanted to understand all there was to know about how emotional storytelling works; on another level, I was preoccupied by the broader question of how people heal from emotional pain and trauma and how I could turn uncontrollable negative experiences into positive and meaningful visions and goals and the basis for a purposeful life. Although, I did not know it at the time, I was an instinctive positive psychologist.

In the next section, I discuss the studies that my colleagues or students and I have conducted with both healthy college students and people undergoing particular types of stress to try to unravel the mystery of how, why, and for whom telling one's emotional story can be beneficial.

## WHY AND FOR WHOM DOES EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING WORK?

In the course of my 20-year career as a researcher in the area of clinical health psychology, I have conducted and supervised many expressive writing studies. These studies, individually and collectively, have examined whether emotionally expressive writing or storytelling interventions work in many different populations, ranging from healthy college students to people going through relationship breakups, gay men, caretakers of cancer patients, and adults and adolescents with chronic pain and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). In some studies and with some types of outcome measures, there were clear overall benefits of the intervention, whereas in others, results were more variable or the intervention worked only in particular subgroups. In this section, I will share some lessons I have learned from this body of work.

In the studies that demonstrated the most benefits for the emotionally expressive group as a whole, participants were chosen based on the experience of some trauma, major life stressor, or chronic strain, rather than just because they were a student at a particular college or had a particular medical diagnosis. For example, in one of my first published studies, based on my doctoral dissertation project (Greenberg, Wortman, & Stone, 1996), we selected participants who had experienced severe traumas, such as death of a parent, child or adult sexual assault, mental illness of a parent, and so on. In this study, participants in the expressive disclosure group made fewer physician or health center visits than controls in the two months following the intervention. Although the psychological effects of this intervention were not clear cut, I was able to replicate Pennebaker and Beall's original findings of physical health improvement with participants who were preselected for trauma experience.

In an earlier study comparing participants who wrote about previously disclosed and undisclosed traumas to controls (Greenberg & Stone, 1992), we did not preselect participants based on trauma experience but rather, accepted anybody who volunteered and was willing to write. In this study, we found no longer-term health or mood benefits for either the disclosed or undisclosed trauma writing groups, relative to controls. Interestingly, participants who rated themselves as writing about more severe traumas and actually wrote about major life stresses, such as bereavement, parental conflict or divorce, reported fewer physical symptoms in the months following the study than participants who rated their traumatic emotional writing topics as less severe, and controls who wrote about unemotional topics.

In interpreting these findings, it seemed clear that not everybody benefited equally from emotional storytelling; those who had experienced and chose to disclose a subjectively highly stressful event had the greatest health benefits. People who had not experienced highly stressful events might not need to tell their emotional stories in this way; their normal coping skills and support networks might be sufficient to handle the situation. Other experimental participants might choose to minimize the severity of the stresses they had experienced and write in an overly distanced way, without experiencing authentic affect. As the theories discussed previously have highlighted, the person needs to admit the stressful nature of the event and

be willing to confront the associated feelings to experience the benefits of emotional storytelling.

A more recent study, which was Genelle Weits's dissertation, examined the effects of expressive verbal disclosure in patients with juvenile fibromyalgia, a pain syndrome of unknown etiology (Weits, Greenberg, & Szer, 2007). Using a three-month follow-up and both self-reports and parent ratings of pain, mood, and quality of life as the outcomes, we found no overall differences in health status between participants assigned to tell their emotional stories and those assigned to speak about nonemotional events. However, a subgroup of participants in the emotional storytelling group who reported that they perceived their storytelling as more personal, meaningful, emotional, and stressful showed a consistent pattern of improvements in pain, fatigue, and patient- and parent-rated quality of life at follow-up, compared with participants in the same group who did not disclose as fully. Again, these findings suggest that to derive benefit from emotional storytelling, the individual needs to have a subjectively stressful event to disclose and must write or talk about this event in a deeply personal and emotionally engaging way. Telling stories from a distanced, impersonal perspective, without accessing heartfelt emotions is not sufficient for physiological or psychological release. Just because a person has a medical diagnosis does not guarantee they will have an authentic emotional story to tell or be willing to engage emotionally with their past traumas or current stresses.

In another study that I supervised, we found similar results using participants with IBS. Specifically, participants assigned to four days of emotional essay-writing over two weeks did not evidence any short-term or longer-term health benefits, compared with control participants writing about their past, current, and future daily schedules (Siegel, Greenberg, & Longstreth, 2003). As in the previous studies, a subgroup of participants did evidence longer-term benefits of emotional storytelling. Specifically, participants in the emotional essay-writing group who maintained higher levels of positive mood during essay-writing had more improved IBS-related quality of life two weeks and three months later, compared with participants whose positive mood decreased more during the writing sessions. Also, those whose negative mood increased more on average during the writing sessions reported less emotional distress two weeks later. The negative mood result once again highlights the importance of being willing to experience the negative affect associated with the stressor in order to derive longer-term benefits.

The greater benefits derived by those who maintained higher positive affect during essay-writing are consistent with findings from other expressive writing studies that participants who write more positive emotion words in their narratives exhibit greater health improvements later on (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). These findings suggest that being able to maintain some level of positive mood, even when telling stories about highly stressful events, may be one key aspect of why emotional storytelling is beneficial. Theories of positive affect (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001) and supporting empirical studies show that positive affect can undo and promote physiological recovery from negative affect. Participants who watched an emotionally positive film immediately after a stressful film evidenced faster

recovery of blood pressure to pre-stress levels than those not given the positive film. Furthermore, positive affect is associated with a broadening of thought processes, as opposed to negative emotion, in which attention narrows to the source of threat or distress. People are generally able to come up with more creative solutions to a problem while in a positive mood.

Emotionally storytelling may be “optimally distanced” and healing when the participant experiences some positive mood along with the negative. What might be the source of this positive mood? Perhaps the storyteller is aware of the context of current safety; of having survived this event and being in a different place now both physically and psychologically. Alternatively, the person might remember moments of triumph or of intimacy, even in the midst of adversity. Maintaining positive affect might allow a person to view the event from a broader perspective, perhaps as an impetus to adopt certain values, live a certain type of life, or actively try to bring about social change. The terror or sorrow of the event may be counterbalanced by an awareness of other positive aspects of one’s current life. For example, an individual might temper the painful memory of a past trauma with a vision of a loving and supportive family member or friend or with the memory of the joy or pride he feels when looking at his child. She may simultaneously feel pain at remembering and joy or pride at surviving and building a better life for herself and her offspring. These may be the reasons then, why optimistic individuals appear to benefit more from unstructured emotional storytelling than pessimists. Positive affect and broadened thinking may make it easier to see the potential for growth inherent in even severe traumas. In the next section, I examine why emotional storytelling may affect broader psychosocial outcomes, including quality of life.

#### WHY DOES QUALITY OF LIFE IMPROVE FOLLOWING ENGAGED EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING?

In at least two studies discussed previously, the health benefits evidenced by the expressive writing group or subgroup were not specific to physical functioning, but rather, encompassed more global aspects of functioning, as assessed by quality of life inventories. Similarly, other studies have found benefits of writing on a broad range of outcomes, ranging from improved grades and reemployment to reduced homesickness and absenteeism. In a study of the efficacy of expressive writing in helping people adjust to relationship breakups that I conducted with Stephen Lepore (Lepore & Greenberg, 2002), participants in the expressive writing group were more likely to reunite with their ex-partner than controls; this finding involved relatively few subjects. These broader effects of essay writing cannot be explained by purely physiological processes and suggest that engaged emotional storytelling may enhance interpersonal and work functioning.

One explanation for these findings is that unresolved traumas and associated cognitive ruminations may divert attentional resources from current life tasks. If writing facilitates greater resolution and acceptance of these past or ongoing stressors, the individual is free to live more in the moment,

with greater participation in and enjoyment of current activities and relationships and, potentially, greater academic or job success. For example, having a safe forum to express one's anger at one's former employer after losing a job may prevent ruminations and emotions associated with the loss from interfering with the person's ability to focus on the job search process. When the job applicant spends time and emotional energy ruminating about the previous job or employer, new opportunities may be missed, leads not followed up upon, or negative emotion may leak out and interfere with performance during the job interview process.

In a quasi-controlled study (Spera, Buhrfiend, & Pennebaker, 1994), expressive writing led to faster reemployment, relative to a trivial writing control, among unemployed engineers. Ironically, this is a group that stereotypically is not known for emotional expression. In a study that I conducted with Lynn Joseph (Joseph & Greenberg, 2001), we replicated the findings of Spera and colleagues in a controlled study, using mental imagery of an imaginary encounter with one's former employer as the forum for expression. Other modules of the imagery intervention focused on envisioning positive future selves, to counterbalance negative images of self that may result from being unemployed in a society that values productivity, and on having the person mentally affirm positive aspects of self. Compared with a nonemotional, imagery control group, the expressive mental imagery group participants were significantly more likely to be reemployed at the two-month and four-month follow-ups and also perceived greater control over the job loss and reemployment process.

In the Joseph and Greenberg (2001) study, several different processes might have been responsible for the effects on reemployment. Possibly, the imaginal expression gave participants an opportunity to confront and cognitively process their feelings about job loss. In addition, reaffirming positive aspects of self might have heightened participants' confidence and resilience to deal with unemployment and job search. In a recent expressive writing study in early-stage female breast cancer patients (Creswell et al., 2007) objective raters coded the essays for content. Expressive writing group participants' essays contained an average of two statements per essay that fit the category of self-affirmation, or reflecting positively on a valued aspect of self or one's life. For example, participants described having a loving, stable marriage, having a positive view of life that helped them through the cancer, or having spiritual faith and strength. Furthermore, self-affirmation accounted for the effects of essay writing on decreased physical symptoms at follow-up. Therefore, when participants are instructed to tell their emotional stories, they may include self-affirming statements in the stories that remind them of their strengths and the things in life they are grateful for, which may enhance their resilience in the face of an adverse event, such as breast cancer or unemployment.

## EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING AND PERCEIVED CONTROL

Many studies in animals and humans have found that uncontrollable, but not controllable stress, is associated with the development and maintenance

of anxiety and learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Maier & Seligman, 1976; Mineka & Henderson, 1985; Overmier & Seligman, 1967; Seligman & Maier, 1967). In classic animal studies (e.g., Mineka & Henderson, 1985), one group of rodents is exposed to shock with the opportunity to terminate it by pressing a lever while another group of rodents is yoked to the first group, receiving the same quantity of shock, but without any control over the timing of its occurrence. Anxiety reactions are significantly higher in the uncontrollable than controllable stress group, despite equivalent duration and intensity of shock exposure. It is probable that the opportunity to exert control by turning off the shock acted as a safety signal that no further shock would be immediately forthcoming, allowing the body's parasympathetic nervous system to act as a brake, turning off the body's "fight/flight" response which prepares for shock, and decreasing blood pressure and heart rate. In the absence of such a signal, the body has to be in a constant state of physiological alert, resulting in chronically high blood pressure and heart rate and, potentially, increasing vulnerability to cardiovascular disease.

If telling one's emotional story in words or images leads people to perceive more control over the stressor or one's reactions to it, as occurred in my study with Lynn Joseph (Greenberg & Joseph, 2001), we might expect such storytelling to lead to reductions in blood pressure and heart rate and a more variable heart rate, as the person begins to discriminate more completely the difference between the stressor memory and the current safe context. This was the focus of a study I conducted with Kimberley Beckwith McGuire and Richard Gevirtz (Beckwith McGuire, Greenberg, & Gevirtz, 2005), designed to examine the physiological effects of expressive writing, relative to a nonemotional writing control group, in a sample of individuals diagnosed with mild hypertension or high blood pressure. We chose mild hypertensives because we wanted a population with some vulnerability of the cardiac system; in the case of severe hypertensives, greater use of medications restricts the reactivity of blood pressure to brief interventions, such as expressive writing. In addition to the expected beneficial effects of expressive writing on the physiological measures, we also expected the subgroup of participants with greater chronic emotional suppression, in other words, those with higher Anger-In, to benefit more from expressive writing. Participants wrote about their assigned topics for twenty minutes on each of three consecutive days. We assessed blood pressure, heart rate, and the variability of heart rate before writing and one and four months after writing. As predicted, both systolic and diastolic blood pressure decreased significantly from baseline to one-month follow-up in the expressive writing group. Furthermore, results on one of the measures showed greater increases in heart rate variability from baseline to one month in the expressive writing group, compared with controls, suggesting the expressive writing may have improved some aspects of cardiac recovery from stress.

As noted previously, expressive writing led to short-term improvements on cardiac parameters in this population. Furthermore, as we expected, participants in the expressive writing group who reported higher Anger-In, or a pervasive tendency to inhibit angry feelings, actually showed longer-term

decreases in diastolic blood pressure at four months, relative to controls. Therefore, whereas expressive writing had short-term benefits for the writing group as a whole, those who typically held back their angry feelings derived long-term health benefits as well. This suggests that providing a safe context for emotional storytelling may be most helpful to those who deliberately hold back from expressing stress-related feelings in their daily lives, either because they are frightened of being overwhelmed by these feelings, or because they are concerned about the negative reactions of others or harm to others that may result from their disclosures. For example, it may be easier to bottle up one's hurt feelings than disclose them to a critical parent or spouse who might respond by saying even more hurtful things or who might cry and get extremely distressed. If this is the case, then expressive writing should be particularly beneficial for individuals who are subject to chronic stress together with social constraints on expression; these issues are examined in work described subsequently.

#### EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING IN POPULATIONS EXPOSED TO CHRONIC STRESS WITH CONSTRAINTS ON EXPRESSION

Two studies conducted in my laboratory have examined the effects of expressive writing in gay men (Swanbon, Boyce, & Greenberg, 2008) and spousal caretakers of cancer patients (Dickinson, 2005). Both populations are exposed to chronic stress. Gay men are exposed to chronic stress because of growing up in a predominantly heterosexual society in which revealing that one is gay may lead to rejection by family and friends, hostility from strangers, and, possibly, antigay violence or ridicule. Spousal caretakers of cancer patients may experience exhaustion, resentment, depression, or fear of losing the person to cancer, yet they often cannot express these feelings to the patient because they do not want to cause the person stress that might interfere with medical recovery. Therefore, these two populations might be especially likely to inhibit and avoid thoughts and feelings relating to the respective sources of stress. Such chronic avoidance should increase cumulative stress, taxing the body's resources and, potentially, impairing immunity to illness. In both studies, we assigned participants at random to expressive writing or nonemotional writing groups and measured health and psychological functioning across subsequent months in the two groups. In both studies, as predicted, significant health benefits of emotional writing were found.

In the first study (Swanbon et al., 2008), gay men who wrote expressively about being gay in the current cultural climate reported fewer physical symptoms at one-month follow-up than controls who wrote nonemotionally. Furthermore, the expressive writing group also reported significant decreases in intrusive thoughts and avoidance of feelings related to being gay across the same time period, and the decrease in avoidance accounted for the effect of the writing intervention on symptoms. The participants in this study wrote poignant stories about being rejected by family members after revealing that they were gay, being bullied or ridiculed by peers and teachers at school, feeling confused and frightened when they

first became aware of attraction towards the opposite sex, engaging in anonymous sex or substance abuse in an attempt to shut out painful feelings related to rejection by others; or experiencing feelings of low self-esteem and worthlessness as a result of being gay. Telling these difficult and painful emotional stories about the stress of being gay in a society that is prejudiced against gay people made these men less likely to ruminate about or deliberately suppress and avoid their thoughts and feelings about being gay in subsequent weeks, potentially alleviating a source of chronic mental stress and reducing associated psychosomatic symptoms. Interestingly, participants in the expressive writing group who reported the most subjective stress associated with being gay also had significantly reduced healthcare utilization at follow-up, suggesting that those with the most unresolved feelings derived the most health benefits from confronting and formulating their emotional stories.

In the caretaker study (Dickinson, 2005), we chose participants who met cutoffs on a measure of caregiver burden and found significant decreases in healthcare utilization in the three months following writing for the expressive writing group, relative to controls. Measures of fatigue, depression, and intrusive thoughts decreased significantly over time for both groups. Perhaps merely participating in a caregiver study and filling out questionnaires about one's thoughts and feelings regarding caregiving led participants in both groups to reflect more about these issues, and perhaps, to communicate them more to others. Consistent with this explanation, participants in both groups reported that they perceived fewer social constraints or barriers to expression from baseline to one month following the intervention. If being in the study, regardless of which group they were in, led participants to talk to their spouses and family members more about their feelings, they may have been surprised by the reactions of others being more validating and accepting than they expected.

Although both groups benefited psychologically from being in a "caregiver stress" study, only the expressive writing group reduced their healthcare utilization in subsequent months. Therefore, expressive writing or putting the emotional story of caregiving into words may have led to greater acceptance and resolution or an altered perspective on the experience. For example, one participant stated:

I don't think I have ever spoken to anyone about my resentment, but it seemed so easy to write about it. It was when I was reading what I wrote that I became aware of my resentment towards the cancer and all of the changes in my role as a wife, and not at my husband. We joke about it now. He has realized the most change in me, I do not yell at him so much anymore. (Dickinson, 2005, p. 139)

For this participant, the writing provided a cognitive change and redirection of anger from the spouse to the cancer. Implicit in this description is the fact that the participant was more able to share her feelings directly with the spouse, rather than indirectly, by yelling at him, which, presumably led to a better understanding and increased intimacy between them.

In a similar vein, it is interesting that 57% of the expressive writing group stated spontaneously at follow-up, when given a list of support group resources, that they planned to attend such a group, whereas only 15% of controls stated such an intention. Therefore, as I suggested previously, writing one's emotional story may act as a precursor to social sharing and support-seeking for those most in need of support and validation, thereby producing far greater benefit than could occur in just the 80 to 90 minutes of actual writing. To return to my own story, conducting this type of research eventually led me to tell my own emotional story of immigration, loss of family and homeland, and helplessness in the face of overwhelming social forces to friends and family members, thus deepening my relationships with them and creating social ties that could support me for years to come.

To summarize the preceding discussion, there are many reasons why telling one's emotional story can be beneficial in recovery from stress, including cognitive resolution and freedom to focus attention on current life tasks, finding meaning and empowerment from the writing process and defining new, more positive directions for one's life, rebuilding feelings of self-worth and perceived control over stress, using positive affect and awareness of present safety and distance from the event to temper one's feelings of distress, undoing the negative physiological effects of cumulative emotional and behavioral inhibition, and promoting social sharing and deepening social ties. To these, I would like to add one more process, which I term "emotional self-efficacy," or the ability to tolerate and face strong emotions without becoming overwhelmed or panicking. In the following section, I discuss how emotional storytelling can bring about emotional self-efficacy.

### EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING AND SELF-EFFICACY FOR HANDLING EMOTIONS

Writers from various theoretical orientations within psychology have argued that one of the effects of severe trauma is an increase in the intensity of one's emotional reactions as well as the number of situations that evoke them. The trauma survivor seems to have lost some ability to discriminate current situations from aspects of the trauma; sensory or emotional memories of aspects of the trauma are cued too easily by situations with only the slightest similarity to the original event (Pitman & Orr, 1990). To the outside observer, the person's emotional reactions seem inappropriate or too intense for the apparently provoking situations. For example, a soldier returning from Iraq who lost his best buddy in a bomb blast might feel overwhelmed by terror when he hears an unexpected loud noise or may experience intense anxiety when he embraces his children. Although the soldier may not be aware of the source of his distress, it could be that the loud noise triggers memories of the bomb blast whereas the warm, affectionate feelings experienced while hugging his children trigger reminders of his affection for his murdered friend, with associated anger and sadness.

As a result of experiencing frequent, intense bursts of emotion at unpredictable times, when circumstances or thoughts consciously or unconsciously

cue memory structures related to the trauma, the trauma survivor often becomes frightened of and tries to avoid any type of emotional experience, or experiences his emotions in an “all or none” manner. Krystal (1988) argued that severe childhood trauma and extreme adult trauma result in “a fear of one’s emotions and an impairment of affect tolerance” (p. 147).

For the traumatized soldier, deliberately putting into words the story of his traumatic experiences and associated thoughts and feelings as they unfolded over time in Iraq, although extremely painful and difficult, may serve to increase his insight into their origins, thereby increasing the predictability and controllability of his current emotional reactions to people and events. Also, deliberately confronting these memories and feelings in a supportive environment for a prescribed period of time may eventually lessen the intensity of these reactions as the individual realizes he can feel strong emotions and survive and that there is an end to them. The individual also learns to discriminate between the present, relatively safe circumstances and the threatening circumstances in which the trauma occurred.

As a result of such repeated, deliberate, controlled confrontations, the trauma survivor should begin to perceive more control over and have more understanding and acceptance of his emotional reactions, thereby freeing him to react more spontaneously and openly to people and events in his current life, potentially leading to reduced chronic stress and anxiety, greater intimacy with others, and improved quality of life. In support of this argument, a statistical reanalysis of several expressive writing studies (Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997) found that participants who had the greatest increases across subsequent sessions in the proportion of words describing causes of events or insights in their written stress narratives evidenced the greatest longer-term physical health benefits. Other studies have found that physiological and emotional reactions become less intense from the first to the last session of emotional essay writing, a phenomenon known as habituation, or lessening of the stress response with repeated exposure (see Greenberg & Lepore, 2004, and Lepore, Greenberg, Bruno, & Smyth, 2002, for a more detailed discussion).

## EMOTIONAL STORYTELLING AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Emotional storytelling, then, represents a particular application of positive psychology, one that emphasizes confronting one’s memories of and reactions to stressful and traumatic events to increase perceptions of control over these reactions and to uncover the potential for psychological growth inherent in these events. Growth does not mean an end to distress or that the person is glad these stressful or traumatic events happened. Rather, it is a process that involves deriving positive meaning from a stressful event, or using the event as an impetus for reconstructing one’s life in a positive way. Positive meanings are individually and voluntarily constructed; they cannot be imposed on people. Regardless of their specific form, positive meanings can have longstanding protective effects on health and quality of life. This phenomenon is illustrated by two studies examining written narratives of individuals affected by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

In the first study, conducted by Julieann Bower and her colleagues at the University of California Los Angeles (Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 1998), objective raters read narratives of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)-related bereavement and coded whether there was any mention of looking for meaning or finding meaning in these events. Merely looking for meaning did not lead to any health benefits; however, those who found meaning in these sad events, regardless of what the specific personal meaning was, had improved immune functioning and lower AIDS-related mortality, compared with those who did not find meaning.

In the second study, which was Wendi Vierra's dissertation, my students and I (Vierra, Dickinson, & Greenberg, 2001) examined the potential protective effects of positive belief appraisals in the narratives of HIV-positive gay men who wrote about their experiences with the disease over two sessions. We broke each narrative down into specific idea units and coded the proportion of idea units that conveyed positive beliefs or negative beliefs. Whereas negative beliefs were unrelated to psychological adjustment, participants whose essays contained a greater proportion of positive belief appraisals about HIV had fewer depressive symptoms several months later. Positive belief appraisals conveyed a variety of perceived benefits and personal meanings related to having HIV, including perceptions of personal strength or spiritual growth, feelings of love and closeness to other people, having the opportunity to be of service to the community and teach others about HIV, the opportunity to live a more authentic, value-driven life, being motivated to turn away from addictions, and so on.

In summary, it is clear that telling one's emotional story involves not only a recounting of past events, but is a dynamic reconstruction that carries the potential to deepen human relationships, transform the meaning of the events in positive ways, and highlight new paths and directions for living a more purposeful life and preventing trauma recurrence for oneself and future generations. Emotional storytelling, therefore, represents a powerful tool for positive psychology. Although we know much about the processes involved, there is still much to learn so that we may most effectively harness the power of narrative to help people survive and grow from stressful experiences.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

#### Telling Your Emotional Story of a Stressful Event

In this chapter we have discussed the effects and benefits of emotional storytelling after stress. This technique can be used to deal with many different kinds of stresses, including childhood experiences, chronic or life-threatening illnesses, personal disappointments, relationship problems, bereavement, and so on. We encourage you to write your own emotional stories so that you can better understand how these events have affected your life and, perhaps, find some potential for meaning and personal growth in these experiences.

***Creating a Safe Context for Writing Your Story:*** First, designate a specific place and time for writing. The writing area should be quiet and comfortable and free of interruption or disturbance. Before you begin writing, you may want to stretch, take deep breaths, or sit quietly and observe what comes into your mind. During writing, you should not interrupt the process for any reason. Turn off all cell phones and put telephone ringers on quiet. Tell other people that you are not to be disturbed. Make a plan for where you are going to store your journal to ensure privacy. Finally, allow yourself enough time after writing to transition back to the demands of daily life, as you may feel temporarily upset, tearful, or withdrawn and contemplative. Allow yourself a set time period to write, typically 20 to 40 minutes, and stop when the time is up. You may want to write once a day or once every few days. Try to write at the same time and place each day. If you like, read the previous day's journal and reflect on it before you begin to write. Be aware of your feelings and any new insights that come up for you as you read your own words.

***Writing Your Emotional Story of a Stressful Event:*** The following instructions are similar to those used in expressive writing studies: For the next 20 to 40 minutes, you are going to write about a stressful or upsetting event from your past or present. Before you begin, try to picture the event in your mind's eye, the people that are there, the sights, sounds, and smells. Be aware of what you are feeling in your body and what thoughts come into your head. Now, begin writing about this event as it unfolded over time. Try to experience your deepest thoughts and feelings about the event and integrate them into your story. You may also want to think about what your life was like before this event, how you felt at the time of the event, and how you were affected afterwards, or may still be affected by it today. Try to allow into your story any spontaneous thoughts and feelings that occur for you, without judging them. Do not worry about style, spelling, or grammar. Rather, write spontaneously and openly about your own experiences.

***Adding New Meanings to Your Emotional Story:*** For some people, the previous exercise is sufficient in allowing you to understand, experience, and respect your own feelings and reactions in the context of this event. Other people may want to try to transform their emotional stories by deliberately adding more positive meanings to them or may want to incorporate new insights into writing. If this is the case you can try the following exercise:

In the course of writing your story and allowing yourself to experience fully your thoughts and feelings about the event, you may come to see the event in a different way or from a new perspective. If this is the case, try to incorporate this new perspective into your story. You may discover new ways of thinking about the event, new values and goals you can commit to, or actions you want to take so as to make it easier for you to cope with or accept this event. Is there anything positive or meaningful that has come out of or could come out of this difficult experience? Could you use your own experience to help or teach other people, learn to take better care of yourself, or protect yourself and those close to you from future harm? For the next 20 to 30 minutes, you will be writing a new story or a new version of the old one; one that respects your strengths and ability to survive or cope or defines a new, more positive perspective or direction for you.

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# Positive Psychology

# Positive Psychology

*Exploring the Best in People*

Volume 4

Pursuing Human Flourishing

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SHANE J. LOPEZ

Foreword by

SONJA LYUBOMIRSKY

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# Who Flourishes? The Criteria of Complete Mental Health

Virginia Miller Ambler

They were a peculiar lot—the hospitable Coast Guard officer, the college student in the middle of her undergraduate career, the brilliant young physicist working on his second master’s degree, the aspiring musician living in an apartment near his parents, the Catholic nun, and my mom. For two years in the early 1990s this unconventional group of six met with a medical researcher in Massachusetts who listened as they reflected on what it was like to live with bipolar disorder. Indeed, each of the six had been diagnosed with the serious psychiatric condition characterized by dramatic disturbances in mood, most commonly experienced as alternating episodes of mania and depression. Many of them had entertained suicidal thoughts. Most had been hospitalized at one time or another. All of them were undergoing treatment for their mental illness.

Although the group members never did see each other again after the research project was complete, the experience was a profound one for my mother who came to appreciate that her bipolar life was qualitatively different from the others’ lives. While her five companions in the group were only in their 20s, Mom’s illness had not manifested itself until she was 40 years old. “You are so lucky,” the others told her with a hint of longing. “You’ve been able to establish a life. You have a degree from Berkeley, a wonderful marriage, and you’ve raised three grown daughters with whom you are very close.” They recognized and reflected back to my mother the many ways in which her experiences exemplified a “life well-lived” (Keyes & Haidt, 2003, p. 6). In light of what Ryff and Singer (2003) have called “challenged thriving,” her positive functioning was most remarkable because it was evident in the context of significant life challenge and adversity (p. 15).

Now in her 60s, my mother's life remains rich—she is active in her church, volunteers as she is able, travels to spend time with her children and grandchildren, and enjoys regular dates with her husband of 43 years. Even as she manages her chronic illness, she expresses profound gratitude for the full life she is living. While none of us can know when or if another manic episode will come, her story reinforces the underlying reason for my own interest in positive psychology's approach to mental health—we need to think about illness and health in ways that go beyond the presence or absence of a clinical diagnosis (Peterson, 2006).

This chapter will describe first how the study of mental health proceeds from and reflects the broader themes of positive psychology. Then, following a discussion of Corey L.M. Keyes's (2002, 2005, 2007) criteria for measuring mental health, I will share the results of my doctoral research, which applied the concept of “flourishing as mental health” to the educational experiences of traditionally aged undergraduate college students. Finally, since the “philosophical underpinnings of positive psychology demand an experiential component to solidify learning” (Peterson, 2006, p. 21), the personal mini-experiments at the end of this chapter will encourage you to explore dimensions of your own emotional, psychological, and social well-being, as well as the quality of your relationships—relationships that may be critically important to your mental health.

## MENTAL HEALTH AS A FOCUS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Martin Seligman (1998a) argued that the building of human strength has been psychology's forgotten mission. He and like-minded colleagues agreed that “since the end of World War II, psychology has moved too far from its original roots, which were to make the lives of all people more fulfilling and productive, and too much toward the important, but not all important, area of curing mental illness” (§3). The field of positive psychology attempts to extend the spectrum of inquiry, arguing that the study of mental *health* is distinct from and complementary to the well-established interest in mental illness (Keyes & Lopez, 2002).

Unfortunately, the study of “mental health” has often translated to the study of “mental illness.” Consider, for example, the stated mission of the National Institute of Mental Health (2004): “The mission of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is to understand mind, brain and behavior, and thereby reduce the burden of mental illness through research” (§1). Happily, in the several decades since NIMH was first established, much has indeed been learned about mental illness—“a persistent and substantial deviation from normal functioning that impairs an individual's ability to execute their [sic] social roles ... and generates suffering” (Spitzer & Wilson, 1975 as cited in Keyes, 2003). It is disappointing that far less is known about positive emotions, states, and traits. Peterson and Park (2003) highlighted the problem with psychology's having focused so disproportionately on mental illness:

We have studied depression by using a standardized depression inventory in which the best one can do is score zero, indicating the absence of depressive symptoms. However, not all zero scores are equal. There is a world of difference between people who are not suicidal, not lethargic, and not self-deprecating versus those who bound out of bed in the morning with shiny faces and twinkling eyes. (p. 146)

The prevailing assumption reflected in research and in national practice seems to have been that mental health is appropriately defined by the absence of mental illness. Yet, if the positive were just the absence of the negative, positive psychology would be irrelevant, requiring only “a psychology of relieving negative states” (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003, p. 159). A more comprehensive definition is that of the World Health Organization (2004), which considers mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (p. 12). This definition affirms a belief that positive psychologists embrace—that mental health is not just the absence of mental illness, but the presence of something positive (Jahoda, 1958; Keyes, 2002, 2007).

### Keyes’ Definition of Mental Health as Flourishing

In an effort to empirically assess the nature and incidence of mental *health* as opposed to mental illness, Keyes (2002) introduced his concept of “flourishing” in what has been called “the first balanced framework for understanding and promoting mental health” (C. R. Snyder, 2003, p. 702). Not unlike mental illness, mental health according to Keyes’ model is defined as “an emergent condition based on the concept of a syndrome” (Keyes, 2002, p. 208). In other words, a state of *health* is indicated when a set of symptoms at a specific level are exhibited for a period of time that coincides with distinctive cognitive and social functioning. Those symptoms Keyes (2002) considered in determining mental health are symptoms of an individual’s *subjective well-being*—including emotional well-being (positive feelings) and *functional well-being* (both psychological and social).

### Subjective Well-Being as Symptoms of Mental Health

According to Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002), subjective well-being emerged in the late 1950s as a relevant index for measuring people’s quality of life through individuals’ own perceptions of their lives. Broadly defined, subjective well-being consists of “an individual’s cognitive evaluation of life, the presence of positive or pleasant emotions, and the absence of negative or unpleasant emotions” (Emmons, 2003, p. 109). One strength of this definition is the assumption that people have diverse values, goals, and strengths (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998). Thus, by allowing people to define well-being for themselves, such subjective measures accurately reflect whether a person’s life is satisfying based on his or her own values, goals,

and life circumstances. Conceptually and empirically, subjective well-being includes an assessment of one's own affective states (e.g., happiness, satisfaction), one's psychological functioning (e.g., personal growth, sense of purpose, autonomy), and one's social functioning (e.g., social acceptance, sense of community, belonging; Keyes, 2002; Keyes, Hysom, & Lupo, 2000; Keyes & Waterman, 2003).

Subjective well-being, as Keyes (2002, 2003, 2005) explained is the critical psychological construct for understanding mental health. *Emotional well-being* is defined as a cluster of symptoms reflecting the presence or absence of positive feelings about one's life. Such symptoms are ascertained from individuals' responses to structured scales measuring the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. However, Ryff (1989) has argued that well-being is more than just happiness with life. Therefore, subjective well-being also includes measures of positive functioning—both psychological and social. According to Keyes (2003), *psychological well-being* represents more private and personal criteria for evaluation—criteria that have been measured reliably and with validity by a six dimensional scale that includes: “self acceptance, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and autonomy” (p. 300). Keyes further asserted (1998), that positive functioning in life must include *social well-being* as well, and that individuals are mentally healthy when they view social life as meaningful and understandable, when they see society as possessing potential for growth, when they feel they belong in their communities, are able to accept all parts of society, and when they see their lives as contributing to society.

### The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing

The assertion that healthiness is ‘more than the absence of illness’ may not be novel to many who study physiological and psychological health (Jahoda, 1958). At the same time, there has been little significant progress over the last 50 years reflecting this view in either the scientific or practical realms (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Having recognized empirically that mental health and mental illness are not opposite dimensions of a single construct, Keyes' (2002) introduced the mental health continuum. His model defines mental health as a syndrome of symptoms of positive feelings and positive functioning in life. According to Keyes (2002):

The mental health continuum consists of complete and incomplete mental health. Adults with complete mental health are *flourishing* in life with high levels of well-being. To be flourishing, then is to be filled with positive emotions and to be functioning well psychologically and socially. Adults with incomplete mental health are *languishing* in life with low well-being. Thus, languishing may be conceived of as emptiness and stagnation, constituting a life of quiet despair (p. 210).

The diagnostic scheme for Keyes' (2002) understanding of mental health actually parallels the scheme used by the American Psychiatric

Association (2000) to diagnose major depression—individuals are diagnosed with the disorder when they exhibit just over half of the total symptoms measured. Thus, in terms of the mental health continuum, to be *languishing* in life, individuals must exhibit a low level on measures of emotional and functional well-being. Such individuals have incomplete mental health, yet they may or may not ever experience clinical depression. Similarly, individuals who are *flourishing* in life must exhibit high levels of well-being as measured by emotional and functional well-being scales. These individuals are “mentally healthy because they ... fit the diagnostic criteria for the presence of mental health” (Keyes, 2003, p. 302). Adults who are *moderately mentally healthy* are neither languishing nor flourishing.

### The “Complete Health” Approach to Mental Health

In 2002, Keyes applied the mental health continuum model to data from the 1995 Midlife in the United States study of 3,032 adults between the ages of 25 and 74. Findings from that study revealed that most adults studied (89.5%) had not experienced a depressive episode in the previous 12 months, yet only 17.2% of those nondepressed cases fit the criteria for flourishing in life. More than half the sample (58.7%) had moderate mental health, and nearly 20% of adults fit the criteria for languishing in life (Keyes, 2003). Results of this study clearly illustrated that although many individuals remain free of mental illness each year, and indeed over their lifetimes, the absence of mental illness infrequently reflected genuine mental health, or flourishing.

It is important, therefore, to assess not only the presence of mental illness but also the level of an individual’s mental health as well. In fact, there are grave reasons, Keyes (2002, 2003) noted, to be as concerned about pure languishing in life (the absence of both mental health and mental illness) as about diagnosed depression. Languishing individuals experienced substantial functional impairment at levels comparable to people experiencing pure episodes of major depression. Moreover, languishing was also found to be as *prevalent* as pure episodes of major depression. In contrast, functioning markedly improved among moderately mentally healthy adults and flourishing adults. Adults who were diagnosed as completely mentally healthy—that is, free from mental illness *and* flourishing—functioned superior to all others both in terms of physical activities (e.g. work attendance, daily life activities), and in a variety of psychological/social areas (e.g. having personal goals, feeling close to friends and family).

Mental health must be understood as a complete state that takes into account assessments of both mental health and mental illness (Keyes, 2007). Table 1.1 highlights the diagnostic categories of the Complete Mental Health Model.

Within the framework of these diagnostic categories, empirical evidence affirms that the absence of mental illness does not imply the presence of mental health, and the presence of mental illness does not imply the absence of mental health (Keyes, 2007)—just as my mother’s diagnosis of

**Table 1.1**  
**Diagnostic Categories of the Complete Mental Health Model**

Mental illness diagnosis (last 12 months)	Mental health diagnosis		
	Languishing	Moderately mentally healthy	Flourishing
No	Languishing	Moderate mental health	Flourishing: Complete mental health
Yes	Mental illness and languishing	Mental illness and moderate mental health	Mental illness and flourishing

*Source:* Based on the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

bipolar disorder does not preclude her living a life of emotional and functional well-being. As scholars and practitioners continue to examine the importance of understanding mental health, Keyes (2003) argued that the promotion of flourishing must become the objective, not merely the treatment and prevention of mental illness. "In sum, it is time to truly pursue the study and promotion of mental health, and this can be achieved with a more positive psychology" (p. 309).

#### WHO FLOURISHES IN COLLEGE? APPLYING THE COMPLETE MENTAL HEALTH MODEL TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Psychological illness among college students is on the rise and represents a significant concern for today's college and university campuses. Certainly the popular press reflects a profound concern about issues of depression, suicide, alcoholism, eating disorders, and other serious psychological diagnoses on college campuses (Crouse, 2003; Ellen, 2002; Franey, 2002; Hallett, 2003; Kelly, 2001; Knight, Wechsler, Kuo, Seibring, Weitzman, & Schuckit, 2002; Lamas, 2004; Lite, 2003; Marano, 2002; O'Connor, 2001; K. S. Peterson, 2002; Rimer, 2004; Schwartz, 2003; Shy, 2001), with the April 16, 2007, shooting rampage of a mentally ill student at Virginia Tech being the most horrific of recent examples (Shapira & Jackman, 2007). Empirically, the results of a 13-year longitudinal study affirm that students today are presenting themselves to college counseling centers more frequently and with a greater complexity of problems than ever before (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003). As a student affairs administrator, I am aware that my colleagues across the country have identified student mental health issues as being among the most critical challenges facing the contemporary college campus (Kadison & DiGerónimo, 2004; M. B. Snyder, 2004), and higher education is surely feeling the pressure—for "increasingly, colleges are [seen as] the first best hope for rescuing the minds of America's future" (Marano, 2002, ¶16).

While the promotion of students' mental health and positive personal growth have long been significant priorities for those of us who work in student affairs, practitioners and scholars alike have focused attention primarily on the incidence and nature of psychopathology among students, the strategies for managing the demand for counseling, treatment options for the mentally ill, and systematic approaches to preventing the most tragic of consequences (e.g., suicide, self-abuse, addiction). Current research on student mental health actually has done little to shed light on those students who are mentally *healthy*, those who exhibit high levels of well-being and functioning and who are flourishing on our campuses.

### Positive Psychology and Research on College Students

The noted gap in our understanding of mental *health* on campus reflects the more pervasive void in the broader field of psychology that the positive psychology movement strives to fill. In an effort to promote better mental health on campus, is it enough to focus our research and attention primarily on the trends and treatment of those who are psychologically ill or those who struggle with intense personal or adjustment issues? Positive psychologists argue that there is much to be learned about mental health by studying those who exhibit positive, healthy, adaptive features of human functioning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Diener, 2003; Harvey & Pauwels, 2003; Keyes, 2002, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Keyes & Lopez, 2002; King, 2003; Lyubomirsky & Abbe, 2003; C. Peterson & Park, 2003; Ryff, 2003; Seligman, 1998a, 1998b, Seligman & Pawelski, 2003; C. R. Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Rather than allowing student affairs research to be driven solely by what some have described as a therapeutic culture gone too far (Rimer, 2004; Seligman, 1998a, 1998b), positive psychologists would urge higher education scholars to complement the existing studies on psychopathology with empirical research investigating those factors that distinguish individual students and student communities who thrive, flourish, and otherwise function in an optimal way from those with more limited functioning (Lyubomirsky & Abbe, 2003). Using positive psychology as a disciplinary foundation, my doctoral research was an attempt to do just that.

#### ANNA'S STORY: PLACING MY RESEARCH IN A REAL LIFE CONTEXT

As an undergraduate, Anna was a phenomenal leader on our campus—working on William and Mary's national-award-winning Bone Marrow Drive for four years and chairing it during her senior year, serving on the Undergraduate Honor Council and the Judicial Appeals Committee, helping to organize and raise the funds to bring the art exhibit, The Century Project, to campus this year and twice serving as the student chair of Family Weekend. She was a strong student who worked tirelessly to write a senior honors thesis in English. Anna was also a phenomenal friend—to her peers, and also to me.

What most people didn't know about Anna is that in her junior year, after returning from a summer doing volunteer work in Africa, she began to lose

weight and often felt weak and exhausted. Visits to the doctor left more questions than answers. Her life as an undergraduate was made difficult by a disease that eluded diagnosis, even by national medical experts. Swelling and pain in her joints often made walking or even sitting difficult activities for Anna. And she endured a host of other symptoms and many treatments which, in themselves, were sometimes debilitating. After an extended leave from campus for a series of medical consults and for some rest at her home far from Williamsburg, Virginia, Anna and her family contacted our student affairs office to see what kind of arrangements could be made to help Anna move back to Williamsburg and continue, as best she could, with her life at the College. She and her parents were absolutely convinced that she should resume as active—as “engaged”—an experience as she was capable of sustaining. Why? What was it about the campus environment that led her and her family to believe it was important to her subjective sense of well-being?

### Introduction to the Study

For college faculty and staff who work daily with some of the most able and engaged women and men in the nation, the idea of learning more about “nurturing genius” (Seligman as cited in Keyes & Haidt, 2003) is surely consistent with the highest of professional aspirations. How might students’ experiences in their higher educational institutions encourage or hinder their thriving? After all, positive psychology is not only the study of positive feeling but also the study of positive institutions (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003). In advocating a new vision for psychology as a discipline, positive psychology also resonates with the core commitments and values of student affairs as a profession. As the American College Personnel Association’s *Principles of Good Practice* (1996) statement affirmed, student affairs practice is rooted in “our conviction that higher education has a duty to help students reach their full potential” (¶7). It is within this intersection of the comparable missions of positive psychology and higher education and student affairs that my dissertation research was undertaken.

### Student Development in Higher Education: Echoes of Positive Psychology

Positive psychologist Carol Ryff (2003) suggested that “it is only from particular vantage points, such as clinical or abnormal psychology, that the positive focus constitutes a novelty. For other subfields, especially life-span developmental and personality psychology, there has always been concern for healthy, optimal human functioning” (p. 157). Indeed, Ryff’s claim is supported by a review of the literature that forms the foundation of student development as a field of study for professionals in higher education (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). In the 1960s particularly, social scientists—largely from psychology and sociology—began to theorize about how students change and grow in college. Both in theory and in practice, student affairs professionals in higher education have had a sustained interest in how students develop in college and in how institutional structures, programs, and services promote students’ optimal functioning. While

formal theories on student development are relatively new in the context of American higher education, the developmental focus is not new:

From the paternalistic faculty authority figure who supervised Harvard students in 1636 to the contemporary student affairs professional who uses developmental theory to examine students' human potential, student development has existed in some configuration ... since the beginning (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 3).

### The Impact of College on Students

A host of scholars have studied how college affects student outcomes (e.g., Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005), including learning, moral reasoning, identity development, and cognitive growth. Research has shown that college does indeed have an impact—that students do grow and change during their years in higher education (Boyer, 1987; Hernandez, Hogan, Hathaway, & Lovell, 1999; Hood, 1984; Kuh et al., 1991; Moore, Lovell, McGann, & Wyrick, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Compared with theories built around psychosocial frameworks, the foundation of college impact models is the *origin* of change (as opposed to the *process* of change), such as institutional programs, policies, and specific student experiences within the higher education environment.

According to *Involvement Theory*, “students learn by becoming involved” (Astin, 1985, p. 133), and involvement itself is “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (Astin, 1984, p. 297); A highly involved student, therefore, likely devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. In contrast, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students (Astin, 1984). While Astin (1984) acknowledged that motivation is an ever-present factor in human behavior, he also emphasized that involvement theory is concerned with the behavioral aspects of the student experience. What a student actually does is more critical to defining involvement, according to the theory, than what the individual thinks or feels.

### Measuring Student Involvement

Within the last several years, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was established with a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts in an effort to assess the extent to which students are involved in empirically derived good educational practices (Kuh, 2002). Its primary activity is an annual survey of college students, the results of which document dimensions of quality in undergraduate education and assist colleges, universities, and other organizations to improve student learning. NSSE, and its instrument, *The College Student Report*, reflect the abundance of research on

college student development that shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development. For that reason, *The College Student Report* was selected to measure student involvement for this study.

The NSSE (2005) results fall into five key clusters of activity and involvement variables that research has shown to be linked to desired outcomes of college:

- **Level of Academic Challenge**—Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. The importance of academic effort and the setting of high expectations for student performance are emphasized.
- **Student Interactions with Faculty Members**—Students learn firsthand by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. Teachers are role models, mentors, and guides for life-long learning.
- **Active and Collaborative Learning**—Students are intensely involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings.
- **Enriching Educational Experiences**—Academic programs are augmented by complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom. Experiencing diversity, using technology, and participating in activities help students integrate and apply knowledge.
- **Supportive Campus Environment**—The college is committed to students' success and cultivates positive relationships among different groups on campus.

### Purpose of My Research

As the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education (Schroeder, 1996) reported:

There is now a great deal of research evidence to suggest that the more time and effort students invest in the learning process and the more intensely they engage in their own education, the greater will be their growth and achievement, their satisfaction with their educational experiences, and their persistence in college (p. 17).

Because involvement significantly predicts other positive college outcomes, my research project explored the extent to which student involvement might also predict students' mental health as defined by Keyes' (2002, 2005) mental health continuum. In other words, I wanted to know who flourishes on college campuses.

### Collecting Data

Specifically, the study examined the mental health, involvement, and achievement of traditionally aged undergraduate students (18–23) at a

mid-sized, selective, public university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States (State College). Using Keyes' (2002, 2005) mental health continuum model, the study identified students who are flourishing and distinguished them from students who are moderately mentally healthy or languishing. In addition to examining the prevalence of these three levels of mental health (i.e., flourishing, moderately mentally healthy, and languishing), it also explored the extent to which individual involvement—as defined by Astin (1984, 1985, 1993) and as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement's *College Student Report* (NSSE, 2005)—predicts mental health. Inspired by my relationship with Anna, I wanted to know more about the relationship between the way students engage in their college education and their mental health.

Data were collected from 534 undergraduate juniors (44% of the 1206 students who were invited to participate in the study), 68.4% of whom were female and 31.6% of whom were male. Based on Keyes' (2002, 2005) mental health continuum model, more than two-thirds of the respondents were classified as being moderately mentally healthy (67.2%), with the remainder being classified on the two extremes of the continuum—flourishing (15.4%) and languishing (17.4%). In addition to looking at gender differences, data analysis also took into account students' socioeconomic status and their level of academic achievement (as indicated by grade point average). Race and ethnicity was not considered due to the homogenous nature of the respondents—nearly 83% were Caucasian. Details of the data analysis, including all requisite tables and statistical measures, are laid out in great detail in Chapter 4 of my dissertation (Ambler, 2006). For the purposes of this essay, I highlight the following significant findings.

- Mental health category (languishing, moderate mental health, languishing) was *not* related to students' gender. Thus, the proportion of men and women in each of the three mental health categories did not differ significantly.
- Students' mental health category was *not* related to their socioeconomic status. Thus the proportion of those classified as high/middle and low socioeconomic status in each of the three mental health categories did not differ significantly.
- Students' mental health category was *not* related to their level of academic achievement. Thus, there were no significant differences in grade point average among those who are flourishing, moderately mentally healthy, and languishing.
- Among the most compelling results are comparisons of student involvement measures by mental health category. For all five involvement variables—Academic Challenge, Active/Collaborative Learning, Student/Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment—the average involvement scores of those who are “flourishing” were significantly higher than the average scores of the “moderately mentally healthy,” whose average scores were significantly higher than those who were “languishing.”

- For both male and female students, one of the five involvement variables—Supportive Campus Environment—was by far the most predictive of their mental health and well-being.
- A more in-depth analysis of the role of a Supportive Campus Environment revealed that having *supportive interpersonal relationships* was most predictive of mental health score for *all* students. For male students, relationships with supportive faculty were most significant, followed by relationships with peers, while supportive peer relationships were most significant for female students, followed by relationships with college administrators.

### Implications for the College Campus

Who flourishes in college? The benchmarks for education practice (NSSE, 2005) which most significantly predicted mental health in this study—Academic Challenge, Active/Collaborative Learning, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment—provide a useful framework for interpreting these results.

#### *Increasing Level of Academic Challenge*

Students who flourish (compared with those who are moderately mentally healthy or languishing) are more likely to report having worked harder than they thought they would to meet faculty expectations; they are regularly prepared for class, they are challenged beyond memorization to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and apply ideas and experiences; and they experience a campus environment that emphasizes the importance of studying and academics. For them, challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning (NSSE, 2005). This finding reflects Boyer's (1990) first dimension of the ideal campus community—purposefulness. In an educationally purposeful campus community, he asserts, “learning is pervasive” (p. 16). Moreover, the cognitive experiences reported by flourishing students in this study are those at the highest levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives, which are application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

#### *Engaging in Active/Collaborative Learning*

Students who flourish are more likely to be actively engaged in the classroom by asking questions and contributing to class discussions. They are more involved in making presentations, working on projects with classmates, and integrating service with their academics by tutoring others, or taking part in community-based projects as part of their course work. In addition, they often discuss ideas from readings or class with people outside of the course. Students who flourish work collaboratively with others and “are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different

settings” (NSSE, 2005). The advantages of such engagement are also consistent with Baxter-Magolda (1992) who found that optimal learning for students is a relational activity, including opportunities for critical thinking and peer collaboration, for connecting learning to real life, and for engaging actively in the classroom (Evans, Fornery, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

### *Enriching Educational Experiences*

Students who flourish report seeking and experiencing learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom (NSSE, 2005). They use technology to facilitate learning, and they are more likely to have taken advantage of opportunities such as internships, community service, study abroad, independent study, and co-curricular activities. Such enriching activities contribute to a student’s broader educational experience by “situating learning in the student’s own experience” (Baxter-Magolda, 1992, p. 378). The findings are also consistent with the student affairs profession’s focus on the development of the *whole* student, and the foundational belief that student learning takes place both in and outside the classroom (Astin, 1984, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Komives & Woodward, 1996; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

In addition, students who flourish are more likely to report engaging with people who are different from themselves—in terms of background, religion, politics, and so on. They experience their institutional climate as one that “encourages contact among students of different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds” (NSSE, 2005). Gurin (1999) found that students (both White and non-White) who experience the most diversity in classroom settings and in informal interactions with peers show the greatest engagement in active thinking processes and growth in intellectual and academic skills. The current study affirms that optimal mental health is another benefit significantly related to diversity in the college setting.

