Positive Traits

Always be positive.
*Trips down the stairs.*
ME: "Whew, I got down those stairs fast!"
Good life: Under our control?

- 10% life circumstances (last week)
- 50% genetic set point (today)
- 40% intentional activity (last lecture)
What are “traits”?

• **Enduring individual disposition**: characteristic way of thinking, feeling and acting across situations

• “top down” influence on many aspects of our lives that affect our health and happiness
What are “positive traits”?

• Positive traits?
  – Influence well-being (SWB, PWB, health)
  – But...consider context
Positive Traits

• Affectivity (PA and NA)
• Personality (Big 5)
• Optimism
• Self-esteem
Affectivity & Happiness

• “hedonic capacity”
  – Capacity for experiencing positive emotions/pleasure
SWB/”happiness”

- *Subjective* well-being (or “happiness”)
- 3 components
  - Positive affect (high)
  - Negative affect (low)
  - Life satisfaction (high)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Very Slightly or Not at all</th>
<th>2 A Little</th>
<th>3 Moderately</th>
<th>4 Quite a Bit</th>
<th>5 Extremely</th>
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Affectivity & Happiness

• Research to support this “capacity”
  – PANAS (measure trait affectivity)
  – PA and NA are very stable (24 years; situations)
  – Reflect diff. in characteristic emotional experience
  – Biological basis: PA – 40%; NA – 55% genetic & emerge early in life
Affectivity & Happiness

• **High Positive Affectivity**: frequent and intense periods of pleasant enjoyable moods, generally cheerful, enthusiastic

• **High Negative Affectivity**: more frequent emotional episodes involving feelings of anger, sadness, distress, guilt, and fear
Positive Traits

- Affectivity (PA and NA)
- **Personality (Big 5)**
- Optimism
- Self-esteem
Big 5 and Happiness

- independent factors describe the essential features of individual personality
- highly heritable (50% of variance)
- very stable across lifetime
- validated across cultures
Big 5
Big 5

Extraversion

• sociable, outgoing, engaged in the world

• *introversion* – detached from others, withdrawn, unassertive, contemplative
My friend said I'm neurotic and after thinking about it for 11 hours, I'm just not sure.
Big 5

Neuroticism

• tense, anxious, moody, emotionally reactive, self-conscious and vulnerable

• *emotional stability* – calmness, emotional control, feelings of security, low reactivity
Frank and Ernest

Now these may lower your resistance somewhat, so take a couple now and we'll talk about your bill.
Big 5

Agreeableness

• concerned with getting along with others, even if compromise own interests – trusting, helpful, compliant

• *antagonism* – disagreeableness, suspicion and distrust of others, non-compliant
Big 5

Conscientiousness

• disciplined, controlled, organization – competent, persistent, dutiful

• *undirectedness* – disorganized, impulsive, careless, neglectful
Big 5

Openness to experience

• imaginative, creative, preference for variety/novelty, aesthetics (art/beauty)

• non-openness – practical-minded, preference for routine, conformity, straightforward
Very happy people study: Results

• Top 10% of people
• E, A, and low N associated with “happiness”
• O and C not significant
Big 5 and PWB

• Personality may contribute to well-being in other ways

• Traits not directly related to affect (conscientiousness; openness) show relatively strong correlations with PWB (i.e., self-acceptance, mastery, purpose in life)
Might extraverts be happier because the world seems to “favour” them?
World designed for extraverts

- Group projects
- Classroom arrangements
- TV protagonists
- Valuing “people skills”
Development of Culture of Personality

- “First impressions” became important
- Focus on how other perceive them
- Become a “performing self”
Development of Culture of Personality

• Shows up in self-help books in 1920s
  – “Masterful personality”
  – Become a “mighty likeable fellow”
  – “to know what to say and how to say it”
  – become fascinating, visibly charismatic
Implications

- Offset quietness
- Learn to socialize
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Pharmaceutical solution – 1955 – anti-anxiety drug (Miltown)
Implications: Overlooking substance

Phone study (deliver same information)

*Talkers* perceived as:

- smarter,
- better leaders,
- more likeable, and
- better looking
Positive Traits

• Affectivity (PA and NA)
• Personality (Big 5)
• Optimism
• Self-esteem
Optimism

2 ways of thinking about optimism
Optimism as trait/disposition

• Optimism is a *global expectation that the future will bring a bounty of good things and a scarcity of bad things*

• Pessimism – the future will have more bad outcomes than good
Life Orientation Test (LOT-R)

• In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
• If something can go wrong for me, it will.
• I'm always optimistic about my future.
• I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
• I rarely count on good things happening to me.
• Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.
Optimism as trait/disposition

• Personal resource that fosters resistance to distress
  – Resistance to postpartum depression
  – Recovering from coronary bypass
  – Dealing with breast cancer
  – Caregiver stress
  – Adjustment to college
  – Etc., etc., etc.
Optimism as an explanatory style

