


## The “Wow” Effect

*How the New Science of Awe Can Make Us Happier, Healthier, and More Connected*

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## About Me

- Author of *Happily Even After*, *Real Happiness*, *The Happiness Toolbox*, and *Awestruck*
- International speaker and workshop trainer

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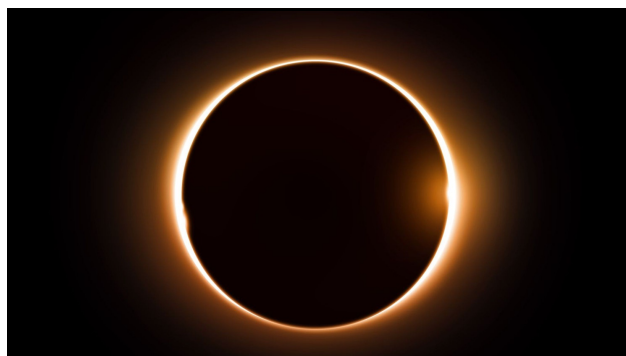
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## An unusual day...

- Record number of sick days
- State populations tripled
- Record-breaking marriage proposals
- Same distinct #hashtag
- Unusual Fashion Choices
- Strange Behaviors



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## What do you feel when you...

Gaze up at the Milky Way?

See a beautiful sunrise or sunset?

Witness an act of great compassion or courage?

Watch a child learn to walk?

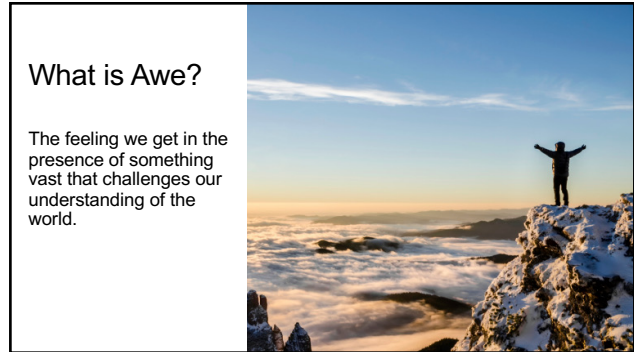
See a mind-blowing work of art?

Attend an incredible performance?

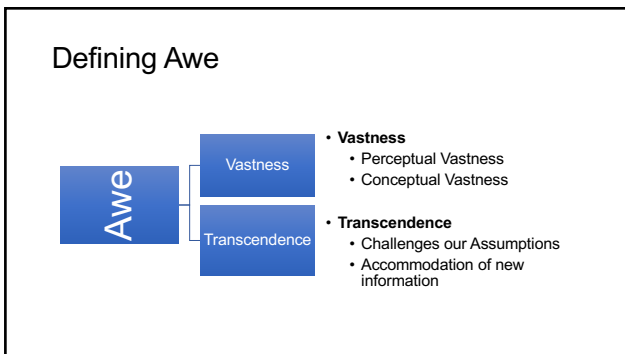
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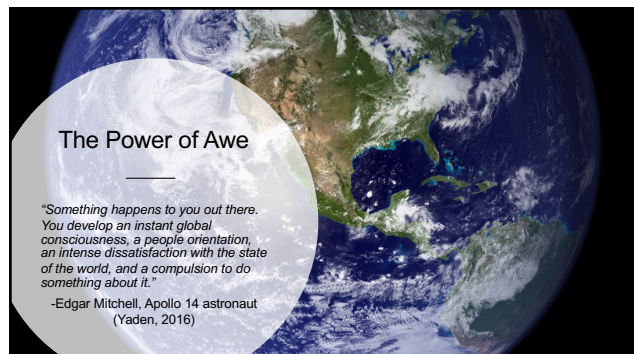
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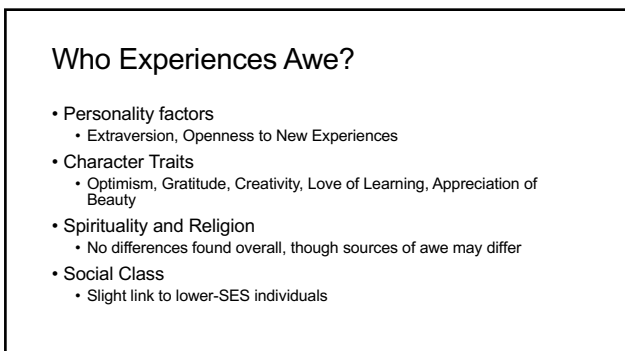
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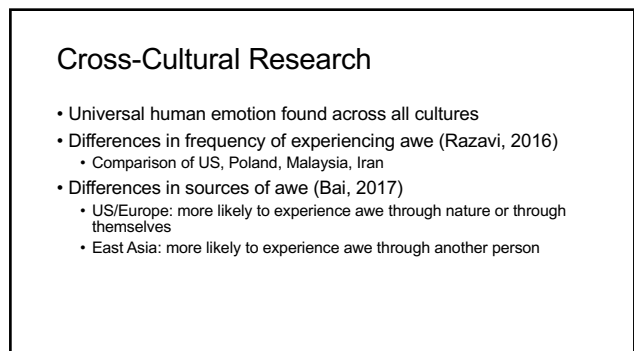
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## Challenges to Awe

- Technology
- Rise of Urban Living
- Increasing length of workday
- Rising levels of stress
- Constant worry and rumination
- Increased materialism
- Changing attention spans
- Decreased attendance for concerts, museums, and live performances



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## THE EXPRESSION OF THE EMOTIONS

MAN AND ANIMALS.

