What is positive psychology?
Basic positive psychology premise:

The field of psych is out of balance, with more focus on the negative than the positive of human behaviour.
We love the dramatic

Numerous studies on the darker side of human nature.

Very few on the human capacity for goodness.
Conformity experiments (Asch)
Obedience to authority (Milgram)
Blue versus brown eyes (Elliott)
The bystander effect (Darley & Latane)

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group size</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% responding by end of fit</th>
<th>Time in sec.</th>
<th>Speed score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 (S &amp; victim)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (S, victim, &amp; 1 other)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (S, victim, &amp; 4 others)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.—p value of differences: $x^2 = 7.91, p < .02; F = 8.09, p < .01$, for speed scores.
The Stanford prison experiment/roles (Zimbardo)

MALE students needed to participate in psychological study of prison life. $15 per day for 1-2 weeks, beginning Aug. 14. Further information and applications may be obtained in rm-248 Jordan Hall.
Hawthorne effect (Landsberger)
What I learned about humans

• Do not think for themselves
• Discriminatory
• Self-absorbed & unhelpful
• Wiling to commit violence/harm
• Lazy
Why the negative focus?

Negative aspects perceived as more authentic and “real”

Self-serving motives (thanks a lot Freud!)
Why the negative focus?

Universal human tendency to give neg’t more weight

E.g., Trait negativity bias

Brain, Look! Not NOW! Can’t you see I’m BUSY?!
Why the negative focus?

- Default: “things are going to be okay”
- Bad sticks out for survival reasons
- Evolutionary basis
Dominance of the “disease model”

Focused on:

• treating illness versus building strengths
• Extensive understanding of and language to describe pathologies

Little value when promoting health
Mental Illness | Languishing | Moderately Mentally Healthy | Complete Mental Health & Flourishing

- DSM diagnosis of mental disorder & low functioning
- Low affective well-being & low functioning
- Neither flourishing or languishing
- High levels of well-being & high functioning
Well-being is a central goal for all of us

“
When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down happy. They told me I didn’t understand the assignment. I told them they didn’t understand life.

John Lennon
”
What is Positive Psychology (PP)?

• Martin Seligman father of “positive psychology”
• Plead for a major shift in psychology’s focus
• 3 words...
PP Defined

“Positive psychology studies what makes life most worth living.” – Peterson
"Nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues," one that revisits the "average person." - Sheldon & King

Lack of attention to everyday lives, which are typically quite positive.
What makes for a “good life”?

Questions regarding the essential qualities of a good society and good life have captured the minds of the greatest thinker across time and culture

Ranging from Aristotle to contemporary thinking
The good life

• Most of us hope for a happy and satisfying life
• Some notion of the life we want to lead, the goals and ambitions we want to pursue
• “Livin’ the good life”
What makes for a “good life”?  

• Contemporary thinking...  
• Several approaches to defining and measuring “quality of life”:
  – social indicators  
  – economic indices
Society: A good life

• Our society reflects shared ideas of “good life”
• Built institutions based on what should be encouraged (church, school, government)
Societal WB

• We can collect information to find out if our society is living a good life
• Count, rate and measure many aspects
Social indicators

Range of societal domains:

– infant morality,
– doctors/capita,
– longevity,
– homicides,
– crime,
– human rights,
– welfare,
– education,
– etc. etc.
Social indicators

• Many are fallible measures (e.g., sexual assault, infant mortality)
• What is the optimal level?
• Who decides what should be counted (libraries, museums, trees)?

• Should we just measure wealth?
Economic indicators

Quality of life determined on whether citizens can obtain what they desire in the marketplace
Economic indicators

• Does not guarantee other important factors (low crime)
• Inversely related to other factors: leisure time, healthy environment
• Wanting things that are not good for us
• What about self-development, love, meaning, etc.?
Seligman – the happy life

3 elements/paths to happiness:
• Positive emotion,
• engagement, and
• meaning.
Seligman – the good life

• Gold standard for “well-being” is flourishing
• Flourishing has five pillars (ends in themselves)
  – Positive Emotion
  – Engagement
  – Accomplishment
  – Relationships
  – Meaning
Positive Psychology in Context

• Overlap with other sub-disciplines
  – Social (relationships)
  – Personality (temperaments)
  – Developmental (resilience)
  – Humanistic (human nature)
  – Health (positive emotions)
  – Clinical and Counselling (strengths)
Overlap with Clinical/Counselling Psych

- Reliance on the disease model & reducing psychopathology
- Now focus on promoting positive mental health
- Establish criteria and language to describe positive mental health
New concept?

Lopez et al. (2006)

• randomly selected 1135 articles from representative journals

• coded articles for 59 positive constructs (e.g. hope, optimism, motivation, positive emotions, and well-being).

