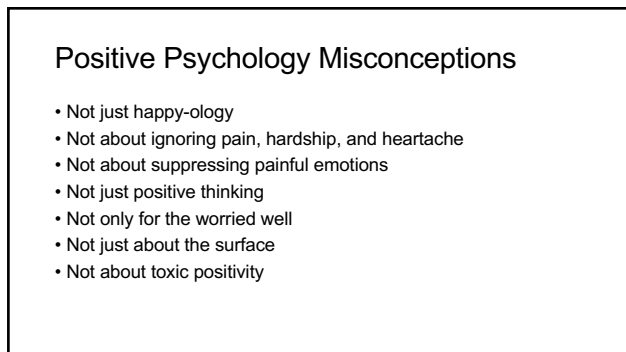


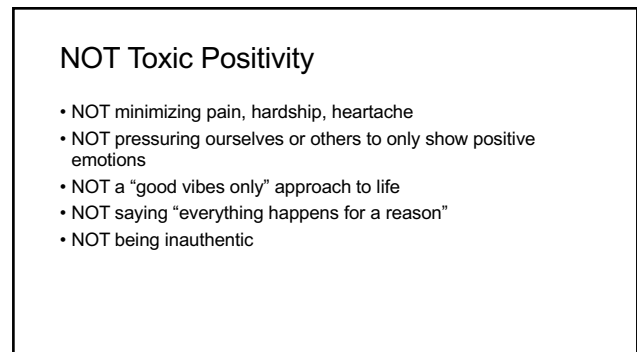
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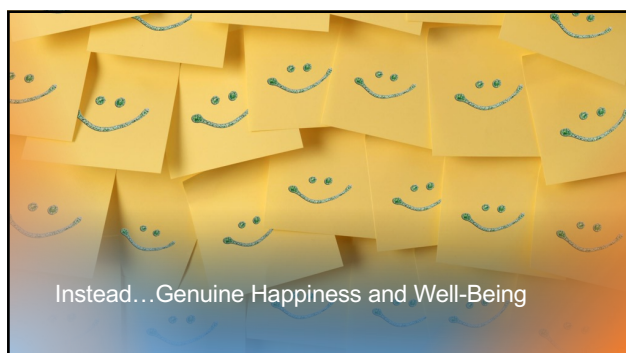
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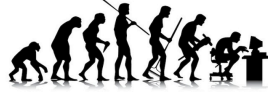
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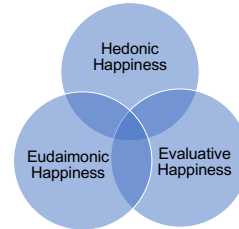
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## Happiness: A new “problem”

7

## What is Happiness?



8

## What is happiness?

- Hedonic Happiness
  - Positive emotions about the past, present, and future
  - A greater proportion of positive emotions versus negative emotions\*
- Evaluative Happiness
  - Essentially equates to Life Satisfaction
- Eudaimonic Happiness
  - A sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging

9

## Barriers to Happiness



10

## Barriers to Well-Being

- Hedonic Adaptation
- Genetics
- Our Brain's Negativity Bias
- The Relentless Pursuit of Happiness
- External/Life Circumstances



11

## Core Habits of Well-Being After Hardship

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| ❖ Give Thanks        | ❖ Awe and Wonder         |
| ❖ Be of Service      | ❖ Self-Compassion        |
| ❖ Make Meaning       | ❖ Mindful Awareness      |
| ❖ Deep Connections   | ❖ Savor the Good         |
| ❖ Cultivate Optimism | ❖ Psychological Richness |
| ❖ Cultivate Growth   |                          |

12

## Gratitude

"He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for that which he has." –Epictetus



13

What is one thing you feel thankful for in this moment?



14

## Gratitude

"A sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life."  
– Robert Emmons

"An antidote to negative emotions, a neutralizer of envy, avarice, hostility, worry, and irritation."  
– Sonya Lyubomirsky

"Gratitude is an attitude, but it is much more. Gratitude has also been depicted as an emotion, a mood, a moral virtue, a habit, a motive, a personality trait, a coping response, and even a way of life."  
–Robert Emmons

15

## The Gratitude 2-step

- 1) We recognize the presence of something good in our lives
- 2) We recognize that the source of this goodness lies outside of ourselves

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## Benefits of Gratitude

### Psychological

Lower Depression, Anxiety, Stress (Seligman, 2005)

Joy, enthusiasm, happiness, love, optimism (Emmons, 2007)

Increased well-being, life satisfaction (Wood, 2010)

Recovery from PTSD (Kashdan, 2005)

More able to forgive (Luskin, 2010)

Improved perception of social support

### Other Benefits

Overall health improved (Emmons, 2007)

Better sleep (Wood, 2009)

Increased immune system functioning

Exercise (Emmons, 2007)

Decreased physical pain

Romantic relationships (Algoe, 2010)

Social Bonds (McCullough, 2002)

