The Power Of Positive Emotions
To Flourish Or To Languish?
Eilish McGuinness MIACP
Before World War 2 - Psychology had 3 distinct missions

- Curing Mental Illness
- Making the lives of all people more productive and fulfilling
  - (among them Jung’s work concerning the search for and discovery of meaning in life, (Jung 1933); Terman’s studies of giftedness (Terman, 1939))
- Identifying and nurturing high talent.
• Post World War 2
  – Face of Psychology changed - 1946 Veterans Affairs founded and psychologists found that they could make a living treating mental illness.
  – National Institute of Mental Health (1947) – based on disease model – academics found that they could get grants if their research was about pathology.

• Other 2 fundamental missions of psychology – making the lives of all people better and nurturing genius – were all but forgotten.
Over the last decade or two, much of the focus of psychology has changed in a radical way.

Instead of the traditional concentration on disorders and dysfunctions

Psychologists have begun to pay much more attention to what helps us to **flourish**.
• What makes us happy?

• What enables us to love and to work in a more successful and fulfilling way?

• What helps us to cope with the inevitable problems and frustrations we face, and to bounce back from adversity?
Languish or Flourish?

Flourish

Languish
• Flourish
  – to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, growth and resilience. (to feel that we are doing what we were into this world to do)

• Languish
  – Living hollow or empty lives, feeling stranded, lost, lacking purpose. Not using full potential
  – (More prone to depression)

Fredrickson & Losada, (2005)
• 20% Flourishing

• Other end of continuum, 20% languishing
  – Could be people with good jobs, running busy family lives, outward appearances be living a good life.

• 60% managing day to day but know we are capable of much more.
Interplay Between Positivity And Negativity
How Much Is Enough?

Positivity Ratio > 3-to-1
Positivity Ratio

11:1  Flourish

2.9:1  Losada Line

1:1  Languish
• Our emotions obey a tipping point.
• Researchers have studied this interplay between positive and negative emotions and have recently discovered a ‘tipping point’ in our emotional life.
• What seems to matter most is the ratio of positive emotions to your negative emotions.
• We need 3 positive emotions to lift us up to one negative emotion which drags us down.
• We need 5 if we want to flourish.
• If ratio falls below 3;1, and stays down – you are tipped into a downward spiral from which it is hard to escape – depression, relationships enter a new destructive state, or when a team or organisation becomes dysfunctional.
• Research shows most of us clock in at 2:1
Flourishing

Overall Well-Being

Positivity Ratio

1:1  2:1  3:1

Flourishing Range

Tipping Point
In other words, for every burst of irritability, every tense exchange, every negative thought and feeling of disappointment, there has to be, not double, but five times as many positives (Gaffney, 2011)
• Why is double not enough?

• "Bad" is stronger than "good" Brain’s signal of threat

• Evolutionary sense

• Bring heavy artillery of survival to deal with everyday threats...
Can we Have Too Much Of A Good Thing?

- Too much positivity is problematic.
- Consistent ratio of 11:1 positive to negative often signals denial of unavoidable conflicts or attempts to hide a real problem.
- Flourishing ratio is 5:1, not 5:0
- Appropriate negativity has an important role to play in flourishing –
  - Constructive confrontation of problems and unacceptable behaviour.
Is Negativity Necessary

NO
NEGATIVITY
ALLOWED HERE

JB
Negative emotions such as anger, fear, disgust and so on help us to respond appropriately to our environment – their adaptive value is easy to explain and understand.

(B. Fredrickson, 2003)
• Fitted three-year-olds out with audio recorders in order to catch -- over a two-week period -- the messages they received from adults, including, crucially, their parents.
• Some 85pc of those messages, subsequently analysed, turned out to be negative.
• The children were repeatedly told what they should not do and frequently criticised for what they had just done.
Estimates of contributors to happiness

- 50% Genetic
- 10% Circumstances
- 40% Intentional Activity
So What Can We Do?

Don’t “Be Positive”
Another feel-good, pop psychology, arm-chair self-help package?

Pop Psychology? Happyology?
“There wouldn’t be such a thing as counterfeit gold if there were no real gold somewhere.”

-- Sufi proverb
Reciprocal relationship – reciprocal causality

A mindset of positivity begets positive emotions and positive emotions beget positivity

Lightly create the mindset of positivity, from that positive emotions will follow.
Create The Mindset Of Positivity
Strategies from which Positivity Springs.

• Be Open
• Be Appreciative
• Be Curious
• Be Kind
• Be Real and sincere
Positivity Opens Us

![Lotus Flowers](image1.jpg)

![Lotus Flowers](image2.jpg)
• Warmth of sunlight opens flowers
• The warmth of positivity opens our hearts and minds.
• To be open means to let go of rigid expectations – removes our blinkers
• Changes our visual perspective at a really basic level, along with our ability to see our common humanity with others. Race...
The ‘Upside’ Of Life
Our Signature Strengths

- Optimism
- Gratitude
- Mindfulness
- Hope
- Peace
- Joy,
- Serenity,
- Awe

- Playfulness
- Inspiration
- Love
- Connection
- Amusement
- Interest,
- Pride,
• Paying attention in the moment to when we are experiencing positive emotions can be an arena of growth.

