

# POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IV

Presented by

CONTINUING PSYCHOLOGY EDUCATION INC.

6 CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS

“Positive psychology, that’s a good way to spend your time.”  
Snyder & Lopez (2002, p. 766)

## Course Objective

The purpose of this course is to provide an understanding of the concept of positive psychology. Major topics include: gratitude, love, appetitive and aversive relationship processes, self-verification, humility, the biology of social support, sustainable happiness, and meaning in life.

## Accreditation

Continuing Psychology Education Inc. is approved by the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (Provider # 3329), Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors (Provider # 386), and Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists (Provider # 110). This course, Positive Psychology IV, meets the qualifications for 6 hours of continuing education for social workers, LPCs, and LMFTs as required by the above-mentioned State Boards; for psychologists, LSSPs, LPAs, and provisionally licensed psychologists as required by the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists; and for LCDCs as required by the Texas LCDC Program.

## Mission Statement

Continuing Psychology Education Inc. provides the highest quality continuing education designed to fulfill the professional needs and interests of mental health professionals. Resources are offered to improve professional competency, maintain knowledge of the latest advancements, and meet continuing education requirements mandated by the profession.

## Learning Objectives

Upon completion, the participant will be able to:

1. Explain the positive influence of gratitude on happiness.
2. Describe empirical findings on the subject of love.
3. Discuss the effect of appetitive and aversive relationship processes on relationship satisfaction and individual functioning.
4. Acknowledge that self-verification is adaptive and benefits intrapsychic and interpersonal functioning.
5. Comprehend the value of humility.
6. Convey that social support can produce positive health outcomes through decreasing the physiological stress response.
7. Expound upon qualitative differences between happy and unhappy people and the effects of happiness-enhancing strategies.
8. Emphasize the importance of having meaning in life.

## Faculty

Neil Eddington, Ph.D.

Richard Shuman, MFT

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Foundations underlying the positive psychology movement include humanistic psychology as elucidated by Rogers (1951) and Maslow (1970); primary prevention programs focused on wellness (Albee, 1982; Cowen, 1994); human agency and efficacy (Bandura, 1989); giftedness studies (i.e., Winner, 2000); interpretations of intelligence viewed as multiple (i.e., Gardner, 1983; Sternberg, 1985); and quality of life studies among medical and psychiatric patients transcending only symptoms and diseases (i.e., Levitt, Hagan, & Bucosky, 1990).

Research on positive psychology covers diverse topics; this course explores the concepts of gratitude, love, appetitive and aversive relationship processes, self-verification, humility, the biology of social support, sustainable happiness, and meaning in life, with the goal of improving the quality of life.

### GRATITUDE

An operational definition of the construct of gratitude is: People experience the emotion of gratitude (e.g., state gratitude) upon acknowledging that something good has happened to them and they largely attribute the positive outcome to someone else (derived from Emmons, 2004). "Someone else" can be a supernatural force or human benefactors; the perceived benefit can include the absence of a negative event (i.e., avoiding a car accident while driving in inclement weather). When feeling grateful toward impersonal forces and objects (e.g., I'm grateful that fate was on my side while driving in the storm), people are granting intentional benevolence onto the impersonal benefactor (Watkins, Van Gelder, & Frias, 2009).

A common assessment of the emotion of gratitude is asking participants to report their extent of feeling grateful, thankful, and appreciative (McCullough et al., 2002).

Personality wise, grateful individuals frequently are agreeable, emotionally stable, self-confident but less narcissistic, and non-materialistic (McComb, Watkins, & Koles, 2004; McCullough et al., 2002; McLeod, Maleki, Elster, & Watkins, 2005; Watkins & Woodward et al., 2003). Gratitude appears to be positively related to spirituality, for example, grateful people exhibit more intrinsic religious motivation and less extrinsic religiosity (Watkins, Woodward et al., 2003). Grateful people report that religion has more importance to them, that they attend more religious services, read the Scriptures more often, pray more, and state having a closer relationship with the Lord than less grateful people (McCullough et al., 2002).

Questions remain regarding the associations between gratitude and religiosity. Given that most religions encourage gratitude, the assumed causal direction is from religiosity to gratitude. A counterpoint suggests that since positive affect facilitates one's capability to understand meaningful relationships, and resultantly, meaning in life (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006), possibly gratitude promotes religiosity. Future research examining grateful

experiences in the absence of a human benefactor should prove interesting (Watkins, Gibling et al., 2005).

Correlations of trait gratitude and with emotional well-being show moderate to strong relationships, indicating that grateful people tend to be happy people (McCullough, et al., 2002; Watkins, Woodward et al., 2003). Relative to the 24 Values in Action strengths, gratitude was third in importance (behind hope and zest) in predicting subjective well-being (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Trait gratitude predicted increased happiness one month later (Spangler, Webber, Xiong, & Watkins, 2008).

Personality traits are known to be stronger predictors of happiness than demographic variables (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Interestingly, gratitude predicted happiness more than the Big Five personality traits (extroversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience), and gratitude was the strongest trait predictor of happiness (McComb et al., 2004; McCullough et al., 2002; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008). These findings are upheld by self-report measures and informant reports (McCullough et al., 2002).

Research supports the theory that gratitude enhances happiness, but such correlations do not address causation. Gratitude can be the consequence of being happy, happiness can be the consequence of feeling gratitude, or both happiness and gratitude can result from a third variable such as reward sensitivity. Several experimental studies have supported the hypothesis that gratitude causes happiness. In two studies, gratitude manipulations improved mood state (studies 3 and 4, Watkins, Woodward et al., 2003). Three studies observed that the practice of counting one's blessings improved several subjective well-being measures relative to control conditions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). This intervention also proved effective with adolescents (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). These results were replicated with the additional finding that more is not necessarily better in relation to counting your blessings; greater improvement in life satisfaction occurred for individuals who counted their blessings once a week as compared to three times per week (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). The efficacy of gratitude interventions is assumed to be moderated by individual differences.

Another effective gratitude intervention involved participants writing a letter of gratitude to someone they believe had benefited them but had "not properly thanked" and then they delivered the letter to their benefactor (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005, p. 416). This intervention produced strong happiness increases and depression decreases compared to the placebo condition, and was more immediately impactful than other positive psychology interventions. Significant treatment gains remained one month after the intervention, but happiness and depression scores returned to baseline by six months (this temporal decrement can be expected due to "hedonic adaptation" which notes that people return to their normal happiness baseline level after a positive or negative event).

Watkins, Van Gelder, and Frias (2009) propose several explanations for the positive influence of gratitude on happiness. First, they suggest that gratitude enhances positive affect, as well as a person's enjoyment of benefits. Chesterton expressed, "gratitude produced. . . the most purely joyful moments that have been known to man" (1924/1989, p. 78). His rationale was, "All goods look better when they look like gifts." In support, studies indicate that there is greater tendency to feel grateful when people believe that a benefit was intentionally given for their well-being (McCullough et al., 2001).

Second, gratitude may enhance mood by guiding people's focus to good things already in their possession and away from things they lack, which prevents unpleasant emotional states associated with upward social comparison and envy. In fact, trait envy and materialism are negatively correlated with trait gratitude (McCullough et al., 2002).

Third, gratitude may promote happiness by improving one's social relationships. Stable social relationships seems to be one of the most reliable predictors of happiness (Diener et al., 1999). Logically, therefore, if gratitude enhances quality relationships, then it should also enhance happiness.

Informants view grateful people as being more likable (Watkins, Martin, & Faulkner, 2003), and expressions of gratitude produce more social reward (McCullough et al., 2001). It has been hypothesized that gratitude may enhance social bonding (Fredrickson, 2004), and findings support this theory (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008). Gratitude is related to prosocial action tendencies, and inhibits antisocial urges (Watkins, Scheer et al., 2006). Two studies completed by Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) determined that gratitude inductions increased the probability of demonstrating prosocial behavior toward a benefactor or stranger, even when the task was unpleasant. Further, Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) found that experimental inductions of gratitude enhanced trust; trust is an essential quality of healthy relationships, hence, this research may help explain how gratitude might improve happiness through supportive relationships. In sum, these research findings suggest that gratitude may improve happiness because it is a prosocial trait.

Fourth, gratitude may enhance happiness by improving adaptive coping. Resulting from focusing on the positive consequences of a difficult experience that one may be grateful for, a person can understand and accept stressful life events. Research shows that grateful people report having more adaptive coping techniques (i.e., Neal, Watkins, & Kolts, 2005), and report experiencing less posttraumatic symptoms after a trauma compared to less grateful people (e.g., Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006). Gratitude for the Lord also seems to be a buffer for the effect of stress on illness in the elderly ( Krause, 2006). Furthermore, the unpleasantness of negative memories often fades faster for grateful than less grateful people (Watkins, Grimm, & Kolts, 2004). The grateful processing of troubling memories may facilitate closure, lessen the unpleasant effect, and lower the

intrusiveness of these memories (Watkins, Cruz, Holben, & Kolts, 2008).

Fifth, gratitude may promote subjective well-being by increasing the accessibility of positive memories. C. S. Lewis (1996, p. 73) expressed, "A pleasure is only full grown when it is remembered." Logically, past positive events may not benefit one's subjective well-being without the ability to recall these events. Several studies have shown that happy people have greater ability to recall past pleasant events (i.e., Seidlitz & Diener, 1993). Memory processes are assumed to be important to gratitude as well. Watkins, Van Gelder, and Frias (2009) suggest that encoding and reflecting on pleasant events with a sense of gratitude should promote a positive memory bias, which could support one's happiness. Research has revealed that gratitude is associated with a positive memory bias (Watkins, Gilber et al., 2005). For instance, trait gratitude predicts positive memory bias one month later, and this relationship was independent of depression, positive affect, and happiness (Watkins, Van Gelder, & Maleki, 2006). The conclusion is that grateful people seem to reflect more positively on their past, and readily retrievable positive memories may promote one's emotional well-being. If gratitude does enhance a positive memory bias, then gratitude may also foster happiness by decreasing depression (Wood, Maltby, Gillett, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). Supportively, depression is related to a negativistic memory bias, and having at one's disposal an accumulation of positive memories may assist in countering the mood and memory detrimental cycle in depression (Watkins, Grimm, Whitney, & Brown, 2005).

A single action of counting one's blessings will likely not influence long-term happiness, instead, a regular practice of displaying gratitude may yield long-lasting happiness increases. The regularity of gratitude expression required probably depends on the person and type of gratitude practice - future research may address this question.

Gratitude has social benefits, however, such benefits are not attainable if there is suspicion that the person's expression of gratitude is solely to receive more benefits (Carey, Clicque, Leighton, & Milton, 1976). Similarly, gratitude has emotional benefits, but a focus on these benefits may lessen their efficacy. In contrast, authentic gratitude is an emotion focused outside of the self, onto the giver, transcendent of one's own emotional circumstances (Watkins, Van Gelder, & Frias, 2009).

Poetically, Henry Ward Beecher (n.d. para. 1) concluded, "Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul."