More forgiving (Rye, 2012)

17

## The Grateful Brain

- Left Prefrontal Cortex (Zahn, 2009)
- Anterior Cingulate Cortex (Fox, 2015)
  - Interpersonal bonding
- Pregenual Anterior Cingulate Cortex (pgACC) (Wong, 2016)
  - Links emotional and cognitive centers of brain
  - Lasting differences months later
- Hypothalamus
  - Sleep, Stress, Metabolism
- Increased gray matter functioning
- Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex (reward circuitry)
- Serotonin, Dopamine (Zahn, 2008)

18

## Practices to Cultivate Gratitude

- 3 Good Things
- Gratitude Letter/Visit
- The Hidden Helpers
- How Far You've Come
- Your Inner George Bailey
- Grateful Reminiscence
- The Things We Take for Granted
- Thanks for where we are

19

## Foster Connection

"Happiness is love. Full stop." –George Vaillant

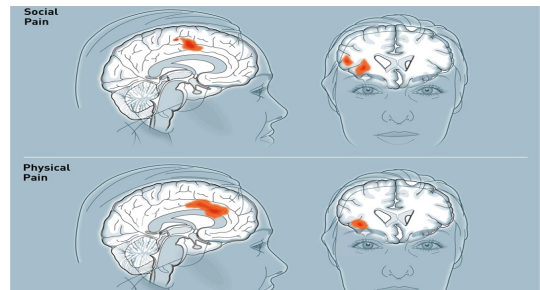


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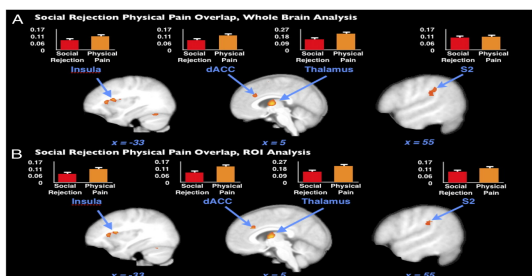
## Lessons from "Cyberball"



21



22



23

## Alarming Trends

- Increased loneliness across time
- Influence of technology
- Impact of social media
- Decreased volunteerism
- Fewer close friends

24

## Reflections on Connection

25

## Benefits of Connection

### Psychological

- Happiness and Well-Being (King & Diener, 2005)
- Bi-directional relationship
- Lower levels of depression and anxiety (Lyubomirsky, 2007)
- Decreased anxiety (Cohen, 2004)
- Improved sleep (Cohen, 2004)

### Physical

- Improved physical health/immune systems (Pressman, 2005)
- Longevity (House, 1988)
  - On par with smoking, substance, exercise
- "Blue Zone" findings (Beutner, 2010)
  - Sardinia, Okinawa, Loma Linda, Icaria, Nicoya

26

## Our Brain and Body on Connection

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor Social Support linked to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activation of the pain centers of our brain</li> <li>• Cingulate gyrus activation in social pain experiences</li> <li>• Increased activation of amygdala</li> <li>• Telomere shrinkage (Epel, 2009)</li> <li>• Cortisol dysregulation</li> <li>• Seeing others' pain activates our own pain centers (Botvinick, 2005)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good Social Support linked to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased cardiovascular reactivity (Lepore, 1993)</li> <li>• Decreased blood pressure (Spitzer, 1992)</li> <li>• Decreased cortisol (Kiecolt-Glaser, 1984)</li> <li>• Improved immune system functioning (Cohen, 2003)</li> <li>• Slows cognitive decline (Bassuk, 1999)</li> <li>• Vagus nerve stimulation</li> <li>• Increased release of oxytocin</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

27

## Prioritizing Connection

- Felt-Sense of Connection
- Gratitude Letter and Visit
- Loving-kindness meditation
- Mental Subtraction of Relationships
- Best Possible Self for Relationships
- Leveraging technology for good

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## Strengths and Flow



29

## Signature Strengths

- 24 Signature Strengths, 6 core virtues (Seligman & Peterson)
- Character Strengths and Virtues – Classification Handbook (Peterson & Seligman)
- Assessing/Testing strengths
  - [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)



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31

### Identifying Signature Strengths

- Is it authentic?
- Does it show up often?
- Do others notice it?
- Does using it energize me?
- If unable to express it, would I feel empty?



32

### Reflection

- Which of the above strengths resonate for you most? Which do you see in yourself, or have others in your life noticed in you?