### *Experiencing a Supportive Campus Environment*

More than any other involvement variable, this one is most significantly related to mental health for all students in the study. Male students who are flourishing report having quality relationships with faculty members who are “available, helpful, and sympathetic” (NSSE, 2005, p 2). Also significantly related to male mental health is having relationships with peers that are “friendly, supportive, and [who promote] a sense of belonging” (NSSE, 2005, p. 2). The relationships most significant for female students in this study were those with supportive and friendly peers, as well as administrators whom they found to be helpful (NSSE, 2005). Students who flourish—male and female alike—are more likely than moderately mentally healthy or languishing students to experience the campus environment as being supportive of their success, both within and outside the classroom.

### Limitations of the Study

The focus of this study was the relationship between mental health and student involvement. Although the results indicate that students' mental health is indeed significantly related to their level of engagement in the educational process, this research cannot show causality. In other words, it is not possible to know from these results if traditionally aged students flourish as a result of their involvement, or if students who flourish are the ones who choose to be more actively involved.

My study was also limited by the nature of the participants and their institution. Results from the study do not address mental health differences by race or ethnicity, for example, because the sample itself was not sufficiently diverse. Moreover, students at State College—a selective, academically rigorous, and highly residential public institution—may exhibit different patterns of involvement or levels of mental health than would traditionally aged students attending other kinds of institutions.

### Research Conclusions

Astin (1985) argues, “The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (p. 136). Given the results of this study, it is at least possible, that an increase in student involvement might result in an enhanced sense of students' well-being, or mental *health*. Certainly higher education literature is replete with studies affirming the benefits of students' active engagement—their involvement—in educational experiences (Astin, 1984, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, et al., 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Sorcinelli, 1991; Tinto, 1993). At the same time, the concept of mental *health* as distinct and separate from mental *illness* is relatively new (Keyes, 2002, 2005, 2007; Keyes & Haidt, 2003) for which there is a limited literature base, particularly with regard to individuals aged 18-23. This study brought together in a unique way (a) foundational constructs in our understandings of undergraduates and the impact of college on students, with (b) a newly proposed model of mental health, one that has never been applied to a college population and that reflects an emerging academic discipline—positive psychology (Fish, 2005; Goldberg, 2006; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

That such significant relationships were found between students' mental health and the extent to which they are engaged in their broad educational experience is indeed noteworthy—and especially so, as these relationships exist regardless of students' gender, their socioeconomic status, and their level of academic achievement. The results of this study suggest that students who flourish may be those most likely to be involved, or perhaps that students actually flourish *because* of their involvement and engagement in the educational experience. Further research should examine more closely those factors which are related to and which could better promote optimal mental health among students on our campuses.

### ANNA—THE REST OF THE STORY

Together, Anna and her mother were invited to move into the President's Cottage, a small colonial out-building beside the President's house on the historic William and Mary campus. She continued with her classes, provided inspiring leadership for her organizations (even if committee meetings were sometimes held in the cottage while she rested). Though she decided not to complete her honors thesis, she nevertheless graduated with an impressive grade point average and received one of our most prestigious student awards at Commencement that year. Anna experienced powerful support in the midst of a challenging ordeal—making it possible for her to complete a most fulfilling undergraduate career. Although her illness remains yet a mystery, she encounters fewer debilitating episodes. In the fall of 2007 she began a Physician's Assistant program at an Ivy League institution, pursuing her dream to become a medical practitioner for underserved populations. She continues to flourish.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Four Pathways to Flourishing

In this chapter, we have discussed the criteria for complete mental health, or *flourishing*. According to Keyes (2002), one's mental health is best reflected by a combined measure of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. In addition, recent research on college students (Ambler, 2006) affirms what Peterson (2006) offers as his three-word summary of positive psychology, "other people matter" (p. 249). We encourage you to examine your own subjective sense of well-being and to explore ways of enhancing positive interpersonal relationships in your life.

***Emotional Well-Being:*** Some strategies for enhancing our ability to savor positive experiences in our lives include (a) talking about our positive experience with others; (b) taking time to congratulate ourselves and feel pride in our individual accomplishments; and (c) sharpening our perceptions to focus on specific meaningful elements of a positive experience as it is happening. (Peterson, 2006; Pleasure and Positive Experience, pp. 69–72).

***Psychological Well-Being:*** One way to give attention to your psychological well-being might be to focus on your personal goal-setting. Try your hand at exploring the following topics through some reflective writing: (a) Write about a time when you achieved a goal you had set for yourself. Describe the situation and your approach to it. What helped or hindered you on the road to achieving that goal? How did you feel when your goal was finally reached? (b) Imagine you have a close friend who is struggling in his/her attempt to reach a personal goal. Write an encouraging letter to that friend with your best advice on setting and achieving a goal. Include examples from your own experiences.

***Social Well-Being:*** One natural way to enhance social well-being might be to take on a new volunteer or service activity. On behalf of a cause or organization in your community, commit to getting involved and making a

difference. There is ample scholarly evidence (Piliavin, 2003) that “on many levels—psychologically, socially, and even physically—one indeed does ‘do well by doing good’” (p. 243).

**Other People Matter:** John Gottman suggested that the “ratio of the explicitly positive to the explicitly negative during actual interactions must exceed 5:1” (cited in Peterson, 2006, p. 270). In other words for every complaint or criticism that one partner voices, there need to be at least five compliments. Choose an important relationship in your life and focus for one week on meeting or exceeding that 5:1 ratio when it comes to your own positive to negative responses and comments.

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# Toward a Durable Happiness

Jaime L. Kurtz and Sonja Lyubomirsky

When trying to envision a happy day, or a happy life, what images come to mind? For some people, it might be sharing a meal with good friends and family members while laughing together, telling stories, and feeling loved. For others, happiness may come from accomplishing an important goal and basking in the glory of a job well done. And for others still, happiness may be the byproduct of doing good deeds, helping others, and believing that the world is a better place because of it. Although people may vary a good deal in what they think will make them happy, an overwhelming majority of U.S. residents place “finding happiness” very high on their list of major life goals (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995).

How exactly *do* you “find happiness?” This question has been posed for thousands of years, and although many self-help books have attempted to offer answers, their authors have often based their conclusions, however well meaning, on their own personal, idiosyncratic experiences. Only recently has *scientific* evidence emerged to suggest a possible path to lasting happiness that is effective for the majority of people. By scientific, we mean that researchers have conducted rigorous experiments to determine whether particular strategies for increasing happiness actually work. The present chapter reviews this evidence and provides practical suggestions that you can use to create long-term, or sustainable, changes in your level of well-being.

## IS HAPPINESS A WORTHWHILE GOAL?

Before we offer you suggestions on how to become a happier person, it is important to establish whether happiness is a desirable goal. Of course,

everyone knows that happiness feels good to the person who is experiencing it. But some may argue that happy people are prone to be lazy, shallow, or unmotivated. However, recent evidence suggests quite the opposite. Rather than being simple and complacent, happy people are energetic, creative, and productive in the workplace, cooperative, and motivated to help others. In the social realm, happy individuals have more friends, more satisfying social interactions, and a lower likelihood of divorce. And in terms of physical and mental health, happy people have stronger immune systems, cope more effectively with stress, and, most strikingly, even live longer (Fredrickson, 2001; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In sum, happiness doesn't merely "feel good." It carries a wide variety of benefits for the individual, as well as for families, workplaces, and communities.

## DEFINING HAPPINESS

When we talk about how happiness can be increased, we aren't just talking about creating the sorts of momentary bursts you may get when your favorite team wins an important game or when you find a dollar on the street. Psychologists are quite good at boosting people's moods over short periods of time. Techniques like giving people a piece of candy, playing pleasant music, or providing positive feedback all produce momentary increases in positive affect (Schwarz & Strack, 1999). The problem is that these increases don't last. As we'll explain below, people's moods respond to and fluctuate along with changes in their environments. When something wonderful happens, they report feeling happier. When something unfortunate happens, they feel sad. However, these changes are often short-lived, and people return to their baseline level of happiness fairly quickly (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). The purpose of the research described in this chapter is to create lasting, sustainable changes in people's *dispositional* level of happiness. This can be thought of as how happy a person feels, on average, over a fairly long period of time.

Most researchers define happiness as consisting of three components: frequent instances of positive affect, infrequent instances of negative affect, and a high level of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1995). Positive and negative affect are simply experiences of good feelings (e.g., excited, joyful, pleased) and bad feelings (e.g., irritable, sad, tense), respectively. Life satisfaction, by contrast, is a more global, cognitive evaluation of how content a person is with the state of his or her life. Those with a high level of life satisfaction would agree with statements such as, "The conditions of my life are excellent" (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).

It's important to add to our description of what we mean by happiness that it is thought of as a *subjective* state, meaning that self-reports are the standard way of determining how happy an individual is. Although a few researchers have assessed happiness by asking friends and family to give their impressions of how happy a particular person is (e.g., Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993), ultimately the final judge is "whoever lives inside [the] person's skin" (Myers & Diener, 1995, p. 11). Therefore, the term

“subjective well-being” (or simply “well-being”) is often used as a synonym for happiness, as it will be throughout this chapter.

## CAN HAPPINESS BE INCREASED? REASONS FOR PESSIMISM

Is it possible to actually become happier? You may be surprised to learn that, until fairly recently, there was very little scientific data to tell us whether or not people can lastingly boost their happiness. In fact, in previous years, researchers were doubtful about the possibility of becoming happier. Two reasons underlie their pessimism—first, happiness is partially determined by genetics, and, second, people tend to adapt (or get used to) most positive life experiences, and what initially brought them great pleasure gradually ceases to do so. Therefore, some say, any attempts to increase happiness would be futile, because people would simply return to their genetically determined happiness “baseline” following a pleasant experience. We describe the evidence for this perspective below.

### The Roles of Heredity and Personality

The baseline level of happiness, or set point, is higher for some people than for others. In other words, some of you are naturally, or dispositionally, happier than others. Years of research on fraternal and identical twins has led psychologists to conclude that this baseline is determined by genetics (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). In other words, if you had an identical twin, he or she would share your height, intelligence, and predisposition to hypertension, and your level of happiness as well.

The fact that happiness has a high heritability is also consistent with the finding that a person’s level of happiness is strongly related to his or her standing on several personality traits (Diener & Lucas, 1999). For example, people who are highly neurotic tend to be less happy, and extraverts are inclined to be happier than introverts. Traits such as these are relatively fixed, meaning that, throughout the life span, people generally do not change much in where they stand on extraversion, neuroticism, and so forth (McCrae & Costa, 1994). Some researchers have used these findings to argue that happiness is yet another personality trait—stable and resistant to any kind of meaningful change (Costa, McCrae, & Zonderman, 1987).

### Hedonic Adaptation

The theory of hedonic adaptation provides another source of pessimism about the possibility of lastingly increasing happiness. Simply put, this is the tendency for the emotional impact of both positive and negative events to diminish over time (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Diener, Lucas, & Napa Scollon, 2006). To illustrate, think about a time in your life when something extremely good happened to you. It may be something you had daydreamed about and strove for, such as getting accepted into the college

of your choice, winning an important race in a track meet, or successfully asking your crush out on a date. How did you feel immediately after? Most likely, you felt exuberant. You probably thought about the event constantly, replaying it in your mind, telling your friends and family all about it, and feeling certain that the joy you were experiencing would last forever.

Of course, your joy did not last forever. Although thinking about your new life as a college student, your athletic prowess, or your upcoming date may have provided a burst of pleasure, later thoughts of the event gradually failed to reproduce the initial joy you felt. This is due to the process of *hedonic adaptation*, in which events that were initially laden with emotion gradually lose their intensity (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). From the life altering to the mundane, there is a wealth of evidence that people adapt to a variety of events. For example, people adapt to the outcome of a presidential election or a sporting event, the end of a romantic relationship, failing to receive a job promotion, being insulted, winning the lottery, becoming paralyzed, losing a loved one, being diagnosed with a serious illness, and so on (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978; Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1997; Sieff, Dawes, & Loewenstein, 1999; Wortman, Silver, & Kessler, 1993).

To further illustrate, researchers Suh, Diener, and Fujita (1996) asked college students to report their level of subjective well-being and the number of positive and negative life experiences that they had experienced over the past 4 years. Although many students experienced major life events, such as the death of a family member, the beginning or end of a romantic relationship, becoming engaged or married, gaining admission to graduate school, and finding a job, there was no relationship between the number of recalled positive and negative events and students' reports of happiness, if the events had occurred more than 6 months in the past. These studies suggest that, despite the elation or heartbreak that an event may initially bring, the duration of these emotional reactions is often surprisingly short-lived. In other words, trying to become happier by changing the circumstances of your life—such as your relationship, job, health, or schooling—is not a strategy that is likely to succeed in the long-term.

### Happiness Cannot Be Consciously Pursued

Finally, when people have the overt, conscious goal of making themselves happier, it sometimes backfires. Research by Schooler, Ariely, and Loewenstein (2003) has found that instructing people to try and feel as happy as they possibly could actually led to a decrease in momentary happy mood, relative to those who were not asked to try to be happy. Constantly assessing and monitoring happiness levels was similarly counterproductive. It seems that happiness is very often the byproduct of an enjoyable experience, but perhaps it cannot be a deliberate goal in and of itself. Or, as Nathaniel Hawthorne eloquently put it, “Happiness is as a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but which if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you.”

## REASONS FOR OPTIMISM: THE SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS MODEL

Some researchers have used the findings we have just described to support the claim that the quest to improve happiness is a fruitless effort (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). Fortunately, both the fact that happiness has a genetic component and the fact that we adapt to positive life events does not mean that it is impossible to become happier. New research suggests that a person's level of happiness is not set in stone, and that he or she can raise this level by taking advantage of certain intentional activities.

As explained below, the sustainable happiness model (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005) proposes that happiness is determined by three factors: The genetically determined set point, life circumstances, and intentional activities (see Figure 2.1). The implication of this model is that a large percentage of your happiness is determined by your own conscious, effortful activities and, thus, that increases in happiness *can* be successfully achieved.

## The Set Point

The largest piece of the pie is known as the set point—quite literally, the point at which one's happiness level is set, or fixed. People tend to have a level of happiness that they gravitate back to following a significant event, and this set point is higher for some people than for others. In other words, some are born happier than others. You probably know people who always seem to be in good spirits and are habitually looking on the bright side. As the saying goes, when life gives them lemons, they make lemonade. On the other hand, you are likely also familiar with people who are generally unhappy. They see the glass as half empty, and find it hard to derive much pleasure from their daily lives. Psychologists would say that these two sets of people have different set points for well-being. Years of research from a field called “behavioral genetics” has led psychologists to conclude that this set point for happiness is determined by genetics (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). For example, identical twins are extremely similar in how

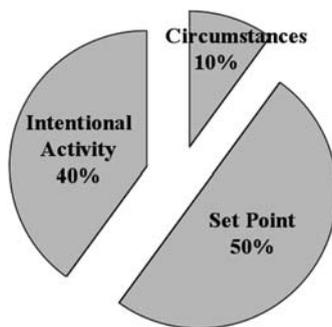


Figure 2.1. What Determines Happiness?

generally happy (or unhappy) they are, even when raised thousands of miles apart, but fraternal twins (whether raised together or apart) are no more similar to one another than regular siblings. Thus, willfully trying to raise your set point by altering your genes is currently impossible. Clearly, the key to lasting increased happiness lies elsewhere.

### Circumstances

You may be surprised to learn that life circumstances account for a mere 10% of people's happiness (Argyle, 1999; Diener et al., 1999). By circumstances, we mean factors that constitute the background of your life. For example, if you were to write a brief autobiography, it would include a great deal of information about your life circumstances. Examples include your demographics (e.g., gender, ethnicity), personal experiences (e.g., past traumas and triumphs), life status variables (e.g., marital status, education level, health, and income), your physical appearance, and the physical setting where you live.

Researchers argue that altering your life circumstances is not a promising way of increasing happiness. Although you may feel that you'd be happier if you had more money, lived in a warmer climate, or were better looking, this is generally not the case. Studies show that people adapt quickly to changes in income and marital status, to name just a few (Diener & Oishi, 2000; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003). Also, more attractive people are not happier (Diener, Wolsic, & Fujita, 1995), and—assuming basic needs are met—rich people are only slightly happier than their less wealthy counterparts (e.g., Diener, Horwitz, & Emmons, 1985). What accounts for these counterintuitive findings? Most likely, the reason that happiness is not strongly related to life circumstances is that such factors as income, beauty, and even marital status are particularly prone to adaptation and people generally don't dwell on them. Instead, these circumstantial factors tend to exist in the background of your emotional life.

This is actually good news. Imagine if the key to happiness *did* lie within the realm of your life circumstances. Because many of these circumstances are fairly constant and extremely difficult to change, successfully altering your happiness would be a very costly undertaking. Fortunately, you don't need to undergo plastic surgery, move to the beaches of California, promptly find a marital partner, or obtain a significant pay raise in order to be happier. As explained in the next section, the keys to lasting happiness are much less costly and much more accessible than you might imagine.

### Intentional Activity

Even after accounting for the effects of heredity (i.e., the set point) and for the life circumstances that do not seem to make people happy for any significant period of time, a very large portion of the pie chart—40%, in fact—still remains. This portion of the sustainable happiness model, which

constitutes people's intentional activities, is what gives researchers hope about the possibility of lastingly increasing well-being. Broadly defined, intentional activities are actions or exercises that a person chooses to engage in. More specifically, they can be thoughts (e.g., counting your blessings) or behaviors (e.g., doing a random act of kindness) that alter your perspective on yourself, your life, and the world in general. Psychologists have found that by electing to engage in certain intentional activities, people can actually make themselves lastingly happier. This is great news, because it tells you that you could be a whole lot happier, if you commit to performing activities that are likely to produce happiness. And, fortunately, a growing amount of psychological research indicates what kinds of activities work best. The following sections describe several activities that have been found to effectively produce sustainable increases in happiness.

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Cultivating a grateful mindset, which can be thought of as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life” (Emmons & Shelton, 2002, p. 460), turns out to be conducive to lasting happiness. However, in using gratitude as a strategy to increase happiness, it must involve more than reflexively saying “thank you.” To reap the benefits gratitude brings, you must focus your attention on the positive things in your life and truly savor them.

### Empirical Evidence

Several recent studies have shown that focusing attention on the positive things in life—essentially, “counting your blessings”—leads to increases in both physical health and happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). In one of the first studies on gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), one group of volunteers was asked to list five things for which they were thankful, once a week for 10 weeks in a row. Their “blessings” ranged from “my family” to “good health” to “The Rolling Stones.” Other volunteers participated in two control groups—that is, instead of focusing on gratitude every week, these individuals were asked either to think about their five daily hassles or five major events that had occurred. Relative to these two groups, those who were asked to express gratitude felt more optimistic and more satisfied with their lives. Also, they reported fewer physical symptoms (such as headaches, coughing, or nausea) and more time spent exercising.

Subsequent studies have continued to examine the effect of expressing gratitude on happiness. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) had participants list their “blessings” in gratitude journals. One group was asked to write in their journals once a week, and a second group was asked to write in them three times a week. A different group of participants was assigned to a control condition, which did not require them to do any exercise. It is interesting to note that compared with controls, participants who

expressed their gratitude did show increases in well-being over a 6-week time period, but only those who did the writing exercise only once a week. When writing three times a week, participants did not become lastingly happier, possibly because the exercise grew to be routine, frustrating, or boring.

Writing letters to express your appreciation is another way to create a grateful mind-set and thereby foster happiness. One study (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2007) found that writing gratitude letters to specific people, for 15 minutes once a week over the course of 8 weeks, produced boosts in happiness that persisted over the course of the study and were still apparent as long as 9 months after the study was over. This was true even for those individuals who did not share or deliver their letters. However, in real life, many people have the desire to actually tell the objects of their gratitude how much they are appreciated. This is also an effective strategy for increasing happiness and for fostering good relationships. In an online study, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) instructed a group of participants to think of a person to whom they were grateful but had never properly thanked. Then this group was asked not only to write a gratitude letter but also to deliver it to the recipient. As a result, relative to a control group, these participants reported increases in their happiness that persisted for a full month.

### Why Does It Work?

Why does expressing gratitude increase happiness? There are several likely reasons. First, feeling grateful for what you have helps to undo the effects of adaptation mentioned above, thereby changing the way you regard your life. To illustrate, think for a moment about the pleasant but constant things you encounter in your daily life, such as a beautiful tree outside your window, a good-natured and helpful coworker, your favorite local restaurant, or your best friend. However pleasant these things are, people have a tendency to stop appreciating them over time, or as mentioned previously, to *adapt* to them (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). But when you are in a grateful mind-set, which may be brought on by telling your best friend or coworker how much they mean to you, writing a detailed account of all the positive attributes of your favorite restaurant, or simply making a list of several pleasant aspects of your immediate environment, you are bringing these things to the forefront of your attention, relishing them, and appreciating them more fully. In other words, these activities aid in savoring and create a positive focus on present experience.

The happiest people are those who report having strong social support and close relationships (Myers, 2000). Thus, another reason why expressing gratitude is beneficial is that it can help foster these important social bonds. Specifically, when you are feeling grateful for the people in your life, you may feel motivated to spend more time with them and to treat them well (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). A “gratitude visit” exercise, such as the

one developed by Seligman and colleagues (2005), has obvious social benefits, strengthening the bonds between the writer of the letter and its recipient. One student delivered a gratitude letter to her best friend. She remarked, “By the time she was done reading her letter, she was crying ... her reaction made me cry as well. She hugged me. I had obviously made my best friend’s day ... whenever I would think about the incident it most definitely brought a smile to my face and even two days after when she and I would talk on the phone, she still mentioned it.”

## VISUALIZING YOUR BEST POSSIBLE SELF

A second activity for increasing happiness works by creating a sense of optimism. It involves thinking about your life in the future and visualizing living it as your “best possible self” (BPS; King, 2001). For example, a college-aged woman might envision her ideal life 10 years down the road and write about having great success as a journalist, being married to a devoted and intelligent man, having two healthy children, living in a house in the country, owning horses, and traveling to exotic locations every summer.

It’s important to point out that visualizing your BPS is more than a fantasy or a daydream and is it meant to be an exercise in self-deception. While it is vitally important to have goals and dreams, these should be attainable and feasible (Diener & Fujita, 1995). Otherwise, you may be setting yourself up for failure. For example, it would be rather improbable to conjure up a future as the next Bill Gates. And a man who is 5’4” probably should not visualize a successful career in the NBA. The purpose of the activity is to lay out your life goals and to think optimistically—not fancifully—about how they might be realized.

## Empirical Evidence

In one study (King, 2001), participants spent 20 minutes a day, for 4 days, writing about how they want their life to be in the future. Compared with those who wrote about more neutral topics, people who wrote about their best possible future selves experienced increases in positive mood both immediately after the writing exercises and several weeks later.

This study was recently replicated to examine the effects of engaging in this activity over a longer period of time—either 4 weeks (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006) or 8 weeks (Lyubomirsky et al., 2007). For example, in the 4-week study, participants in the BPS condition were instructed to write about desirable images of their future selves, whereas those in a control condition were asked to recall daily events. As predicted, over the 4-week time period, those in the BPS condition reported experiencing increases in positive emotions after doing the writing exercises, compared with the control participants (see also Lyubomirsky et al., 2007). Therefore, visualizing your best possible self on a regular basis seems to be another effective means of increasing happiness.

### Why Does It Work?

Essentially, the BPS activity is fostering an optimistic mindset, because it involves assuming that you will achieve your most cherished future goals, thereby creating a positive image of your future self and an enhanced sense of efficacy, purpose, and meaning. To illustrate, as she completes the writing exercise, the hypothetical college-aged woman described above may be having thoughts like, “Hey! I *am* a good writer. My journalism professor tells me I have the talent and drive to succeed, and I *can* make my career goals happen!” The writing exercise reveals her goals as being more attainable, and this may foster a sense of self-determination and motivation.

Indeed, optimistic people are more likely to persist in the face of challenges, because they maintain the belief that their goals are within reach. Also, if a person truly believes that his or her long-term goals are realizable, which this exercise encourages, they may be better equipped to cope with minor setbacks (Scheier & Carver, 1993). After failing to secure a coveted journalism internship, for instance, the woman above would certainly be disappointed, but she has the newfound perspective to think of it as only a minor setback and to maintain the confidence that, if she keeps persisting, she will secure a similar opportunity down the road.

In addition, this exercise allows people to articulate and solidify their life goals *in writing*. The act of physically writing down your dreams for the future helps you structure and logically formulate the story, whereas simply thinking about your future life in your head may trigger a more nebulous, unstructured flow of ideas (Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006; Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001). When your ideal future is laid out with a sense of structure and coherence, the steps you need to take to achieve it may appear to be clearer and more under your control.

## PERFORMING ACTS OF KINDNESS

A third strategy that produces lasting changes in well-being involves doing acts of kindness. This may be surprising, because helpful (or “prosocial”) behavior can easily be construed as a self-sacrifice. Whether it is done on an individual basis, or through a formal volunteer organization, helping others is often thought of as time-consuming, tiring, and thankless. However, mounting evidence suggests that prosocial behavior actually has positive outcomes for both the recipient (the person who is benefiting from a kind act) *and* for the benefactor (the person doing the kind act; Piliavin, 2003).

### Empirical Evidence

Recent research (Tkach, 2005) systematically examined the effects of doing acts of kindness over the course of several weeks. In one study, participants chose such acts as doing a roommate’s dishes, helping a classmate with homework, or holding the door open for a stranger. In general, doing

these acts increased participants' happiness, relative to controls. But it wasn't quite that simple. Researchers also varied (a) the frequency with which participants practiced acts of kindness (either three or nine times each week) and (b) the variety with which participants practiced acts of kindness (either varying their kind acts or repeating the same acts weekly). By contrast, a control group simply listed neutral life events from the past week and were not instructed to engage in any prosocial behavior.

Results showed that the frequency of doing kind acts did not impact well-being. However, the *variety* of kind acts that were done did have an effect, such that those who were asked to perform a range of kind acts showed a noticeable increase in happiness, even at a 1-month follow-up. Those who did not vary the types of acts they were doing actually showed a slight decrease in well-being at one point in the study, only to rebound to their original baseline by the end. The effect of variety on subsequent well-being can be partially explained by the idea of hedonic adaptation mentioned above. Imagine that you are doing the same kind act—opening the door for the person behind you—for several weeks. Initially, it might delight you to see people's surprised and grateful reactions to this behavior, but over time, these reactions may become predictable and dull, and the act may quickly become viewed as nothing more than a chore. If this is the case, it makes sense that this activity would cease to bring you happiness. By varying your kind acts, however, you ensure that each one brings you a burst of happiness as you commit it and witness the recipients' novel and unpredictable reactions.

### Why Does It Work?

Presumably, performing acts of kindness works as a happiness-enhancing strategy because it changes your self-perception, allowing you to see yourself as a helpful, kind, and capable person (Bem, 1972). For instance, after volunteering to be a math tutor on the weekend, you may cease to think of yourself as a person who sleeps until noon on a Saturday, and begin to see yourself as one who willingly gets out of bed on a chilly weekend morning to help a struggling math student. This is a far more positive self-view.

Also, doing acts of kindness may help you learn about or capitalize on your personal strengths or talents (Seligman, 2002). The math tutor may learn that he is especially skilled at simplifying and explaining abstract concepts. A Habitat for Humanity volunteer may discover that she is good at working with her hands. As noted by Seligman (2002), making the most of strengths and skills creates a feeling of authenticity that is closely related to well-being.

Also, it simply feels good to observe the effects of your generosity. Seeing your math student vastly improve due to your help or receiving a heartfelt "thank you!" after serving someone at soup kitchen can be a genuine mood booster. But more than that, doing acts of kindness may help build strong social relationships and foster an "upward spiral" of social benefits. As noted by Algoe and Haidt (2005), the recipient of a kind act often feels a bolstered sense of positive feelings and connectedness to his or her

benefactor, which strengthens their relationship. Moreover, doing things for others is socially engaging. It often requires direct interaction with people you may never meet or get to know well. Volunteers at a nursing home may learn the often-remarkable life histories of the patients. A math tutor may come to appreciate that his student is actually hard-working, but that he excels in the arts, rather than at math. Working at a homeless shelter may make you aware of the particular challenges faced by people living all around you. In this way, prosocial behavior can create a sense of empathy for the recipients. Therefore, it is no surprise that people who volunteer report feeling greater ties to the community (Putnam, 2000).

### CHOOSING A HAPPINESS-INCREASING ACTIVITY

Right now you may be feeling quite motivated to try out some of these exercises in your own life. We offer some specific instructions on how to do this in the Personal Mini-Experiments at the end of the chapter. In addition, this section provides some helpful advice on how to make these happiness activities work best for you.

To reiterate and summarize what was mentioned above, too much of a good thing with regard to these activities is possible. It is important to keep them fresh, meaningful, and exciting, so we advise you to be mindful of the frequency with which you are doing them. Once a week seems like a good rule-of-thumb, and is consistent with the findings mentioned above (e.g., Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005). Performing the activities more frequently than this may inadvertently turn them into predictable, routine, or boring chores.

Also, consider ways that you might vary the activity you choose to engage in. For example, if your preferred activity is to express gratitude, think of how you could keep this feeling novel. One possibility is that you could focus in and expand on a different domain of life each week. For example, you might write about nature one week, your personal life the next, and your health the next. Ideally, each time you do this exercise, you will focus in on new things for which you can express gratitude, thereby finding more and more things that are worthy of your attention and appreciation.

As anyone who has achieved long-term weight loss, earned a college degree, or finished a marathon can attest, most meaningful successes in life do not come easily or quickly. In keeping with this notion, it is important to remember that improving your level of happiness requires committed effort. Research has found that those who have increased their happiness most successfully have been those individuals who have persisted with the intentional activities over the course of weeks or months (Lyubomirsky et al., 2007; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). This means committing to both initiating and maintaining the happiness activities over a long period of time. As is the case with any goal, long-term commitment is required for success.

The activities described above do not work equally well for all. Accordingly, it is important to choose an activity that “fits” with your personality and goals. By fit, we mean that the activity feels natural and genuine to

you. For example, in reading the above descriptions, one type of exercise may have jumped out at you, because it felt very feasible and authentic. Another one may have felt slightly unreasonable, hokey, or unnatural. This is because your personality, strengths, interests, and values will predispose you to enjoy and benefit from certain activities more than others. For example, very shy people might feel more comfortable writing in a gratitude journal rather than doing acts of kindness, which might require what they perceive as awkward interactions with strangers. In short, the happiness activities really only work when this sense of fit exists (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005).

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite research and theory to the contrary (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), there is evidence, shown in the present chapter, that suggests that people can make long-term changes to their level of well-being. By engaging in certain intentional activities, such as expressing gratitude, visualizing one's best possible future self, and doing kind acts, individuals report increases in their happiness over periods of several weeks and even months. When implemented consistently and properly (meaning that the activity is well-timed, varied, and "fits" with the person doing it), these activities help change the way people think about and act in their daily lives. Surprising as it may be, we suggest that attaining lasting happiness does not require a large-scale overhaul of the conditions of one's life, but simply an effortful and habitual restructuring of daily behaviors and thoughts. In sum, recent research finds that the road to happiness is a lot closer than most people believe.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Start a Gratitude Journal

In this chapter, we discussed several activities that appear to create lasting improvements in people's levels of happiness. We describe these techniques in greater detail below, and hope that you will find one that works for you and will commit to using it regularly and habitually in your own life.

Choose a time of day when you have several minutes to "step outside" your life and thoughtfully reflect. It could be first thing in the morning, during lunch, or before bedtime. Think of three to five things for which you are currently grateful. These can range from minor events (the coworker who always smiles at you first thing in the morning, or the fact that your roommate took out the trash) to qualities of your life more broadly (your good health, a particular talent you have, or the positive qualities of your best friend). Do this task once a week to start. You may find that you would like to do it a little more often than that, and that is fine. The key is to tailor the activity to suit you best.

Having said that, research does show that people can get bored or weary of doing the exact same activity over and over, so our advice is to add some variety to the ways in which you express your gratitude. Some days, you may

choose to simply list a few of your so-called “blessings.” Other days, you may want to expand on them and write about *why* you are grateful for them. You could also vary the domain—one day writing about gratitude for people, the next day writing about gratitude for nature, and so on. Sometimes, you may prefer to actually tell someone in person how grateful you are to have him or her in your life.

**Think About Your “Best Possible Self”:** “Think about your best possible self” means that you imagine yourself in the future, after everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realization of your life dreams, and of your own best potentials.

Set aside 20 minutes, once a week, and sit down to reflect upon your best possible future self. Write a detailed description of what your life might be like. Focus on aspects of both your personal and your professional life and vary the domains you consider each week, such as your romantic relationship, your career goals, and your health.

**Perform Acts of Kindness:** In our daily lives, we all perform acts of kindness for others. These acts may be large or small and the person for whom the act is performed may or may not be aware of the act. Examples include feeding a stranger’s parking meter, donating blood, helping a friend with homework, visiting an elderly relative, or writing a thank-you letter. For this exercise, perform five acts of kindness each week and vary them as much as you want. Choose one day during the week (e.g., a Monday or a Saturday) in which to do all five kind acts. The acts do not need to be for the same person, and the act may or may not be similar to the acts listed above. Do not perform any acts that may place yourself or others in danger.

Keep a “kindness journal” in which you write down the details of performing your kind acts at the end of the day in which you did them. You may want to describe exactly what you did, who benefited from your kind act, and—if applicable—their reaction. Also, make a note of how you felt before, during, and after each act.

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# Will Money Buy Happiness?

David G. Myers

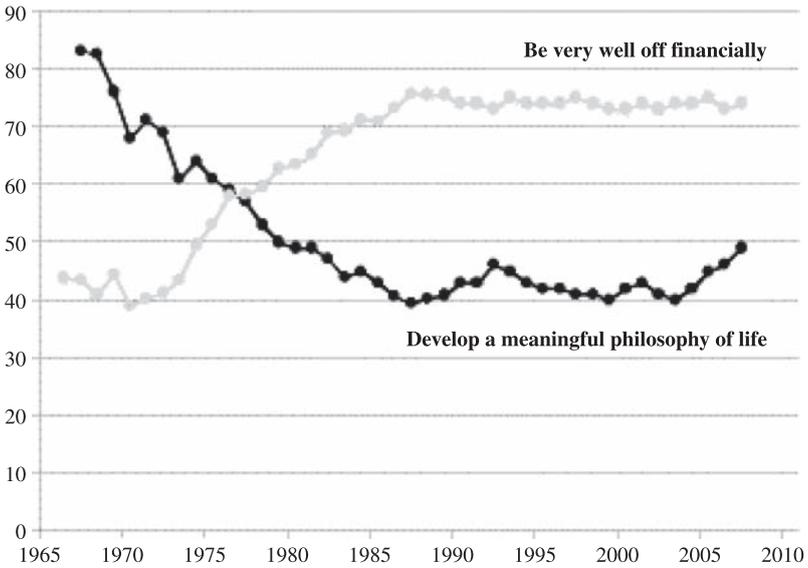
**D**oes fiscal fitness foster feeling fine? Does wealth promote well-being? Let's personalize this: Could money buy *you* happiness? If that sounds too crass, let's moderate the question: Would a *little* more money make you a *little* happier?

## MONEY MATTERS

If only we had more money. A quarter century ago, when University of Michigan interviewers asked Americans what hampered their search for the good life, the most common answer was, “We’re short of money” (A. Campbell, 1981, p. 41). What would improve their life quality? “More money” was the most frequent answer.

In 2006, such sentiments still prevailed when Gallup (Carroll, 2006) asked employed Americans, “Would you be happier if you made more money?” The answer, by a three to one margin: Yes. Indeed, the more the better. In an earlier Gallup Poll (Gallup & Newport, 1990), one in three women, two in three men, and four in five people earning more than \$75,000 a year say they would like to be rich.

More evidence of the “greening of America” comes from the annual UCLA/American Council on Education survey of entering American collegians—more than 13 million between 1966 and 2007 (see Figure 3.1). From 1970 through the mid-1980s, students assigned decreasing importance to developing a meaningful philosophy of life and increasing importance to being very well off financially (which for most years of the last decade has remained the highest ranked of some 20 life goals, even



**Figure 3.1.** Percent of entering American collegians saying “very important or essential.”

Source: Annual UCLA/American Council on Education surveys, reported in *The American Freshman*.

outranking “helping others who are in difficulty” and “raising a family”). It’s today’s American dream: Life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness.

Economist Thomas Naylor (1990) sensed this intense materialism during his 6 years of teaching corporate strategy courses at Duke University. After asking students to write their personal strategic plan, he observed that “With few exceptions, what they wanted fell into three categories: Money, power and things—very big things, including vacation homes, expensive foreign automobiles, yachts and even airplanes.... Their request to the faculty was: Teach me how to be a moneymaking machine.” Few expressed concern for ethics, family, spirituality, or social responsibilities.

In *Luxury Fever*, the Cornell economist, Robert Frank (1999) reported that, at the 20th century’s end, spending on luxury goods was outpacing the growth in overall spending four to one. Sales of luxury cars, private jets, cruise liners, and private mega yachts had soared. High-end Aspen hotel suites were booked months ahead. Malcolm Forbes, Jr., appealed to the modern ethos in marketing his magazine: “I want to make one thing very clear about FORBES, namely—we are all about success and money. Period.”

Are Gallup’s Americans, today’s collegians, Thomas Naylor’s business students, and *Forbes*’ readers on to an important truth? Does being well off indeed produce—or at least correlate with—psychological well-being? Would people be happier if they could exchange their struggling middle class lives for palatial surroundings, Aspen ski vacations, and executive class travel? Would we be happier had we won the publishers’ sweepstakes that

allowed winners to choose a 40-foot yacht, a deluxe motor home, a designer wardrobe, a luxury car, and a private housekeeper? Would we be happier having the power and respect that accompanies affluence? “Whoever said money can’t buy happiness isn’t spending it right,” proclaimed a Lexus ad.

## WEALTH AND WELL-BEING

As people’s money goes up does their misery go down? Does money enable “the good life”? We can triangulate on this by asking three focused questions:

- Are people happier in rich countries?
- In any given country, are richer people happier?
- Over time is economic growth accompanied by rising happiness?

### Are Rich Countries Happy Countries?

In surveys of several hundred thousand people—from 16 nations in one 1980s study and from 82 nations in the most recent World Values Survey—there are striking national differences. In one 16-nation survey of 170,000 people, one in ten people in Portugal said they were “very happy,” as did four in ten people in the Netherlands (Inglehart, 1990). These appear to be genuine national differences and not merely the result of translation differences. For example, regardless of whether they are German-, French-, or Italian-speaking, the Swiss reported greater well-being than their German, French, and Italian neighbors.

Comparing countries, we do see in Figure 3.2 (R. Inglehart, personal communication, April 13, 2006) a positive but curvilinear relationship between national wealth (indexed as Gross National Product per person) and well-being (a composite of self-rated happiness and life satisfaction). The curvilinear relationship replicates earlier World Values Survey data from 40 countries (Inglehart, 1997). In both data sets, the Scandinavians are generally prosperous and happy. Yet in both we also see a diminishing utility of increasing national wealth. As one moves from the very poor eastern European nations to the moderately well off countries, national well-being rises. Ronald Inglehart (1997, p. 64) explains: “The transition from a society of scarcity to a society of security brings a dramatic increase in subjective well-being.”

But further increases in wealth pay few additional dividends. Inglehart (1997, p. 64) reasons that, “at this level starvation is no longer a real concern for most people. Survival begins to be taken for granted.” And in both waves of the survey, there are curious reversals: The Irish, for example, have reported greater happiness and life satisfaction than the better off Germans. Moreover, the Latin American countries are “over achievers” (Inglehart, in press), with Puerto Rico and Mexico exhibiting the highest well-being among 82 countries in the latest available data.

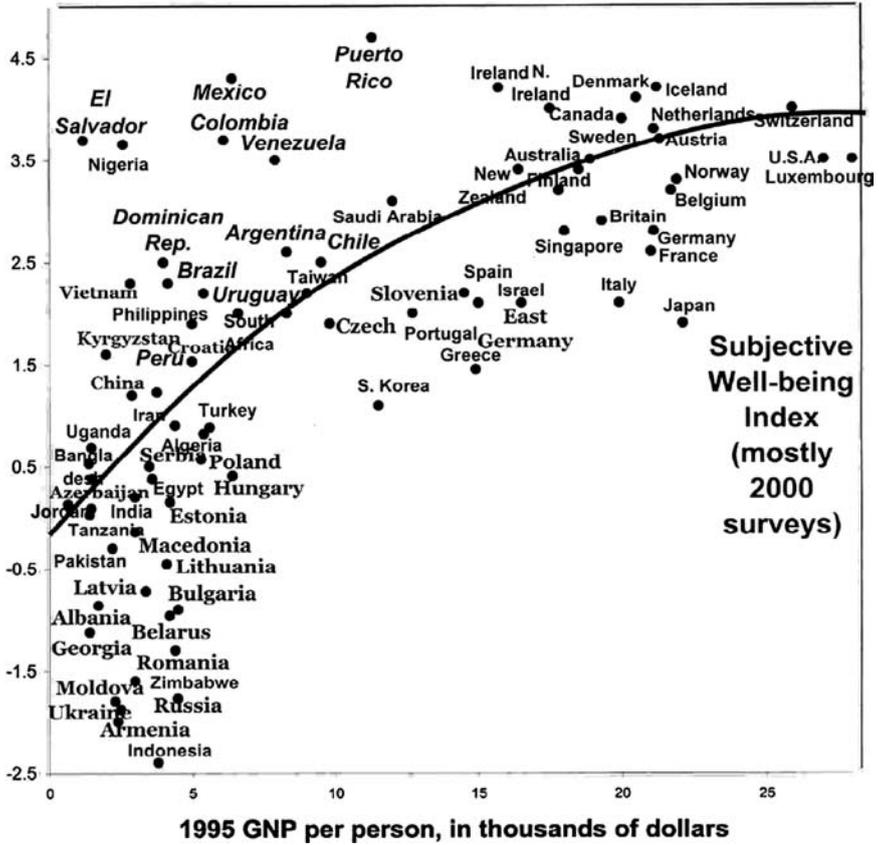


Figure 3.2. National wealth and well-being.

Source: Inglehart, in press.

Of course, national wealth is confounded with other happiness predictors, such as civil rights, literacy, and the number of continuous years of democracy. The Scandinavians and Swiss enjoy not just abundant wealth but also a history of stable freedom.

The bottom-line conclusion—that national poverty and insecurity demoralizes but that national wealth beyond a certain point implies no greater happiness—became real for me during the year in the mid-1980s that my family and I spent in St. Andrews, Scotland. To most Americans, Scottish life then would have seemed spartan. Incomes were about half those in the United States. Among families in our region, 44 percent did not own a car, and we never met a family that owned two. Central heating in this place not far south of Iceland was a luxury.

During our year there we enjoyed hundreds of conversations over daily morning coffees at my university department, in church groups, and over dinner or tea in many homes. Our repeated impression was that, despite their simpler living, the Scots appeared no less joyful than our American

neighbors back home. We heard complaints about Margaret Thatcher, but never about being underpaid or unable to afford one's desires. There was less money and less consumption, but apparently no less satisfaction with living, no less warmth of spirit, no less pleasure in one another's company.

### Within Countries, Are Rich People Happier?

We have seen that national wealth and well-being do correlate, up to a point. But the correlation is entangled with other happiness predictors, such as stable democracy and personal empowerment. So let's ask a second question: Within any country, are higher income people happier?

In historically poor countries, such as Bangladesh and India, being relatively well off has made for greater well-being (Argyle, 1999). In places where being relatively poor means living with unmet needs for food, clean water, secure rest, and warmth, relative affluence predicts happier lives.

In more economically developed Western countries, noted Inglehart (1990, p. 242), the income-happiness correlation is "surprisingly weak." As Figures 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate, happiness and life satisfaction are lower among the poor. But just as economic growth provides diminishing returns for national well-being, so, once comfortable, more money provides diminishing returns for individuals. The second \$50,000, like the second piece of pie, seldom tastes as good as the first. To say that we "cannot live by bread alone" acknowledges that we do need bread, but that, having bread, other needs come to the fore (as Abraham Maslow recognized in his famous hierarchy of needs). Tell me someone's income and you haven't given me much clue as to their satisfaction with their marriage, their family, their friendships, or themselves—all of which do predict happiness. Thus, noted David Lykken (1999, p. 17) from his happiness studies, "People who go to work in their overalls ... are just as happy, on average, as those in suits."

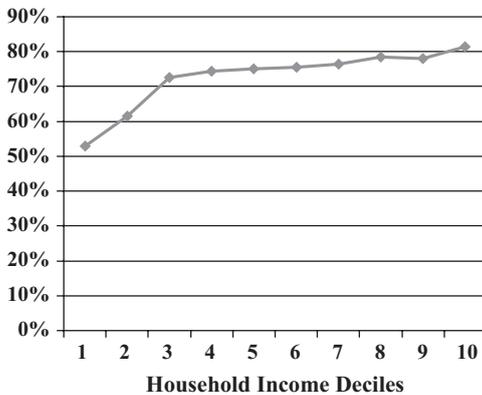


Figure 3.3. Personal income decile and life satisfaction in Australian Living Standards Survey, 1991–1992 (percent reporting high life satisfaction).

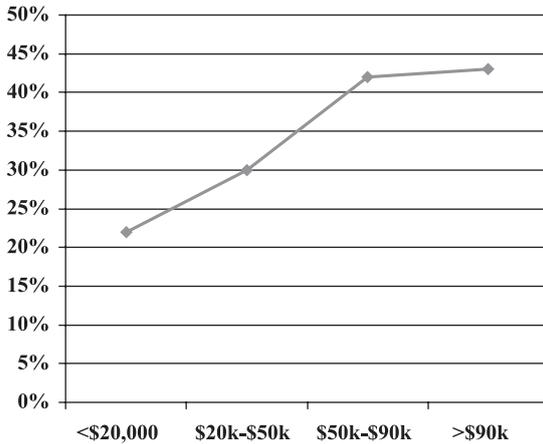


Figure 3.4. Personal income and happiness in National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey, 2004 (percent of Americans “very happy,” by income).

Even in Calcutta and Pakistani slums, people “are more satisfied than one might expect” (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001; Suhail & Chaudhry, 2003). And though growing up poor puts children at risk for some social pathologies, growing up rich puts them at risk for other pathologies. Children of affluence are at elevated risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety, and depression (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005). And among nearly 1,000 American teens whose experience was periodically sampled by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1999), those from upper middle-class backgrounds reported *less* happiness than those from the lowest socioeconomic class. One possible explanation, suggested Csikszentmihalyi, is that children of professional and executive parents tend to spend less time with their parents than do children of middle and working class parents.

Ergo, wealth is like health: Its utter absence can breed misery, yet having it is no guarantee of happiness. What matters more than money (assuming one can afford life’s necessities with a sense of security) is how you feel about what you have. Those who live with a sense of gratitude—or who cultivate their gratitude by each day writing down what they are grateful for—enjoy greater happiness (McCullough, Tsang, Emmons, 2004; Watkins, 2004).

Even very rich people—the *Forbes*’ 100 wealthiest Americans surveyed by Ed Diener and his colleagues (1985)—are only slightly happier than the average person. With net worths providing ample money to buy things they don’t need and hardly care about, four in five of the 49 people responding to the survey agreed that “Money can increase OR decrease happiness, depending on how it is used.” And some were indeed unhappy. One fabulously wealthy man said he could never remember being happy. One woman reported that money could not undo misery caused by her children’s problems. When sailing on the *Titanic*, even first class cannot get you where you want to go.

Warren Buffett (1997) reported that Diener's findings are consistent with his own observation of billionaires. Indeed, examples of the wretched wealthy are not hard to come by: Howard Hughes, Christina Onassis, and J. Paul Getty and his heirs (Pearson, 1995). "If you were a jerk before, you'll be a bigger jerk with a billion dollars," added Buffett.

There is a progressive implication of the diminishing utility of income increases at high income levels, notes Robert Cummins (2006) from his analysis of Australian data. Beyond a certain point, further income loses its power to increase happiness. Said differently, more money will buy more happiness for the poor than for the rich. This implies that people's happiness could most effectively be raised "by providing additional financial resources to the lowest income groups" (p. 9).

At the other end of life's circumstances are many victims of disabling tragedies. Apart from prolonged grief over the loss of a loved one or lingering anxiety after a trauma (such as child abuse, rape, or the terrors of war), even tragedy usually is not permanently depressing. Learning that one is HIV-positive is devastating. But after 5 weeks of adapting to the grim news, those who tested positive felt less emotionally distraught than they had expected (Sieff, Dawes, & Loewenstein, 1999). Kidney dialysis patients recognize that their health is relatively poor, yet in their moment-to-moment experiences they report being just as happy as healthy nonpatients (Riis et al., 2005). People who become blind or paralyzed also usually recover near-normal levels of day-to-day happiness (Gerhart, Koziol-McLain, Loewenstein, & Whiteneck, 1994; Myers, 1993).

Among a sample of Germans incapacitated by ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or Lou Gehrig's disease, a progressive neurological disease that leads to paralysis), a striking 85 percent rated their quality of life as "satisfactory," "good," or "very good." Moreover, their ratings were not much affected by whether they were on ventilators or tube fed or not (Kübler, Winter, Ludolph, Hautzinger, & Birbaumer, 2005). "If you are a paraplegic," explains Daniel Kahneman (2005), "you will gradually start thinking of other things, and the more time you spend thinking of other things the less miserable you are going to be." Thus, most ALS patients, despite their tragic illness, gradually accommodate to their paralysis. Although somewhat less happy than the average person, they express considerably more happiness than able-bodied people with depression (Schwartz & Estrin, 2004).

These findings underlie an astonishing conclusion from the scientific pursuit of happiness. As the late New Zealand researcher Richard Kammann (1983) put it, "Objective life circumstances have a negligible role to play in a theory of happiness."