## LOVE

Historically, conceptions of love were associated with abstract virtues, for instance, "the good," or to gods. Singer (1984) noted four broad conceptual views of love: "Eros" is desire for the good or for the beautiful; "Philia" is friendship love; "Nomos" is submitting to a god's will, and in human

terms, complying with the desires of a loved one; and "Agape" is a divine bequeath of love upon creation.

Hatfield (1988) contends that passionate love, in the form of intense attraction, has pervaded in all cultures and historical periods, and is a "human universal." Passionate love and marriage with the same person is a more recent cultural adoption. Marriage for love was not a common tradition throughout much of human existence. As this practice developed during the Middle Ages, courtly love comprised an intricate stylized ritual that signified moving away from the tradition of arranged marriages. Courtly love idealized the love felt for a person to whom one was not married.

In a slow moving evolution, this concept of passionate love between man and woman in a courtship context culminated in "love marriages," frequently in dismay to those upholding traditional norms of arranged marriages. Love marriages expanded widely in the Western world during the 18th century. In contemporary times, the perceived link between love and marriage is still changing. A 30-year longitudinal study of college students' perceptions of the relevance of love as a basis for marriage showed that, over the passage of time, participants evaluated romantic love as an increasingly important basis for marriage; also, remaining in love was seen as necessary for marriage continuation (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986). A study of American men and women revealed a stronger connection between love and marriage than a Chinese sample "and also believed that passionate love was a more important prerequisite for entering marriage" (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002, p. 139). Supporting this cultural difference, love and marriage were more strongly related for college students from Western/Westernized nations than their peers from Eastern nations (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995). The strongly perceived link between love and marriage suggests that the high divorce rate may be spurred by the attitude that when passions cease, so do marriages and intimate partnered relationships.

When passion is low in a relationship, friendship is one love component that can strengthen the bond and ease the tension of passion's ebb and flow. Many young couples currently seek partners who are effective companions as well as good lovers. S. Hendrick and Hendrick (1993) instructed college students to write an essay about their romantic relationship or closest friendship. Friendship was the dominant theme used to describe their romantic relationship, and almost 50% of participants named their romantic partner as their closest friend. Additionally, Sprecher and Regan (1998) observed that both companionate love and passionate love were associated with commitment and relationship satisfaction. Friendship is therefore an important component of romantic love, along with passion.

Numerous perspectives on the study of love exist but they can be classified under two broad headings: naturalistic /biological and psychological/social. Naturalistic approaches focus on the body, emotion, and evolutionary heritage (particularly as evolution links to sexuality). The

psychological/social approach highlight concepts such as cognition, social motives, interaction and communication, and various classifications of love.

Naturalistic /Biological Approaches - Berscheid and Walster (1978) define passionate love as two lovers being in a state of total absorption, with mood swings ranging between ecstasy and anguish. Companionate love is the deep affection experienced by two people whose lives are intricately intertwined. Generally, love initiates with the heat of passion and then cools into companionship. Hatfield (1988) contends that passion and companionship coexist in a relationship rather than being sequential, and people seem to want both in their love relationships - other scholars as well agree with this view (i.e., Noller, 1996).

The attachment theory of love emanated from studies by Bowlby (1969), who researched the types of relationships (i.e., secure, anxious, avoidant) that infants develop with their caregivers. It is theorized that these early attachments are causally related to future relationships. Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied attachment theory to adult love relationships and concluded that this model explains the joys and sorrows observed in adult love. The correlation between childhood and adult attachment styles, however, is mixed and needs further study (Feeney & Noller, 1996).

The evolutionary theory of love, for example, Mellen (1981), contends that human survival required an emotional bond between breeding pairs of partners, thus, each partner would nurture their dependent infants. Pairs of partners without this emotional bond lost the evolutionary race due to higher infant mortality. This primitive emotional bonding is considered the dawn of love. The evolutionary psychologist, Buss (1988), reinforces this origination of love by defining love as behaviors performed by both females and males that support the bonding function and ultimately serves to preserve and perpetuate the species.

Psychological/Social Approaches - In the prototype model of love, Fehr (1994) assessed that respondents rated companionate love as representing the most typical form of love (the prototype or "best example"), with maternal love, parental love, and friendship illustrating the best examples. Passionate and sexual love were viewed as less representative (less prototypical) of love. In another prototypical study of love, respondents rated the quintessential features of love and passion was included on the list of central features but it ranked below several companionate features, such as honesty and trust (Regan, Kocan, and Whitlock, 1998). The most general concept of love is companionship within this prototype research model of love. Romantic love is conceptualized as companionate love with passion.

The self-expansion model of love, construed by Aron and Aron (1996), is based on Eastern schools of thought on the concept of self and suggests that people have a basic motive for self-expansion. Such self-growth can include physical possessions, power, and influence. Falling in love produces a fast expansion of self-boundaries and is thus pleasurable. Two people falling in love can mutually include one another into this expansion process (e.g., Aron, Norman, Aron,

McKenna, & Heyman, 2000), in turn, "you and me" becomes "we."

Sternberg (1986) devised the triangular theory of love in which love is a mixture of intimacy, passion, and commitment. A relationship can demonstrate high or low levels of each concept resulting in eight types of possible love. For example, "consummate love" is the presence of all three features, "nonlove" is the absence of all three, "liking/friendship involves intimacy, infatuated love is passion, empty love is commitment (as in an arranged marriage), romantic love is passion and intimacy, companionate love is intimacy and commitment, fatuous love is passion and commitment (a commitment is made based on passion but without the stability of intimate involvement). Consummate love is a complete form of love, depicting an ideal relationship that people strive towards. This "perfect couple," according to Sternberg, continues to enjoy great sex at least fifteen years into the relationship, believes no other person can offer a happier long-term bond, confronts and overcomes their few difficulties smoothly, and genuinely enjoys the relationship with one another. Sternberg warns that maintaining a consummate love is more difficult than initially acquiring it. He advises that enacting the three components of love is vital, by affirming, "Without expression, even the greatest of loves can die." Consummate love, therefore, is not always permanent, for instance, companionate love will develop if passion dissipates over time.

Investigation into a typology of the different ways that people love has resulted in six relatively unrelated styles of love. "Eros" is characterized by passionate love, the lover idealizes the partner, has specific preferences for physical characteristics in the partner, and pursues love intensely. "Ludus" is love played as a game, for mutual satisfaction, does not have the intensity of Eros, lacks commitment, and can occur with different people simultaneously. "Storge" is friendship love and is synonymous with companionate love. "Pragma" is practical love and is characterized by "shopping" for a partner with a list of preferred qualities clearly in mind (i.e., computer dating). "Mania" is manic love such that the individual desperately wants love but frequently experiences pain associated with the process. Specifically, there may be a cycle of jealousy, emotionally-charged breakups, followed by dramatic reunifications, thus, the relationship is described as "stormy passion." The sixth type of love, "agape," is selfless and involves giving love due to genuine concern for the partner's well-being. Much research supports the styles of love conception for the examination of love (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006).

Hecht, Marston, and Larkey (1994) introduced a typology of "love ways," which categorized the verbal and nonverbal ways, (styles) of expressing love to a partner. They observed seven different ways of communicating love that represented the experiences of more than 90% of lovers:

Active love - Love centers on activity and doing things together; there are feelings of increased self-confidence and strength.

Collaborative love - Love is viewed as a partnership involving mutual support, negotiation, enhanced energy, and intensified emotion.

Committed love - Love is based on commitment that produces a strong sense of connection, spending time with one another, and planning for the future.

Intuitive love - Love is a feeling that is generally communicated with nonverbal behavior as touch and gaze, and experienced through physical reactions, for example, feeling warm inside, losing appetite, and feeling nervous.

Secure love - Love is based on security and intimacy; it is experienced via a sense of safety and warmth and communicated through intimate self-disclosure.

Expressive love - Love is demonstrated by overt behavior, doing things for the partner, and expressing "I love you" often.

Traditional romantic love - Love manifests togetherness and commitment and a sense of feeling healthy and beautiful.

Awareness and understanding of each other's love style can help perpetuate a happy relationship.

Marston and Hecht (1994) offered ways to manage love styles to enhance relationship satisfaction. First, it is recommended to recognize that one's love style may be different from their partner's. John may express love through public affection but he should not expect Mary to necessarily reciprocate because she may dislike such, instead, she may show love through shared activities. Second, they suggest not overvaluing specific elements of one's love way. Mary has an active love style and she is concerned that John is developing different sports and movie interests from her own. Mary would benefit by realizing that other aspects of their relationship can express love. Third, people are advised to not verbalize statements such as "If you really loved me, you would tell me more often," rather, they can be cognizant of numerous other ways to express their love. Two partners may have different expectations about love, hence, it may be wise to value what each person is contributing rather than forcing the other to match their own love style.

Murray and Holmes (1997) found that the positive illusions that love partners have about each other and their relationship may influence relationship outcomes in a positive manner. Reflecting this finding, the perceptions of a partner's disclosure was more predictive of relationship satisfaction than the partner's actual level of disclosure (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). These results show that love is communicated in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways.

Gender differences in love styles are apparent in most studies, for instance, men frequently report more game-playing (ludic) love whereas women report more friendship-based (storgic) and practical (pragmatic) love (C. Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). Men also report more altruistic (agapic) love (C. Hendrick et al., 1998). Not surprisingly, game-playing love has shown a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction (S. Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). Similarly, women's tendency to display more friendship oriented and practical love styles than men is not

strongly related to satisfaction. Men and women have few differences regarding passionate love, which is strongly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Actually, passion is highly predictive of relationship satisfaction across age and cultures (Contreras, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1996).

Regan and Berscheid (1999) observed that sexual desire is a fundamental component of romantic love. Positive relationships have been found between love and sex (C. Hendrick, Hendrick, & Reich, 2006), for instance, greater erotic and altruistic love are associated with more idealistic sexuality, and game-playing love is related positively to casual and biologically oriented sexuality.

S. Hendrick and Hendrick (2002) found that people link love and sex (perceived as more than simply intercourse) within their romantic relationships. This research determined that love was the most important thing in the relationship and it took precedence over sex in significance and sequencing. Additionally, sex was believed to be a profoundly important way to demonstrate love.

A large-scale study of sexual behavior in the United States concluded that respondents who reported the greatest physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction in their relationships were in partnered, monogamous relationships (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). One research conclusion is that though love may be experienced without sexual/physical intimacy and sex may be experienced without love, generally, love and sex are linked (S. Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2002).

Research is finding that respect can positively influence romantic relationships and combined with love can lead to relationship satisfaction. John Gottman (1994), the distinguished couple researcher, wrote, most couples desire "just two things from their marriage - love and respect" (p. 18). Frei and Shaver (2002) developed a Respect for Partner Scale and found that respect for one's partner, coupled with love (Rubin, 1970), was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction.

S. Hendrick and Hendrick (2006a) devised a Respect Toward Partner scale using the six dimensions of respect illustrated by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000), including the variables of attention, curiosity, dialog, empowerment, healing, and self-respect. This scale correlated with love; respect significantly and positively correlated with passionate (erotic) love, altruistic (agapic) love, and friendship (storgic) love; it significantly and negatively correlated with game-playing (ludic) love. Frei and Shaver's (2002) respect scale correlated significantly and positively with Eros, Pragma, and Agape, and significantly and negatively with Ludus and Mania. Eros and the Respect Toward Partner Scale were also strong predictors of relationship satisfaction (S. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006b).