33

### Benefits of Incorporating Strengths

- Decreased depression among those who regularly use their strengths (MacDougal, 2018)
- Higher rates of overall well-being (Blanchard, 2019) and happiness levels (Schutte, 2018)
- Increased levels of optimism (Uliaszek, 2020)
- Buffers against pandemic related stress (Waters, 2021)
- Stronger social and romantic relationships (Kashdan, 2017)

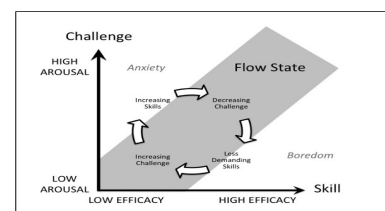
34

### Practices for Strengths Work

- Identify your strengths
  - Take the free VIA survey at [viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)
- You at your best
  - Craft a new narrative through a strength perspective
- Identify ways you currently use your strengths
- Strengths during hard times
- Using Strengths in new ways

35

### Flow (Csikszentmihalyi)



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## Flow

- A state of complete absorption in what one does
- Moments of peak performance
- Matching skills to challenge
- How to Increase Flow
  - Activities that engage our skills and strengths
  - Using Signature Strengths in new ways

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## Flow and the Brain

### Neuroanatomical changes

- transient hypo-frontality
- temporary deactivation of the prefrontal cortex

### Neurochemical Changes

- Large quantities of norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, anandamide

### Neuroelectrical Changes

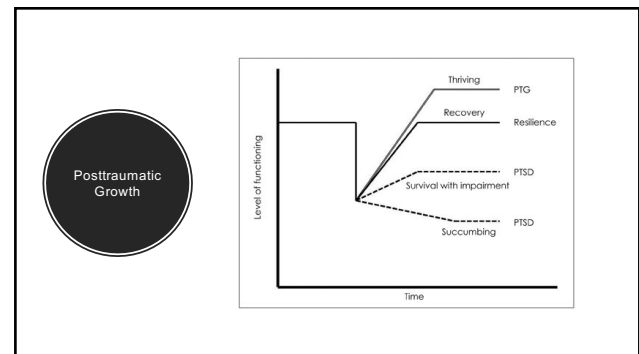
- Increased alpha waves to enhance focus & concentration

38



Finding Growth from Hardship

39



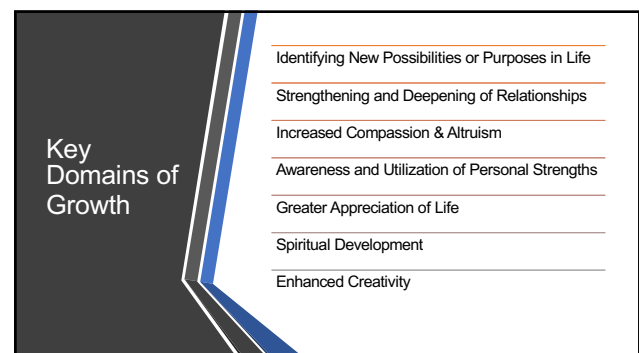
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## Not so rare?

(Bonanno, 2005; 2012)

- Following trauma, on average:
  - 10-15% will experience chronic symptoms of trauma following the event (impairment)
  - 25% will experience symptom remission (recovery)
  - 60% report growth following trauma (PTG)
- A cross-cultural phenomenon
  - PTG has been studied across numerous cultures/countries including Turkey, Germany, Japan, China, Bosnia, Australia, Israel, and others (Taku & Tedeschi, 2021)
- Well established
  - research base has existed since the Vietnam war.
- More common than we might expect:
  - Pietrzak, 2010: 72% of Iraq/Afghanistan war veterans with PTSD report moderate/high growth
  - Tsai 2015: 72% of all veterans with PTSD reported moderate/great PTG

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## Posttraumatic Growth as an Intervention

- Compatible with previously discussed research-backed approaches for PTSD
- Integrative in nature:
  - Elements of cognitive, narrative, behavioral, and existential approaches



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## 5 Stages of PTG as Intervention

- Education
- Emotion Regulation
- Constructive Self-Disclosure
- Creation of Trauma Narrative
- Service

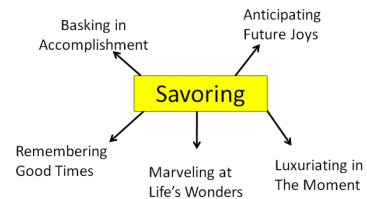
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## Savoring the Good



45

## 5 Paths to Savoring



46

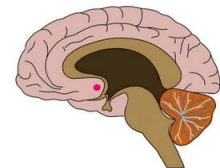
## Savoring

- | <u>Why</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <u>How</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negativity Bias</li> <li>• Positive experiences come and go</li> <li>• Using the mind to change the brain               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased neural firing</li> <li>• Long-term changes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 A's               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice or Create</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Amplify*                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrich the experience</li> <li>• 5-10 seconds or more</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Absorb                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let it sink in</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

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## Savoring and the Brain

- Ventral Striatum
  - Linked to sustaining positive emotions and reward
- Left Prefrontal Cortex
- Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex
- Decreased Cortisol
- Increased serotonin, dopamine



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### Tips for Savoring (Fred Bryant)

- Share the Experience with others ("Capitalizing")
- Memory Building
  - Mental Notes, Photos/Souvenirs
- Self-Congratulate
- Pay attention to our senses
- Avoid multitasking
- Absorption
- Ruminant on the Good

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### Self-Compassion

"If your compassion does not include yourself, it is incomplete."  
—Jack Kornfield



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### Self-Compassion

#### Key Concepts:

- 3 components (Neff, 2011)
  - Mindful Awareness
  - Common Humanity
  - Self-Directed Kindness
- Self-Compassion vs. Self-Esteem
  - "Contingent self-worth"
  - Unstable concept

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### Barriers to Self-Compassion

- "It will make me weak"
- "It's selfish"
- "I won't achieve my goals"
- "A pity party"
- Others?

