

## Praise for *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology*

"This wonderful encyclopedia – nearly 300 entries assembled from more than 300 contributors – is an unprecedented and valuable resource for today's (and tomorrow's) students and scholars of positive psychology."

*David G. Myers, Hope College, author of The Pursuit of Happiness*

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*Robert Biswas-Diener, Centre for Applied Positive Psychology*

"A truly comprehensive overview of the dynamic field of positive psychology, written by a veritable 'Who's who' of the field. This will be an indispensable source for students of positive psychology, and a must-have for every university library."

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"This is a welcome and timely compilation of the key concepts and personalities which form the new discipline of positive psychology. The entries are wide-ranging, authoritative, and accessible. *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology* is an invaluable resource for newcomers to the field and experts alike – informative, enjoyable, and engaging."

*Felicia Huppert, University of Cambridge*

"This encyclopedia is a strikingly comprehensive yet concise account of the breadth of positive psychology. It is skillfully compiled and an essential resource for those with an interest in positive psychology . . . the pages will not stay crisp for long!"

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"I wanted to read this one from cover to cover – not what I usually do with encyclopedias! History, personalities, organizations, concepts, theories, and controversies can all be found in this most comprehensive volume in the field to date. A must-have reference book for any positive psychology scholar, practitioner, or student."

*Ilona Boniwell, University of East London*

"This is a brilliant book that provides a rich picture of the field of positive psychology. The information in each entry provides a thoughtful and synthetic panorama of this emerging field. This is a book that should be on the shelves of any scholar or general reader interested in the area of well-being and positive psychology."

*Carmelo Vázquez, Universidad Complutense*

"We now live longer and more securely than earlier generations did. That allows us more opportunities to optimize our lives. Positive psychology helps to make the most of these chances. *The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology* provides a comprehensive and accessible summary of this growing area of scholarship and practice."

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# **The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology**

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# The Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology

*Edited by*  
Shane J. Lopez

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# Foreword

Positive Psychology has burgeoned in the past decade. From gleams in the eyes of Ray Fowler, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and me in 1998 it has grown into a discipline. It can boast of:

- several thousand journal articles;
- two dozen tradebooks;
- a handful of textbooks, for example Peterson's *Primer of Positive Psychology* and Snyder and Lopez's *Positive Psychology*;
- substantial scientific grants;
- flourishing research laboratories;
- research and practice centers around the globe;
- the International Positive Psychology Association with more than 2,500 members;
- hundreds of courses including the most popular one at Harvard;
- advanced degree programs led by the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology at Penn;
- a website [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) with more than one million registrants; and
- best of all – critics (happiness is not motherhood and apple pie)!

Googling “Positive Psychology” from 1900 to 1997 will get you a handful of citations, since 1998; however, there are several hundred thousand references.

Why has Positive Psychology become a legitimate and popular scholarly endeavor, say in contrast to Humanistic Psychology of the 1950s, which shares many of its premises with one major exception – mainstream, cumulative, and replicable scientific method? The city of Florence in the fifteenth century offers a clue. When nations are at war, in famine, poor, and in civil turmoil, it is quite natural that the endeavors they support will be about defense and damage. When nations are (relatively) peaceful, sated, wealthy, and harmonious, they ask, not just about removing the disabling conditions of life, but about creating the enabling and ennobling conditions of life. Cosimo the Great's Florence decided to devote its surplus to beauty and gave us what was later called “Renaissance.” The wealthy world of the late twentieth century met most of these conditions and the call for a Positive Psychology – a psychology that was not just about suffering, trauma, depression, victims, irrationality, madness, and crime – did

not fall on deaf ears. This Encyclopedia embodies what is known in this new discipline today.

What might tomorrow hold?

- Positive Physical Health
- Positive Neuroscience
- Positive Social Science
- Positive Education.

The logic is after all the same. Positive Psychology argues that mental health is something over and above the absence of mental illness. I predict that these new disciplines will hold that:

- Physical health is something over and above the absence of physical illness.
- Neuroscience can be much more than just the study of the diseased brain.
- Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, and History can be much more than the study of how institutions go wrong.
- Education will become more than the building of tools for success and achievement, but for teaching fulfillment and well-being as well and that these new disciplines will, like Positive Psychology, flourish.

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## Preface

A decade ago, “positive psychology” became a buzz term in academic circles; today it is casually referred to on network television, in magazines, and on-line. Indeed, positive psychology has become a primary focus of scholars in the hallowed halls of universities and a topic of discussion for people on the park benches in downtown America.

Though it has become a popular term and field of study, it is hardly a well-understood one. My hope is that the entries in the *Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology* clarify any misunderstanding and round out your knowledge of what is positive about people and places.

The scholarly work that has been done in all corners of the world warrants closer examination by a broader readership. Enjoy learning about positive psychology concepts and principles. And, please do me this one favor . . . share your newfound knowledge with other people. That would help me realize my purpose for working on this encyclopedia, giving positive psychology away.

Shane J. Lopez  
Omaha, Nebraska

## Acknowledgments

Literally hundreds of people contributed to this attempt to give positive psychology away to a new readership. Indeed, the *Encyclopedia of Positive Psychology* is a product of positive psychology in action. Lots of love, social support, and wisdom came from Allison Rose Lopez and Neil Salkind. Hope was the outcome of many chats over coffee with Anne Beauchamp, who did a masterful job in her role as Associate Editor and manager of this huge project. My friends, Naif Al-Mutawa, Lisa Edwards, Amy Fineburg, Alex Linley, and Tom Rath gave generously of their time and expertise when generating and reviewing entries. And, Candie Ackerman brought open-mindedness and persistence to a series of tasks that helped us get this project done.