Being in a relationship, and being in love, substantially contributes to the human condition. Baumeister and Leary (1995) profess that humans are a group species with a "need to belong." In support, Myers and Diener (1995) state, "Throughout the Western world, married people of both sexes report more happiness than those never married,

divorced, or separated" (p. 15). A large sample study, which looked at links between happiness and various relationship variables, found that individuals who were in love were significantly happier than those not in love; further, happiness scores correlated positively with passionate love, friendship love, and relationship satisfaction (S. Hendrick & Hendrick, 2002).

Stress negatively affects love and sex, in fact, "less stress and more free time are the top things 45-59-year-olds say would most improve their sex life" (Jacoby, 1999, p. 43). Also, "the vast majority of the medical complaints brought to doctors' offices are stress- and belief-related" (Benson, 1996, p. 292). Therapists who assist clients to simplify their lives, in turn, lowering their stress levels, may indirectly also be improving their relationships (love and sex).

## APPETITIVE AND AVERSIVE RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES

Intimate relationships represent one of the most important components of life and close relationships significantly influence health and well-being. Having a large social network links to a lower mortality risk (Berkman & Syme, 1979), and the absence of strong social ties was found to be a mortality risk factor equivalent to smoking and high blood pressure (House, Landis, & Umberson, (1988). A review of 81 studies on social support and social integration revealed a consistent relationship between social ties and enhanced physiological functioning of the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Close relationships also strongly correlate with subjective reports of happiness and life satisfaction (i.e., Diener & Seligman, 2002).

In contrast, interpersonal relationships also provide negative outcomes (e.g., Rook, 1984). Partner loss due to death or divorce can be detrimental and frequently results in large well-being decreases (e.g., Stroebe, Stroebe, Abakoumkin, & Schut, 1996). Further, negative social relationships can impart much stress and pain (i.e., Kiecolt-Glaser, 1999; Seeman, 2001), hence, relationship quality is relevant. Marriage appears to be associated with positive health and psychological outcomes but only if the marriage is happy and nondistressed (i.e., Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). In sum, social ties improve health and well-being but relationships characterized by negative emotions and conflict accompany the risk of health and well-being adversity.

One way to differentiate between the positive and negative features of relationships is by examining the appetitive and aversive dimensions of motivation which distinguishes between moving "toward" rewarding and desired outcomes (appetitive processes) and moving "away" from punishing and undesired outcomes (aversive processes; i.e., Carver, 1996). The appetitive domain manages approach-oriented behavior such as concentrating on rewarding stimuli, and the aversive domain regulates avoidance-oriented behavior such as focusing on punishing stimuli (Gable, 2006).

Separate biological systems regulate the two processes (Elliot & Covington, 2001), specifically, brain research has shown that individual differences in the behavioral activation system (BAS) and the behavioral inhibition system (BIS) scores (i.e., Gray, 1987) differentially predicted prefrontal cortex activity in that individuals with higher BAS exhibited more greater resting activity in the left prefrontal cortex while participants with higher BIS demonstrated greater resting activity in the right prefrontal cortex (Sutton & Davidson, 1997). Additionally, the appetitive and aversive systems are thought to be mainly independent (Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2003) in relation to motivation, affect, personality, attitude formation, and more.

Videotaped interactions of partners demonstrating aversive social relationship behaviors such as anger, violence, and conflict have illustrated negative patterns, for example, demand-withdrawal patterns, whereby criticism and defensiveness underlie conflict management (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Gottman's (1998) research identified some predictors of divorce, including contempt, negative affect reciprocity, stonewalling, belligerence, and criticism. Supportively, it is theorized that two of the most relevant variables influencing relationship satisfaction and stability are conflict and negative affect management (Christensen & Walczynsky, 1997; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998).

Contrarily, trust in relationships produces predictability, dependability, and other positive outcomes (Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001). Likewise, "felt security" (i.e., Holmes, 2002), defined as feeling secure in one's relationship, helps to defend against the threat of rejection and fosters feeling more loved and accepted by one's partner (e.g., Murray, 2005).

People differ relative to the frequency and influence of positive emotions on a day-to-day basis. Specifically, individuals who display higher approach-oriented motivation frequently experience more positive emotions daily and are likely to attribute more of their daily subjective well-being to their positive emotional experiences (Updegraff, Gable, & Taylor, 2004). These effects were independent of the impact of any negative emotions, which supports the research indicating that positive and negative emotions are essentially independent dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single continuum (i.e., Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Maintaining focus on positive emotional experiences has interpersonal advantages. For example, people who commonly reported greater positive affect showed more facility with social interactions and demonstrated interactions of higher quality but negative affect did not predict either of these valued outcomes (Berry & Hansen, 1996). Further, a daily diary study of friendship dyads noted that high positive affect linked to feelings of closeness while high negative affect was associated with feelings of irritation and conflict in the friendship (Berry, Willingham, & Thayer, 2000).

Numerous positive emotions are fundamentally social in nature. The emotions of love, gratitude, and compassion, for instance, usually lead to an interpersonal target. Emotions in the genre of joy can stimulate play behavior that bolsters

relationships (Fredrickson, 2001). Emotions such as pride can produce interpersonal benefits by encouraging people to divulge their achievements and thus strengthen interpersonal communication and bonding (Lewis, 1993). For individuals who have positive emotions together, such as amusement and excitement, these shared experiences can yield possibly long-lasting social bonds (Fredrickson, 2001). The emotion of gratitude associates with greater prosocial activity along with enhanced empathy for others (e.g., McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

Social support in close relationships is based on the interaction of individual differences (i.e., attachment style), contextual factors (e.g., ones' mood, severity of the stressor), relationship factors (i.e., satisfaction), and the support that is offered (Lakey, McCabe, Fiscaro, & Drew, 1996).

Social support research traditionally has examined the communication of negative and stressful events to others. A newer concept within this construct involves "capitalization," defined as disclosing positive events with others and acquiring additional benefits as a consequence of the disclosure (Gable, Reis, Impert, & Asher, 2004). These researchers found that various benefits arise from sharing positive events with others, such as increased daily positive affect and well-being, and these increases are also significant when controlling for benefits generated by the positive event. Moreover, it is theorized that capitalization interactions can produce greater relationship intimacy and closeness without risking one's self-esteem or self-worth as might occur when requesting support for a negative event (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000).

Capitalization happens frequently, in fact, Gable and colleagues assessed that people share positive events with others about 80% of days during a 10-day period. The greatest capitalization benefits occur when the listener reacts actively and constructively, for example, responding with enthusiasm and genuineness (Gable et al., 2004). A laboratory study of responses to positive event disclosures also determined that active and constructive responses significantly linked to positive post-interaction reports and to various relationship well-being measures (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Another concept within the relevance of positive events is "savoring," which is focusing on and attending to positive emotions and experiences (Bryant, 1989). Supportively, participants were randomly assigned to positive reminiscence conditions and positive reminiscences produces greater savoring and increases reports of happiness (i.e., Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005).

Another measure of appetitive processes in relationships involves intimacy and perceived partner responsiveness (i.e., Reis & Patrick, 1996). People possess a need to belong and to pursue intimacy with close others (Reis & Shaver, 1988). A model of intimacy, proposed by Reis and Shaver, commences with an individual's self-disclosure to a romantic partner followed by the partner interpreting the disclosure (through the lens of individual differences and contextual factors) and responding accordingly. The disclosing person then interprets the partner's response (through the lens of

factors such as goals, personality traits, and context). The outcome of this process may be "perceived partner responsiveness," which is the sense that one is understood, validated, and cared for by the partner (Reis & Patrick, 1996).

Self-disclosure and responsiveness are thereby key elements of intimacy. Self-disclosure by itself is not sufficient to establish intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996), rather, much research shows the relevance of perceived responsiveness to self (i.e., Reis, Clark, & Holmes 2004), and its link to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Reis & Patrick, 1996) and felt security (i.e., Holmes, 2002). The effects of disclosure and responsiveness on intimacy was studied by Laurenceau et al. (1998) who observed that perceived partner responsiveness was a strong mediator of the association between self-disclosure and intimacy. Manne and colleagues (2004) studied couples in which one partner had cancer and also determined that perceived partner responsiveness mediated the link between self-disclosure and increases in intimacy.

A further important appetitive process in relationships is self-expansion (i.e., Aron, Aron, Trudor, & Nelson, 1991), defined as including a close other into one's concept of the self. The self-expansion process can involve adopting a close other's "resources, perspectives and characteristics" (Aron et al., 1991, p. 243). Findings show that partners' shared involvement in novel and arousing experiences can increase relationship satisfaction, possibly due to such experiences providing continued self-expansion. The value of appetitive processes in relationships is apparent as evidenced by findings showing that partners who are motivated to experience fun and exciting activities together, (e.g., outdoor sports and travel), are likely to exhibit high levels of marital satisfaction (i.e., Hill, 1988).

Experimental studies also illustrate that relationship satisfaction increases when couples engage in novel and physiologically arousing tasks (Aron et al., 2000). Presumably, high positive affect rather than lower negative affect may be the mediating factor between such novel tasks and enhanced relationship satisfaction (Strong & Aron, 2006). These results transfer from married couples to other relationships as well, for instance, Fraley and Aron (2004) observed an increase in stranger closeness resulting from a shared humorous experience. Continued exploration on how couples maintain relationship fun and excitement may help to prevent decreased satisfaction.

Investigations are underway into the biological systems that regulate appetitive and aversive social processes. Panksepp, for example, suggests that an underlying reward system in the brain may "mediate specific behavioral sequences related to appetitive engagements with the world" (Panksepp, Knutson, & Burgdorf, 2002, p. 462). This "seeking system" for social rewards is thought to be independent of a separation-distress system. Likewise, analysis of the brain using electroencephalograms (EEGs) shows that different parts of the brain are activated when people approach rewarding stimuli versus avoiding punishing

stimuli (i.e., Pizzagalli, Sherwood, Henriques, & Davidson, 2005). Examination of the biological basis of affiliative behavior suggests that the hormone oxytocin seems to lower anxiety and increase a person's willingness to trust others and participate in prosocial behavior (Bartz & Hollander, 2006). Neuroscience research may ultimately help explain the association of interpersonal relationships and biology (e.g., Fisher, Aron, Mashek, Li, & Brown, 2002).

Related to appetitive social processes, positive emotions can facilitate interpersonal and intrapersonal well-being. Findings reveal that positive emotions and dispositional positive affect are related to better health. Harker and Keltner (2001) observed that women who displayed more positive affect in their college yearbook photographs reported better emotional and physical health thirty years later. Also, autobiographies of Catholic nuns written when the women were in their early twenties indicated a significant correlation between high positive emotional content in the autobiographies and increased longevity (Danner, Snowdon & Friesen, 2001). One way that positive emotions may influence health is through the beneficial consequences of social relationships. Supportively, individuals displaying higher trait levels of positive affect and agreeableness are likely to have better relationships (Watson, Clark, McIntyre, & Hamaker, 1992), which may result in enhanced health and well-being.

