POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE SYSTEMATIC PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS:
A LITERATURE REVIEW

BY
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Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certifies that she or he has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled Positive Psychology and the Systematic Pursuit of Happiness: Literature Review submitted by Sasa Simcisin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counselling.

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ABSTRACT

The field of psychology has historically been one-sided; directed towards and focused on negative emotions and mental illnesses. Positive psychology provides a balance to more traditional approaches by focusing on positive emotions, positive traits, and positive institutions as well as ways in which to develop and strengthen them. Positive psychology claims that these major components are required for the authentic achievement of happiness. By focusing on the positive, psychologists will be able to help clients achieve happiness by reinforcing and building upon their strengths rather than repairing their weaknesses. Positive psychology is not intended to replace the traditional approach nor does it claim that psychologists should forgo treating mental illnesses, rather, it provides a more well-rounded and comprehensive approach that involves building on individual strengths in order to increase happiness and prevent the onset of illnesses such as depression.

The purpose of this project is to summarize the main findings of positive psychology research as well as to identify the challenges and limitations of some aspects at the forefront of this movement. The overall goal is to provide an understanding of this growing field as well as to create a resource for counsellors who would like to pursue further study in the area of positive psychology or who wish to implement some of these concepts into their practice.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................. ii

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction ......................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Foundation ........................................................................ 5

  What is such a Big Deal about Happiness Anyway? ........................................ 5
  Pessimism about Happiness ................................................................................. 6
  New Field on the Block ......................................................................................... 9

  Overview of Positive Psychology ......................................................................... 12

  Positive Emotions ................................................................................................ 14

  Positive Strengths .............................................................................................. 22

  Wisdom and Knowledge ....................................................................................... 23

  Courage ................................................................................................................ 24

  Humanity ............................................................................................................. 25

  Justice ................................................................................................................... 25

  Temperance ......................................................................................................... 26

  Transcendence .................................................................................................... 27

  Positive Institutions ............................................................................................. 28

  Critique of Positive Psychology .......................................................................... 29

CHAPTER THREE: Procedures and Implications .......................................................... 34

  Project Procedures ................................................................................................. 34

  Synthesis and Implications .................................................................................. 36

CHAPTER FOUR: Empirically Proven Happiness Enhancing Strategies ...................... 39
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Happiness Scale</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteen Fundamentals of Happiness</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for a Happier Life</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques for Rearing Happy Children</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Development Programs</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Interventions for Increasing Happiness</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating Positive Emotions</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write, Talk, and Think about Life’s Triumphs and Defeats</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualizing Best Possible Future Selves</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disputation</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a Beautiful Day</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting One’s Blessings</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing Acts of Kindness</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude Exercise</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Good Things in Life</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Signature Strengths in a New Way</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Affiliation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental Goal Pursuit</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Leisure</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Control</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Martin Seligman, the past president of the American Psychological Association, stated that before World War II psychology had three fundamental missions: to cure mental illness, to make the lives of all people more fulfilling, and to identify and nurture talent (Seligman, 2002). Seligman believes that as many psychologists discovered they could make a living treating and researching mental illnesses they focused solely on that mission. As a result, health professionals have become somewhat successful in treating many mental illnesses but at the same time, they have lost any true connection to what makes life worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Although scientific psychology has had success in helping those who are struggling with mental health issues, it remains ineffective in preventing mental health issues from arising in the first place (Keyes & Lopez, 2005). For this reason, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) have called for the development of positive psychology; the systematic pursuit of happiness that promises to advance human fulfillment, make people happier, examine what makes life worth living, and prevent negative traits and feelings from arising when life seems meaningless (Gunnel, 2004; Jaret & Wright, 2004).

Although positive psychology and its systematic pursuit of happiness has emerged as a dominant area of focus in the last few years, attracting numerous students, clinicians, and critics (Gunnel, 2004; Lawson, 2004), most psychologists still have an inadequate knowledge of what makes people happy (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This is likely due to the gap between those who conduct research and those who are engaged in practice (Ruby, 2005; Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003). This gap is largely
created due to the fact that data relating to human happiness is immensely underreported (Wellner & Adox, 2000) and health professionals have a tendency to study pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In addition, some researchers argue that long-term happiness has a genetic set point and this cannot be changed or influenced (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). The purpose of this project is to draw together a diverse collection of literature related to the field of positive psychology and the systematic pursuit of happiness in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of this emerging field, tighten the researcher-practitioner gap, and create a resource for counsellors wishing to implement some of the concepts of positive psychology into their practice. As a practical component, within this literature review, I will compile strategies that have been empirically demonstrated to enhance happiness (Jaret & Wright, 2004).

Almost everyone professes a desire to be happy (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995) and many people seem willing to quickly spend money on books and CDs that promise a more fulfilling life (Gunnel, 2004) even though these are rarely based on any research (Corliss & Bjerklie, 2003). Happiness has become a multi-million dollar industry that brings numerous life-coaches without adequate credentials to the forefront, offering their services based on non-scientific knowledge and charging up to seven times what qualified professionals would charge (Gunnel, 2004; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). As mentioned, qualified health professionals have inadequate knowledge of what actually makes people happy (Corliss & Bjerklie, 2003; Gunnel, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and hence those who are searching for a better and happier life have no safer, regulated empirical alternative and often end up being taken advantage of by numerous non-qualified happiness coaches (Gunnel, 2004). Positive psychology
has an opportunity to meet the public demand for happiness (Ruark, 1999). It can protect the public by informing consumers (Grant, 2001) and producing empirical knowledge (McLafferty & Kirylo, 2001) that can offset the potentially harmful effects that may come from the numerous non-scientific offerings that are available (Gunnel, 2004).

The positive psychology movement offers a novel way of thinking about psychology and provides a long needed balance by exploring various positive topics that have previously been neglected (Vitz, 2005). This, in turn, creates many new career opportunities for young psychologists as many major Universities are already offering funding for faculties and researchers devoted to this emerging field (Vitz, 2005). It is clear that the findings of positive psychology will have an immediate effect on education, child-rearing, and psychotherapy itself (Vitz, 2005).

Practitioners need to recognize that they can help their clients the most by focusing on happiness, making the understanding of what makes life worth living their primary task, and amplifying their clients’ strengths rather than repairing their weaknesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The positive psychology movement and its focus on happiness can help health professionals reconnect with the positive side of life, make them and their clients stronger, more resilient, and happier human beings; bringing a once vague picture of what makes people happy into focus (Seligman & Peterson, 2000). Additionally, it will provide a scientific understanding of the pursuit of the best things in life (Seligman, 1998).

The following chapter presents the background literature review that leads to the identification of relevant issues with regard to positive psychology and the collection of empirically proven happiness enhancing interventions depicted in chapter four. The third
chapter details the procedures used in this project and discusses the synthesis and future implications of this project, while the last chapter describes empirically proven happiness enhancing strategies.
CHAPTER TWO
Theoretical Foundations

Happiness seems to be the one thing that everyone wants from life and is “the ultimate aim of all human endeavor” (Fordyce, 1983, p.483). Most people consider personal happiness to be more important than money, moral goodness, health, and sex (Fordyce, 1977; King & Napa, 1998). Beside people’s desire to be happy, research also shows that it is in people’s best interest to be happy (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Why is Happiness Such a Big Deal Anyway?

Happy individuals tend to be successful and accomplished across multiple life domains including health, friendship, marriage, work performance, and income. They show superior physical and mental health than their less happy peers (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). They have stronger immune systems, higher energy, a more optimistic outlook, less heart disease, recover from surgery faster, are less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and social phobia, cope better with stress, have a higher sense of control over their good fortune, are less likely to attempt and commit suicide, and are more likely to live longer (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Dillon, Minchoff, & Baker, 1985; Koivumaa-Honkanen, Honkanen, Viinamaeki, Heikkilae, Kaprio, & Koskenvuo, 2001; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Ostir, Markides, Black, & Goodwin, 2000). With regard to social aspects, happier individuals are more likely to marry and have stronger marriages, build better social lives, have more friends, have a more positive attitude toward others, are perceived as more likeably, have stronger social support, and are more
satisfied with their romantic relationships, family, and friends (Berry, & Hansen, 1996; Okun, Stock, Haring, & Witter, 1984).