### Over Time, Does Happiness Rise with Affluence?

Having compared rich with not-rich countries, and rich with not-rich individuals, we come to our third question: Over decades, does our happiness grow with our paychecks? For example, are Americans happier today than in 1940, when two out of five homes lacked a shower or bathtub, heat

often meant hand-feeding a furnace, and more than a third of homes had no toilet? Or than in 1957, when economist John Galbraith was about to describe the United States as *The Affluent Society*?

Since 1957, our average per person income, expressed in inflation- and tax-adjusted dollars, has more than doubled, thanks partly to increased wages during the 15 or so years following 1957. Thus, compared with 1957, we now are the “doubly affluent society.”

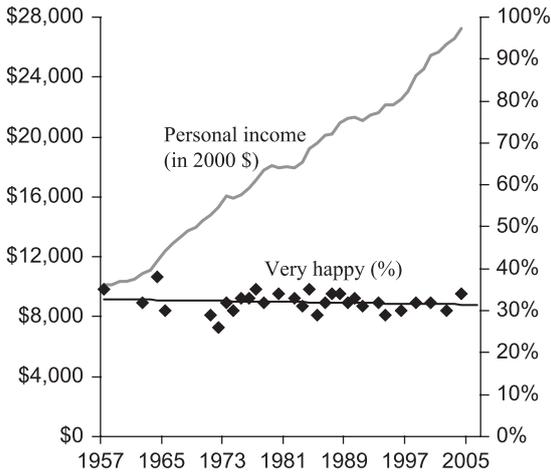
A caveat: The rising economic tide has lifted the yachts faster than the dinghies. In constant dollars, production workers’ hourly earnings were no higher in 2006 than in 1973 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Still, with increased nonwage income, increased working hours, and the doubling of married women’s employment, most boats have risen. Compared to 1957, today’s Americans have twice as many cars per person. We eat out two and a half times as often. We build vastly bigger houses. We are five times as likely to enjoy home air conditioning. And we (even many at lower income levels) relish the technology—the laptops, iPods, Playstations, and camera cell phones—that enriches our lives.

So, believing that more money would make us a little happier, and having seen our affluence ratchet upward little by little over the last half century, are we now happier? Now that we can dial pleasant room temperatures with our fingertips, eat fresh fruit in winter, sip skinny lattes, and travel by jet airliner with our handy suitcase on wheels, are we happier? Has our collective happiness floated upward with the rising economic tide and all the cool stuff it has given us?

It most definitely has not. Since 1957, when National Opinion Research Center interviewers first queried Americans, the number of “very happy” Americans has slightly declined, from 35 to 32 percent (see Figure 3.5). Twice as rich, and slightly less happy. In fact, between 1956 and 1988, the percentage of Americans saying they were “pretty well satisfied with your present financial situation” *dropped* from 42 to 30 percent (Niemi, Mueller, & Smith, 1989).

Meanwhile, various misery indexes were increasing during the third of a century after 1960, as the divorce rate doubled, the teen suicide rate more than doubled, and more people than ever (especially teens and young adults) became depressed (Myers, 2000a). Asked “Have you ever felt that you were going to have a nervous breakdown?” 17 percent of Americans said “yes” in 1957. This number rose to 24 percent in 1996 (Swindle, Heller, Bescosolido, & Kikuzawa, 2000). Similar increased depression has been observed in Canada, Sweden, Germany, and New Zealand (Klerman & Weissman, 1989; Cross-National Collaborative Group, 1992). At the very least, increased physical comfort has not been accompanied by increased psychological comfort.

We might call this soaring wealth and shrinking spirit “the American paradox.” More than ever, we have big houses and broken homes, high incomes and low morale, more comfortable cars and more road rage. We excel at making a living but often fail at making a life. We celebrate our prosperity but yearn for purpose. We cherish our freedoms but long for connection. In an age of plenty, we feel spiritual hunger (Myers, 2000a).



**Figure 3.5. Economic growth and happiness.** American’s average buying power has almost tripled since the 1950s, while reported happiness has remained almost unchanged. (Happiness data from National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey; income data from *Historical Statistics of the United States* and *Economic Indicators*.)

It is hard to avoid a startling conclusion: Our becoming much better off over the last 5 decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased subjective well-being. The same is true of the European countries, Australia, and Japan (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Easterlin, 1995; Eckersley, 2000). In these countries, people enjoy better nutrition, health care, education, and science, and they are somewhat happier than those in very poor countries. Yet their increasing real incomes have not produced increasing happiness. In Britain, for example, great increases in the percent of households with cars, central heating, and telephones have not been accompanied by increased well-being. And after a decade of extraordinary economic growth in China—from few owning a phone and 40 percent owning a color television to most people now having such things—Gallup surveys revealed a *decreasing* proportion of people satisfied “with the way things are going in your life today” (Burkholder, 2005).

The findings are startling because they challenge modern materialism: *Economic growth has provided no apparent boost to human morale.* Having been told over and over again that “it’s the economy, stupid,” believing in the American version of “the good life,” these results come as a shock. Yet in study after study and country after country we see much the same result: Once we have enough income to afford our needs and feel control over our lives, piling on more and more money and consumption entails thinning increases in our happiness. To modern materialists the conclusion may be shocking, but it is not original. Seneca (c. 4 B.C. to A.D. 65) observed nearly 2,000 years ago that

Our forefathers ... lived every jot as well as we, when they provided and dressed their own meat with their own hands; lodged upon the ground, and were not as yet come to the vanity of gold and gems.... which may serve to show us, that it is the mind, and not the sum, that makes any person rich.... No one can be poor that has enough, nor rich that covets more than he has.

Without romanticizing the struggles of oppression and poverty, Seneca would say that to be rich is less an ample bank balance than a state of mind. To be rich is to have wants that are simpler than our incomes can afford.

## WHY RICHES, CONSUMPTION, AND MATERIALISM FAIL TO SATISFY

If his government achieves its 4 percent economic growth-rate goal, noted Australian researcher Richard Eckersley (2001), its people will be twice as rich in 20 years, “and 10 times richer than we were 100 years ago. Can we be sure that this increasing wealth creation is beneficial to personal and social well-being?” As we have seen, the psychological benefits will likely be limited, especially for those already at higher income levels. Why is this?

### Materialism

Materialism minimizes morale. This finding—that individuals who strive most for wealth tend to live with lower well-being—“comes through very strongly in every culture I’ve looked at,” reports Richard Ryan (1999). Seek extrinsic goals, such as wealth, beauty, and popularity, and you may instead find anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic ills (Eckersley, 2005; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). Strive for intrinsic goals such as “intimacy, personal growth, and contribution to the community” and you likely will experience greater quality of life, notes Tim Kasser (2000, 2002). Ryan and Kasser’s research echoes an earlier finding by H. W. Perkins (1991): Among 800 college alumni surveyed, those with “Yuppie values”—who preferred a high income and occupational success and prestige to having very close friends and a close marriage—were twice as likely as their former classmates to describe themselves as “fairly” or “very” *unhappy*.

Imagine yourself as a participant in a study by Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, and Kasser (2001). Pause and think: “What were the most satisfying events that you have experienced in the last month? And to what extent did those events meet your desires for self-esteem, relatedness to others, and autonomy? And your desires for money and luxury?” For most people, the truly satisfying happenings in life less often involve money than feelings of connection, control, and self-worth. In a study of university students, Ed Diener and Martin Seligman (2002) confirmed that the best things in life are not things; very happy university students are distinguished not by their money but by their “rich and satisfying close relationships.”

Moreover, materialists—people who identify themselves with expensive possessions—experience fewer positive moods (Solberg, Diener, & Robinson,

2003). Materialists also report a relatively large gap between what they want and what they have, and they enjoy fewer close, fulfilling relationships. And for most of us, just thinking about money diminishes volunteerism, generosity, and feelings of connection. That's what Kathleen Vohs, Nicole Mead, and Miranda Goode (2006) observed when, in nine experiments, they primed people's thinking about money, as when asking them to unscramble phrases that were either about money ("high a salary paying") or not ("cold it outside is"). With money on their minds, university students became less willing to ask for help on a task, to help someone with dropped pencils, and to donate money.

Economist Robert Frank and his Cornell psychology colleagues Thomas Gilovich and Dennis Regan (1993) surveyed money-minded economics professors. Despite having relatively high salaries, economists were more than twice as likely as those in other disciplines to contribute no money to private charities. In responding to public television appeals, their median (and most common) gift was nothing. Moreover, in laboratory monetary games, students behave more selfishly after taking economics courses.

If, as research indicates (Myers, 1993, 2000b), happiness is mostly a matter of positive traits, close relationships, engaging work and leisure, and a faith that entails meaning, hope, and social support, then why is making more money so often our consuming passion? And why do yesterday's luxuries so quickly become today's necessities? Two principles drive this psychology of wealth and consumption.

#### Adaptation: Happiness and Prior Experience

Perhaps you have noticed. Bad events—an argument, a rejection, a setback—put you in the dumps. And good events—winning a big game, an A on a test, falling in love—trigger joy. But only for a while. "We are never happy for a thousand days, a flower never blooms for a hundred" says a Chinese proverb. Within a day or two, our moods settle back toward normal, with our ups and down reflecting the day's events.

Thus dejection and elation are both hard to sustain. When in a funk, we know we will rebound. Stung by criticism, we wallow in gloom, but not for long. Delighted by acclaim, we relish the success, but then discover that Seneca again was right: "No happiness lasts for long."

Our emotional resilience illustrates the "adaptation level" phenomenon, which is our tendency to adapt to any given experience and then notice variations from that level. Based on our experience we adjust our neutral levels—the points at which sounds seem neither loud nor soft, temperatures neither hot nor cold, events neither pleasant nor unpleasant. We then notice and react to changes from these levels. Where I live in Michigan, a 50-degree morning feels distinctly cold in July and warm in January.

So, when our achievements rise (or when our income, prestige, or technology improves) we feel successful and satisfied. Before long, however, we adapt. What once felt good—that first color television, which I recall—comes to register as neutral, and what formerly was neutral (the black and

white TV it replaced) now feels like deprivation. Having adapted upward, what once felt positive now feels negative. Satisfaction, as Richard Ryan (1999) has said, “has a short half-life.” Or as Dutch psychologist Nic Frijda (1988) recognized, “Continued pleasures wear off.... Pleasure is always contingent upon change and disappears with continuous satisfaction.”

Indeed, observed Donald Campbell (1975), a permanent social paradise on earth is impossible. If you awoke tomorrow to your utopia—no bills, no ills, basking in love—you would be ecstatic, for a time. But then you would begin recalibrating your adaptation level, and before long your emotions would again be a mix of gratification (when achievements surpass expectations) and frustration (when they fall below).

Richard Solomon (1980) documented a corollary “opponent-process” principle: Emotions trigger opposing emotions. Thus for many pleasures we pay a later price, and for much suffering we receive a later reward. For the euphoria of a drug high, we pay the price of craving and depression when the drug wears off. For enduring hard exercise or even the pain of childbirth, we afterward enjoy a well-earned glow.

As Solomon wisely noted, the opponent-process principle is bad news for hedonists. Those who seek artificial pleasures will pay for them later (and, as his experiments showed, repetition diminishes the pleasure’s intensity). There is no free lunch. With every kick comes a kickback. “Take what you want,” said God in an old Spanish proverb. “Take it and pay for it.”

But the good news is that suffering or simplified living can lower our adaptation level, paving the way for an emotional rebound. Biblical wisdom anticipated the point. “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30:5). “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). For pain endured and remembered, we gain a sweeter joy.

Our intuition tends to ignore the reality of adaptation. We assume a sequence: We want. We get. We are happy. In actuality, as Daniel Gilbert and Timothy Wilson (2000, p. 182) have shown, we often “miswant.” Those who fantasize a desert island holiday with sun, surf, and sand may discover “how much they require daily structure, intellectual stimulation, or regular infusions of Pop Tarts.” We are, they say, vulnerable to “impact bias”—overestimating the durability of emotions. In reality, our emotions are attached to elastic bands that pull us back from highs and lows.

Impact bias is important, say Wilson and Gilbert (2005) because our predictions of our future emotions influence our decisions. If we overestimate the intensity and duration of the pleasure we will gain from purchasing a new car or undergoing cosmetic surgery, then we make ill-advised investments in that new SUV or extreme makeover.

But then we can thank the adaptation-level phenomenon for fueling our ambition. Without it, we would dwell contentedly on our first plateau of success, feeling no further upward drive. Because every desirable experience, from passionate love to the pleasure of a new possession, is transitory, achievement breeds happiness only as new plateaus are followed by higher highs.

C. S. Lewis (1956/1984, p. 228) recognized this in his Narnia tales, which conclude as its creatures, with their world collapsing behind them,

step into a joyous never-ending story. “All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: Now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: Which goes on forever: In which every chapter is better than the one before.”

### Social Comparison: Happiness and Others' Attainments

Happiness is relative not only to the past experiences to which we have adapted, but also to our observations of others' experiences. We compare ourselves and our outcomes with others. And we feel good or bad depending on whom we compare with. We feel agile when others seem clumsy, smart when others seem slow-witted, and rich when others seem poor. As Karl Marx wrote in *Wage-Labor and Capital* (1847/1976), “A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small, it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house into a hut.” In *Brother to a Dragonfly*, Will Campbell (1980) recalls experiencing the phenomenon: “Our poverty became a reality. Not because of our having less, but by our neighbors having more.”

World War II Air Corps soldiers offered a classic example of such “relative deprivation”—the sense of being relatively worse off than one's comparisons. Although the Corps soldiers enjoyed a rapid rate of promotion, many were frustrated with their own promotion rates (Merton & Kitt, 1950). Seeing others promoted inflated their expectations. And when expectations fly above attainments, the result is frustration.

Further feeding our dissatisfaction is the tendency to compare upward. As we climb the success ladder, or gain affluence, we mostly compare with peers who are a rung or two above our current level. Bertrand Russell (1930/1985) saw no end to upward comparison: “Napoleon envied Caesar, Caesar envied Alexander, and Alexander, I daresay, envied Hercules, who never existed. You cannot, therefore get away from envy by means of success alone, for there will always be in history or legend some person even more successful than you are.”

Such social comparison finds a modern expression in today's reports of rich Silicon Valley entrepreneurs feeling envy for their super rich counterparts (Hafner, 2006). When a multimillionaire early executive of PayPal compares himself with the mega-millionaire YouTube creators, or when the wealthy founder of an Internet dating site compares himself with his best friend, who was a founder of PayPal, they feel wistful rather than wealthy.

Where inequality exists, comparisons are more likely to breed dissatisfaction. With the yachts rising faster than the dinghies over the last third of a century, American inequality has exacerbated. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that the percentage of household income earned by the top fifth has increased from 43 percent to 50 percent. Across locations and over time, income inequality makes for more people who have rich neighbors, and thus more people at risk for diminished satisfaction with their

own existence (Hagerty, 2000). Television's modeling of the lifestyles of the wealthy also serves to accentuate relative deprivation (Schor, 1998). Both these factors surely help explain why Chinese satisfaction has decreased since 1994 even while visible attainments have increased, though unequally so.

### Managing our Adaptations and Comparisons in a Sustainable World

There is a bright side to the malleability of our happiness and life satisfaction. As increasing consumption and population combine to exceed the earth's carrying capacity and change the climate, we have the potential to respond not only with ecologically responsible technologies but also simplified living. With pricier petrol, Americans will follow Europeans by electing more fuel-efficient cars. Such simplification will at first cause dissatisfaction. But if the sacrifices are shared, we will adapt. And in time we will recover our normal mix of discontent, joy, and neutrality.

Positive psychology's contribution to a sustainable future will come from its consciousness-transforming insights into what makes for the genuinely good life. With echoes of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (55:2), positive psychology invites us to consider: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" What's the point of accumulating stacks of unplayed CDs, closets full of seldom-worn clothes, three-car garages with luxury cars—all purchased in a vain quest for an elusive joy? And what's the point of leaving significant inherited wealth to one's heirs, as if it could bring them happiness, rather than applying it to a hurting world?

Ronald Inglehart, a social scientist who follows world values surveys, has discerned the beginnings of a subsiding of materialism and signs of a new generation maturing with increasing concern for personal relationships, the integrity of nature, and the meaning of life. Happily, those things that make for the genuinely good life—close relationships, a hope-filled faith, positive traits, engaging activity—are enduringly sustainable. As Jigme Singye Wangchuk, King of Bhutan (quoted by Mancall, 2004), has observed, "Gross national happiness is more important than gross national product."

Envisioning a new American dream need not romanticize poverty or destroy our market economy. But it will require our seasoning prosperity with purpose, capital with compassion, and enterprise with equity. Such a transformation in consciousness has happened before; today's thinking about race, gender, and the environment differs radically from a half century ago. If it is to happen again, as a new kind of satisfaction untethered from materialism, these practical principles may help.

### *Restrain Nostalgia-Fed Expectations*

In Royal Institution lectures two centuries ago (later published as *Elementary Sketches of Moral Philosophy*) Sydney Smith advised that we "are always happier for having been happy; so that if you make them happy

now, you make them happy twenty years hence, by the memory of it.” Actually, despite our enjoyment of happy memories, dwelling on our past Camelot moments can make our present seem pedestrian. If we use our happiest memories, or our images of most ecstatic love, as our yardstick for assessing the present, we may doom ourselves to disappointment. In one German experiment, adults felt better about their present lives after recalling and writing down a significant low rather than high moment from their past (Strack, Schwarz, & Gschneidinger, 1985). Although magnificent memories are pleasant, nostalgia can breed discontent.

Indeed, noted Allen Parducci (1984), remembered ecstasies exact a price. Because the *range* of our prior experiences colors our assessments of our current experience, yesterday’s highs often dull today’s ordinary pleasures. Raise the top of your range—with an idyllic holiday from your everyday poverty, earning twice your previous high commission, sharing unbridled sexual passion—and you may discover, back in the real world, that your ordinary weekends, your regular commission, your routine love-making, now feel mundane.

Ed Diener and his colleagues (Diener, Colvin, Pavot, & Allman 1991; Smith, Diener, & Wedell, 1989) have confirmed the lesson: If super high points are rare, we’re better off without them. Better *not* to expose ourselves to luxury, if its rarity only serves to diminish our daily quiet joys.

### *Experience Occasional Reminders of How Bad Things Can Be*

Given time to fully recover, people report greater happiness after hospitalization for a health problem (Schwarz & Strack, 1990). Contrasts help define contentment. The pangs of hunger make food delicious. Tiredness makes the bed feel heavenly. Loneliness makes a friendship cherished.

In more routine ways we can give ourselves reminders of our blessings. The ground under the sleeping bag makes the bed, when back home, feel softer. The Lenten bowls of rice make the roast chicken tastier. The temporary separation from our loved one makes the union sweeter, the person less taken for granted. Such experiences help reframe our attitude and renew our gratitude.

Shelley Taylor (1989, pp. 167–168) illustrates the principle with a Jewish fable about a farmer who seeks a rabbi’s counsel because his wife nags him, his children fight, and his surroundings are in chaos. The good rabbi tells him to go home and move the chickens into the house. “Into the house!” cries the farmer. “But what good will that do?” Nevertheless, he complies, and two days later returns, more frantic than before. “Now my wife nags me, the children fight, and the chickens are everywhere, laying eggs, dropping feathers, and eating our food. What am I to do?” The rabbi tells him to go home and bring the cow into the house. “The cow!” cries the distraught man. “That can only worsen things!” Again, the rabbi insists, the man complies, and then returns a few days later more harried than ever. “Nothing is helping. The chickens are into everything and the cow is knocking over the furniture. Rabbi, you have made things worse.”

The rabbi sends the frantic man home to bring in the horse as well. The next day the man returns in despair. “Everything is knocked over. There is no room for my family. Our lives are in shambles. What shall we do?” Now the rabbi instructs, “Go home and take out the horse and cow and chickens.” The man does so and returns the next day smiling. “Rabbi, our lives are now so calm and peaceful. With the animals gone, we are a family again. How can I thank you?” The rabbi smiles.

### *Choose Comparisons that Will Breed Gratitude*

Two of my children work at the opposite ends of the economic spectrum. One provides personal technology services in the homes and yachts of one of the world’s-mega billionaires. The other currently is living in South Africa, and doing volunteer work in impoverished townships. Although the second child is poorer, I wouldn’t be surprised if she felt as rich as her sibling. As Abraham Maslow (1972, p. 108) noted, “All you have to do is to go to a hospital and hear all the simple blessings that people never before realized *were* blessings—being able to urinate, to sleep on your side, to be able to swallow, to scratch an itch, etc. Could *exercises* in deprivation educate us faster about all our blessings?”

Short of engaging the sick and the poor, even imagining others’ misfortunes can trigger greater contentment with one’s own fortune. Marshall Dermer, Cohen, Jacobson, and Anderson (1979) experimented with the phenomenon by inviting University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, women to view grim depictions of Milwaukee life in 1900, with its sickening hygiene, hunger, unemployment, crime, and despair. Or they imagined and wrote about personal tragedies such as being burned and disfigured. After these experiences, the women expressed a greater sense of satisfaction with their own lives, which now seemed not so bad.

In another experiment, Jennifer Crocker and Lisa Gallo (1985) tested the wisdom of an old song, “Count your blessings, name them one by one.” After five times completing the sentence, “I’m glad I’m not a ...” people felt relatively happy and satisfied with their lives. Those who instead counted their unfulfilled desires, by completing sentences beginning with “I wish I were a ...” then felt *worse* about their lives. “I cried because I had no shoes,” says a Persian proverb, “until I met a man who had no feet.”

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

### Thinking about Money Matters

In this chapter we have seen that national income correlates with national subjective well-being (but only to a point), that personal income correlates with personal well-being (but only to a point), and that economic growth over time has not been accompanied by increased well-being. We have also seen that the materialist values that prevail in modern America are not predictive of happiness. Two principles help explain why wealth and materialism fail

to satisfy: The adaptation-level phenomenon and social comparison. As incomes and consumption rise, we at first feel good but then soon adapt. Comparing with others, we may even feel relatively deprived.

This being so, how would you—or will you in the future—answer these questions:

- What are your deeply felt aspirations? How important is it to make lots of money? If that is a significant goal for you, what motivates you—a desire for more possessions and comfort? For status? For the chance to leave a legacy?
- If you have or were to have significant wealth, what would you do with it while alive? Would you leave most of it to your heirs? If not, how would you distribute it?
- What sort of “ecological footprint” does your lifestyle demand? Is this what you intend?
- To influence consumption, would you favor changed incentives or regulations? For example, would you support or oppose higher fuel-efficiency requirements for cars and trucks? Higher fuel taxes to motivate smaller cars and fewer carbon dioxide emissions?

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# Presenting a Positive Alternative to Strivings for Material Success and the Thin Ideal: Understanding the Effects of Extrinsic Relative to Intrinsic Goal Pursuits

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Contemporary consumer culture offers a seemingly promising pathway to developing a satisfying and happy life. In numerous advertisements, we are told that the pursuit of a good life can be equated with a “goods life” (Kasser, 2002) or with the attainment of a “perfect body” (Dittmar, 2007). The mass media suggests that if we manage to garner the possessions that are presented to us on TV and in glossy magazines and if we are able to reach the idealized body images that role models exemplify, we are more likely to be satisfied with ourselves and with our lives in general. In bringing this message, the mass media creates a dream world in which wealth and the attainment of good looks are glorified as indicators of happiness and success (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007).

In line with the exponential growth of consumer culture over the past decades, psychologists have become increasingly interested in examining whether the promise of the “American Dream” (Kasser & Ryan, 1993) holds some truth or whether it represents a myth in which people might even get entrapped (Dittmar, 2007). The purpose of this chapter is to frame this discussion about consumerism and the good life within a well-grounded motivational theory, that is, Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the qualitative distinction this theory makes between intrinsic goals (e.g., self-development, community contribution) and extrinsic goals (e.g., financial success, status). In doing so, we will not only focus on the implications of pursuing extrinsic goals, but, following the positive psychology perspective (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), we also consider a positive alternative, that is, the pursuit of intrinsic goals. Furthermore, we move beyond the personal and social well-being correlates of people’s goal pursuits (see Kasser, 2002, for

an overview) by also focusing on the consequences of extrinsic versus intrinsic goals in the domains of ethical, ecological, and inter-group attitudes and performance and persistence.

This chapter consists of four different parts. In the first two parts, we discuss the implications of the personal pursuit of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals and the exposure to the contextual promotion of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals. After this, we review a number of theories that have challenged the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic goals. Finally, we argue that the lack of satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan, 1995) that follows from endorsing or being exposed to the promotion of extrinsic goals at the expense of intrinsic goals might account for the differential effects of these goals on people's functioning (Kasser, 2002).

In addition to discussing the mechanism of basic need satisfaction, we also "zoom in" on the micro-mediational mechanisms that might play an intervening role between goal pursuits and basic need satisfaction. In doing so, we review research from the body image literature, from consumer psychology and from social psychology.

## INTRINSIC- VERSUS EXTRINSIC-GOAL PURSUITS

Within SDT, it is argued that some goals are more likely to contribute to people's personal and social well-being than others (Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). Specifically, SDT-researchers (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006) have distinguished two different types or contents of goals, that is, (a) extrinsic goals such as garnering social popularity or fame, being financially successful, attaining power and influence over others, and having a physical appealing image, and (b) intrinsic goals such as building meaningful relationships, developing one's talents, achieving a sense of physical fitness and good health, and meaningfully contributing to the community.

Extrinsic goals exemplify salient aspects of a consumer culture, in which fame, money, and good looks are portrayed as signs of success (Kasser, Cohn et al., 2007). The appeal of these goals lies in the anticipated power, admiration, and sense of worth that might result from realizing them (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004). They are considered extrinsic because they would promote an "outward orientation" (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000) or a "having orientation" (Fromm, 1976), as they focus people on making a good impression on others. However, the pursuit of these goals is likely to be "exogenous" to basic need satisfaction, as their pursuit is unlikely to satisfy and might even thwart the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In contrast, intrinsic goals are typically valued because their pursuit is inherently satisfying and health promoting. They reflect an inward oriented frame or a "being orientation" focused on the actualization of one's interests, values, and potential (Fromm, 1976; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). In agreement with humanist thinking, intrinsic goals are thought to reflect

people's tendency to obtain meaning, to grow as a person, and to connect with others (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Thus, intrinsic goals can be considered manifestations of the organismic growth tendencies common to human beings; under sufficiently supportive circumstances, people would have the natural inclination to increasingly move away from extrinsic goals, toward intrinsic goals (Sheldon, Arndt, & Houser-Marko, 2003). The pursuit of intrinsic goals is more likely to lead the person to have experiences that can satisfy inherent psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, so that intrinsic goal pursuit is said to be more "endogenous" or more inherently related to basic need satisfaction.

In contrast to researchers who aimed to chart the structure of all possible human values (e.g., Schwartz, 1992), the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic goals is not meant to be exhaustive: Not all possible goals can be classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, and goals that are neither means to impress others nor inherently growth-promoting (e.g., hedonism) might fit neither category. It should also be noted that the study of extrinsic goals is by no means unique to SDT. Although labeled differently, the concept of extrinsic goals has also received considerable attention in fields such as consumer psychology (e.g., Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992), political sociology (e.g., Inglehart, 1990), and organizational psychology (e.g., Elizur, 1984), which have all primarily focused on the pursuit of one particular extrinsic goal, that is the pursuit of wealth. In the literature on body image and eating disorders (e.g., Stice & Shaw, 1994), researchers have focused on another single extrinsic goal, that is, the thin ideal. Although pursuing material success and physical appeal might be important for understanding different phenomena (e.g., ethical functioning versus the etiology of eating disorders), from a SDT perspective, they can both be studied under the extrinsic-goal concept, as they share an outward character.

Furthermore, rather than studying extrinsic goals in "isolation" from other goals, SDT argues that the pursuit of extrinsic goals needs to be contrasted with a positive alternative, that is, the pursuit of intrinsic goals. Accordingly, empirical studies in the SDT tradition often use a composite score reflecting the relative importance individuals attach to intrinsic compared to extrinsic goals. Thus, a higher score reflects a tendency to value more strongly intrinsic than extrinsic goals.

In the first studies on intrinsic and extrinsic goals, Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) developed the Aspiration Index, assessing the importance that individuals attribute to the pursuit of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. Initial factor-analytical work in U.S. samples indicated that these two types of goals fall apart in an intrinsic and extrinsic factor. More recently, using more sophisticated analytical techniques (i.e., multidimensional scaling), Grouzet, Kasser, et al. (2006) demonstrated the generalizability of the intrinsic-extrinsic goal distinction by showing that it holds up in 15 different nations varying in cultural foci and Bruto National Product, providing further evidence for the generalizability of the intrinsic-extrinsic dimension. Because intrinsic and extrinsic goals are said to result in qualitatively different modi of functioning, the critical issue at hand concerns whether living

a life that is organized more strongly around the pursuit of intrinsic than extrinsic goals yields implications for individuals' adjustment. Note that it is not so much the absolute importance attributed to extrinsic goals that might be problematic rather than the relative weight these goals occupy in the person's total value-structure.

### Personal Well-being and Health

A few dozen studies, conducted in countries as diverse as South-Korea, Russia, Belgium, Germany, and the UK, have now convincingly shown that the pursuit of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals is associated with lower psychological well-being (e.g., self-actualization, vitality), lower subjective well-being (e.g., happiness, life satisfaction), and stronger signs of ill-being (e.g., depression, negative affect, proportion of time spent being unhappy, and anxiety; see Kasser, 2002, for an overview). Various studies in the consumer literature have confirmed these results by showing that the pursuit of materialism is negatively associated with self-esteem (e.g., Richins & Dawson, 1992) and quality of life (e.g., Roberts & Clement, 2007), while being positively associated with social anxiety, narcissism, and conduct disorders (Cohen & Cohen, 1996).

In a similar vein, Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) found that people who believe that money spent on experiential purchases (i.e., the "consumption" of a series of events, such as traveling) when compared to material purchases (i.e., the buying of a tangible object; e.g., jewelry) is "better spent" and that experiential relative to material purchases provoke more positive feelings. These findings were further corroborated by Kasser and Sheldon (2002), who reported that a happy and satisfying Christmas is positively associated with more frequent engagement in religious and family experiences and is negatively associated with engagement in materialist experiences (e.g., spending money). Furthermore, Kasser (2005) found materialist children of 10 to 11 years old to be more prone to depression and reduced well-being. In a related study, Dohnt and Tiggeman (2006a) showed that by 6 years old a large number of girls desired a thinner ideal figure; girls who looked at women's magazines were more likely to be dissatisfied with their appearance concurrently, whereas girls who watched more appearance-related television programs were more at risk for developing low appearance satisfaction prospectively (Dohnt & Tiggeman, 2006b). The finding that young children are already vulnerable for the adverse effects of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal pursuits is alarming in light of the advertising industry's increasing attempts to seduce children to buy the message that achieving an ideal body and material goods guarantees happiness.

Finally, research in different domains, including exercise (Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, in press), sports (Vansteenkiste, 2007) and work (Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, et al., 2007) starts to show that the valuation of intrinsic over extrinsic goals is associated with better domain-specific adjustment. In addition to studying adjustment and well-being, other studies have linked people's goals to self-reported (un)healthy behaviors. For

instance, extrinsically oriented individuals were found to watch more TV and to smoke, drink, and use drugs more often (e.g., Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000). Moreover, materialist individuals were more likely to be “shopaholics” (Dittmar, 2005). These behaviors can be considered self-medicating, because they may help extrinsically oriented individuals to compensate for their lack of daily need satisfaction. Such an interpretation of the findings suggests that extrinsic goal pursuits might not only result in poorer well-being but might also be undertaken to overcome and compensate for distress (Kasser, 2002).

### Social and Ethical Functioning

The pursuit of extrinsic goals does not only yield personal well-being and health costs but also has a number of social implications, at both interpersonal and intergroup levels. For instance, extrinsically oriented individuals are more likely to engage in conflicting and less trustful love relationships (Kasser & Ryan, 2001), and materialists are found to be less satisfied with their family and friends (e.g., Richins & Dawson, 1992). In addition to affecting the quality of intimate and family relationships, the pursuit of intrinsic relative to extrinsic goals also seems to affect the interaction with opponents during sports games. For instance, on the ball field, extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal oriented soccer players have been found to be more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors, such as tackling (Vansteenkiste, 2007). Although such unfair behavior might be perceived by soccer players as necessary and instrumental for achieving their extrinsic goals (i.e., winning the game and making more money), they are unlikely to foster respectful relationships with one’s opponents.

A similar lack of ethical functioning was observed in the organizational domain by Tang and Chiu (2003) who found materialist white collar employees to be more likely to overcharge customers, use their expense account inappropriately, and steal merchandise. The current findings thus suggest that the pursuit of extrinsic goals is associated with poorer ethical functioning (Kasser, Vansteenkiste, & Deckop, 2006).

Adopting an extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal orientation was not only found to be problematic for the quality of one’s social relationships (i.e., the interpersonal level) but also for individuals’ attitudes toward social groups (i.e., the intergroup level). For instance, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, and De Witte (2007) found that an extrinsic- relative to intrinsic-goal orientation was associated with a less prejudiced attitude toward ethnic minorities (see also Roets, Van Hiel, & Cornelis, 2006).

This effect could be accounted for by the stronger social dominance orientation that is associated with an extrinsic relative to an intrinsic goal orientation. Specifically, extrinsic goal oriented individuals are more likely to adopt a social dominance orientation, that is, they want their group to maintain a superior position relative to other social groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). A social dominance orientation is likely to take root in extrinsically oriented individuals’ belief that they live in a

dog-eat-dog world that requires them to compete with others for scarce material goods. Hence, the adoption of a socially dominant attitude fits with these individuals' worldview and would be instrumental in achieving their extrinsic ambitions.

Conversely, the pursuit of material goods might also represent an instrument allowing socially dominant individuals to confirm their superior position in society. In line with this reasoning, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, et al. (2007) found that a social dominance attitude and an extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal orientation reciprocally predicted one another over time, suggesting that they form a mutually reinforcing constellation that is likely to contribute to the stability and even rise in prejudice over time.

Finally, the pursuit of intrinsic relative to extrinsic goals not only yields effects on the way one treats other people but also on the way one deals with our planet and the environment at large. For instance, Brown and Kasser (2005) demonstrated that an extrinsic- relative to intrinsic-goal orientation negatively predicted engagement in proecological behaviors and was associated with an enlarged ecological footprint. Similarly, Richins and Dawson (1992) found materialism to negatively predict voluntary simplicity, that is, a lifestyle that is characterized by low consumption and high ecological responsibility (see also Kilbourne & Pickett, in press). Finally, in an experimental role playing study, Sheldon and McGregor (2000) showed that extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal oriented individuals were more likely to keep a greater proportion of scarce natural resources to themselves.

## CONTEXTUAL PROMOTION OF INTRINSIC VERSUS EXTRINSIC GOALS

The previous section detailed the differential consequences that are related to individuals' pursuit of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents. Hence, this line of SDT-research has investigated the impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals from an *individual difference* perspective, that is, the degree to which people focus upon the attainment of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals. However, authority figures, such as parents, teachers, managers, and doctors as well as the broader culture play an important role in spreading, promoting, and reinforcing these goals. From the SDT-perspective, analogous to the differential effects of holding intrinsic and extrinsic goals, the contextual promotion of these goal contents is likely to yield differential psychological dynamics as well. Several recent experimental and correlational studies have provided evidence for this notion.

In a set of experimental studies (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004), the effects of framing a learning task in terms of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal attainment on quality of learning, performance, and persistence were examined. In a first study, students were invited to read a text on recycling and were either told that learning more about this could help them to attain the intrinsic goal of community contribution or the extrinsic goal of a monetary benefit. Then, they were tested on text knowledge and were given questionnaires assessing deep and rote learning. Finally, it was recorded which students visited the library to get additional

information on recycling, and which students chose to visit a recycling plant on a weekday after school a few days after the experiment.

It was reasoned that intrinsic goals, because of their closer link with individuals' inherent growth tendencies, are more likely to promote a deep commitment toward the learning activity. In contrast, extrinsic goal framing would shift learners' attention from the learning toward external indicators of worth, thereby resulting in poorer commitment and reduced learning. Consistent with this, intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal framing promoted self-reported deep processing and resulted in superior performance and higher persistence. These results were replicated using different activities (i.e., exercising rather than reading), different intrinsic goals (i.e., self-development and health), different extrinsic goals (i.e., physical attractiveness), and different age groups (i.e., children instead of adolescents; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, & Matos, 2005).

In another series of experimental studies, Vansteenkiste, Simons, Braet, Bachman, and Deci (2007) explored the impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal framing among a group of severely obese children. They examined whether framing a learning text on the four-leafed clover (a simplified version of the food pyramid) in terms of the attainment of the intrinsic goal of physical fitness versus the extrinsic goal of physical attractiveness would affect (a) adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyles, (b) continued engagement in a diet program, (c) longitudinal participation in physical exercise, and (d) weight loss assessed up to two years after participation in the experiment.

Although extrinsic goal framing might prompt some behavioral change, it was expected that initial changes were unlikely to be maintained over time, as the newly adopted behaviors were undertaken in a strategic and conditional fashion, that is, to attain the anticipated extrinsic goal of physical attractiveness. Consistent with this, it was found that both intrinsic and extrinsic goal framing promoted the adoption of a healthier lifestyle, but that these gains were only maintained among participants placed in the intrinsic goal condition. Furthermore, intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal framing resulted in a more continuous engagement in the diet program and greater weight loss at 6 weeks, 14 weeks, 1 year, and 2 year follow-up assessments.

Subsequent work (Duriez, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2007) examined whether parents' promotion of intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals would affect children's social functioning, as indexed by their socially aggressive and domineering attitude towards other social groups. Thus, rather than studying the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic goal promotion at the situational level (i.e., with respect to a particular activity), intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal promotion was studied at the global level, as parenting is likely to affect children's general functioning. Complementing the experimental research, perceived parental intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal promotion was found to both concurrently and longitudinally predict adolescents' social dominance orientation which, as mentioned before, represents a strong predictor of ethnic prejudice (e.g., Pratto et al., 1994). Notably, the effects of parental goal promotion emerged above and beyond the effects

of the quality of parents' rearing style (i.e., how parents interact with their children). These findings thus suggest that, in order to evaluate the impact of socializing agents (e.g., parents, coaches, managers, etc.), it is not only critical to consider the way people interact with others and the type of emotional climate they create but also to consider the type of goals they try to transmit.

Finally, Schwartz (2006) provided interesting evidence on how the extrinsic and capitalistic versus more intrinsic character of a country's economy is associated with and represented in the cultural orientation of that country as well as in the average importance individuals within these countries attribute to particular values. Using an index developed by Hall and Gingerich (2004) that reflects the extent to which a national economy is coordinated by competitive market principles rather than strategic principles, Schwartz (2006) showed that the strategic vs. competitive coordination index was strongly positively correlated with a cultural emphasis on intrinsic ideals including (a) harmony (i.e., a concern with nature and world peace), (b) egalitarianism (i.e., a focus on equality, social justice, and honesty), and (c) intellectual autonomy (i.e., a focus on broadmindedness, curiosity, and creativity), whereas it was negatively correlated with a cultural orientation toward more extrinsic oriented endeavors, including (a) mastery (i.e., an emphasis on ambition, and success), (b) hierarchy (i.e., an emphasis on authority, social power, and wealth), and (c) embeddedness (i.e., a focus on tradition, social order, and obedience). Along similar lines, individuals within more capitalistic societies were found to attribute, on average, a stronger importance to extrinsic values, such as achievement and power, whereas placing less importance on intrinsic values, such as universalism and self-direction.

#### ALTERNATIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE INTRINSIC VERSUS EXTRINSIC GOAL DISTINCTION

SDT's intrinsic versus extrinsic goal conceptualization has been criticized from different angles. One of the reasons why this distinction is critically received is the fact that the SDT perspective on goals is regarded as highly "value-laden." Indeed, the research reviewed previously suggests that intrinsic goals are to be preferred over extrinsic goals and, as such, should be encouraged at the expense of extrinsic goals. However, many scholars are hesitant to make such prescriptive suggestions. Skepticism vis-à-vis the desirability of intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals has even led some scholars to severely criticize the intrinsic-extrinsic goal distinction.

Specifically, three different types of criticisms have been forwarded. First, it has been argued that this distinction is a "false" one because it represents nothing but a different way of speaking about autonomous versus controlled regulations. Second, based on quantitative theories of motivation, it can be argued that intrinsic goal framing results in more adaptive learning than extrinsic goal framing because it induces a higher quantity or amount of motivation rather than a different quality of

motivation. Third, it has been suggested that the negative impact of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal pursuits would be limited (a) to individuals residing within intrinsic goal environments and (b) to individuals who do not attain their extrinsic ambitions (e.g., people with low income). Similarly, the detrimental impact of extrinsic goal framing would be limited to individuals with an intrinsic goal orientation. We will now discuss each of these critical claims in more detail.

### Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Goals: A False Distinction

One of the problems that various theorists point out with a “self-actualization model” as provided by SDT is that it is difficult to specify a priori what anyone’s true self consists of (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 2000). If an individual has a real interest in accumulating wealth, for example, why can this not be truly self-actualizing for that person? If an elderly individual wants to hide the signs of aging by buying new clothes, visiting a hair stylist, and purchasing the latest antiwrinkle cream, why would such an endeavor not represent a core goal for that person? Carver and colleagues thus doubt that some goals are more inherently need-satisfying and congruent with the self than others. In line with this, they suggested that the intrinsic–extrinsic goal distinction is a false one that can be conceptually reduced to the differentiation between an autonomous and controlled regulation (Carver & Baird, 1998; Srivastava, Locke, & Barthol, 2001). Carver and Baird (1998) argued that the effect of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals can be fully explained by the reasons or motives underlying people’s goal pursuit. Specifically, these authors contend that extrinsically oriented individuals display more signs of ill-being because they feel more pressured and coerced (i.e., controlled) during their goal pursuits. In contrast, intrinsically oriented individuals are happier and more fulfilled because they pursue these goals in a more volitional (i.e., autonomous) manner. In other words, the impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal striving could be completely carried by the extent to which people pursue their goals for autonomous rather than for controlled reasons. If this were the case, the effect of goal pursuits on well-being would disappear after controlling for type of regulation, and the effect of the intrinsic versus extrinsic goal dimension would be fully accounted for by its underlying autonomous versus controlled regulation.

In spite of their criticism, Carver and Baird (1998) could not provide compelling evidence for their claim. Consistent with other work (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1996), the results of Carver and Baird’s (1998) hierarchical regression analyses indicate that the intrinsic versus extrinsic goal dimension positively predicted well-being, even after controlling for the autonomous versus controlled reasons that underlie the goal pursuits. In another study, Srivastava et al. (2001) found the negative effect of pursuing financial success on well-being among business students and entrepreneurs to disappear after entering three types of motives for valuing financial success, that is, positive motives (e.g., helping one’s family), freedom of action motives

(e.g., charity), and negative motives (e.g., appearing worthy). Whereas positive motives were positively associated with well-being, negative motives yielded a negative relationship.

The findings of Srivastava et al. (2001) were criticized by Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, and Kasser (2004), who suggested that, among other things, some motive scales (e.g., charity) reflect higher order goals rather than reasons for pursuing a goal. Hence, because of this mixture of goals and motives in their motive measure, it should not be surprising that aspiring financial success could not explain additional variance.

However, although Sheldon, Ryan, et al. (2004) refuted Carver and Baird's (1998) criticism, they did recognize that intrinsic and extrinsic goals and autonomous and controlled regulations are correlated. Specifically, previous studies (e.g., Sheldon & Kasser, 1995) demonstrated that the pursuit of intrinsic goals is positively related to an autonomous regulation (correlation of about .30), whereas the pursuit of extrinsic goals is positively related to a controlled regulation (correlation of about .30). The strength of these correlations suggests that goals and regulations are indeed related, as suggested by Carver and Baird (1998). Yet, the size of these correlations also suggests that they are empirically distinguishable.

Indeed, it is quite possible to, for instance, follow a language course to develop one's talents (i.e., an intrinsic goal) because one is pressured by one's boss to improve one's language skills (i.e., controlled regulation) or because one is personally interested in learning languages (i.e., autonomous regulation). Conversely, a person can be focused on being attractive and good-looking (i.e., extrinsic goal) because he feels an inner obligation to do so (i.e., controlled regulation) or because he personally values beauty and attractiveness (i.e., autonomous regulation). In spite of these relationships between goals and motives, past research has shown that both predict independent variance in well-being and adjustment (Sheldon, Ryan, et al., 2004; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995), and similar results were reported in the exercise domain (Sebire et al., in press).

If intrinsic and extrinsic goal contents could be conceptually equated with an autonomous and controlled regulation, this would also imply that framing a learning activity in terms of the attainment of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals should be fully (instead of partially) accounted for by the autonomous versus controlled motives underlying one's activity engagement. The experimental work on goals thus opened new ways to test this criticism. Although autonomous motivation fully explained the goal framing effects on five out of 11 outcomes, it only partially reduced the relation in the remaining six outcomes (Vansteenkiste, Simons, et al., 2004), providing reasonable evidence for the assertion that the intrinsic- versus extrinsic-goal framing effect cannot be reduced to the underlying regulation it induces.

Although research to date suggests that goals seem to matter above and beyond their underlying motives, more research is needed to further test this alternative explanation of the effects of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals. We suggest that, if the criticism by Carver and Baird were true, *any* observed effect of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals on any outcome (e.g., well-being, ethical functioning, performance) should disappear when

controlling for individuals' motives. In this respect, it should also be noted that, maybe, goals only have an independent effect in some domains or for some outcomes. Given that goals are more cognitive in nature than regulations or motives (which are more affective in nature), it is possible that goals yield unique effects on cognitive and attitudinal outcomes (e.g., prejudice, fair play attitudes) whereas motives would be more strongly related to affective and well-being outcomes. To the best of our knowledge, no study to date has explicitly tested this hypothesis of specialized effects of individuals' goals and motives.

### Quantity rather than Quality of Motivation

Experimental goal-framing research has indicated that extrinsic goal framing hinders conceptual learning, presumably because it shifts attention away from the activity at hand toward external indicators of worth (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). In contrast, intrinsic goal framing promotes learning and achievement presumably because it leads to a qualitatively different approach of and engagement in the learning activity. However, based on quantitative conceptualizations of motivation, as articulated within expectancy-value theories (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) and instrumentality models (Husman & Lens, 1999), the effects of goal framing on learning can also be explained in a different way. Given that intrinsic goals are, on average, more highly valued than extrinsic goals (Kasser, 2002), presenting a particular learning activity as serving a more highly valued intrinsic goal should increase the perceived utility value (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) of the learning activity compared with framing that activity in terms of the attainment of a less valued extrinsic goal. This enhanced utility would increase learners' quantity or amount of motivation, resulting in higher performance and persistence.

This alternative account was tested in several studies. In a first study (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Soenens, Lens, Matos, & Lacante, 2004), a learning activity was portrayed as serving either an intrinsic goal, an extrinsic goal, or both an intrinsic and an extrinsic goal. This allowed investigating the effects of double versus single goal framing upon learning and achievement. From a quantitative motivational perspective, the perceived utility value in a double goal condition is higher than in the single goal conditions. Hence, providing two goals should always result in better learning than providing only a single goal. However, according to a qualitative view on goals, as defended within SDT, not only the number of goals but also their quality needs to be considered (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). Providing an extrinsic goal in addition to an already present intrinsic goal is likely to shift attention from the learning activity to external signs of worth, thereby hindering the learning process. In contrast, providing an intrinsic goal in addition to an extrinsic goal is likely to increase a thoughtful and task-focused commitment toward the activity, so that individuals in the double goal framing condition get more fully engaged in the activity. The predictions derived from SDT were supported such that intrinsic goal

framing enhanced performance and persistence compared with both extrinsic goal framing and double goal framing; yet, the perceived utility of the activity was greater in the double goal condition.

Comparing the effects of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal framing does not allow the derivation of strict conclusions regarding the impact of extrinsic goal framing per se: It is quite possible that indicating how a learning task relates to an extrinsic goal leads to better learning outcomes compared to a control-group where no goal references are made. In fact, on the basis of quantitative theories on motivation, it can be hypothesized that extrinsic goal framing enhances the perceived utility of the activity, so that better outcomes should follow in the extrinsic goal condition compared with when the relevance of the activity is not stressed at all. However, in contrast to this view, SDT holds that extrinsic goal framing will result in poorer quality learning compared with a no-goal control group. The findings of an experimental study by Vansteenkiste, Simons, Soenens, and Lens (2004) were in line with SDT-based hypotheses: Whereas intrinsic goal framing resulted in better performance and greater persistence than no goal framing, extrinsic goal framing undermined performance and persistence.

### Limited Negative Effects of Extrinsic Goal Pursuit and Extrinsic Goal Framing

#### *Match Perspective*

The match perspective, which maintains that optimal functioning and well-being will occur when individuals' own goals fit with the goals that are promoted within the environment, has received considerable attention in a broad array of fields, including social psychology (e.g., Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), educational psychology (e.g., Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1998), organizational psychology (e.g., Edwards, 1991), developmental psychology (e.g., Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991), and sports psychology (e.g., Amiot, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2006).

One example of the match perspective is an employee who experiences lower well-being and job satisfaction when his own values are discrepant from those promoted in the organization. Hence, the impact of goals for well-being and functioning would not depend on the content of the goals as such but on the extent to which individuals' own goals correspond to or match with the goals promoted in the immediate social environment. In other words, the negative impact of extrinsic goals would be limited to people residing in an environment that promotes intrinsic goals. Also, the negative effects of pursuing extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals, as observed in a number of previous studies (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1996), would be primarily carried by individuals involved in intrinsic goal oriented climates. The negative effects of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal pursuits would be offset or even reversed among people who find themselves in an extrinsic goal promoting environment.

Overall, the match perspective assumption posits, at least implicitly, that any kind of goal can be incorporated within one's sense of self. In this respect, the match perspective fits a social-constructivist viewpoint

(Berzonsky, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 2003), which rejects the idea that individuals are inherently oriented toward particular goals (i.e., intrinsic goals). Instead, one's goals and the identity that is based on them are considered constructions, obtained in part through socialization processes.

The extent to which internalized goals are successful in regulating behavior and the extent to which they are associated with optimal functioning merely depends on the degree to which goals are also adopted in the social context. Thus, the same goals may be negatively associated with well-being in one environment but not in another. For instance, the pursuit of the extrinsic goal of financial success might be positively related to well-being in a business organization or in a culture that highlights such goals but may negatively predict adjustment in an organization that emphasizes intrinsic goal attainment or in a society that promotes generativity and solidarity between its members.