My deep gratitude goes to each of the contributors who shared their discoveries with us, and to you, the reader, who has invested some time in learning about the positive in the world.

Shane J. Lopez  
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## Abnormal Psychology

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Abnormal psychology is the area of psychological investigation concerned with understanding the nature of individual pathologies of the mind, mood, and behavior. It addresses dysfunction associated with distress or impairment in functioning and a response that is not typical or culturally expected. Such dysfunction should be considered on a continuum, rather than solely whether it is present or absent. Clinical assessment and diagnosis are important processes in the understanding and treatment of abnormal behavior, or psychopathology. Clinical assessment involves the evaluation of psychological, biological, and social factors in an individual presenting with abnormal behavior or symptoms of a possible psychological disorder. Diagnosis refers to the determination of whether reported problems or symptoms meet the criteria of a psychological disorder. As there are no specific lab tests to identify the presence of a disorder, diagnosis depends on the client report of symptoms, clinician observation of behavior, and signs from a mental status examination. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition (DSM-IV) provides a recognized classification system for identifying abnormal behavior. It includes disorders arranged in a number of major diagnostic classes: disorders usually first diagnosed in childhood (e.g., mental retardation, learning disorders, pervasive developmental disorders); delirium, dementia, amnestic, and cognitive disorders; substance-related disorders (i.e., substance use disorders, and substance-induced disorders); schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders; mood disorders (i.e., depressive and bipolar disorders); anxiety disorders; somatoform disorders; factitious disorders; dissociative disorders; sexual and gender identity disorders; eating disorders; sleep disorders; impulse-control disorders; adjustment

disorders; and personality disorders. Personality disorders reflect an enduring pattern of functioning that deviates from the expectations of an individual's culture. They are also pervasive and inflexible, have an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, are stable over time, and lead to distress/impairment. There are three clusters of personality disorders based on descriptive similarities. Cluster A reflects odd/eccentric behavior and includes paranoid, schizoid, and schizotypal personality disorders. Cluster B reflects dramatic, emotional, and erratic behavior, and includes antisocial, borderline, histrionic, and narcissistic personality disorders. Cluster C reflects anxious/fearful behavior, and includes avoidant, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. Culture often sets parameters for what is viewed to be pathological versus what is not. For example, prior to 1980 the DSM included homosexuality as a mental disorder; it has since been removed from the DSM and is seen as part of normality. Diagnosis continues to evolve as the understanding of mental disorders increases. This is reflected by changes to each new edition of the DSM. Diagnosis is limited by clinical judgment about whether an individual's symptoms meet diagnostic criteria. Cultural differences can be misinterpreted as impairments if the clinician is not sensitive to the cultural context.

Conceptions of abnormal behavior have changed considerably over time. Efforts to understand problematic behavior often derive from the prevailing theories of behavior that are popular at any given time. During the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries supernatural traditions prevailed which suggested that deviant behavior was defined by the battle between good and evil. Bizarre behavior was seen as the work of the devil and witches and drastic action was taken against those who were viewed to be possessed, such as exorcism. Later, biological traditions proposed physical causes for mental disorders. Hippocrates, known as the father of modern medicine, suggested that mental disorders were caused by brain pathology or head trauma. Brain functioning was proposed to be related to four bodily fluids or humors – blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm – which emanated from different organs. Disease resulted from too much or too little of the fluids. For example, too much black bile was thought to lead to melancholia (depression). The biological tradition flourished in the nineteenth century, leading to increased institutionalization for those with mental illness. Psychological traditions soon developed. The approach of moral therapy developed to treat patients as normally as possible in environments providing the opportunity for social interaction. By the twentieth century two major psychological approaches emerged. Sigmund Freud developed the psychoanalytical approach which emphasized the influence of unconscious processes on abnormal behavior. Behaviorism also emerged with a focus on learning and adaptation in the development of psychopathology. The prevailing theory is now one of a multidimensional model of psychopathology (integrating biological, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social factors). This biopsychosocial model has been attributed to the work of George Engel. He described a framework from which to understand health and disease, offering a broad view that biological factors alone are not enough to explain health



and illness. Biopsychosocial factors are thought to be involved in the development, course, and outcome of illness, including mental disorders. The relative importance of any one factor on causation varies. The role of these factors also varies across individuals, and across stages of the lifespan. Biological influences include the role of genetics in the development of illness. It is a challenge to determine which genes affect behavior and how. It is expected that no single gene or even combination of genes determines whether someone will develop a disorder, but rather genes providing risk interact with environmental factors. Psychosocial influences include stressful life events, one's personality and temperament, interpersonal relationships, and culture. Various terms are used in discussing the etiology of mental illness, such as correlation, causation, and consequence. Correlation refers to the association between two or more events, and does not necessarily mean causation. Correlation studies have identified risk factors, which are biological, psychological, or sociocultural variables that increase the probability for developing a given disorder. Causation is difficult to establish, particularly due to the challenges of experimental research involving human subjects.

There are several research strategies for studying psychopathology, with the ultimate goal to uncover the causes of a particular disorder. Case study methodology provides detailed examination of a single individual; it provides detailed understanding of the given individual, but not general psychological principles. Epidemiological studies address the distribution of disorders in a given population, and the variables that are associated with the distribution. To study genetic and environmental influences, behavior-genetic paradigms are used which involve family, twin, and adoption studies. Environmental studies also address shared versus non-shared influences on psychopathology. Biological studies include psychophysiological research which addresses the impact of physiological responses on psychological processes, and utilizes brain imaging technology to document the structure and functioning of the brain. Psychopathology research is increasingly turning to hybrid forms of research design to address multiple methodological approaches simultaneously.