The happier individuals are, the more likely they are to be cooperative, decisive, motivated, trusting, and caring, as well as get more job interviews, obtain jobs, be more excited about their jobs, achieve a higher quality of work, earn higher salaries, succeed in their careers, do better at complex and creative tasks, be more helpful and charitable, volunteer more, and assist their families and society at large (George, 1995; Kasser, & Ryan, 1996; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994; Williams & Shiaw, 1999). Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005), leading researchers in the field of positive psychology, showed that happiness and positive affect precede numerous successful outcomes and behaviours leading to success.

*Pessimism about Happiness*

Even though happiness has numerous benefits, seems extremely desirable, and is considered by many to be one of the most important things in life, attainment and the nature of happiness are viewed as enigmatic. Some myths claim that happiness can never be understood (Fordyce, 1983) and that one’s happiness can never be permanently increased (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Many people do seem to be unsuccessful in achieving happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The World Values Survey Group (1994) shows that on average, the World population is less than sixty-five percent happy.

Myers and Diener (1997) mention that in North America, Europe, and Japan, the proportion of those who consider themselves to be very happy has declined in the last forty years while divorce has doubled, arrests for juvenile violent crimes increased six
times, teen suicide has tripled, and depression has sky rocketed. Millions of adults in North America are now suffering from depression and find meeting the essential requirements of daily living a challenge (Oman & Oman, 2003). Depression and sadness can lead to extreme loneliness, hopelessness, a sense of worthlessness, self-blame, and suicide (Gray, 1994). People in wealthier countries are somewhat happier than those living in destitute countries, but increased incomes are not always accompanied by increased happiness (Myers & Diener, 1997). In fact, as wealth and comfort in our society has increased, mental health and well-being has declined (Myers, 2000).

Science doesn’t know much about happiness either (Seligman, 2002; Tucker-Ladd, 1996). This scant knowledge should not be surprising given the fact that some psychological search engines offer one article on positive emotions for every twenty-one articles on negative emotions (Myers, 2000). Seligman (2002) points out that this focus on the science of negative emotions is understandable since negative emotions have certain survival values attached to them and possess evolutionary significance. For example, fear signals that danger is close and hence calls people to act to external threats. Similarly, when cultures face poverty, instability, military threat, and shortages of goods, they naturally focus on damage control and defense.

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) point to three sources for the empirical lack of knowledge about happiness and pessimism about influencing one’s individual level of happiness. One idea suggests that genes may predispose an individual to be at a certain point on the happiness scale (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). According to this view, one’s level of happiness is genetically predetermined and although one’s happiness level could be influenced in the short term, in the long run people will always
return to their set range (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). The second idea claims that people have consistent personality traits that are stable across their life span and hence one’s level of happiness will remain relatively the same over time and consistent across situations (Diener, 1994). A third argument is that humans are on the hedonic treadmill; they adapt to changes relatively quickly and even though happiness can rise and fall in response to life events, it will return to its set point once hedonic adaptation has occurred (Kahneman, 1990). When taken together, these three ideas suggest that trying to achieve greater happiness is futile (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) and that one’s pursuit of happiness may lead to deep disappointment (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

However, recent studies shed more light on how people’s enduring levels of happiness are affected. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) point to three primary types of factors that affect one’s happiness: personality predispositions (individual genes), individual life circumstances, and intentional activity. Evidence suggests that genetics account for approximately 50% of the population disparity (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), circumstances for approximately 10%, while the variance for intentional activity accounts for as much as 40% (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Rising evidence shows that long term happiness increases are not just possibilities but certainties (Fordyce, 1983; King, 2001; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith, & Share, 2002). For example various training programs found that happiness can be increased by up to twenty five percent on average in a two to ten week period (Fordyce, 1977, 1983). Seligman (2002) suggests that people can influence
their happiness best by developing new personality traits, more positive attitudes, and different outlooks because these are more under one’s voluntarily control than one’s circumstances. More and more evidence reveals the efficacy and effectiveness of certain positive interventions aimed at cultivating pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). Recent movements in the field of psychology, known as positive psychology, attempt to answer questions by relating what mechanisms, if any, can enhance and nourish happiness, and as well reveal the secrets to positive mental health, happiness, and optimal functioning (Lyubomirsky & Abbe, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

New Field on the Block

For years, the field of psychology has been mostly used to treat depression, suffering, anxiety, and neuroses. While that was commendable and has resulted in the illumination of many mental disorders, other important positive aspects of life have been neglected and the field of psychology has lost its connection to the positive side of life. It now lacks knowledge about what makes human life most worth living (Gunnel, 2004; Jaret & Wright, 2004; Seligman, 1998). Recently, however, increased attention has been devoted to positive mental health and happiness due to the positive psychology movement (Faller, 2001). Simply stated, positive psychology is the scientific study of human strengths and virtues as well as the understanding of the best things in life (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology may very likely discover a set of human strengths that will serve as buffers against serious mental illnesses (Seligman, 1998).

The aim of positive psychology is to broaden the focus of clinical psychology and move the profession's paradigm away from curing the pathological, suffering,
weaknesses, and mental illnesses to focusing on positive emotions, virtues, human strengths, the best qualities in life, happiness, and well-being in order to bring a much needed balance to the field of psychology (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology aims to advance human fulfillment, make people happier, prevent depression, and examine some of the true gems that make life worth living (Gunnel, 2004; Jaret & Wright, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology claims that this is the time for promoting the empirical study of happiness since most people have reached profound levels of material well-being and now want to know more about what really constitutes ‘the good life’ and enhances enduring happiness (Seligman, 2002).

Seligman (1998) states that we need to remind our field that it has been sidetracked; that psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage, but it is also the study of strengths and virtues. Hence, we need to nurture what is best within ourselves and not just fix what is broken (Seligman, 2002). Laura King (2003), one of the leading researchers in the field, mentioned that, from her experiences and the experiences of her colleagues and students, often when psychologists disclose to someone their profession, that someone almost instantly wants the psychologist to tell him or her what is “wrong” with him or her. She goes on to say that this is mostly because people believe that psychology is the study of what is wrong with people. Lopez, Snyder, and Rasmussen (2003) also warn that many people view human strengths as “fuzzy constructs,” claiming that they cannot be measured reliably, and demanding that they are only considered along with human weaknesses.

Positive psychology is not a new idea. Humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rodgers, A.H. Maslow, Victor Frankl, and Rolo May all stressed the importance of
psychological health, however, the humanistic movement failed to change the field of psychology mostly due to its lack of emphasis on empirical research (Faller, 2001). Scientific psychology has neglected the study of what is right with people and rarely has more to offer on the topic of ‘the good life’ than motivational speakers, pop psychologists, and armchair gurus (Peterson & Park, 2003). Peterson and Park go on to state that human beings are seen as damaged and fragile, causalities of bad genetics or victims of harsh environments. They also state that the common belief in the field of psychology is that people are honest when they describe their deficiencies and problems but if they disclose that they are happy and things are going well they must be in denial, or at best in recovery (Faller, 2001). This belief has even now sneaked into common culture and many of us see ourselves as victims who are trying to survive and not as individuals who seek to bloom (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology wants to change this.