Yet, if one assumes that a fundamental, psychological make-up underlies the human psyche, as in an organismic theory such as SDT, it becomes important to consider whether individuals' goals or the goals promoted by the social environment are consistent with basic elements of human nature. SDT assumes that the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness form an inherent part of the human organism. Thus, to derive predictions about the adaptive value of goals, SDT considers the extent to which people's goals are congruent with these universal propensities (i.e., people's basic psychological needs) rather than with the goals prevailing in the social environment. Therefore, SDT maintains that the pursuit of intrinsic relative to extrinsic goals should predict well-being because it is more likely to be associated with basic need satisfaction. In sum, within SDT the most important criterion to evaluate whether goals promote or detract from well-being is whether these goals contribute to the satisfaction of human basic needs and not whether goals match the requirements of particular environments (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006).

In line with the match perspective, in a sample of psychology and business students, Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) showed that the effect of valuing extrinsic over intrinsic goals on well-being interacted with participants' study environment. Business students who valued extrinsic over intrinsic goals reported higher psychological well-being, whereas psychology students reported more optimal functioning when they valued intrinsic over extrinsic goals. In contrast to this, in two subsequent studies (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Vansteenkiste, Duriez, Simons, & Soenens, 2006), extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal pursuits were associated with lower well-being and more internal distress among business students, even though extrinsic goals tend to be emphasized in their environment (see also Srivastava et al., 2001). Furthermore, Sheldon and Krieger (2004) reported that law students shifted away from intrinsic toward extrinsic goal pursuits during the first year of law school. Given that law schools typically foster status-seeking, competition, and image-building (Krieger, 1998), a match perspective would suggest that such changes should be adaptive. In spite of this, these changes were found to be positively related to a decline in psychological well-being.

The experimental induction of intrinsic and extrinsic goals provided a new avenue to further test these two conflicting perspectives, as it could examine whether extrinsic goal oriented individuals would benefit from being placed in an extrinsic goal framing condition. Based on the match perspective, it is suggested that the negative effects of extrinsic goal framing are limited to learners who value intrinsic over extrinsic goals and that the overall enhancement of learning and persistence in the intrinsic goal conditions of the studies reviewed earlier were primarily carried by learners whose goal orientation was more intrinsic than extrinsic. A study among business students provided preliminary counterevidence for this viewpoint by showing that extrinsic goal framing undermined business' students learning and performance (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, et al., 2004, Study 2). Unfortunately, in this study, participants' personal goal orientations were not measured prior to the goal exposure. This was the case in a study among 5th- and 6th-grade children (Vansteenkiste, Timmermans, Lens, Soenens, & Van den Broeck, 2008). Results confirmed SDT as the performance and persistence of children preferring either intrinsic or extrinsic goals was enhanced when placed in an intrinsic instead of an extrinsic goal framing condition. Although more research is needed on this issue, the existing empirical evidence suggests that the negative effects of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal pursuits are unlikely to be altered depending upon the goals that are promoted in the environment.

### *Aspiration Theory*

Although a stronger valuation of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals might be associated with lower well-being, the aspiration theory (e.g., Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1967; McGill, 1967) would predict that the attainment of extrinsic goals should produce well-being as it provides people with rewards and a sense of self-efficacy. Thus, according to this theory, because well-being is a function of the discrepancy between people's aspirations or goals and their attaining these aspirations and goals, attaining one's materialist goals should be associated with enhanced well-being. For instance, the negative effects associated with aspiring financial success are limited to the pursuit of such success but should disappear or even be inversed once people are capable of attaining these aspirations.

In contrast to such predictions, Kasser and Ryan (2001) showed that, whereas intrinsic goal attainment was conducive to psychological well-being, extrinsic goal attainment was not. Similar results were reported by Ryan et al. (1999) in a sample of Russian adults. Furthermore, in a longitudinal study, Sheldon and Kasser (1998) showed that making progress at extrinsic goals over a semester did not result in an increase in well-being, whereas intrinsic goal progress positively predicted enhanced well-being. Most recently, in a sample of older adults (>65 years), Van Hiel and Vansteenkiste (2007) showed that reported attainment of intrinsic goals over the life course was positively predictive of feelings of ego integrity and

death acceptance, whereas extrinsic goal attainment was not. These results fit the idea that, if people are able to attain goals that are consistent with their natural growth-trajectory, they experience more harmony and seem more ready to face the “final curtain.”

The question whether the negative effects of aspiring financial success disappear when one is able to actually attain financial success has been examined in a second line of research as well. In a number of studies, it was examined whether the well-being effect of pursuing materialist goals would be different for individuals with low compared with high income. LaBarbera and Gürhan (1997) argued that pursuing materialist goals should positively predict well-being for individuals with a high income, because these individuals reached their materialist goals. LaBarbera and Gürhan (1997) provided partial support for the hypothesis derived from the aspiration theory: Two of their materialism subscales, nongenerosity and possessiveness (Belk, 1985), interacted with income in the prediction of general affect, and materialism did not negatively predict general affect for people with a high income. Similarly, in a longitudinal study, Nickerson, Schwartz, Diener, and Kahneman (2003) found that the negative impact of aspiring financial success on life and job satisfaction diminished for people earning a high income. Such moderation effects were not found for satisfaction with family life.

In contrast to these studies, Kasser and Ryan (1996) found that the negative effects of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals on a broad range of self-reported and rated well-being outcomes (i.e., self-actualization, vitality, depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms) were not offset for people with a high level of income. Similarly, Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, et al. (2007) found that the negative effect of holding an extrinsic relative to an intrinsic work value orientation on life and job satisfaction was not moderated by income, suggesting that the negative well-being effect of pursuing material goals equally applies to individuals with a low and a high income.

Instead, they reported that objectively earning a higher income had a small but positive effect on job and life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), whereas the personal valuation of a higher income over more intrinsic work aspirations was negatively related to well-being. This was referred to as the “income-paradox”: Whereas objectively making more money increases happiness, subjectively valuing money seems to have the opposite effect.

This brief overview suggests that more research is needed in this area of inquiry. In particular, it would be interesting to explore whether the attributed meaning (e.g., autonomous versus controlled, Deci & Ryan, 2000) would be different for people with different income levels. This might help to achieve further insight in which circumstances (i.e., income level) and for which reason the pursuit of materialist aspirations yield negative well-being implications. We turn to the latter issue in more detail in the following section, when a number of macro- and micro-mediational mechanisms are proposed that might help clarify the link between intrinsic relative to extrinsic goals and optimal functioning.

## MACRO- AND MICRO-MEDIATIONAL MECHANISMS UNDERLYING GOAL EFFECTS

### Macro-Mediational Mechanisms: Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction

A variety of processes explain the relation between an intrinsic relative to an extrinsic goal pursuit and optimal functioning. For instance, because time is a limited resource requiring people to make choices that will determine the content and quality of their lives, it has been suggested that investing too much time pursuing extrinsic goals is likely to occur at the expense of devoting time to intrinsic goals (e.g., Ryan et al., 1996; Sheldon, Ryan, et al., 2004). As stated by Csikszentmihalyi (1999, p. 823), for materialist individuals, “the opportunity costs of playing with one’s child, reading poetry, or attending a family reunion might become too high, and so one stops doing these irrational things.” Put differently, intrinsic activities are likely to be crowded out by an overly strong investment in extrinsic goals.

Furthermore, within SDT, it is suggested that the pursuit of intrinsic, relative to extrinsic, goals is likely to be differentially linked to psychological well-being because of their differential effect on basic psychological need satisfaction. SDT maintains that people are endowed with three basic innate psychological needs (Ryan, 1995): (a) the need for *autonomy* or the desire to feel volitional with respect to one’s behavior, (b) the need for *belonginess* or relatedness or the desire to care for and feel cared for by others, and (c) the need for *competence* or the desire to feel effective in the actions one undertakes.

These basic needs—which can best be remembered through the acronym “ABC”, because of the first letter of the three basic terms—propel and instigate a wide variety of human behaviors across different contexts, and their satisfaction is said to promote the realization of one’s basic growth tendencies. Indeed, the satisfaction of these psychological needs is considered equally fundamental for people’s psychological thriving, integrity, and well-being, as satisfaction of physical needs (e.g., hunger and thirst) is for their physical survival and growth (Ryan, 1995).

Basic need satisfaction is thus considered to be the energizing and driving force behind individuals’ growth, so that basic need satisfaction would foster the pursuit of intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals. The relationship between people’s growth tendencies and basic need satisfaction is, however, likely to be bidirectional, as the pursuit of intrinsic relative to extrinsic goals is likely to yield more optimal functioning because it allows for a greater satisfaction of the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser, 2002).

Although various studies provide indirect evidence for these claims (see Kasser, 2002, for an overview), the mediational role of basic need satisfaction has only recently been investigated. For instance, fashion models—who are likely to personally value the body ideal and definitely work in a social environment that places high emphasis on physical attractiveness and body image—were recently found to experience lower daily need satisfaction

relative to a control-group (Meyer, Enström, Harstveit, Bowles, & Beevers, 2007). This lower need satisfaction could in turn, account for the mean-level differences in psychological well-being between models and nonmodels. Further, Rijavec, Brdar, and Miljkovic (2006) found intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal pursuits to relate positively to need satisfaction.

Similarly, in the organizational domain, Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, et al. (2007) found that intrinsic relative to extrinsic work value orientations positively predicted need satisfaction at work, which, in turn, predicted job well-being. Finally, Sebire et al. (2008) reported intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal pursuits during exercising to be more strongly linked to basic need satisfaction, which, in turn, predicted a variety of well-being outcomes.

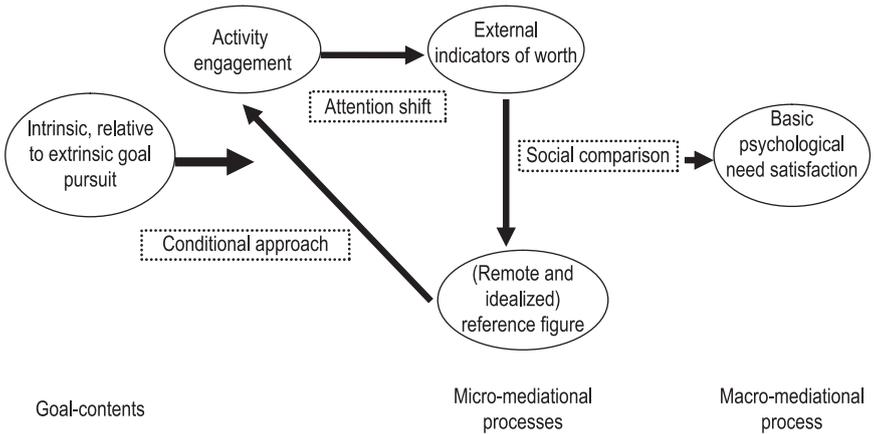
What kind of mechanisms can account for the link between intrinsic relative to extrinsic goal pursuit and basic need satisfaction? We believe that people will approach activities and other people differently depending on their dominant goal orientation, resulting in different need satisfaction opportunities. In the following section, three different micro-mediational mechanisms are discussed that might explain how and why pursuing extrinsic versus intrinsic goals or being exposed to extrinsic versus intrinsic goal promotion is differentially linked to need satisfaction: (a) attention shift, (b) interpersonal comparison, and (c) conditional approach (see also Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Lens, 2007). We suggest that these attentional and cognitive mechanisms help break down the marco-mediational mechanism of basic need satisfaction into lower-level processes.

### Micro-Mediational Mechanisms: Cognitive-Attentional Processes

#### *Attention Shift*

Let us assume that an absorbed and committed activity engagement represents the best way to get one's basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness met. When people are fully immersed in an activity, they are more likely to express their own interests and values (autonomy) and are more likely to effectively deal with the challenges of the activity (competence). Similarly, when people are fully absorbed in a conversation, they are more likely to derive a sense of satisfaction from it and to experience a sense of connectedness with the other person (relatedness). If an absorbed activity engagement is a necessary condition for basic need satisfaction, it can be concluded that any goal that precludes such an engagement will yield less optimal effects. We suggest that extrinsic goals are likely to shift individuals' attention away from the activity at hand and, as such, forestall need satisfaction (see Figure 4.1).

Consider an extrinsic goal oriented female exerciser who is exercising as a way to improve her sex appeal and attractiveness. Instead of being immersed in the exercise activity at hand, she is likely to be "number-checking" during a work-out session (e.g., "how many calories did I already burn?") because such information helps her to monitor her progress toward the extrinsic goal ambitions. Or consider an academic who is



**Figure 4.1. Graphical Representation of Different Micro-Mediational Processes involved in the Pursuit of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Goals.**

focused on building up a prestigious academic career. When giving a talk at a conference, instead of being focused on the content of the talk, he is likely to feel stressed and anxious because his perceived academic status and worth is contingent upon the quality of the presentation.

These anecdotes suggest that extrinsic goal oriented people's attention is more likely to shift away from the content of the activity. In line with this, experimental studies have shown that extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal framing resulted in poorer conceptual integration of the learning material and lower subsequent achievement because it hindered committed and task-oriented learning (e.g., Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, et al., 2005; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, et al., 2004). A number of other empirical studies, although not based on the SDT-perspective, also provided evidence for the distracting role of extrinsic goals. Quin, Kallen, Twenge, and Frederickson (2006) reported that when women's attention was oriented toward their physical looks, they displayed decreased performance on a Stroop task, presumably because their attention focus was disrupted. Furthermore, Kashdan and Breen (2007) showed that the pursuit of materialism is associated with greater experiential avoidance, representing a lack of willingness to be in contact with negatively evaluated thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Thus, materialist individuals do not seem as receptive to their momentary unfolding emotions, presumably because their attention is focused on attaining external indicators of worth (Kasser, 2002).

As a consequence of shifting their attention away from the activity at hand, people are less likely to fulfill their needs. First, a lack of thorough engagement in an activity typically results in poorer performance and achievement, thus undermining individuals' need for competence. Second, a focus on external indicators of worth is stressful and autonomy inhibiting because it induces a preoccupation with self-worth concerns. Third, such a focus is also likely to elicit ego-involvement and egoism, such that extrinsic

goal oriented individuals may fail to be attuned to the needs and concerns of others.

### *Interpersonal Comparison*

After becoming concerned with her bodily attractiveness during a workout session, the female exerciser is likely to gaze in the mirror to check her own figure and to check the difference with other exercisers' figures or with role models. Similarly, being concerned with academic status, a researcher is likely to compare the own publication record with the record of his colleagues or with an admired researcher. Indeed, several researchers in different fields of psychology, including consumer psychology (Sirgy, 1998; Van Boven, 2005) and health psychology (Dittmar, 2007), have suggested that a focus on extrinsic goal pursuits is likely to increase people's tendency to engage in interpersonal comparisons. That is, after turning to the external indicators of worth, individuals are likely to start comparing their own extrinsic goal realizations with those of others (see Figure 4.1).

Several studies have now provided evidence for this claim. For instance, studies in the body image literature have shown that women engage in social comparison processes after being exposed to attractive comparison targets (e.g., Patrick, Neighbors, & Knee, 2004; Tiggeman & McGill, 2004). Furthermore, in the domain of education, extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal framing was found to provoke a stronger performance-approach orientation (Elliot, 1999), that is, a desire to outperform others (e.g., Vansteenkiste, Matos, Lens, & Soenens, 2007). By definition, a performance orientation involves making comparisons of one's own achievements with the achievements of others. Extrinsic goals are not only associated with interpersonal but also with intergroup comparisons, as indexed by a stronger adoption of a social dominance attitude (Duriez, Vansteenkiste, et al., 2007).

A first likely result of such comparisons is that the pursuit of extrinsic goals or the exposure to extrinsic goal messages will be experienced as stressful and controlling, as people experience an inner urge to achieve the high standards exemplified by reference figures. Consistent with this, extrinsic goal framing was found to result in a more stressful learning experience and to prompt more controlled engagement in learning activities, signaling lack of autonomy satisfaction (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, et al. 2004; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Soenens, et al., 2004).

Second, in addition to failing to provide autonomy satisfaction, engagement in interpersonal comparisons is likely to make people feel inferior to others because there are always people that outperform a person in attaining an extrinsic goal. Moreover, extrinsic goal oriented individuals tend to override wealth and physical appeal and are more likely to monitor their success against the success of romanticized and rather remote reference figures (e.g., models, successful managers; Kasser, 2002). As a result, extrinsic goal oriented individuals are more likely to make upward comparisons (Sirgy, 1998), which provoke a sense of frustration and unhappiness and

fuel their feelings of incompetence and insecurity. Even if people are momentarily able to meet their extrinsic ambitions, the benefits associated with extrinsic goal attainment are said to be quite short-lived. This is because, although extrinsic goal attainment might yield some hedonic satisfaction, its attainment is unlikely to engender a sense of eudaimonia and self-realization (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). As a result, new extrinsic ambitions are likely to set quickly in place, leading extrinsic goal oriented people to get trapped in a “hedonic treadmill” (Brickman & Campbell, 1977). This treadmill would be further fed by the ongoing gap extrinsic oriented individuals experience between their current realized and desired extrinsic ambitions (Solberg, Diener, & Robinson, 2004).

The notion that extrinsic aspirations would result in reduced competence satisfaction through processes of social comparison has recently received some evidence. In a meta-analytical review, Groesz, Levine, and Murnen (2002) showed that the experimental exposure to the thin ideal resulted in decreased body satisfaction ( $d = -.31$ ), an effect that was more pronounced among women with an eating disorder or body dissatisfaction history.

Similarly, in a sample of male participants, Gulas and McKeage (2000) reported that self-esteem dropped when presented with ads referring to physical appeal or financial success, especially if participants were sensitive to idealized images. Notably, not only the exposure to attractive professional models but also to thinner peers was found to result in decreased body satisfaction (e.g., Krones, Stice, Batres, & Orjada, 2005). Research even suggests that exposure to attractive peers might be more harmful than exposure to attractive models (Cash, Cash, & Butters, 1983), presumably because one might perceive attaining an attractive body of a peer as easier, such that a failure to do so might engender a stronger sense of incompetence, body dissatisfaction, and related psychological insecurity compared with being exposed to a professional attractive model.

Several studies have begun to explicitly elucidate the explanatory role of social comparison. Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, and Buote (2006) showed that, when being asked to freely describe their weight and body shape, women (but not men) appear more likely to make upward rather than downward comparisons, and, more important, that the number of spontaneously generated upward comparisons was positively correlated with the number of negative self-statements with regard to their physical appearance.

Using an experimental design, Tiggeman and McGill (2004) reported that the frequency of engaging in social comparisons mediated the negative effect of exposure to media images on negative mood and body dissatisfaction. Thus, after being exposed to ads depicting highly attractive models with (presumably) unattainable appearances, women tended to feel less competent and worthy of their own bodies because they compared their own appearance and figure with an unattainable ideal in a critical and self-evaluative fashion (Martin & Gentry, 1997). Similar mediational findings were reported by Bessendorf (2006), who showed that women who experienced a large discrepancy between their current and ideal body images were especially vulnerable to social comparison processes and, as a result, were

also more at risk for increased body dissatisfaction and depressive feelings after being exposed to thin-ideal advertisements.

Third, upward interpersonal comparisons are also likely to be experienced as socially alienating and to interfere with the possibility of deeply relating to others. By devoting attention and energy to interpersonal comparisons, the woman in the fitness room would fail to share exercise enjoyment with her friends and would be less likely to feel connected to them. By comparing the own publication record with the record of others, the extrinsic goal oriented academic might become envious of other people's successes and less inclined to collaborate with them. Thus, the competitive and performance-oriented focus that is activated through engaging in interpersonal comparisons is unlikely to contribute to the development of trustful relationships.

### *Conditional Approach*

The lack of need satisfaction that is associated with an attention shift and with engagement in interpersonal comparison might lead people to feel insecure about their competencies, relationships, and personal values. Such insecurity might provoke two different reactions.

First, insecurity and anxiety are likely to prompt various defensive behaviors that are intended to reduce anxiety and threat. For instance, an individual could try to minimize the extrinsic goal attainments of others when observing that he or she was less successful in attaining these goals, or such an individual might be more likely to provide external, and hence more self-protective, explanations (i.e., attributions) for failure to attain extrinsic goals. Second, the heightened insecurity might also prompt people to acquire more external indicators of worth to improve their standing relative to others, as a way to prove their worth (see Figure 4.1).

To illustrate, after having observed that she was a bit fatter than her friends, the woman in the fitness room might put extra effort into the exercises to show her friends that she is able to live up to the extrinsic ideals. Alternatively, she might put her friends down or provide a self-protective excuse for her failure to attain a slim body in an attempt to ameliorate her insecurity and feel better about herself. Similarly, after finding out that his colleagues are more successful, the extrinsically oriented academic might decide to work harder to get another project finished, increasing the chances of work-family interference (Vansteenkiste, Neyrinck, et al., 2007). Alternatively, this person might defensively minimize the publication record of colleagues or provide rather external attributions for his lack of academic success.

Previous research has provided evidence for these hypotheses. For instance, Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, and Greenberg (2001) demonstrated that defensive behavior in a new situation is more likely to occur when people's extrinsic goals rather than their intrinsic goals are activated. Duriez, Vansteenkiste, et al. (2007) found that extrinsically oriented individuals were more right-wing authoritarian, presumably because adopting

such attitudes helped them to alleviate the intraindividual insecurity that extrinsic goal pursuits engender. Similarly, Duriez, Soenens, et al. (2007) showed that parents who emphasized the attainment of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals in their child rearing had children who displayed stronger right-wing authoritarian attitudes.

In addition to these defensive reactions, more extrinsically oriented individuals might display more interest in other people or put extra effort in activities that help them attain the desired external indicators of worth. Unfortunately, they are likely to approach other people and activities in a nonoptimal, that is, a conditional way. Specifically, extrinsic goal oriented individuals would only select activities and would only interact with individuals as far as other people are perceived as being useful or instrumental for the achievement of their own extrinsic ambitions. Kasser (2002) used the term “objectifying stance” to refer to the conditional interest that extrinsically oriented individuals show in other people. Extrinsically oriented individuals would perceive others as objects that need to be used (and even abused) in the most efficient way to get ahead in their extrinsic strivings.

Such a self-centered approach stands in opposition with the more empathic stance that characterizes an intrinsic goal orientation. In line with this, an intrinsic relative to an extrinsic goal orientation has been found to be inversely related to Machiavellian attitudes (McHoskey, 1999) while being positively associated with empathy (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). As a result of these different relational attitudes, individuals will be more or less likely to get their basic need for relatedness satisfied. It is interesting to note that extrinsic goal oriented individuals not only consider others as objects but also tend to adopt a self-objectifying stance toward themselves as well (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Specifically, when people are self-objectifying, they perceive their bodies from a third-person perspective, thereby focusing on body attributes (“How does my bum look?”) rather than from a first-person perspective, thereby focusing on nonobservable body attributes (“How do I feel?”). Such a self-objectifying stance would increase the vulnerability for low competence satisfaction, as illustrated by the finding that self-objectification predicts body shame, which, in turn, predicts low body satisfaction (Noll & Frederickson, 1998).

In addition to observing oneself and others in a conditional fashion, more extrinsically oriented individuals tend to approach activities in a conditional way, which is equally unlikely to contribute to one’s need satisfaction because activities are more likely to be carried out in a rigid and narrowly focused way. In line with this, it has been shown that, although participants in an extrinsic goal condition are engaged in the learning activity, the learning material is processed in a relatively superficial fashion (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, et al., 2004; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, et al., 2005).

This suggests that extrinsically oriented students only focus on those elements that are perceived as instrumental in performing on the test, which is likely to preclude feeling a sense of competence. Further, although such a rigid approach promoted initial persistence, these gains were not maintained in the longer run (e.g., Vansteenkiste, Simons, Soenens, et al.,

2004), leaving individuals with a sense of ineffectiveness and incompetence for failing to persist at the requested behaviors.

In sum, extrinsic versus intrinsic goal pursuits and the exposure to extrinsic versus intrinsic goal promotion seem to affect a set of related attention and cognitive processes that might explain why these different goals are differentially related to basic need satisfaction. Drawing upon the existing data on extrinsic and intrinsic goals, we propose that extrinsic relative to intrinsic goals promote an attention shift away from the activity at hand toward external indicators of worth. When people become concerned with living up to these external indicators, they are more likely to compare their own realizations with those of others, which can involve both romanticized and remote reference figures as social partners in one's direct environment. These upward comparisons will, on average, hinder basic need satisfaction and will leave people with a sense of insecurity and intraindividual threat. Such insecurity and threat can evoke defensive behavior or a more proactive tendency to garner external indicators of worth. As a result, and rather paradoxically, such individuals' attention shifts back to the activity at hand, as the instigated insecurity might lead them to become more strongly focused on attaining their extrinsic ideals (Kasser et al., 2004). However, more extrinsically goal oriented people approach the activity at hand and other people around them in a conditional, and hence, more rigid and self-centered fashion, which, is—rather unfortunately—likely to further interfere with basic need satisfaction, thereby fuelling a sense of insecurity and thus further activating the negative vicious cycle.

## CONCLUSION

The question whether materialist strivings buy happiness has received increasing attention by psychologists over the past 15 years. Self-determination theory discerns materialist strivings and other extrinsic aspirations such as social status and physical appeal from more organismic and intrinsic strivings such as self-acceptance and emotional intimacy. The articulation of a positive alternative for the pursuit of extrinsic strivings is very much needed, as researchers within the fields of consumer psychology and the body image literature have tended to study extrinsic goals in relative isolation from a more rewarding and growth-promoting alternative. Moreover, the study of such a positive alternative seems to fit very well within the current zeitgeist in the psychological literature to focus on those social conditions and personal attributes that facilitate the deployment of one's potential and contribute to growth.

The work reviewed in this chapter suggests the pursuit and promotion of intrinsic, relative to extrinsic, goals yields a host of differential effects, including people's personal well-being and health, the quality of their social relationships, their ethical functioning, their concern with ecological welfare, and their performance. Moreover, several lines of research begin to show that these conclusions are not only valid for people's general life aspirations but also hold when looking at different life domains as diverse as

sports and exercising, work, education, and health care. Future research might shed further insight in why these effects occur. The proposed macro-mediational process of basic need satisfaction as well as the three intervening micro-mediational mechanisms might provide some inspiration in this regard.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

#### Discovering the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goal Importance of your Daily Strivings

*Personal Strivings:* Try to think for a while about your personal strivings. These are midlevel goals you have set for yourself. They represent what you typically try to do in your daily behavior, such as learning to play guitar, trying to exercise more, trying to put extra effort in your job, spending more time with your children, or cleaning your house. Please write down three different personal strivings you have set for yourself for the next 3 months.

*Intrinsic and Extrinsic Goal Importance of Your Strivings:* Now, ask yourself why these strivings are so important for you? To what extent is the pursuit of each of these strivings helpful in achieving different life goals? To help you brainstorm, you can write down how helpful each striving is in terms of achieving the following:

- 1) financial success in your life
- 2) helping other people in need
- 3) increasing your physical appeal to others
- 4) developing your talents
- 5) being more socially admired by others
- 6) being in better physical shape
- 7) having a stronger influence over others
- 8) developing stronger relational bonds with others

For each of these goals, indicate whether your current strivings help you in achieving them by scoring them from 1 (*not helpful at all*) to 5 (*very helpful*). Then, sum your scores across the three strivings for goals 1, 3, 5, and 7, and your scores for goals 2, 4, 6, and 8. The first set of goals assesses the importance of extrinsic goal strivings, and the second set of goals measures the importance of intrinsic goal strivings.

Look at your results. If your intrinsic goal score is much higher than your extrinsic goal score, your daily strivings are centered around goals that promote growth. If your extrinsic goals score is higher than your intrinsic goal score, your daily strivings are focused on material gain. Take a moment to reflect on your goals. What is it that makes extrinsic goals so important for you? What are the benefits to pursuing them? What are the costs? How do you pursue other people around you when you have an extrinsic goal on your mind when engaging in an activity? If you manage to attain an extrinsic goal, how long does the satisfaction of goal attainment last?

These kinds of questions might help you to gain further insight in the dynamic effects that are associated with the pursuit of intrinsic and extrinsic goals and might perhaps ultimately lead you to alter your perspective on your goals, to abandon some of them, and to select new ones.

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# Positive Schooling

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There is much agreement that youth development takes place in three major contexts: families, peer groups, and out-of-home contexts, such as schools (Cox & Harter, 2003). Nevertheless, research investigating the relationship between school experiences and positive youth development has lagged behind scholarship examining the other two contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize studies that have focused on factors contributing to positive school experiences, or school satisfaction. In this chapter, the definition and measures of school satisfaction will be provided, followed by a review of the linkages between individual difference and environmental factors and school satisfaction. Finally, we provide a discussion of the implications of the research for the design of healthy school environments.

## DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Simply stated, positive or “good” schools are those that are experienced as positive by students. Although the primary goal of schools is to prepare students for life beyond graduation, the quality of experiences *during* the formal school years dictates in some part the choices one makes post-high school. Indeed, students who report positive school experiences also report more favorable life experiences (e.g. Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003), and they are less likely to report unfavorable experiences such as chronic alcohol use and heightened mental distress years after graduating (Locke & Newcomb, 2004). These findings emphasize that when students report positive school experiences, good things tend to happen for them both as current students and in the future as adults. Understanding factors that

contribute to positive schooling should thus be an important consideration in the evaluation of school effectiveness (Hegarty, 1994).

In this regard, life satisfaction provides a useful conceptual framework to assess school effectiveness. Life satisfaction is an individual's cognitive appraisal of his or her current life circumstances, with these appraisals taking into account both internal (e.g., self-beliefs) and external factors (see Diener, 2000, for a review). Among youth, life satisfaction has been primarily studied from a global perspective, that is, asking youth to evaluate the positivity of their life as a whole (e.g., "overall, my life is going well"). The importance of global evaluations in adults and children and youth has been well established (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Huebner, 2004). However, studies of domain-specific perceptions, such as satisfaction with family and peer relationships have emerged and have proven successful as well. Students as young as 8 years old are able to provide meaningful assessments of major life domains, and they are also able to differentiate life satisfaction judgments from positive and negative emotions, showing that life satisfaction reports are related to, but not limited to, their experiences of different emotions (Huebner, 1991, 2004). In other words, students who are satisfied with their lives do not have to be happy all the time.

School is considered an important life domain for most youth, and to this end research efforts have been made to assess youth's school satisfaction. School satisfaction has been defined as a student's judgment of the positivity of her or his school experience *as a whole* (Huebner, 1994). Nevertheless, although there may be some consensus on important criteria that are necessary for positive school experiences (e.g., "fair" teachers, small class sizes), students are likely to assign different weights to these criteria or, in some cases, develop their own criteria (see Pavot & Diener, 1993). As a result, items on measures of school satisfaction reflect global (e.g., I like my school) rather than specific (e.g., I like my school building; I like my school curriculum) characteristics. These measures allow students to weight or incorporate domains of unique criteria for positive schooling.

Such measures are thus differentiable from school climate measures, which include researcher-generated domains that are predetermined to be important for the respondents. The usefulness of each measure is, of course, dependent upon the aims of the researcher.

Although research remains in its beginning stage, it is evident that the levels of students' school satisfaction judgments are related to a number of favorable psychological, psychosocial, and psychoeducational outcomes. For example, Huebner and Gilman (2006) found that "very high" levels of school satisfaction are associated with school-related benefits above and beyond "average" and "below average" levels, such as higher grade point averages, a greater sense of motivation and personal control, and fewer psychological symptoms. Also, higher school satisfaction has been shown to be associated with fewer adolescent problem behaviors concurrently (DeSantis-King, Huebner, Suldo, & Valois, 2006) and prospectively (Elmore, 2006). Most important, school satisfaction appears to be a precursor of student engagement behaviors and academic progress even in students as young as kindergartners (Ladd, Buhs, & Seid, 2000). Thus, school satisfaction

appears to serve as one clinically useful and important indicator of positive school adaptation and its accompanying benefits.

## MEASUREMENT OF SCHOOL SATISFACTION

School satisfaction measures are often designed to be used for a particular research study or for a single grade level, which often limits their generalizability to other groups and ages of interest. Nevertheless, there are some measures that have been used across multiple studies, and they will be the focus of this section. The earliest measure was the Quality of School Life Scale (QSL; Epstein & McPartland, 1976), which consists of 27 items that assess three domains believed to be most relevant to positive school experiences: satisfaction with school in general, commitment to school work, and attitudes towards teachers. Item response formats range from dichotomous true–false options to multiple response options. The QSL was originally administered to over 4,000 elementary, middle, and high school students in one U.S. state. Results supported the psychometric properties of the scale, with adequate internal consistency for each of the three domains (generally ranging from .70 to .85), and moderate consistency across a 1-year time span. Evidence for the convergent and discriminant validity of the scale was obtained via significant and expected positive correlations with school performance and negative and significant correlations with school anxiety and poor school behaviors such as cutting class or school. Finally, the QSL yielded evidence of construct validity via exploratory factor analytic methods. Subsequent studies have generally supported these original findings (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1993). Other measures have largely adapted the QSL but have expanded the number of domains and applied them to students from different nationalities (e.g. Karatzias, Power, & Swanson, 2001; Mok & Flynn, 2002).

Other school satisfaction measures are embedded within larger multidimensional scales to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors that contribute to students' overall well-being. For example, the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994) assesses global life satisfaction as well as satisfaction with school, family, friends, living environment, and self. The School Satisfaction subscale consists of seven items that reflect the degree of positivity surrounding students' relationships with teachers and classmates, as well as their overall impression of their school environment (e.g., "school is great"). All items are responded to on a 6-point rating scale. Extant findings reveal that the scale yields strong psychometric properties, including internal consistency estimates of .80 or greater, adequate internal consistency across multiple time frames, and evidence of convergent and discriminant validity across youth representing different age and grade ranges (see Gilman & Huebner, 2003). The School Satisfaction subscale also demonstrates solid evidence of construct validity for students across many nationalities (Gilman et al., in press).

Other scales are incorporated into standardized instruments, to be used as part of a comprehensive assessment to establish clinical diagnoses. The Behavioral Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC–2;

Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) is one example of such an instrument, which includes the Attitude to Teachers and Attitude to School subscales. Both subscales evidence strong psychometric properties and have been used in recent studies (e.g. Gilman & Anderman, 2006b).

In summary, evidence from available school satisfaction instruments indicates that positive school perceptions can be reliably and validly assessed among youth. It should be noted like most satisfaction measures, school satisfaction is primarily assessed via self-report, using written responses on measures that are administered in group settings. Considering that such perceptions are based on internalized beliefs that may not be shared with others, self-reports will continue to prevail as the primary assessment method. Nevertheless, such measures cannot completely address potential limitations such as social desirability, positive impression management, and faking responses. For this reason, other methods have been recently utilized to limit these response artifacts.

For example, the use of momentary time sampling, where students are given a pager and then randomly “beeped” throughout the day to assess their in-the-moment perceptions have been recently applied and have garnered reliable results (e.g. Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). Other methods also have included having students keep an ongoing diary or having the students respond to questions via computer survey at home. Finally, reports of others who know the student well (such as peer, teacher, and parent reports) have been used to address limitations inherent in self-reports.

## FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SATISFACTION

Until recently, studies have largely focused on the presumed consequences related to school dissatisfaction, including disengagement from the academic curriculum, increased behavior problems, and other difficulties. Nevertheless, research has now turned to understanding antecedent conditions that presumably contribute to elevated levels of school satisfaction such as demographic variables—as well as temperament variables (e.g., outgoing personality and emotional regulation styles). Other antecedents include environmental factors ranging from proximal variables (e.g., student–teacher relationships, academic expectations of the school) to more indirect, distal ones (parent–school relationships, cultural expectations).

Most research has been largely atheoretical, although recent models adapted from motivational and school engagement research (Marchand & Skinner, 2007), sociological research (Locke & Newcomb, 2004), developmental psychology (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003), and population studies (Evans, 1994) have all been used as conceptual frameworks to examine the influence of antecedent conditions on perceived school quality. Common beliefs held by many of these frameworks are that (a) subjective appraisals (such as school satisfaction reports) are thought to mediate the relationship between personal and environmental antecedents and behavioral consequences, and (b) the relationship between subjective appraisals

and behavioral outcomes can move in both directions. Thus, school satisfaction can both influence and be influenced by changes in environmental conditions as well in student behaviors. It should be noted that although some efforts have been undertaken to test unique aspects of these models with respect to students' school satisfaction (see DeSantis-King et al., 2006; Elmore, 2006), much work remains to be done. For one example, among kindergarten students, Ladd et al. (2000) found support for a longitudinal path model in which school satisfaction predicted classroom participation and achievement, rather than the converse. Considering the young age of the participants however, elements of this model (and others) may require revision when applied to students of different ages, backgrounds, and so forth.

### Proximal Factors

Research suggests the importance of key proximal factors in the promotion of school satisfaction. It should first be noted that demographic variables such as age, gender, and race have relatively little influence on school satisfaction reports. Indeed, regardless of composition studied, whatever differences are found are quite small, with effect sizes typically ranging between 2% and 7% (see Huebner, Gilman, Reschly, & Hall, in press).

What appears more influential to school satisfaction reports are qualities and characteristics within students. For example, among the highest relationships shared with school satisfaction are self-esteem and self-efficacy, and more specifically academic self-efficacy (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). That is, students who believe that they can competently complete their academic work report higher school satisfaction.

Other personal characteristics include external locus of control, with students reporting that their academic successes are due to effort and ability (rather than through chance or luck) often reporting higher school satisfaction (Gilman & Anderman, 2006b). Related to locus of control is hope, a multidimensional construct consisting of motivational tendencies and goal strategies. In general, students who can formulate alternative academic strategies when their primary strategy becomes impeded, and who are motivated to pursue these alternative strategies tend to report higher satisfaction (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006).

Other proximal factors related to school satisfaction extend beyond internal characteristics to the choices students make while in school. For example, the type of activities that youth spend their time on outside of their school work has been a topic of increasing interest. It has been estimated that 40–50% of youths' waking hours are spent in unsupervised and nonstructured leisure pursuits, such as watching television or playing videogames (Larson & Verma, 1999). Although these activities are largely innocuous and enjoyable, research finds that an over-reliance on them can lead to chronic boredom, lack of initiative, and maladaptive behaviors. Participation in structured extracurricular activities (SEAs) is one class of leisure pursuits that has drawn increasing attention from researchers given their

unique characteristics. For example, SEAs differ from more relaxed leisure pursuits in that one or more adult leaders who are judged as competent within the interest area lead them. Further, SEAs contain some established standards of performance or work effort and require voluntary and ongoing participation, rather than activities that are required or held at only one point in time (or only occasionally). SEAs also emphasize skill development and growth, with the skill set continually increasing in both challenge and complexity. Finally, the activities require sustained attention, and clear and consistent feedback from the adult is provided regarding the participant's level of performance (Mahoney et al., 2003). With respect to school satisfaction, research finds that students who report higher involvement in SEAs also tend to report higher levels of school satisfaction than do students reporting little or no SEA involvement (Gilman, 2001). Further, more recent findings suggest that the relationship between school satisfaction and SEA participation may be mediated by motivational factors. For example, borrowing from Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory of motivation, Gilman and Stacy (2007) found that the effect of moderate-to-high SEA participation on school satisfaction was significant only if such activities promoted feelings of individual autonomy, competency, and social relatedness. Activities that were selected to fulfill a course requirement, to satisfy a request from a parent, or participated in for reasons other than personal preference (e.g., because the student's peer group was engaged in the activity) were less influential on school satisfaction reports.

In addition to internal characteristics and individual choices, there are other proximal factors that contribute to school satisfaction. Most notably, peer support and social acceptance by teachers are also significantly related to school satisfaction (Baker, 1998). In general, students who are connected to their peers and report positive relationships with teachers also report higher school satisfaction than students who report moderate-to-high levels of social stress and problems with their teachers (Huebner & Gilman, 2006).

Clearly, these positive relationships can be explained in part by attitudes and behaviors demonstrated by the student, including possessing adequate social skills and having an outgoing personality; both of which increase the probability of initiating and maintaining positive interactions with peers and teachers and thus increasing school satisfaction.

Nevertheless, other proximal factors outside of the student's control also can also facilitate or discourage positive interactions. For example, students whose teachers promote positive peer interactions via shared learning tasks and other social activities also report higher school satisfaction (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Further, teachers who have clearly developed and enforced classroom rules, and who create predictable classroom structures also promote positive peer relations and school satisfaction (see Baker et al., 2003). Conversely, teachers who establish class structures characterized as authoritarian or who avoid praising appropriate behaviors can diminish students' positive interactions and reduce school satisfaction (Baker, 1998; Carey & Bourbon, 2005).

The relevance of classroom instruction methods also has been shown to be correlated with positive school experiences. For example, classrooms that incorporate intrinsically interesting activities that challenge students to use their developing skills (such as those found in group work activities or individual activities that involved active learning) were far more satisfying to students than passive activities (such as lectures; Shernoff et al., 2003). Finally, the larger goals of the school may influence school satisfaction as well. For example, research indicates that more positive psychological outcomes (including perceived positive school experiences) are obtained from schools that incorporate mastery learning strategies. These strategies focus on having students master new skills and material, where the level of self-growth reported by the student largely determines success. Conversely, less satisfying school experiences have been found in schools that embrace performance learning strategies, in which success is determined by comparing a student's performance against that of his or her peers, or against a standardized criterion (Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006).

### Distal Factors

In comparison to proximal factors, few studies have investigated how more remote factors influence school satisfaction reports. Cultural expectations about academic performance may be one factor to consider when assessing school satisfaction. One recent study of adolescents from America, Ireland, China, and South Korea found that while there were differences in school satisfaction scores between students from America and Ireland versus China and South Korea, these differences were quite small, suggesting that students hold comparable views of the quality of their school experiences regardless of cultural nuances (Gilman et al., in press).

Another distal factor to consider when assessing school satisfaction is the amount of stress experienced by students as they transition between school levels (i.e., from elementary school to middle school, and from middle school to high school). As noted by Akos and Galassi (2004), transitions between school levels are quite difficult for many students and mark a time of heightened ambivalence. Meeting new peers, having specific teachers for specific classes, having greater opportunities to participate in activities of interest, and even having a locker are frequently cited as positive aspects, while increasing academic demands, less flexible school rules, and the fear of being bullied are commonly noted as negative aspects.

Although research continues to explore factors that increase school satisfaction as the student transitions between levels, two of the more prominent factors are positive relationships with adult figures and the types of goal strategies adopted by teachers. For example, regardless of the student's age, parents (and to a great extent, teachers) serve as an important base from which students appraise their school satisfaction (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1999), and these relationships appear to be most critical during the time preceding and after school transitions. Further, positive school experiences are most noted by teachers who report a greater mastery learning focus and a reduced performance focus (Kumar, 2006).

Finally, the size of the school may partially influence school satisfaction reports. For example, in a study of schools with differing enrollment sizes, Bowen, Bowen, and Richman (2000) found that school satisfaction was lower among schools with populations of 1,000 students or more. Nevertheless, other studies reported no differences across enrollment sizes (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). These conflicting findings are likely due to sample differences and the manner in which school satisfaction was assessed, underscoring the need for further research in this area.

#### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL SATISFACTION TOWARD THE PROMOTION OF POSITIVE SCHOOLING

As noted elsewhere (Gilman & Anderman, 2006a), if examined through the lens of objective indicators, much can be positively written about the American education system. In the past 2 decades, school enrollment has steadily increased, the high school dropout rate has steadily decreased, and there has been a significant increase in basic math, reading, and writing skills scores. Yet in spite of these improvements there has been a marked decrease in the number of youth who report that their school curriculum is meaningful or relevant to their future and an increase in those who report that they are passive participants in the learning process and who report high levels of anger, boredom, and stress. Indeed, large scale studies find that a significant number of students report hating school or liking it very little (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000). Thus, for all the academic gains that have been made, the school experiences of many children are often pessimistic at best and miserable at worst.

Noddings (2003) cogently argued that the seeming overemphasis on academic outcomes by school systems has largely come at the expense of understanding important affective and experiential factors. Such factors, which include school satisfaction, are believed necessary for the formation of positive school environments that would facilitate enjoyment in learning. To create such environments, several key attributes of positive schools assembled from the school satisfaction literature can be delineated and will be described for future recommendations.

First, there is a significant relationship between students who report elevated levels of school satisfaction and academic outcomes (e.g., Huebner & Gilman, 2006), underscoring the notion that positive school perceptions and achievement variables are interrelated rather than distinct. An evaluation of school satisfaction reports by individuals and across groups would provide useful information for school personnel to evaluate the overall psychological “health” of their schools. Such reports can easily be integrated into existing evaluation strategies that often rely on standardized scores to determine how well schools are meeting their academic goals. Yet standardized scores do little to address the ultimate goal of schools, which is to produce graduates who are productive, self-actualizing individuals throughout their life span. Assessing school satisfaction provides essential information in this regard, which can be used in both promotion and intervention strategies.

Second, the review of antecedents contributing to school satisfaction emphasizes the importance of supportive parent, teacher, and peer relationships. Indeed, the highest levels are reported by students who also report positive relationships with each group, indicating that parents, peers, and teachers add unique and significant variance to school satisfaction reports (DeSantis-King et al., 2006; Rosenfeld & Richman, 1999). That is, school satisfaction is lower if relationships with members of one of these three groups are unfavorable. Unfortunately, the relationship between parents and schools is less than optimal. These poor relationships may directly and indirectly influence a student's perception of his or her school experiences.

Third, although research remains in the beginning stages, the type of instructional method and tasks that are provided to students may influence levels of school satisfaction. It appears that school and classroom settings that emphasize instructional tasks that are appropriately challenging, interesting, and taught in group format (versus lecture) facilitate positive school perceptions. Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) provide useful recommendations pertinent to educational policy for secondary schools. These recommendations include the development of curricula that emphasize creativity and emotional intelligence and increased provision of instructional activities that are intellectually engaging (vs. passive), social in nature (e.g., activities with peers) and intrinsically motivating; underscoring the importance of lifelong learning for students, clarifying the links between time management and vocational preparation, and greater parental involvement in teenagers' lives.

Finally, schools that promote mastery learning goals and capitalize upon individual differences in personality, abilities, and interests also facilitate positive school experiences. In contrast to traditional efforts to "repair" what is either missing or broken in children, schools that promote elevated levels of school satisfaction focus their attention to students' unique personal strengths and environmental assets, in addition to their deficits. This situation applies not only to "normal" students but also to students with special needs and at-risk students. In the latter cases, the articulation of personal strengths and environmental supports can balance the identification of "pathology" so that such students can be perceived and educated in a more holistic manner. In this regard, students are treated as persons with unique strengths and characteristics, rather than being viewed simply as students with a "disability."

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Increasing School Satisfaction in Students

In this chapter, we have shown how positive school satisfaction relates to a variety of academic and behavioral performance measures. Use a combination of your personal observations, input from significant others (e.g., parents, other school professionals), and self-report measures (e.g., measures of school satisfaction, school climate, positive and negative emotions) to monitor your students' sense of well-being in school. These assessments should be conducted at least

once per academic semester for the entire academic year. Once the data are collected and examined, hold classroom discussions with the students to discuss the results and develop plans to improve the classroom climate. As appropriate, utilize individual student data to promote healthy individual student functioning and prevent the development of problems.

**Recognize and Utilize Students' Unique Personal Strengths in the Classroom and at Home:** Hold occasional parent conferences in which the purpose of the conference is to work with children and their parents to identify and recognize the child's individual differences, focusing on his or her areas of strength and interest. Develop individual action plans to facilitate the child's use of her or his strengths in school and at home. Develop specific strategies that reward (e.g., praise, privileges) students' efforts. For example, adopt a 5:1 ratio between providing rewards and providing negative evaluation. That is, five instances of praising a student when he or she displays a personal strength for every instance where the student needs to be corrected for a behavior. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the most positive classrooms adopt this 5:1 ratio, while the least positive classrooms provide far less positive feedback in relation to providing negative evaluations.

**Provide Daily Acts of Kindness Toward Others:** To foster positive peer relationships in the classroom and school, start each day with a morning group meeting in which the children are asked to think about one kind thing they can do for a peer during the day. Near the end of the day, hold another group meeting. Have the children describe briefly one act of kindness they performed during the day and reward appropriately.

**Provide Frequent "Flow" Activities:** Teach students to understand the concept of flow experiences. Set aside time each week for students experience a "flow activity" in the classroom. Facilitate student participation in personal flow experiences in other school setting as well (e.g., extracurricular activities, recess time). Discuss the importance of flow activities and their impact on student engagement, well-being, and academic functioning, encouraging students to thoughtfully plan, manage, and evaluate the extent of their flow experiences in a manner appropriate to their developmental level.

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# Employee Engagement: How Great Managing Drives Performance

James K. Harter

## THE ENGAGEMENT STORY OF BOB

The menu was pretty simple in 1958 when Bob was a short-order cook and waiter at McDonalds in Battle Creek, Michigan. For minimum wage, he and his coworkers sold 15-cent hamburgers, 19-cent cheeseburgers, fries, shakes, and cokes. The organization and its menu have expanded considerably in nearly 5 decades. But like young adults just out of high school today, a first job back then was mainly an economic transaction. This 18-year-old wasn't married and just wanted to make some money and spend time with his friends. This job was hardly a career. Bob enjoyed meeting and serving the guests at McDonalds, getting his job done right, and making some of his own money for the first time. Bob's first exposure to the world of management was positive. His manager made work expectations clear, kept the employees continually busy, cooking, serving, and cleaning. He even sat down with Bob and talked about opportunities in the future. As much as Bob could tell, the manager had a genuine concern for the employees he managed. But since this was Bob's first real job, he didn't really think much about the important qualities of great managing, and what impact that might have on his life. He wanted a job, and he wanted to improve his pay. And to day, he can't remember the name of that first manager. About 5 decades, three companies, three children, six grandchildren, and 45 years of marriage later, Bob found himself working in the electronics department of a home improvement store in Lincoln, Nebraska. He had retired from an auto manufacturer about 5 years earlier and had gone to work as a consultant for another auto manufacturer, and had then retired for good. Well, almost. About 6 months into retirement he became a little uneasy. His wife Sandy was still working, and he needed something to do. He didn't watch much TV and "you can only clean the same closet so many times," he said. Like

many who enter into retirement, Bob found himself missing the sense of purpose and importance that work once provided, no matter the unnecessary struggles and hassles wrapped up within it.

The home improvement store was a good fit; it was close to his home and Bob was an avid do-it-yourselfer.... With the right retirement job, he could give other people advice on how to get their projects done. He applied for a job and was quickly hired, and then went through an extensive training regimen that lasted about 3 weeks, teaching him nearly everything about every department in the store (from lawn mowers to plants to TVs). He loved his work. He enjoyed the customers and got to know many of them quite well. From the little kids to the older folks, Bob loved to greet them, ask them about their day, tease them, hug them, and of course, help them find products. This reminded him of how much he enjoyed serving guests, even in his very first job, 50 years earlier. He liked helping out his coworkers at the checkout counter, when they needed a break. He had good relationships with many of the store managers. Bob felt he was doing something important, enjoyed doing it, and could see his impact on the success of the store.

Customer service was, of course, the store's mantra. Not unlike other businesses around the world, this organization said the right things. The corporate communication made it clear that the "customer comes first." Executives know their bread and butter, and their well-intended messages were effectively spread to the stores throughout the country, including the one Bob worked at in Lincoln.