By CHARLES DARWIN, M.A., F.R.S., &c.

WITH PHOTOGRAPHIC AND OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.  
1872.

(The right of Translation is reserved.)

## Why do we experience Awe?

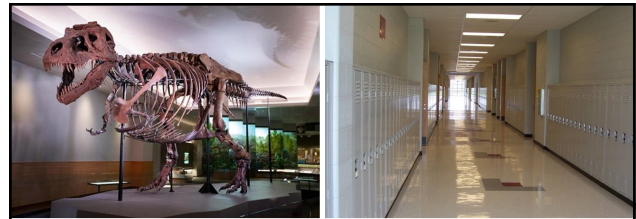
- Emotions not only serve a purpose, but developed within our species for specific evolutionary advantages
- Not merely a result of social learning
- But what purpose might awe serve?

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## The Purposes of Awe

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## 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)



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 (Rudd, 2012)

- Brief writing exercise
  - Happy memory or awe-inspiring memory
- Awe condition
  - Higher levels of patience
  - Greater willingness to donate time or money to a good cause

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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



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### Awe Increases Generosity (Prade, 2016)

- Follow-up study compared people reflecting on awe-inspiring experiences to neutral experiences
- Then asked to imagine winning the lottery
- Reflecting on awe resulted in significantly increased generosity and sharing of the potential prize money

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Awe Makes  
Us More  
Curious  
(Smith, 2016)



"Bad news, its curiosity"

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### 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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### 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

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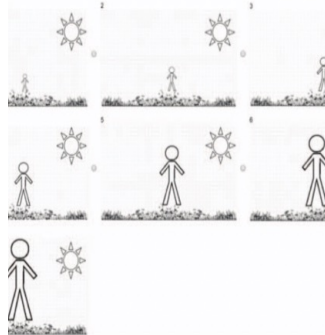
### Lasting Mood Boosts (Stellar, 2017)

- 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

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### 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."



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### 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)



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### 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



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### 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



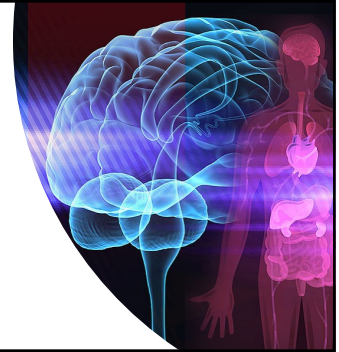
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### Awe Increases Humility (Stellar, 2018)

- 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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### Our Brain and Body on Awe



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### 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

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### Awe and Inflammation

DPES Subscale	IL-6	IL-6
Awe	-0.33***	-0.33**
Amusement	-0.02	0.16
Compassion	-0.09	0.05
Contentment	-0.20*	0.04
Joy	-0.23*	-0.11
Love	-0.10	-0.07
Pride	-0.21*	-0.009

*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.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

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

- Activation in areas linked to interpersonal bonding and release of oxytocin
- Decreased activation in the parietal lobe
  - Contributes to sense of self, orients us to world around us
  - May explain the "out of body" experience many report during moments of awe
- Decreased activation of subgenual prefrontal cortex
  - Linked to anxious rumination

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### 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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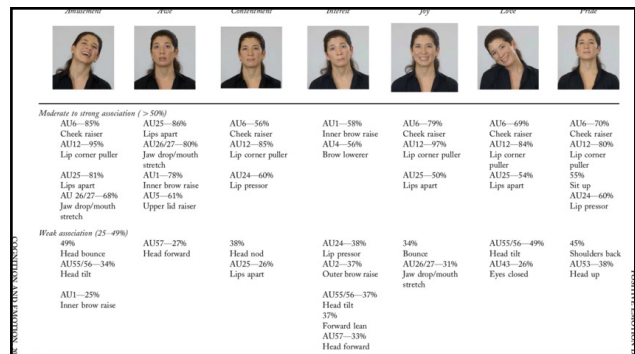
## Verbal and Nonverbal expressions of awe

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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## The Dark Side of Awe



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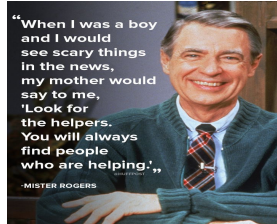
## The Impact of Negative Awe