Considering the overabundance of depression, unhappiness, and suicide in our society (Myers & Diener, 1997; Oman & Oman, 2003; Pinel, 1997), the positive psychology movement has a lot to add (Lampropoulos, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001) by focusing on the prevention of depression and the increase of happiness (Hollon et al., 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Schulman, DeRubeis, & Hollon, 1999). Transforming the field of psychology from its present focus on pathology, weaknesses, and mental illnesses to an approach that focuses on building positive qualities, increasing happiness, and preventing depression is a difficult but worthy task (Lampropoulos, 2001).
In order for positive psychology to succeed in leading the field of psychology toward happiness and human fulfillment, it needs to provide a theoretical framework that can be scientifically tested (McLafferty & Kirylo, 2001) and ground itself firmly in scientific knowledge (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Positive psychology’s main aim is the scientific understanding of subjective well-being, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Seligman, 2002).

Overview of Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology can be viewed at the subjective, individual, and group level (Seligman, 2002). At the subjective level, the field of positive psychology is about positive subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, pride, and satisfaction (in the past); happiness, flow, the sensual pleasures, joy (in the present); and optimism, faith, trust, and hope (for the future). At the individual level, the field is about positive personal traits such as compassion, the capacity for love, forgiveness, creativity, integrity, courage, interpersonal skill, perseverance, future-mindedness, originality, and wisdom. These human strengths enable positive experiences. At the group level, the field of positive psychology emphasizes positive institutions such as families, schools, businesses, communities, and societies as well as civic virtues such as altruism, responsibility, civility, tolerance, moderation, and work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These institutions enable positive traits and thereby positive experiences (Seligman, 2002).

Seligman (2002) proposes that there are three distinctive kinds of happiness: the pleasant life (pleasures); the good life, which is achieved by exercising one’s strengths through deep engagement in family, work and such; and the meaningful life, which
comes when we devote ourselves and our strengths to great causes such as charity or
religion and which lodges in belonging to something more worthwhile than just one’s
pleasures and desires (Seligman, 2002). The truly full life is the one that satisfies all these
criteria of happiness. Seligman (2002) states that happiness in the present could be
increased by pleasures (eating, having fun, having sex, doing exciting things, relaxing,
and being mindful) and gratifications (engaging in satisfying and fulfilling activities that
absorb one’s attention and make the person feel proud).

Seligman and Pawelski (2003) point out that many people do not consider
engagement and meaning as very important and hence they build their lives around
pursuing pleasures only. They use various shortcuts to positive emotions such as drugs,
shopping, chocolate, loveless sex, and television. Positive psychology does not deny that
these means can result in positive emotions but it warns that these shortcuts lose their
effect with repetition and that there is a cost if these shortcuts become an individual’s
only road to happiness. Positive emotion “alienated from positive character leads to
emptiness; to a lack of meaning; and as we age, to the gnawing fear that we are fidgeting
don’t just want positive feelings but that they want to be entitled to them. People want to
know that their feelings are stemming from their personal strengths and virtuous actions.

Positive psychology with its scientific focus on positive emotions, positive
individual strengths, and positive institutions can lead people to optimal functioning and
well-being (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). Without considering and enhancing
positive emotions, virtues, strengths, institutions and meaning, we could never understand
the full, happy life or truly improve human lives (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology
attempts to clarify what works well in people’s lives by pointing out that positive functioning consists of six dimensions of psychological well being and five dimensions of social well being (Keyes & Lopez, 2005). The six dimensions of psychological well-being include self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others. The dimensions of social well-being are social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence, and social integration. Keyes and Lopez (2005) go on to state that mental health is not just the absence of mental illness as mental illness and mental health, although correlated, are distinct dimensions; they are not just at opposite ends of a single continuum. Complete mental health consists of high levels of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being as well as the absence of mental illness.

The first step in understanding ‘the good life’ resides in understanding positive emotions and positive traits. These are the ingredients of happiness. The second step involves classification of positive traits and the third step involves building interventions that work to increase positive emotions as well as positive traits (Seligman, 2002). These positive emotions and traits are also associated with mental health. In the next two sections of this paper, I will focus on positive emotions, positive strengths, and positive institutions while positive interventions will be focus of the fourth chapter.

**Positive Emotions**

In the theoretical framework of positive psychology, happiness or subjective well-being, is viewed as the behavioural outcome that stems from the experience of positive emotions. Happy people are viewed as those who experience positive emotions and positive moods most of the time (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991). Happiness is most
often defined in literature in terms of a high life satisfaction and the predominance of positive affects over negative ones (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Positive emotions include such feelings as interest, excitement, enthusiasm, pride, alertness, inspiration, and determination. In addition to experiencing high levels of pleasant emotions and low levels of negative moods, happy people also report a high level of life satisfaction. The positive experiences embodied in happiness make life rewarding and are therefore a core concept of positive psychology. The notion that happiness is defined by the amount of time that people experience positive affect and not necessarily the intensity of that affect has strong empirical support (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Numerous studies show that happy individuals - those who experience recurrent positive emotions such as joy, pride, and interest, and infrequent negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, and anger - tend to be successful and accomplished across multiple life domains, including health, friendship, marriage, work performance, and income (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Happiness is commonly reported as subjective well being because people are the best judges of their own happiness (Myers & Diener, 1995). One of the top researchers in the field of positive psychology and psychology in general, Ruut Veenhoven (2005), emphasizes that happiness is a state of mind and therefore it can reliably be measured across nations by simply asking people how happy they feel as well as how much they enjoy and like their lives as a whole. Happiness is not a competition after all; it is about raising one’s personal bar (Seligman, 2002). These questions can be posed as clinical interviews, surveys, and life-review questionnaires and asked directly or indirectly by using multiple or single items. Research suggests that happiness best refers to the state in
which people report the frequent experience of positive affect and not necessarily the intensity of that affect. Happy people on average experience positive emotions most of the time (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). The current levels of national happiness range between 3.2/10 (Tanzania) and 8/10 (Switzerland) (Veenhoven, 2005).

The formula for happiness claims that happiness is an emotion (Seligman, 2002). Emotions are very complex bodily functions that change in response to various people, things, and events encountered on a day-to-day basis. Emotions express how these daily challenges affect people’s satisfaction with life (Caprara & Steca, 2005; Delle Fave & Massimini). All emotions have four components: feeling, sensory, thinking, and action (Seligman, 2002).

Research on positive emotions is still in its infancy but it already offers some very tangible results (Faller, 2001). For instance, we now know that for right-handed people, positive feelings reside in the left side of the pre-frontal cortex while negative feelings inhabit the right side of the same region (Davidson, 2000). Some of the major findings in the study of happiness are that circumstances such as age, degree of education, income, the climate a person lives in, race, gender, health, and age seem to have relatively little to do with happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Contrary to popular belief, we can now state for certain that once a person has just enough money to feel barely comfortable, more money will not lead to more happiness (Myers, 2004). Being poor does make people unhappy but, once basic needs are met, money doesn't have much impact. In fact, wealth can often get in the way on the road toward a good life. It seems that one’s striving toward money is negatively correlated with one’s well-being. As a
result of our capacity to adapt quickly, yesterday’s excitement rapidly becomes today’s necessities and tomorrow’s leftovers (Myers, 2004).

Furthermore, older people are happier than younger people (Easterbrook, 2001). While young people strive toward many things they want to achieve, older people have either already achieved what they wanted or made their peace with the truth that they will never achieve it. In summary, changing ones circumstances in order to increase one’s happiness is usually impractical, expensive, and not all that successful (Seligman, 2002). There are better paths toward happiness. Sometimes one’s happiness can be increased for a long time by just doing something simple such as counting one’s blessings at the end of the day, taking a walk, or writing a letter one may never send (Jaret & Wright, 2004).

These initial findings have the potential to encourage further investigations of positive emotions and thus in turn advance positive psychology. Current research findings show that happiness is closely related to self-esteem, loving relationships, satisfying and challenging work, extroversion, good health, status and power, exciting interests and goals, religion, a sense of control, an optimistic outlook, being open to experiences, and being helpful to other people (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991).