Treatment for mental disorders has evolved since the deinstitutionalization movement of the 1950s. Treatments may be pharmacological, psychological, or a combination of both. Much research has focused on the effectiveness of psychotherapy for psychological disorders. Most prominently, Hans Eysenck questioned the effectiveness of psychotherapy in papers in 1952 and 1960. This spurred increased attention to the study of therapeutic effectiveness, and in 1977 Smith and Glass reported that therapy works after utilizing meta-analysis. With increased efforts to study therapy outcomes has come increased attention to the development of empirically-based treatment for psychological disorders. The goal is the identification of which treatment is most effective for which person.

SEE ALSO: ► Clinical psychology ► Developmental psychopathology  
 ► *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* ► Mental illness ► Psychopathology

## Academic Achievement

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*Academic achievement* refers to any measure of a student's progress in a scholastic setting or in an academically related subject area. Academic achievement is usually measured by a student's subject test scores, course grades, standardized test scores, or matriculation through school. The body of research related to academic achievement is significant. Numerous research studies use some measure called academic achievement. Academic achievement has been studied since the early days of psychology. Such notable psychologists as James, Lewin, Festinger, and McClelland have all made important early contributions to the study of academic achievement.

Researchers use many different types of behaviors and measures to quantify academic achievement. Most studies use these measures to determine how some intervention, teaching technique, student condition, or learning situation affects achievement. Test scores and course grades are the most typically used measures of academic achievement. Often test scores result from assessments given during the course (e.g., a midterm or final exam grade), but test scores can also stem from standardized tests. Qualitative research in academic achievement utilizes interviews and alternative assessment techniques (e.g., portfolios, journal responses, etc.). These qualitative measures attempt to reveal aspects of academic achievement that may not be apparent in traditional pen-and-paper tests, such as cultural bias, nonverbal ability, or creativity.

Academic achievement is believed to be related to intellectual ability. One of the primary ways psychologists measure intellectual ability is through intelligence tests. Intelligence has been a popular indicator of academic achievement since Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon developed the first intelligence tests to determine the academic fitness of children in France. The exact nature of intelligence has been debated over the past century. Charles Spearman in the early 1900s advocated for a generalized view of intelligence (called the *g* factor). This *g* factor was thought to pervade all aspects of life so that a person who was intelligent in one subject would also be intelligent in another. Lewis Terman, who brought the original Binet-Simon test to the United States, developed a formula for calculating intelligence by dividing mental age (the score from the test) with chronological age and multiplying by 100. Studies throughout the years have shown a correlation between this intelligence quotient (IQ) and academic achievement. Modern theorists and researchers, such as Howard Gardner and Robert Sternberg, believe that intelligence is a combination of several factors, and people can be intelligent in one or more areas and perhaps not in others. Intelligence tests, such as the Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), are often used by school districts to identify students who might need special education

services, either for mental retardation or for giftedness, although they are not typically used as the only determinant of special education placement. Critics of intelligence tests believe that the tests harbor cultural and socioeconomic biases that inordinately identify minority and lower-income children as academically challenged.

Numerous lines of research have revealed other factors that lead to determining and defining academic achievement. The level of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation one has can be related to academic achievement. Intrinsic motivation is that which is inherently desirable, such as enjoying an activity for its own sake, while extrinsic motivation includes externally valuable rewards for behavior. Studies indicate that intrinsic motivation leads to higher long-term academic achievement. People who report that when they participate in activities for their own sakes, they work harder and longer toward accomplishing the goals they set. Extrinsic motivation often leads to less enjoyment in a given activity, particularly in terms of the overjustification effect. Studies on the overjustification effect have shown that when people are rewarded for activities they find inherently enjoyable (e.g., learning), they will lose their intrinsic motivation for the activity and rely on the extrinsic rewards. Whether externally valuable rewards such as grades have a detrimental effect on academic achievement is unclear, however.

The goals students set for themselves can also affect academic achievement. C. R. Snyder's hope theory suggests that the quality of a goal determines whether one is hopeful. Snyder proposes that those who set easily achievable goals, such as watching TV all day, will not show high levels of hope even though they have set concrete goals. Goals that are too easily achieved do not lead to developing suitable pathways or require high levels of agency for achieving the goals. The same is true for those who set unreasonable goals. Snyder believed that goals should be challenging, yet achievable in order to lead to high levels of hope. A complementary line of research is goal orientation theory, formulated by Nicholls, Dweck, and Ames, as well as others. These researchers have found that the type of goals students set for themselves influences their academic performance. They identified two main types of goals related to academic achievement: mastery goals, which focus on learning the material or mastering a skill; and performance goals, which focus on earning a particular grade or doing better than another student. According to Dweck, students who set mastery goals do better in school and are resilient in the face of failure. Performance-oriented students do not seek out challenges, but only pursue those activities that will guarantee success. Performance-oriented students experience less academic achievement than their mastery-oriented counterparts. Both hope and goal orientation research suggest that the quality and type of goals affect academic achievement.

The types of attributions students make about failure can affect achievement. Weiner's attribution theory predicts that students who make stable attributions about failure experience self-pity and decreased effort. Seligman's explanatory style theory suggests that pessimistic students who are at risk for depression often underachieve. A pessimistic explanatory style predicts that students who fail will

explain the event as internal (“I’m so stupid!”), stable (“I’ll never do well in this subject!”), and global (“I must be a terrible student overall!”). These types of attributions about academic failure lead students to underachieve.