How people explain why bad things happen
Optimism as an explanatory style

• Originally focused on thinking patterns of persons with depression

• Pessimists
  – Stable (enduring & unlikely to change)
  – Global (affect’s aspects of their lives)
  – Internal (stems from self rather than external)

• Optimists: unstable, specific, external
Explanatory Style Assessments

Attributional Style Questionnaire

• Brief descriptions of pos’t & neg’t events & describe major cause & rate on internal-external, stable-unstable, global-specific
Attributional style questionnaire

• negative event ("You can’t get all the work done that others expect of you")

• positive events ("Your romantic partner has bene treating you more lovingly")
How optimism works

• Source of motivation
  – Easier to initiate action & protective if bad events are temporary/specific
Unrealistic optimism

• Expectations too far removed from reality
• Underestimate likelihood of negative life events
Positive illusions

• Some **optimism** built into human nature?
• Suffer if view is “too close” to reality
• 4 positive illusions we share
  – Better than average
  – Rosy future
  – Exaggerate control over our lives
  – Attribute failures to external factors
• Absence linked with mild depression
Can pessimism be useful?
Defensive Pessimism

• Positive functions
  – Soften blow of failure; success a pleasant surprise
  – Prepare in advance to avoid failure
  – “harness” anxiety into a productive purpose
Defensive Pessimism

• As successful as optimists, but diff strategy
• Need to follow to be successful; if blocked, then poor outcomes
• Emotional price – lower self-esteem; interpersonal costs
Positive Traits

• Affectivity and Temperament (PA and NA)
• Personality (Big 5)
• Optimism
• Self-esteem
Self-esteem

“It's not your job to like me – it's mine”

- Byron Katie
Self-esteem

• One of the most heavily researched areas of psychology
• Strong evidence for stability (stable 6 to 83 yrs.)
• Strong predictor of PA (positive affect) & life satisfaction
Why is self-esteem?

• Self-worth that results when the self judges itself
• Based on our judgements of our abilities, talents, relationships, successes, goals
• Motivated to protect, enhance, maintain
• Usually successful: most mid-range
Self-esteem

• High SE
  – favourable view of self (competent, likeable, attractive, successful)

• Low SE
  – uncertain or conflicted view of the self (true self) – vulnerable to life’s ups and downs
Why do we want high self-esteem?

• Buffer & cope with life experiences
• Evolutionary perspective: Maintain social relationships! **Sociometer theory (monitor social inclusion & exclusion)**
Global Self-Esteem

- “I feel I have a number of good qualities”
- “I take a positive attitude toward myself”
- “I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”
Contingencies of worth

• Global measures, too oversimplified
• Domain or category of outcome on which a person staked his or her self-esteem
Contingencies of worth

• Impact on SE depends on relevance/importance
  – E.g., getting a “c” = hard for some, not for others

• Powerful predictors of behaviour
  – E.g., appearance important to self-worth, then spend more hours grooming
Self-esteem: The Dark Side

1) Wrong contingencies

Making self-esteem contingent on an area/domain of life that is being continually frustrated and not affirmed (we all do this)

For example: financial success
2) Contingent vs non-contingent SE

- INVOLVES JUDGMENT
- Contingent SE (pressure to meet external standards)
- versus non-contingent SE (unconditional – inherent value)
3) Pursuing self-esteem

• Pursuit may undermine WB
• Missing out on other basic needs
  – E.g., high GPA, but low competence
  – E.g., high approval from others, but low autonomy
PERSONALITY

CHARACTER
Break
Exercise

• Think of someone you hold in high regard and look up to as a model for yourself and others.
• Make a list of 4 or 5 qualities that make the person deserving of your respect.
Positive vs virtue traits

• Positive traits
  – Extraversion, PA, optimism, self-esteem, etc.
  – Not the full picture of positive traits
  – Additional way to think about positive traits: “good character”
  – E.g., integrity, courage, honesty, kindness, wisdom, fairness, modesty
Virtue & character

• Good for 2 reasons:
  – Increase life satisfaction, make life more meaningful and healthy
  – However, valued in their own right (connected to religious & secular mores)
“The Culture of Character”

• Previous ideal
  – What counted was how we were in private (or when anonymous)
  – Serious, disciplined, honourable
Good character: Self-help

- Citizenship
- Duty
- Work
- Golden deeds
- Honor
- Reputation
- Morals
- Manners
- Integrity
The difference

- **Personality**
  - Easy to read; either at first meeting or soon after
  - Largely determined by heredity

- **Good Character**
  - Longer to figure out
  - Traits revealed in specific (and uncommon?) circumstances
  - Malleable with great effort
Mistakes we make

• Who we bring into our lives:
  – Judgements based on personality
  – assume things about their character

• Example:
  – If someone is outgoing, confident, and fun, we tend to think they are honest, moral and kind
Mistakes we make

• Why connect personality to character?
  – Want to like people we already like
  – Character judgements are work and time-consuming
Values in Action Project

• What exactly is a human virtue?
• Is there a common set of human qualities universally regarded as positive virtues?
Values in Action Project