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### Benefits of Self-Compassion

<u>Psychological</u>	<u>Other</u>
Lower rates of depression & anxiety (Neff, 2011)	Alleviates chronic pain
Recovery from PTSD (Thompson & Waltz, 2008)	Improved lower back pain (Carson, 2005)
Eating Disorders (Leary & Adams, 2007)	Chronic Acne (Kelly, 2009)
Cigarette Smoking (Kelly, 2010)	Closer relationships (Germer, 2009)
Greater compassion towards others	Increased altruism (Crocker & Canavello, 2008)
	Romantic Relationships (Neff, 2011)
	School & Work (Neff, 2011)

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## The Physiology of Self-Compassion

### Self-Criticism

- Increased amygdala response
- R Prefrontal Cortex
- Cortisol increases
- Adrenaline released

### Self-Compassion

- L Prefrontal Cortex
- Increased PNS activation
- Breathing slows
- Insula activation
- Decreased cortisol
- Increased oxytocin

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## Fostering Self-Compassion

- Self-Compassion Break
- Identifying Needs
- How I'd treat a friend
- What you admire about yourself
- Give someone, or yourself, a hug
- Check in with yourself
- Appreciate your strengths
- Drop the shoulds and comparisons

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Embrace  
Awe and  
Wonder



57

## Reflection

- *What have been some of your most awe-inspiring experiences? Take a moment and identify one that comes to mind.*
- *How did you feel during and after the experience? What did you notice emotionally, interpersonally, and physically?*

58

## Defining Awe



59

## The Power of Awe

*"Something happens to you out there. You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it."*

—Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut  
(Yaden, 2016)

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### The Purposes of Awe

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### The Benefits of Awe

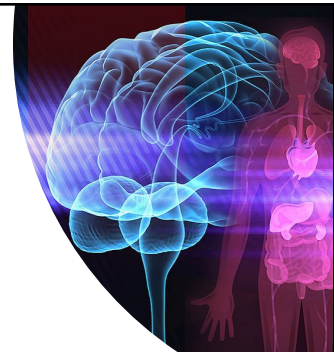
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### Psychological Benefits of Awe

- Enhances Positive Emotions (Joye, 2015)
- Increases Life Satisfaction (Rudd, 2012)
- Lastingly Boosts our Mood (Stellar, 2017)
- The "Small Self" Effect (Bai, 2017)
- Decreases Materialism (Jiang, 2018; Rudd, 2012)
- Lowers Stress (Anderson, 2018)
- Decreases PTSD symptoms (Anderson, 2018)
- Expands our sense of time (Rudd, 2012)
- Increases Humility (Stellar, 2018)

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### Our Brain and Body on Awe



64

### Awe and Inflammation (Stellar et al., 2015)

#### Short-Term/Acute

- Fights disease and infection
- Restores us to homeostasis
- Signals immune system to spring to action
- Heals and repairs damaged tissue
- Localized

#### Chronic

- Persistent, low-grade
- Widespread (rather than localized)
- Linked to heart disease, stroke, Alzheimers, depression, and much more

65

### Awe and Inflammation

DPES Subscale	IL-6	IL-6
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*Note.*  $\beta$  values for positive emotions predicting IL-6 and controlling for participant's BMI. In column 1, emotions are separately entered into regressions and in column 2 they are simultaneously entered.

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66

## Your Brain on Awe

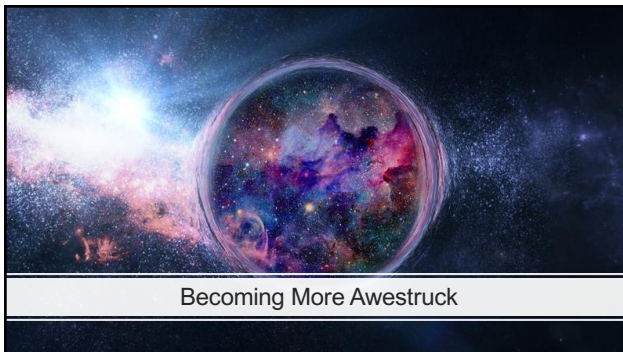
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  - May explain the "out of body" experience many report during moments of awe
- Decreased activation of subgenual prefrontal cortex
  - Linked to anxious rumination

67

## Incorporating Awe in Clinical Work

- Link Awe to the presenting problem
  - E.g., discuss the effects of awe on mood, stress, social belonging
- Explore past experiences the patient has had that we can see through this lens
- Assign realistic "awe homework" assignments in line with client preferences
  - E.g., short visits to nature, reading about awe-inspiring people, learning about topics of interest, connecting to art
  - Encourage journaling and savoring practices to accompany this
- Review and consolidate experience in next session

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## Reflection

- *What something you often take for granted but is actually awe-inspiring?*
- *What is one step you can take towards seeking more wonder in the week ahead?*

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## Get in Touch!