• Doing something just for the fun of it in the moment may seem trivial but it forecasts more vitality, growth, and ultimately flourishing.
Empirical Support

In the moment, Positive Emotions:

- **Broaden Attention and Thinking**
  
  (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2002; Waugh & Fredrickson, in prep)

- **Undo Lingering Negative Emotional Arousal**
  
  (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan & Tugade, 2000)

- **Fuel Resilient Coping**
  
  (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2002; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002)
Over time, Positive Emotions:

- Prevent depression
  
  (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2002)

- Trigger Upward Spirals to Increase Well-being
  
  (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2002)

- Build optimism, tranquility, and resilience
  
  (Fredrickson, Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2002)
Positive Emotions & Altruism

- Positive Emotions Promote Altruism – acting altruistically not only springs from PE’s, but produces PE’s as well.

- Altruism, in turn, creates
  - pride in givers
  - gratitude in recipients
  - elevation in onlookers
• PE brings us closer to others – allows us to see our common humanity, our oneness.

• Race has become irrelevant when people are under the influence of PE.

• When we induce PE, people are more trusting and come to better win-win situations in negotiations

• Start to think in terms of We instead of Me.
Positivity Nourishes and Transforms Us
WELL-BEING
Fredrickson has argued that Positive Affect is an active ingredient within human flourishing.

Plain psychological fact that we need to pay attention to so that we can understand how to go to that relatively rare state of flourishing.
We become psychologically disconnected from our best self.

These experiences are still there – buried treasure waiting to be discovered.

Recall and write specific experiences of flourishing

Be specific....

Share them with someone
Ask yourself…

- What were the circumstances?
- How were you thinking, feeling and reacting?
- What strengths did you discover in yourself?
- Where do my strengths come from?
- How did you manage your usual vulnerabilities or weaknesses?
- What did you learn about yourself from it?
- What did you learn about other people?
- What did you learn about life more generally?
• Step on the positivity scale frequently – 2 minutes. [http://www.positivityratio.com/](http://www.positivityratio.com/)

• Most of us aren’t anywhere above this 3:1 on a daily basis if we are honest with ourselves.

• Every day for 2 weeks.

• Continue as you make positive changes in your life – see if these positive steps make a difference in your life.
• Value positivity more deeply by becoming more mindful of our emotions.

• Discover what makes you come alive and give those activities higher priority.

• When we invest in things that bring us positive emotions, we are investing in our future.
• Beauty of 3:1 ratio – wide enough – no emotion need be banished.

• Lot of negativity pointless – keep it in check
  – Questioning mental habits that fan the flames of negativity, like, jumping to conclusions, mind reading, mental filtering.
Questioning Mental Habits

- **All-or-nothing thinking**: You look at things in absolute, black-and-white categories.
- **Overgeneralization**: You view a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
- **Mental Filter**: You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives.
- **Discounting the positives**: You insist that your accomplishments or positives don’t count.
- **Jumping to conclusions**: A. Mind Reading: you assume that people are reacting negatively to you when there is no definite evidence for this; and B. Fortune Telling: you arbitrarily predict that things will turn out badly.
• **Emotional Reasoning**: You reason from how you feel: “I feel like an idiot, so I really must be one”. Or: “I don’t feel like doing this, so I’ll put it off”.

• **Should statements**: You criticize yourself or other people with "shoulds" or "shouldn'ts." "Musts," "oughts," and "have tos" are similar offenders.

• **Labeling**: You identify with your shortcomings. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," you tell yourself, "I'm an idiot," or "a fool," or "a loser."

• **Personalization and blame**: You blame yourself for something you aren't entirely responsible for.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative - Powerless</th>
<th>Positive - Powerful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;That's me. That's just the way I am.&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;I choose to .....&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• &quot;There's nothing I can do about it.&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;I prefer to .....&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• &quot;I have to do it.&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;I will .......“ “I won’t”</td>
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<td>• &quot;I have to .....&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;I can ......&quot;</td>
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<td>• &quot;If only ......&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;Let's look at the alternatives.&quot;</td>
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<td>• &quot;He makes me so mad!&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;I can choose a different approach.&quot;</td>
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<td>• &quot;They won't allow that.&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;I control my own feelings.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• &quot;I must.“ “I should”</td>
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Cultivates important resources
Mindfulness – maintain awareness of thoughts, feelings, and surroundings.
Improvement in relationships
Improvements in resilience.
Reductions in aches and pains and other signs of physical illness.
Do you see your life through the lens of lack or a lens of gratitude?