As mentioned above, understanding positive emotions and happiness requires the study of satisfaction, fulfillment, contentment, pride, and serenity with the past; joy, calm, zest, ecstasy, pleasure, and flow in the present; and hope, faith, optimism, and trust for the future (Seligman, 2002). People can move in a positive direction by learning about these three different types of happiness. They can learn to change how they feel about their past, how they think about their future, and how they experience the present. It is not what happens to us nor is it what we have that determines how happy we are; the
determinant is how we interpret what happens (Seligman, 2002). People’s happiness can be greatly affected by teaching them how to internalize positive experiences and how to internally dispute negative reactions on a daily basis. Cognitive therapy, for example, can greatly relieve sadness and depression by teaching people how to change their thinking about their future and their past. In order for people to feel more happiness about what went before, they need to appreciate good events of the past and show more gratitude toward them; realize that their past does not determine their future; as well as forgive, suppress, and forget bad memories of earlier times. In order for people to feel happier about their future, they need to build and increase their optimism and hope. This can be done, for example, by teaching people how to recognize and dispute their pessimistic thoughts.

And finally, people can increase happiness in the present by either increasing their pleasures or their gratifications (Seligman, 2002). Pleasures are divided into bodily pleasures and higher pleasures and are characterized by strong emotional components. They come through senses, are immediate, satisfy biological needs, and are usually short lived. They include ecstasy, orgasm, and exuberance. In order for pleasures to prolong and increase, people have to break habituation, savor the moment, and practice mindfulness. Gratifications, on the other hand, are activities that we enjoy doing but for which we do not have any strong feelings. Gratifications engage us fully in activities in which we lose self-consciousness. For example, such activities could be rock climbing, reading, or dancing. Gratifications involve a lot of thinking and last longer than pleasures. Pleasures are about the emotions and the senses and gratifications are about endorsing one’s personal strengths and virtues. While both of these are important contributions to
happiness, many pleasures quickly lose their joy. Seligman (2002) suggests that people should not overdo having fun, that they should space their pleasurable activities over time and invest in activities that would allow one to get into the state of flow. Gratifications are marked by psychological growth, complete absorption, as well as the state of flow.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), one of the founders of the positive psychology movement, introduced the concept of flow in order to attempt to explain what constitutes a good life. Csikszentmihalyi claims that flow is the absolute experience of happiness. In a state of flow, people are fully implicated in the present moment and time seems to stop. Csikszentmihalyi states that a good life is characterized by complete absorption in one’s activity. In order for flow to happen, the following conditions must be met: the challenges and skills of the activity must be just above the person’s average level and one must see clear proximal goals as well as receive immediate feedback about progress. Flow is characterized by intense and focused concentration on the present activity, the integration of awareness and action; a sense of control, distortion of temporal experiences, and enjoyment constituting the primary reason for taking up a certain activity (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Attention is key in entering and staying in flow. Flow can be fostered by encouraging people to actively choose, get engaged, and pursue activities that suite their own interests. It seems clear that flow can act as a buffer against adversity and that it can highly contribute to the quality of people’s lives. For example, research shows that happier people are more productive at work and earn higher incomes, live longer, have better pain endurance, and more rich and fulfilling social lives (Seligman, 1998). Hence it seems that the surest way of achieving enduring happiness resides in getting more gratifications in one’s life. As mentioned above, the study of positive emotions is
still in its early stages and it will take a lot of further work and commitment for positive psychologists to better understand what constitutes ‘the good life’ and explain how ‘the good life’ can be achieved.

The study of positive emotions has often been hindered due to scientists’ tendencies to cast emotions as the results of adaptation, however, positive emotions are not so easily explained through this spectrum (Frederickson, 2003). From the evolutionary perspective, positive emotions such as serenity, joy, and gratitude do not seem as useful as negative emotions such as anger, fear, and disgust. Barbara Frederickson, a leading expert on positive emotions, (2001, 2005) claims that positive emotions have a bigger role than just making us feel happy and good. She claims that positive emotions, along with negative emotions, in fact play an enormous role in our survival. With her “broaden-and-build” theory, she suggests that positive emotions and positive attitudes broaden our enduring physical, intellectual, and social resources and in this way further our personal growth and development. Positive emotions broaden people’s momentary mindset and in turn these help people build on enduring personal resources that are necessary for future hard times. In other words, when all is going well for a person and when a person is in a positive mood, that person can take the opportunity to expand his or her friendships and resources and hence build skills and confidence for future challenges. The alternative is to rest and rebuild one’s energy after spending high levels of effort. Building on positive emotions helps people to think more creatively, to better their relationships with others, and to bounce back from adversity faster. Positive psychologists, therefore, suggest that people take advantage of their experiences of
positive emotion and seek new and not yet attained goals (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Positive emotions can be best cultivated by finding positive meaning in current circumstances (Frederickson, 2003). Positive meaning can be acquired by effective problem solving, by finding benefits within adversity, and by instilling ordinary events with meaning. It seems that positive experiences may be the best building blocks for happiness and growth. Focusing on goodness can change the world of one person but it can also change the world (Frederickson, 1999). It increases the likelihood of people feeling good in the future. Positive emotions are about personally meaningful conditions and require cognitive appraisal. They encourage individuals to partake in certain activities and engage in their environments. For example, the positive emotions of joy can urge one to play and explore the environment while contentment can encourage one to sit back and relish current life circumstances. We need to cultivate positive emotions because they can be the means to psychological growth and physical health over time. They can, for example, be cultivated by practicing relaxation and by increasing pleasant activities. Positive emotions result from finding positive meaning.

Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) suggest that happy people experience repeated positive moods and by experiencing them, they have a greater chance to work actively toward their goals. In addition, happy people gain valuable skills and resources over time from previous pleasant moods. However, we still need to gain a much deeper understanding of happiness, cheer, optimism, humor, resilience, and courage (Faller, 2001).
**Positive Strengths**

Starting from the great virtues identified by philosophers over the last five thousand years such as courage, wisdom, justice, love, transcendence, and temperance, Seligman (2002) claims that each person has his or her own unique combination of strengths, traits or virtues and that these are his or her “signature strengths.” He believes that by nurturing and using one’s positive natural strengths more often and in new ways, one can live “the good life” and have lastingly happier experiences in love, work, and child rearing. Strengths are associated with physical and psychological health (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In order for this to happen, individuals need to develop healthy attitudes towards accepting and viewing one’s past, becoming optimistic about one’s future, and increase pleasures and gratifications in one’s present.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) point that virtues are core characteristics that are perhaps universal, grounded in biology, have evolutionary importance, and are valued by religious thinkers and moral philosophers. Such virtues include: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity and love, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Virtues are further defined by character strengths; these are the psychological ingredients. Strengths are respected in almost every culture, are appreciated in their own right, and are malleable (Seligman, 1998). To be included as a character strength, a positive characteristic must satisfy most of the following ten criteria. A strength must contribute to various fulfillments that compromise a good life; be morally valued in its own right; not diminish others in the vicinity by being displayed by one individual; be a non-felicitous opposite; be trait-like in the sense of having a degree of stability across time and generality across various situations; be distinctive from other positive traits in its classification; be
embodied in consensual paragons; be sensible to the existence of prodigies; be completely absent in a selective group of people and; have associated institutions and rituals for its cultivation and sustentation. These strengths are neither exhaustive nor exclusive and we need subsequent research to understand them more (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The next section will describe the six virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity and love, justice, temperance, and transcendence, along with twenty-four strengths. These strengths constitute an individual’s character and are identified and described in Peterson and Seligman’s (2004), recently published Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification.