Examination of appetitive relationship processes, such as positive emotions, capitalization, perceived partner responsiveness, and novel experiences sheds light on the anatomy of healthy relationships. Continued research on positive psychology and close relationships may further demonstrate how positive variables in relationships impact relationship satisfaction and individual functioning.

## SELF-VERIFICATION

John Steinbeck originally titled his famous novel, *Of Mice and Men* as "Something That Happened," which mirrored his life philosophy of accepting things as they are without dispensing judgment (Shillinglaw, 1994), a philosophy he termed "is thinking." He wrote that this style of thinking "concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually 'is' ... (Steinbeck, 1951). Steinbeck believed "is thinking" was adaptive because it promoted understanding and acceptance. Self-verification theory reflects "is thinking" due to its tenet that people are motivated to pursue confirmation of their positive, and negative, self-views (Swann, 1983). Self-verifiers enjoy interacting with "is thinkers," in other words, people who see them as they assert they truly are, rather than as they want to be, could be, or should be. Self-verification, similar to "is thinking," is adaptive for the rationale offered by Steinbeck and for intrapsychic and interpersonal advantages inherent in self-verification.

Self-verification theory professes that once people establish their self-views, these self-views supply a strong sense of coherence and ability to predict and control their world



(Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Given that self-views perform such meaningful functions, people strive to maintain them, even their negative self-views (Swann, 1983). Accordingly, people will prefer to interact with others who perceive them as they perceive themselves. Hence, people with positive self-views will choose interaction partners who perceive them positively, and people with negative self-views prefer interaction partners who see them negatively (i.e., Hixon & Swann, 1993; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Swann, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990; Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989).

Self-verification theory predicts the relationship partners that people choose, the degree of happiness experienced in the relationships, and whether the relationships continue or terminate. Studies show that people obtain greater relationship quality and more intimacy in romantic relationships when partners verify their self-views (De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Likewise, people often move away from relationships when the relationship partner does not offer self-verification. College students with negative self-views living with roommates who evaluated them positively began planning to find new roommates (Swann & Pelham, 2002). Further, married people with negative self-views over time became less intimate with their partners who perceived them more positively than they saw themselves (i.e., Burke & Stets, 1999; De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Ritts & Stein, 1995; Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996; Swann et al., 1994) and separated or divorced overly positive, nonverifying partners (e.g., Cast & Burke, 2002).

Self-verification theory's prediction that people with positive self-views prefer interacting with others who see them as positive is supported by self-enhancement theory's belief that people want to think well of themselves (Jones, 1973). The notion that people with negative self-views desire partners who perceive them negatively is less apparent, but the self-verification strivings of people with negative self-views which dominate over their self-enhancement strivings is logical given that, for those with negative self-views, negative evaluations are believable and validating, but positive evaluations can create cognitive dissonance and anxiety. Thus, acquiring self-verification produces psychological coherence, which is a sense that one's self, the world, and things in general are as one believes they are.

Psychological coherence is an important source of emotional comfort (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2007). Self-verification strivings promote psychological coherence because they facilitate the validation of self-views. People often avoid interaction with others who do not support their self-views which allows the bypassing of negative feelings accompanying the absence of psychological coherence. Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) noted the comments of self-verifiers which illustrates that psychological coherence associates with the self-verification process and is valued. Self-verifiers with negative self-views

explained their rationale for interacting with a confederate who evaluated them negatively. One participant stated, "Yeah, I think that's pretty close to the way I am. [The negative evaluator] better reflects my own view of myself, from experience." The following participant's comment shows the desire for psychological coherence over positive appraisals from others: "I like the [favorable] evaluation but I am not sure that it is, ah, correct maybe. It sounds good, but [the negative evaluator] ... seems to know more about me. So, I'll choose [the negative evaluator]."

Self-verification lowers anxiety (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2007), based on studies showing that verifying feedback produces less anxiety than nonverifying feedback. Mendes and Akinola (2006), for instance, studied cardiovascular responses to positive and negative evaluations that were either verifying or nonverifying. People with negative self-views, upon receiving positive feedback, felt physiologically "threatened" (avoidant and distressed), and upon receiving negative feedback, they felt physiologically "galvanized" (i.e., cardiovascular arousal was present but in a positive way, similar to approach motivation). As predicted, people with positive self-views reacted in the opposite manner. Likewise, Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, and Ross (2005) examined the responses to success experiences of high- and low-self-esteem individuals. High-self-esteem participants responded favorably to success whereas low-self-esteem respondents became anxious, presumably because the feedback was inconsistent with their self-views (Lundgren & Schwab, 1977). Further, students' reactions to receiving midterm examination grades were observed and those with low self-esteem exhibited the largest increase in overall distress, including anxious and depressive symptoms, after they received grades viewed as successful to them. Thus, low-self-esteem individuals felt more distress to grades that they interpreted as acceptable than to grades they interpreted as failures (Ralph & Mineka, 1998). Collectively, these research findings conclude that non-self-verifying events increase anxiety, even if the outcome is positive, and verifying events and feedback lower anxiety, even if they are negative.

There is some empirical support for the hypothesis that the stress resulting from positive but nonverifying events for people with negative self-views, over a long period of time, can be harmful to physical health. Brown and McGill (1989) examined the effect of positive life events on health outcomes for high- and low-self-esteem individuals. Positive life events (i.e., earning very good grades, living conditions improvement) predicted increases in health for those with high self-esteem and decreases in health for participants with low self-esteem. Shimizu and Pelham (2004) replicated this result and observed that positive life events predicted increased illness for low-self-esteem participants, even when controlling for negative affectivity which negated the possibility that negative affect influenced both self-reported self-esteem and reports of physical symptoms. It is theorized that the distinction between positive life events and a negative identity may be mentally threatening enough to

negatively impact physical health (Iyer, Jetten, & Tsivrikos, 2008).

Self-verification may promote authenticity, defined as "the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise" (Kernis, 2003, p. 1). Authenticity is enhanced when a person's inner experience is validated (Kernis, 2003). Authentic behavior is thought to occur when people feel they will be accepted by being themselves (Leary, 2003). Authenticity in children is theorized to develop when caregivers love the children for being themselves (Deci and Ryan, 1995).

Authenticity is viewed as a character strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and is related to various positive psychological outcomes such as positive affect (Harter et al., 1996) and greater psychological well-being (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Conversely, deficient authenticity has been linked to negative psychological outcomes, such as neuroticism (Horney, 1950) and narcissistic disorders (Bleiberg, 1984).

The association between self-verification and authenticity is amplified by research indicating that a lack of self-verification processes is related to inauthenticity. In fact, inauthenticity may arise when self-verification strivings are non-existent and people engage in relationships with others who do not perceive them as they see themselves. Such inauthenticity, at its worse, can yield neurosis and narcissistic disorders.

Self-verification strivings are adaptive within social relationships because they stimulate entry into relationships with honest, "is thinking" partners which promotes enhanced intimacy and trust in relationships. Self-verification is also related to greater predictability in people's behavior, which facilitates genuine, natural interactions, and trust in relationships (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985).

Self-verification strivings are related to enhanced intimacy in relationships. Swann et al. (1994) found that among married couples, participants indicated having more intimacy when their spouses perceived them as they saw themselves; this finding was true for people with positive self-views and those with negative self-views. Participants whose spouses perceived them in an "extremely" favorable way often withdrew from the relationship, even for people with positive self-views. A meta-analysis of self-verification in marriages supported the propensity for people whose spouses saw them in a self-verifying way to have superior relationship quality (Chang-Schneider & Swann, 2009), regardless of the people having positive or negative self-views. Cassidy (2001) believes that intimacy "is making one's innermost known, sharing one's core, one's truth, one's heart, with another" (p. 122); this conceptualization is the focus of self-verification, which is pursuing relationship partners who perceive you as you believe you truly are.

Feeling understood, which is central to intimacy (Cassidy, 2001; Reiss & Shaver, 1988), may be a key variable for the link between self-verification and intimacy. Swann et al. (1992) noted that self-verifiers with negative self-views explained why they chose a confederate who evaluated them

negatively. One participant stated, "Since [the negative evaluator] seems to know my position and how I feel sometimes, maybe I'll be able to get along with him." Feeling understood draws people to relationship partners who support their self-views.

Honesty is also a link to intimacy and self-verification strivings. Lerner (1993, p. 15) contends that "closeness requires honesty" and "truth telling" is the "foundation of ... intimacy." More intimacy and satisfaction is produced when we interact with others who see us as we are rather than a glorified, less honest portrayal of self.

The behavior of self-verifiers' and their relationship partners becomes more predictable due to the self-verification process. Self-verifiers' act in stable, predictable ways and they interact with others who confirm their self-view, thus, the interaction partner's behavior becomes more stable and predictable. Such mutual predictability generates more compatible relationships. Social relationships would be under pressure if a partner failed to demonstrate a stable self-view and manifested different personalities. The evolutionary model professes that mutual predictability among small hunter-gatherer groups facilitated division of labor and improved survival chances (Goffman, 1959, Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2007). Predictability in the behavior of a relationship partner is a highly valued personality characteristic (Athay & Darley, 1981; Rempel et al., 1985).

The self-verification process promotes greater predictability in behavior which fosters trust. Rempel et al. (1985) contend that the three essential components of trust are predictability, dependability, and faith. Self-verification stimulates finding honest interaction partners, and honesty produces trust.

Self-verification can be maladaptive and problematic for individuals with negative self-views because of the perpetuating nature of self-verification. Research often links low self-esteem with depression (Trzesniewski et al., 2006; Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996) and high self-esteem with happiness (Diener & Diener, 1995; Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Shackelford, 2001), therefore, the maintenance of low self-esteem through self-verification can be harmful (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClary, 2007).

The self-views accompanying low self-esteem and depression may be unwarranted and assuming that one is hopeless is arbitrary and subjective. In fact, depressed individuals often harbor inaccurate, negative assumptions regarding their ability-levels and likability. Self-verification predicts these individuals prefer to interact with people who perceive them negatively, despite the negative perceptions not necessarily being accurate, due to these relationships providing psychological coherence, in other words, a feeling that self and the world are as one thinks they are. Such a cycle will preserve the negative, inaccurate self-views and possibly hinder goal-attainment and happiness.

Low self-esteem is prevalent in one-third of the population (Swann, 1987), suggesting a need to be examined. Self-verification does not improve self-esteem, however, it can

help the process by stabilizing a person's self-view with awareness of his or her current level of functioning and a plausible brighter future.

Telling people with negative self-views that their views are inaccurate is not likely to raise their self-esteem. Self-verification research asserts that people are motivated to preserve their self-views, and they will either choose to not interact with partners who do not verify their self-views or they will emotionally withdraw from the relationship. Our self-views are deeply engrained and offer us psychological coherence, hence, significant changes to these views can cause uneasiness, confusion and unproductive outcomes. John Steinbeck would label the attempt to raise a person's self-esteem through persuasion as "teleological thinking," rather than "is thinking" (also termed "non-teleological thinking"). Teleological thinking focuses on what could or should be as opposed to what is (Steinbeck, 1951). Steinbeck advised that teleological thinking does not produce effective change, as illustrated by the following: "In their sometimes intolerant refusal to face facts as they are, teleological notions may substitute a fierce but ineffectual attempt to change conditions which are assumed to be undesirable, in place of the understanding-acceptance which would pave the way for a more sensible attempt at any change" (Steinbeck, 1951, p. 138). He recommends that "is thinking" is a better vehicle for change, but "is thinking" involves accepting things as they are, thus, the question arises of how such thinking can produce change.