And Bob believed in the importance of the message, because he had seen it firsthand throughout his career, including his last "pre-retirement" consulting job. After a long career at an automobile parts manufacturer, he had taken a consulting job with his brother-in-law, Johnny, who managed another automobile parts manufacturing organization. Bob's job had been to travel around the country to assist suppliers in processing, meeting timelines, financial obligations, and ultimately in meeting customer requirements.

Over the course of 5 years, he had met with a lot of suppliers and vendors. He could see the impact of each conversation on the end customer, either in meeting timelines or producing quality products. If the suppliers weren't getting the information or finances they needed from the company, they couldn't do what they needed to do, and the customers would eventually suffer. Bob also had seen the impact of each problem, however large or small it seemed from a distance, on the suppliers themselves. Many of the suppliers employed the majority of workers in small communities. And so they were dependent on the parts company for their own well-being.

As a consultant, Bob would sit down with each person and discuss problems that were causing inefficiencies. He quickly recognized that each supplier had their own unique issue, and that if he could help make each supplier more successful, it would ultimately make the business more successful. "Every issue is an individual issue—you just have to sit down and listen—each has a different solution," Bob had said. "These are good companies; we just need to help them out. Every day that I went to each facility, I tried to make their day. These companies' whole existence was based on supplying our company." By sitting down and listening to each supplier, and then responding, Bob had helped save them, and the company, millions of dollars. Bob had been amazed by how much could be discovered and resolved by simply listening to the needs of each supplier. And Johnny let

him do what he needed to do to ultimately serve the customer, and their company.

These lessons weren't lost on Bob when he entered his "retirement job" at the "customer service focused" home improvement store. One afternoon Bob responded to a call from a customer from his usual station in the electronics department. Like many customers, this one did business in many departments throughout the store. The customer inquired about a product in the "lawn & garden" department. Bob listened to the customer, and, then rather than transferring the call to someone in lawn and garden, walked over, himself, to get the customer what she needed. But the next thing that happened stunned Bob. The store manager saw Bob walking outside his department and jumped to the conclusion that he must be slacking on his duties in electronics. As Bob walked by, rather than asking him what he was doing, or thanking him for his exemplary customer service, the store manager proceeded to page Bob's direct supervisor on the intercom to inquire as to why he was not doing his job. When confronted by his supervisor, Bob, of course, explained that he was helping a customer. He was doing what he thought was right for that customer. But such behavior didn't fit into the structure and accountability that had been built into the store by the store manager. The whole situation did not seem sensible to Bob and the part that irritated him the most was that, rather than stopping and asking *him*, the store manager paged his supervisor, subordinating his role and value to the organization.

As you can tell, Bob's store manager was strong on setting structure, and accountability, but weak on the human elements that often make the difference between serving customers effectively, or not. He put process ahead of service.

With the company vice president coming to the home improvement store in a few days, Bob noticed the increased attention to detail around the store. An unkempt area in one department was specifically targeted for cleanup prior to the VP's arrival, only left to return to clutter after his departure. Given his strong sense of ownership for the store's success and desire to serve customers, Bob asked his manager, "What did the vice president buy today?" His manager responded, "Nothing, but he *is* the vice president." Bob countered, "Now he leaves and we let it look sloppy again? Shouldn't everything we do be about the customer? Aren't they the ones that make this store successful?"

The store manager was soon promoted.

For Bob, the final straw came a few months later when a new store manager proved ineffective in managing his four supervisors, each operating with separate agendas, not in sync toward the common purpose of the store. This resulted in confusion for many employees who served multiple departments. Employees were directed to do things that might benefit one department but jeopardize the success of other departments. Merchandise often found itself in the wrong places. And something as simple as getting the shelves stocked on time each morning was compromised. The management solution was to have each employee sign a form that says "I will get the shelves stocked by 10 a.m. each morning," to insure each employee's commitment to this most basic task.

Bob's manager asked him to sign the form; it was a requirement. "When I tell you I am going to do something, I will do it ... and I don't need to sign a form that says I'm going to do my job," Bob told his manager. It was

degrading, dehumanizing, to want to come to work and help customers every day and have management get in the way. And to sign a form that says he will do something he already intended to do reminded Bob of the lack of trust he had witnessed in the battle between his union and supervisor in former work at an automobile manufacturing plant. Bob had a long history of quality work and customer service.

Many employees, maybe most, would have gone ahead and signed the form and went about their day. After repeatedly attempting to voice his opinion to management about how they were jeopardizing customer service, and company sales, Bob had enough. He resigned. He, of course, had a choice. He was retired and didn't have to work for financial reasons. But he also resigned because he knew there was a different side to management, and that he didn't have to tolerate the form of management he was experiencing. This was particularly unfortunate for the home improvement store, not to mention its customers. With unnecessarily high turnover rates and a lot of opportunity for work in most industries, many other employees make the same choice Bob made.

The good news for Bob was that he had many good management experiences in those 5 decades between McDonalds and the home improvement store. In fact, his best lessons about himself, and management, came in a 35-year career at an auto manufacturer, his third job. Having 20 different managers during his tenure, he learned a lot about different styles of managing, and eventually became a manager himself.

## MANAGING ENGAGED EMPLOYEES

Bob moved from being “engaged” to “actively disengaged,” in months, based on the quality of his encounters with management. I will continue with Bob's story a little later. But first, I want to describe how we, as scientists, can know which elements of great managing best describe high performing, engaged, cultures.

Each week contains 168 hours. For most people, more than half of our awake time is spent working. For most of us, several of the nonwork hours are spent either preparing for or commuting to work. And with e-mail, cell phones, and handheld computers, we are often reminded by our families that we are working when we are not at work. And so it should not be a surprise that the quality of our work experience contributes significantly to our overall well-being. But what makes a good work experience? What do most people expect from work? Over the past several decades, in more than 120 countries, Gallup has had a chance to study the quality of workplaces all over the world.

George Gallup studied human needs and satisfactions all over the world, starting in the 1930s. In the 1970s Gallup reported that less than half the people in North America were highly satisfied with their work lives (Gallup & Kettering, 1977). The percentages were even lower in other countries.

In addition to the polling work, Gallup researchers have spent decades studying what happens within organizations and the factors that drive their performance. During this time, they have conducted thousands of in-depth interviews with high performing managers and employees, in a wide range

of occupations, industries, and countries. This research was originally led by Dr. Donald O. Clifton, a former professor and chairman of Gallup, and the “Father of Strengths-Based Psychology.” The interviews by Gallup researchers led to the identification of factors that described the top performing teams and then questions were written to measure the factors. For the most part, surveys were written under the assumption that every organization is unique and needs its own survey questions. The surveys were very long and attempted to measure just about everything you might imagine, from pay and benefits to the organizational structure to perceptions of senior management.

In the early and mid-1990s researchers accumulated data from many long surveys across hundreds of organizations, literally thousands of questions. One of the findings was that the answer to what defines a productive work environment was much simpler than we originally thought was the case. We found there are some basic elements that consistently define high performing environments in any setting we had studied. The following are the 12 statements (called the Q12) that describe an engaging and productive culture:

- Q01. I know what is expected of me at work.
- Q02. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
- Q03. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- Q04. In the last 7 days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- Q05. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- Q06. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- Q07. At work, my opinions seem to count.
- Q08. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
- Q09. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
- Q10. I have a best friend at work.
- Q11. In the last 6 months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
- Q12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.<sup>1</sup>

The statements start with very basic employee perceptions that are often overlooked. Knowing what’s expected, for instance, is the most basic employee perception you can ask about, and act on. Yet only a little over half of employees in Gallup’s large international database clearly know what is expected of them at work. This most basic perception is often overlooked. The 12 statements measure basic needs (Q01, Q02), individual contribution (Q03–Q06), belonging (Q07–Q10), and growth (Q11, Q12). Wagner and Harter (2006) present research and practical application of each the 12 elements.

Employee engagement is defined as the *involvement with and enthusiasm for work* (Harter, in press; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). As William

Kahn (1990) described, engagement is best understood through the day-to-day experiences employees have within their work situation. Employees can become engaged when they find meaning in their work, feel safe to do good work, and can then transfer their energy into performance. Engaged employees are both cognitively and emotionally connected to their work and workplace. Employees become involved in their work when their basic needs are met consistently, and when they have a chance to make an individual contribution.

In addition to the fulfillment that comes from being in the right job and getting recognized for good work, employees that feel connected to their coworkers and the larger organization, and those that can clearly see their future in their work, have high levels of enthusiasm, or positive emotional energy. Engaged employees use their discretionary effort to help their organization improve through higher productivity, greater efficiency and innovation, and more meaningful customer impact, leading to higher profitability. Disengaged employees withhold effort or withdraw from the organization, thus jeopardizing the organization's future through higher absenteeism, higher turnover rates, more theft or merchandise shrinkage, and more accidents on the job. The Q12 have now been responded to by more than 10 million employees in 124 countries around the globe.

As we were studying the data across companies, we found something quite interesting. Companies were certainly different in how satisfied and committed their employees were, in aggregate. But when we sliced the data across teams within companies, we found some of the best run companies had some poorly committed teams, at the bottom of our overall database. We also found some of the worst run companies had some highly committed teams, at the top of our database. There was wide variation within every company we studied, across manager-led teams. Mapping the data to the team level took some work, but it was well worth it, because it revealed variation in its most critical place ... the local level, where managers have great influence. Rather than finding a common company culture, we found there were almost as many cultures as there were managers ... tremendous variation in employee opinions across manager-led teams.

The Gallup database has employee engagement data mapped for work units (such as teams or departments) or business units (such as stores, restaurants, or bank branches). Many of these business units also have performance data (such as profitability, productivity, customer ratings, employee turnover, safety records, absenteeism, and theft or lost merchandise) that can be studied alongside the employee engagement data. This allows us to study the relationship between employee engagement and performance within companies and then to pool those data across companies using a statistical technique called meta-analysis (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). And what we found was that business or work units that have a critical mass of engaged employees also tend to be in work units that perform better on all of the metrics listed above. We've had a chance to repeat this analysis six times, most recently across 125 companies, and 23,910 independent teams or business units (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, & Asplund, 2006). The results have led us to essentially the same conclusion each

time—that employee engagement is related to work unit performance and has great practical value, if understood and applied correctly.

A separate meta-analysis, across thousands of employees, found a substantial correlation between individual job satisfaction and performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). As you might expect, the 12 engagement items listed above correlate highly with job satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002) and other important work attitudes (Le, Schmidt, Lauver, & Harter, 2007) such as passion, dedication, commitment, and absorption in work (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006).

Just because work attitudes *correlate* with performance doesn't mean they *cause* performance. By collecting data across time, we've also been able to statistically test two different causal scenarios. Scenario 1 tests whether employee engagement predicts future performance. Scenario 2 tests whether performance predicts future employee engagement. The research to this date suggests Scenario 1 is more valid than Scenario 2 (Harter, Schmidt, Asplund, & Killham, 2004).

Employee engagement predicts performance. But wide variation in engagement exists across manager-led teams in nearly any organization we study for the first time, with some teams at the very top of our database, some teams at the very bottom of our database, and a lot of teams in the middle (the typical bell shaped curve you may be familiar with from your statistics classes). This pattern is ideal for researchers (because we love to study variance), but it is terrible for organizations (because it means the culture is not constant, and thus less predictable). While organizations may have reduced the variation on operational elements, they have often overlooked the human elements. But why does so much variation exist within companies, across manager-led teams? The reason has something to do with how people have been put into management roles historically, and how people management has been valued within organizations. The problem also stems from how we have historically valued (or not valued) non-management positions. Historically, managers have earned their right to manage through promotion due primarily to two factors: tenure within the company, and success in a prior, nonmanagement job. Since management is viewed as a senior position hierarchically, and often compensated as such, most employees aspire to be a manager. And so there are many successful sales people, engineers, analysts, accountants (among many other nonmanagement roles) who end up with stewardship over the company's "greatest assets." Some become successful managers, but most don't.

You might notice, as you look through the 12 engagement items, that they all represent elements that can be influenced and improved on. In fact, organizations that focus on measuring the 12 elements, while providing good education for managers and holding them accountable, often double the number of top quartile work units, over time. Top quartile business units outperform their bottom quartile counterparts by 12% on profit, and 18% on productivity. Bottom quartile units have 30–50% higher turnover, 62% more accidents on the job, and 51% more theft on average (Harter et al., 2006).

Not all managers improve the engagement of their employees, and some aren't suited psychologically for managing people. But measurement and

education can create awareness and change for many. The average organization has about two engaged employees for every actively disengaged employee. But due to the heavy downward tug of the disengaged employees, two to one is not enough. Publicly traded organizations, for instance, that double that ratio (four to one), have achieved 18% greater earnings per share than their competitors and a growth trajectory that is 2.6 times greater than below average engagement organizations, who have closer to one engaged employee for every actively disengaged employee (The Gallup Organization, 2006).

## BACK TO BOB

Bob's varied experiences in the organizations parallel the general pattern seen in workplaces throughout the world. Most organizations have well-intended corporate messages about what they want to get done ... their purpose or mission. But what impacts workers every day is what they experience locally, and this has a lot to do with their immediate manager.

About a year into his first job, at McDonald's, Bob took an entry level job with a local insurance company where his brother, Richard, worked. He was paid to be a clerk, distributing business forms and taking orders from customers. During this time, he and Sandy got married and focused on making a good living for their family. Like his first job, his first manager in the insurance company, Norm, took the time to get to know him, helped think about his future. Bob got to know Norm and his family quite well, and he enjoyed the closeness of the relationship. Bob didn't know it at the time, but he was leading a charmed life, as he was two for two in getting a good manager in his early career. Based on our research, Bob was defying the odds. But, like gambling in Vegas, the winning streak wouldn't continue.

Looking to advance within the insurance company, he put in for a promotion and was relocated to the home office where he had opportunities for better pay and career advancement. His job was to provide quotes on insurance accounts in addition to some odd jobs in other departments. While he was beginning to advance in his status at the insurance firm, he was also advancing in exposure to the wide variety of management styles he would come across in his career. Contrary to his previous supervisors, his new manager, Jack, was "stand-offish," and had the philosophy that "if you don't hear from me, you are doing your job" ... basically, "no news is good news." Bob got the sense that Jack was filling time until retirement. The door was never open to have discussions with him, a stark contrast from his previous experiences. Bob recalls the relationship being "all about work ... he didn't really show much confidence in us." He doesn't recall much, if any, recognition from Jack. Bob and his fellow employees would often "work the manager over a little" when he wasn't around.

And so it shouldn't be a surprise that Bob jumped at an opportunity to work for a local automobile manufacturer, a large international organization, employing more than 44,000 workers. It was an entry level job, but

promised a 30% increase in pay and good benefits. This local unionized plant employed about 1,200 workers in the area. Bob worked on the “floor” for 16 years, rotating among various jobs and shifts. For about 5 years he helped manufacture engine valves. Bob recalls a time when he had difficulty forging the valves and they continued to crack, even after considerable effort on his part. He went to his supervisor, Lou, to explain the situation, because he wanted to do good work. Lou was a well-liked person but may not have been the right fit for management. In classic company-union speak Lou said “the only reason you are coming to me is that you don’t want to work.” And so Bob did his best work and reluctantly sent the parts through. The next day, Bob received a “work-back” tag with his name on it labeled “insufficient.” One of his coworkers, Norm, a veteran of 25 years, was doing the same job. Norm was accustomed to the relationship between company representatives and union employees and had reached a point of “learned helplessness,” and no longer cared about the quality of the products. He would send his parts through, even if deficient. Norm found it was easier not to raise a fuss about parts deficiencies, because Lou didn’t seem to care one way or another, unless it inconvenienced Norm. They were both putting in their time. There came a point, down the road, when the company had to take deficient parts seriously, because the automobile company they were manufacturing the parts for eventually rejected all of them and told them they had to be corrected immediately. Bob, a regular guy on “the floor,” had discovered the problem, but no one wanted to listen. Management didn’t take the issue seriously until a crisis occurred. Fixing all these deficient parts led to a major financial burden on the company, which impacted various budget items, including pay and benefits. In the late 1970s the union went on strike. The company temporarily gave the union what it wanted and then eventually had major layoffs. Bob was one of the victims.

This was a turning point in Bob’s career. He noticed the contrast between him and Norm, and as he described it, “if you take something to your boss and he doesn’t listen or care, you begin to stop caring too.” In this case, it affected the fate of hundreds of workers. It bothered Bob that they didn’t care. And he started believing there had to be something better. Bob was only laid off for 5 days, but it was the first time in his life when panic started to set in. He had a wife and three kids by this time and it “scared the hell out of me,” he said later. He wasn’t going to let someone like Lou affect his job and the future of his company. He saw how much one poor manager could destroy things for so many people.

After the layoff, Bob’s new boss was Mike. Whether by providence or pure chance, Bob was given a manager who was very different from Lou and many of the other managers he had worked with over the years. “Mike knew how to have fun at work. He was a happy person,” Bob described, “we laughed at a lot of things, but we were also a team, where people had different roles, responsibilities, where each person was important.” Bob’s analogy, given his Michigan heritage, was a football team where some were blockers, a quarterback, a running back ... with each person knowing their role on the team. Mike organized everyone at the start of each day and

“got us going,” Bob said, “he got us in a group huddle and made us feel like a team, that what we were doing as a team was important and had a purpose.” “Mike liked me,” Bob explained, “he had talks with me along the way and asked me whether I had ever thought about being a supervisor, and then he came to me one day and said they’re going to offer you a supervisory job ... and you’d better take it.” Bob knew that Mike had been looking out for him and, behind his back, talking to upper management about his potential, getting him this opportunity. But Bob was a long-time union member, and he believed in the union. He didn’t like how supervisors were disliked by union members. He had built close relationships with his fellow employees and was hesitant to take a supervisory job. Eventually, with Mike’s coaxing, Bob got to the point where he knew he had to take the initiative himself. He had to be an active player in making a difference and couldn’t sit back and watch another supervisor do what he had seen Lou do before. “I think Mike saw I had some leadership, that I could make things happen and make friends,” said Bob.

And so Bob got his first taste of supervising for a year and a half until, after union negotiations, the plant closed and he was eventually repositioned to another plant in Nebraska where he would spend 18 years. But those 18 months were some of the most valuable Bob had experienced. “Mike would mentor me along the way. We had morning meetings where we shared thoughts and ideas, and he gave me direction,” explained Bob, “Mike and I were on the same level, but he was still my mentor. Early on, I kept asking our boss, Tom, what I should do next, because I was new, and second guessing myself. Mike gave me some good advice. He told me they are paying you to be the supervisor, you need to do what’s best for the company.” That gave Bob the push to create his own style of managing, rather than try to follow a set of prescribed steps. The outcome he was working toward was clear. Do what is best for the company. The union people he managed were his best friends. He had fun with them, picked on them, teased them, and even hugged them. They did things for Bob because they liked him. But it was more than having fun. If one of his employees needed something, a machine repaired, some fine tuning of equipment, whatever was getting in their way, Bob would write the order and chase it down to be sure they got what they needed. In some situations, he had to work the internal politics to get his employees what they needed. He pushed until he could get them what they needed. “If you do something good for your people, they’ll do something good for you,” he explained.

He spent the first 4 years in Nebraska as a technician and engineer, given his knowledge of the manufacturing process and the organization’s products. After a lot of success in that role, he was offered another supervisory job. This time there was no hesitation. Supervising gave Bob a lot of gratification. He took initiative to inspect the machines and expected his employees to do the same. He expected his employees to question the current process, to evaluate its efficiency. He held many discussions with them about improving the current processes, and over time, “they took charge and did it all themselves,” Bob said. During his 9 years of supervision at the plant in Nebraska, his team saved about \$500,000 in tooling and

increased productivity from 182,000 to 350,000 valves per day, at the same cost. Bob attributes this to the ownership his employees had for their own performance and that of their organization. They took pride in their work, and knew their work was important. Needless to say, his employees were engaged. And their company was better *because* their lives were better. This had something to do with what Bob did for them, and years earlier, what Mike did for Bob.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Being and Becoming an Engaged Employee

In this chapter, you read about the role of managers in employee engagement. Take some time to learn about engagement and good managing by conducting informational interviews with a family member and a manager at your favorite business.

*Interview an Engaged Employee:* What do you really know about the work lives of your loved ones? Take some time to learn more about the work of a family member and about employee engagement by sitting down and asking the following questions.

- Of all the work you have done, what gave you the most positive energy?
- When you have good days at work, what are the contributing factors?
- What makes you feel successful at work?
- How can you use your strengths to positively impact the performance of your coworkers?
- How do you continually clarify what you are expected to do in your work?
- What do your best friends at work do well, and how do they like to be recognized?
- Who do you want to recognize you when you do good work?

*Interview an Engaging Manager:* Emerging research suggests that a high quality workplace is associated with health and overall well-being. It is clear that engagement at work is important to organizations, but it is also important to the overall quality of life for individuals. Identify a manager at one of your favorite businesses who you believe is good to his or her employees. Ask the manager three or four good questions about how they foster the well-being and health of their employees.

*Future Work Fantasy:* Just take a few minutes and imagine you spending a day at your dream job. Begin by shutting off all media and becoming as relaxed as possible. Then, just let your mind wander through a full day at work. How are you being your best at work? Who is supporting you at work? How are you being acknowledged for a job well done?

## NOTE

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## CHAPTER 7

# Families That Work

John Eagle

**T**here is not one formula for developing and maintaining families that work. First of all, all families have strengths. Healthy functioning families exist in many different compositions, cultures, and interaction styles. Just looking around at your neighbors' or friends' families is an indication of this; no two families are the same. However, there are common characteristics of families that function well. In general, families that have found a balance between structure and flexibility tend to be families that support family members' emotional, physical, social, and educational development. These families also tend to be more resilient during challenging times.

In the past families were typically viewed with respect to the “traditional” family, complete with two biological parents and consisting of one parent in the workforce and the other in a caregiver role. However, during the past few decades, the landscape of the family structure has changed dramatically. The United States has seen a decrease in the “traditional” family. It is now being replaced with an ever-increasing diverse family structure. The population of children living with two parents has decreased significantly since 1980. There has been an increase in single-parent and step-parent families, which, in turn, may place children from these families at a greater risk for lower academic achievement, dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, and mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and aggression (Fields, Smith, Bass, & Lugaila, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). The proportion of single-parent families headed by women more than doubled between the years of 1960 and 1988 (Carlson, 1996), and grandparents are playing a larger role as caregivers, even when a parent is present (Fields, 2003).

The cultural climate of the American family has also changed over the years. In 2004, 59 percent of children were identified as White, non-Hispanic; 30 percent lived in households that did not include two biological/adoptive parents; 17 percent lived in a blended family; 12 percent had at least one half-sibling; and 17 percent lived in poverty (Kreider, 2007). Given the challenges associated with discrimination, differing family structures, language barriers, and poverty, it is critical that resilience and well-being in children and families be promoted consistently.

To appropriately present the qualities of families that work, it is first best to depict how family functioning is viewed by clinicians and researchers. Family functioning is typically conceptualized within both a systems and developmental framework. Family systems theory conceptualizes the family as a complex composition made up of interdependent groups of individuals who (a) have a mutual sense of history, (b) experience a degree of emotional bonding, and (c) develop strategies for meeting the needs of individual family members and the family as a whole (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1995). Although the family is considered a single unit, the unit is comprised of individual family members. Additionally, the family unit is affected by the interactions between individual family members. Within the family system, positive or negative interactions between individual members have significant effects upon all other member of the family, both young and old.

There is only one hard and fast rule about families; they change over time. Throughout the years, families change with respect to family composition, age of family members, family characteristics (e.g., economic or social status), and environmental factors (e.g., location). Due to this, family functioning is often looked at according to a developmental, or life-cycle, orientation. Characteristics of healthy functioning families differ based on where the family exists along the developmental continuum. For example, a family with two toddlers operates and interacts in a different manner than a family with two children heading off to college. In a similar vein, there are different expectations for healthy functioning in families that are facing crises, loss, or grief and those who are not. A developmental perspective views healthy family functioning based on the developmental context, or the current situation. In this way a family's ability to function effectively is a multifaceted process occurring over time and developed in response to complex and changing conditions (Walsh, 2003).

## MODELS OF FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Although there are several different theories or models of family functioning, three of the more prevalent are discussed below. All of these models are based on a systems approach to family functioning.

One of the most renowned theories is the McMaster Model of Family Functioning, developed by Epstein and colleagues (2003). The McMaster Model has been evolving and evaluated over the past 30 years. According to this model, the primary function of the family is to provide an environment

that supports the physical, social, and emotional development of family members. Within the McMaster Model are six dimensions of family functioning that determine the family structure, organization, and transactional patterns. These dimensions include problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control. Healthy family functioning is not represented by one sole dimension; rather, many dimensions are needed to represent the complexity of functioning families.

Similarly, the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson & Gorall, 2003) has been developed and researched over the past 25 years. Three dimensions of family functioning are represented in the Circumplex Model: family cohesion, flexibility, and communication. The level of cohesion, flexibility, and communication describes both the nature of interactions within the family system and between family members and the larger community. Not only do these dimensions provide insight into family dynamics, but they also have implications for how community members can support and strengthen the family unit. Within cohesion and flexibility dimensions of the model, balanced or moderate levels (versus extreme levels) are associated with more optimal functioning. Positive communication skills allow families to modify their levels of cohesion and flexibility based on the demands of the situation or developmental context.

The Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning, as described by Beavers and Hampson (2000), provides a cross-sectional approach to family functioning. In this model family functioning falls along two dimensions: family competence and family style. Family competence refers to the structure, available information, and adaptive flexibility of the family system. High levels of family competence require both structure and the ability to adapt the structure to meet the needs of family members. Family style relates to a stylistic quality of interactions within the family unit. Healthier functioning is associated with families that place importance on their relationships both within and outside the family.

## RESILIENCE IN FAMILIES

It is almost impossible to talk about families that work without discussing the notion of resilience within families. Resilience refers to how well families adapt to situations or address crises. Patterson (2002b) defined resilience as the process of successfully overcoming adversity. Historically, the notion of resilience solely focused upon individuals and individual factors associated with adaptive adjustment, such as personality traits and coping strategies (Walsh, 1996). Gradually, the concept of resilience was expanded to include larger social constructs, such as families and communities (Patterson, 2002a).

A resilient family is one that values itself as a collective unit, has a common set of values, communicates effectively, responds successfully to changing conditions or crises, and solves problems collaboratively. For example, families demonstrate resilience by effectively functioning in the face of

family crises, including parental job loss, relocation to a different region of the country, parental divorce, chronic medical conditions of a family member, or death of a family member. The idea that families bond together after facing a crisis is connected with the concept of family resilience.

The concept of family resilience recognizes not only key processes that help families address persistent challenges but also those that strengthen the family unit. In this way, family resilience enables the family to foster resilience in all individual members (Walsh, 1996). Family resilience is exemplified by (a) rising in the face of hardship, (b) returning to previous levels of functioning, and (c) being viewed in terms of wellness versus pathology (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996).

In many circles resilience is almost synonymous with, or at least very closely tied to, family functioning. That is, the more resilient a family is, the better it functions. Every family faces adversity at one point or another, thus resilience is a characteristic of every family. In fact this is a core aspect of positive psychology with respect to families; how do families utilize their strengths to function effectively and adapt to adverse situations?

The concept of family resilience is made up of several different family characteristics that are described below.

### Family Cohesion

Family cohesion is defined as “family members’ close emotional bonding with each other as well as the level of independence they feel within the family system” (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p. 108). The degree of emotional connectedness varies significantly between and within families and is influenced by the culture, age, and stage of life of the family members.

Olson and Gorall (2003) presented a continuum for family cohesion, ranging from *enmeshed/overly connected* (very high), to *very connected* (moderate to high), to *connected* (moderate), to *somewhat connected* (moderate to low) to *disengaged/disconnected* (very low). An enmeshed style of interaction is characterized by overidentification with the family, resulting in extreme levels of consensus and limited individual autonomy and independence. At this level of cohesion loyalty is demanded and individuals are very dependent upon each other. Disengaged families are marked by high autonomy and low bonding, in which there is little attachment to the family system. Along with this independence comes an inability to receive support from other family members.

Within Olson’s model of cohesion there are three “balanced” levels of cohesion and two “unbalanced” levels. Family functioning is enhanced when there is a balance between enmeshment and disengagement. Thus, the three central levels (somewhat connected, connected, and very connected) are considered to provide optimal family functioning across the life-cycle. Balanced levels of cohesion indicate a family in which individuals experience both separateness and togetherness. There is no one “best” level of cohesion, but families that exist at the extremes (e.g., enmeshed, disengaged) tend to have more difficulties over time.

### Family Involvement

Affective involvement, as defined by Epstein and colleagues (2003), refers to the extent to which family members value and display interest in the activities of other family members. An emphasis is placed on the amount of interest as well as the manner in which family members demonstrate their interest and investment in each other. Family involvement exists on a continuum, ranging from lack of involvement to overinvolvement. The lowest level, *lack of involvement*, indicates a complete absence of interest in other members of the family. The second level, *involvement devoid of feelings*, represents some involvement among family members, but it is typically intellectual in nature. The third level, *narcissistic involvement*, refers to a degree of interest among family members, but only to the degree that it reflects on oneself. The fourth, and optimal level, *empathetic involvement*, depicts a genuine interest; family members are invested for the sake of others in the family unit. The development of healthy functioning in families is enhanced through empathetic family involvement practices. Level five, *overinvolvement*, represents an excessive degree of interest among family members. A *symbiotic involvement*, the most extreme level of involvement, indicates an interest that is so extreme that there is a marked difficulty distinguishing one family member from another (Epstein et al., 2003).

### Family Adaptability and Flexibility

Every family faces situations throughout the course of life that present challenges to the manner in which family members relate to one another or how the family unit functions within the community. Although related to resilience, family adaptability differs from resilience in that it does not encompass the characteristics and qualities of families necessary to strengthen the family unit. In other words, a family may be adaptive and flexible, but that does not ensure effective communication, collaborative problem solving, and strong family unity, all of which are also components of family resilience.

Olson and Gorall (2003) indicated that families have differing degrees of adaptability falling along a continuum from *rigid/inflexible* (extremely low) to *somewhat flexible* (low to moderate) to *flexible* (moderate) to *very flexible* (moderate to high) to *chaotic/overly flexible* (extremely high). Similar to the construct of family cohesion, moderate, or “balanced” degrees of adaptability (e.g., somewhat flexible, flexible, very flexible) may allow for healthier degrees of family functioning than those on the extremes (e.g., rigid or chaotic).

A *somewhat flexible* relationship between family members tends to follow a democratic leadership with stable roles, some role sharing, enforced rules, and few rule changes. A *flexible* relationship provides a leadership that believes in the equality of all members and with decision making that is democratic. Thus, children also have a say in family decision making. Family roles are fluid and shared, and rules can be changed based on the

developmental needs of the family. A relationship that is *very flexible* is characterized by frequent changing in leadership and family roles. Rules are often changed and are very flexible based on the needs of the family.

In contrast, “unbalanced” levels of flexibility depict families that are too stable or too fluid. *Rigid* families consist of one dominant leader who is always in charge. Leadership roles do not change, and there is very limited negotiation within family decision making. Family rules are explicit and do not change. Chaotic families have inconsistent or limited leadership and provide impulsive decision making. Family roles are not well defined, and roles differ from family member to family member.

To function as a healthy system, families must be both adaptive and stable. The ability to determine when it is appropriate to maintain stability or address change is a characteristic of healthy, functional families. Such families are both proactive in the development of individual family members and also understand the importance of maintaining the family unit.

### Parenting Styles and Problem-Solving Processes

Family functioning is related to the family’s parenting styles and problem-solving skills. The interactions between parents and children often serve as a model for the family’s overall style and ability to communicate and problem-solve. Walsh (2003) reported that family functioning benefits from collaborative problem-solving that includes shared decision making among family members, is goal-oriented, follows concrete steps, and builds on successes.

Parenting style refers to “a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parents’ behaviors are expressed” (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 493). Diana Baumrind (1991) identified four main types of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful, and indulgent.

The *authoritarian* parenting style is restrictive and punitive. It is characterized by high levels of authority and control, with limited negotiation regarding standards of behavior. This is often exemplified by a parent indicating “Do it my way, or it’s the highway.” Strict limits are placed on children, and there is very limited discussion between parents and children regarding the fairness of rules. Authoritarian parenting is associated with children who have decreased social and communication skills, have difficulty initiating activity, and are more anxious about social comparisons (Santrock, 2007).

Parents using an *uninvolved* parenting style are neglectful with their children’s activities and lives. Neglectful parents allow children to regulate their own activities, standards, and rules, with few decisions imposed by caregivers. Children of uninvolved parents are more likely to have poor self-control, are less motivated by achievements, and have difficulty handling independence well (Santrock, 2007).

*Indulgent* parenting depicts style of parenting in which parents are extremely involved in the lives of their children. These parents provide

support but do not place a great deal of restrictions or limits on their children's activities or behaviors. Often, parents utilizing this parenting style believe that this environment will foster creativity and independence in their children. However, children of indulgent parents are not placed in an environment in which they learn to control their own behavior (Santrock, 2007).

*Authoritative* parenting, considered the optimal parenting style for healthy family functioning, is marked by a balance between freedom and responsibility. Parents adopting this style engage family members in problem-solving processes to negotiate compromise and manage conflict. These parents are nurturing and limiting at the same time. There is often a verbal give-and-take and learning process associated with this style of parenting. This type of parenting fosters social competence, higher levels of self-esteem, and more appropriate decision making in children (Santrock, 2007).

### Shared Beliefs and Values

Another critical component for the development of healthy family functioning is the establishment of a shared belief system within the family. Shared values and beliefs are essential for family resilience and reinforce specific patterns regarding how a family reacts to new situations, life events, and crises (Walsh, 1996). A common belief system assists families in making meaning of crisis events and facilitates hope and a positive outlook. The concept of shared beliefs appears in the literature under similar constructs, including family schema, family worldview, and family coherence.

A strong family schema represents a belief in the family unit that views its interactions with the world from a collective "we" versus "I" orientation. Families with a strong schema, as discussed by McCubbin and colleagues (1993), are likely to perceive life in a realistic manner and not expect perfect solutions to the difficulties that life presents. Families with higher levels of resilience have a shared set of values regarding the critical components of life, such as time management and financial issues. Additionally, resilient families have a shared worldview of confidence that the outcomes of situations will be positive (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, Elver, & McCubbin, 1994).

### Family Communication

Effective communication among family members is another critical characteristic of families that work. How family members communicate with each other either verbally or nonverbally impacts the functioning of the family. Family communication not only refers to how family members present information but also how they attend, listen, and receive information from other members. There are two categories of family communication: instrumental and affective (Epstein et al., 2003). Instrumental communication represents an exchange of factual information between one another.

Affective communication refers to how family members express their emotions to each other. Both are critical for effective family communication.

Within instrumental and affective communication there are four styles of communication have been described by Epstein and colleagues (2003): clear and direct, clear and indirect, masked and direct, and masked and indirect. These styles of communication differ based on their position on two continuums: clear versus masked and direct versus indirect. Clear communication is straightforward and easily understood by family members. Content provided through masked communication is difficult to comprehend and confusing. Direct communication is presented specifically to the intended recipient; whereas, indirect communication is not clearly directed to the person intended. These communication styles are associated with both instrumental and affective communication,

#### *Clear and Direct Communication*

This is the most effective manner for families to communicate with each other. In this communication style, the content of the message is plainly stated and directed at the person it was intended for. An example of this is when a father says to his son “I am upset that you missed curfew, but let’s get you to bed.” As communication styles become more masked and indirect, family communication becomes less effective.

#### *Clear and Indirect Communication*

In this case the message remains plainly stated but the intended person is not the recipient. Following the example, this would occur when a father says to his wife while their son is present, “I am upset with our son because he missed curfew.”

#### *Masked and Direct Communication*

This communication style presents a muddled and confusing message directly to the intended recipient. Using our example, this would occur when a father says to his son “Are you okay? It seems like you had some difficulty getting home.”

#### *Masked and Indirect Communication*

This represents the least effective family communication style. In this case not only is the message muddled and confusing but it is also not directed towards the intended family member. To conclude with our example, this would occur when a father says to his wife while his son is present, “People who miss curfews are obnoxious.”

Communication styles associated with healthy family functioning include clear, direct, and honest communication, active listening, and positiveness.

Peterson & Green (1999) identified key strategies for families to use that will increase the effectiveness of their communication. These include: (a) communicate frequently, (b) communicate clearly and directly, (c) be an active listener, (d) think about the person with whom you are communicating, (e) pay attention to nonverbal messages, and (f) be positive.

### Characteristics of Television Families

Although not always the best representation of American families, television has provided us with a wide variety of examples of functioning families. The Wilder family from the television show *Little House on the Prairie* and the Salingers from the 1990s television show *Party of Five* are examples of families that demonstrate the characteristics of resilience and adaptability. Set in the Midwest prairie during the late 1800s, the Wilders faced many hardships, including medical, environmental, and economic crises. However, though these crises the family was able to maintain its ability to function as an effective family unit; thus demonstrating great resilience.

Similarly, the Salinger family, comprised of five children orphaned when their parents died in a car crash, provided a profile of a family that showed adaptability. In this case, the older siblings took up the familial roles previously held by the children's parents after their parents' death. This adaptability of familial roles was clearly depicted as the five siblings functioned as a family unit without any other external support. The family operated in a democratic fashion with specific roles and leadership shared among the siblings in a flexible fashion that was neither rigid nor constantly changing.

Cliff and Clair Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* are examples of an authoritative parenting style that uses clear and direct communication. These parents provided their children with clear boundaries and effectively set limits. However, they also allowed their children to have some say in the family rules as was developmentally appropriate. The Huxtables' communication style consisted of explicit expectations and clear meanings and included a process for checking with their children for understanding.

The Walkers from the recent show *Brothers and Sisters* characterize a family that has a strong family schema. This family approaches all aspects of life with a "we" versus "I" approach. The family unit is what is most important to them. This family schema is so strong that in-laws, or outsiders, have difficulty feeling as though they are part of the family unit.

The Barones from *Everybody Loves Raymond* depict a family that is enmeshed and overinvolved. Partially contributed to by the proximity of living conditions, this family does not have clear established boundaries between family members. For example, it is commonplace to watch Marie, the grandmother, clean her son's house without any invitation and against the wishes of his wife. In addition, the members of the Barone family exhibit a high degree of dependence upon each in their daily lives.

In contrast, the Bundy family from the television series *Married ... with Children* portrays a family that demonstrates a lack of involvement. Often, the father, Al Bundy, is seen watching television with his favorite beverage

and ignoring other members of the family. The family members are not involved in the lives of each other, and there is little genuine interest from the parents in their children's lives. However, although there is a lack of involvement, the Bundys still show a somewhat connected level of cohesion as a family. The family members do bond over the fact of being Bundys and demonstrate pride in family name.

## FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

Parents in healthy functioning families are engaged in the academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral development of their children in settings other than home, particularly schools. These parents strive to develop partnerships with their children's teachers and other school personnel. A key component of building effective home-school relationships is the understanding of parents and teachers as *partners* in the educational, social, and behavioral development of children. This includes the concept of shared meaning and shared responsibility between families and schools. Thus, home-school relationships consist of families and schools working, as partners, towards a common goal: the establishment and maintenance of a supportive environment for a child's educational, social, and behavioral development.

### Types of Family Involvement

Families that are looking to become more involved in their children's lives at schools should be aware of different opportunities available to connect with schools and school personnel. Schools use a variety of models to make connections between a child's school and home environments. These different models fall along a continuum based on differing degrees of interaction, collaboration, and focus. However, the goals of all family involvement models are "to enhance success for students and to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for children and youth, including those that are academic, social, and behavioral in nature" (Christenson & Godber, 2001, p. 455).

Epstein (1996) describes six types of family involvement that fall along a continuum (low to high). These include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. These types of family involvement have been adopted by the National Parent and Teachers Association. However, not all families need to become involved in their children's schooling at the highest levels. It is best for families to recognize and utilize their strengths and resources in ways that are appropriate.

### *Parenting*

The first type of family involvement their children's educational development is to provide an environment that is supportive to their children's schooling. This includes providing the necessities, such as food, shelter,

love, safety, and health supports that enable a child to enter school ready to learn. This also involves developing parental literacy.

### *Communicating*

This level of involvement consists of communication between the home and school. Ideally, this communication is bidirectional and reciprocal, coming from both home and school. Parent–teacher conferences and home–school notes are a few ways parents become involved at this level.

### *Volunteering*

Parental involvement through volunteering includes activities through which parents can offer support for the school environment. Such activities include becoming playground monitors, assisting with classroom management, conducting bake sales or money raising initiatives, or running the snack bar at athletic events. Most often, these are ways that bring parents onto the school grounds and make their presence available.

### *Learning at Home*

Family involvement at this level of support includes assisting their children with academic tasks in the home setting. This goes beyond providing a supportive environment and consists of assisting with homework, helping establish appropriate educational goals, and providing assistance with other curriculum-related activities.

### *Decision Making*

Parents active in the school's PTA/PTO or other parent organizations are demonstrating their involvement at this level. This also includes becoming involved in schoolwide decision making, serving as a representative for parents on committees, and being active in curriculum considerations or school reform.

### *Collaborating with Community*

Involvement at this level consists of identifying and connecting community supports and resources with the school. This includes helping develop community partnerships for after-school programs, mentoring, or transition services. At this level, community resources are used to support and enhance student learning, family functioning, and school operations.

## Socialization and Development of Children

Establishing effective home–school connections is extremely important because both environments are essential to the socialization and development

of a child. Scott-Jones (1988) reported, “There is no doubt that children’s development is enhanced by connections between the major contexts in which children grow and develop—family and school” (p. 66). Pianta and Walsh (1996) referred to the family, child, and school as the “invidious triangle.” They contend that problems cannot be isolated as existing solely in the child, home, or school; rather, problems are located in a reciprocal relationship between all three. Therefore, efforts to support a child must include both home and school environments. Problems in the socialization and education of children can occur if there is a disconnect between the home and school environments or a lack of shared meaning across these two contexts.

Families grant a child an informal education that is considered a prerequisite for successful experiences in the classroom. Although the school environment sets up developmental tasks for students, the family serves as an important resource for the acquisition of these developmental tasks. Parents provide opportunities and learning experiences from the beginning of childhood through adult years. Such experiences consist of (a) exposing a child to ideas and activities that promote the acquisition of knowledge, (b) assisting in the socialization of gender, cultural, and peer roles, and (c) parental standards, expectations, rules, rewards, and praise (Clark, 1988).

Conoley (1987) stated that not only are schools and families more similar than previously thought but they also share similar ways of socializing a child, through support, teaching, nurturing, punishment, rewards, and evaluation. Parents are also responsible for the “curriculum of the home” that is an essential component to a child’s educational development in school (Walberg, 1984). The “curriculum of the home” refers to activities families can participate in that enhance a child’s learning and educational success. Thus, parents can impact educational development by providing academic guidance and support, modeling effective work habits and educational activities (e.g., reading), and demonstrating interest and expectations for academic growth.

### Benefits of Family Involvement in Education Settings

Parental involvement in their children’s schooling is beneficial in many ways to many different people and different environments. Henderson (1989) conducted a highly cited review of the literature, consisting of 48 studies, on the effect of parental involvement in education. Christenson and colleagues (1992) concluded that all empirical reviews of this literature, including Henderson’s, could be summarized in to five major findings.

1. Parental involvement is related to student achievement—students’ tests scores and grades are higher when there is parental involvement.
2. Other aspects of student success at school are also positively impacted. (e.g., higher attendance rates, better attitudes toward school, and more appropriate behaviors).
3. Not only do parental involvement strategies benefit students but they also have a positive impact on teachers, parents, and schools.

4. While all different forms of parental involvement appear to be helpful, programs that are more comprehensive and meaningful seem to be more effective.
5. Gains in student achievement seem to be higher when parental involvement is incorporated at an earlier age.

It is important to note that although positive benefits have been ascertained for parents, not all forms of parental involvement are appropriate for each family. Kerbow and Bernhardt (1993) conducted a study evaluating cultural differences in parental involvement. They found that Asian American parents preferred to be involved in out-of-school activities, whereas African American parents were more actively involved in at-school activities. They also concluded that minority parents in the study already demonstrated a high level of involvement that equaled or surpassed nonminority parents of the same socioeconomic status level.

### FAMILY-CENTERED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

One model for providing positive psychological services to children and families was developed by Susan Sheridan and her colleagues at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Building upon two fundamental philosophies for providing services for families, these researchers and clinicians promoted a means of enhancing family functioning by incorporating aspects of both family-centered service delivery and positive psychology. Family-centered positive psychology (FCPP; Sheridan et al., 2004) is defined as a framework for working with families that promotes strengths and capacity building, instead of focusing on resolving problems or focusing on deficiencies. Within the family-centered positive psychology model, there are five key principles.

First, FCPP is *concerned with the process as well as the outcomes*. Not only are positive outcomes important in delivering services through a FCPP framework, but the process in which services are delivered is also emphasized. Family-centered positive psychology, as a process, encourages engagement, self-efficacy, skill acquisition, and self-determination (Sheridan et al., 2004). Thus, families are involved through identifying their own needs and selecting appropriate resources that match their needs and strengths as a family.

Second, FCPP focuses on *family-identified rather than professional determined needs*. The family determines what their needs are. Although professionals can collaboratively assist the family identify these needs, the family is responsible for determining what type of assistance will ultimately be helpful.

Third, FCPP *uses existing family strengths and capabilities to access and mobilize family resources*. A major premise of FCPP is that all families have strengths and resources. The professional is there to assist the family in identifying, getting in touch with, and assembling these resources. Helping the family utilize their own strengths provides an environment in which the family's feeling of self efficacy and ability to function can be enhanced.

Fourth, FCPP *promotes the acquisition of new skills and competencies through specific types of helping behavior and professional roles*. Family-centered positive psychology seeks to support the attainment of skills within the family unit. The goal is to establish a level of empowerment within the family, so that the family feels that they are able to address further needs as they arise. The focus is on developing skills, assets, and strengths and not only on the remediation of deficiencies (Sheridan et al., 2004).

Finally, FCPP *emphasizes strengthening social supports and networks*. A purpose of this model is to develop and maintain relationships between the family and community supports. These relationships are best conceptualized as “partnerships” in which the family has shared ownership and responsibilities for identifying needs, accessing resources, acquiring new skills, and evaluating the effectiveness of supports.

## CONJOINT BEHAVIORAL CONSULTATION

One technique for providing services to families that follows the family-centered positive psychology model is conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996). CBC is a model of service delivery for families and children that brings together family members, educators, and other key community stakeholders within a partnership framework. Within this framework, members of the consultation team work collaboratively to address the developmental, academic, social, and behavioral needs of a child and the family. CBC is an extension of the traditional behavioral consultation model (BC; Bergan & Kratochwill, 1990) that has been used as the basis for school-based, problem-solving teams.

CBC follows a structured but flexible, evidence-based problem-solving model and is based on (a) a family-centered service delivery model, (b) the principles of positive psychology, and (c) an ecological-systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Through the process of CBC, parents and educators share in the identification of the strengths and needs of children and families and the development, implementation, and evaluation of supports to address those needs in home and school environments.

The problem-solving model of CBC follows four stages (i.e., needs identification, needs analysis, treatment implementation, treatment evaluation) and allows for each phase to be recycled as needed.

CBC recognizes the importance of bidirectional, reciprocal influences between systems (i.e., children, families, schools, and other systems) and that securing the connections between these systems is critical in establishing positive support and outcomes for children and families. Based on elements of family-centered services, CBC (a) provides an opportunity for families to be equal partners in the process of addressing the needs of their children, (b) focuses on both family-identified and professional-identified needs, (c) uses identified family and educator strengths and capabilities to access and mobilize services, (d) promotes family and educator empowerment through the acquisition of new skills and competencies, and (e) emphasizes strengthening social supports and networks (Sheridan,

Warnes, Cowan, Schemm, & Clarke, 2004). CBC fosters an environment that promotes home-school partnerships by providing a structured environment in which trust, collaboration, effective communication, shared responsibility, and mutual support between families and educators can be developed.

This method of service delivery is a process that fosters a healthy attitude towards the home environment. The process adheres to a no-fault philosophy that neither the school nor home is responsible for the targeted concerns. In accordance with Christenson and Sheridan (2001), CBC focuses on the “contextual circumstances that can be altered, not the individuals” (p. 75) and instead places an emphasis on solutions. Inherent in the CBC model is a focus upon the strengths, not deficits, of the family and child. All participants in CBC are considered to have distinct areas of expertise and knowledge related to the identified concerns or needs. Thus, families are not only highly encouraged to provide their own knowledge and experiences to the problem-solving process; it is built within the collaborative, partnership model.

CBC is a solution-focused model, based upon the strengths and needs of the participants. The CBC process follows a four-stage, staggered process; however, the model is fluid and cyclical in practice. Thus, the model allows itself to be responsive to the present and immediate strengths and needs of the family. Another goal of CBC is to facilitate collaboration between home, school, and community supports. To achieve this goal, CBC implores the use of two-way collaborative communication between parents, teachers, and community agency representatives. Supports developed in CBC are often structured in a fashion that encourages an increase in collaboration and communication between the home and school environments.

### Goals in CBC

Inherent in the implementation of CBC is the understanding that the process is just as important as the outcomes. In addition to the goals listed previously that parallel family-centered services, there are several other process goals that have been identified for CBC. These are to (a) increase communication and knowledge about the family, (b) improve the relationship among the child, family, and school personnel, (c) promote shared ownership for the identified need and solution, (d) recognize the need to address problems as occurring across, rather than within, settings, (e) promote greater conceptualization of the problem, (f) increase the diversity of expertise and resources available, and (g) establish and strengthen the home-school relationship and home-school partnership (Sheridan et al., 1996).

### CBC Research

There is extensive body of research demonstrating the effectiveness of CBC in addressing a variety of needs for families and children. These studies have evaluated CBC both on direct observational outcomes as well as the acceptability and perceived effectiveness of services. Case studies have

demonstrated that CBC is effective in supporting students with emotional and behavioral difficulties in mainstream classrooms, increasing positive social interactions of children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, increasing social initiation behaviors of socially withdrawn children, and improving academic performance. A large-scale study also found CBC to be effective in addressing behavioral, social, and academic difficulties in home and school settings, resulting in high levels of reported satisfaction from parents and teachers (Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001). In addition, CBC has been reported to be effective in supporting families from diverse backgrounds (Sheridan, Eagle, & Doll, 2006).

Additional social validity research has indicated that parents, teachers, and practitioners (e.g., school psychologists) rate CBC as a highly acceptable model for addressing behavioral, social-emotional, and academic concerns. Process research also suggests that CBC is effective in establishing a collaborative environment, characterized by reciprocal and cooperative verbal interchanges between participants (Sheridan, Meegan, & Eagle, 2002).