Wisdom and Knowledge

The virtue of wisdom and knowledge encapsulate cognitive strengths that entail the attainment and use of knowledge in the service of ‘the good life.’ This virtue includes five strengths. These are creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and wisdom (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Creativity (ingenuity, originality, practical intelligence, and street-smarts) is distinguished by thinking in productive, unusual, useful, and novel ways in order to conceptualize and do things. Curiosity (interest, novelty seeking, and openness to experience) is a strength that is visible in people who find topics fascinating, who seek exciting and novel experiences, who are rarely bored, and who have an ongoing, intrinsic interest in experiences within the world around them as well as within their inner experiences. Open-mindedness (judgment, rationality, and critical thinking) is the willingness to search for evidence against one’s beliefs and to weigh such evidence fairly. Open-minded people do not jump to conclusions but rather examine evidence and think
things through; hence, they are more resistant to manipulation. People who possess love of learning are motivated to acquire new knowledge and skills, to build on already existing knowledge, and to satisfy curiosity. The strength of wisdom (perspective) refers to the ability to listen to others, to evaluate what they say, and to provide wise advice. This strength also involves looking at the world in a way that makes sense to oneself and to others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Courage

The second virtue is courage (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This virtue includes emotional strengths that involve the exercising of will in pursuit of one’s goals while in the face of external and internal obstacles. This virtue includes strengths of bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality.

Bravery (valor and courage) refers to one’s ability to do what has to be done despite fear, difficulty, challenge, or threat. This strength also includes speaking up for what is right and acting on convictions even when that is not popular. Persistence (perseverance, industry, and diligence) is symbolized by finishing what one has started in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement and by taking pleasure in completing given tasks. Integrity (genuineness, honesty, authenticity) is a strength that is characterized by taking responsibility for one’s actions and feelings by being true to oneself, by not being deceptive, by being genuine, and by speaking the truth. Measures of integrity correlate positively with measures of life satisfaction, positive mood, self-actualization, openness to experiences, empathy, and positive interpersonal outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Vitality (zest, vigor, enthusiasm, energy) is distinguished by feeling alive, by being full of zest, by living life with enthusiasm and as an adventure.
People with this strength are bouncy, vigorous, energetic, spirited, alert, rarely worn-out, and bright-eyed.

**Humanity**

Humanity is the third virtue on the list of the six universal virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This virtue includes strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence. These strengths manifest themselves through caring relationships with others.

The strength of love is portrayed by being close to people and by valuing close relationships with others, especially those relationships that are reciprocated. Love is defined by comfort, acceptance, and sharing and involves comfort, acceptance, and positive feelings. Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, and altruistic love) is a character strength that is possessed by those who have a pervasive tendency to do favours and good deeds for others; to whom giving is more important than receiving, who help everyone, not just family and friends, and who are compassionate and nice to others. Some evidence shows that volunteerism, for example, is closely associated with mental and physical health for benefactors and that it can reduce the risk of early death (Van Willigen, 2000). Social intelligence (personal intelligence, emotional intelligence) manifests itself through one’s ability to be aware of the feelings and motives of other people as well as one’s own motives and feelings. It also includes one’s ability to perceive and understand emotions in relationships, to know how to act in different social situations, and how to use acquired emotional information in reasoning.

**Justice**

The virtue of justice includes civic strengths that are foundations for healthy community life. These strengths are also essential for optimal interaction between the
individual and the group. These are citizenship, fairness, and leadership (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Citizenship (social responsibility, teamwork, loyalty) encapsulates a sense of commitment for a common good that stretches beyond personal interests and includes the interest of the group in which one is a member. Fairness (equity) involves treating everyone the same according to notions of justice and fairness, not letting personal biases influences one’s decision about others, and giving everyone a fair chance. Fairness is the outcome of the moral judgment process by which people determine what is morally wrong, what is morally right, and what is morally forbidden. The strength of leadership is found in those individuals who encourage a group to get things done while at the same time sustain good relations with other members of the group. Correlates of leadership include being energetic, creative, independent, self-confident, and emotionally stable.

Temperance

The fifth virtue is temperance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This virtue includes strengths that protect people from excess (arrogance, short-term pleasures with long-term costs, and hatred). Strengths of temperance are defined partially through what people refrain from doing. Temperance includes the strength of forgiveness, humility and modesty, prudence, and self-control. These strengths are seldom praised in Western cultures.

Forgiveness (mercy) is characterized by an individual ability to forgive those who have done him or her wrong, giving them a second chance, and not being vengeful. When people forgive then their actions and thoughts toward the transgressor become more compassionate, positive, and peaceful. Forgiveness is associated with traits that enhance
one’s personal and societal well-being. People who forgive appear to have lower levels of negative affects such as anxiety, anger, depression, and hostility. Humility and modesty are represented by letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves. People who possess this strength do not seek the spotlight; have an accurate sense of their abilities and achievements; and do not take unjustified credit for their accomplishments.

Prudence (discretion, caution) is a strength that is visible in being careful about one’s choices and in not doing things that one may later regret. Self-control (self-regulation) relates to exerting control over what one does and feels, being disciplined, and controlling one’s emotions and appetites. According to a review by Baumesiter, Heatherton, and Tice (1994), self-control failure is the basis for almost all the personal and social problems that citizens of the modern world are struggling with such as addictions, crime and violence, failure to exercise, and unwanted pregnancies. Self-control allows people to reach their desired states of happiness and health.

Transcendence

The last of the six virtues is transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This virtue includes strengths that build connections to the larger universe and provide meaning to people’s lives. Five strengths that belong to this virtue include: appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, playfulness/humor, and spirituality.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation) relate to noticing and appreciating excellence, beauty, and/or skilled performance in various life domains and everyday life situations. Gratitude is a strength that is characterized by one’s awareness and thankfulness for the good things that happen. Three components of gratitude are: a warm sense of appreciation for something or somebody, a sense of
goodwill, and disposition that comes out of appreciation (Fitzgerald, 1998). Hope (optimism, future mindedness, and future orientation) represents a cognitive, emotional, and motivational position toward the future, expecting the best, working hard to achieve goals, and always looking on the bright side despite challenges. Playfulness and humor are defined by a liking to laugh, bringing smiles to others, making jokes, and seeing the lighter side. Spirituality (sense of purpose, faith, religiousness) is distinguished by stable and pervasive beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe and knowing where one fits within it. A sizable body of research has established links among religiousness, happiness, life purpose, life-satisfaction, and psychological and physical well-being (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991).

These above described six virtues and twenty-four strengths are not final and they will evolve in the future but their importance and influence on people’s well-being and happiness cannot be underestimated (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These virtues and strengths could become a central construct of positive psychology; they could integrate numerous areas of practice and science and lead scientists away from the ideology of mental illness (Maddux, 2005). We need to understand that these strengths do not exist in a vacuum and that they are highly dependent on people’s environments and positive institutions.

*Positive Institutions*

Positive institutions include families, communities, schools, businesses, and societies that enable positive emotions, positive traits, and positive experiences to flourish. There are numerous institutions that cultivate positive strengths but most of them have not been empirically validated (Dean, 2004). For example, youth development
programs such as the Boy Scouts and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts are associated with many positive outcomes such as better health and better grades, but they have not been the subject of systematic evaluations. In addition, parents are the ones who have opportunities to encourage strengths in children at a very early age. For example, parents could teach children that their misbehaving acts will bring them less trouble than lying about them (Quinn, 1998). However, the way that parents influence positive emotions and positive strengths in their children is not yet clearly examined.

Positive institutions have not yet been given a fair share of research in the field of positive psychology (Fairman & Knapp, 2005). The positive psychology movement focuses strongly on positive emotions and positive strengths while giving very little attention to the institutions that help form and maintain those emotions and strengths. It is reasonable to expect that these positive institutions can be used to advance individuals’ happiness (Wong, 2006). If we want children to benefit, then families, community organizations, schools, health care and policymakers have to work together and strengthen programs that focus on strengths rather than those that compensate for perceived deficits (Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003). Thus, it is clear that in order to understand well-being and happiness, the field of positive psychology needs to give more attention to the study of positive institutions (Fairman & Knapp, 2005).