Social and cultural factors that influence academic achievement include socioeconomic status (SES), racial/ethnic status, and gender. Students who live in low SES neighborhoods and attend schools that are poorly funded typically achieve less than their more affluent counterparts. Students in certain minority groups (i.e., Hispanic, African American) that are typically impoverished also underachieve, yet other minority groups (i.e., Asian American) achieve as well or better than the majority students. In addition, female students tend to underachieve in certain areas (e.g., math and science) when compared with their male counterparts. Students’ perception of racial and ethnic stereotypes about their own group can influence how well they achieve on certain standardized tests. Claude Steele and Josh Aronson have identified a phenomenon known as stereotype threat that reveals the impact of prejudice on academic achievement. When students are made aware of the stereotypes about their own group, they tend to perform on standardized tests in the way the stereotype would predict. For instance, African American students scored lower on standardized tests than their White peers when told that the test would reveal innate intelligence. In addition, White students underperformed on standardized tests as compared to Asians when Whites were told the test would reveal skill in math. Research in stereotype threat has shown that the activation of a stereotype can lead to decreases in academic performance in many different groups.

Current research into academic achievement focuses on narrowing the definition of the term and pinpointing which factors most influence achievement. Researchers also debate how well traditional academic measures reveal true achievement. Legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) defines academic achievement in terms of progress on standardized tests. This type of federal attention to test scores spurs research on practices that increase the scores. Leading psychologists have criticized such reliance on standardized test scores. Some argue that establishing benchmarks for all students of a particular age to achieve neglects issues in developmental readiness and individual progress. For instance, Robert Sternberg and Howard Gardner advocate a broad view of intelligence, and in turn academic achievement, which encompasses academic and non-academic domains. In their *Handbook of Competence and Motivation*, Andrew Elliot and Carol Dweck suggest that academic achievement ought to be reformulated as competence. Elliot and Dweck argue that achievement is too broadly articulated, with no coherent parameters by which to measure it, and yet does not go far enough to grasp the breadth of achievement. They propose that competence more accurately reflects the behavioral constructs of achievement and allows for achievement to be studied beyond the classroom.

SEE ALSO: ► Goals and goal-setting theory ► Intelligence ► Seligman, Martin ► Snyder, C. R. ► Stereotype threat

# Actualizing Tendency

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*Actualizing tendency* refers to an innate growth drive or impulse that is said to exist within all human beings. Proponents of the concept make the optimistic assumption that people have an inherent tendency to become more elaborated, integrated, and internally coordinated over time – that is, to grow and develop as personalities. Although not everyone grows throughout the lifespan, the potential remains throughout. The challenge for teachers, therapists, and service providers, then, is to help people “unlock” these sometimes-hidden capacities.

The idea that humans have inherent growth potentials can be traced back at least to Aristotle, and his proposal that all people are born with certain virtues whose recognition and cultivation leads to happiness. The idea reappears in the enlightenment era proposal that people naturally seek greater self-determination and happiness, and also in the romantic era proposal that people are naturally good and will develop into virtuous citizens unless the socialization process goes awry. Such assumptions became unpopular during the early twentieth century, as operant behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis dominated mainstream thinking. However, even at that time some theorists, such as Jackson, Smuts, Dewey, Piaget, Angyal, and Goldstein, began to make use of the actualizing concept. These originators of the organismic theoretical perspective shared in common a belief that human beings have an inherent drive towards increasing complexity, self-organization, and wholeness. Stated in abstract terms, living systems are open and able to maintain themselves far from equilibrium, resisting the universe’s dominant trend towards entropy or disorganization, by changing and elaborating their internal structures in response to perturbations and challenges. In this view *all* living things, not just humans, might be said to have an actualizing tendency, rooted in life’s ability to utilize energy in service of compensation, adaptation, and learning.

Today, the actualizing tendency idea is most closely associated with the humanistic psychologies of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Maslow proposed that all humans have a need for self-actualization, but that this need does not come to the fore until lower level needs for safety, belongingness, and esteem are met. In Maslow’s view the actualizing tendency is only contingently activated, and becomes fully manifest in only a rare few. In contrast, Rogers viewed the actualizing tendency as standard equipment in all human beings. Although people may sometimes get “stuck,” the tendency can be reactivated by skilled therapists who give unconditional positive regard, use empathy, and employ nondirective techniques. In particular, Rogers proposed that all people have an *organismic valuing process* (OVP) which enables them to perceive and enact the most health- and growth-relevant choices for themselves. Although the OVP is

subtle and its outputs easily overlooked or ignored, Rogers claimed that accurate internal information is always available given sufficient desire and attention. Notably, neither Maslow nor Rogers provided empirical research support for their ideas, an omission for which the humanistic psychologists were justifiably criticized.

Within contemporary research psychology, the actualizing tendency is probably best represented within Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT). This complex but comprehensive theory of human motivation was built on the concept of intrinsic motivation, in which people are internally motivated to explore and engage the environment, elaborating their knowledge and skills in the process. SDT's proactive view of human nature contrasts with the reactive views of earlier drive and learning theories. Later, the theory expanded to posit an *organismic integration process*, which motivates people to internalize and identify with important behaviors that are not intrinsically enjoyable (i.e., studying, diaper-changing). Indeed, there is evidence that this process does occur and is even normative; for example, older children perform socially valued behaviors, such as sharing with others and picking up their rooms, for more internalized reasons compared to younger children, and older adults pursue personal goals for more internalized reasons than younger adults. Given that internalized motivation typically correlates with measures of well-being and personal development, such normative temporal trends may be interpreted as supporting the existence of an innate actualizing tendency in all humans.