• 29% discussed one or more of these constructs/processes
Positive Psychology in Context

Positive Psychology as a SCIENCE

It is now okay to study hope, mindfulness, etc.
Positive psychology in Context

Zeitgeist – spirit of the times. Why now?
Your experience

What is it like to have a conversation with someone when they are stuck in a bad mood?
Clear value of negative emotions

- Fear, anger, disgust, sadness
- Survival function
- Autonomic and hormonal system is activated
- Specific action tendency
- Narrows attention to the threat at hand
• Do these “survival functions” apply to positive emotions?
• “Forgotten emotions”
Broaden & Build Theory
(Fredrickson, 2001)

- Negative emotions narrow attention & thought-action repertoires (e.g., attack, flee)
- Positive do essentially the opposite
Broaden & Build Theory

Positive emotions...

1) *broaden* attention & thought-action repertoires

2) help undo negative emotions

3) help build enduring resources that help improve well-being
Broaden & Build Theory

_Broaden_ attention & thought-action repertoires

- Fredrickson and Barnigan (2005)
  - Emotionally charged film (joy, contentment, anger, fear, neutral)
  - Think of a situation that created similar feelings
  - List all the things you would like to do right then
“... take a moment to imagine being in a situation yourself in which this particular emotion would arise (the one you wrote on the previous page). Concentrate on all the emotion you would feel and live it as vividly and as deeply as possible. Given this feeling, please list all the things you would like to do right now ”
Film clip mood inductions

"It's practically impossible to look at a penguin and feel angry."
- Joel Moore

What the hell is your problem?

TLC
Own race bias

white people: "asians all look the same"
white people:
Broaden & Build Theory

• Johnson & Fredrickson (2005)
  – Do positive emotions eliminate the own-race bias?
  – Caucasian participants
  – Viewed 56 pics of Black and White individuals
  – Assigned to video: joy, fear, neutral
  – Testing phase: half new faces, half from before
  – Have you seen this face before? Yes or no?
Broaden & Build Theory

Positive emotions...

1) *broaden* attention & thought-action repertoires

2) *help undo* negative emotions

3) *help build* enduring resources that help improve well-being
Broaden & Build Theory

• Fredrickson & Levenson (1998)
• examined whether positive emotions would speed up recovery from stressful task
• Participants – “give a speech about why you are a good friend in front of an audience & we will videotape it”
• Verified increased heart rate & blood pressure
Broaden & Build Theory

- 4 film conditions: neutral, joy, contentment, sadness
Inducing positive during stress

- AIDS caregivers
- Some still experienced positive emotions
  - Positive reappraisal
  - Problem-focused coping
  - Infusing ordinary activities with positive meaning
Broaden & Build Theory

Positive emotions...

1) *broaden* attention & thought-action repertoires

2) help undo negative emotions

3) help build enduring resources that help improve well-being
Broaden & *Build* Theory

Joy, leads to play/exploring/creativity
- builds strength, stamina
- involves laughter and builds relationships
- involves puzzle solving, building intellectual and creative talent
Broaden & Build Theory
(Fredrickson, 2001)

Interest (exploration, new information)

Contentment (savouring, integration)
Broaden & *Build* Theory

• Positive emotions help to *build* resources:
  – Physical (e.g., skill)
  – Social (e.g., friendships)
  – Psychological (e.g., resilience)
  – Intellectual (e.g., knowledge)

• Personal resources accrued are durable
Physical resources

• 48 men completed daily mood diaries for 12 weeks
• Antigen pill everyday
• Daily saliva samples to measure antibody production
• Association between positive moods & antibody production
Other Positive Emotions that build resources...

Knowledge emotions: promote learning
Knowledge Emotions

**Interest**: Appraised as novel & comprehensible, usually experienced as pleasant, promotes exploration, leads to superior learning.

*Crocodiles swallow stones to help them dive deeper.*
Knowledge Emotions

Awe: Appraise as inconsistent & desire accommodation; experienced as very pleasant; inspires learning
Knowledge Emotions

**Surprise:** Appraise as unexpected, interrupts attention, fills the mind, not really positive or negative, motivates learning
Upward spiral

Positive emotions lead to an upward spiral
Positive emotions & optimal functioning

• Fredrickson & Losada (2005)
• How much positive emotion until move from floundering to flourishing (i.e., optimal human functioning)?
Positive emotions & optimal functioning

• Critical positivity ratio! 3 to 1
• Found this in diverse samples and across various life domains (business, marriage, college students, etc)
• Upper limit? 11 to 1
Flow

- ‘Discovered’ across many domains (art, chess, athletics)
- Occurs when challenge and ability/skill matched
- Total absorption/loss of time
- Intrinsically rewarding
- Renewal
Savouring

3 conditions:

1) sense of immediacy of what is happening in the moment, in the here and now

2) focus on the pleasurable features of a current experience

3) social and esteem needs are set aside

Focused on *enhancing* the experience
Next week:
What is happiness & who is happy?