### Case Example

The following case example depicts the use of CBC within an FCPP framework. George Stevenson was a 14-year-old Caucasian male diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. George lived at home with his mother in a Midwest urban setting. Resulting from his obsessions and compulsions, George found it difficult to complete schoolwork and had failing grades that were due to incomplete assignments. He was referred to the CBC process because of academic difficulties. Following are four ways in which the CBC process was able to help George and his family.

#### *CBC Focuses on Family-identified Rather than Professionally Determined Need*

The consultation team, consisting of his mother, school personnel, and a CBC consultant, met together to discuss and prioritize the needs of the family. Ms. Stevenson reported that although the school was interested in focusing on work completion, she preferred to focus on school attendance. She indicated that George commonly stayed home from school or did not attend school until the afternoon. This was due to his obsessions and compulsions that made it difficult for him to be present at school. Her interest in initially focusing on this behavior was because of her own employment. She reported that she was unable to go to work when George remained home from school. Working from a family-focused perspective, the team agreed to target school attendance.

#### *CBC Uses Existing Family Strengths and Resources*

Based on information attained from the family, a plan was developed that took into account the strengths and resources available. Throughout

this process, Ms. Stevenson demonstrated her own strengths and expertise. She was the expert regarding George's medical, social, educational, and psychological history and provided invaluable information. Ms. Stevenson reported that she was familiar and comfortable with positive reinforcement techniques and that she preferred them to punishment strategies. Resulting from her strength in this area, a strength-based intervention was developed using positive reinforcement to encourage school attendance.

Ms. Stevenson's skill in assisting George to resist performing compulsions was also utilized. A second component of the plan was for her to help George relax when his anxiety was elevated and help him get to school. Further, the consultation team evaluated additional family resources. Ms. Stevenson reported that she would begin to ask George's grandmother to watch over him when he remained at home during the school day. This strategy would allow Ms. Stevenson to go to work on those days.

### *CBC Strengthens Social Supports to Promote Partnership and Collaboration Among Systems*

A major goal of the consultation was to establish partnerships between the family, school, and community systems. Through collaboration with George's individual therapist, Ms. Stevenson and school personnel were able to acquire additional skills in learning how to respond effectively when George experienced elevated anxiety. This provided a support system that crossed over settings; both home and school environments consistently responded to George's obsessions and compulsions in the same manner. Further, Ms. Stevenson's support system now extended to the school setting as school personnel learned more about George's difficulties and the subsequent stress placed upon the family unit. Moreover, the two environments began to work towards a common goal.

### *CBC Promotes Acquisition of Family and Child Competencies*

Throughout the CBC process, the procedures and steps used during consultation were made overt to all parties. This was done to increase the family's understanding of how to proceed in future situations. For example, through this process the steps of (a) prioritization of need, (b) identification and use of existing resources, and (c) collaboration and partnership development were modeled and described for Ms. Stevenson. The plan was also designed to enhance George's ability to resist his compulsions, because of the support received at home and school. Foremost, the CBC process is designed to promote the use of existing and new resources to establish hope within the family.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, all families work in some way or fashion. Families are more diverse in structure than ever before, but all families have strengths. The

key is that some families work more efficiently or with less conflict. These families typically have some common characteristics. First, families that work have found a nice balance between structure and flexibility. Second, these families are positively involved in the developmental aspects of their children's lives in school and community settings. Third, families that work are also utilize effective communication techniques, appropriate parenting strategies, and valuable problem-solving skills.

There are effective ways to help families function better and to become empowered in their ability to demonstrate resilience. One such model for assisting families to function better is through family-centered positive psychology. This framework allows families to develop skills based upon their own strengths and available resources. Effective families also develop strategies that are goal and solution oriented. They look at how to mobilize resources and supports instead of focusing on problems or deficiencies.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Discovering and Capitalizing on Your Family's Strengths

In this chapter, we have discussed the characteristics of families that work. We encourage you to learn more about your family's strengths both as a unit and as individual family members.

**Discovering Your Family's Weaknesses and Strengths:** Conduct a family meeting and have family members write down a list of family strengths and weakness. Have each member read the list out loud and ask the remaining family members to provide feedback regarding their opinion of the comments. Ask family members to identify at least one strength that other individual family members bring to the family. Have each family member read the list of individual strengths aloud.

**Capitalizing on Your Family's Strengths:** We would like each member of the family to capitalize on one strength. Each member should pick one individual strength and try to use that strength five times a day for 5 days. Your 25 attempts to capitalize on that strength have the potential to bolster it and create a habit of using that strength more each day.

Keep track of how many positive comments family members give each other. One way to do so is to keep a bunch of pennies in your left pocket. When you make a positive comment to another family member then switch a penny to your right pocket. At the end of the day count how many pennies are in your right pocket. Try to make 40 to 50 positive comments to family members each day.

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# How Smart Girls Become Talented Women

Barbara A. Kerr and Amber Lynn Larson

**M**uch of the literature on gifted girls has lamented that fact that so many bright young females lose sight of their dreams and goals. Early works such as *Smart Girls, Gifted Women* (Kerr, 1985) and *Meeting at the Crossroads* (Brown & Gilligan, 1993) detailed the ways in which internal and external barriers prevent gifted girls from finding their own voices and fulfilling their true potential. National Science Foundation gender equity studies (National Science Foundation, 2003, 2004, 2005) have compiled many reports that show the leaks in the math and science pipeline of talent from 6th grade onwards. Nevertheless, there are increasing numbers of smart girls who navigate the barriers to their success, who find their voices, and who go on to become accomplished women. This chapter, in the true spirit of positive psychology, focuses upon the strengths that allow women to overcome internal resistance to growth and the behaviors they manifest in order to transcend the limitations of traditional gender roles.

## WHO ARE GIFTED GIRLS?

Where once the upper percentiles of intelligence tests narrowly defined giftedness, it has now been redefined in such a way that it is more inclusive, more culturally sensitive, and more carefully linked to the neuroscience of intelligence. While this has often led to some confusion and to needless complexity of definitions, the result has been the identification of a far more diverse and promising group of young women. The first studies of gifted girls were Terman and his colleagues' longitudinal investigations of 1,528 gifted children identified as those who scored over 140 on Terman's Stanford-Binet intelligence tests (Terman, 1925; Terman & Oden, 1935,

1947, 1959). Using this definition, and sampling from school districts in large cities in California, the Terman sample of gifted girls was largely middle class, with an underrepresentation of students of color and an overrepresentation of Jewish students.

The gifted girls were described by Terman (1925) as larger, stronger, and healthier than average girls. In addition, Terman took pains to describe how these girls, while having many masculine interests, still retained gender role appropriate behaviors such as playing with dolls and reading girls' magazines. The *Genetic Studies of Genius* is characterized throughout by an ambivalence about gender role noncompliance. Nevertheless, the conclusion was inescapable from the descriptions of their adventurous play, their broad-ranging interests, and their unusually high career aspirations that these gifted girls were more similar in many ways to gifted boys than to average girls.

As the girls grew up, they became more feminine in their interests while retaining high achievement throughout high school. Many more of them went on to college than other women of their generation (Terman & Oden, 1935). However, after college, the gifted women began to fall away from their original career dreams. Fewer gifted women than gifted men went on to graduate school and an even smaller proportion entered careers. (Terman & Oden, 1947).

Although half of the Terman women became homemakers, and a large number of the others entered traditionally feminine careers, there was a handful that overcame the considerable barriers to women's entry into the professions and became accomplished in nontraditional careers. In addition, the Terman sample of women remained psychologically well adjusted throughout their lives, although in terms of overall life satisfaction, those who had chosen to be single, childless, and career oriented were more likely to be happy with their choices. (Terman & Oden, 1959; Sears & Barbee, 1977).

For 50 years, the Terman definition of giftedness dominated gifted education, and therefore, little progress was made in understanding gifted girls who did not fit the white, middle-class profile of talent. Because the Terman girls were, for the most part, privileged children, a blind eye was often turned by researchers to the impact of sexism, racism, and poverty in the development of talent, so that gifted girls who did not achieve their potential were considered to have a "fear of success" (Horner, 1972) or to be suffering from "Imposter Phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978). The role of resilience in the internal lives of bright girls was virtually unexplored. In addition, because intelligence tests predict academic, but not creative achievement, the accomplishments of women who pursue occupations that do not require academic degrees were deemphasized in the first decades of research.

All of this changed in the 1970s as increased criticism of intelligence testing and academic "tracking" reached a crescendo. Concerns about equal opportunity led to a search for broader definitions of giftedness. Torrance (1977) broadened the definition of giftedness by persuasively showing that creatively gifted children were unlikely to be identified through

intelligence or achievement testing alone and made a case for the use of creativity tests to identify ideational fluency, flexibility, and originality. The U.S. Office of Gifted Education, following the Marland Report (1972), added creativity, leadership, and artistic ability to academic ability as signs of giftedness. What this meant for girls was that giftedness now included many abilities that girls have encouragement in developing, such as aesthetic and interpersonal skills.

A new emphasis on equity also encouraged research on “culture-fair” intelligence testing, and although the goal proved elusive, a plethora of new measures and adaptations of old measures appeared in the 1980s, such as the Culture Fair Intelligence Tests based on Cattell’s Culture Free Intelligence Test (1963) and the Raven Standard Progressive Matrices (Raven, 2000), which claimed to measure fluid intelligence, or abstract reasoning, rather than crystallized intelligence, which was assumed to be based more on achievement and experience within one culture. Although these tests were never in wide use of the identification of gifted students, they signaled a change in attitudes toward children of non-White, lower socioeconomic status backgrounds so that educators were more aware and more motivated to search for talent among these populations. This, too, was a step forward for bright girls.

The creation of university-based talent search programs, however, was somewhat of a mixed blessing for gifted girls. These programs, begun at the Johns Hopkins University (The Study for Mathematically Precocious Youth) and spreading to seven talent search regions, promoted the use of the SAT college admissions tests among 7th graders to identify youth who were already performing at the level of high school seniors. Although both the Verbal and the Mathematics tests were given, most of the emphasis was upon the high scoring students in math, for whom the creation of linear, highly accelerated math curricula was simpler than the creation of accelerated verbal programs.

Sadly, for gifted girls, the majority of the research publications as well as the popular media took up the observed predominance of males at the upper end of math scores as evidence of a possible male superiority in mathematics. This is a finding that to this day has been misinterpreted and overgeneralized to create barriers for females in math achievement. It took 2 decades of research and meta-analyses of mathematics achievement tests to overturn the idea among scholars of hereditary superiority of males in mathematics (Spelke, 2005); yet the popular notion of male superiority in math remains.

Nevertheless, the talent search programs did open up a new method of identification of specific talents rather than general intelligence, and thousands of girls who otherwise might never have come to the attention of educators were provided with summer programs, camps, and out-of-school opportunities to enhance their academic abilities and to learn with their intellectual peers.

An emphasis on specific abilities brought gifted identification into a closer predictive relationship with actual adult accomplishment, because although eminent people across professions indeed have high general

intelligence, they tend to have particular interests, passion, and motivation to develop their talents in just one, focused area of strength. Gardner's (1983) publication of *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* further expanded the possibilities of identification of talent, because he made a case for the existence of not one, but seven intelligences (later expanded further to eight). Curiously, although feminist psychologists had long lamented the failure of psychology to recognize interpersonal skills as being as valuable enough to be considered an aspect of intelligence; it took male authors to provide the convincing argument. The advent of research on emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1997) and social intelligence (Goleman, 2006) has opened the way for a discussion of those strengths that have long been considered the domains in which women express their giftedness. Whether this is because, as cultural feminists such as Gilligan claim, women truly think, reason, and express themselves with a "different voice," or because women, as lower status people in most societies have had to cultivate emotional and social abilities to gain and preserve power, does not matter. What matters is that such capacities as understanding and managing the emotions of oneself and others (emotional intelligence) and understanding and using intuition to make decisions (social intelligence) are now part of the discussion about what makes it possible for gifted girls to become accomplished women.

#### GENERALIZATION FROM STUDIES OF EMINENT INDIVIDUALS

Besides a few studies of eminent women, there are few studies of eminent individuals that point to gender differences in the development of eminence. In fact, Lubinski and Benbow (2006) have made a convincing case that the conditions for attaining eminence are similar for males and females. Many authors of studies of eminent individuals have pointed out the difficulties in studying the lives of eminent women. Terman and Oden (1935) noted that by midlife, it was necessary to limit their study of adult accomplishment to males, because by this point in life, most of the gifted women in their study listed their occupation as "homemaker." Because there was a "lack of a yardstick" to measure eminence in homemaking, and the number of women who had attained eminence was small, no conclusions could be drawn about women's path to eminence. Even though the number of women attaining eminence in all field grew steadily from the early 1970s onward, most authors of studies of eminence continued to avoid the topic; for example, Simonton's (1988) study of genius; Gardner's (1994; 1996) studies of creatively eminent people and leaders have had little to say about eminent women. One must read between the lines of all of these studies to make generalizations about the lives of eminent women, and these statements must be made with caution. Only Csikszentmihalyi (1996) was careful in his study to include proportionate representation of women. There are, however, some findings about eminent people that are so robust across studies that they should be considered in determining the strengths of eminent women.

### Loss of a Parent

The most common finding across all studies of eminent individuals is the finding of parent loss. This strange and disturbing fact has led to much speculation about how parental loss can engender creativity, drive, and achievement. For males, the loss of a father seems more common than loss of a mother; for females, it is unclear whether it is the loss of a father or mother that is most significant. Yewchuk, Aysto, and Schlosser's (2001) data would suggest that the presence of a strong father figure is very important to the development of eminence for women. Kerr (1997) suggested that psychological or physical separation from a mother might allow girls to diverge from traditional paths of marriage and motherhood. In studies of eminent people, the loss of a parent has been considered to be important in promoting early emotional and financial independence (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996); in producing a more creative, less linear approach to career development (Albert, 1994) and in creating the psychological tension necessary for creativity (Runco & Richards, 1997). For many of the talented at-risk girls in the NSF gender equity studies (Kurpius & Kerr, 2005), the absence of a father meant that they took additional responsibility for themselves as well as for siblings. Many of the girls spoke proudly of their role as their mother's ally and of their desire to achieve their career goals for the sake of their mother and siblings. The absence of a mother, according to Edelman's (2006) theory, if worked through, can lead to a strong and independent identity if a daughter is not required to take on too many of her mother's responsibilities.

In sum, the loss of a parent, although devastating for any child, may lead to greater creativity and autonomy in the long run. The strengths that are a part of eminent women's lives that can be related to early loss include resilience in the face of setbacks, individuation and independent identity formation, and early assumption of adult responsibilities with the attendant life skills.

### Early Engagement and Time Spent Learning

Across studies of eminent individuals is the finding of early engagement with a specific domain of talent. Most creatively eminent individuals show an early passion for a specific intellectual activity. Future artists spend many hours as children perfecting their drawing, copying cartoons, and experimenting with designs (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). Future writers read voraciously, write journals and stories, and are fascinated by language at an early age (Pirto, 2002). This specific, powerful interest can get in the way of general school achievement, because many young people destined for eminence show little interest in being well rounded or in stellar achievement outside of their areas of interest (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Nevertheless, early engagement is critical in some fields such as music where few achieve eminence that have not begun their career as children (Sloane & Sosniak, 1985) and important even in later developing talents such as writing.

In addition, great accomplishment in any field is directly related to the number of hours spent working toward expertise and the number of hours spent while on the job (Lubinski & Benbow, 2006). Although there is a tendency for women to want to spend less time working than men prefer, it is clear that part-time commitment to a passion will not result in great achievement in a field. Therefore, early engagement with a domain of talent, including working toward excellence and expertise, gives gifted girls a head start in gathering the sheer amount of knowledge and skills needed to make a difference.

Therefore, it is likely that preoccupation with a specific talent domain is a strength for gifted girls that can translate to adult accomplishment. For girls, an early passion not only builds important skills but also may provide resilience in the face societal pressures to redirect interests to prettiness and popularity (Kerr, 1997).

### Making Connection to a Master Teacher

Although proximity to and access to a master teacher is characteristic of the eminent person's environment, the capacity to make connection with a master teacher is a psychological strength. All people who achieve eminence in their fields are people who have come in contact with at least one teacher who challenged the student to achieve his or her full potential; who held extremely high expectations; who developed the student's technical skills and knowledge base; and who provided access to the student's future profession (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Master teachers can be difficult and demanding, and it takes a special set of strengths to be able to profit from their instruction. Students who can persist with only minimal reinforcement and who can weather intense criticism are those who respond best to master teachers. These students are primarily interested in gaining skills and knowledge rather than in garnering approval. In most studies of eminent individuals, the future artist, musician, scientist, or inventor went to great lengths to find the right teacher, to find the resources to pay for instruction, and to engage the teacher in mentoring and guidance beyond the usual expectations.

The strengths that are necessary for the gifted girl to obtain such rigorous instruction and mentoring are persistence and resourcefulness. The strengths necessary for a continuing bond with the master teacher are a "thick skin;" a desire to prove oneself worthy; and willingness to show consistent and sustained effort.

### CONDITIONS OF EMINENCE FOR WOMEN

What are the characteristics of gifted girls that are most predictive of adult accomplishment? In the analysis of themes in the lives of eminent women, Kerr (1997) suggested that voracious reading and learning; ability to be alone; willingness to be different and acceptance of being special; and high aspirations set gifted girls who had potential for eminence apart.

Yewchuk et al.'s (2001) studies of Canadian and Finnish eminent women placed a strong emphasis on the role of being "special" and showed how supportive, loving parents (particularly fathers) who encouraged girls' identities as brainy, smart, and capable were critical to the origins of eminence. Interestingly, however, in Yewchuk's studies, the eminent women gave primary importance to their own abilities and personal characteristics in childhood as the source of their accomplishments. This is in keeping with research showing the importance of self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 2006) and self-esteem (American Association of University Women, 1991) in the development of talent. Kerr and Kurpius (2005) suggested that ability and personal characteristics such as self-esteem and self-efficacy might be necessary but not sufficient for the development of talent. Rather, they said, the childhoods of eminent women were marked by loss, stress, and adversities that had to be endured or overcome. In their NSF studies of girls gifted in math and science, they tested the idea that being an "at risk" gifted girl might actually build the resilience that would be necessary in adolescence and adulthood. Their samples of talented at-risk girls did indeed match the profiles of scientific interest and curiosity, self-efficacy, and resilience that are characteristic of accomplished women scientists.

Freeman and Walberg (1999) study of eminent African American women showed that although they shared many traits with eminent women and men in general, their eminence also appears fostered by psychological traits and conditions generally similar to those that benefit other eminent men and women, they were significantly more often advantaged with respect to several psychological traits, including independence, perseverance, single-mindedness, and alertness to novelty.

### A LOVE OF SOLITUDE

Eminent women remember girlhoods full of exploration, adventure, and voracious reading. Although both eminent women and men spent a great deal of time in solitary activities as children, solitariness is not as strong a theme in eminent men's lives as it is in those of eminent women. Alone time seems critical to the development of girls' talents (Kerr, 1997).

Why is it that aloneness is so much more important to the achievement of goals for women? Perhaps it is because society places so much more emphasis on social achievement for girls and women than for boys or men. Girls are expected to participate in extracurricular activities, informal social groups, and a wide network of friendships. From a human capital perspective (Bryant, 1992), girls have less time available for intellectual pursuits because of their investment in social activities, particularly after adolescence. Therefore, girls who spend time alone in childhood, by choice or chance, are likely to have more time for reading, reflection, and skill building.

Another possibility is that aloneness in childhood develops the habit of solitude, a condition that is critical to adult productivity. People who have difficulty spending time alone may never develop the capacity to spend long

hours solving a problem or experimenting with a new design. Girls who are able to be alone are less likely to be caught up in the “culture of romance” (Holland & Eisenhart, 1991) that persuades them that their career goals are less important than their relationships with men. Solitude to these girls becomes not a source of social embarrassment but a source of strength.

## DEVELOPED IDENTITY

One of the major differences between gifted young women and gifted young men seems to be the ways in which career identity is developed. Talented females are either slower or less willing to claim an identity in their chosen vocation. For example, while male students at the Art Institute of Chicago claimed the identity of “artist,” female students were more likely to say that they were “students” (Kerr, 1991). In the Holland and Eisenhart (1991) study of the “culture of romance” on college campuses, the authors observed that bright women subverted their career identities to the development of their romantic relationships. In general, there may be gender differences in how women form their identity.

Early research showing sex differences yielded to studies showing similarities, with the current consensus being that there are differences in how women and men develop their identities in particular domains such as occupational and sex role domains, but overall, they are similar to one another. Women seem to develop their relationship and career identities simultaneously, while men may delay exploration of their relationship identity until after achieving their career identity.

Nevertheless, it is clear from the studies of lives of eminent women that the development of a strong, clear vocational identity is critical to adult accomplishment in all domains. The identity of the gifted girl must be as a “musician” or “scientist,” for example to advance in these fields.

## BOUNDARIES

For many eminent women, childhood isolation prevented them from exposure to pressures to conform to feminine norms. Many gifted girls today experience social isolation, merely because these girls do not fill the traditional mold. They also may try to hide and deny their abilities in order to become socially accepted. As a result of others reactions to their giftedness, talented girls often develop “thorns and shells” in their personalities in order to protect themselves from social scrutiny (Kerr, 1997). Thorns can manifest themselves by way of sarcasm, intolerance, self-righteousness, brusqueness, or simply having a sharp tongue. On the other hand, a gifted girl can alternately form shells by wrapping herself in shyness, timidity, and modesty. In this way, girls can protect themselves from the social persecution they experience. Kurpius and Kerr (2005) found that the strongest need and characteristic of talented at-risk girls with career goals in science was defence, the need to defend oneself from interpersonal attacks and threats. Kerr, McKay, and Hammond (2007) also found defence to be

one of the strongest needs of creatively gifted girls. Although dependence is often seen as a negative personality trait by psychologists, it may be a necessary protective factor for gifted girls who are focused on accomplishment.

Another trait seen among eminent women is their resistance to confluence (Kerr, 1997). Many females tend to view themselves as part of someone else—they may have borrowed values and interests from their romantic partners and friends and tend to say “we” instead of “I.” Although the capacity to connect to another in intimacy is a basic human need, the tendency to overidentify with another’s needs can cause women lose their identities. However, eminent women have the ability to still feel connected with others without relinquishing their sense of self, which is perhaps a testament to their strong personalities.

### RESISTANCE TO STEREOTYPE THREAT

A common belief held by many is that boys naturally perform better than girls in math and science. This belief affects the mentality and efficacy for girls in school. However, a meta-analysis by Hyde (2005) found that male and female students are alike in terms of personality, cognitive ability, and leadership. Differences arise when comparing male and female performance in mathematics and the sciences not because of an inherent biological difference but because of the existence of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997), which can cause women to underperform in these areas. Stereotype threat works by lowering expectations for women in the areas of science and math. When women are aware of a stereotype, according to this research, they will not only suffer damage to their intellectual identity but will also unconsciously underachieve. So not only does society disadvantage women by expecting them not to achieve in these areas, but it also harms them by making them believe that they simply cannot do it, because of being female.

How then, can young women protect themselves from stereotype threat? An intervention designed by Johns, Schmader, and Martnes (2005) found that simply by teaching women about stereotype threat and the anxiety that it rears boosted performance in stereotype-relevant tasks. This worked because it allowed women to not base their performance on unchangeable internal factors—such as being female—and allowed them to attribute their performance to external factors instead. So women gifted in areas of math and science must be educated about the existence of these stereotypes and how they relate to the widespread belief that boys are better than girls in some areas.

In addition, women can show a general resiliency to societal expectations by using positive emotionality to cope with stress and negative experiences. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) found that positive emotions may contribute to efficient emotion regulation, which leads to quicker recovery from negative events and finding meaning even under negative circumstances. They found that highly resilient people expressed more positive emotions in the face of frustration. Letzring, Block, and Funder (2004) additionally

found that people with high ego-resiliency could exert emotional control over life events, resulting in higher levels of self-confidence and better psychological adjustment. The results of these studies should not be discounted when examining the processes that eminent women use to overcome barriers.

## RESISTANCE TO THE CULTURE OF ROMANCE

Young women, particularly upon their entrance to college, are at risk to become entangled in the “culture of romance,” which revolves around the pressure for young women to become heavily involved in the romantic world (Holland & Eisenhart, 1991). Rather than focusing on academic goals and career development, women often find themselves being pressured to make themselves attractive, participate in parties and dances, and go to places like bars and clubs all with the sole purpose of meeting men. These female students are pressured both subtly and overtly to participate in romantic pursuits, which requires them to devote most of their time and energy into making themselves attractive and finding men to date who will boost their status and prestige. By dating men of high status, such as athletes, women thereby prove that they are highly attractive, thereby boosting their prestige among their peers. Evidence from the nationwide freshman survey (Sax, Lindholm, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 2003) shows that college women spend more time taking care of family and household responsibilities than do college men, even to the extent of doing their boyfriend’s laundry. College women are essentially being socialized to take on conventional marriage roles. Conventional marriage arrangements in which women take primary responsibility for home and family are a benefit to male scientists but are a liability to the success of female scientists. It may be that the culture of romance encourages conventional relationships, preventing women from seeking and finding the more equitable marriages that will support their career goals.

A strong personality as well as a resistance to confluence may protect talented young women from becoming enmeshed in the culture of romance (Kerr, 1997). In addition, Kerr and Kurpius (2005) developed counseling and mentoring interventions designed to strengthen scientifically talented young women’s resistance to the culture of romance. These interventions included career exploration and career counseling that encouraged young women’s science interests and retreats with women scientists that focused on modeling equitable gender relations. Recent evidence from the NSF studies of women in science, technology, engineering, and math fields shows that the nature of relationships, marriage, and family is the strongest predictor of women’s tenure and promotion in the sciences.

## COURAGE

An important way of understanding how gifted women overcome the barriers is the concept of courage and how it shapes a person’s perceptions

of life's obstacles. Courage may be defined as having three basic domains—physical, moral, and vital. Moral courage is defined as standing up for one's beliefs in the face of adversity (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Particularly in relation to eminent women, moral courage is needed to stand up against the social pressure and sexism they may face so that they might achieve their true potential.

Courageous people are more likely to perceive problems as challenges, rather than impassible obstacles. So, for women to surpass the obstacles they must face throughout their lives, a certain measure of courage is important for them to realize their dreams and aspirations.

### EGALITARIAN RELATIONSHIPS AND FLEXIBLE CHILDCARE

There is increasing evidence that accomplished women tend to create their own models of marriage, family, and mothering that are independent of societal ideals and stereotypes. Kerr (1997) found that eminent women found their love through their work; that is, they chose partners who either shared the same career interests or were respectful of the chosen work of the gifted women and equally devoted to a cause or purpose. Recent NSF studies show that women scholars are more likely to persist toward the highest levels of achievement in their fields when they are in dual career couples rather than more conventional marriages (NSF, 2005). Kerr found that eminent women tended to find ways to have children on their own terms, taking their children with them to work and in the field, making creative use of extended family and friendship networks for childcare, and seeking high quality childcare. In addition, Yewchuk et al. (2001) found that eminent women had more egalitarian partnerships and flexible child-rearing arrangements.

### FALLING IN LOVE WITH AN IDEA

Of all of the characteristics of eminent women, the capacity to fall in love with an idea may be the most powerful determinant of success. Torrance (1995) named this as the major characteristic of creatively gifted adults. Csikszentimihalyi (1990) described the sense of flow that was experienced by eminent individuals in participation in their chosen domain; whether art, science, or leadership, these creative people felt at one with their work, felt a sense of challenge and mastery, and experienced a timelessness and joy in the practice of their discipline. Falling in love with an idea strengthens gifted young women's resolve in almost every other area of her life, giving her the courage to overcome obstacles, to ignore gender barriers and stereotypes and to spend intensive time alone in pursuit of mastery of her field. In addition, falling in love with an idea may encourage even a shy, isolated gifted girl to seek master teachers and mentors and to insist on the educational opportunities she needs to fulfill her potential (Kerr, 1997).

## LESSONS FROM EMINENT WOMEN FOR GIFTED GIRLS

Not all gifted girls will become, or want to become eminent women. However, most gifted girls do want to realize their potential and fulfill their dreams, and most teachers, counselors, and parents want to assist them in achieving their goals. Many of the experiences of eminent women are not those that one would wish for any child, such as parental loss and early, unchosen isolation. In addition, a good many of the conditions of eminence are almost the opposite of the conditions of contemporary girlhood. For example, girls are encouraged to be socially active and to have busy lives; seldom are today's girls encouraged to be reflective and solitary. Most media that are oriented toward girls and young women concerns grooming, weight loss, and relationship skills rather than self-exploration or career development. Nevertheless, it seems that some of the conditions of eminence could be moderated in such a way as to suggest strengths that can be encouraged. Even if eminence is not the goal, optimal development of gifted girls may sometimes require guiding them away from unchallenging education, media stereotypes of girls, and negative peer relationships.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### Going from Smart Girl to Talented Woman

In this chapter, we have explored the strengths that allow women to overcome internal resistance to growth and the behaviors they manifest to transcend the limitations of traditional gender roles. We encourage you to discover your own strengths and the barriers that sit between you and your goals.

***An Exercise in Noticing:*** Take one day to notice all the ways that popular Web sites, television, magazines, and music give messages that women should be pretty and popular, thin and sweet, and oriented toward relationships with men. How much have you believed these stereotypes and acted on them by dieting, talking exclusively with friends about relationships, and avoiding thinking about your long-term goals? Now, the next day, become your own positive psychologist, and notice every time you see an example in the media of women being strong and healthy, goal-oriented and achieving, and supportive of other women's goals? How can you become more like these women?

***A Female Family Tree of Strengths:*** Build a family tree of the women in your family. Ask your mom, your grandmother, your aunts, and your sisters what their dreams were for themselves, and why they did to achieve those dreams. Now, think about your own dreams for yourself. How will your life be different from that of the women in your family? If you have daughters some day, what will you dream for them?

***Using Your Strengths to Change the World:*** Open the newspaper and look through the headlines. Which headlines upset you the most? What is the problem behind those headlines—conflict among people, disrespect of the environment, injustice? Now, make a list of your interests, abilities, and strengths. How can your interests, abilities, and strengths be brought to bear upon the problem? How can you make a difference in the world given your unique capacities?

*Let's Hear It from the Boys:* Guys, take one day to notice how the girls or women in your life sell themselves short, compromise their goals, or try to be something they're not to please a man in their lives. Just for today, challenge every girl and woman you know to see herself as a strong and capable person and to go for her goals.

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# Practicing Authentic Leadership

Bruce J. Avolio and Tara S. Wernsing

**I**n today's world, there is a strong chorus of calls for more authentic leadership. Maybe these calls abound because of the growing level of cynicism that many people have expressed regarding leaders around the globe who seem to pad their own pockets at the expense of their people and the organizations they serve. Many examples exist, including the leader of North Korea who lives in opulence while the majority of his population is starving, contractors working in Iraq who are supposed to be there to support the multi-national war effort but incurring scores of accusations concerning overcharges and special bonuses, and prominent members of the U.S. Congress found guilty of taking bribes and misusing public funds. It is somewhat staggering to read that recent polls done by the Gallup Organization indicated that a third of the American public believed members of Congress were corrupt!

Nowadays, we know more about everything leaders do in the spotlight and beyond. Their failures are big news, and this publicity sparks the call for more authenticity in leadership. For example, less than a decade ago, we had moment-to-moment coverage on President Clinton's affair while in office, whereas few Americans probably realize that President Franklin D. Roosevelt died ostensibly in the arms of his long-term lover in Warm Springs, Georgia, while his wife Eleanor was in Washington, D.C. (Gerber, 2002).

The enormous availability of information on governments and organizations, the standard of transparency being demanded of organizational leaders, as well as the growing awareness of the general populace that they can access this information online is promoting a call for more authentic leadership. We also suspect that as followers become more challenging of

authority because they simply know more, they also would expect more from leaders in positions of authority. So what we have occurring perhaps is a “perfect storm” for promoting authentic leadership whereby more information, smarter citizens and employees, coupled with the ability to quickly connect with others around the world through the Internet to establish a collective voice are contributing to increasing demands on leaders to get it right!

If the perfect storm is upon us, then where are we in our understanding of what constitutes authentic leadership and, perhaps more important, its development? We start with some examples of authentic leadership in practice and then move more into what are its components. The good news is that it has always been around if we look for it and are willing promote it in our organizations.

Forty years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. was interviewed on the *Mike Douglas Show* about his stance on the Vietnam War. Although he offered many eloquent responses on this television show, two comments were particularly relevant to examining the practice of authentic leadership:

MLK: A man of conscience can never be a consensus leader ... he doesn't take a stand in order to search for consensus. He is ultimately a molder of consensus. I've always said a measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and moments of convenience, but where he stands in moments of challenge and moments of controversy.

Douglas: Do you care if you lost favor with [President] Johnson?

MLK: Well that isn't the most important thing to me. The most important thing is that I not lose favor with truth, and with what conscience tell me is right, and what conscience tells me is just. I'm much more concerned about keeping favor with these principles than keeping favor with a person who may misunderstand a position I take. (Pugliese, 2007)

Through these particular words, Martin Luther King Jr. illustrated authentic leadership. First, he spoke of conscience being his guiding factor. Authentic leaders listen to inner conscience to guide them in decision making and taking a stand on controversial issues. Yet, the truth they listen for from within themselves is how to best serve their constituencies. In this way, authentic leadership is inner-guided yet other-focused. Robert E. Quinn (2004) describes this phenomenon and seeming paradox in his book *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*. Through deep change, leaders become more authentic in their approach, guided by inner values and desire to serve other people. It follows that Bill George and Peter Sims (2007) place self-awareness at the core of developing authentic leadership. Indeed, leaders must undertake the lifelong journey of self-discovery to lead authentically.

Second, Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) spoke of being true to certain principles other than concern for what people think or how they might misinterpret his words or intentions. This shows how authentic leaders are guided by principles for the betterment of humankind, not for one group of people at the expense of others. MLK described his core principles as

genuine equality and peace; he did not discuss annihilation or punishment of one group of people (e.g., Whites) so that another group (e.g., Blacks) might feel vindicated for the past or more able to thrive in the future. He described a future in which all people are equally thriving. His expression of these ideals became shared goals among many people from both groups and motivated political action on a national and eventually global basis. Ironically, and in contrast to King's philosophy, Hitler had used the U.S. "Jim Crow" laws to justify his differential treatment of the Jews during World War II.

Last, MLK shared his thoughts and feelings about the war regardless of political backlash and physical threats. Moreover, his actions reflected the core values of equality and peace of which he spoke often. The way he interacted and communicated with people over a lifetime reflected these values. The effort he put into creating peaceful marches for equality across the nation required daily commitment to these ideals. For these reasons, MLK modeled authentic leadership by (a) being guided by inner conscience, as to how to (b) be true to core principles of improving well-being (equality and peace) for all people, and (c) taking actions aligned with core principles regardless of external pressures or threats.

Eleanor Roosevelt is an example of another kind of authentic leader. She was told that her husband had died while on vacation in Warm Springs, Georgia. She was asked to come to Georgia to accompany his remains back to Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, when she arrived she was told that her Franklin had continued his long-time affair, and perhaps more devastating, that her daughter had been arranging for her father and his girlfriend to have clandestine meetings over the years.

During the time the president was in Georgia, he was sitting for a portrait for his girlfriend. Months later, Eleanor who had now left the White House, was in Hyde Park, New York, when she discovered the nearly completed portrait of her husband. Of course, one might not fault the former first lady for throwing the portrait in the trash. Yet, instead, she wrote a note to his girlfriend indicating that she did realize how much the girlfriend must have loved her husband and that Eleanor Roosevelt was sure the portrait had great meaning for her. Eleanor Roosevelt was the same person who, as a member of the United Nations, promoted the international code of human rights, while demonstrating in this instance amazing authentic leadership in this most personal challenge of her own (R. Gerber, personal communication, January 26, 2007).

Warren Buffett at this writing is the second richest man in the world behind his close friend Bill Gates. For a number of years, he discussed taking all the money "he borrowed" from the economy and giving it back to a foundation he would create to address some of the most compelling issues of our time, such as nuclear proliferation or world hunger. When asked by a student in a class held at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln what he would like his foundation to focus on, he replied, if the money had been there at the time, he would have funded the Civil Rights Movement in the United States because it had no significant constituency with enough wealth to do so (University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 2006).

In 2007, Mr. Buffett took a step that perhaps solidifies his authenticity as a leader. Rather than taking his 30 or 40 billion dollars and setting up a foundation in his family's name, he is investing his wealth in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as he believes together they can accomplish much more than each alone. In this one act, he has demonstrated the importance of doing what is good for the collective, even at the expense of his legacy not being tied to a foundation name like his predecessors Ford, Kellogg, Carnegie, and now Gates.

### WHAT IS AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP?

The previous examples offer some interesting insights into what constitutes authentic leadership. The common core is doing what is good for others while being guided by inner conscience, even at great personal sacrifice (such as no legacy foundation, or being kind to your spouse's mistress, or even assault and assassination). This kind of leadership is not blind attention to serving the larger group or one's individual desires, but rather a very high form of altruism that shows how the individual and the group can both achieve their aims, if (a) the leader and group can be aligned in core principles and (b) a leader challenges the notion that it is a zero sum game between them, i.e., that one's gain is the other's loss.

The level of self-awareness at the core of authentic leadership requires substantial time and effort invested over many years into self-discovery to distinguish inner conscience from external programming. In addition, authentic leaders recognize and accept that people in the group are at different levels of developing their self-awareness and authenticity and may not be able to see paradoxical possibilities suggested by the stories of authentic leaders presented thus far.

Authentic leadership clearly depicts a higher level of moral reasoning and capacity to make judgments that goes beyond one's self interest, or said another way, includes one's self-interest to the serve the collective interests of the group. Yet, it doesn't stop there. These leaders go through life continually revisiting their theory of the self that represents the beliefs, views, and evaluations they hold about themselves (Epstein, 1973). This self-awareness and revision process allows them to determine how they can be better so that the collective can be better. It seems many people are incapable of evaluating their own theory of self, often unconscious to the fact that they even have a concept of themselves that is shaping all they do. So they simply execute on a theory they have never fully discovered. In this way, they operate by default on theories that early experiences programmed into them.

Basically, authentic leadership is leading from the core theory of oneself that is tied to high moral values and beliefs. Developing an understanding of those core values is a central component of authentic leadership, and then over time elevating them as new circumstances and challenges are confronted constitutes the practice and development of authentic leadership. As the starting point for authentic leadership development, leaders must

question what constitutes their current core values and beliefs. What represents the center or base for their important decisions, actions, and behaviors? Moreover, because this is leadership, these core values and beliefs must include more universal principles than simply one's personal desires and incorporate ideals as to how such individuals come to influence others by raising themselves and others to higher standards of moral conduct. It is also important to consider that authentic leadership is not something that either exists or does not exist; rather, there is more or less authentic leadership in leadership episodes over time.

In this chapter, we explore the development of authentic leadership practices by describing the nature of authenticity, the role of self-awareness, components for practicing authentic leadership, and assessments available.

### AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Inevitably, people will say, "Sure, Martin Luther King Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, and Warren Buffett are exceptional people who exhibited high moral principles. But what if a leader's values and true self at the root or core are evil? Are they authentic expressing that?" The answer to this commonly asked question is that enacting authentic leadership assumes a positive path toward developing oneself toward higher levels of moral perspective and adult development. At these higher levels of human development, we know from years of accumulated theory and research (Erikson, 1959; Kegan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1976; Loevinger, 1976; Piaget, 1954) that people move to more complex and sophisticated ways of understanding the world and relating to other people. They go through transitions, crises, and transformations, and emerge into each new stage with a broader set of perspectives for interpreting their experiences that is more inclusive than the last.

These perspectives move from primarily individual concerns for personal gain, to relational concerns for support and status, to universal concerns for higher order principles such as genuine freedom, justice, equality, and peace for all members of the human family. The highest levels of development imply a move toward universal consciousness, an awareness of everything being connected (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Debold, 2002; Wilber, 2000). For example, to the extent the leaders of the nations of the world exemplify high moral character and perspective we would expect these individuals to delay judgment in determining the underlying causes for any one country's actions. By delaying judgment they would be signaling they are willing to listen, and hear one country's reasoning and cost-benefit considerations for all constituencies in a balanced way.

Balanced processing is thus another essential component of authentic leadership identified by Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa (2005). Unfortunately, the trend of global opinion about U.S. attention to self-interest compared with collective interests suggests that the world is trending toward seeing this superpower as being much less authentic these days. The tangible impact of this trend is that the United States needs to

invest billions more in security and much more time in convincing other nations that the direction chosen will benefit them as well.

Authentic leadership is based in core values and beliefs, but ultimately we judge such leaders by the authentic leadership episodes that are expressed through action, that is, forgoing putting one's name on a foundation to have a more positive and sustainable impact on the world's problems. Avolio and Luthans (2006) argued that authentic leadership represents the root construct or base underlying all positive forms of leadership. This means there can be authentic directive and participative leaders, just as there can be authentic transformational leaders.

An important distinction was made by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) that there can be authentic forms of ethical or transformational leadership, as well pseudo-authentic expressions of leadership. Additionally, transformational leaders were defined by Bass and Avolio (1990) and earlier by Burns (1978) as being focused on developing followers into leaders themselves. Thus the basic "transformation" was in the follower becoming a leader. They reasoned that a leader that would be so concerned about developing followers into leaders, versus having them remain as "subordinates," evidenced a higher level of moral perspective. Why? Such leaders would be focused on the good of the individuals, not just their own self-interests, and would want to leave behind individuals and organizations more capable of leading into the future. One only has to look at several despot dictators to realize this was clearly not part of their intentions.

The work on transformational leadership in particular led Avolio (2005) to explore where such authentic leadership originates, which we discuss in more detail in the latter part of this chapter. The important point made by Avolio and his colleagues at the Global Leadership Institute is that authentic leadership is the root, and that like the roots of a plant, if it becomes corrupt so does any form of leadership exhibited above the root or base.

So how does such root-based leadership get developed? Authentic leadership is a developmental process that is largely characterized by learning about the self as it evolves toward broader and more complex perspectives, while in turn applying this learning to leadership episodes and practices. The self here is the core concept, mental model, and theory an individual leader holds that addresses the question—Who am I?

## DEVELOPING AUTHENTICITY

To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.

*Hamlet*, act 1, scene 3, lines 564–566, Shakespeare, 1604

Authenticity is defined as being true to the self (Harter, 2002). As Shakespeare wrote above, being true to one's self is the highest level of truth there is. As the theory of authentic leadership describes, the self we are talking about is linked to higher levels of moral development. In the cognitive psychology literature, Lord and Brown (2004) present a way to more clearly understand the theories of the self each person holds. The first

theory is the *feared self*, which represents areas that we do not feel adept at engaging, e.g., “I am not able to sway people by standing up and presenting my deep beliefs and opinions.” The second theory of the self represents the current view of the self or *actual self*. The actual self represents that which we have come to understand about ourselves and that which guides our action, for example, “I am not an empathetic person, so I don’t try to engage people in counseling because I am not good at it.” The actual self represents our theory of our self in use day to day. The final self is referred to as the hoped for or *possible self*. This represents the individual I am becoming or could become, e.g., “I know that to be a successful manager in most organizations today, I must develop a global mind-set. With such a mind-set, I will be able to successfully engage my employees and customers across cultural contexts in a way that we each come to understand the other’s perspective and develop trust.”

At any one point in time, we can consider that we all have a feared self, an actual self, and a possible self that are each evolving in some unique way depending on the challenges we have chosen to confront, or that occur through serendipity and life events. Authentic leadership development focuses on the dynamic between these components with the intent of moving the actual self to a higher level perspective towards the possible self. Thus, authentic leadership development begins by developing this sense of clarity about the self and authenticity through action (Gardner et al., 2005).

Taking actions that go against inner values or inner base represents self-abandonment and a slide into negativity. We suggest that individuals who truly know themselves and are progressing throughout their lives towards higher perspectives are people who are more positive, and we have some evidence to support this assumption. Indeed, in one police study, officers who were rated by their followers as more authentic, and who were higher in psychological capital, over a 6-month period of time had followers who showed higher levels of flourishing, on-the-job performance, and well-being (Peterson, Walumbwa, Avolio, & Fredrickson, 2007; Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

Now contrast the above focus on positivity and think of the officers in the German army in World War II, who were required to dehumanize and eventually put to death approximately six million people in death camps. For many of these officers, there must have been an initial moment when they went against their own inner principles—knowing that killing these human beings was against their moral values. Yet for their own survival (and safety of their families) they bought into, or at least went along with, Nazi policies. It seems that once you abandon your inner values, it becomes easier each time as you become a little more deadened to its voice. These officers may have thought they were surviving, but instead, they experienced the slow death of their moral perspective and well-being.

We see this same pattern occurring for people in organizations, who are selling out their inner values, often for security or status. At first, it may be one difficult choice, and it may not even be noticed. But over time, these people no longer hear their inner conscience, and they make decisions

purely based on economic reasoning. This too results in slow death. Inauthentic behavior shows up in leaders and followers who behave as social chameleons, changing who they are according to whatever group or authority figure with whom they are currently interacting.

We suggest one indicator of inauthenticity is that people experience polarities of energy: (a) frenetic, hyper, wired energy or (b) low, dull, exhausted energy or (c) a constant swing between both extremes over a short period of time. This is because inauthenticity reflects an imbalance. When someone is not grounded in who they are, they are likely to look outside themselves for answers, validation, or direction. Repeatedly ignoring one's own inner moral base drains a person's energy, and not being aware of inner conscience and instead tuned toward other's people attitudes and opinions leads to more frenetic energy states. We also know that maintaining this sort of psychological and physical imbalance will eventually take a toll on the person's well-being.

In sum, authentic leaders have a better understanding of who they are, as well as more experience and facility in acting in alignment with their true selves under various conditions (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Accordingly, being true to the self, being authentic, involves both a "knowing" and "doing" component. That is, leaders must first *know* who they are, and only then can they choose to *do* things that match their true values and principles. Thus, the first component to developing authenticity in individual leaders and authentic leadership is leader self-awareness.

## SELF-AWARENESS IS THE FIRST STEP

Most people tend to overestimate or are more favorable toward themselves compared with ratings they receive from coworkers (Nilsen & Campbell, 1993). So we know from this research that most people really aren't clear about how they are perceived by others. But self-awareness is more than knowing how others see you; also it is being aware of aspects that others don't see, as well as understanding some basic principles common to all people, such as how we all make sense of and derive meaning from our life experiences. It also allows for the possibility that everyone else may be wrong about you!

Although the term self-awareness is often used to refer to a certain state of "enlightenment" that some people attain, in practice self-awareness is a long-term, really a lifetime, learning process without an ultimate destination level of 100%. This is because the actual self is dynamic and changes over time. As noted above, there are multiple components to the self (i.e., actual, feared, and possible) and not everything about the self can be known anyway. In fact, cognitive psychologists suggest there is a "working self-concept" that represents what we are able to access about ourselves at any one point in time, since we cannot access all of it all of the time (Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

In the book titled *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* by Malcolm Gladwell (2005), a study was described where unsuspecting

people were primed to think either young or old, and as a result their subsequent behaviors changed. Priming them involved flashing a word on a screen below the threshold of awareness, so that people were unaware this was happening yet unconsciously processing the words. People who were primed with old words walked more slowly afterwards than those that were not primed with such words.

In another clever experiment, people primed with aggressive words interrupted a meeting after about 5 minutes of waiting, while those who were primed with polite words did not interrupt the meeting at all (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). This series of studies provides evidence of how people's thoughts and perspectives of themselves affect their actions, and yet they can be unaware of what is driving their behavior. Developing greater self-awareness is one way to become more conscious of what shapes behavior. Although it probably cannot overcome intentional priming conducted in laboratories by scientific researchers as described here, self-awareness development can bring to consciousness many other aspects of the self that do shape behaviors and that can be adjusted. For instance, leaders who become aware of these common biases in the ways they perceive and process information can intentionally seek more ways to balance their perspectives. Therefore, authentic leaders are likely to engage in a more balanced processing as a result of greater self-awareness.

### SELF-AWARENESS BEGINS WITH A TRIGGER MOMENT

So what is a trigger moment? An example of a trigger moment might be: *“Consider that when you are leading every single conversation matters.”* A young leader asked her mentor, “What is the one thing that would help me be a better leader?” His reply to her question was the statement above, and she indicated to us that it has guided her very successfully through the past 10 years of work in the public school systems.

Self-awareness means asking central questions about yourself that relate to your theory of yourself. When am I at my best? How can I improve? Where am I being true to myself, and where am I selling out? It can be triggered by receiving feedback. For example, how many of your friends would hide you if your life and theirs depended on it? This kind of question really gets one to think about true and deep friendships and what they mean in life. Thus, self-awareness is a process of learning about the self that includes moments of insight (i.e., an “aha!” moment), self-reflection, and an accumulation of knowledge about the self over time.

Trigger moments cause leaders to pause and reflect on the meaning of the event and implications for their current and future leadership. These moments may be negative, neutral, or positive. One clear indication we have found for authentic leadership development is when leaders stop searching for answers from outside sources and listen to their own wisdom and conscience on key issues. One hospital director remarked that he had read so many books on leadership that were useful to his development, but his real development started to emerge when he set out to understand and

address his own model or theory of leadership. When he began to dig deeper into his own model, he was able to see how he wanted to be guided from the inside out. Here is another example we picked up in a class where a student addressed the following question to Warren Buffett.

STUDENT: But when you need advice and feedback about an idea or a decision, I'd like to know who do you go to?

WARREN BUFFETT: Well, usually I look in the mirror, to be totally honest. The nature of what I do means I have to think pretty much independently because if I take a poll, in effect, I'm gonna do whatever everybody else is doing, and I don't think much of that usually in investments; and so I have to have an environment and I have to have the temperament personally that lets me think for myself (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2007).

Mr. Buffett has no doubt sought advice throughout his life from his acquaintances and readings, but there comes a point where such leaders believe they must fully own the decision and its consequences. Given his response, he has apparently reached a level of experience where he knows that he has his own answers. This behavior represents trust in one's self that comes with years of experience and experimentation. Contrast this example with a new leader who doesn't have much experience in his field and decides not to ask for feedback or advice on a key business decision. What we describe here is a leader not willing to be vulnerable, which can be the kiss of death in most careers, particularly those where we observe leaders who are extremely high in exhibiting hubris! Of course, this behavior could be considered arrogance and ignorance. This is why we refer to authentic leadership *development* ... because it is a long-term process of moving toward more complex ways of understanding yourself, others, and the effective leadership that comes through experience and deep reflection. For leaders, this happens while they are on the job in leadership episodes, as well as through separate reflective practices, like journaling or meditation. Self-reflection is critical thinking usually performed after some event has occurred deemed relevant to oneself. Feedback from other people (such as performance reviews at work or after-action reviews and debriefing) is a common trigger for self-reflection.