Sheldon, Arndt, and Houser-Marko provided specific empirical support for the existence of the OVP posited by Rogers, through an application of SDT's *organismic values* model. Sheldon, Arndt, and Houser-Marko showed that participants tend to shift towards intrinsic values (satisfying and growth-promoting; intimacy, growth, community) and away from extrinsic values (compensatory and less satisfying; money, image, fame), over periods of time ranging from 20 minutes to 6 weeks. Also, Sheldon showed that a similar biased shift away from extrinsic values and towards intrinsic values took place over the 4 years of the college career. Furthermore, Sheldon and Kasser showed that older adults listed more generativity and integrity strivings, compared to young adults who listed more identity strivings. They suggested that the observed age-based shift towards the higher levels of Erik Erikson's stage model of personality development represents the cumulative effects of the OVP and the actualizing tendency.

Importantly, SDT does not propose that growth and actualization tendencies will always win out; a properly supportive environment is required to facilitate these tendencies. Specifically, authorities, teachers, bosses, parents, therapists, and coaches should be autonomy supportive rather than controlling, if they want to maximize their charges' growth and self-organizational potentials. Perhaps paradoxically, if people are granted the freedom to decide for themselves what to do, then they are most likely to internalize the values that authorities want them to. In contrast, authorities who try to force-feed ideas to their charges, or to compel or coerce their behavior, tend to forestall the internalization process.

Another contemporary perspective relevant to the actualizing tendency is that of motivational interviewing (MI). MI is a set of techniques for resolving clients' ambivalence, thus helping them to move towards more adaptive ways of being, especially in the domain of health behavior. MI assumes that the impetus for positive change can only come from within the client, and must be discovered by the client with a minimum of interference and direction from the therapist. Instead, the therapist merely reflects and mirrors the different sides of the client's internal conflicts, so they may be integrated in a manner of the client's own making. Notably, MI and SDT are quite consistent with one another, providing complementary technical and theoretical resources for counselors and researchers.

Positive psychology is in part an attempt to rectify the biases of past research's focus on pathologies and errors. The actualizing tendency concept is quite relevant for positive psychology because the goal of enhancing actualization fits squarely with positive psychology's emphasis on understanding positive adaptation and change, i.e., thriving. Also, the actualizing concept helps to ground positive psychology's optimistic assumptions regarding human nature, via a perspective ultimately rooted in biology and living systems theory. In addition, the concept provides an important heuristic for helping situations, suggesting that encouraging people's self-direction and personal initiative may be paramount for helping them to reach new levels of thriving. Finally, the concept helps link positive psychology to its conceptual and historical precursors (i.e., the humanistic and organismic philosophical perspectives). Acknowledging such linkages is something that positive psychology sometimes seems reluctant to do, to its own and the field's detriment.

In future research, it will be important to develop concepts and measures for determining when the actualizing process is occurring within an individual's life, vs. when it is not occurring. Ideally, this account would include biological and neurofunctional markers, perhaps involving temporal lobe activation or complex intercoordination between different brain regions. Research also needs to understand better the routes to actualization. As suggested above, autonomy-supportive authorities may help to forward the process, as well as unconditional positive regard or psychological need-satisfaction in general. However, it is also apparent that positive change often occurs in the face of negative circumstances and great difficulties (i.e., post-traumatic growth), and research needs to understand the different initiators, processes, and results of growth derived from supportive vs. traumatizing life-circumstances. It will also be important to understand how exposure to inspirational peers and mentors might "kick-start" people's own actualizing process. Could actualization sometimes result from social contagion processes, such as those instantiated by transformational leaders? Obviously, these are crucial questions for a positively-oriented psychology.

SEE ALSO: ► Intentional self-development ► Maslow, Abraham  
 ► Positive therapy ► Rogers, Carl ► Self-determination

## Adaptability

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*Adaptability* is the capacity to adjust oneself readily (without great difficulty) to fit changed circumstances. This adjustment can be psychological and/or physical in nature, and the changed circumstances can be positive, negative, or neutral. Given the constantly changing universe in which all things exist, the degree of someone or something's willingness and/or capacity to adapt is a barometer of the likelihood of continued existence, as well as the subjective quality of that existence.

The traditional connotation of adaptability is a positive one. While the capacity to adjust to novel circumstances is positive, adaptability can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. A unique and complex concept, adaptability plays an integral role in several essential domains of human existence. Among these domains are developmental adaptability, interpersonal functioning, and relationship with the world of work. Adaptability is especially pertinent to the field of positive psychology, the focus of which is on defining and cultivating optimal functioning.

Adaptability is merely the *capacity* to change. Whether a change is made, as well as the appropriateness of the degree of change, is another issue entirely. A person may have a high capacity for change, but low self-efficacy about the probability of successfully implementing that change. Although the person realizes that change is necessary, and possesses many of the physical and psychological resources to effect change, the confidence to take action renders that capacity moot. There are many parallels between this aspect of adaptability and the agency component of Snyder's hope theory. Higher levels of hope facilitate more positive adaptation, increasing well-being, as well as the number of goals to be achieved and their difficulty and complexity. Furthermore, like most things in this world, adaptability exists as a continuum. Accuracy and moderation are the keys to successful adaptation.

Adaptability is not always a positive force. *Hedonic adaptation*, one of the many forms of adaptability, refers to a situation where someone adjusts to a positive life event to the point where the event is taken for granted and loses its positive valence. Hedonic adaptation is part of the hedonic treadmill. According to the model, although new circumstances may cause temporary increases in happiness or sadness, people rapidly adjust, and the effect of these new circumstances on their well-being then quickly decreases or disappears entirely. For example, Brickman and colleagues showed that recent lottery winners were no happier than controls (nonlottery winners) and, furthermore, that recent victims of paralysis were not as unhappy as one would expect. Brickman further reasoned that no matter whether something makes you happier or sadder, you will always come back to your biologically predetermined happiness set point. However, Diener and colleagues found individual differences in the rate and extent of adaptation that occurs to the exact same event with regard to the effect on measures of life satisfaction or subjective well-being. Understanding individual differences in adaptation



is important because it will help in discovering when and why hedonic adaptation does and does not occur.