Email: [doctorpaquette@gmail.com](mailto:doctorpaquette@gmail.com)  
 Website: [www.jonahpaquette.com](http://www.jonahpaquette.com)  
 Facebook: [www.facebook.com/doctorpaquette](https://www.facebook.com/doctorpaquette)  
 Twitter: @doctorpaquette  
 Instagram: @jonahpaquettepsyd  
 Books: Happily Even After, Awestruck, Real Happiness, The Happiness Toolbox  
 Newsletter: Three Good Things Thursday  
 Podcast: The Happy Hour



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## Fostering Flow States, Peak Experiences, and Psychological Richness

Jonah Paquette, Psy.D.  
 Author of *Happy Even After*, *Awestruck*, *Real Happiness*, and *The Happiness Toolbox*  
 Co-Host of *The Happy Hour Podcast*  
[www.jonahpaquette.com](http://www.jonahpaquette.com)



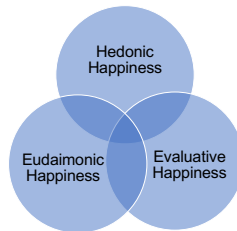
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## About Me

- Author of *Real Happiness*, *The Happiness Toolbox*, *Awestruck*, and *Happy Even After*
- International speaker and workshop trainer
- Organizational Consultant
- Host of *The Happy Hour* podcast

2

## What is Happiness?



3

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- Hedonic Happiness
  - Positive emotions about the past, present, and future
  - A greater proportion of positive emotions versus negative emotions\*
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  - Essentially equates to Life Satisfaction
- Eudaimonic Happiness
  - A sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging

4

## 3 Interconnected Self-Transcendent States



5

## Awe and Wonder



6



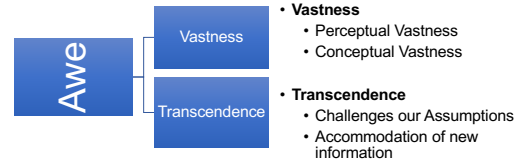
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The feeling we get in the presence of something vast that challenges our understanding of the world.



7

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-Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut  
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9

## Who Experiences Awe?

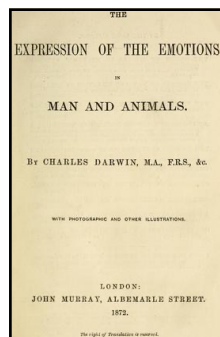
- **Personality factors**
  - Extraversion, Openness to New Experiences
- **Character Traits**
  - Optimism, Gratitude, Creativity, Love of Learning, Appreciation of Beauty
- **Spirituality and Religion**
  - Conflicting data on the link with awe
- **Social Class**
  - Inverted U-curve

10

## Cross-Cultural Research

- Universal human emotion found across all cultures
- Differences in frequency of experiencing awe (Razavi, 2016)
  - Comparison of US, Poland, Malaysia, Iran
- Differences in sources of awe (Bai, 2017)
  - US/Europe: more likely to experience awe through nature or through themselves
  - East Asia: more likely to experience awe through another person

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## Why do we experience Awe?

- Emotions not only serve a purpose, but developed within our species for specific evolutionary advantages
- Not merely a result of social learning
- But what purpose might awe serve?

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### The Purposes of Awe

13



### Awe Connects Us With Others (Shiota & Keltner, 2007)

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Awe  
Connects  
Us

Circle the picture that best describes your relationship with the community at large. (S = Self; C = Community at Large)

S C S C S C S C S C S C S C S C

Bai (2017): Awe resulted in greater feelings of closeness with others in the community compared to neutral or negative experiences

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### Awe Makes Us More Compassionate (Piff, 2015)

- 60 seconds gazing up at Eucalyptus grove or at Science building
- Staged "accident" would then occur
- Awe condition far more likely to help
- Piff: "Awe arouses altruism"



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### Awe Increases Generosity (Prade, 2016)

- First study looked at how frequently people experienced various emotional states.
- Participants also given 10 lottery tickets and that they'd be entered for a cash prize
- Could either keep all the tickets, or share with an unknown stranger
- Awe linked to 40% greater generosity



17

### Awe Makes Us More Curious (Smith, 2016)



"Bad news, its curiosity"

18





19

### Awe Enhances Positive Emotions (Joye, 2015)

- Participants watched slideshow of either awe-inspiring nature scenes or those that were more commonplace
- Both groups reported mood improvements, but awe condition led to vastly greater gains
- These findings also suggest that awe itself may play a major role in nature's healing powers