Critique of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is a new field that is not yet well-established and hence, many are skeptical about its promises to improve the mental health of people (Kelley, 2004; Lawson, 2004). Common claims are that positive psychology is just a reproduction
of the humanistic approach and not really anything new; hence, stating that this
movement is just offering old ideas without a new richness (Bohart & Greening, 2001).
Others claim that positive psychology does not answer any fundamental questions
(Wellner & Adox, 2000), doubt that it has a future (Lazarus, 2003), and argue that in
order for positive psychology to develop, positive psychology must recognize its negative
side (Held, 2004) and its fundamental limitations (Lazarus, 2003). Seligman’s
experiential approach and therapeutic suggestions are also criticized for mostly being
based on short experiments using students, brief classroom exercises, and old humanistic
interventions. Therefore, the conclusion is often made that his findings cannot offer a
strong basis for reliable happiness enhancing interventions (Tucker-Ladd, 1996).

Lazarus (2003), one of the most published skeptics of positive psychology,
suggests that positive psychology is just a fad that will disappear. Lazarus also states that
positive psychology is misleading, naïve, and dogmatic. He states that positive emotions
cannot be fully understood without negative ones. Positive psychology needs to
understand that many human cognitions, motivations, and behavioural consequences are
very often embedded in human despair, misery, and pain (Lazarus, 2003). In order for
scientists to understand what factors contribute to happiness, they also need to understand
which factors do not. Positive psychology, in his view, has lost sight of all the suffering
in the world.

Lazarus (2003b) also concludes that cross-sectional research designs, widely used
in the positive psychology field, cannot demonstrate a casual relationship between health
and well-being reliably. He concludes that the positive psychology field should not have
published the Handbook of Positive Psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2002) before
establishing itself with substantial empirical foundations, a firm theory, and more conceptual clarity. Furthermore, positive psychology would profit from a common vocabulary, for example, some psychologists conceptualize well-being as growth during human development, others interpret it as the quality of life, and yet other as optimism, self-esteem, or life satisfaction (Katariina & Ingrid, 2005). A better integrated conceptual picture is necessary if positive psychologists intend to measure the same concepts. The positive psychology field also includes relative insulation from prior work in prevention and wellness enhancement as well as a lack of a cohesive theoretical framework (Cowen & Kilmer, 2002). Positive psychology must be careful not to prescribe only a single form of ‘the good life;’ it must choose appropriate methods for its investigations, must include previous relevant research, and must encourage cross-cultural research (Rich, 2001).

In response to Lazarus, many proponents of positive psychology claim that although most of studies in the positive psychology field are correlation survey studies of self-reported happiness that they are replicated across time and various cultures and hence they need to be taken seriously (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). They also state that no one can tell for sure if the positive psychology movement will disappear or create advancements in science but that this movement deserves to be criticized on its merits and not just dismissed as a fad (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). They claim that positive psychology does not in any way dismantle the importance of studying negative emotions but that this field just attempts to bring some long needed balance to psychology (Diener, 2003). Seligman argues that one third of patients do not respond well to treatment in spite of all the advancements in clinical psychology (Lawson, 2004). Seligman (2005) also points out that positive psychology is not a new idea and that it has many distinguished
precedents; however, these precedents somehow failed to attract an empirical body of research in order to ground their ideas. In addition, he states that positive psychology has offered an umbrella term for all those isolated researchers studying ‘the good life.’

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) conclude that the science of positive psychology does not need to start anew. They point out that many taxonomies, interventions, and valid empirical methods that developed in the field of psychology over the last fifty years can be used in measuring positive psychology constructs. The same tools that have been used to make sense of experiences of mental illness can be used now to measure and illuminate human strengths.

Barbara Held (2004), a psychology professor at Bowdoin College in Maine, blamed positive psychology for being negative, elitist, and separatist toward other psychologists and other psychology methods. She stated that psychology is fragmented as it is and that there are better ways for integration. She states that if the field of psychology is going to be whole, then the field must address both disease as well as the ways to increase positive mood. Held (2002) claims that people are pushed toward positive attitudes in a tyrannical way. She suggests that we are bombarded with messages in our society that demand us to keep smiling and to keep our heads up no matter how hard our lives may get. These messages are portrayed in songs, iconography, and self-help books. Furthermore, people are expected to do this especially when life is at its hardest. Held stated that she is worried that the positive psychology movement could also unintentionally become tyrannical. She believes that the movement may further pressure people to be happy and this pressure might in turn make many people unhappy. This may produce more happiness-enhancing pills and downgrade people’s reliance on their
internal and external resources. Pressure to suppress negative emotions could damage people physically, cognitively, and emotionally. She concludes that sometimes people just need to be allowed to feel bad when they feel bad and that feeling bad is sometimes perfectly healthy and rational.
CHAPTER THREE

Procedures and Implications

Project Procedures

With this project, I intended to draw together a diverse collection of literature relating to positive psychology in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of this emerging field and reveal its strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and weaknesses (Kelley, 2004; Lawson, 2004; Lazarus, 2003). In addition, I intended to identify controversies, inconsistencies, shortcoming, and gaps in current work, thus providing direction for future research (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As a practical component, I have compiled strategies for increasing happiness for which there is empirical support (Seligman, 2004).

Mertens (1998) provided general aspects regarding the literature review process, which could lead researchers toward a more comprehensive understanding of their topic of exploration. I used the steps outlined by Mertens as a guide in this project. Furthermore, I employed the following steps in my study: (a) reviewed secondary sources (i.e. journals that publish literature reviews such as Psychological Bulletin and Annual Review of Psychology as well as books that contain literature reviews) to get an overview of the field; (b) completed computerized searches using the PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, and ERIC databases; (c) examined journals that publish articles related to topics of positive psychology such as the American Psychologist, European Psychologist, Psychological Bulletin, and the Journal of Humanistic Psychology starting from the most recent sources and working backwards, including bibliographies and references found at the end of these journals in order to obtain further relevant articles and sources; (d)
examined the work of leading researchers in the field of positive psychology such as Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, Diener, Lyubomirsky, Snyder, Lopez, Fredrickson, King, Myers, and Veenhoven as well as leading critiques of the field such as Lazarus and Held; (e) examined books that relate to topics of positive psychology and happiness such as Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment (Seligman, 2002), Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), Handbook of Positive Psychology (Snyder & Lopez, 2005), Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook of Classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and Positive Psychological Assessment: A Handbook of Models and Measures (Lopez & Snyder, 2003); (f) obtained titles using library holdings and on-line library databases; (g) read and examined obtained titles, recorded bibliographical details for all selected and obtained references, and noted a brief critical synopsis of each source (e.g., problem addressed, design, data analysis strategy, major agreements and disagreements in the literature, controversies in the literature (Bruce, 1994), gaps and inconsistencies in research, empirically proven and identified happiness enhancing strategies); (h) synthesized the results according to common themes in order to provide a solid, balanced, and practical overview of positive psychology, and as mentioned, created a resource for counsellors wishing to incorporate some of the concepts of positive psychology and happiness-enhancing strategies into their own practice but who are unable to review and synthesize an entire field of positive psychology often due to a lack of time or funding (Ruby, 2005).

In examining the literature I gave consideration to the author’s credentials, institutional affiliations, educational background, and past writings or experiences. I also took into account data collection strategies, credibility, validity, reliable evidence that
supported the author's contentions, methodological issues, objectivity, conflicting or inconclusive results, relevance, publication dates, and the potential usefulness of the source (Mertens, 1998; Neuman, 2003). In addition, I identified and compiled empirically validated happiness enhancing strategies. These happiness enhancing strategies can be used as an educational tool and an addition to counseling (Fordyce, 1977). They can help counsellors to guide their clients toward long term happiness (Fordyce, 1983; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003; Lyubomirsky, 2001).