The answer to this paradox is that validating a person's self-views, which occurs in self-verification and "is thinking" is a first step in the process of change. This first step grants stability, coherence, and a feeling of being understood and accepted. Deci and Ryan (1995) agree with this methodology by suggesting that enhancing self-esteem in someone encompasses "valuing the other for who he or she is and taking that other's frame of reference ... it means beginning by accepting and relating to the self of the other. It is precisely by acceptance of self - first by others and then by oneself - that supports the development and maintenance of true self-esteem" (p. 46). This form of acceptance parallels Carl Rogers' concept of "unconditional positive regard" whereby therapists can foster personal growth and effective change in clients by creating an environment of unconditional acceptance. Rogers commented on this method in his book, *On Becoming a Person*: "So I find that when I can accept another person, which means specifically accepting the feeling and attitudes and beliefs that he has as a real and vital part of him, then I am assisting him to become a person" (p. 21). Rogers responded to the unanticipated connection between acceptance and change by stating, "the curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I change" (Rogers, 1961, p. 17). Accepting what a person is experiencing versus what one believes the person could or should experience is an important first step to enacting change. Self-verification, within this framework, represents a relevant first step to improving self-esteem.

Self-esteem can be raised by slowly providing positive feedback, which opposes negative self-views, within a context of self-verification. Positive feedback offered by a relationship partner can motivate a person to internalize a new self-view (Jones, Gergen, & Davis, 1962), hence, positive remarks can enhance self-esteem but in tandem with verification. Finn and Tonsager (1992) found that combining verification and positivity improves self-esteem. College students were given feedback about a problem-focused personality test within a supportive environment and they demonstrated a self-esteem increase, despite the feedback often being negative. These researchers concluded that the self-esteem enhancement resulted from a combination of "creating a positive emotional tone, while verbally offering self-confirmatory (and often negative) feedback" (p. 285). In other words, the two-fold process of accepting an individual's reality or perception while slowly and gently introducing positivity that challenges negative self-views improves the self-esteem of a person with a negative self-view. This method can initiate positive self-views without creating defensiveness. The process of self-verification can now resume based on positive and adaptive self-views.

The combination of accepting another's current reality with incremental positive change is instrumental in various therapies. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) teaches clients to substitute the control of thoughts or feelings with nonjudgmentally observing and accepting them, while changing behaviors in positive ways to improve living (Hayes, 1994). Likewise, Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) advises clients to accept themselves completely, while striving to change their behaviors and environments to better their lives (Baer, 2003). Acceptance and positivity, in this order, can improve self-esteem.

North and Swann, Jr. (2009) believe that the self-verification process can promote happiness in that self-acceptance (offering oneself self-verification) is central to happiness. They contend that acceptance of our deficiencies, imperfections, and full range of emotions is relevant to happiness, on intrapsychic and interpersonal dimensions.

In sum, self-verification theory believes that people strive to maintain their self-views by seeking their confirmation, regardless of the self-views being positive or negative. This process interfaces positive psychology because it is adaptive and benefits intrapsychic and interpersonal functioning. Self-verification strivings contribute in positive ways such as enhancing authenticity, relationship intimacy, self-esteem, and happiness.

## HUMILITY

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1998) defines humility as "the quality of being humble or having a lowly opinion of oneself; meekness, lowliness, humbleness, the opposite of 'pride' or 'haughtiness.'" The fields of psychology, philosophy, and theology offer a broader and brighter conception of humility, for instance, Emmons (1998) expresses:

Although humility is often equated in people's minds with low self-regard and tends to activate images of a stooped-shouldered, self-deprecating, weak-willed soul only too willing to yield to the wishes of others, in reality, humility is the antithesis of this caricature. To be humble is not to have a low opinion of oneself, it is to have an accurate opinion of oneself. It is the ability to keep one's talents and accomplishments in perspective (Richards, 1992), to have a sense of self-acceptance, an understanding of one's imperfections, and to be free from arrogance and low self-esteem. (Clark, 1992, p. 33)

Templeton (1997) also characterizes humility positively: Humility is not self-deprecation. To believe that you have no worth, or were created somehow flawed or incompetent, can be foolish. Humility represents wisdom. It is knowing you were created with special talents and abilities to share with the world; but it can also be an understanding that you are one of many souls created by the Lord, and each has an important role to play in life. Humility is knowing you are smart, but not all-knowing. It is accepting that you have personal power, but are not omnipotent... Inherent in humility resides an open and receptive mind... it leaves us more open to learn from others and refrains from seeing issues and people only in blacks and whites. The opposite of humility is arrogance - the belief that we are wiser or better than others. Arrogance promotes separation rather than community. It looms like a brick wall between us and those from whom we could learn (pp.162-163).

Humility is associated with open-mindedness, willingness to admit mistakes and receive advice, and an interest to learn (Hwang, 1982; Templeton, 1997). Humility encompasses less self-focus and preoccupation, which Templeton (1997) labels as becoming "unselved," a concept that also reflects recognizing a person's place in the world. Those who have achieved humility are not centered on self, instead they focus on the community at large, of which they are one part.

Subsequent to transcending an egocentric perspective, people with humility increase their recognition and acceptance of the abilities, potential, and worth of others. Becoming "unselved" means we do not have the need to defend and aggrandize the ego, or self, at the expense of our perceptions and evaluations of others (Halling, Kunz, & Rowe, 1994). Our perspective broadens and we can non-defensively appreciate the potential and actualization of others. Means, Wilson, Sturm, Biron, and Bach (1990) illustrate this concept by articulating that humility "is an increase in the valuation of others and not a decrease in the valuation of oneself" (p. 214). Myers (1979) paraphrased C. S. Lewis by the following: "...Humility leaves people free to esteem their special talents and, with the same honesty, to esteem their neighbor's. Both the neighbor's talents and one's own are recognized as gifts and, like one's height, are not fit subjects for either inordinate pride or self-deprecation (p. 38).

Clearly, the discipline of psychology presents the construct of humility as more multi-dimensional than dictionary definitions that highlight unworthiness and low

self-regard.

Humility includes these central aspects:

- Accurate evaluation of one's abilities and accomplishments (not skewed to favorable or unfavorable)
- Acknowledgment of one's faults and limitations
- Openness to novel ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping one's abilities, achievements, and place in the world in perspective (e.g., perceiving oneself as simply one person in a large world)
- Maintaining a low self-focus; being self-transcendent
- Acknowledging the value in all things and non-defensively accepting the multitude of ways that people and things contribute to the world

Personality research suggests that humility is an uncommon characteristic. Social psychology research reveals many "self-enhancement biases" that limit the presence of humility (Baumeister, 1998; Greenwald, 1980), evidenced by our propensity to accent the positive and suppress the negative. People generally take credit for their successes but blame others for their failures (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Snyder, Higgins, & Stucky, 1983; Zuckerman, 1979). Further, people frequently perceive, ponder, and remember positive information about themselves, but negative information is "lost in the shuffle" (Mischel, Ebbsen, & Zeiss, 1976). This self-enhancement tendency implies that humility contradicts human nature and is exceptional.

Still, people can manage their degree of self-enhancement in response to the social setting, for instance, more modesty is demonstrated in interactions with friends than strangers (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995).

The benefits of modesty, particularly "moderate" modesty, have surfaced in many studies (Baumeister & Ilko, 1995; Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1995). People like and feel less threatened by those who display modesty about their accomplishments, while conceited and arrogant behavior usually breeds social disapproval.

Predispositions toward self-enhancement, grandiosity, and narcissism provide poor prognosis for long-term adjustment, notably in the interpersonal domain (Ehrenberg, Hunter, & Elterman, 1996; Means et al., 1990). Psychological maladjustment is related to the degree that people rate themselves more favorably than the ratings of others (Asendorpf & Ostendorf, 1998; Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995).

Exline et al. (2000) observed a connection between humility and forgiveness. Participants who were primed to experience humility (i.e., they wrote about a non-self-deprecating humility experience) retaliated less to a provoking laboratory task, whereas those primed to feel morally superior judged another's transgression with more harshness and less forgiveness.

Humility encompasses a "forgetting of the self," and acknowledgment that one is "just one part" of a larger world. This tendency to be "unselved" may offer psychological and physical advantages. In contrast, well-documented links

exist between excessive self-focus and numerous psychological issues, including, but not limited to, anxiety, depression, and social phobias. Baumeister (1991) suggests many advantages abound to "escaping the self," including respite from the affliction of self-preoccupation (Halling et al., 1994), and the need to defend the vulnerable self. Further, medical researchers propose that excessive self-focus is a risk factor for coronary heart disease (Fontana, Rosenberg, Burg, Kerns, & Colonese, 1990; Scherwitz & Canick, 1988).

Promoting humility may be a secondary goal of various therapies. For narcissistic personality disorder, cognitive-behavioral therapy may help to lower the client's egocentric bias. Many psychotherapies touch upon philosophical and existential themes related to a sense of humility. Insight-oriented, humanistic, and existential therapies commonly address one's place in the world. Moreover, "talk" therapies assist clients to acquire a realistic view and acceptance of both their strengths and shortcomings.

Parents, teachers, and role models in various forms such as sports figures, world and community leaders model or do not model humility for all to see. Many life experiences enhance a sense of humility, including exposure to different people and cultures, significant life-changing events (e.g., serious illness or accident, birth of a child, divorce), religious beliefs, or "transcendental" experiences. Humility is one of the classic virtues and certainly is a worthy construct within positive psychology.

## THE BIOLOGY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social relationships can significantly influence health. Much research shows that close, supportive bonds can produce numerous positive effects, for example, having diverse social connections consistently predicts longevity, even controlling for demographic factors and health behaviors (i.e., Berkman & Syme, 1979; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Not having close personal connections relates to an increased mortality risk comparable to other known risk factors as obesity and smoking (Berkman & Syme, 1979). People who have high amounts of social support or are socially well integrated exhibit lower susceptibility to infection (i.e., Cohen, Doyle, Skoner, Rabin, & Gwaltney, 1997), reduced rates of cardiovascular disease progression (e.g., Lett et al., 2005), and slower cognitive declines with aging (i.e., Seeman, Lusignolo, Albert, & Berkman, 2001).