This kind of leader self-awareness is more than just surface level thinking and learning; it includes, yet moves beyond, knowing your own strengths and weaknesses. It is knowing one's self on many levels and also knowing certain aspects of the self in much greater depth and detail. First, consider how people always are interpreting their circumstances, situations, and interactions with other people. They are assessing, judging, evaluating, trying to understand and make meaning of each event, while determining if action is needed. This process is referred to as meaning making or sense making. So at one level of self-awareness a leader comes to the realization that all people are meaning makers. In fact, leadership itself is considered a meaning-making function. It involves creating meaning

through describing a vision and engaging people in sharing the vision and taking action towards specific goals that fulfill the vision. Leader self-awareness contributes to ensuring that leaders responsibly shape the meaning and sense-making that goes on in their teams, organizations, and communities.

Gaining greater self-awareness is a choice, and for some it is uncomfortable to discover new things about themselves. Thus, one of the ways to facilitate leader self-awareness is through self-observation and mindfulness. Mindfulness allows a leader to observe him or her self with a minimum amount of judgment, as a witness or as a third-party observer. Practicing mindfulness is one way to turn off or slow the meaning-making process for a time. This nonjudgmental self-observation contributes to self-acceptance, which is also important to authentic leadership development (Gardner, Avolio, et al., 2005). Gaining more awareness of the self without accompanying self-acceptance can be painful. Thus, combining a variety of self-awareness practices (i.e., self-reflection, journaling, mindfulness) to develop authentic leadership works best.

#### ALIGNING ACTIONS WITH INNER VALUES IS THE SECOND STEP TO AUTHENTICITY

Clif Bar is a private company with estimated annual revenues of about \$150 million and employs about 170 employees. Yet, there was a moment when they almost became another product line of a large conglomerate corporation. It was a “moment” of authentic leadership that changed the course of this company’s future.

After key competitors were bought up by large corporations, an offer was made by another large corporation to purchase the company in the year 2000. It was a great offer, sure to make both owners of Clif Bar very wealthy so they would never have to work another day in their lives. On the day of signing the contract, one owner felt a sense of panic, so he took a walk outside and in that moment realized he did not want to sell the company. He decided he was not going to give in to the rational reasons people gave him for selling the business, primarily that the key competitive products recently were bought by corporations with large marketing budgets and Clif Bar would never be able to compete at that level and would wither away under the attack. But on that day, he listened to his conscience and he made a decision that went against all the experts including the other owner of Clif Bar, who he would now have to buy out.

Gary Erickson decided to buy out the other owner for over \$60 million, even though he only had \$10,000 in his bank account that day. The company has since grown from about \$40 million in sales to \$150 million in just 6 years, even while competing with those other large companies. Most recently Clif Bar became a leader in business sustainability by offering the nation’s first incentive program to pay cash to employees who purchase clean-burning biodiesel cars, also helping employees buy high-mileage

hybrids, and offering a variety of rewards to those who leave their cars at home altogether (Burlingham, 2005; Erickson, 2007).

Gary Erickson demonstrated authentic leadership by aligning his actions with his conscience, when he chose to back out of the sale at the last minute and follow through on his inner voice and values. He honored and trusted his own wisdom over the advice of the other highly experienced business people involved, and he not only succeeded in sustaining the revenue growth of the company over time, but he continues to create innovative ways to be a company that values and takes actions towards sustaining the planet. In retrospect, he could have been wrong about the future potential, but he would have still been right about himself.

## AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

As noted above, we witness authentic leadership in the episodes of leading that occur in everyday decisions and in moments of great challenge and change. Martin Luther King Jr. practiced a high level of authentic leadership through the clarity and transparency with which he shared his dreams for equality and peace, and through his daily choices to adopt a nonviolent approach to leading political and social change. Gary Erickson practiced authentic leadership through making an important and expensive decision based on his inner conscience, values and concern for his employees.

Authentic leadership development (ALD) theory suggests there are several specific core practices involved in practicing authentic leadership: namely self-awareness, transparency, balanced processing, and moral perspective and actions. We discussed leader self-awareness and its development through trigger moments and self-reflection above. Now we explore specific practices associated with self-awareness and the other components of authentic leadership below.

### Self-Awareness Practices

Authentic leaders choose a path of self-discovery. They invite feedback and insights about the self, choosing to engage in practices that enhance leader self-awareness. These practices include three main types: (a) seeking feedback regularly, thereby creating trigger moments, (b) engaging in self-reflection to understand the meaning of triggers to the actual self and emotional responses, and (c) spending time in self-observation, or mindfulness mode, which makes one aware of immediate thoughts and feelings. These three practices contribute to heightened self-awareness. When the focus of feedback, reflection, and self-observation are on leadership episodes, and leaders intend to learn about implicit theories they hold regarding themselves, effective leadership, and worldviews, we call this process leader self-awareness.

Receiving feedback from a variety of sources is a way to gain perspective on how a leader is perceived across a range of people. Hence, 360-degree performance feedback instruments are very popular in organizations as a

tool for leader development (see Atwater, Brett, & Waldman, 2003). Although these instruments are useful for triggering self-reflection via feedback, it is also important to point out that they are only one mechanism for enhancing self-awareness. Moreover, a leader may know herself very well and still differ in her ratings of leadership from followers, and in our view, this does not necessarily mean the leader is not self-aware.

In terms of learning one's strengths and receiving feedback on them, Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, and Quinn (2005) have developed an exercise called the "Reflected Best Self." In this exercise, people seek feedback on when they have been at their best, what characteristics they display, and under what circumstances. Authentic leaders invest time in understanding their own strengths and best possible self, as well as helping those around them learn the same. Leveraging strengths and being at your best affects well-being positively (i.e., feels better), and it also is likely to lead to better individual and ultimately group performance, since everyone is encouraged to rely on knowing their strengths and blending them into a more effective course for execution.

A second practice for heightening self-awareness is self-reflection. Making time to consider trigger moments and learn from leadership experiences is practicing reflection. Adaptive self-reflection is a form of critical thinking, involving examination and evaluation that results in insights (aha! moments) and learning about the self. Maladaptive self-reflection is spending time reenumerating what and why things went wrong and never deriving positive lessons learned. Authentic leaders seek out trigger moments for learning from their own actions as well as those of others. They actively engage in self-reflection on a regular basis, whether asking for feedback on which they can reflect, or by performing a "debrief" or after-action review on a weekly leadership episode or experience.

Thirdly, practicing mindfulness and self-observation is another component practice of self-awareness. This practice involves observing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as they are happening. Mindfulness involves being attentive to what is happening in the present moment without judgment (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Although this sounds simple, practicing mindfulness can be quite a challenge. Most people use meditation or reflective exercise techniques to learn how to observe their inner thoughts, emotions, and visceral reactions from a nonjudgmental, witness-like perspective. This kind of self-observation is distinct from thinking about whether your thoughts and behaviors are aligned with your goals. This latter practice represents an example of self-reflection, and both practices are central to self-awareness development.

Mindfulness helps leaders become more self-aware of the current flow of thoughts and feelings they are having in the present moment. This metacognitive (thinking about the way one thinks) capacity for this kind of awareness allows for greater immediate adjustments and adaptive flexibility. Mindfulness allows leaders to interrupt automatic or habitual reactions and to select alternative pathways of thinking and responses based on insights gleaned from self-reflection. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. may have felt at many times an automatic reaction of anger or a desire to aggressively

push back or defend against attacks as his contemporary Malcolm X did. Yet, it is likely his ability to practice peaceful responses in a variety of challenging and even violent situations was due at least in part to his capacity to observe his automatic reactions in the moment and choose to respond differently.

Thus, authentic leaders are those who have built the capacity to choose to act true to their core values, even when they have more automatic human emotional reactions to perceived threatening situations. There may be leaders who reach a state of transcending emotional triggers and remain disciplined in linking their positive core values to positive growth strategies for resolving dilemmas. How easy it would have been for Nelson Mandela to come out of 27 years in prison and seek revenge on his captors. What made this authentic leader so different in that “moment”?

### Practicing Balanced Processing

Based in the process of leader self-awareness just described, authentic leaders come to understand that all people are biased processors of information. Just like the people in the Bargh’s experiments who responded to non-conscious priming from words related to being young or old or to aggression (Bargh et al., 1996), authentic self-aware leaders realize that all humans filter what they perceive, interpret their environment according to past experiences, and are nonconsciously influenced by a variety of phenomena around them, including other’s people emotions. Thus, authentic leaders seek out alternative, often competing perspectives on important issues. They know that any one person is a biased processor of information. Therefore, this core component of practicing authentic leadership encourages leaders to create the conditions for adaptive conflict (Avolio, 2005). Adaptive conflict occurs when a diversity of views from people of different backgrounds are considered in decision making. Healthy debate and fair consideration of competing ideas result in more creative, emergent, and adaptive solutions.

It stands to reason that if leaders aren’t aware of the inherent biases in their own meaning-making processes, and that of their teams, they will not set up their organizations to benefit from the diversity and innovative solutions that come from adaptive conflict. At the other extreme, stereotyping, prejudice, and righteousness set up the conditions for maladaptive conflict. Thus, people need education and training about these inherent cognitive biases and automatic sense-making processes, so they can begin to decipher their own implicit theories and to learn how to constructively interact with others who are operating from their own personal filters and biases at all times. Realizing these processes are in place is a huge step toward more balanced processing.

### Practicing Transparency

Authentic leadership development recognizes the relational nature of leadership: that leadership is built on social interactions and influence. As such, a key component of authentic leadership is relational or interactional

transparency, defined here as sharing relevant information, being open to giving and receiving feedback, being forthright regarding motives and the reasoning behind decisions, and displaying alignment between words and actions (Vogelgesang, 2007).

Transparency is central to building trust between people. Withholding information, saying one thing but doing another, and not being willing to receive or give feedback all erode transparency in relationships and reduce trust. Although we do know in practice, people wonder how much information is necessary to share. Avolio and Luthans (2006) reason that that the more certain you are about your values and beliefs, the more clear you will become about how transparent to act with others. Being transparent may cause feelings of vulnerability at times but should not make you so vulnerable as to invoke anxiety or invite exploitation from others. If you know your core values, and your core is based on high moral principles, why would you not want to be transparent in your interactions with others?

### Practicing Moral Actions

ALD ultimately is about leaders being true to themselves in their leadership practices. The “self” to which we refer has been described in many ways (i.e., the possible self, the best self, or one’s conscience and core values). All these terms imply a higher level of awareness than might be average for most people. To practice ALD means regularly identifying with your best self, checking in with your core values concerning your leadership agendas and operating practices, and verifying that indeed your actions are aligned with the highest ethical and moral principles you hold. In this way, practicing authentic leadership becomes taking actions that serve high moral principles concerning relationships, social responsibilities, and performance standards. Practicing ALD means continual engagement in self-discovery and awareness opportunities, and learning which values and principles are the highest form of conscience and possible self for each leader at the current stage in his or her life stream.

In sum, authentic leadership development involves several practices, including self-awareness, balanced processing, transparency, and moral actions. Together these practices put a leader on a path to becoming more authentic and to serving as a role model in their leadership relationships, and it follows that the leadership experience for all exemplifies higher levels of trust, engagement, and performance.

### CONCLUSION

Returning to our example of Martin Luther King Jr., he challenged all of us in the United States to find a way to create a nation that viewed all people as equal and demonstrated true equal opportunities for all. He challenged our nation and indeed the world to practice authentic leadership and to hold ourselves true to the principles upon which the nation, and now the United Nations, was founded—equal liberties for all. Forty years later, we are challenging ourselves in a similar way to practice authentic

leadership on a global scale. This does not imply a right way, but rather implicates a process of transforming perspectives to become broader, more inclusive and integrated than before.

For example, many Americans would be surprised to find out from a Gallup Muslim poll, that a majority of Muslims have a tremendous respect for our innovativeness and liberties (Esposito, 2006). However, the majority of Muslims believe that Americans have little respect for their culture and what Muslims stand for. One Muslim professor in Singapore illustrated this latter point by showing clips of the myriad of American movies that had “Arab” characters in them. In every movie over the last 3 decades the Arabs were depicted as being gang members, terrorists, or extravagantly wealthy, corrupt business men.

Reflecting back on the findings above, we can think about every world leader today, and ask: how self-aware are those leaders and how does that affect their ability to be authentic leaders? How does the current global context affect the development of authentic leadership in our world today? If we could take those leaders and simply enhance their self-awareness, their level of transparency, balanced processing, and moral perspective-taking concerning their actions, could we change the path of human history? Absolutely! Indeed, we believe that inauthentic leadership is at the root of what is causing many of the dilemmas facing current and future generations. Leadership has been a significant force in the course of human history with both good and bad results. Shifting our focus to developing more authentic leadership could actually help drive humanity to a much higher and more positive level of development.

The question is: how can each of us commit to a new level of authentic leadership in our lives, relationships, and leadership opportunities? How can we become more aware of our biases, blind spots, and filters? How can we up the level of transparency in our interactions with those we want to instill trust? How can we learn to act more in alignment with our highest moral principles and inner conscience everyday? Provided below are some initial suggestions for engaging this developmental path.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Everyday Practices

Life is a series of quasi-experiments where you choose one thing over another in pursuing learning or a course of action. Here are some actions you can choose or not choose to pursue, and the experimental outcomes, so to speak, are up to you.

***Discovering Your Authentic Leadership:*** Assess your Authentic Leadership Development online using a short well-validated survey that assesses the components of authentic leadership described above. Go to [www.gli.unl.edu](http://www.gli.unl.edu) and take the survey.

***Personal Reflections to Develop Self-Awareness:*** Learn what your implicit theories are about yourself and your beliefs about good leaders and effective leadership. Start by listing what you feel are the top positive attributes of

leaders and compare your list with a colleague's list. What was the first one you put on the list "top of mind" versus your colleague's list?

***Personal Reflections on Your Worldview:*** Discover your "worldview." Learn how it differs from other people close to you, and how this "filter" impacts your behavior. What is your worldview regarding the responsibilities of leaders to develop followers into leaders? What is your worldview regarding how other cultures perceive exemplary leadership in your own culture? What is your worldview on leadership legacies?

***Asking Others About Your Strengths:*** Try a "reflected best self" exercise (Roberts, Spreitzer, Dutton, Quinn, Heaphy, & Barker, 2005). Ask the key people you work with and live with: what are your strengths, when are you at your best at work or at home, and what circumstances bring out your best?

***Getting to Know How You Make Fair Decisions:*** Seek out conflicting perspectives when making important decisions. Uncover and understand the assumptions underlying your decisions.

Create diverse teams by ensuring diversity of backgrounds and beliefs. Be sure to obtain training for these team members in understanding cognitive biases and learning to thrive from adaptive conflict. Pick a topic that might be controversial and have each member describe their core belief and discover differences.

***Getting to Know Your Level of Transparency:*** Develop transparency in your interactions and trust in your relationships: What information are you most and least comfortable in sharing? Why? Try to share relevant information freely. Regularly seek out feedback and be willing to give feedback, especially positive feedback often. Ask people what they don't know and how you can better inform them. Share your motives and reasoning behind decisions. Make sure that you align your words and actions by debriefing important events to see if you were in alignment. Ask others to give you feedback on how aligned you were from their point of view.

***Getting to Know Your Level of Moral Perspective:*** Align your actions with your highest principles and inner conscience. Of course, you must first engage in some self-reflection and self-awareness activities to understand who you are at your best, and what are your core values and principles. Take a difficult moral dilemma and explore the principles you use to guide the decision that should be taken. Ask your colleagues to do the same and compare your moral principles. Read about world class leaders who you consider the highest in exhibiting moral values and principles. Describe how those values align with your own.

***Compile What You Have Learned About Authentic Leadership:*** Now that you have looked at the components of authentic leadership, consider how they may be applied in terms of your development each and every day. What would you now choose to work on to become a more effective authentic leader? What would you stop doing? What would be your leadership goal and how would you measure success?

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## Cultivating Civic Engagement

Lonnie R. Sherrod and James W. Lauckhardt

**T**he first author has a vivid memory from early adolescence that to this day serves to define his interest in the development of civic engagement. “I grew up in the Southeastern United States. Every fall there was a county fair on the other side of town from where I lived. It had amusement park rides, games, junk food, 4-H animal judging, and other activities. I loved going but my parents hated it. For the first time, my best friend and I were allowed to go on our own. We thought this was fantastic because we could now do whatever we wanted at the fair. I was about 12 years of age. We took public transportation and we had to change city buses in downtown. When we boarded the bus in downtown, the aisles were crowded with people standing even though there were numerous empty seats. We stood because the aisles were so crowded you could not get to an empty seat.

At home that night, I told my mom, and she explained to me about the ongoing civil rights movement. African Americans were protesting having to sit in the back of the bus by sitting one person per seat so that the White people had to sit by a Black person in order to sit down. They chose to stand. What amazed me the most was that I had never noticed that Blacks had to sit at the back of the bus—nor that they had separate water fountains, bathrooms, and all lived in a particular region of the city. I also had never observed that there was not a single Black person in my school—teacher or student. My school did a good job of attending to civic engagement, better than schools do today. We took civics classes, had mock congresses and elections, emphasized school government as politics, and even pledged allegiance to the flag until it was outlawed. The schools did nothing however to attend to issues of social justice nor did they socialize

students to recognize their freedom to take action to correct injustices when identified.

Civic engagement was defined as obeying laws, following the rules, and *not* “rocking the boat.” I should have noticed the gross injustice being done to African Americans, but nothing served to alert me to it, until I was directly confronted with the civil rights movement. Segregation was part of the natural landscape of the environment in which I had grown up.”

Our current research shows that teens today often conceptualize citizenship as obeying laws and not as correcting social injustice (Sherrod, 2003). How do we socialize young people into citizenship in such a way that attention to equity and social justice becomes part of their duties as citizens—part of their natural landscape?

In this chapter we review the current mechanisms U. S. society uses to cultivate civic engagement. Cultivate is a strategically chosen word to emphasize that civic engagement is grown across childhood and adolescence and requires the same kind of attention and care as for nurturing a plant. We first discuss existing social mechanisms that research has shown relates to later civic engagement, including civic education, community service, school activities, youth programs and family influences. We next discuss some influences such as the media for which there is less research so we are not certain of their impact. We conclude by discussing some limitations of current research and by considering where we need further research, especially to understand how to promote development of citizenship so that adult citizens are aware of social justice issues.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Citizenship is as important a domain of adult responsibility as work or family, yet it has been the subject of far less research and program attention. I have referred to this statement as my mandate since I have begun almost every paper and presentation in recent years with it. If we are to maintain a viable democratic civil society, we must attend to the development of citizenship (Lerner, 2004; Sherrod, 2007a). Democracies such as the United States are dependent on the active, engaged, and informed participation of their citizenry. It has been argued that we are facing a crisis in this country in terms of low levels of civic engagement, especially in youth (Putnam, 1996, 2000). This argument is controversial; others argue that civic engagement has changed not declined (Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, & Silbereisen, 2002; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Nonetheless, we know that voting rates and the level of civic knowledge in our population are lower than is preferred. As a result, it is imperative that we as a nation attend explicitly to the development of civic engagement. Science is a powerful tool for generating information that can be used to design policies and programs to cultivate citizenship. As a result, we emphasize research on the development of civic engagement in this chapter.

There have been two periods of research attention to the development of citizenship across the past few decades. In the 1950s research emphasized early experience and therefore focused mainly on how the family socialized children into citizenship relevant behaviors. Developmental research then generally emphasized early development so that this approach was consistent with then current trends. The second period of research occurred during the 1970s when a variety of social movements were occurring such as civil rights and the anti-Vietnam War protests. This research therefore involved adolescents and youth but it did not really ask developmental questions; it described civic engagement in young people in the form of their participation in these social movements. However, studies at this time did not try to understand how civic engagement developed nor why individual differences arose (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Sherrod, 2007a). Now a new wave of research is emerging fueled in part by Robert Putnam's book titled *Bowling Alone* (2000). Putnam, a political scientist, argues that we are facing a crisis in regard to low levels of civic participation, and that the crisis is especially serious in youth. As we stated previously, this argument has been contested, but nevertheless, it has captured the attention of researchers and policy makers resulting in increased attention.

#### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AS POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

A new approach to youth research and policy, described as a positive youth development approach, is based on the ideas that all youth have needs, so that youth vary according to whether their needs are met, not by individual qualities such as risk and resilience. This approach shifts the focus of both research and policy to fixing environments such as families, schools, or neighborhoods, not fixing individuals. Positive youth development has three important ideas: (a) Development is promoted by developmental assets, both internal and external; (b) communities vary in the qualities that promote the development of these assets; (c) societies at large vary in the qualities that promote these assets. Forty assets have been identified. And it is clear that the more internal and external assets youth have, the healthier and more successful is their development into adulthood (Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000). Yet research indicates that young people have only 16.5–21.6 assets on average (Benson, 2004). Hence, we as a society need to do much more to promote the positive development of our young people, and promoting civic engagement is one way of doing that (Sherrod, 2007b).

“Five Cs” of positive youth development have been described: character, competence, confidence, connection, and caring (or compassion). Youth who exemplify these five Cs are likely to be productive members of their community (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003); that is, they are likely to be civically engaged. Contribution is often referred to as a sixth C, and it most directly represents civic participation (Lerner, 2004). Civic engagement clearly represents positive development, but it also contributes to further positive development. The two go hand in hand.

## DEFINING CITIZENSHIP

The Cs indicate that the definition of civic engagement is not quite clear; in fact, it is somewhat controversial. For some, a focus on citizenship is often interpreted to reflect a conservative orientation. The first author prepared a prospectus for a textbook on child development and proposed a major focus on citizenship. Reviewers of the proposal argued that he must be a right-wing fanatic from a Christian university! In fact, this author is quite liberal and does not hold any particular religious affiliation, but a concern for the development of citizenship was seen to reflect a conservative religious interest. Having an active, engaged, and informed citizenry, irrespective of political orientation, party affiliation, or specific civic beliefs is a goal that benefits the many and not the few. Walzer (1989, p. 211) offers the following: “A citizen is, most simply, a member of a political community, entitled to whatever prerogatives and encumbered with whatever responsibilities are attached to membership. The word comes to us from the Latin *civis*; the Greek equivalent is *polites*, member of the polis, from which comes our politics.” Borrowing from Walzer’s definition Flanagan and Faaison (2001) define civic engagement in terms of both the civic and the political. However, Walzer’s definition also includes membership—of a nation. And it involves both rights and responsibilities. One responsibility involves generally taking an interest in and being involved in one’s country by obeying laws, voting, following current events, and so on. And in exchange the individual gets certain rights such as freedom of speech and certain benefits such as public education—at least in the United States.

Adolescents do have opinions about the duties and rights they will acquire as adult citizens that map onto this differentiation of civic and political. They see responsibilities to consist of civic ones such as showing tolerance or political ones such as voting (Bogard & Sherrod, in press). They see rights to consist of freedoms that relate to political participation and entitlements that relate to nurturance from their community (Sherrod, 2007c).

The complexities of the definition of “citizen” arise because one can be a member of institutions other than the nation state or the government of the country, and such memberships also carry benefits and duties. As a result, the individual can express some of those same behaviors that constitute citizenship through membership in or allegiance to other institutions. Examples of other allegiances or memberships include one’s community, school or church, and research has shown that these other allegiances relate to adolescents’ views of citizenship (Bogard & Sherrod, in press). But the controversy in regard to the definition of citizenship is whether the behaviors that result from allegiances to community or family should be viewed to be as important to citizenship as actual political behaviors such as voting. The civic would certainly relate to some of these other allegiances but are they sufficiently related to the political?

Another issue for the definition of citizenship is whether concern for others and altruism should be viewed as a component of citizenship. Working for one’s community by doing service is, for example, usually seen to

be somewhat altruistic. But, can one be quite selfish and oriented entirely to one's own material or occupational success and still be considered a good citizen? What is your view? Would you answer the same if the person is self-oriented but also involved with and committed to the nation state, in regard to voting, campaigning, following news, and so on? At any rate, citizenship is certainly a quite complex domain of adult behavior (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). As a result, the developmental path into citizenship is by no means clear.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF CITIZENSHIP

One does not typically engage in behaviors that we define as active citizenship until adulthood. Eighteen is the legal voting age; formerly it was 21. Yet, younger persons can and should also be informed about political events. And some teens do work in political campaigns or do student government, for example. Nonetheless, most do not so that different behaviors than those that actually constitute citizenship are considered childhood and adolescent precursors of adult citizenship. That is, the developmental progression to the behaviors that are explicitly defined as citizenship must involve earlier behaviors that may be only loosely related to civic engagement in adulthood. In this regard, civic engagement clearly shows what is described as developmental discontinuity. Research has shown earlier influences to include civics education, school activities, youth programs, community service and service learning programs. Most research has however involved adolescents because they are on the threshold of exercising their citizenship. However earlier experiences, even during the preschool period, must underlie the precursors identified during the teen years.

There are also a variety of other influences for which there is less research than for the precursors listed above. In today's world, the media are an important influence (McLeod, 2000). Parents and family, of course, have a role; politically active parents produce politically active children (Niemi & Junn, 2000). Religiosity or spirituality has been shown to relate directly or indirectly through participation in service to civic engagement (Lerner, 2004). Finally research has shown that the macro socio-political context certainly plays a role (Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). Based on research about the early influences on later civic engagement, a small number of programs have been designed specifically in recent years to influence directly the development of civic engagement.

Hence young people may show involvement in and commitment to institutions such as schools or community organizations before they are able to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Extracurricular school activities, community service and youth organizations such as 4-H and Boys and Girls Clubs, for example, may offer opportunities for behavior that is a precursor to citizenship behavior. However, we need to be more strategic about using these activities and institutions to influence the development of civic engagement. Citizenship is too important to leave to chance. In the remainder of this chapter we discuss these influences and

consider what more we may do as a society to further the development of civic engagement.

### THE CIVIC STATUS OF TODAY'S YOUTH

In 2006 the Center for Information and Research for Civic Learning and Engagement completed the National Civic and Political Health Study. This study surveyed 1,700 youth aged 15–25 years. Also 550 adults over 26 years of age were surveyed. The sample was representative of the population in the United States except that various ethnic groups were over-sampled. There were 19 core measures of civic engagement; these measures were based on a scale used by Keeter, Sukin, Andolina, and Jenkins (2002). Hence this study provides a reasonably good glimpse of the civic attitudes and behaviors of today's young people. The report of the study offers both good news, in that some forms of engagement are quite widespread, and bad news in that substantial numbers of young people are not at all involved in either politics or community life. Some notable results follow: (a) 72% say that at least some of the time they follow what's going on in government and public affairs; (b) 36% have volunteered within the last year; (c) 35% participate in political discussions; (d) 30% have boycotted a product because of the conditions under which it was made or the values of the company that made it; (e) 26% of those ages 20 to 25 years say that they "always" vote.

The report suggests that some young people are intensely involved. Thirteen percent engage in at least two different forms of both community engagement and political participation. Seven percent are even more involved and report 10 or more different kinds of civic participation. Those highly involved shows a particular demographic profile: more likely to be Democratic (or leaning toward the Democrats), liberal, urban, from a family with parents who volunteer, a current student (in college or high school), and from college-educated homes. They are also more likely to regularly attend church and to be African American. These findings generally replicate previous research (Bogard & Sherrod, *in press*; Flanagan & Tucker, 1999).

A lot of young people (58%) are not involved at all, failing to report even two forms of civic or political engagement. The report describes these youth as "disengaged." Of these disengaged young people, 28% report doing not even one of the 19 forms of civic engagement measured in this survey. One reason for their disengagement is that have much less confidence in their ability to make a difference than does the highly engaged group. Demographically they are less likely to have college-educated parents or to have parents who volunteer. They themselves are also less likely to have any college experience. They align with either political party and are more likely to be Latinos or immigrants.

One general summary of these results is that education and politically active parents make a difference, in part because they empower youth to believe that they can have an effect through their involvement.

## THE SOCIALIZATION OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Civic Education

Certainly education is an especially important early influence. Both the extent of civic education adolescents receive in school as well as factors such as school climate and teacher behavior have been shown to predict later civic participation (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999; Niemi & Junn, 2000). For example, teachers who treat students fairly promote the development of just behavior in teens. Classes that promote open discussion of issues promote higher levels of understanding of civics materials. A large international study recently examined the civic education of 14,000 14-year-olds across 28 countries (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001), asking about the teens' understanding of democracy, of the governments in their country, and of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. There was little variability from nation to nation in teen levels of civic knowledge, and overall civic knowledge was not as high as civic-minded adults would want.

Youth need to understand how their government works, how they can legitimately influence it, when it is important to take action to change things for the better and how to do so. Civic education should be of the same national priority as math and science; it is as important to functioning as an adult in society as are math and science, and it is also as important to the functioning of the country (Sherrod, 2003). Civic knowledge is also important because it is the single most important predictor of voting; students with more knowledge are more likely to vote in political elections. If democracy is to work, citizens need to participate, and voting is one of the most important forms of adult participation (Torney-Purta, 2002). Nonetheless the current No Child Left Behind legislation is being implemented to focus entirely on achievement in reading, math, and science. Although a variety of school-based character education programs have been funded, there has been little attention to civics achievement. In fact a number of schools and school districts are abandoning their social studies curriculum altogether because of the need to focus on achievement in other areas.

### School Activities and Youth Programs

School extracurricular activities have been shown to be particularly important early contributors to later civic involvement (Barber & Eccles, 1997; Eccles & Barber, 1999). Participation in school government, clubs, publications, even athletics are in many ways similar to participation in politics later in life. The difference is that they support people's schools rather than their country. It is therefore not surprising that teens who participate in these school activities are more likely to participate in civic and political activities later in life. What we need now is research that connects specific activities to later specific civic behaviors. For example, participation in school government would seem to be more relevant than participation in an arts club.

Youth programs can also serve to prepare young people for citizenship. There are a number of relevant programs today including the 4-H, Boys

and Girls Clubs, and Youthbuild. Youthbuild is a particularly interesting program. It is a training and leadership effort that employs out-of-school youth to rehabilitate housing in low-income areas. The youth are connected to meaningful experiences, do something to help their communities, develop relationships with building supervisors and peers, and learn practical as well as social skills. Many of the youth move into more management level positions within the program after completing the initial experience. There is a strong commitment and connection to the program among the participants, just as we hope citizens feel toward their country. Participation in Youthbuild offers clear opportunities for young people to get involved and immediately see the results of their efforts (Stoneman, 2002; Tolan, Sherrod, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2003).

The 4-H was created for the educational development of youth and to tap their creativity and energy, but it has been associated with clubs that relate to agricultural activities such as growing corn, tomatoes, and pigs or other livestock. Recently it has redirected its attention to urban youth. It is the first youth organization to add young people as voting members of its Board of Directors.

One example of a new activity with urban youth is the Metro Youth Art Force. This program recognizes youth's need for support for their artistic activities (Tolan et al., 2003). Various activities such as weekend workshops are organized from the perspective of promoting positive youth development, which then relates to civic engagement. It promotes artistic expression as a form of involvement. Commoncents is a New York City based program that collects pennies from individuals, organizations, and businesses. This organization has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars. The funds raised by collecting pennies are used to set up small school-based foundations that are run by youth and offer small grants for youth-designed and run projects. Youth review applications for funding and establish priorities (Tolan et al., 2003). As is true for Youthbuild, participants see how their involvement has an impact. They play a role in their schools by funding projects that can benefit the school and all its students.

After-school programs are increasingly popular with youth. There has been very little research asking how participation in after school relates to later civic engagement. One preliminary study shows that after-school programs do not show a strong relationship to adolescents' views of citizenship (Sherrod & Hoxie, 2007). However, this may result from the fact that many programs emphasize academics and offer activities such as homework help. Programs that attend to civics by discussing political issues do relate to views of citizenship (Sherrod & Hoxie, 2007). Hence after-school programs may represent a vehicle for promoting civic engagement that has yet to be tapped for this purpose.

### Community Service and Service Learning

For the second author, a high school service learning class had the most influence of all of his high school courses. The information covered in this

class addressed social responsibility issues as well as the importance of being an active member of one's community. The students, regardless of their direction in life, learned skills that could be used to benefit their communities. For example, one class unit consisted of completing grant applications to support a community service project.

This project consisted of applying for a grant to improve the nature trail around the school, including renovating the existing signs that described exercise activities that users could complete throughout the trail. Applying for this grant provided a sense of worth within society—a sense that one could actually make a difference. This type of empowerment provided the motivation to undertake and complete this project, which was difficult for a high school student. The grade received for doing the project and the approval of the teacher offered little motivation; the sense of doing something important and making a contribution was intrinsically motivating. This service learning experience was enjoyed by all participants, so that it did not seem like a class. It is possible to look back on the experience of this class and the lessons learned from it, making it as valuable and salient as the academic education. The difference between this type of learning and more typical academic learning is the incomparable feeling of accomplishment and the ability to see directly the impact on something and someone larger than a subject in an academic class. This service learning experience in high school made the second author the passionate positive youth development researcher that he is today.

In the last 2 decades, there has been a significant increase in attention to youth service. One reason for this attention is that there are reports that volunteerism is at an all-time high (Yates & Youniss, 1996; Youniss et al., 2002). Another is that service has been found to relate to a host of positive outcomes, of which increased civic engagement is only one desirable goal (Andersen, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1994). Service has been found to increase prosocial skills, to relate to positive self-esteem, to promote identity development, to relate to career choice, and to promote civic engagement (Andersen, 1998; Austin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Stukas, Clary & Snyder, 1999; Tierney & Branch, 1992; Youniss & Yates, 1999). Although most research on service is not done with typical psychological experiments, there have been a few experimental studies that have reported similar findings to those from correlational studies (Andersen, 1998). Service also relates to future service (McAdam, 1988) and enhances moral development (Leming, 2001; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003).

Service has also been found to relate to academic gains (Markus et al., 1993). As attention to educational gains has increased over the past 10 years, a more pronounced movement to combine service and learning has emerged. The term *service learning* was first coined in 1967 as a result of a credit-based internship program for students working on community-based projects with the Southern Regional Economic Board. The practice of service learning was however limited to a small number of participants until the mid 1980s, but the 1990s saw great growth in service learning initiatives. Service learning is in fact now regarded as an educational movement

(Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2000; Markus et al., 1993; Reinders & Youniss, 2006; Scales et al., 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1996), and it represents a significant component of youth's overall participation in service.

Youniss and Yates (1997) have offered the most detailed description of the importance of community service to adolescents' moral development. Adolescents volunteered in a soup kitchen, which had a major impact on reducing stereotypes about the homeless. The authors argue that views were changed through the adolescents' interactions with the homeless they served. They came to realize that the homeless are similar to them; they have just had a different string of luck.

Leming (2001) presents a study indicating one way to promote moral development. He describes two different types of community service. The first type includes a structured ethical reasoning component. The students are given a chance to ethically reflect on the work they do. The second type incorporates limited reflection on the ethics of the service. Students who participated in the ethical expression form of service had a stronger sense of social responsibility within their school. Also, these students focused less on personal pleasure and more on responsibility and helping others than those that did not have the expression component. That is, both identity formation and ethical consideration was shown to be enhanced by the ethical expression component of the community service.

Community service clearly represents the positive contribution of youth. It both uses adolescents' positive assets and contributes to the development of these assets. That is, there bidirectional relationship between adolescent and community assets; by doing service adolescents become both products and producers of their actions (Lerner et al., 2003). Schools provide an ideal opportunity to foster service in youth.

### The Role of the Media

Although civic engagement has dropped as a whole, youth political participation seems to have dropped precipitously (Delli Carpini, 2000). Voter turnout, as one among many criteria of participation, averaged 37%, in the age 18–24 category in the past three presidential elections; this was 21% lower than among all citizens. This level compares unfavorably with three earlier elections, 1972–1980, when the 19–24 age group averaged 44% and was 17% below that of all citizens, respectively (McLeod, 2000). This raises the issue of what, exactly, is causing this change. One possibility could be the salience of issues presented in the media.

The media, in particular entertainment television, have been criticized as one important cause for the decline in civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). There is a public perception that entertainment media rarely addresses serious societal issues and instead may be used as an outlet to escape serious issues as politics or current events, especially among adolescents. However, Pasek, Kenski, Romer, and Jamieson (2006) report that media use is associated with greater involvement in civic activities and higher levels of political awareness. This report was based on an aggregate

scale of media use, and as a whole, media use was positively related to civic activities.

However some forms of media might have been negatively related to civic engagement but this specific study did not review specific categories of media use. McLeod (2000) found that with respect to political learning among adolescents, newspaper and news magazine use has positive effects that are stronger than the negative effects of television time. Content makes a difference within television use. Watching news has beneficial effects, whereas watching entertainments has a negative influence on civic knowledge.

The growing availability of the Internet implies that this form of information dissemination should have an impact on society, and this impact may disproportionately involve youth since they are heavy users (McLeod, 2000). It does not seem however that youth between the ages of 18 and 24 years are using the Internet to compensate for their inattention to newspapers and television news sources (Keeter et al., 2002). In fact, the Internet is not a more popular source among 15- to 25-year-olds than it is for those 26 and older. The frequency of use of the Internet for news information is comparable across these two age groups; the older group may in fact use the Internet more than the younger one (Keeter et al., 2002).

Meyrowitz (1985) argued that one effect of the electronic media, especially television, is the reduction of trust in formal institutions, such as the government. However, it has also been argued that the more exposure could lead to greater political involvement in the future. For example, McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) found that when children reach adolescence, newspaper use becomes a strong predictor of further progress toward political competence. While this information is important, we also need to figure out how we can get adolescents to become consistent consumers of information. Atkin (1981) regards adolescent media use as a cost-benefit trade-off in which the child weighs various gratifications against expenditures such as mental effort. The implication of this theory is that it is necessary to make news media consumption more gratifying for a child so that they are more willing to put the mental effort across to process the information they are receiving. McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) found that news attention is more likely when children perceive that the media provides useful information for conversations or school assignments. Examples of service learning programs aimed at increasing critical consumption of media as well as fostering civic engagement are provided subsequently.

### Programs Designed to Promote Civic Engagement

Because of the association between media use and civic activity (Pasek et al., 2006), a number of school-based interventions devoted to enhancing civic involvement have a media component. For example, the Student Voices project piloted by the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania suggests that Web-based information gathering

and interactions can increase high school students' knowledge of and interest and engagement in local elections (Delli Carpini, 2000). In this program, the main goal was to actively engage students in the learning process through interactive exercises.

The Student Voices Project encourages the civic engagement of young people by bringing the study of local government, policy issues, and political campaigns into the classroom. Working with school districts throughout the country, Student Voices makes the study of government relevant and exciting for high school students by helping them examine how issues they consider important are played out in their own governments and election campaigns. Each class formulates a Youth Issues Agenda, reflecting the issues that are of most concern to students and their communities. These issues provide the focus for students through the rest of the program, ensuring they research and act on issues that concern them. Students use the interactive Student Voices website to find information on issues and candidates and discuss policy issues online. Through classroom visits and forums, students raise their concerns directly to political candidates and public officials and hear what can be done to address them. Finally, students communicate their concerns to the general public by making their voices heard in the news media. (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2007)

In an evaluation of this program, Flanagan, Syvertsen, Mitra, Oliver, and Sethuraman (2006) found this to be the case; there was an increased overall use of media to obtain political information as well as an increase in use of specific forms of media such as radio, newspaper, and the Internet to access information about political affairs and current events.

Another school-based intervention called Kids Voting, USA produced similar results to the Student Voices program. Kids Voting, USA gets students involved and ready to be educated, engaged citizens through a combination of classroom activities, an authentic voting experience, and family dialogue. The creators of the program claim that their "high-quality instructional materials provide K–12 teachers with valuable civic learning tools to be used throughout the school year, every year. In addition to classroom activities about voting and elections, students also explore the right to vote, democracy and citizenship" (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2000) In an evaluation of the program, McDevitt and Chaffee (2000) found that this school-based curriculum prompted student–parent discussion at home and that there was an increase in students' newspaper reading, TV news viewing, attention to campaign news, and election knowledge.

Not only do programs like these foster knowledge within the students, but they can also have an impact on the family. McDevitt and Chafee (2000) found that because of the student–parent discussion component of the curriculum, parents were significantly more likely to watch television news and become interested in current events after their students were involved in the curriculum than before they were involved with the program. Hence, school-based curricula show a potential to benefit students involved in the program as well as members of their family.

### Social Political Context

There have been a number of studies that have examined the impact of major social political factors (e.g., collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the fall of apartheid in South Africa, and the off and on religious strife in Northern Ireland) on young people's political attitudes and behaviors. The most ambitious of these studies examined adolescents' civic commitments in seven countries. The countries were divided into three stable democracies and four in the midst of social change. Overall this study examined public interest as a life goal of adolescents and asked how it was influenced by volunteering, by school climate, and by family values. A family ethic that emphasized social responsibility influenced public interest as a life goal across both gender and type of country. In addition, volunteering and developing a sense of solidarity at school related to this life goal. Another major finding was differences between boys and girls in five of the countries; girls' families encouraged more social responsibility and girls volunteered more than did boys (Flanagan et al., 1998).

Another study examined adolescents' perceptions of economic changes occurring in three countries undergoing social change in Eastern Europe—Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic. Perceptions of the justice of the newly emerging social contract were also examined. Older adolescents and girls were more likely to observe that economic disparities were increasing as a result of the social change; as a result they were cynical about the value of working hard. There were also differences across countries, with high school students in the Czech Republic being the least cynical and those in Bulgaria being the most cynical (Macek et al., 1998).

South Africa is another country that underwent massive social changes in the 1990s, and because the changes were clearly of a political nature, researchers were keen to examine the influence on youth civic engagement. Racial segregation in the form of apartheid was eliminated, a democratic government was put in place for all citizens, and the first elections were held. A study by Finchilescu and Dawes (1998) examined high school students' reactions to these changes. All had grown up in an era of racially segregated communities not unlike what the first author experienced as a teen in the Southeastern United States. All adolescents were concerned about the future in the midst of this change. However, White adolescents felt alienation whereas Black Africans were generally positive. Indian teens and those of mixed racial descent fell in the middle. Age was not an important influence on views (Finchilescu & Dawes, 1998).

Northern Ireland is a country where politics and religion loom large in citizens' daily lives even though it is not undergoing current social change. A study of adolescents in Belfast, Ireland, found that national identity was important to their perceptions of the fairness of the current political system. Teens who saw themselves as Irish or British were more likely to rate politics higher than those who saw themselves as Catholic or Protestant (Whyte, 1998).

### The Need for Greater Specificity

Research examining early childhood and adolescent precursors of adult citizenship participation has certain limitations. First, we need to examine how specific experiences relate to specific later civic behaviors. We know for example that civic knowledge predicts adult voting, but that seems to be its only long-term consequence—although we found that knowledge did protect youth from fearfulness following the 9/11 disaster (Sherrod, Quinones, & Davila, 2004). Similarly in regard to school activities, we would expect working for school government to have different consequences than working for the yearbook but available research does not allow us to make such differentiations. Community service carries the desired consequences only if it has certain qualities and most service programs do not show the necessary qualities. Hence, much more research is needed to understand what childhood and youth experiences promote the development of citizenship, and such research is of course preliminary to designing policies and programs to promote its development. We especially need research that examines those factors that lead to an activist orientation to youth's ideas of citizenship (Sherrod, Flanagan, Kassimir, & Syvelsten, 2005).

### Attention to Diverse Populations

Second, the socialization factors that have been identified by research are not part of the life experience of all youth. Poor, disadvantaged youth may for example not be able to afford to do either school extracurricular activities or community service (Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998). Sexual minority youth do not enjoy all the rights of citizenship such as the right to marry, and this is likely to influence their views of citizenship and their participation (Russell, 2002). As a result, we need research examining how the diversity that characterizes today's youth population maps onto the early predictors of later civic engagement (Sherrod, 2007a; Sherrod et al., 2002). Different strategies are likely to be needed to promote citizenship in different youth.

### A Developmental Focus

Developmental considerations are also critical to the emergence of citizenship. Concern for others as a component of citizenship shows a particular developmental trajectory. Even quite young children show forms of prosocial behaviors and empathy, which may be precursors of a generalized concern for others, for the welfare of other people. Hence, early behaviors involving cooperation, sharing, and emotions such as empathy may relate rather straightforwardly to later development of concern for social justice and to the development of a concern for others (Eisenberg et al., 1999). Moral development is another area that intersects the development of prosocial behavior. Furthermore, social cognitive development and children's

understanding of their rights and responsibilities is also likely to play a role (Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998).

So in summary, although research offers quite a bit of information on the childhood and adolescent precursors of adult civic engagement, more studies are needed before we are able to launch programs and policies to promote civic involvement in all youth.

## PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

### Cultivating Civic Engagement

In this chapter, we have explored various factors that influence the development of civic engagement in children. In these mini-experiments, we ask that you examine some of these, such as the media and participating in community service. We also ask that you look into voting, which is considered to be one very important index of civic participation.

**Use of the Media:** Locate two different newspapers, a national one such as the *New York Times* or *Boston Globe* and a local newspaper, such as the *Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel* or the *Pocono (PA) Record*. Compare three news stories from the cover page of each newspaper. Is there overlap in the news covered? What are the differences? Does coverage of a specific event vary in the amount of detail or the specific details? Would readers of the different newspapers get the same information about current events?

Now do the same thing for TV news coverage. First watch a national news show, such as CNN or one of the network news shows usually on around dinnertime. Then, watch a local news show for the area in which you live. Channel 1 would be an example for New York City, for example. Then, evaluate them the same way you did the newspapers. How does the news coverage vary across the different TV shows? How is it the same?

Finally, look up an Internet news site such as MSN or CNN, as well as a local Internet news site, and do the same comparisons as above. How do these vary from the newspapers or TV? What does this analysis tell you about media coverage of news and how helpful it might be to young people's sense of civic involvement?

**Community Service:** Talk to some of your friends or relatives about community service. Do they do it, or have they done it? Why or why not? If so, what kind of service did they do—e.g., work in a soup kitchen or tutor young children? Did their program include a time to reflect on their service experience, and if so, what was its value? Have they done service learning? If so, how was it different from or the same as service?

**Voting:** Talk to three people of different ages about their past and planned voting. Poll an adult your parents' age, a young adult 18–25 years of age, and someone younger than 18. Ask them if they voted in a past national and past local election—or if they would have if they had been old enough. Then ask why or why not. Ask who they voted for or would have voted for, and why. Ask whether they have heard of MTV's Rock the Vote or Nickelodeon's KidsVote. If so, ask what they think of them. Do these interviews offer any information about how we might increase the percentage of voters at different ages?

## NOTE

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# Positive Psychotherapy

Tayyab Rashid

**F**or more than a century, clients have gone to psychotherapists to discuss their troubles, relying on the largely untested belief that discussing troubles is curative. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people attend workshops, retreats, camps, and courses, engaging in numerous brands of psychotherapy, mostly to repair wounds, deficits, and disorders. In all of these interventions, positives are rarely the focus and never are they systematically so. Therapies that attend explicitly to the strengths of clients are rare. One empirically validated psychotherapy that does attend to patients' strengths is positive psychotherapy (PPT).

PPT is an approach that explicitly builds positive emotions, strengths, and meaning in a client's life to undo psychopathology and promote happiness. In this chapter I argue that psychotherapy needs to go beyond negatives and also should cultivate positives. Notions of well-being and interventions based on these notions are surveyed. Theoretical assumptions, content, potential mechanism of action, and therapeutic process are described, and validation studies of PPT are summarized. Finally, some caveats and future directions are offered.

## NEGATIVES—PERVASIVE AND POWERFUL

Negatives fascinate us. They certainly did Machiavelli, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Darwin, Marx, and Freud—all of whom perceived negatives as indispensable to human existence. Freud (1930/1995) even asserted that human civilization is a sublime defense to keep sexual and aggressive impulses at bay. Freudian views are pervasive and have significantly

influenced art, literature, and academia. Contemporary media is a vivid illustration. It creatively juxtaposes fear, violence, greed, jealousy, insecurity, and sexual infidelity in news, films, music, dramas, and reality shows. Psychologically, stories of evil arouse our curiosity more than accounts of virtue, integrity, cooperation, altruism, or modesty do. The attraction to negatives is perhaps the courtesy of our Stone-Age brain, which evolved putting out fires, attacking trespassers, and competing for food, shelter, and mates. In evolutionary terms, life until recently has been a Darwinian test of fitness. Research shows that negatives carry more weight and impact (e.g., Cottrell & Neuberg 2005; Wright, 1988), and that our brain is wired to react more strongly to bad than to good (Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998; Luu, Collins, & Tucker, 2000). Fear, sadness, and anger mark the defense lines when we are under threat. Negatives are pervasive as well as potent. By one count, there are twice as many negative emotions than positive ones (Nesse, 1991). We ruminate about negative emotions for months or even years, rather than savoring positive moments and memories (Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker, & Larson, 1994). The pain of losing \$100 stings us more than gaining \$100 would please (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Bad emotions, bad parents, bad feedback—all have more impact than their good counterparts. Negative impressions and stereotypes are quicker to form and more resistant to disconfirmation than are positive ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

## NEGATIVES IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

By focusing on negatives, psychotherapy has made huge strides. Rigorous studies have demonstrated that psychotherapy helps significantly more than placebos do, and perhaps more long-lastingly than do medications (Lambert et al., 2003; Seligman, 1995; Shadish, Navarro, Matt, & Phillips, 2000). Moreover, in addition to psychotherapies for specific disorders, we now have better understanding of the finer aspects of psychotherapy, such as therapeutic alliance, nuances of therapeutic communication, nonverbal language, therapist effects, treatment process, and the feedback process to and from the client (Wampold, 2001; Weinberger, 1995). While the focus on pathology has effectively eased symptoms, it has not necessarily enhanced happiness, which is still neglected in the therapy process. Despite understanding the evolutionary, philosophical, social, and psychological underpinning of the pervasive impact of negatives, there is little empirical justification for psychology's predominantly negative view of human nature, and this view impacts psychotherapy significantly.

It may be time to re-examine our assumptions regarding psychotherapy. There is a growing awareness that some psychotherapies confound response to treatment with full recovery. Psychotherapy outcome researchers have expressed the view that quality of life needs to be included in the evaluation of treatment outcome (Gladis, Gosch, Dishuk, & Crits-Christoph, 1999), and that psychological well-being needs to be incorporated into the definition of recovery (Fava, 1996). Ryff and Singer (1996) have suggested that

the absence of well-being creates vulnerability to possible future adversities, and that the path to lasting recovery lies not exclusively in alleviating symptoms but in engendering the positives. Psychotherapy needs to be a hybrid enterprise—promoting happiness as well as alleviating psychopathology.