**Synthesis and Implications**

There are many clear positive implications that stem from the findings of this project. First, the findings will improve my own practice and allow me to share my acquired knowledge of happiness with my clients. A focus on happiness can help us reconnect with the positive side of life and make our clients stronger and happier human beings (Seligman & Peterson, 2000). This review can also be an excellent resource for counsellors who wish to learn more about the field of positive psychology. It can help researchers identify other people working in the same field, build on the platform of existing knowledge, and provide direction for future research (Bourner, 1996). As well, counsellors can implement some of the positive psychology findings and empirically validated happiness enhancing strategies into their own practices (Seligman, 2002). These strategies can increase the efficiency of therapists by allowing them to help a larger number of individuals with minimal guidance while relying, when appropriate, on an individual’s own ability for growth (Fordyce, 1977). In addition, the findings from the literature on positive psychology can fortify research on the primary prevention of depression (Meyers & Meyers, 2003).
The project findings may offer some ideas and strategies that could be exercised by those searching for more happiness in their own lives. Fordyce (1981) suggests that those who want to be happier should devote time to happiness and make their happiness enhancement a project. He suggests that people should try some of these strategies and check if they are leading them toward a happier life-style. As people become more familiar with happiness and happiness enhancing strategies in general, they will be able to incorporate them more habitually and creatively individualize them according to their needs and life-style. Simple attitudinal and behavioural changes may increase one’s personal happiness and “there may be things anyone, in any situation, can do to increase his or her satisfaction with life” (Fordyce, 1977, p. 521). Through proper education, individuals can mirror qualities of happy people and in turn become happier themselves (Fordyce, 1981). Fordyce (1977, 1983) reported that through exposure to the happiness related materials, participants in his studies reported a much greater understanding and appreciation of their own happiness, an emphasis on the importance of making happiness a personal goal, and motivation to direct their efforts toward greater happiness. After all, “those who understand happiness have the best chance of attaining it” (Fordyce, 1983, p. 497).

I hope and believe that this project will also further promote the increase of human happiness in general. This comprehensive review could be further integrated into a handbook, workshop, website, manual, or power point presentation, and be implemented as a tool for endorsing happiness and combating depression. These strategies could find their way to others via television, printed material, telephone, and the Internet. As mentioned above, benefits of happiness are numerous.
This project had a diverse literature base. Even though the field of positive psychology is relatively new, it has already produced an enormous empirical base. This empirical base has to be critically evaluated and investigated so that we can for sure state that it stands the test of time. I have attempted to provide balanced and an objective view of positive psychology but my own acceptance of this emerging field is quite positive and supportive. Therefore, my project may have been infused with a bias in favour of the emerging field of positive psychology.
CHAPTER FOUR
Empirically Proven Happiness Enhancing Strategies

The pursuit of happiness has been a cultural obsession for a long time (Lyubomirsky, 2001). The majority of people rate happiness as very important and view the pursuit of happiness as a very worthy goal (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995). This is not surprising due to the fact that happiness has many positive by-products. As discussed above, among other things, happiness is positively correlated with better psychological and physical health, increased productivity, higher income, bolstered immune system, longer life, more energy, and more charitable work (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Bookstores now carry enormous amounts of literature on happiness and self-help with millions of these books sold annually (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). However, very little scientific research has focused on how happiness can be increased and sustained (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Thus, the majority of self-help books on happiness are not based on research, have a limited basis in scientific theory, and have almost no empirical confirmation of their effectiveness. As such, they do not provide a valid picture of how individual happiness can be increased (Norcross et. al., 2000). Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade, (2005) argue that enhancing individual levels of happiness is a worthy scientific goal and one that the field of positive psychology needs to partake in. Therefore, there is an opportunity for positive psychology to catch up to the public demand for happiness (Ruark, 1999) and inform consumers (Grant, 2001) which of these competing methods concerning happiness are indeed true and effective. In order for this to happen, this emerging field needs to engage in more research (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade,
Rigorous empirical methods need to be further amplified so that effectiveness and validity of various positive psychology interventions can be accurately measured (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Previous research on happiness offers a construal framework for future study. Thus further research should draw on prior theoretical work in order to advance our understanding of the sources of happiness and provide a comprehensive scientific study of optimal happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihaly, 2000). In order for us to gain the most from the previous research, we need to look at both its strengths and limitations (Lyubomirsky, 2001). For example, one of the limitations of previous happiness research is that most past studies have been cross sectional and have, as such, conveyed between-subject effects rather than investigating happiness longitudinally, investigating within-subject effects (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Also, future research needs to include the impact of ethnicity and race, poverty, culture, gender, and sexual orientation in order for above mentioned interventions to gain depth (Johnson, 2003).

The positive psychology movement is still fairly young yet this movement is expanding rapidly (Simonton & Baumeister, 2005). Positive psychology research has attracted many new investigators who now study a vast array of topics alongside more established researchers. It is clear that this movement will continue to grow as numerous young researchers seek to build their careers by studying happiness and human strengths (Simonton & Baumeister, 2005). As positive psychology grows, the attention of many will turn to interventions that aim at cultivating and sustaining ‘the good life’ (Lyubomirsky, 2001).
This growth corresponds to the appeal of positive psychology. Positive psychology appeals to psychologists of all interests, backgrounds, and orientations to adopt a more admiring perspective regarding happiness, well-being, motives, potentials, strengths, and capacities by focusing additional attention on the positive aspects of human nature (Sheldon & King, 2001). This project joins this call and hopes to spark the interest of many upcoming researchers and counsellors to join the exploration of happiness and the positive side of life. In order for the positive psychology field to grow, it needs to develop and test interventions that can increase human happiness and strengths (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Positive psychology will make an enormous contribution to human life if it succeeds in reliably teaching people how to become and remain happier (Simonton & Baumeister, 2005). So far, only a few happiness-enhancing intervention studies have been conducted and the choice of empirically proven happiness-enhancing strategies is still quite limited (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). However, studies that were conducted have identified certain interventions that are effective in increasing one’s happiness and begin to show the way that this can be accomplished. These interventions are the focus of this last chapter.

The goal of this chapter is to set apart the empirically validated, effective happiness enhancing strategies from the numerous non-scientific offerings and thus offer legitimate happiness enhancement tools to counsellors wishing to implement some of the concepts of positive psychology into their practices. This distinction of validated from non validated happiness-enhancing interventions can offset the potentially harmful effects of the numerous non-scientific offerings (Gunnel, 2004). For example, a person may strive for happiness and pursue it using ineffective techniques and this futile pursuit can
result in deep disappointment for this individual (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Hence, individuals may give up on pursuing happiness, believing that they can never increase their own. Research shows that people often engage in activities which they believe will be able to relieve their negative moods, but which often have no benefits or make them feel worse in the long run (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

It is important to note that the techniques described in this chapter are not a substitute for counselling. The field of positive psychology does not intend to replace the current field of psychology and traditional interventions but rather aims to supplement it with new research findings on happiness, human strengths, resiliency, and growth, complementing the current knowledge base (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). In addition, the positive psychology movement does not ask psychologists to adopt a specific viewpoint or support any specific approach (Simonton & Baumeister, 2005). Techniques offered in this chapter are intended to aid the positive psychology movement in creating a much needed balance within the field of psychology. A complete science and practice of psychology should include an understanding of both happiness and suffering, their interaction, and validated interventions that increase happiness and relieve suffering (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). These are two separable endeavours. Psychologists need to allow themselves to see both the best and the worst in people in order to derive important new understandings of human nature (Sheldon & King, 2001).

Before these techniques are presented, it is important to state that there are no shortcuts to happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). We cannot reach eternal happiness in seven days or buy it on the Internet (Gunnel, 2004). Happiness-enhancing interventions require consistent commitment and effort in order for
interventions to be initiated and performed over the long term (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). People should attempt to discover the most advantageous timing for each happiness-enhancing activity so that that the chosen activity remains meaningful, fresh, and positive. In addition, we must understand that there is no single key to happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). There are many different routes to lasting happiness and no single activity will make everyone happier (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade, (2005) go on to point that in order for a particular activity to yield a sustained happiness change, that activity needs to be performed over the long term. Hence individuals would be wise to use their strengths, values, interests, and inclinations to choose the activity that will benefit them the most. This activity should appear to them as intrinsic and fit their personality. For example, extroverts may gain most from those activities that emphasize social contact. Sometimes increasing one’s happiness could be as simple as choosing the right strategy. Schwartz et al. (2002) pointed out that while happiness could be a matter of choice, choice could also be a matter of happiness.