- 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

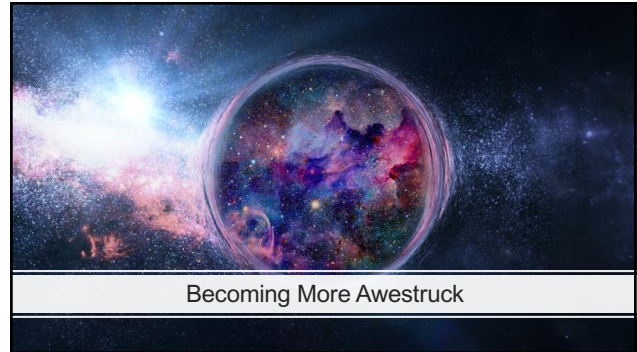
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## Negative Awe and Altruism

Negative awe experiences resulted in increased altruism and a desire to help others (Piff, 2015)



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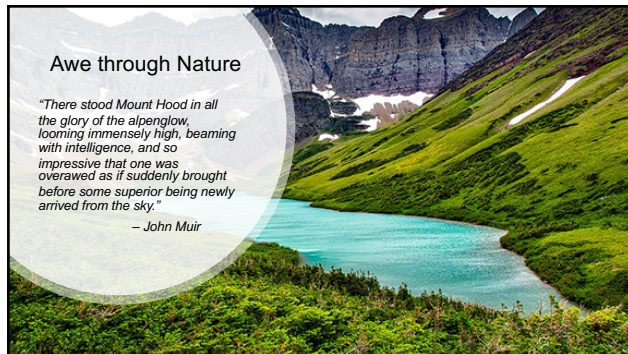


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## Awe through Nature

"There stood Mount Hood in all the glory of the alpenglow, looming immensely high, beaming with intelligence, and so impressive that one was overawed as if suddenly brought before some superior being newly arrived from the sky."

— John Muir

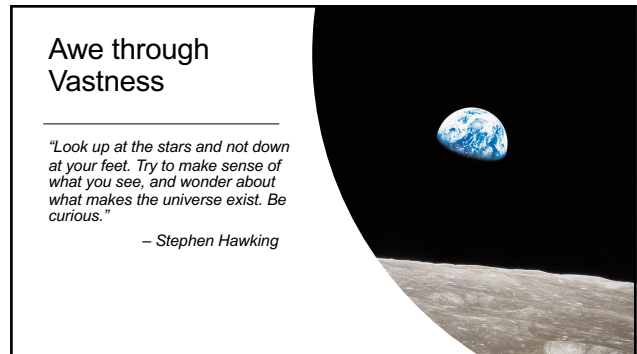


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## Awe through Vastness

"Look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see, and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious."

— Stephen Hawking

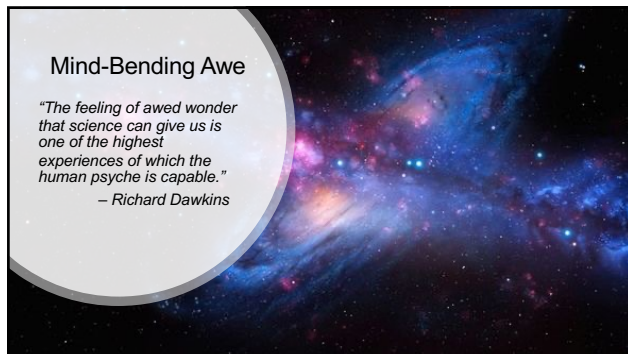


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## Mind-Bending Awe

"The feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable."

— Richard Dawkins

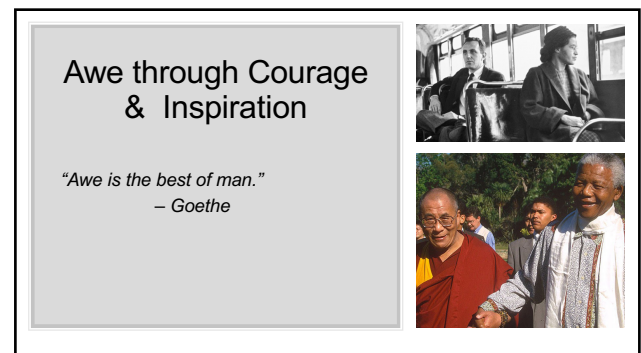


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## Awe through Courage & Inspiration

"Awe is the best of man."