### HAPPINESS: SOME THEORETICAL NOTIONS

For ages, philosophers, sages, and scientists have pursued happiness, trying to define it and enumerating conditions that lead to it. Aristotle observed that happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence. Benjamin Franklin (1733–1758/1980) emphasized its dependence on industry, temperance, and cleanliness. Bertrand Russell (1930) noted that happiness is accompanied by the fullest exercise of our faculties and the fullest realization of the world in which we live. Before World War II, well-being, optimal functioning, meaning, and happiness featured prominently in the literature. Immediately after the World War II, due largely to economic and political factors the assessment and treatment of psychopathology became virtually the exclusive mission of psychology (Maddux, 2002). However, proponents of humanistic psychology continued to advocate for positives in the therapeutic framework.

Maslow (1968/1999) felt that too little attention is given to topics like creativity, healthy and normal personality, love, play, perspective in life, personal growth, and higher levels of consciousness. He believed that a self-actualizing personality has superior perception of reality, increased acceptance of self, others, and nature, increased spontaneity, increased problem-centering, increased autonomy and resistance to enculturation, higher frequency of peak experiences, increased identification with the human species, more democratic character structure, and increased creativity.

Rogers (1959) proposed that every individual has an inherent tendency to develop all his or her capacities in ways that enhance the person. His contemporary, Marie Jahoda (1958) made a persuasive argument that well-being should be explicitly attended to in its own right. Jahoda extracted six processes that contribute to well-being: acceptance of oneself, growth/development/becoming, integration of personality, autonomy, accurate perception of reality, and environmental mastery. More recently, Ryff and Singer (1996) have identified and empirically examined six components of psychological well-being that markedly overlap those of Jahoda. Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, and Deci (1996) maintain that well-being is based on three universal psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that the gratification of these needs is a key predictor of psychological well-being. These various shades and flavors of happiness and well-being may give an impression that happiness means many things to many people, with a risk of meaning nothing at all.

However, despite this heterogeneity, recent surge in happiness research has offered two converging insights (e.g., Ben-Shahar, 2007; Haidt, 2006; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). First, striving to obtain goods and goals does not bring us more than momentary happiness. We are

incredibly adaptable creatures who quickly habituate goods and goal. After achieving one, we pursue the next target and keep on replacing targets. We just don't habituate; we also recalibrate (Haidt, 2006). Second, after the strong influence of genes upon a person's average level of happiness, environmental and demographic factors have little influence on happiness. Gender, climate, age, education, and financial status have little impact on our happiness. Yet, we spend disproportionately large sums of time and effort in pursuit of some of these factors. For example, we believe that more money will make us happier, when in fact, beyond safety net; incremental increases in money have diminishing returns (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Noble laureate Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues (2006) have noted:

The belief that high income is associated with good mood is widespread but mostly illusory. People with above-average income are relatively satisfied with their lives but are barely happier than others in moment-to-moment experience, tend to be more tense, and do not spend more time in particularly enjoyable activities. Moreover, the effect of income on life satisfaction seems to be transient. (p. 1908)

Because of this illusory belief about money, Ben-Shahar (2007) has observed that we often confuse means with ends and sacrifice happiness (end) for money (means). In demystifying the notion of happiness, Ben-Shahar further notes that money and material goods are not happiness but subordinate to it and have no intrinsic value in themselves. They are desirable, as having them could lead us to experience positive emotions or meaning. Happiness is also not a sacrifice; neither is it a trade-off between present and future benefits. It is not a choice between pursuing meaning or pleasure. Happiness is not about making it to the peak of the mountain nor is it about circling aimlessly around the mountain. Happiness is enjoying the journey itself as well as completing the journey. Most important, it is about synthesis, about creating a life in which all of the elements essential to happiness are in harmony.

## INTERVENTIONS TARGETING HAPPINESS

Fordyce (1983) was the first researcher to develop and test a "happiness" intervention, focusing on the characteristics of happy people to extract 14 strategies for increasing happiness. These include being active, socializing more, engaging in meaningful work, forming closer and deeper relationships with loved ones, lowering expectations from oneself, and prioritizing being happy. Fordyce found that students who received detailed instructions were happier and showed fewer depressive symptoms at the end of the term than a control group who did not. These gains were maintained in 9- and 18-month follow-ups.

Well-being therapy, based on Ryff and Singer's (1996) multidimensional model, has been found effective in the residual phase of affective disorders (Fava & Ruini, 2003). Well-being therapy emphasizes building environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, self-acceptance, and

positive relations with others. Its techniques help clients focus on moments of well-being in their lives, keep a written record of those moments, and encourage self-observation.

Integrating Cognitive Therapy with positive psychology notions, Frisch's quality of life therapy (Frisch, 2006) targets the fulfillment of cherished goals, needs, and wishes in 16 valued areas of life including health, spiritual life, work, play, learning, creativity, helping, love, friendship, and community. The efficacy of quality of life therapy was established in a bibliotherapy outcome study with clinically depressed clients (Grant, Salcedo, Hynan, & Frisch, 1995). Next, PPT is described in detail.

## POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

Positive psychotherapy (PPT) is a therapeutic approach within positive psychology to broaden the scope of traditional psychotherapy. Its central hypothesis is that building positive emotions, strengths, and meaning will not only undo symptoms but also is efficacious in the treatment of psychopathology. Negativity bias and symptomatic stress may not lend positives readily accessible to the consciousness and memory of troubled clients. Therefore, PPT actively elicits from clients positive emotions and memories, in addition to discussing troubles. Because, clients who carry weightiest psychological distress care much more about happiness than simply relieving their misery. In this way, PPT is a "build-what's-strong" supplement the traditional "fix-what's-wrong" approach (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman (2005, p. 631). Thus the focus in PPT is integration of transgressions and acts of kindness, of insults and compliments, of selfishness and compassion of others, of hubris and humility, of hurry and harmony, of hate and love, of pain of trauma and potential growth from it.

### Assumptions

A fundamental assumption of PPT is that clients have an inherent capacity for happiness as well as susceptibility to psychopathology. Clients have good and bad states and traits that influence each other. Psychopathology does not entirely reside inside clients. The interaction between the clients and their environment generates both happiness and psychopathology. This is in sharp contrast to the notion that human behavior is primarily motivated by unconscious sexual and aggressive drives. Seligman (2002) calls this the "rotten-to-the-core" (p. xiv) dogmatic view of human nature, which reduces the client to a mere slave of damaged habits and sexual drives. Governed by this questionable view, the function of psychotherapy would essentially be to restrain aggressive and sexual drives. Before Seligman, Rogers (1959) also questioned this fundamental assumption:

I have little sympathy with the rather prevalent concept that man is basically irrational, and thus his impulses, if not controlled, would lead to destruction of others and self. Man's behavior is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle

and ordered complexity toward the goals his organism is endeavoring to achieve. (p. 29)

Within the framework of PPT, clients are perceived as autonomous, growth-oriented individuals equipped with a sophisticated executive center in addition to an amygdala. Undoubtedly, clients seeking psychotherapy are prone to attend, perceive, analyze, and internalize negatives more sharply than they do positives. Drawing their attention to positives therefore takes on added importance. Clients have the potential to rise above natural selection and consciously civilize their actions and habits to alter genetic influences. Thus, a client's behavior is best understood in terms of dimensions, not categories. Dividing behavior into categories or pigeon-holes obscures reality. As Alan Watts (1966) said, "however much we divide, count, sort, or classify [the world] into particular things and events, this is no more than a way of thinking about the world. It is never actually divided" (p. 54). In symptom and disorder oriented therapy, clients are often viewed as passive victims of intrapsychic and biological forces, primarily needing help with their disease and disorder *only*—not with their overall well-being.

Clients seeking psychotherapy readily describe how negative emotions, negative actions, bad parents, bad genes, and bad feedback impact their lives. The emotional impact of resentments, traumas, sour interpersonal interactions, and setbacks at work and in love is felt more in the therapy room than the joy of accomplishments, savoring of pleasant experiences, and cheer and laughter of friendships. Clients remember pain much more vividly than pleasure; they share with the therapist the struggle of letting go of grudges and ruminations. In the traditional, pathology-oriented model of psychotherapy, these negatives are perceived, analyzed, and further synthesized into the personality structure, with an underlying assumption that symptoms are authentic and central ingredients of psychotherapy whereas positives are by-products of symptom relief or at most clinical peripheries that do not need exclusive attention. So steeped in this assumption is mainstream psychology that the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-IV)* labels affiliation, anticipation, altruism, and humor as "defense mechanisms" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 752). Altruistic behavior is similarly considered a coping mechanism through which defense "depressive people often handle their unconscious dynamics by helping others, by philanthropic activity, or by contributions to social progress that have the effect of counteracting their guilt (McWilliams, 1994, p. 238)." Sharply criticizing this assumption, Seligman (1999) has asked:

How has it happened that the social sciences view the human strengths and virtues—altruism, courage, honesty, duty, joy, health, responsibility and good cheer—as derivative, defensive or downright illusions, while weakness and negative motivations—anxiety, lust, selfishness, paranoia, anger, disorder and sadness—are viewed as authentic? (p. 559)

In PPT the positive emotions and strengths of clients are considered to be as authentic as their weaknesses are, valued in their own right, contributing

to happiness in the same way that weaknesses and symptoms contribute to psychological disorders. Human strengths are as real as human weaknesses, as old as time, and are valued in every culture (Lopez, Snyder, & Rasmussen, 2003; C. Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Some psychotherapists may argue that it is difficult to assess positive emotions because these tend to be fleeting and that strengths naturally do not stand out as much as weaknesses. Furthermore, social desirability may elude a valid assessment of strengths because some clients, in order to seek therapist's attention or from fear of appearing vain, may over- or under-report them. Compared with the assessment of psychopathology, assessment of positive emotions and strengths has seriously lagged behind. Only recently was the first serious classification of strengths *Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues* (C. Peterson & Seligman, 2004) published, whereas four editions of *DSM* have appeared so far. In addition, according to Lopez and colleagues (2003), the unfavorable or favorable self-representation of clients to seek attention or to alter perception is part of the response style and content and should be not statistically controlled. Positive emotions and strengths are authentic and should be valued in their own right.

Without discounting the adaptive value of negatives, human existence is not just about resentment, deception, competition, jealousy, greed, worry, and anxiety. It is also about honesty, co-operation, gratitude, compassion, contentment, and serenity. The function of psychotherapy is not only to help client put out fires, eliminate dangers, reduce hostility, or alleviate moral, social, and emotional malaise—it is also to restore and nurture courage, kindness, modesty, perseverance, and emotional and social intelligence. The former may make life less painful, but the latter are what make it fulfilling. Therefore, psychotherapy—the most visible face of psychology—should explicitly incorporate strengths as they are as real and authentic as weaknesses and misery.

The bulk of traditional therapies, especially before the drug revolution, consisted of talking about troubles such as bad parenting, suppressed emotions and memories, faulty thinking patterns, and resentment in interpersonal relations. Portrayals of psychotherapy in Hollywood films (e.g., *Prince of Tides*, *Good Will Hunting*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) and television talk shows, mostly anchored by pop therapists, have further reinforced public perception that talking about troubles and ventilation of the “inner child” are cathartic and thereby curative. Clients have been socialized to believe that therapy essentially entails talking about troubles. Some clients at the onset of therapy even tell their therapist, courtesy of a Google search, that their troubles correspond with a specific *DSM* disorder. Most of those seeking treatment view themselves as deeply flawed, fragile, victims of cruel environments or casualties of bad genes. Undoubtedly, talking about troubles with an empathetic, warm, and genuine therapist can be the powerful cathartic experience deemed necessary for any form of psychotherapy. For this reason, all major approaches to psychotherapy emphasize that the therapist–client interaction should be positive and that the psychotherapist should generally be empathetic, genuine, warm, and professional (Luborsky, McLellan, Woody, & O'Brien, 1985). Indeed,

psychotherapy outcome research has shown that this is one of the most robust curative factors (Orlinsky, Ronnestad, & Willutzki, 2004; Wampold, 2001).

However, this leads to the assumption, without much empirical evidence, that a strong therapeutic relationship between client and therapist is best built while discussing troubles. So, clients and therapists talk about instances when parents did not meet needs, not when these needs were fulfilled; antecedents of interpersonal conflicts are explored rather than situations when an adaptive compromise resolved a conflict; emphasis is on times when clients were transgressed by others, not when they forgave or were forgiven, on the selfishness of others, not their compassion, on insults hurled, not genuine admiration and appreciation received. It is not that troubles are not worth discussing but this discussion is not the *sine qua non* of building a strong therapeutic relationship. Powerful and healing therapeutic bonds can also be built by discussing deeply felt positive emotions and experiences.

Discussing positives can provide psychotherapists with powerful tools to understand a client's psychological repertoire, which can then be effectively utilized to counter troubles. Considering what strengths a client brings to effectively deal with troubles provokes a very different discussion from a pathology-oriented inquiry asking, "What weaknesses have led to your troubles?" Importantly, in PPT the discussion of psychological pain and distress is not discouraged or undermined. Rather, such an expression is encouraged so that clients can place it in the broader context of positives and strengths.

It is worth noting that curing mental illness through talk therapy and emotional ventilation is largely a Western tradition (Nisbett, 2003). The Western mind applies formal logic to reason through troubling states. This reasoning is verbalized and categorized under labels. The habit of categorizing and labeling may lock us into mechanical reactions, argues Jon Kabat-Zinn (1991). Doing so is beneficial for the analysis of discrete emotions and behaviors. However, emotions and behaviors are rarely completely discrete. Their genesis often involves others, along with a host of contextual features.

Clients seek therapy because of negative feelings and thoughts that are painful and hard to let go. However, if psychotherapy becomes an exercise analyzing the minuscule details of negatives, including tracing down their childhood origins or monitoring every distorted thought, then a vulnerable client will be less motivated to explore anything else. In addition, locating causes of resentments in unsupportive parents and significant others, or attributing problems to environment and bad genes, may be counterproductive for some clients, who may come out of therapy believing that "It wasn't my fault anyway." Blaming others creates sympathy, not happiness.

It is an interesting paradox of the Western tradition of psychotherapy that the therapist is expected to give complete attention and unconditional positive regard to the client, but the client is expected to be more self-indulgent (Rogers, 1951). Contrary to the Western view, the Eastern healing practices of mind emphasize contemplation, reflection, and meditation.

Instead of talking about troubles, healing begins by training attention to observe the flow of thoughts and feelings. The goal is not necessarily to change the content of thoughts and feelings. Rather it is to increase awareness of how one relates to them, and to learn to relate to them from a wider, decentered perspective as “mental events” rather than as aspects of the self or even as necessarily accurate reflections of reality (Teasdale et al., 2000; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006).

The focus of psychotherapy should not be limited to negatives but also include a thorough discussion of positives. For example, reflecting on a positive experience that might initially have received insufficient appreciation, followed by a discussion with the therapist, can uplift a client’s depressed mood. Similarly, recalling actions that brought joy, contentment, and satisfaction can undo negative feelings. Rewriting bad events by forgiveness and letting go can loosen the hold of anger and resentment.

### Theoretical Background

Positive Psychology, from which PPT evolves, is the scientific study of positive emotions, positive individual traits, and the institutions that facilitate their development (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). PPT is positive psychology’s therapeutic arm to broaden the scope of psychotherapy from alleviation of suffering to systematic promotion of happiness. It advocates a more serious consideration of the client’s intact faculties, ambitions, positive life experiences, and strengths and asks how these can be marshaled to treat and buffer against psychopathology. It contends that positive emotions, strengths, and meaning serve us best not when life is easy, but when life is difficult.

For example, when one is depressed, having and using such strengths as perspective, integrity, fairness, and loyalty may become more urgent than in good times; the strengths may shore up and enable positive institutions like strong family, peers, and social support to assume an added and immediate importance and may cultivate positive emotions to counteract the negative states. Adversity and trauma may build strengths but they more likely reveal them. Psychotherapy can be a powerful avenue of this revelation. PPT is primarily based on Seligman’s (2002) theory of happiness. According to this theory, the vague and fuzzy notion of “happiness” could be decomposed into three more scientifically measurable and manageable components: positive emotion (the pleasant life), engagement (the engaged life), and meaning (the meaningful life).

#### *The Pleasant Life*

The pleasant life successfully pursues positive emotions about the present, past, and future. The positive emotions about the past are satisfaction, contentment, and serenity. Optimism, hope, trust, faith, and confidence are future-oriented positive emotions. Positive emotions about the present are divided into two crucially different categories: pleasures and gratifications.

The pleasures are comprised of bodily pleasures and higher pleasures. The bodily pleasures are momentary positive emotions that come through the senses: delicious tastes and smells, sexual feelings, moving your body well, and delightful sights and sounds. The higher pleasures are also momentary, set off by events more complicated and more learned than sensory ones, and are defined by the feelings they bring about: ecstasy, rapture, thrill, gladness, mirth, ebullience, comfort, amusement, relaxation, and the like. These are rock-bottom subjective feelings. The gratifications are the other category of positive emotions about the present. Unlike pleasures, they are not feelings but activities one likes to do, such as reading, rock climbing, dancing, good conversation, baseball, playing chess, and so on.

Positive emotions are not a fleeting luxury but a vital need. They change people's mind-sets, widen the scope of their attention (Chesney, Darbes, Hoerster, Taylor, & Chamber, 2005; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and increase intuition (Bolte, Goschke, & Kuhl, 2003). Positive emotions speed up recovery from the cardiovascular aftereffects of negative affects and alter front brain asymmetry and increase immune system functioning (e.g., Davidson et al., 2003; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Positive emotions broaden the thought–action repertoire, leading one to increased well-being, which in turn builds social and psychological resources and, in so doing, increases life satisfaction.

Positive emotions likely buffer against depression and many other psychological problems. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) also have shown empirically that resilient people use positive emotions to rebound from, and find positive meaning in, stressful encounters. Gratitude and forgiveness exercises enhance positive memories and positive emotions (e.g., Burton & King, 2004; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

It appears, then, that lack of positive emotion and pleasure are not just symptoms of psychopathology but may partly cause it. In depression, for example, enhancing the pleasant life could be a goal of psychotherapy for depression, and it should be appealing for patients in a way that exploring the details of childhood traumas, arguing against catastrophic cognitions, or taking medication with potential adverse side-effects are not. It should be noted that cultivation of positive emotions is does not mean ecstasy and excitement. Rather the emphasis is on cultivation of more frequent experiences of moderate positive emotion. Research suggests that people who seek ecstasy much of the time are likely to be disappointed. Even worse, they move from one job or relationship to another, seeking intense levels of pleasure (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991).

### *The Engaged Life*

The second “happy” life in Seligman's theory of happiness is the engaged life, a life that pursues engagement, involvement, and absorption in work, intimate relations, and leisure. Engagement is synonymous with Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow (1990). Flow is a psychological state that

accompanies highly engaging activities: time passes quickly; attention is completely focused on the activity; total absorption is experienced; even the sense of self is lost.

A number of psychological symptoms not only correlate with lack of engagement but that very lack of engagement may cause them. Engagement is an important antidote to boredom, anxiety, and depression. Anhedonia, apathy, boredom, and restlessness—hallmarks of many psychological disorders—are largely functions of how attention is structured at a given time. When we are sad or bored, the low level of challenge relative to our skills allows our attention to drift. When we are anxious, the perceived challenges exceed our capacities. Negative states are characterized by disruption of attention, disengagement, and mood instability.

Seligman (2002) proposed that one way to enhance engagement is to identify clients' salient character strengths and then help them to find opportunities to use them more. He calls these *signature strengths*. Every client possesses several signature strengths. These are strengths of character that a client self-consciously owns, celebrates, feels a sense of ownership and authenticity about ("This is the real me"), and feels excited while displaying. The client learns quickly as the signature strength is practiced, continues to learn, feels invigorated rather than exhausted when using it, and pursues projects that revolve around it. In PPT, engagement is created by utilizing a client's signature strengths.

This also allows a client an opportunity for growth around his or her deepest psychological resources (signature strengths). The assumption is that when such growth occurs, happiness will take care of itself. Therapeutic interventions have been designed with the aim of transforming daily negative experiences into more positive ones by increasing engagement (Inghilleri, 1999; Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

The use of signature strengths in the pursuit of happiness is illustrated in a thought experiment designed by Robert Nozick (1997). Nozick observes that if our brains could be hooked up to a machine that could give any kind of pleasure desired, most people would find this idea quite unattractive. This is because, in pursuing pleasure, we want to *do* certain things and *be* certain kinds of people. In PPT, the engaging life is promoted by encouraging clients to undertake intentional activities that use their signature strengths to create engagement and happiness.

Unlike hedonic activities, which are short-cuts and rely on modern gadgets, these intentional activities are relatively more time-intensive, including, for example, such things as rock climbing, chess, basketball, dancing, creating or experiencing art, music, and literature, spiritual activities, social interactions, other creative activities like baking, gardening, playing with a child, and so on. Compared to sensory pleasures, which fade quickly, these activities last longer, involve quite a lot of thinking and interpretation, and do not habituate easily. These activities are essentially signature strengths in action. The client is coached that happiness does not simply happen, but is something that they themselves make happen.

Any activity that taps a client's signature strengths can be engaging. For example, a client with the signature strength of creativity is encouraged to take a pottery, photography, or painting class; someone with the signature strength of curiosity might be encouraged to make a list of things they would like to know, identify ways to find them out, and meet someone else who has successfully marshaled curiosity to create engagement.

When individuals are fully engaged, subjective states will provide satisfaction and the motivation to continue. Despite distractions, they will continuously adjust the ongoing relationship with the environment to find the optimal balance. Engagement can replace brooding and rumination. Similarly, instead of indulging in "retail therapy" (Faber, 2004) clients are encouraged to pursue explicit challenges that tap their strengths. As they achieve these challenges, they usually develop greater skills in using their signature strengths, and activity may cease to be as involving as before.

When such roadblocks occur, the therapist can help clients identify increasingly complex challenges. As the process continues, clients realize their potential and see that they are capable of creating their own happiness. The therapist then can discuss long-term engagement goals with the client. If the client reports that present engagement is rewarding, then measures to maintain it are discussed. If it is less rewarding, as it may be in many cases, deployment of other signature strengths or trying out of new pursuits is encouraged to expose the client to new experiences.

### *The Meaningful Life*

The third "happy" life in Seligman's theory of happiness is the pursuit of meaning. This consists of using signature strengths to belong to and to serve something the client believes to be bigger than the self. Victor Frankl (1963), a pioneer in the study of meaning, emphasized that happiness cannot be attained by wanting to be happy—it must come as the unintended consequence of working for a goal greater than oneself. People who successfully pursue activities that connect them to such larger goals achieve what we call the "meaningful life." There are a number of ways to achieve a meaningful life, including close interpersonal relationships, generativity, social activism or service, careers experienced as callings, and spirituality (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2004; Larson, 2000; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; B. E. Peterson & Stewart, 1997; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). One necessary condition for meaning is the attachment and connection to something larger than is the self. Institutions such as church, synagogue, mosque, temple, a professional or leisure club, or a nonprofit, environmental, or humanitarian organization all offer opportunities to connect with something larger.

Regardless of the particular way in which a person establishes a meaningful life, doing so produces a sense of satisfaction and the belief that one has lived well (Ackerman, Zuroff, & Mosokowitz, 2000; Debats, 1996). Conversely, lack of meaning is linked with physical and psychological problems. A meta-analysis on the efficacy of volunteerism shows that

volunteers, on average, are twice as likely to feel happy with themselves as are nonvolunteers. Moreover, volunteering contributes to happiness by decreasing boredom and creating an increased sense of purpose in life (Cris-Houran, 1996). Life satisfaction has been found to improve 24% with the level of altruistic activity (William, Haber, Weaver, & Freeman, 1998). Easterbrook (2004) has observed that most Western societies are undergoing a fundamental shift from “material want” to “meaning want.” PPT asserts that lack of meaning is not just a symptom but a cause of depression and a number of other psychological disorders. Through the meaningful life, PPT helps clients to forge connections to deal with psychological problems.

### *The Full Life*

The full life consists of experiencing positive emotions in the past and future, savoring positive feelings from pleasures, deriving abundant gratification through engagement, and creating meaning in the service of something larger than the self. The three lives noted above—pleasant, engaged, and meaningful—are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Most engagement experiences have the potential for meaningfulness.

Similarly, higher pleasures that require considerable thinking and action can become passions. A passion is usually sufficiently intense to engage an individual. Similarly, when an individual establishes and sustains engagement, it often evolves into a meaningful endeavor. The long-term careers of artists and scientists illustrate a sense of meaning emerging from an extended relationship with an activity that uses their highest abilities. Wrzesniewski and colleagues' (1997) study of individuals' relationships to their work provides an example of pleasure, engagement, and meaning encompassed at work, which translates into a career, and then, for some, into a calling. In short, a full life entails pleasure, engagement, and meaning, through separate activities or through a single activity. In contrast, an empty life lacking these elements, particularly engagement and meaning, is partly causal of psychological problems.

### HOW PPT WORKS

Table 11.1 presents an idealized, session-by-session description of PPT. Consistent with the theory discussed, themes of pleasure, engagement, and meaning are integrated throughout the course of therapy. Right from the outset, PPT encourages clients to explore their strengths. It builds a congenial and positive relationship by asking clients to introduce themselves through a real-life story that shows them at their best. This is followed by clients identifying signature strengths and the therapist coaching them to find practical ways of using them more often in work, love, play, friendship, and parenting.

In addition, they are actively encouraged to use their signature strengths to solve problems. Clients set goals of using and enhancing their signature

**Table 11.1**  
**Idealized Session-by-Session Description of Positive Psychotherapy**

Session & Theme	Description
1 Orientation	<p><b>Lack of Positive Resources Maintains Psychopathology</b>            The role played by the absence or lack of positive emotions, character strengths, and meaning in maintaining psychopathology and an empty life is discussed. The framework of PPT, therapist's role, and client's responsibilities are discussed.</p> <p><b>HW*:</b> Client writes a one page (roughly 300 words) positive introduction in which a concrete story illustrating his/her character strengths is narrated.</p>
2 Engagement	<p><b>Identifying Signature Strengths</b>            Signature strengths are identified from the positive introduction, and situations are discussed in which these signature strengths have helped previously.</p> <p>Three pathways to happiness (pleasure, engagement, and meaning) are discussed in light of PPTI results.</p> <p><b>HW:</b> Client completes VIA-IS questionnaire online, which identifies his/her signature strengths.</p>
3 Engagement/Pleasure	<p><b>Cultivation of Signature Strengths and Positive Emotions</b>            Deployment of signature strengths is discussed. Client is coached to formulate specific, concrete, and achievable behaviors to cultivate signature strengths.</p> <p>Role of positive emotions in well-being is discussed.</p> <p><b>HW (on-going):</b> Client starts a Blessings Journal in which three good things that happened during the day (big or small), are written.</p>
4 Pleasure	<p><b>Good Versus Bad Memories</b>            Role of good and bad memories is discussed in terms of maintenance of symptoms of depression. Client is encouraged to express feelings of anger and bitterness. Effects on depression and well-being of holding onto anger and bitterness are discussed.</p> <p><b>HW:</b> Client writes about three bad memories, the anger associated with them, and their impact in maintaining depression.</p>

- 5  
Pleasure/Engagement
- Forgiveness**  
Forgiveness is introduced as a powerful tool that can transform anger and bitterness into feelings of neutrality or even, for some, into positive emotions.  
**HW:** Client writes a forgiveness letter describing a transgression and related emotions, and pledges to forgive the transgressor (if appropriate), but may not deliver the letter.
- 6  
Pleasure/Engagement
- Gratitude**  
Gratitude is discussed as enduring thankfulness, and the role of good and bad memories is highlighted again with emphasis on gratitude.  
**HW:** Client writes and presents a letter of gratitude to someone he/she has never properly thanked.
- 7  
Pleasant/Engagement
- Mid-therapy Check**  
Both Forgiveness and Gratitude homework are followed up. These homework assignments typically take more than one week. The importance of the cultivation of positive emotions is discussed. Client is encouraged to bring and discuss the effects of Blessing Journal. Goals regarding using signature strengths are reviewed. The process and progress is discussed in detail. Client's feedback about therapeutic gains is elicited and discussed.
- 8  
Meaning/Engagement
- Satisficing instead of Maximizing**  
Satisficing (good enough; Schwartz, Monterosso, Lyubomirsky, White, & Lehman, 2002) instead of maximizing in the context of the hedonic treadmill is discussed. Satisficing through engagement is encouraged instead of maximizing.  
**HW:** Client writes ways to increase satisficing and devises a personal satisficing plan.
- 9  
Pleasure
- Optimism and Hope**  
Client is guided to think of times when she/he lost out on something important, when a big plan collapsed, when he/she was rejected by someone. Then client is asked to consider that when one door closes, another one almost always opens.  
**HW:** Client identifies three doors that closed and three doors that then opened.

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(Continued)

**Table 11.1** (*Continued*)

Session & Theme	Description
10 Engagement/Meaning	<p><b>Love &amp; Attachment</b></p> <p>Active-Constructive responding (Gable et al., 2004) is discussed. Client is invited to recognize the signature strengths of a significant other.</p> <p><b>HW1</b> (on-going): Active-Constructive feedback client is coached how to respond actively and constructively to positive events reported by others.</p> <p><b>HW2:</b> Client arranges a date which celebrates her/his signature strengths and that of her/his significant other.</p>
11 Meaning	<p><b>Family Tree of Strengths</b></p> <p>Significance of recognizing the signature strengths of family members is discussed.</p> <p><b>HW:</b> Client asks family members to take VIA-IS online and then draws a tree which includes signature strengths of all members of family including children. A family gathering is to be arranged to discuss everyone's signature strengths.</p>
12 Pleasure	<p><b>Savoring</b></p> <p>Savoring is introduced as awareness of pleasure and a deliberate attempt to make it last. The hedonic treadmill is reiterated as a possible threat to savoring and how to safeguard against it.</p> <p><b>HW:</b> Client plans pleasurable activities and carries them out as planned. Specific savoring techniques are provided.</p>
13 Meaning	<p><b>Gift of Time</b></p> <p>Ways of using signature strengths to offer the gift of time in serving something much larger than the self are discussed.</p> <p><b>HW:</b> Client is to give the gift of time by doing something that requires a fair amount of time and whose creation calls on signature strengths, such as mentoring a child or doing community service.</p>
14 Integration	<p><b>The Full Life</b></p> <p>The concept of the full life that integrates pleasure, engagement, and meaning is discussed. Client completes PPTI and other measures before the final session.</p> <p>Therapeutic progress, gains, and maintenance are discussed.</p>

*Note:* **HW** = homework; material in the table is based on Rashid (2005).

strengths through real-life exercises. Substantial time is spent coaching clients to re-educate their attention and memory to what is good in their lives, with the goal of providing them a more balanced context in which to place their problems. The goal is to keep the positive aspects of clients' lives in the forefront of their mind, to teach behaviors that bring positive feedback from others, and to strengthen already existing positive aspects rather than teaching the reinterpretation of negative aspects.

When clients report negative emotions or troubles, they are empathically attended to and actively coached to deal with their troubles by utilizing their signature strengths. This balanced process enables the therapist to become a witness to the client's deepest positive characteristics rather than just an authority figure who elicits faulty thinking, negative emotions, and maladjusted relationships. Usually, there are already plenty of such critical individuals in a client's life, and this can be the very reason a client seeks therapy. PPT should be custom-tailored to meet a client's immediate clinical needs (e.g., conflict with significant others, romantic break-up, or career related issues), and the length of therapy and order of the exercises can be varied with each client's circumstances and the feasibility of completing the exercises. Likewise, homework assignments are selected from the pool of potential exercises in Table 11.1, and the exercises are tailored to the individual.

PPT, despite the implication of its name, is not just about positives. Neither does it assume that all other psychotherapies are essentially negative. It is utopian to conceive of a life without negative experiences. Therefore, PPT does not deny distressing, unpleasant, or negative states and experiences, nor does it aim to help a client see the world through rose-colored glasses. It fully validates the client's negative experiences originating from physical and psychopathologies, dysfunctional families, and ineffective social institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005). PPT is a systematic therapeutic effort to treat symptoms by explicitly building positive emotions, character strengths, and meaning. In doing so, it appreciates that human strengths cannot be fully understood without comprehending human weaknesses. Nevertheless, a viable way of undoing negative states is to accentuate positive states and traits. As Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) have shown, positive reappraisal (focusing on the good in what is happening or what has happened) and creating positive events help in dealing with negative emotions and experiences.

PPT draws heavily on clients' signature strengths and suggests undertaking endeavors that best use these strengths. However, in using signature strengths, as suggested by Schwartz and Sharpe (2006), clients are coached about practical wisdom. Specifically, clients are taught three considerations: *relevance* (does a particular situation require a signature strength or some other one?); *conflict* (should one be honest or kind?); and *specificity* (translating one's signature strengths into concrete actions, as real-life situations rarely come labeled with instructions for using a particular signature strength).

By drawing attention to positives, PPT also helps clients find potential positives in traumatic situations. Doing so has been documented to yield

health benefits as well as growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; King & Miner, 2000). In PPT, through systematic and sustained efforts, potential ways of growing from trauma, adversity and loss are explored. However, the therapist must be careful and avoid mechanistically offering empty platitudes, for example, pointing out what wonderful opportunities for growth trauma, loss, or adversity have brought.

Amidst the warmth, understanding, and goodwill created in the therapeutic milieu, listening mindfully allows the therapist to notice and help the client label experiences in positive terms and learn ways to encounter negative states and traits by keeping genuine positives in the foreground. Working diligently and deeply to articulate the genuine and authentic positives of the client, the PPT therapist does not create a Pollyannaish or Panglossian epitome of happiness or caricature of positive thinking. The therapist neither minimizes nor masks under positives unavoidable negative events and experiences such as abuse, neglect, and suffering, and such issues are dealt with under the standard clinical protocols.

Since clients have long been socialized into believing that therapy entails talking about troubles, any perceived failure to take their troubles seriously violates expectations and can undermine good rapport. PPT adopts a flexible approach. While the focus is helping clients explore their positives, it is inevitable that clients will discuss or even, in some cases, display negative emotions and experiences. In PPT, the expression of negative emotions is never dismissed nor superficially replaced with positive ones. Rather, the stance is to explore the role of negative emotions. One PPT exercise explicitly asks clients to write down bitter memories or resentments and then discuss in therapy the effects of holding onto them. This allows the easing of cognitive and emotional constrictions associated with the memory.

Also, in some cases, negative emotions could have unexplored adaptive functions. For example, fear, sadness, or anger might have prompted clients to utilize their support systems. Drawing on the client's personal emotional intelligence, in PPT, clients are coached to allocate emotional resource appropriately. That is, clients are encouraged to undertake activities at the appropriate time and in proper proportion. In doing so, PPT follows Seligman's (2002) advice, "Choose your venue and design your mood to fit the task at hand" (p. 39). Clients are taught that positive emotions are best utilized in seeking out and establishing new social ties, attempting difficult tasks, undertaking tasks that call for creative, generous, and tolerant thinking, finding ways to increase the amount of love in life, thinking about a new career, hobbies or noncompetitive sports, and in creative writing. By contrast, since negative emotions activate critical thinking (Alloy & Abramson, 1979; Norem & Chang, 2002), tasks such as taking important exams, copy-editing, doing income tax, deciding whom to fire or where to move, dealing with repeated romantic rejections, and making important decisions in competitive endeavors are best undertaken when one feels slightly, though not overly, gloomy.

A number of validation studies of PPT have been completed. Individual PPT with severely depressed clients led to more symptomatic improvement and to more remission from depressive disorder than treatment-as-usual

and than treatment-as-usual plus antidepressant medication. PPT also measurably enhanced happiness (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). Group PPT given to mild to moderately depressed college students led to significantly greater symptom reduction and more increases in life satisfaction than experienced by the no-treatment control group. This improvement, moreover, lasted for at least 1 year after treatment. Group PPT with middle school children increased their well-being, with large effect size (Rashid & Anjum, 2007). Web-based study and studies with mental health professionals and students that initially validated individual PPT exercises yielded reliable changes in strengths and well-being, with medium effect sizes (Seligman, 2004; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Taken together, across samples and settings, PPT demonstrated efficacy, with large to medium effect sizes.

### DPT Mechanisms for Change

Psychologically disturbed individuals exaggerate the natural tendency of remembering the negative. They gravitate toward attending to and remembering the most negative aspects of their lives. Several PPT exercises aim to re-educate attention, memory, and expectations away from the negative and the catastrophic and toward the positive and the hopeful. For example, when a client does the three good things exercise (“Before you go to sleep, write down three things that went well today and why they went well”); the bias toward ruminating only about what has gone wrong is counteracted. The client is more likely to end the day remembering positive events and completions, rather than troubles and unfinished business. Similarly, the gratitude visit may shift memory away from the embittering aspects of past relationships to savoring the good things that friends and family have done for the client.

This re-education of attention, memory, and expectation is accomplished verbally as well as through journal writing. As noted previously, cultivation of positive emotions helps individuals flourish. PPT exercises attempt to create positive emotions in a number of domains of life: noticing positive emotions in the present through the savoring and three good things exercises, remembering the good deed of someone in the past, providing constructive and active feedback to a loved one. This allows clients to generalize the role played by positive emotions across situations. In addition, positive emotions stemming from exercises such as the gratitude letter and visit or active-constructive feedback essentially strengthen close interpersonal relations and help clients notice and value the positive things in their lives rather than brooding over negative aspects. Their repertoire of positive emotions is broadened, which can fuel self-transformation and allow them to identify negative thinking and behavioral patterns.

The mechanism of other PPT exercises tends to be more external and behavioral. For example, increasing clients’ awareness of their signature strengths likely encourages them to apply themselves more effectively at work by approaching tasks in a way that better uses their abilities. Having

more flow at work and doing better work can lead to an upward spiral of engagement and positive emotion. Similarly, teaching clients to respond in an active and constructive manner to good news from coworkers, friends, and family teaches a social skill that will likely improve most relationships (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004).

Another possible mechanism of change in PPT is sustained emphasis on strengths as a way to have more engagement and meaning in life. Throughout therapy, clients are coached in identifying their signature strengths. Near the outset of therapy, clients are asked to introduce themselves through a real-life story about their highest character strength. The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; C. Peterson & Seligman, 2004), a well-validated test that identifies clients' signature strengths, is then administered. The therapist and client collaboratively devise new ways of using those signature strengths in work, love, friendship, parenting, and leisure. Clients are also invited to write or articulate detailed narratives about what they are good at. Without ignoring clients' concerns about their "deficiencies," identifying, attending to, remembering, and using more often the core positive traits they already possess is emphasized. This can allow clients to make "end-runs" around their perceived faults.

In addition to increasing their general awareness of strengths, clients are coached to explicitly employ their signature strengths in countering their symptoms. For example, in the individual PPT trial with severely depressed clients (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006) one client devised several new, specific ways of using her signature strength (appreciation of beauty) to manage negative moods. She rearranged her bedroom in way that she found to be most aesthetically pleasing and decorated her wall with a print by her favorite artist, so that she would wake up to beauty. She had always wanted to write poetry but had never found time; through PPT, she took the time to join a poetry club. She wrote three experiences of beauty in her journal every day for a week, and as she loved hiking, took a hiking trip to climb Mount Washington.

When PPT is effectively delivered with the basic therapeutic essentials of warmth, empathy, and genuineness, exploring and promoting positives establishes an authentic therapeutic relationship. This relationship is as authentic and genuine as the one in which the therapist only attends to the negatives. In PPT, the therapist is asked to care more for the therapeutic alliance than for adherence to the treatment protocol. Tensions and misunderstandings may arise when clients seek only symptom relief but the therapist is convinced that they would benefit from the active promotion of happiness. In addition, a stressed client may be more inclined to complete pleasure-based exercises rather than engagement and meaning-making exercises. In some cases, due to initial emotional distress, clients may not immediately appreciate the benefits of engagement and connecting with others. The therapist should therefore focus on establishing a strong therapeutic alliance at the outset, as from this relationship adherence to the treatment protocol may naturally flow.

In conducting PPT, some caveats are in order. PPT is not prescriptive but descriptive approach based on converging scientific evidence that

clearly document the benefits of positives. PPT is not a panacea, nor is it relevant for all clients in all situations. It is not “one size fits all” approach. Moreover, therapists should not expect a linear progression of improvement as motivation to change long-standing behavioral and emotional patterns fluctuates during the course of therapy. Finally, results of pilot studies, although promising, should be viewed cautiously. Rigorous outcome studies are needed to extrapolate generalizability and role of mediating variables.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Benjamin Franklin said that wasted strengths are like sundials in the shade. Similarly, traditional psychotherapy has failed to utilize the vital therapeutic assets of clients. PPT taps these resources in a systematic and planned therapy. The potency of positive psychology exercises, the congeniality of the approach for depressed clients, the length of time that benefits last after the end of treatment, and the sheer effect size of PPT when delivered by a skilled therapist are all encouraging. Should these results replicate well, future therapy for depression may combine talking about troubles with understanding and building positive emotions, engagement, and meaning. The effects of PPT appear to be specific to depression, but it is expected that increasing positive emotions, engagement, and meaning can promote highly general ways of buffering against a variety of disorders and troubles.

With the proliferation of research in positive psychology over recent years, happiness, growth, and well-being based therapies are gaining theoretical and applied momentum (e.g., Joseph & Linley, 2005; Lent, 2004). Currently, Lisa Lewis and her colleagues at the Menningers Clinic are comparing PPT with traditional psychotherapy with a larger inpatient sample ( $N = 100$ ). Such endeavors will help to unearth the answers to important questions regarding PPT’s generalizability, specificity, and response rate. In order to justify the inclusion of happiness and well-being based interventions in mainstream clinical practice, more rigorous research may be needed to validate that lack of happiness and well-being is a causal factor in psychopathology and that PPT can demonstrate change in outcome measures that are directly related to treatment outcome. To demonstrate potential as an effective preventive strategy, treatment like PPT should be delivered to at-risk populations through longitudinal and prospective studies.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENT

#### **Enhancing Pleasure, Engagement, and Meaning: In Pursuit of Happiness**

This chapter discussed positive psychotherapy (PPT). PPT is relevant to those who would like to enhance their happiness by cultivating positive emotions, exploring and using signature strengths, and pursuing meaning in their lives. You are encouraged to conduct a mini-experiment by yourself to enhance your level of happiness.

**Personal Reflections:** Using Appendix A, complete the Positive Psychotherapy Inventory (PPTI). Determine your scores on the pleasant, engaging, and meaningful lives. Then, on a separate page, write things that are most pleasurable, engaging, and meaningful to you, that make you happiest. For example, eating crème brûlée, chocolate pops, meeting your dearest friend after a long while, burying the hatchet, savoring the magic curl of waves, helping a friend, resting under cool tree, bringing smiles on a crying child's face, building a train model, reading your favorite author, and so on. Also, write how much time you devote weekly or monthly to these activities. Integrate PPTI scores and list to determine if you have appropriate balance of pleasure, engagement, and meaning that makes you happy. If you feel you do not have appropriate balance in your life, write how this manifests, do you feel unhappy, sad, anxious, or listless?

**Envision Balance:** Next, envision this balance. Initially you will struggle, but keep in mind that envisioning concrete material things (e.g., income, appliances, impressive status, tangible goals) is easier than envisioning deeply emotional experiences such as fun, glee, ebullience, relaxation, engagement or helping others, which genuinely enhance our happiness. Also remind yourself of research findings that clearly suggest that after sacrificing and negating pleasures, when we attain material goals, we become happy—but only momentarily. Recall and write a couple of such personal pursuits. Then write a clear and vivid description of your optimal balance in which you would enjoy the journey as well as the destination. Recall and write one such pursuit from your past.

**Eliminate and Manage Barriers:** Make a list of uninspiring internal and external barriers that prevent you from achieving your optimal imagined balance. Next to each of these barriers, write ways of eliminating them. If some of these are your own deeply ingrained habits and patterns, do not expect dramatic overnight changes. Rather, focus on what you can realistically do and write at least two practical ways of gradually eliminating or managing these barriers more effectively. If these barriers involve others, elicit their cooperation and reciprocate them in similar endeavors.

**Enhancing Pleasure, Engagement, and Meaning:** Review your envisioned balance. Write ways of translating this balance into concrete actions, for example, working 5 hours less or working more efficiently, spending more pleasant time with your loved ones by engaging in activities that tap your and their signature strengths such as cooking, exploring gardening, playing board games, solving problems together, volunteering for local community organization at least once a week. Keep the list short, one or two activities in each domain and for each activity, create a ritual. Your ritual may include a small set of specific behaviors, performed regularly at specific times. Make a sincere commitment of continuing these rituals weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, if not daily. Gradual and regular change is better than ambitious failure. Remember what Aristotle said, we are what we do regularly. To avoid habituation, modify and increase skill and challenge level.

**Create a Circle of Support:** Create a circle of support, which should include two or more individuals who care about your happiness. Share your vision of optimal balance, your rituals, and your commitment of performing them regularly. Elicit their cooperation to keep you on course and ensure that you follow through on them on your commitments. Discuss your progress with your circle regularly. Reciprocate by encouraging at least one member of your circle of support to conduct similar experiment.

## APPENDIX A

## Positive Psychotherapy Inventory

Please read each group of statements carefully. Then, pick the one statement in each group that best describes you. Be sure to read all of the statements in each group before making your choice.

*Some questions are regarding strengths. Strength in PPTI refers to a stable trait which manifests through thoughts, feelings and actions, is morally valued and is beneficial to self and others. Examples of strength include but not limited to optimism, zest, spirituality, fairness, modesty, social intelligence, perseverance, curiosity, creativity, teamwork ... etc.*

**1. Joy**

0. I rarely feel joyful.
1. I occasionally feel joyful.
2. I feel more joyful than joyless.
3. I usually feel joyful.

**2. Knowing strengths**

0. I do not know my strengths\*.
1. I have some idea about my strengths.
2. I know my strengths.
3. I am very well aware of my strengths.

**3. Impact on society**

0. What I do usually does not matter to society.
1. What I do occasionally matters to society.
2. What I do often matters to society.
3. What I do usually matters to society.

**4. Positive mood observed by others**

0. Others say I usually do not look happy.
1. Others say I occasionally look happy.
2. Others say I usually look happy.
3. Others say I look happy most of the time.

**5. Pursuing strength activities**

0. I usually do not pursue activities which use my strengths.
1. I occasionally pursue activities which use my strengths.
2. I often pursue activities which use my strengths.
3. I usually pursue activities which use my strengths.

**6. Sense of connection**

0. I do not feel connected to people with whom I regularly interact.
1. I occasionally feel connected to people with whom I regularly interact.
2. I often feel connected to people with whom I regularly interact.
3. I usually feel connected to people with whom I regularly interact.

**7. Gratitude**

0. I usually do not take time to think about the good things in my life.
1. I occasionally notice good things in my life and feel thankful.

2. I often notice good things in my life and feel thankful.
  3. I feel grateful for many good things in my life almost every day.
- 8. Solving problem using strengths**
0. I rarely use my strengths to solve problems.
  1. I occasionally use my strengths to solve problems.
  2. I often use my strengths to solve problems.
  3. I usually use my strengths to solve problems.
- 9. Sense of meaning**
0. I rarely feel like my life has a purpose.
  1. I occasionally feel like my life has a purpose.
  2. I often feel like my life has a purpose.
  3. I usually feel like my life has a purpose.
- 10. Relaxation**
0. I rarely feel relaxed.
  1. I occasionally feel relaxed.
  2. I often feel relaxed.
  3. I usually feel relaxed.
- 11. Concentration during strength activities**
0. My concentration is poor during activities which use my strengths.
  1. My concentration is sometimes good and sometimes poor during activities which use my strengths.
  2. My concentration is usually good during activities which use my strengths.
  3. My concentration is excellent during activities which use my strengths.
- 12. Religious or spiritual activities**
0. I usually do not engage in religious or spiritual activities.
  1. I occasionally spend some time in religious or spiritual activities.
  2. I often spend some time in religious or spiritual activities.
  3. I usually spend some time every day in religious or spiritual activities.
- 13. Savoring**
0. I usually rush through things and don't slow down to enjoy them.
  1. I occasionally savor at things that bring me pleasure.
  2. I savor at least one thing that brings me pleasure every day.
  3. I usually let myself get immersed in pleasant experiences so that I can savor them fully.
- 14. Time during strength activities**
0. Time passes slowly when I am engaged in activities that use my strengths.
  1. Time passes ordinarily when I am engaged in activities that use my strengths.
  2. Time passes quickly when I am engaged in activities that use my strengths.
  3. I lose the sense of time when I am engaged in activities that use my strengths.

**15. Closeness with loved ones**

0. I usually do not feel close to my loved ones.
1. I occasionally feel close to my loved ones.
2. I often feel close to my loved ones.
3. I usually feel close to my loved ones.

**16. Laughing/smiling**

0. I usually do not laugh much.
1. I occasionally laugh heartily.
2. I often laugh heartily.
3. I usually laugh heartily several times each day.

**17. Managing strength activities**

0. It is usually hard for me to manage activities which use my strengths.
1. I can occasionally manage activities which use my strengths.
2. I often can manage well activities which use my strengths.
3. Managing activities which use my strengths comes almost natural to me.

**18. Contributing to something larger**

0. I rarely do things that contribute to a larger cause.
1. I occasionally do things that contribute to a larger cause.
2. I often do things that contribute to a larger cause.
3. I usually do things that contribute to a larger cause.

**19. Zest**

0. I usually have little or no energy.
1. I occasionally feel energized.
2. I often feel energized.
3. I usually feel energized.

**20. Accomplishment in strength activities**

0. I do not feel a sense of accomplishment when I spend time in activities which use my strengths.
1. I occasionally feel a sense of accomplishment when I spend time in activities which use my strengths.
2. I often feel a sense of accomplishment when I spend time in activities which use my strengths.
3. I usually feel a sense of accomplishment when I spend time in activities which use my strengths.

**21. Using strengths to help others**

0. I rarely use my strengths to help others.
1. I occasionally use my strengths to help others, mostly when they ask.
2. I often use my strengths to help others.
3. I regularly use my strengths to help others.

**Please add scores to compute:**

**Pleasant Life**

1. Joy —
4. Positive mood observed by others —

7. Gratitude —  
 10. Relaxation —  
 13. Savoring —  
 16. Laughing/smiling —  
 19. Zest —  
**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

### Engaged Life

2. Knowing strengths —  
 5. Pursuing strength activities —  
 8. Solving problems using strengths —  
 11. Concentration during strength activities —  
 14. Time during strength activities —  
 17. Managing strength activities —  
 20. Accomplishment in strength activities —  
**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

### Meaningful Life

3. Impact on society —  
 6. Sense of connection —  
 9. Sense of meaning —  
 12. Religious or spiritual activities —  
 15. Closeness with loved ones —  
 18. Contributing to something larger —  
 21. Using strengths to help others —  
**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

### Overall Happiness Score\*

Life (range)	Depressed Adults	Non-depressed Adults	<i>Your Score</i>
Pleasant Life (0–21)	8	13	
Engaged Life (0–21)	10	14	
Meaningful Life (0–21)	9	12	
<b>Total (0–63)</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>39</b>	

\*Scores based on a normative study of 302 adults. For psychometric details please email (tayyab@psych.upenn.edu)

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