Adaptability is a complex psychological mechanism that has received much intrigue and scrutiny in recent years. *Resilience*, and its role in positive adaptation, has been of particular interest. Resilience is often referred to as the maintenance of successful positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity. Temperament, sex, intellectual ability, humor, empathy, social problem-solving skills, social expressiveness, and an inner locus of control have been found to influence adaptation under stressful or adverse conditions.

Buckingham and Clifton identified adaptability as one of the 34 talent themes measured by the Clifton StrengthsFinder. They define *talent* to mean a “naturally recurring pattern of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied” (Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006, p. 2). A talent represents a capacity to do something. In the case of adaptability, that capacity is to live in the moment. Someone who possesses a high level of adaptability sees the future as something they make for themselves with their choices today. Adaptability enables them to be flexible and respond to the demands of the moment even if they diverge from plans for the future. They are extraordinarily flexible people able to stay productive when the demands of life are pulling them in many different directions at once.

## Career Adaptability

*Career adaptability* is the readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in one’s job, and also includes the willingness to deal with the unpredictable changes in work and working conditions. That adaptability is a highly valued commodity in the world of work today which is not surprising. In today’s ever-changing workplace, in which organizations are characterized by dynamic environments, the need for adaptive workers has become increasingly important. New technology, globalization, and modifications in jobs require workers to adapt to new and varied situations at work. This influx of new technology mutates the nature of various work tasks, and streamlining, or corporate “rightsizing,” requires employees to learn new skills to remain competitive for different jobs. For the majority of the work force, gone are the days of learning one skill set to be used for an entire career. Instead, effective performers in today’s organizations are those who anticipate future needs and adapt to changing job requirements by learning new tasks, technologies, procedures, and roles. Furthermore, the demands of an ever-increasingly global economy necessitate the capacity to adapt to different cultures and their subsequent values and orientations.

Pulakos and colleagues devised a multidimensional model to describe and measure adaptive job performance. The model consists of eight empirically generated dimensions: handling emergencies or crisis situations; handling work stress; solving problems creatively; dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations; learning work tasks, technologies, and procedures; demonstrating interpersonal

adaptability; demonstrating cultural adaptability; and demonstrating physically oriented adaptability. Indeed, adaptability has become so popular within the world of work that numerous researchers have suggested that adaptive characteristics should be one type of criteria used for personnel selection and performance evaluation. Some have even proposed that career adaptability replace career maturity as the central construct in career development theory.

## **Interpersonal/Social Adaptability**

Adaptability can also be applied to interpersonal relationships. It is a personal characteristic that allows an individual to change his or her way of being in order to relate better to another person or persons. For example, you would lower your voice in a library, avoid profanity in a church, and raise your hand during class even though deep down you might prefer to be loud, vulgar, and impetuous.

If an individual can maintain their authenticity while adapting to the different ideas, customs, and worldview of others, that is the ideal scenario. *Interpersonal adaptability* is defined by being able to make compromises and to adjust to changing circumstances. Being able to consistently consider someone else's needs is also a positive aspect of adaptability. This ability to adapt makes all other relationships more likely to be meaningful and successful, and is a great boon to overcoming the evolutionary problems of reproduction and survival.

The when, how, how much, what, and why of adaptability are all crucial questions, and ones that are answered in various ways. Some are gleaned by individuals on their own through trial and error. Others are learned from family, friends, and society in general. When there is too much adaptation, instability and chaos result. However, when there is not enough change, rigidity and intractability arise. These polar extremes are especially problematic in interpersonal or group dynamics. Therefore adaptability, like all things, must be accurately engaged to produce a positive result.

Social/cultural learning increases human adaptability, particularly in uncertain environments, because it allows us to obtain useful information without the costly individual learning process of trial and error. For example, if a hungry person comes across a patch of berries in a field, but does not know which ones are edible, the process of trial and error could prove fatal. However, the person can avoid this problem by relying on information from other people with prior experience. The acquisition of human food preferences is very heavily influenced by social/cultural adaptation.

## **Evolutionary Psychology**

Adaptability has also played a significant role in the evolution of mankind. The central aim of evolutionary psychology is to identify psychological mechanisms and behavioral strategies as evolved solutions to the adaptive problems that humans

have faced for millions of years. Human adaptive psychological mechanisms operate according to different principles across different adaptive domains, are many, and are complex solutions to specific adaptive problems. In general, these problems fall into two broad categories: problems of survival and problems of reproduction.

An example of evolutionary adaptability to address the problem of survival is infant attachment to the caregiver and early female interest in infants. An infant's fear of strangers is an adaptive psychological mechanism that has evolved to ensure the infant's safety and better its chances for survival. In addition to the examples of infant attachment to the caregiver, early female interest in infants, and infant avoidance of strangers, humans share with other primates many age-specific behavioral and psychological adaptations for survival and reproduction. Some of these adaptive traits have immediate fitness benefits at the age at which they are expressed, whereas others have delayed benefits that manifest later on. The capacity to adapt and change according to one's physical and social environment is an essential part of the development of human beings, both within their lifespan and across generations.

SEE ALSO: ► Career development ► Clifton StrengthsFinder  
► Evolutionary psychology ► Hope ► Vocation

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## Admiration

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Admiration is an emotional response involving pleasure, wonder, and reverence. Although admiration has been mentioned in the psychological literature for many years, it has only recently been studied empirically because it is representative of the many positive emotions that have become the focus of research by positive psychologists. According to Barbara Fredrickson, positive emotions are believed to be unique in that, unlike negative emotions which direct one's responses toward narrow and specific goals, they offer opportunities for broadening one's thought-action repertoire in a way that promotes positive well-being by increasing one's personal resources.