— Goethe

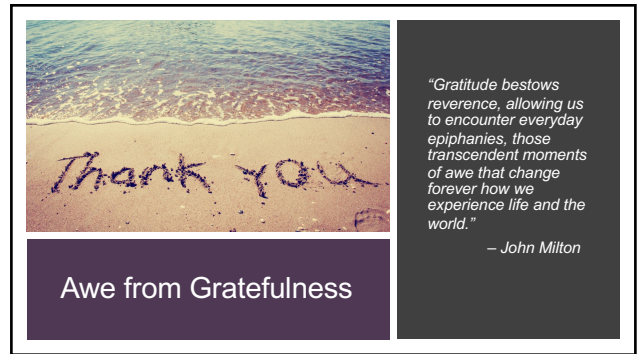


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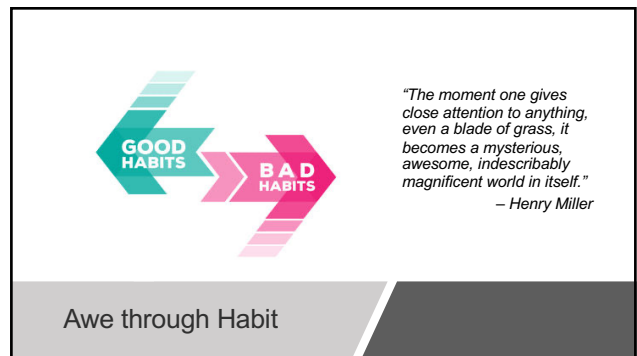
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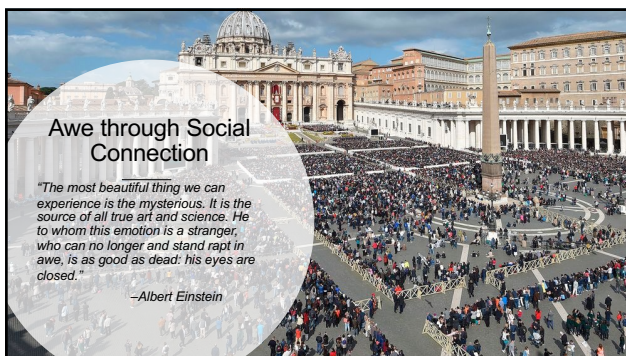
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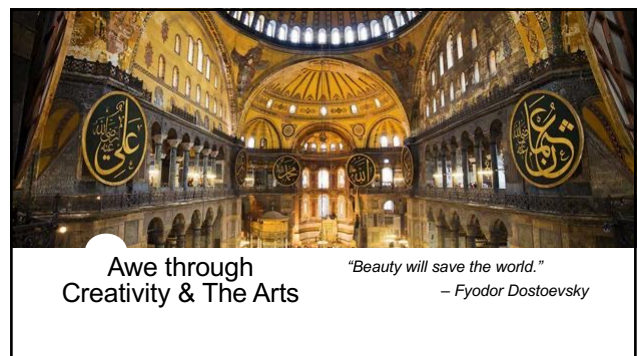
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## An Ancient Solution to a Modern Problem

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



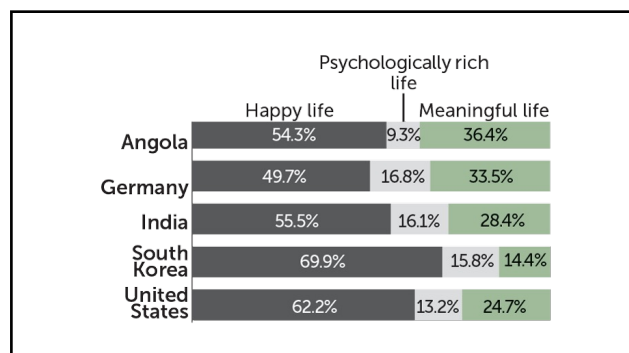
- Psychological Richness:
  - A life marked by "interesting experiences in which novelty and/or complexity are accompanied by profound changes in perspective." (Oishi, 2020)

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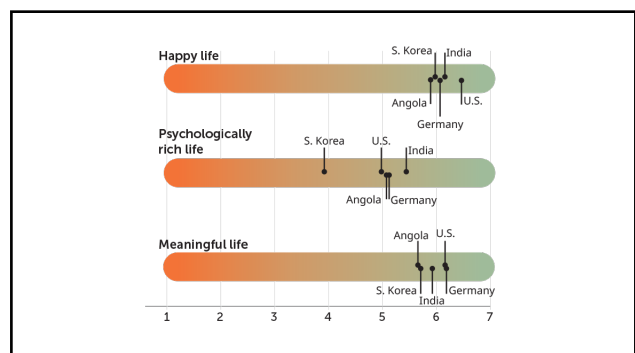
## Psychological Richness (Oishi, 2020)

- 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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## Get in Touch!

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 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 Well-Being: A Strength-Based Approach to Change

Jonah Paquette, Psy.D.  
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 Co-Host of *The Happy Hour Podcast*  
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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

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## What we'll cover

<u>What</u> is happiness?	<u>Why</u> happiness?	Can we <u>increase</u> happiness?
Key <u>brain</u> regions and systems	<u>How</u> to become happier	<u>Tools</u> for clinical change • Practical, Evidence-Based, Easy to Integrate

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## Happiness: A timeless and universal question

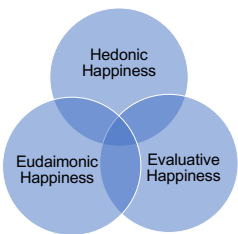
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## Happiness: A new “problem”

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## What is Happiness?