-Jasmin Terrany, LMHC
Gratitude and the Brain

• Reshapes the physical structure of your brain - neuroscientists have shown that how we focus our thoughts can directly alter the brain’s activity and structure.

• The more you consciously choose to focus on what is going well, the more your brain is trained to default to the positive.
• 3/5 minutes EVERY DAY writing down several good things in your life by asking yourself
  – What went well today?
  – What are you grateful for? (no matter how small)
  – What did you do right?
  – What’s good about your current circumstances
  – What enabled you to have this wonderful experience/circumstances today?
• Get Into positive feelings
• Review what it felt like when this good thing happened.
• Savour those successes, the lucky breaks and the kindness of others...
• Get a sense of the physiological change that PE bring.
• Huge difference in the amount of positive emotions you feel in your life everyday if you engage in this practice.
Gratitude Letters

✓ In research studies, both initiator and recipient of a gratitude letter report positive outcomes.
✓ Instructions: Write a gratitude letter to a person you choose, expressing your gratitude and for what and why, specifically, you are grateful.
✓ If at all possible, deliver it personally and ask the person to read the letter in your presence.
✓ If personal delivery is not possible, mail, fax, or email the letter and follow up with a phone call.

Source: Chris Peterson, *A Primer in Positive Psychology*
‘What we are today, comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.’

(Buddha)
Count the black dots! :o)

“We see what we look for and we miss much of what we are not looking for even though it is there... Our experience of the world is heavily influenced by where we place our attention”. Stavros & Torres
• Counting Acts of Kindness – count your own acts of kindness every day.

– Subjective happiness was increased simply by counting one's own acts of kindness for one week. Happy people became more kind and grateful through the counting kindnesses intervention.

• Three Good things in life - every night, write down three things that went well for you during the day and their causes.

• Using Signature strengths in new ways – use of your character strengths in a new and different way.

24 - Character Strengths

A Life of Pleasure, Engagement and Meaning

- Bravery
- Persistence
- Integrity
- Vitality
- Love
- Kindness
- Social Intelligence
- Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humor
- Spirituality
- Citizenship
- Fairness
- Leadership
- Forgiveness and Mercy
- Humility/Modesty
- Prudence
- Self-regulation

Wisdom and Knowledge

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Open-mindedness
- Love of Learning
- Perspective

Justice

Temperance

Transcendence
• **Build Your Capacity For Happiness**
  – this is a realistic goal including allowing for adversity and realising what is making you unhappy (example, your friend's cousin is ill, her mood will affect you)

• **Control Your Attention in a focused way.**
  – We can only concentrate for a short length of time each day - use this wisely and not on negative thoughts.
Maureen Gaffney’s 10 Strategies To Flourishing

• **Set Yourself Goals.**
  – Have a range of projects – one that relates to your work, one that relates to your family or friends and one that relates to a personal interest.

• **Always Know Your Positive Purpose**
  – Know the positive purpose to all meetings/encounters whether professional, personal or social

• **Actively Manage Your Mood**
  – Positive mood improves quality of thinking, memory, ability to pursue goals – is contagious – effects quality of vital interactions.
• **Know The Meaning Of Things** –
  – for some this is a religious/spiritual meaning, for others it is establishing what is important within your own belief/value system

• **Build your resilience**
  – Developing an effective coping style - health, stress

• **Embrace The future**
  – Why optimism is vital to positive human functioning and warns against ‘positive illusions’
• Master The Art Of Vital Engagement.
  – Dealing with adversity can often lead to flourishing depending on how you deal with it – to be totally enjoyably engaged with what you are doing – to be energised and happy, in full control of your actions, masters of the moment.

• Stop Sabotaging Yourself
  – You can't be driven crazy without your full cooperation – we have a free will. we can exercise choice, self-defeating thinking styles and behaviours.
Start with any one of the 10 strategies that appeal to you or seem more relevant to where you are in your life and what particular challenges you are facing.

Use singly or together to help you build the positive and limit the negative in your life.
• It is all about choice:
  – what you choose to attend to in life,
  – how you choose to think,
  – which activities you choose to engage in, day-to-day,
  – together with the goals that you set yourself and pursue, can change your life for the better.
To Sum Up: What Good Are Positive Emotions?

- Broaden attention and thinking
- Undo lingering negative emotions
- Fuel psychological resilience
- Build enduring personal resources
- Trigger upward spirals toward well-being
- Transform individuals and relationships
- Transform organizations
“One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, ‘My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Negativity. It’s anger, sadness, stress, contempt, disgust, fear, embarrassment, guilt, shame and hate. The other is Positivity. It’s joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and above all, love.’ The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: ‘Which wolf wins?’
The old Cherokee simply replied, ‘The one you feed’”
References


References