- Peterson & Seligman
- Classification system that focuses on human strengths (opposite of DSM)
- Candidates generated by examining philosophy, religion, cultural traditions
In his epistle to the Christians living in Galatia, St. Paul composed a list that has become famous even outside church circles that he identifies as the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit in the believer’s life (5:22-23):

- Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control
Values in Action (VIA) Project

- 6 virtues
- 24 underlying character strengths – means of developing the virtue

Virtues (6) & character strengths (24)

**The VIA Classification of Strengths**

- **Wisdom**
  - Creativity
  - Curiosity
  - Judgment
  - Love of Learning
  - Perspective

- **Courage**
  - Bravery
  - Perseverance
  - Honesty
  - Zest

- **Humanity**
  - Love
  - Kindness
  - Social Intelligence

- **Justice**
  - Teamwork
  - Fairness
  - Leadership

- **Temperance**
  - Forgiveness
  - Humility
  - Prudence
  - Self-Regulation

- **Transcendence**
  - Apprec of Beauty & Excellence
  - Gratitude
  - Hope
  - Humor
  - Spirituality
Courage

- Emotional strength to overcome fear in the face of opposition and adversity
  - Confronting death/illness
  - Confronting one’s own limitations/weaknesses
  - Standing up for convictions
Humanity

• Capacity for sympathy, empathy, compassion and love in our relationships with others
Justice

• Fair-minded and even-handed – rather than being biased by self-interest
Temperance

- Strength to control excesses and restrain impulses that may harm the self or others
Transcendence

• Connects the individual to a deeper meaning of life
• Puts things in perspective
Measurement

• Develop measures for 24 strengths
• Used existing instruments
• 240 item self-report questionnaire
• Outcome: character strength profile and identifies your top 5 strengths “signature”
Can using our strengths lead us to be happier?
Positive Psychotherapy
Positive psychotherapy

• Broaden the scope of traditional psychotherapy
• Address positive resources (positive emotions, character strength, meaning) in addition to treating psychopathology
Positive psychotherapy

• Based on 3 assumptions:
  – Inherently desire growth, fulfillment, happiness
  – Positive resources are as real as symptoms
  – Effective therapy can also include discussion of positive resources
Positive Psychotherapy

- Seligman’s work (PPT):
- Methods *(part of)*
  - Identify and cultivate own strengths
  - Acts of forgiveness, gratitude, cultivating more optimistic attitudes, helping others
Positive Psychotherapy

• Results
  – Found effectiveness of PPT
  – Example: **Reductions in depression symptoms** (6mon-1yr)
Wisdom

Don't let your happiness depend on something you may lose.

C.S. Lewis
Wisdom

• Doesn’t necessarily follow from formal education or a high IQ
• Practical intelligence & good judgement
• Learning life’s lessons (through hardship)
Balance Theory

• Tacit knowledge (practical) – learned in the “trenches”

• Tacit knowledge becomes wisdom when used to achieve a common good

• Attempt to balance conflicting interests and choices
Balance Theory

• 3 interests: interpersonal; intrapersonal; extrapersonal
• 3 choices: adaptation; environment (including others); new environment
• Not perfect, but best possible balance

• EXAMPLE: parents with frail health
Measure wisdom?
Wisdom Model (Baltes)

- Wisdom = **Expert knowledge concerning “fundamental pragmatics of life”**
- Developed 5 criteria
  - **Factual knowledge**: Knowing the 'whats' of the human condition and human nature
  - **Procedural knowledge**: Strategies and approaches for solving life’s problems, achieving goals, dealing with conflict
Wisdom Model (Baltes)

- *Lifespan contextualism*: Knowledge of life's settings and social situations and how they change over time
- *Relativism of values*: Being aware of cultural differences and being considerate and sensitive to different values
Wisdom Model (Baltes)

- **Awareness and management of uncertainty**: Recognizing the limits of knowledge, and understanding the uncertainty of the future
Wisdom assessment

• Present with challenging, hypothetical life situations/dilemmas
• What should be considered? Done?
• Tape recorded and valued by trained judges on 5 criterial
"A 14 year old girl wants to move out of her house right away. What should be considered in this situation?"
Low-scoring Response

"She's only 14 years old! She should never be aloud to move out. She's too young to make such a big decision."

The participant failed to show any of the five criteria above. They didn't think about the details of what could be going on in this girl's life, and just focused on her age.
High-scoring response

"She is really young, but she might live in an abusive home and need to move to a safer environment. Perhaps her parents are too poor to afford food. Also, it might depend on her culture. She may be in an unhappy arranged marriage in some cultures at that age."

This participant understood how varied her situation could be. They looked past her age and noted the different social, cultural, and economical situations that would validate her need to leave.
Wisdom & happiness?

- Emotional price tag (deeper meanings, dilemmas of life)?
- Not guided by “pleasure principle”
Wisdom & happiness?

• Less freq NA & PA
• More freq feelings of active involvement (interest, alertness, attentive)
• Excel at emotional regulation?
Next week

• Choosing the “right” goals to improve our well-being.
• With enhanced focus on materialistic goals.