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## 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

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## Measuring Happiness

- Authentic Happiness Inventory
- General Happiness Scale
- Satisfaction with Life Scale
- Subjective Happiness Scale
- Optimism Scale
- Gratitude Survey
- Grit Scale
- VIA Strengths Test, Brief Strengths Test
- PERMA Questionnaire
- Meaning in Life Questionnaire
- Compassionate Love Survey

\*Free through  
[www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org)

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## Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky)

1. In general, I consider myself:
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not a very happy person						a very happy person
2. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
less happy						more happy
3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						a great deal
4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?
 

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all						a great deal

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## Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener)

### The Statements

Rate your agreement with each statement using the scale 1 – 7.

- \_\_\_\_\_ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The conditions of my life are excellent.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Add your ratings to produce the total score.

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## Why Happiness?

What do **nuns**, **baseball players**, and **yearbook photos** have in common?

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## The Nun Study (Danner, 2001)

"God started my life off well by bestowing me grace of inestimable value... The past year which I spent as a candidate studying at Notre Dame has been a very happy one. Now I look forward with eager joy to receiving the Holy Habit of our Lady and to a life of union with Love Devine."

—Cecilia O'Payne

"I was born on September 26, 1909, the eldest of 7 children, 5 girls and 2 boys. My candidate year was spent in the motherhouse, teaching chemistry and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Latin at Notre Dame Institute. With God's grace, I intend to do my best for our Order, for the spread of religion and for my personal sanctification."

—Marguerite Donnelly

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### The Yearbook Study (Harker & Keltner, 2001)



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### The Baseball Card Study (Abel & Kruger, 2010)



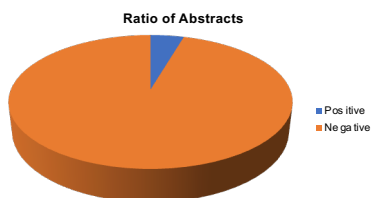
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### It's Good to be Happy

- **Psychological:** Increased life satisfaction, lower rates of depression and anxiety, increased frequency of positive emotional states, increased resiliency, openness to new experiences
- **Physical:** Increased longevity, improved physical health, stronger immune system, decreased inflammation, improved coping with chronic illness
- **Life:** Higher income, stronger marriages, closer relationships, improved job performance

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### Mental Health Abstracts, 1968-2000



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### Happiness: Can we *really* increase it?

"I don't have one minute's regret. It was a glorious experience." – Moreese Bickham

"It was the worst thing that ever happened to me." – Billy Bob Harrell, Jr.



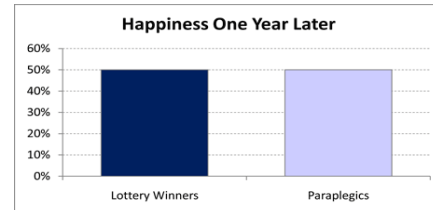
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## Happiness Forecasting



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## 12 months later (Gilbert, 2006)



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## Barriers to Happiness



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## Barrier #1: Hedonic Adaptation

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"People are exposed to many messages that encourage them to believe that a change of weight, scent, hair color (or coverage), car, clothes, or many other aspects will produce a marked improvement in their happiness. Our research suggests a moral, and a warning: Nothing that you focus on will make as much difference as you think."

— Daniel Kahneman, Ph.D.

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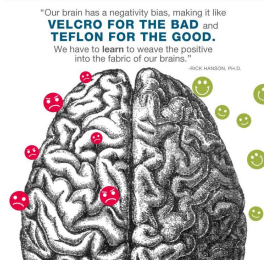
## Barrier #2: Genetics



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## Barrier #3: A "Negative" Brain

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## The "Negativity Bias"

- Greater focus on negative experiences
- Learn faster from pain than pleasure
- Hard to "undo" these effects
- Negative experiences stored longer in memory
- Great for survival, but...

"Most good experiences are wasted on the brain."  
– Rick Hanson

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## Barrier #4: The Way We Pursue Happiness



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## Barrier #5: Societal Factors and Social Inequality

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### Core Habits of Well-Being

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| ❖ Gratitude              | ❖ Awe               |
| ❖ Compassion             | ❖ Self-Compassion   |
| ❖ Cultivating Strengths  | ❖ Health & Wellness |
| ❖ Meaning                | ❖ Forgiveness       |
| ❖ Connection             | ❖ Mindfulness       |
| ❖ Optimism               | ❖ Savoring          |
| ❖ Fostering Resilience   | ❖ Nature            |
| ❖ Psychological Richness |                     |

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### Well-Being Principle: 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



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



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### 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

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### 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