Admiration is among a group of positive emotions that are moral in nature. Moral emotions, as described by Haidt, are unique in that they are other-focused, rather than being focused directly on self-interests, and as such, they elicit prosocial or goal-directed behaviors that have potential benefits to others. Four

different families of moral emotions are discussed in the literature, including: (1) self-conscious emotions (shame, guilt, embarrassment); (2) other-suffering emotions (sympathy, compassion, empathy); (3) other-condemning emotions (contempt, anger, disgust); and, (4) other-praising emotions (gratitude, elevation, admiration). These latter emotions are the only ones that can be considered as positive moral emotions in that they involve emotional responsiveness to good deeds. Thus, as a positive moral emotion, the experience of admiration should broaden one's thought-action repertoire by recognizing goodness in other people.

Although the literature on admiration is sparse, available research by Haidt and colleagues suggests that admiration is triggered by specific contexts and elicits certain physical sensations. For example, whereas elevation is typically a response to witnessing excellence of the moral kind, admiration is a response to witnessing great skills or abilities. In a series of studies using video induction and self-report methods (recall and diary) to delineate the characteristics that make the other-praising emotions unique, in 2006, Algoe and colleagues found that both admiration and elevation produced a feeling of being "uplifted," but the experience of admiration was unique in producing excitement and energy. Thus, the experience of admiration is motivating because it activates one towards self-improvement; individuals who witnessed another person displaying great abilities reported the desire to achieve and to praise and emulate the person being admired. Finally, the experience of admiration was the only other-praising emotion that was associated with the kind of inspiration that includes having tears in one's eyes and experiencing chills or tingles.

In addition to being considered within the framework of positive emotions, the concept of admiration has also been considered as a character strength in a classification system for positive traits that includes 24 character strengths, which demonstrate six different virtues that appear to be valued across history and cultures. The core virtue of transcendence includes a character strength that involves aspects of admiration: namely, appreciation of beauty and excellence or awe, wonder, and elevation. Conceptualized in this way, the positive moral emotion of admiration is considered in a trait sense; a person who is high in the character strength of appreciation would have frequent emotional experiences of awe and its related emotions of admiration, wonder, and elevation, whereas a person who is low in appreciation would have fewer experiences of awe-related emotions. The practice of appreciating beauty and excellence is representative of the virtue of transcendence because it provides an experience of connecting to something larger than oneself. This argument is consistent with the consideration of awe-related emotions, including admiration, as important elements in a group of moral emotions referred to by Haidt as self-transcendent. Admiration, then, can be considered as an emotional response or aspect of character that motivates one toward self-improvement in a way that is transcendent.

SEE ALSO: ► Awe ► Haidt, Jonathan ► Heroes ► Positive emotions  
► Strengths (personality)

## Adult Attachment Security

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An *attachment* refers to a unique and enduring affectional bond between two persons and, according to attachment theory, the experience of security within these relationships favorably shapes individual developmental trajectories across the lifespan. Although originating in the study of infant and early child development, over the past two decades attachment theory has emerged as an important framework for understanding healthy and effective adult behavior.

### Attachment Security: Basic Concepts and Assumptions

Attachment theory posits that our human propensities to seek and form affectional bonds with others reflect the functioning of an independent and innate motivational system that is operational at birth, activated by the experience of fear, discomfort, or fatigue, and designed by evolution to protect the species from external threat and predation. In short, when stressed, infants are programmed to elicit care and protection from their caregivers who, in turn, are typically disposed to provide these resources to their offspring. The caregiver's appropriate responsiveness to the infant's proximity needs returns the system to a quiescent state, thus enabling the infant to engage in unfettered exploratory behaviors. To the extent that this recursive dynamic is a consistent feature of early infant-caregiver interactions, the infant experiences a secure attachment bond with the caregiver, and the relationship itself advances the child's acquisition of affect self-regulatory competencies by alternatively serving as a *safe haven* from situational threat and a *secure base* for autonomous exploration and progressive environmental mastery. By contrast, an insecure attachment is formed when the infant's bids for comfort or care are either inconsistently apprehended or consistently rejected by the caregiver. These problematic relational patterns are assumed to bias the normative functioning of the attachment system toward either chronic states of *hyperactivation* (i.e., excessive proximity-seeking behavior) or *deactivation* (i.e., proximity-seeking behavior is suppressed) that impede healthy personality development.

Early observational studies of mother-infant pairs during controlled episodes of threat, separation, and reunion (i.e., the "Strange Situation") reliably identified the presence of three different *attachment styles* (i.e., secure, anxious, avoidant) representing distinctive patterns of mother-infant interactions under these varying conditions. Attachment theory further assumes that, within the first year of life, the child comes to cognitively represent these relational patterns as part of an *internal working model of self and other* or IWM. By integrating self-perceptions of lovability and appraisals of the dependability of caregivers with interactional

strategies for managing the experience of insecurity, the IWM is presumed to function as a cognitive template (and thus an individual differences variable) that guides patterns of affective self-regulation and interpersonal behavior in later adult relationships.

## **The Conceptualization and Assessment of Adult Attachment Security**

Beginning in the mid-1980s, two parallel lines of research on the nature of adult attachment relationships emerged – one in developmental psychology and the other in social psychology, with each line fashioning different ways of conceptualizing and assessing the construct of adult attachment security. Developmental psychologists have generally conceptualized adult attachment in terms of one's recollections and accounts of early (childhood) experiences with adult caregivers gathered via a semi-structured interview (Adult Attachment Interview [AAI]). On the basis of the independently-rated discourse quality of AAI narratives, interviewees are reliably classified into one of four adult attachment "states of mind": *Secure/autonomous* persons demonstrate the capacity to provide thoughtful, reflective, and coherent answers to AAI probes. By contrast, persons classified into one of the remaining insecure groups are likely to respond to AAI questions by either emotionally disassembling (*preoccupied*), denying the emotional impacts of painful attachment experiences (*dismissing*), or otherwise lapsing into dissociative and dysfluent speech (*unresolved/disorganized*).