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### Lasting Mood Boosts (Stellar, 2017)

- Participants tracked mood and experiences of awe over several weeks
- On average, people experienced approximately 2 instances of awe per week
- Powerful awe experiences resulted in mood improvements even weeks later

21

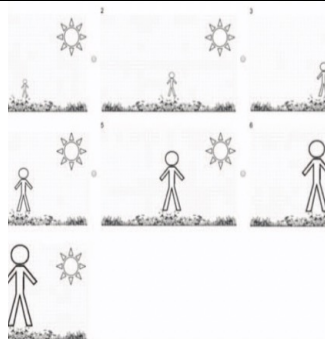
### Awe Increases Life Satisfaction (Rudd, 2012)

- Participants asked to read an awe-inspiring story or a more neutral one
- Then asked to rate their own overall life satisfaction
- Reflecting on awe resulted in significantly increased life satisfaction

22

### The *Small Self* (Bai, 2017)

- Awe reliably leads to a feeling of smallness relative to the world around us, a phenomenon known as "the small self."



23

### Awe Decreases Materialism

- Awe linked to a preference for spending \$ on experiences rather than material goods (Rudd, 2012)
- Awe leads to a decreased emphasis on money, and prioritization of other values (Jiang, 2018)



24

### Awe Lowers our Stress (Anderson, 2018)

- Whitewater rafting adventure for war veterans and inner-city high schoolers
- Led to dramatic decreases in stress and PTSD symptoms
- Improved overall well-being, optimism, and social functioning
- Awe as the "active ingredient" in nature



25

### Awe Changes Our Time Perspective (Rudd, 2012)

- The rise of "time poverty"
- Experiences of awe "stretch out time"
  - Participants reported a sense that time had expanded
  - More likely to volunteer time to charity
  - Reduced overall stress



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### Awe Increases Humility (Stellar, 2018)

- Individuals who reported more awe experiences rated by both self and peers as being:
  - Less self-absorbed
  - Less narcissistic
  - More humble
  - Possessing a more accurate understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses

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### Awe Can Lead to Rapid Change

"Awe is a lightning bolt that marks in memory those moments when the doors of perception are cleaned and we see with startling clarity what is truly important in life."

-- David Elkins



28

### Our Brain and Body on Awe



29

### Awe and Inflammation (Stellar et al., 2015)

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### Your Brain on Awe (Newberg, 2016)

- Activation in areas linked to interpersonal bonding and release of oxytocin
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  - May explain the "out of body" experience many report during moments of awe
- Decreased activation of subgenual prefrontal cortex
  - Linked to anxious rumination

32

### Awe and the Brain

- Sixty audience members wearing electroencephalogram (EEG) headgear
- Able to detect unique and specific brainwave "signatures" during particular awe-inspiring moments during the performance



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### Awe and our Nervous System

- Typically work in reverse of each other (like a hot and cold faucet)
- Awe appears to be a rare state in which both branches are activated simultaneously

#### AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

##### • SYMPATHETIC

— Fight or Flight



##### • PARASYMPATHETIC

— Rest and Digest



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### Verbal and Nonverbal expressions of awe

Vocal bursts: listeners able to identify "awe vocalizations" compared to other emotions (Simon-Thomas et al, 2009)

Similar verbal expressions across both Western and non-western cultures (Cordaro, 2016)

Facial expressions: widening of eyes, jaw slightly dropped, raised eyebrows common across cultures (Shiota, 2003; Campos, 2013; Anderson, 2017)

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Amusement	Disgust	Contempt	Surprise	Joy	Fear	Anger
						
<i>Moderate to strong association (&gt; 50%)</i>						
AU6—85%	AU25—80%	AU6—56%	AU1—58%	AU6—79%	AU6—69%	AU6—70%
Check raiser	Lips apart	Check raiser	Inner brow raise	Check raiser	Check raiser	Check raiser
AU12—95%	AU26/27—80%	AU12—85%	AU4—56%	AU12—97%	AU12—84%	AU12—80%
Lip corner puller	Jaw drop/mouth stretch	Lip corner puller	Brow lowerer	Lip corner puller	Lip corner puller	Lip corner puller
AU25—81%	AU1—78%	AU24—60%		AU25—50%	AU25—54%	55%
Lips apart	Inner brow raise	Lip pressor		Lips apart	Lips apart	Set up
AU 26/27—68%	AU5—43%					AU24—60%
Jaw drop/mouth stretch	Upper lid raiser					Lip pressor
<i>Weak association (25–49%)</i>						
49%	AU57—27%	38%	AU24—38%	34%	AU55/56—49%	45%
Head bounce	Head forward	Head nod	Lip pressor	Bouncer	Head tilt	Shoulders back
AU55/56—34%		AU25—26%	AU2—37%	AU26/27—31%	AU43—26%	AU53—38%
Head tilt		Lips apart	Outer brow raise	Jaw drop/mouth stretch	Eyes closed	Head up
AU1—23%			AU55/56—37%			
Inner brow raise			Head tilt 37%			
			Forward lean			
			AU57—33%			
			Head forward			