<u>Psychological</u>	<u>Other Benefits</u>
Lower Depression, Anxiety, Stress (Seligman, 2005)	Overall health improved (Emmons, 2007)
Joy, enthusiasm, happiness, love, optimism (Emmons, 2007)	Better sleep (Wood, 2009)
Increased well-being, life satisfaction (Wood, 2010)	Increased immune system functioning
Recovery from PTSD (Kashdan, 2005)	Exercise (Emmons, 2007)
More able to forgive (Luskin, 2010)	Decreased physical pain
Improved perception of social support	Romantic relationships (Algoe, 2010)
	Social Bonds (McCullough, 2002)
	More forgiving (Rye, 2012)

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## 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)

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## 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

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## Well-Being Principle: Strengths and Flow



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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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wisdom	courage	humanity	transcendence	justice	moderation
//creativity //curiosity //judgement //love of learning //perspective	//bravery //persistence //honesty //zeal	//love //kindness //social intelligence	//appreciation of beauty //gratitude //hope //humour //spirituality	//teamwork //fairness //leadership	//forgiveness //modesty //prudence //self-control

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### 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?

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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

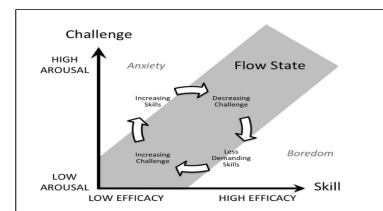
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### Identifying and Using Signature Strengths

- 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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### 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

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## Strengths-Eliciting Questions (Saleebey)

### 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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## Well-Being Principle: Connection

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

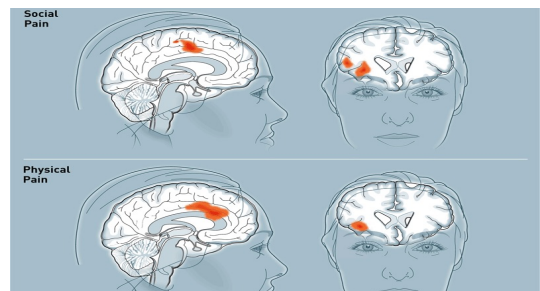


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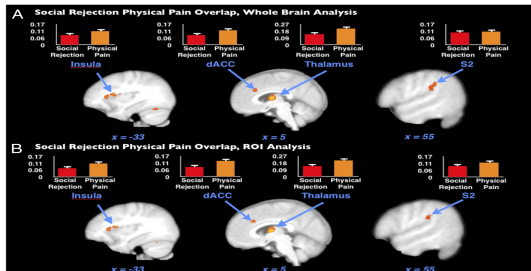
## Lessons from "Cyberball"



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## 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, 1998)
  - On par with smoking, substance, exercise
- "Blue Zone" findings (Beutner, 2010)
  - Sardinia, Okinawa, Loma Linda, Icaria, Nicoya

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## Our Brain and Body on Connection

- Poor Social Support linked to:
  - Activation of the pain centers of our brain
  - Cingulate gyrus activation in social pain experiences
  - Increased activation of amygdala
  - Telomere shrinkage (Epel, 2009)
  - Cortisol dysregulation
  - Seeing others' pain activates our own pain centers (Botvinick, 2005)
- Good Social Support linked to:
  - Decreased cardiovascular reactivity (Lepore, 1993)
  - Decreased blood pressure (Spitzer, 1992)
  - Decreased cortisol (Kiecolt-Glaser, 1984)
  - Improved immune system functioning (Cohen, 2003)
  - Slows cognitive decline (Bassuk, 1999)
  - Vagus nerve stimulation
  - Increased release of oxytocin

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## Well-Being Principle: 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)
  - Self-Kindness
  - Mindfulness
  - Shared Humanity
- 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

### Psychological

Lower rates of depression & anxiety (Neff, 2011)  
 Recovery from PTSD (Thompson & Waltz, 2008)  
 Eating Disorders (Leary & Adams, 2007)  
 Cigarette Smoking (Kelly, 2010)  
 Greater compassion towards others

### Other

Alleviates chronic pain  
 Improved lower back pain (Carson, 2005)  
 Chronic Acne (Kelly, 2009)  
 Closer relationships (Germer, 2009)  
 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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## Self-Compassion Practices

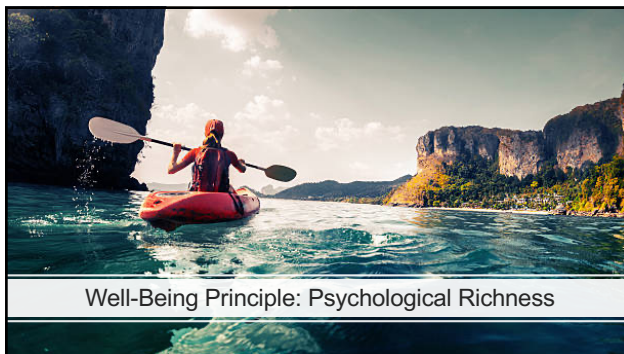
- Self-Compassion Break
- Compassionate Touch
- A letter of Self-Compassion
- Identifying Needs
- How I'd treat a friend
- Self-Appreciation
- Lovingkindness meditation