Stressful situations can provoke physiological changes that, if experienced without relief, can lead to disease. Acute stressors potentially can activate the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which arouses elevations in heart rate, blood pressure, blood glucose, and secretion of the catecholamines epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline). Release of the hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine is part of the fight-or-flight response. The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis can also be activated, causing release of the hormone cortisol. Cortisol is released in

response to stress and it facilitates survival given exposure to immediate threats. Prolonged cortisol secretion, which chronic stress can produce, may induce significant physiological changes. The combination of sympathetic and HPA activation is important for immediate and short-term behavior because it regulates various somatic functions required for responses to stressors (i.e., accelerated heart function and lung action, metabolic activity changes, reduced digestion, tunnel vision (peripheral vision loss). Chronic or repeated exposure to stressors, and the accompanying exposure to stress hormones, is related to many negative outcomes, including suppression of particular parts of the immune system (e.g., decreased lymphocyte proliferation), hippocampal neuron damage, and depressive symptomology increases (i.e., Heim & Nemeroff, 1999; Sapolsky, Romero, & Munck, 2000). Elevated levels of SNS and HPA hormones are associated with pathophysiological parameters (i.e., high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol levels, larger waist-to-hip ratios), which are risk factors for many negative health conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes (McEwen & Seeman, 2003). Further, proinflammatory cytokines can be activated by stress (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004), and their elevations are linked to increased mortality risk (Reuben et al., 2002), and the incidence and progression of disease (e.g., Black, 2003).

The quantity and quality of social connections are related to indicators of positive physiological regulation. Community-based population studies have observed associations between higher levels of social support and lower resting heart rate, cholesterol, blood pressure, norepinephrine levels and markers of systemic inflammation (i.e., Bland, Krogh, Winkelstein, & Trevisan, 1991; Loucks, Berkman, Gruenewald, & Seeman, 2006; Seeman, Blazer, & Rowe, 1994; Thomas, Goodwin, & Goodwin, 1985; Uden, Orth-Gomer, & Elofsson, 1991). These relationships existed when controlling for health behaviors, chronic health problems, and current physical health.

Deficient levels of social support and feelings of loneliness have been linked to lower immune response outcomes (e.g., reduced natural killer cell activity; Kiecolt-Glaser, Speicher, Holliday, & Glaser, 1984; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1984). Contrarily, social support has been associated with a positive influence on functional immune parameters (e.g., blastogenic response to antigen; Uchino et al., 1996). A study, for instance, on medical students' responses to a series of hepatitis B inoculations noted that participants reporting more social support had stronger immune responses to the vaccine (Glaser, Kiecolt-Glaser, Bonneau, Malarkey, & Hughes, 1992). This implies that the people with inadequate social support systems would experience a delayed antibody response to pathogens, placing them at risk for illness (Kiecolt-Glaser, 1999).

A study showed that people with fewer social network ties displayed more susceptibility to the common cold than individuals with more diverse social connections (Cohen et al., 1997). Moreover, as the quantity of social connections increased, the number of viral replications and severity of

objective and self-reported symptoms decreased. The study also revealed that chronic interpersonal stressors also predicted catching a cold (Cohen et al., 1998), implying that social connections are beneficial but only to the degree that they are not conflict laden. The research concluded that diverse social ties appear to help in preventing infection, but conflicted relationships can increase acute illness incidence.

Research has offered credibility to the stress reactivity hypothesis, which suggests that social relationships improve health by lessening physiological responses to stressors. Laboratory stressor reactivity studies generally subject participants to an acute laboratory stress task (i.e., mental arithmetic, public speaking), under conditions of either being alone or with a friend or supportive audience. Many studies show that social support reduces cardiovascular responses to the stressor (Christenfeld et al., 1997; Kamarck, Annunziato, & Amateau, 1995), but some results are mixed (Christian & Stoney, 2006).

Social support is defined in different ways in stress reactivity literature, which can add to some of the inconsistent results. To offer resolution, Lepore (1998) distinguished between "active" and "passive" support. Active social support is receiving unambiguous emotional support from a friend or confederate, and this group typically exhibits lessened cardiovascular response compared to the alone condition (i.e., Thorsteinsson, James, & Gregg, 1998). Passive support is simply the presence of a friend or stranger with support implied by physical nearness. Fear of negative evaluation, which can interfere with support, can arise in this situation (Lepore, 1998), but when evaluation was removed, passive support lessened cardiovascular responses (Kamarck et al., 1995).

The supportive partner does not need to be physically present to lower cardiovascular responses to stressors. Systolic blood pressure responses were lower in individuals asked to simply think about a close friend before exposure to a stressor (Ratnasigam & Bishop, 2007). The conclusion is that having mental representations of social support may be sufficient for lowering cardiovascular reactivity to stressors.

Studies have observed the effects of social support on stressful situations relative to cortisol responses and have found positive correlations. Participants who had frequent interactions with supportive others over a 10-day interval demonstrated lower cortisol responses to a future laboratory stressor (Eisenberger, Taylor, Gable, Hilmert, & Lieberman, 2007). Another study presented to the experimental group video-relayed emotional support to a laboratory stressor and results showed reductions in cortisol levels and heart rate during a cognitive challenge relative to a no-support control group (Thorsteinsson et al., 1998). Likewise, men supported by their romantic partners or friends revealed less cortisol responses in relation to a speech/math stressor than no-support control conditions (Heinrichs et al., 2003). The connection between social support and cortisol reactivity, however, can change due to variables such as gender (Kirschbaum et al., 1995) and culture (Taylor Welch, Kim, &

Sherman, 2007). Thus, social support is concluded to offer beneficial effects through attenuated cortisol reactivity to stressors, but this effect is a function of several variables, including individual characteristics of the support provider and recipient.

Whereas social support in the midst of an acute stressor can buffer cardiovascular and neuroendocrine responses, conflict or negative interactions can cause reactivity. Cardiovascular reactivity is increased when in the presence of people being nonsupportive (e.g., showing boredom/disinterest, overtly disagreeing or undermining; Sheffield & Carroll, 1994). Stressors in the realm of social-evaluative threat (i.e., exposure to an evaluative audience) are linked to greater cortisol responses and longer recovery times compared to those not exposed to such (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004). Further, couples engaging in negative interactions (i.e., criticism, put-downs) while communicating about a marital issue displayed more sympathetic and HPA responses and immune functioning decreases compared to those not demonstrating this negative behavioral pattern (Kiecolt-Glaser, 1999). Collectively, these findings show that non-supportive or antagonistic interactions can initiate or exacerbate SNS, HPA, and immune reactivity in response to an acute stressor, while social support can frequently lessen the response.

Much of the research on social support and physiological reactivity has occurred in the laboratory, but more studies are focusing on daily living. Utilizing ambulatory monitoring, people who have high amounts of social support or interact with close others have demonstrated better cardiovascular profiles (e.g., higher cardiac output and less total peripheral resistance, lower blood pressure) than individuals who are lonely or deficient in strong social connections (i.e., Hawkey, Bureson, & Cacioppo, 2003; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2003). Other research has shown that high amounts of social support has the potential to buffer cardiovascular reactivity to negative emotional states in daily life (Ong & Allaire, 2005). These results suggest that the relationship between social support and positive physiological responses generally seen in the laboratory may have positive transfer to naturally occurring events.

Individual differences such as personality, gender, or other factors can influence the effect of social support on physiological response. Hostility, for instance, comprises negative beliefs about people, including cynicism, mistrust, and aspersion, which can eliminate highly hostile people from accruing the benefits of social support. Lepore (1995) tested this idea by having participants scoring high and low on cynicism give a speech either alone or with a supportive confederate. Social support lowered cardiovascular reactivity for the low but not high cynicism individuals. Hostility can increase cardiovascular disease risk due to not utilizing social support in stressful situations.

Many studies have revealed interactions between gender, social support, and physiological reactivity. By example, the presence of a supportive male partner under stress can

produce "exaggerated" cardiovascular and cortisol reactivity in women (i.e., Glynn, Christenfeld, & Gerin, 1999; Kirschbaum et al., 1995; Sheffield & Carroll, 1994), which is opposite the pattern of less reactivity generally seen in men. Women also appear to show greater physiological responsiveness to negative marital interactions (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser, 1999). Interestingly, the health-protective effects of social ties are stronger in men than women (i.e., House et al., 1988). Generally, women are more emotionally responsive to conflict and they report more negative interactions in their relationships (Schuster, Kessler, & Aseltine, 1990). Hence, women may not attain the same benefits from social relationships as men because women appear to be more vulnerable to negative social interactions (Taylor et al., 2000).

These findings suggest that the buffering effect of social support on physiological stress responses varies across individuals and situations.

Positive social relationships may be vital during particular developmental stages of the life span. Neonatal, infant, and early child developmental phases are critical times in which social interaction can impact later social behavior and physiology (Cushing & Kramer, 2005; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). The lack of positive interaction or negative interaction during these early development periods can result in adverse physiological and behavioral outcomes in people and animals. Positive social contact and relationships during early postnatal phases in animals (e.g., nursing, handling, grooming) can yield positive effects. Rat pups who are repeatedly separated from their mothers, for instance, exhibit greater stress vulnerability in adulthood (i.e., increase HPA responses to novel stimuli; Francis et al., 1999).

Research shows that oxytocin, a hormone that also acts as a neurotransmitter in the brain, and the endogenous opioid system, an innate pain-relieving system consisting of widely scattered neurons that produce opioids which act as neurotransmitters and neuromodulators, are involved in the development and maintenance of social bonds, and can lessen physiological responses to stress. These physiological mechanisms can help explain the complex relationships between social support physiology, and health (Taylor et al., 2000; Taylor, Dickerson, & Klein, 2002).

Oxytocin is related to many social processes in animals, for instance, it can facilitate social affiliation, parental nurturing behaviors, and the development of selective mother-infant bonds (Bartz & Hollander, 2006; Carter et al., 2006). Oxytocin can influence stress-regulatory responses, for example, newborn rats exposed to high levels of oxytocin exhibited lower HPA reactivity in adulthood (Holst, Peterson, & Uvnas-Moberg, 2002).

The growing body of research on humans matches the findings from animal studies demonstrating that oxytocin lessens the stress response and is associated with increased social affiliation. Oxytocin has been associated with prosocial emotions (Carter, 1998). Intranasally administered oxytocin lead to significant increases in trust in people

(Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005), and oxytocin, naturally released in response to breastfeeding is related to subsequent calmness (Heinrichs et al., 2002; Nissen et al., 1998).

A double-blind, placebo-controlled experiment showed that people who received both intranasally administered oxytocin and social support revealed lower cortisol and anxiety and increased calmness in response to a laboratory acute psychosocial stress compared to the control group (Heinrichs et al., 2003). It is theorized that oxytocin may offer protective effects on SNS and HPA activity, especially within a social context.

Endogenous opioids are also involved in social behaviors and physiological stress response regulation (Nelson & Panksepp, 1998). Human and animal studies indicate that opioids are released during social contact, act as a reward for social affiliation, and assist with social learning (Nelson & Panksepp, 1998; Ribeiro et al., 2005). Opioids can lessen SNS and HPA responses to stressors in humans and animals. In support, McCubbin (1993) observed that giving an opioid antagonist to people before a laboratory stressor produced increased blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol responses, relative to a placebo injection. It was concluded that opioids can contribute to attenuation of stress responses.

Findings from human and animal studies illustrate that oxytocin and endogenous opioids are released during social bonding activities and are associated with lessened physiological stress responses and decreases in anxiety and anxiety-related behaviors. Such stress-buffering, positive physiological effects may result in long-term beneficial health effects, and the positive psychological effects may enhance motivation to pursue social contact and support.