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## The Dark Side of Awe

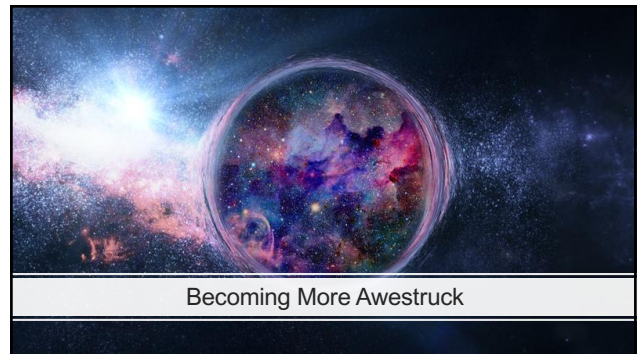


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## The Impact of Negative Awe

- 20% of reported awe experiences are negative
- Threat-based awe (Piff, 2015)
  - Lower rates of positive emotions
  - Higher rates of anxiety and sadness
  - Greater activation of sympathetic nervous system
- Negative awe experiences resulted in increased compassion and altruism and a desire to help others, along with increased feelings of connection to community (Piff, 2015)

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## Pathways to Awe

- Nature
- Vastness
- Mind-Bending
- Courage & Inspiration
- Timelessness
- Gratefulness
- Mindful Awareness
- Habit-building
- Social Connection
- The Arts

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## Incorporating Awe in Clinical Work

- Link Awe to the presenting problem
  - E.g., discuss the effects of awe on mood, stress, social belonging
- Explore past experiences the patient has had that we can see through this lens
- Assign realistic "awe homework" assignments in line with client preferences
  - E.g., short visits to nature, reading about awe-inspiring people, learning about topics of interest, connecting to art
  - Encourage journaling and savoring practices to accompany this
- Review and consolidate experience in next session

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## Reflection

- *What something you often take for granted but is actually awe-inspiring?*
- *What is one step you can take towards seeking more wonder in the week ahead?*

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## An Ancient Solution to a Modern Problem

People have never been more:

- Stressed
- Socially isolated
- Short on time
- Depressed
- Materialistic
- Polarized

Awe helps us to:

- Relieve stress
- Connect with others
- Feel "time rich"
- Improves mood
- Connect with deeper values
- Become kinder towards others

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## A 4<sup>th</sup> Happy Life?

- However, 10-15% of people resonate more with something else



- Psychological Richness:

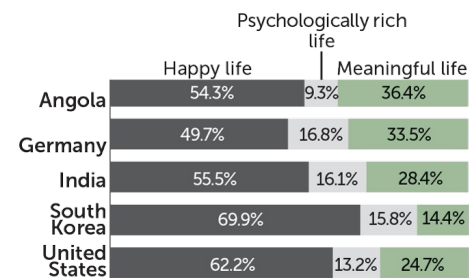
- A life marked by "interesting experiences in which novelty and/or complexity are accompanied by profound changes in perspective." (Oishi, 2020)

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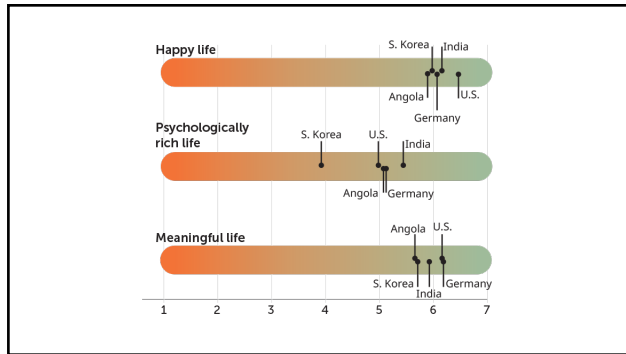
## Psychological Richness (Oishi, 2020)

- An alternative to the hedonic vs. eudaimonic model
  - Psychometrically distinct from these as well
- 9-country cross-cultural study found that 17% (and even higher in some countries) preferred the psychological rich life over the hedonic or eudaimonic life
- Characterized by variety, novelty, and interest

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## Psychological Richness

- Some link to trait characteristic of Curiosity
- Linked to individuals who experience both positive and negative emotions more intensely
- Linked with individuals high in Openness on Big-5
- Linked to lower levels of regret in surveys

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## Reflection

*What are some experiences or activity that have made you feel alive, pushed your comfort zones, or sparked your passion?*

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## Strategies to Enhance Psychological Richness

- Learning new skills
- Seek activities that yield flow states
- Undo a regret
- Stretch beyond your comfort zone
- Become a lifelong learner
- Foster curiosity
- Write your obituary
- Travel if able to; if not, seek small adventures
- Lean into things that scare or intimidate you