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## Benefits of Loving-Kindness

- Increased positive emotions (Frederickson, 2008)
- Increased Vagal Tone (Kok, 2013)
- Reduced Migraines (Tonelli, 2014)
- Improves lower-back pain (Carson, 2005)
- PTSD symptoms (Kearney, 2013)
- Increased gray matter (Leung, 2013)
- Prosocial behaviors increased (Leiberg, 2011)
- Increased empathy (Klimecki, 2013)

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

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



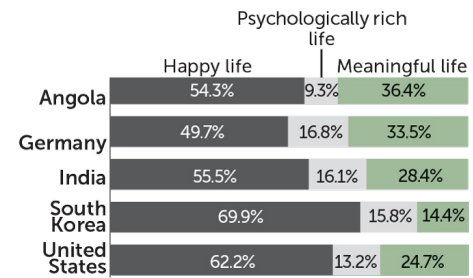
- Psychological Richness:
  - A life marked by "interesting experiences in which novelty and/or complexity are accompanied by profound changes in perspective." (Oishi, 2020)

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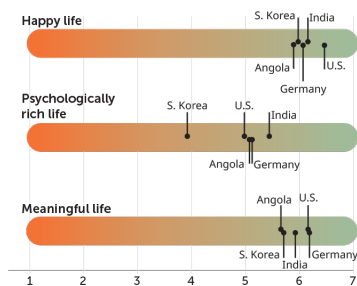
## Psychological Richness (Oishi, 2020)

- 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?*

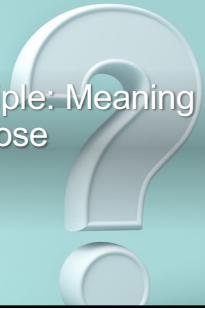
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## Strategies to Enhance Psychological Richness

- 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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## Well-Being Principle: Meaning & Purpose

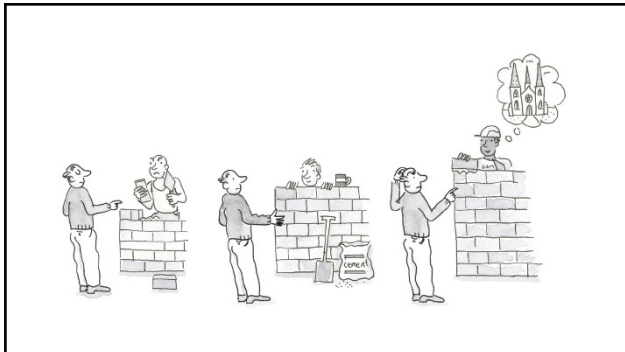


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*"Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her own life."*

– Viktor Frankl

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## Reflection

*What are some aspects of your life that tap into something larger than yourself?*

*What helps you feel connected to something greater than yourself?*

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## Meaning

- A sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, or to have a sense that our life is linked to a greater purpose and has greater significance beyond our day-to-day struggles
- Meaning in life "may be defined as the extent to which a person experiences his or her life as having purpose, significance, and coherence." (Laura King, *psychologist and positive psychology expert*).

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## Benefits and Importance of Meaning

- Higher levels of happiness (Huo, 2019)
- Increase life satisfaction (Ivtzan, Lomas, & Hefferon, 2016)
- Lower levels of depression (Steger, 2009)
- Lower risk of substance use disorders (Csabonyi, 2020)
- Greater resilience to adversity (Schaefer, 2018)
- Health seeking behaviors (Kim, 2014)
- Cognitive functioning across lifespan (Lewis, 2016)
- Better physical health and lower risk of chronic illness (Steptoe, 2012)
- Successful aging (Hedberg, 2010)

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## Impact of lack of meaning on psychopathology

Consider how a person's lack of meaning may tie into:

- Depression
- Anxiety Disorders
- Substance use issues
- Anger
- Work-related stress/job dissatisfaction
- Relationship conflict

Rather than view psychopathology as a maladaptive set of symptoms to be managed or cured, consider how they might partially represent a reaction to existential concerns or a perceived lack of meaning.

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## Reflection

*Consider the role of meaning (or lack thereof) in a person's life, and how this might be playing out with some of your clients struggling with depression, addiction, anxiety, relationship conflict, or other forms of "traditional" psychopathology.*

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Absolutely Untrue 1	Mostly Untrue 2	Somewhat Untrue 3	Can't Say True or False 4	Somewhat True 5	Mostly True 6	Absolutely True 7
1. _____						
2. _____						
3. _____						
4. _____						
5. _____						
6. _____						
7. _____						
8. _____						
9. _____						
10. _____						

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## "Purpose Anxiety" (Rainey, 2014)

- The experience of negative emotions stemming from a perceived lack of purpose, or a perceived lack of success in seeking meaning and purpose
- Some evidence of increased purpose anxiety in recent years
  - Increased social comparison due to social media
  - Longer lifespans
  - Shifting social norms and decreased social cohesion
  - Changes in religiosity
  - Greater fulfillment of basic needs
- Possible signs: frequent job changes, frequent relationship changes, struggles with social comparison

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## Reflection Questions (van Deurzen, 2016)

- What do I intend to do before I die? How can I take meaningful steps towards this?
- How do I get along with my friends, family, and those closest to me? Am I satisfied with these, or are there changes I'd like to see happen?
- What do I owe myself in life, and how do I get it?
- What are my moral values, and how do I live up to them?