In sum, social support and social interaction are related to beneficial physiological outcomes, including decreased SNS and HPA activity, and increased immune functioning whereas a lack of social relationships or having social conflict associates with negative biological outcomes. Social support can produce positive health outcomes through decreasing the physiological stress response, and this process could be facilitated by the biological mechanism of administering oxytocin or endogenous opioids.

## SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS

The circumstantial factors present in people's lives, including marriage, age, gender, culture, income, and life events, do not completely explain the differences between happy and unhappy people. Lyubomirsky (2001) contends that happy and unhappy people significantly differ in their "subjective experience and construal of the world," thus, happy individuals perceive and interpret their environment differently than less happy persons. Therefore, this construal theory examines the effects of attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and so forth rather than the objective circumstances of one's life, upon happiness.

Findings show that happy people generally perceive the world more positively and with a happiness-promoting style.

Self-reported happy people described their previous life experiences and evaluated them as more pleasant at the time of occurrence and when recalling them (study 1, Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998; Seidlitz, Wyer, & Diener, 1997), whereas self-reported unhappy people evaluated their past life experiences comparatively unfavorably at both time points. Experimentally pertinent, objective judges did not rate the happy people's experiences as more positive than those of the unhappy people, implying that happy and unhappy people experience similar events but interpret them qualitatively differently. Moreover, these same participants evaluated hypothetical situations and the happy people rated the events more positively than the unhappy group, even after controlling for mood (study 2, Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998).

Happy people also maintain a positive perspective during evaluation of themselves and others. For instance, in a laboratory study, students interacted with a female stranger and later evaluated her personality. Self-described happy students evaluated the stranger more positively and reported greater interest in establishing a friendship with her versus the self-described unhappy students (study 3, Lyubomirsky & Tucker, 1998). Additionally, happy people frequently judge almost everything regarding themselves and their lives positively and favorably, including their friendships recreation, self-esteem, energy levels, and purpose in life (Lyubomirsky, Tkach, et al., 2006; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Ryff, 1989).

The self-perceptions of happy people are stable and relatively unaffected by social comparisons. In support, participants solved anagrams in the presence of a confederate who performed the same task either more quickly or slowly (study 1, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1997). Exposure to a slower confederate improved confidence in the skill set of both the self-reported happy and unhappy participants. The presence of a faster confederate did not change judgments of ability at anagram solving in happy individuals but unhappy people lowered judgments of their skills.

Happy and unhappy people display different levels of acceptance to decisions they have made. Happy people generally are more satisfied with all of their available options (along with the ultimately-chosen option) and they usually only reveal dissatisfaction in situations in which their sense of self is threatened. Lyubomirsky and Ross (study 1, 1999) noted that after being accepted by individual colleges, self-reported happy students increased their liking and interest of those colleges, and self-protectively, decreased their overall ratings of the colleges that rejected them. This cognitive dissonance reduction method apparently fostered the happy participants' ability to preserve positive feelings and self-regard and was concluded to be an adaptive strategy. Self-reported unhappy individuals did not employ the same strategy of fostering positivity, rather, they (maladaptively) preserved their liking for the rejecting colleges.

Happy and unhappy people differ in making decisions when many options are available. Happy individuals frequently "satisfice," defined as being satisfied with an

option that is simply "good enough," and not being concerned with alternative, potentially better options (Schwartz et al., 2002). Unhappy individuals, conversely, frequently "maximize" their options, meaning they pursue making the absolute best choice. Certainly, maximizers' decisions can yield the best results, but research shows that maximizers experience more regret and less well-being than satisficers (Lyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006). The maximizing trait of unhappy people may reinforce their unhappiness.

Happy people are significantly less likely than their unhappier peers to overly self-reflect and dwell on themselves. Several studies found that unhappy students who "apparently" failed a verbal task experienced negative affect and intrusive negative thoughts, which impaired their concentration and performance on a subsequent intellectually challenging test (Lyubomirsky et al., 2008). These results infer that unhappy people experience negative and maladaptive dwelling more than happy people and this tendency leads to feeling bad and to negative outcomes (Lyubomirsky & Kasri, 2006). Other research demonstrated that manipulating an individual's focus of attention (e.g., presenting reflecting information or distracting information designed to either enhance or reduce concentration, respectively) can eliminate the differences in the cognitive strategies and processes exhibited by happy and unhappy people (study 3, Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999). This finding shows the power of our thoughts and a key difference between happy and unhappy people, in that happy people can appear to be unhappy by instructing them to ruminate about themselves, and unhappy people can resemble happy people by directing their attention away from themselves.

Ways that people interpret their past life events may affect levels of happiness. Happy people are more likely to report savoring past life experiences, and they conclude being much better off today than in the past, while unhappy people frequently report ruminating about past negative experiences and they feel much worse off today than in the past (Lieberman et al., 2008; Tversky & Griffin, 1991). These findings imply that the strategies used by happy people to process life events fosters positive emotions, and the strategies used by unhappy people diminishes the intrinsic positivity of positive events and heightens the negative affect of negative events.

Happy people maintain attitudes and behaviors that reinforce their happiness. The question arises whether unhappy people can adopt such ways of thinking and behaving leading to enhanced well-being. Findings show that people do try to become happier, for instance, college students utilize different strategies to increase happiness such as social affiliation, pursuing goals, enjoying leisure activities, engaging in religion, and "direct" attempts (i.e., acting happy, smiling; Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Some of these strategies (particularly social affiliation and direct attempts) positively correlate with happiness, but it is inconclusive whether these techniques cause happiness



increases or whether happy people simply are more likely to employ them.

The feasibility of changing one's level of happiness is debated. Arguments to the contrary emphasize that twin and adoption studies contend that genetics account for roughly 50% of the variation present in well-being (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). For instance, Tellegen and colleagues (1988) studied the well-being of identical and fraternal twins who were raised together or apart. Identical (monozygotic) twins develop from one zygote that splits and forms two embryo whereas fraternal (dizygotic) twins develop from two separate eggs which are fertilized by two separate sperm. Happiness levels of the identical twin pairs were highly correlated and this correlation was equally strong whether they were raised in the same home ( $r = .58$ ) or miles apart ( $r = .48$ ). Fraternal twin pairs, however, revealed significantly smaller correlations between their happiness levels, even when they experienced the same upbringing and home ( $r = .23$  versus  $r = .18$ ). Longitudinal studies of changes in well-being across extended periods of time reinforce these findings. Supportively, positive and negative life experiences increase or decrease happiness levels only for short periods of time, and people then quickly return to their baselines of happiness (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996). These findings illustrate that each individual may have a personal set point for happiness that is genetically determined and resistant to influence.

Another argument against lasting modifications to well-being involves the concept of hedonic adaptation, which suggests that subsequent to positive and negative life experiences, people rapidly habituate to their new conditions and ultimately return to their baseline of happiness present before the life experiences (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). This concept has been termed a "hedonic treadmill" and contends that people adapt to circumstantial changes, particularly positive events. Though people suspect that a significant positive life change (e.g., winning a lottery) will make them much happier, a study compared lottery winners with a control group that did not experience a sudden windfall and found that lottery winners were no happier (and seemed to derive less pleasure from daily activities) than nonwinners (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978). Thus, hedonic adaptation is another obstacle to enhancing long-term well-being (i.e., Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis & Diener, 2003).

An additional argument against lasting change in happiness is the significant relationship between happiness and personality (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Personality traits are relatively fixed and do not vary over time (McCrae & Costa, 1994). One school of thought views happiness as part of one's stable personality, hence, a construct not amenable to relevant change (Costa, McCrae, & Zonderman, 1987).

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon et al. (2005) argue that sustainable increases in happiness is possible. Their construct of chronic happiness, or the level of happiness experienced during a specific period in life, is influenced by three factors - set

point (50%), life circumstances (10%), and intentional activities engaged in (40%). As noted, the set point is "set," fixed, and inflexible, therefore, it is resistant to change and unlikely to yield sustainable increases in happiness.

A person's life circumstances account for only approximately 10% of individual differences in chronic happiness (Diener et al., 1999). Life circumstances include factors such as national or cultural region, demographics (i.e., gender and ethnicity), personal experiences (e.g., past significant hardships and successes), and life status variables (i.e., marital status, educational attainment, health, and income). These circumstances are essentially constant, therefore, they are prone to adaptation and have a relatively small effect on happiness. As such, changing circumstantial factors is unlikely to produce long-term increases in happiness.

Though most people rapidly adapt to positive life changes such as getting married or winning the lottery, individual differences are observed in degrees of adaptation. For instance, research on people's reactions to marriage showed that some newlyweds reported significant life satisfaction increases after the wedding and for years beyond, some reported returning to their happiness baseline level, and others became unhappy and remained relatively unhappy (Lucas et al., 2003). These results infer that individuals vary in ways they intentionally behave in relation to changing circumstances, for instance, the degree they show gratitude to their marriage partner, work at cultivating the marriage, or enjoy positive experiences together.

Intentional activity thereby represents the best way to change chronic happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Intentional activity involves voluntary action requiring commitment and effort that can be behavioral (e.g., engaging in acts of kindness), cognitive (i.e., displaying gratitude), or motivational (e.g., seeking value-laden, important life goals). Intentional activities resist adaptation because they are variable and episodic (have beginning and ending points). In other words, it is harder to adapt to something that is always changing (e.g., the activities we pursue) compared to something that is relatively constant (i.e., our circumstances and situations).

Reinforcing this view, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006a) asked participants to rate features of recent positive changes in their activities (i.e., beginning a new fitness program) in contrast to positive changes in their circumstances (e.g., moving to a better apartment), and they reported their activity-based changes as more "variable" and more resistant to adaptation. Further, activity-based changes predicted well-being at 6 and 12 weeks after the study began, while circumstance-based changes predicted well-being only at week 6. The study concluded that participants adapted to their circumstantial changes but not to their intentional activities by week 12.

Research findings show that happiness interventions encompassing intentional activities can increase and maintain happiness. Fordyce (1977, 1983) was an early pioneer in

teaching volitional strategies to increase happiness and his model included the following "14 fundamentals:"

1. Be more active and keep busy
2. Spend more time socializing
3. Be productive at meaningful work
4. Get better-organized and plan things out
5. Stop worrying
6. Lower your expectations and aspirations
7. Develop positive optimistic thinking
8. Get present oriented
9. Work on a healthy personality
10. Develop an outgoing, social personality
11. Be yourself
12. Eliminate the negative feelings and problems
13. Close relationships are the #1 source of happiness
14. Value happiness (happy people value happiness more than average, and much more than unhappy people, who commonly perceive happiness as an unimportant life goal).

Boehm, Lyubomirsky, and Sheldon (2008) experimented with the happiness intervention method of having participants engage in kind acts (e.g., holding the door open for a stranger, washing a roommate's dishes). Committing acts of kindness was postulated to increase happiness due to enhanced self-regard, positive social interactions, and eliciting charitable feelings toward others and the greater community. The frequency and variety of practicing acts of kindness was assessed. The frequency had no effect on subsequent well-being but the variety of kind acts influenced later happiness. Participants who were asked to perform a wide variety of kind acts experienced happiness increases, even through the 1-month follow-up, but those asked to not vary their kind acts became less happy midway through the study (they returned to their baseline level of happiness at the follow-up assessment). It was concluded that happiness can be increased by behavioral intentional activities.