Social psychologists have alternatively conceptualized adult attachment security in terms of how persons describe their typical cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to intimate peer relationships. Factor analyses of a large number of these self-report measures demonstrated that the specific nature of one's adult attachment organization can be characterized by the relative level of fears of rejection or abandonment by intimate partners (i.e., Attachment Anxiety) together with the corresponding level of expressed discomfort with closeness and intimacy (i.e., Attachment Avoidance). These two relatively independent dimensions are further assumed to create a conceptual space wherein four distinct adult attachment styles can be located. Adults with a *secure* style exhibit low scores on both dimensions, whereas persons with a *fearful* style report high scores on both dimensions. By contrast, adults with a *preoccupied* style evidence high levels of Attachment Anxiety but low levels of Avoidance, whereas those with a *dismissing* style demonstrate the opposite pattern (i.e., high scores on Avoidance, but low scores on Anxiety).

Although evidence of classification congruence between interview and self-report measures has been modest at best, both approaches yield moderately stable assessments that are nonredundant with scores on measures of more basic personality traits. Indeed, there is a growing consensus that each assessment method offers complementary and potentially integrative perspectives on the larger construct of adult attachment security.

## **Key Findings**

Whether assessed using interview or self-report methods, adult attachment security has been consistently related to more adaptive cognitive, affective, and interpersonal functioning. For instance, when compared to their less secure peers, secure adults generally demonstrate more flexible and optimistic cognitive processes, more differentiated, integrated, and resilient perceptions of self-worth, and more competent forms of coping and social behavior. Adult attachment security also has been linked to more confident academic and career exploration, higher levels of work satisfaction and parenting competence, stronger altruistic and prosocial orientations, more trusting, collaborative, and satisfying intimate relationships, and to evidence of post-traumatic growth. Furthermore, and consistent with theoretical expectations, adult attachment security has been related to more positive retrospective accounts of early family environments and, across several prospective studies, to more favorable developmental trajectories.

Research has progressed rapidly from an early focus on establishing bivariate associations between adult attachment security and various indicators of psychosocial functioning to more sophisticated correlational and experimental investigations of mediational processes capable of explaining these relationships. In particular, recent experimental studies have used either contextually-activated or subliminal methods to prime the experience of attachment security in order to establish causal associations with perceptual and self-regulatory processes and to differentiate conscious and nonconscious features of the construct. Also receiving greater current emphasis are observational studies of the care-seeking and care-giving behaviors of intimate adult couples as well as the operation of adult attachment dynamics in therapist–client relationships. Emergent findings in the latter domain indicate that variability in adult attachment security is related to distinct client patterns of symptom-reporting and help-seeking behavior, to transference and countertransference processes, and to the formation of effective working alliances.

## **Directions for Future Research**

The extant literature on adult attachment security also suggests several important directions for future inquiry. For instance, further theory-guided prospective studies of particular dyads (i.e., intimate couples, therapist–client, supervisor–worker) should yield a more nuanced understanding of how the attachment-related expectations and appraisals of both interactants cooperatively shape relationship processes and outcomes over time. Also, because few investigations have thus far studied adult attachment security within diverse samples, greater inquiry into how cultural variables may interact with attachment schema should prove useful. Lastly, emerging efforts to integrate attachment concepts and assumptions within broader systemic frameworks of affect-regulation, personality development,

and therapeutic change should advance the practical applications of research findings in promoting psychological health and effectiveness.

SEE ALSO: ► Amae ► Attachment theory ► Close relationships  
► Romantic love ► Successful aging

## Aerobic Activity

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A walk in the park, climbing the stairs at work, cycling through the forest, a game of soccer, and an early morning swim are all forms of aerobic activity. *Aerobic activity* is a continuous, rhythmic activity that uses large muscle groups, loads the cardiovascular system, and results in an increase in energy expenditure above resting levels. Aerobic exercise is a subcategory of aerobic activity that is planned, structured, and repetitive and is performed to maintain or improve aerobic fitness. A robust body of evidence demonstrates that regular aerobic exercise reduces morbidity and mortality for chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers. However, the advantage of aerobic exercise is not confined to preventing the aforementioned conditions. Mounting evidence now relates this mode of activity with enhanced psychological well-being, making aerobic exercise a viable pathway to many of the mind states espoused within positive psychology.

The “feel good” effect of aerobic exercise has been demonstrated through decreases in anxiety and depression and increases in mood and emotion, self-esteem, and cognitive functioning. However, even though empirical evidence demonstrates that single bouts of activity can make people feel better in the post-exercise time period, levels of inactivity remain high. Further, in today’s society physical exertion has been overtaken by mental exertion both in the workplace and at home. Therefore, we must seek to expend energy during our leisure time or by active integration into our daily routine. Engaging in regular aerobic activity holds considerable potential to enhance well-being and mental health. For example, individuals who partake in such activity routinely express feelings of achievement, control, energy, and in the case of group exercise, a sense of belonging, even in the presence of enduring mental ill-health. Given the diversity of possible psychological responses, this discussion will focus on the relationship between aerobic exercise and two aspects of well-being that embody the broad sweep of positive psychology – positive affect and self-esteem.

## Aerobic Activity and Positive Affect

Pleasure–displeasure and perceived activation are dimensions that suitably define *affect*, and pleasure is a key theme within positive psychology. A recent meta-analysis