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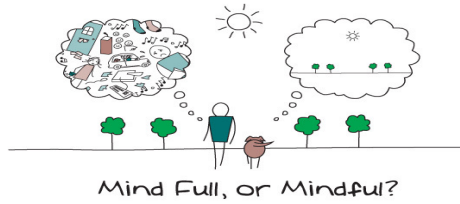
## Practices

- The unlikelyhood of existence
- The last time
- Ripple Effects
- Growth following hardship
- Being of service
- Fostering connection
- De-reflection

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## Well-Being Principle: Mindful Awareness

"The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it." –Thich Nhat Hanh



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What is  
Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness means  
paying attention  
in a particular way;  
On purpose, in  
the present moment,  
and non-judgmentally.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

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- Mindfulness vs. Mindlessness
- The toll of a wandering mind (Killington & Gilbert, 2010)
- Barriers to Mindfulness
  - Modern Culture
  - What mindfulness is not
- A way of being in the world



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## Benefits of Mindfulness

### Psychological

- Depression (Keng, 2011)
- Reduced stress & anxiety (Hofmann et al., 2010; Bowden, 2010)
- Buffers against future depressive episodes (Williams & Penman, 2011)
- Happiness, Well-Being (Shapiro, 2008)
- Problem-solving, attention & focus (Moore, 2012)
- Enhanced cognitive ability (Xion & Doraiswamy, 2009)
- Disordered Eating
- Decreased negative emotions (Erisman, 2010)

### Physical

- Fewer doctor's visits, fewer hospital days (Williams & Penman, 2011)
- Immune system (Davidson & Kabat-Zinn, 2003)
- HIV (Creswell, 2009)
- Chronic Pain
- Reduced insomnia (Bowden, 2012)
- Improved heart rate variability (Miu, 2009)

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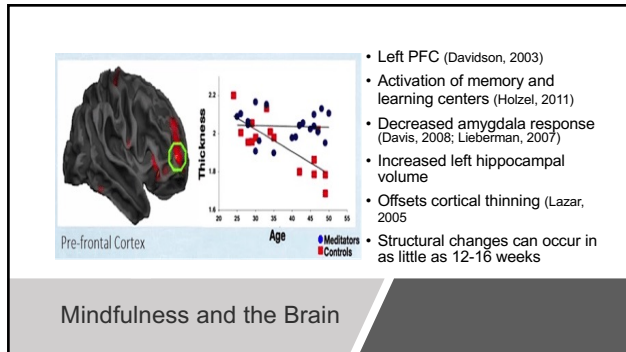


## Benefits of Mindfulness

### Life/Relationships

- Improved job performance & retention (Dane, 2013)
- Less aggression, improved behavior in schools for students
- Lower BP for teachers (Flook, 2013)
- Increased altruism (Condon, 2013)
- Increased empathy (Fulton, 2005; Zhipiro & Izett, 2008)
- Increased compassion for others' suffering (Weng, 2013)

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### Everyday Mindfulness

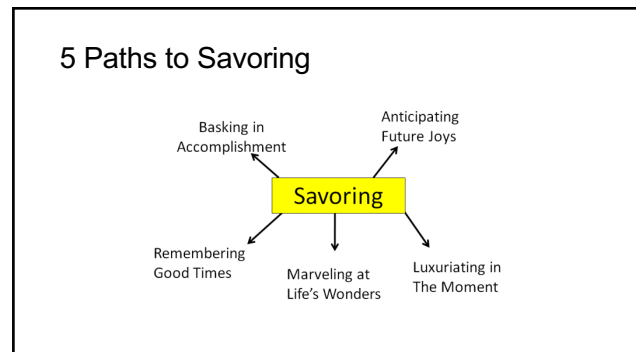
- Choose 1 "autopilot" activity per day
- Cultivate present moment, nonjudgmental awareness
- Examples include:
  - Eating
  - Walking
  - Showering
  - Cleaning Dishes
  - Gardening
  - Others?

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### Well-Being Principle: Savoring

**How The Simple Act of Savoring Can Make You Happier**

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### 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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### Get in Touch!

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 Books: Happily Even After, Awestruck, Real Happiness, The Happiness Toolbox  
 Newsletter: Three Good Things Thursday  
 Podcast: The Happy Hour



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