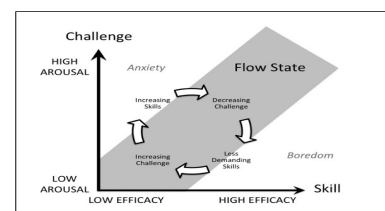
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## Flow and Strengths



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## Flow (Csikszentmihalyi)



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## Flow

- A state of complete absorption in what one does
- Moments of peak performance
- Matching skills to challenge
- How to Increase Flow
  - Activities that engage our skills and strengths
  - Using Signature Strengths in new ways

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## Common Characteristics of Flow States

- Attentional focus
- A proper degree of challenge
- Goal oriented
- Continual feedback
- Sense of control
- Time orientation
- Feelings of peace and calm
- Intrinsic motivation
- Disconnection from physical needs
- Single-mindedness

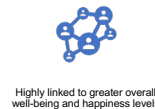
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## Flow and the Brain

- Default Mode Network changes
- Neuroanatomical changes
  - transient hypo-frontality
  - temporary deactivation of the prefrontal cortex
- Neurochemical Changes
  - Large quantities of norepinephrine, dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, anandamide
- Neuroelectrical Changes
  - Increased alpha waves to enhance focus & concentration

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## Benefits of Flow States



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## Signature Strengths

- 24 Signature Strengths, 6 core virtues (Seligman & Peterson)
- Character Strengths and Virtues – Classification Handbook (Peterson & Seligman)
- Assessing/Testing strengths
  - VIA Survey
  - [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)

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## Examples of Items

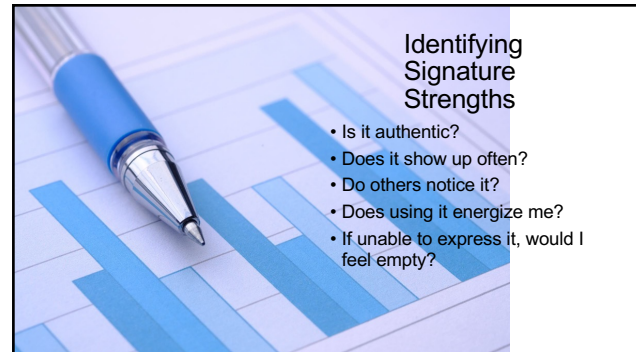
- Love of Learning
  - Do you feel an adrenaline rush from learning new things?
- Kindness
  - Have you done good deeds for strangers on a regular basis?
- Appreciation of Beauty
  - Does a sense of awe sweep over you as you contemplate the vastness of nature?
- Creativity
  - Is your mind constantly challenging the status quo and looking for a better way?

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### Reflection

- Which of the above strengths resonate for you most? Which do you see in yourself, or have others in your life noticed in you?

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### Benefits of Incorporating Strengths

- Decreased depression among those who regularly use their strengths (MacDougal, 2018)
- Higher rates of overall well-being (Blanchard, 2019) and happiness levels (Schutte, 2018)
- Increased levels of optimism (Uliaszek, 2020)
- Buffers against pandemic related stress (Waters, 2021)
- Stronger social and romantic relationships (Kashdan, 2017)

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### Practices for Strengths Work

#### Identify your strengths

- Take the free VIA survey at [viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)

#### You at your best

- Craft a new narrative through a strength perspective

#### Identify ways you currently use your strengths

#### Strengths during hard times

#### Using Strengths in new ways

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### Identifying and Using Signature Strengths

- Take the VIA Survey to identify core strengths
  - Ensure that identified strengths resonate with the individual
- Identify 3-5 core "signature" strengths that are both resonant and high scoring
- Choose 1 signature strength per day
- Use it in a way that is outside your normal routine

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## Strengths-Eliciting Questions (Saleeby)

### Support questions

*Example:* Who are the people that you can rely on? Who has made you feel understood, supported, or encouraged?

### Exception questions

*Example:* When things were going well in life, what was different? What point in your history would you like to relive, capture, or recreate?

### Possibility questions

*Example:* What do you want to accomplish in your life? What are your hopes for your future or the future of your family?

### Esteem questions

*Example:* What makes you proud of yourself? What positive things do people say about you?

### Perspective questions

*Example:* What are your ideas about your current situation?

### Change questions

*Example:* What do you think is necessary for things to change? What could you do to make that happen?

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## Get in Touch!

Email: [doctorpaquette@gmail.com](mailto:doctorpaquette@gmail.com)

Website: [www.jonahpaquette.com](http://www.jonahpaquette.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/doctorpaquette](https://www.facebook.com/doctorpaquette)

Twitter: @doctorpaquette

Instagram: @jonahpaquettepsyd

Books: Happily Even After, Awestruck, Real Happiness, The Happiness Toolbox

Newsletter: Three Good Things Thursday

Podcast: The Happy Hour



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