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon et al. (2005) observed the effect of expressing gratitude ("counting one's blessings") on well-being. Being grateful was theorized to increase happiness because it fosters the savoring of positive events and situations, and it possibly resists hedonic adaptation by having people perceive goodness in their life instead of taking such for granted. Participants wrote in gratitude journals up to five things they were grateful for in the past week, with frequencies of either once a week, three times a week, or not at all. The "blessings" included significant and trivial factors. Well-being increases only occurred in those recounting their blessings once a week rather than three times a week. This study shows that intentional activity can increase happiness but moderating variables must be considered.

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006b) studied the effect of visualizing and writing about one's ideal self (participants considered desired future images of themselves) on enhancing happiness. King (2001) previously showed that writing about one's best future self increases well-being, possibly because it fosters optimism and integrates a person's

priorities and goals. The 2006 study revealed significant happiness increases in participants who visualized their best possible self.

People across many cultures indicate that the pursuit of happiness is one of their most important and meaningful life goals (Diener & Oishi 2000; Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995). Fortunately, evidence shows that less happy people can boost their happiness by deliberately practicing happiness-enhancing strategies. Boehm and Lyubomirsky (2009) believe that hedonic adaptation to life's positive changes is a major barrier to happiness, happily, engaging in intentional activities can counteract the adaptation process.

## MEANING IN LIFE

The "meaning in life" is a multifaceted concept, however, one effective operational definition views having meaning in life as comprehending, making sense of, or perceiving significance in one's life, along with believing oneself to have a purpose, mission, or overarching goal in life. Meaning enables people to understand, interpret, and organize their life experience, realize a sense of worth and place in the world, recognize relevancy, purposefully manage their energy, and quintessentially, promotes the belief that their lives are significant and they transcend the transient and fleeting present. Frankl's (1963, 1965) theory of meaning centered on each person having a unique purpose or overarching goal for their life that reflected their values and benefited the community. Meaning is experienced by actively pursuing one's most relevant strivings and ambitions.

Much research demonstrates that people who report having meaning or purpose in life appear to be better off, for instance, they are happier (i.e., Dehats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993); indicate greater overall well-being (e.g., Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000), life satisfaction (i.e., Chamberlain & Zika, 1988; Steger, Kashkdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008), and control over their lives (i.e., Ryff, 1989); and feel more involved with their work (Bonebright et al., 2000; Steger & Dik, 2009). People who report high levels of meaning also indicate less negative affect (e.g., Chamberlain & Zika, 1988), depression and anxiety (i.e., Dehats et al., 1993), workaholism (Bonebright et al., 2000), suicidal ideation and substance abuse (e.g., Harlow, Newcomb, & Bender, 1986), and less need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973). Meaning also seems to be stable and independent of other aspects of well-being over a one-year time period (Steger & Kashdan, 2007).

Predictably, evidence shows that people who have dedicated themselves to an important cause, or to an ideal transcending trivial concerns, report higher levels of meaning than others. People who are experiencing psychological distress, such as psychiatric patients (i.e., Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), report having lower levels of meaning in their lives. Illustrating the benefit of therapy, research reveals heightened meaning in life for psychiatric patients at posttreatment versus at pretreatment (Crumbaugh, 1977;

Wadsworth & Barker, 1976), and treatment of psychological distress helps people to rebuild meaning in life (e.g., Wadsworth & Barker, 1976). Meaning in life, therefore, is related to well-being and optimal functioning (King & Napa, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Baumeister and Vohs (2002) contend that "the essence of meaning is connection," (p. 608) and people gain a sense of stability relative to the changing conditions of their lives through these connections. This view relates to defining meaning in life in terms of assessing one's intentions, significance, and what he or she stands for.

The two main unidimensional ways to define meaning in life are thereby purpose-centered or significance-centered, in addition, multidimensional approaches to defining meaning in life unite these dimensions with an emotional dimension that also examines fulfillment in one's life. For instance, Reker and Wong (1988) define meaning by the ability to see order and coherence in one's life, pursuing and achieving goals, and resulting feelings of affective fulfillment from such coherence and pursuits. Individuals who fulfill the multidimensional perspective of meaning in life likely have clear goals, warmly accept the way-of-the-world, and confidently believe they have life figured out.

Finding meaning in life, based on the concept's various definitions, may develop by understanding one's existence, recognizing and attaining valued goals, and feeling fulfilled by life, or by a combination of these factors. Additional schools of thought describe ways to find meaning. Frankl (1963), for example, believes that meaning in life may be found by pursuing creative endeavors, having elevating experiences, or reflecting upon and growing from negative life experiences and suffering. Baumeister (1991; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002) describe four ways to achieve meaning: having a sense of purpose, feeling self-worth, fully understanding the values system for judging right from wrong, and establishing efficacy in the world. A person's sense of meaning may arise from the stories and narratives that explain their lives (e.g., McAdams, 1993; Niemeyer & Mahoney, 1995). Supportively, writing about one's life events can help integrate the events into a broader meaning system (King & Penedaker, 1996).

Emmons (2003) described a four-part "taxonomy" of meaning involving work/achievement, intimacy/relationships, spirituality, and self-transcendence/generativity. Seligman (2002) suggests that meaning may be derived by applying one's signature talents to an endeavor beyond one's self, which parallels the transcendence variable of Emmons' taxonomy. Reker and Wong (1988) also value self-transcendence as they contend that greater self-transcendence produces deeper meaning in life.

Evidence also shows that finding meaning in traumatic events (termed meaning making or event appraisal) can enhance meaning in life (i.e., Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 1998; McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993). Frankl (1963) also firmly believed that confronting and overcoming adversity can yield meaning in life.

Research reveals numerous ways to find meaning in life. Agreement generally abounds that achieving meaning is fostered by engaging in self-transcendent activities and pursuing valued goals while comprehending one's worth and abilities; further, pursuing personal growth and relationship tending are facilitative (Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi, 2008).

Common sources for attaining meaning in life include relationships, religious beliefs, health, pleasure, and personal growth. Generally, having relationships with others is perceived as the most important source of meaning in life (i.e., Emmons, 2003).

Understanding the deepest of philosophical questions, such as "What does it all mean?" is beyond basic psychology, but examining the following question is within the realm of general psychology and positive psychology - "What does 'my life' mean?" Findings illustrate that the answer to this question is relevant to one's well-being, that our relationships influence the answer, and life is perceived as more meaningful when one feels good, whether due to positive affect, valued religious commitments, or the absence of disturbing psychopathology.

The importance of having meaning in life can even affect our longevity. Meaning in life predicted successful aging (e.g., greater well-being and physical health, less psychopathology) 14 months later, even controlling for demographic variables and relevant predictors such as social and intellectual resources (Reker, 2002).

Meaning in life allows our experiences to unite and our lives to consolidate into a meaningful whole.

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## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IV

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## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IV

### 6 Continuing Education Hours

Record your answers on the Answer Sheet (click the "Texas Answer Sheet" link on Home Page and click your answers).

Passing is 70% or better.

For True/False questions: A = True and B = False.

1. **Research shows that grateful people report having more adaptive coping techniques.**  
A) True    B) False
2. **Sternberg warns that maintaining a consummate love is more difficult than initially acquiring it.**  
A) True    B) False
3. **Throughout the Western world, married people of both sexes report more happiness than those never married, divorced, or separated.**  
A) True    B) False
4. **Authenticity in children is theorized to develop when caregivers love the children for being themselves.**  
A) True    B) False
5. **The absence of strong social ties was not found to be a mortality risk factor equivalent to smoking and high blood pressure.**  
A) True    B) False
6. **Psychological maladjustment is related to the degree that people rate themselves more favorably than the ratings of others.**  
A) True    B) False
7. **Prolonged cortisol secretion, which chronic stress can produce, may induce significant physiological changes.**  
A) True    B) False
8. **The growing body of research on humans matches the findings from animal studies demonstrating that oxytocin lessens the stress response and is associated with increased social affiliation.**  
A) True    B) False
9. **Lyubomirsky contends that happy and unhappy people significantly differ in their "subjective experience and construal of the world."**  
A) True    B) False
10. **Intentional activities do not resist adaptation because they are not variable and episodic.**  
A) True    B) False

Continuing Psychology Education Inc. is approved by the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (Provider # 3329), Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors (Provider # 386), and Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists (Provider # 110). This course, Positive Psychology IV, meets the qualifications for 6 hours of continuing education for social workers, LPCs, and LMFTs as required by the above-mentioned State Boards; for psychologists, LSSPs, LPAs, and provisionally licensed psychologists as required by the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists; and for LCDCs as required by the Texas LCDC Program.

11. **Grateful people seem to reflect \_\_\_\_\_ on their past.**  
A) with more negative illusion  
B) more negatively  
C) more positively  
D) with more cognitive dissonance
12. **When passion is low in a relationship, \_\_\_\_\_ is one love component that can strengthen the bond and ease the tension of passion's ebb and flow.**  
A) recalling the past  
B) gift-giving  
C) making promises  
D) friendship
13. **A large-scale study of sexual behavior in the United States concluded that respondents who reported the greatest physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction in their relationships were in \_\_\_\_\_.**  
A) extramarital affairs  
B) partnered, monogamous relationships  
C) casual sexual relationships  
D) multiple sexual relationships
14. **Less stress and more \_\_\_\_\_ are the top things 45-59-year-olds say would most improve their sex life.**  
A) work involvement  
B) annual income  
C) free time  
D) disposable income
15. **Marriage appears to be associated with positive health and psychological outcomes but only if the marriage is \_\_\_\_\_.**  
A) happy and nondistressed  
B) composed of similar socioeconomic level partners  
C) above the financial poverty level  
D) composed of two gainfully employed partners

16. **John Steinbeck believed \_\_\_\_\_ was adaptive because it promoted understanding and acceptance.**
- A) "illusion thinking"
  - B) "wishful thinking"
  - C) "is thinking"
  - D) "daydreaming"
17. \_\_\_\_\_ **professes that once people establish their self-views, these self-views supply a strong sense of coherence and ability to predict and control their world.**
- A) Self-disclosure theory
  - B) Intrinsic motivation theory
  - C) Predisposition theory
  - D) Self-verification theory
18. **Personality research suggests that humility is \_\_\_\_\_.**
- A) facilitated by self-enhancement biases
  - B) an uncommon characteristic
  - C) common because people take credit for their failures
  - D) common because people frequently remember negative information about themselves
19. **Research has offered credibility to the stress reactivity hypothesis, which suggests that social relationships improve health by \_\_\_\_\_.**
- A) decreasing natural killer cell activity
  - B) increasing physiological responses to stressors
  - C) lessening physiological responses to stressors
  - D) increasing systolic blood pressure
20. **Generally, \_\_\_\_\_ is perceived as the most important source of meaning in life.**
- A) having relationships with others
  - B) material goods
  - C) work satisfaction
  - D) leisure activity

Please transfer your answers to the Answer Sheet (click the "Texas Answer Sheet" link on Home Page and click your answers).

Press "Back" to return to "Texas Courses" page.