Pavot & Diener (1993) stated that many researchers focus on the causes of happiness and fail to realize that a basic first step for the advance of a science of happiness is defining and measuring it. Hence three scales that measure life’s satisfaction and happiness will be presented. These include a satisfaction with life scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993), Dr. Michael Fordyce’s emotions questionnaire, and Sonja Lyubomirsky’s general happiness scale. These scales can and need to be used as criteria for happiness strategies’ effectiveness (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Both counsellors and clients can use these scales to identify and match the client with the activity that would have the
most effective result. The empirical confirmation of effectiveness is necessary if positive psychology is to separate itself from the non-empirical self-help movement (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). The description of scales is followed by empirically validated happiness enhancing strategies: Fordyce’s (1977, 1983) fourteen fundamentals of happiness, David Myers’s (1993) suggested ways toward happiness, Seligman’s (2002) techniques for rearing happy children, Park and Peterson’s (2003) guide toward effective youth development programs, and recent interventions for increasing happiness.

*Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)*

The following is a short, five-item tool designed to measure people’s global cognitive judgments (Pavot & Diener, 1993). This scale is often used in happiness research (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). It is shown to have positive psychometric properties including high temporal reliability (Pavot & Diener, 1993). It also highly correlates with other measures of subjective well-being. The SWLS scale is suited for use with different age groups. This scale is not copyrighted and can be used without permission and without charge by all researchers and practitioners. Further description of the psychometric properties of this scale can be found in Pavot and Diener (1993).

Below are five statements that a person may agree or disagree with. By using the scale below, a person should respond openly and honestly to each item, rating responses from one to seven. The scale is ranked such that:

seven = strongly agree;

six = agree;

five = slightly agree;
four = neither agree nor disagree;
three = slightly disagree;
two = disagree; and
one = strongly disagree.

These statements include:

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal;
2. The conditions of my life are excellent;
3. I am satisfied with my life;
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life; and
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

The following shows how ratings for this scale are done. If a person scores between thirty one and thirty five then that person is extremely satisfied with his or her life; between twenty six and thirty, a person is satisfied; slightly satisfied lays between twenty one and twenty five; twenty is neutral; between fifteen and nineteen, the person is slightly dissatisfied; between ten and fourteen, one is dissatisfied; and between five and nine, the person is extremely dissatisfied.

*Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire*

In order to measure a person’s momentary feeling of happiness, Fordyce has designed the following questionnaire (Seligman, 2002). The questions he asks relate to how happy or unhappy a person usually feels. He then offers the following responses:

10. extremely happy (joyous, ecstatic feelings);
9. very happy (feeling good and elated);
8. pretty happy (high spirits);
7. mildly happy;
6. slightly happy;
5. neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy);
4. slightly unhappy;
3. mildly unhappy;
2. pretty unhappy;
1. very unhappy (depressed);
0. extremely unhappy (completely down).

Fordyce then asks one to consider his or her emotions further to try and answer what percentage of the time, on average, one feels happy, unhappy, and neutral. Seligman (2002) states that in a sample of 3050 adults from North America, the average score was 6.92 out of ten. On average, American adults are happy 51.43 percent of time, unhappy 20.44 percent, and neutral 25.43 percent. This clearly shows us that there is still much room for advancing people’s happiness.

*General Happiness Scale*

This scale was devised by Sonja Lyubomirsky (Seligman, 2002, p. 46) in order to measure people’s general levels of happiness. People are asked to circle the point on the scale (one to seven) that most closely represents their state in question.

1. In general, I consider myself to be: one (not a very happy person) to seven (a very happy person).
2. Compared to most of my colleagues, I consider myself: one (less happy) to seven (more happy).
3. To what extent are you generally happy, enjoy your life and get the most out of it, regardless of what is going on: one (not at all) to seven (a great deal).

4. To what extent are you generally not very happy, and although you may not be depressed, you are not as happy as you might be: one (a great deal) to seven (not at all).

The test is scored by answering and totaling all the questions and dividing that number by eight. The mean for American adults is 4.8 while two-thirds of adults score between 3.8 and 5.8.

Fourteen Fundamentals of Happiness

In 1977, Dr. Michael Fordyce conducted and published several happiness enhancement experiments and thus started the human potential movement and happiness increase interventions research. Fordyce offered fourteen different techniques that belonged to cognitive, behavioural, or volitional categories and that were solely based on scientific research. His studies showed that certain strategies could increase an individual’s happiness by twenty five percent on average through training over only a few weeks. He also discovered that not all of these techniques had the same effect on every individual and that some of these strategies worked better for certain individuals than for others. He suggested that people should choose these techniques according to their needs and interests (Fordyce, 1977, 1983). Fordyce (1977, 1983) also stated that these techniques require a lot of daily work, practice, effort, self-reflection, and personal-analysis.

Fordyce’s (1977, 1983) research provides a strong framework for future research as well as for creating new interventions (Lyoubomirsky, 2001). For instance,
Lyubomirsky, Tkach, and Yelverton (2003) have build on earlier intervention work by Fordyce (1977, 1983) to test and develop two of their interventions, “random acts of kindness” and “counting one’s blessings.” Future research is also needed to further clarify the effectiveness of Fordyce’s interventions (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Because of this, his interventions are given special attention in this chapter with hope that they will spark new ideas toward creating and solidifying new happiness-enhancing interventions.

1. Be more active and keep busy. This fundamental draws from previous research that happy people are extremely active, busy, and always on the go. Both quantity and quality of activity is important. Happy people are involved in every aspect of their lives. They also invest their time and effort in living life fully and they do that with a lot of energy. The research also isolated five general types of activities in which happy people get engaged more often than less happy people. These five general categories are: enjoyable activities, exciting activities, novel activities, social activities, and meaningful activities. Fordyce states that it is not easy to change one’s lifestyle overnight and hence suggests that those who do wish to work on their happiness should write down anything that comes to their mind that they love to do and then analyze their list. Happier people will have longer lists. After this, people need to make a master list of at least twenty activities that are specific, practical, and affordable, and are just additions to one’s normal routine. After all this is done, Fordyce suggests that people pick a few activities from the list each day and do them for about an hour each day. He points that most people will find that their activities are spontaneous and hence they require little planning
and are low at cost. Being happy is not always easy but a happy person seems able to find balance between their obligations and fun.

2. *Spend more time socializing.* Based on social research, this fundamental states that a rewarding and active social life, more than any other factor, impacts one’s happiness. For example, Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004) examined four studies and found that when personal positive events are shared with others and when others perceive those shared events actively and constructively, individual well-being, life-satisfaction, and positive affect were increased beyond the impact of the positive event itself. All kinds of social interactions increase one’s level of happiness. Happy people participate in all kinds of clubs, groups, and organizations. However, close social interactions such as interactions with family, dearest friends, and a spouse or mate increase one’s happiness the most. Fordyce suggests joining a group, widening your social contact, taking a course at college, volunteering, or acting sociable, as an effective route toward individual happiness.

3. *Be productive at meaningful work.* People are able to enhance their level of happiness if they are able to find a significance and meaning in their daily as well as long term work. Personal productivity has proved to be one of the major sources of happiness. Keeping with one’s responsibilities and making progress toward one’s goal are very important in avoiding depression and enhancing happiness. However, keeping busy is not enough for one to be happy. In order for our happiness to be profoundly impacted, our busy lifestyles have to hold significance and meaning to us. The bottom line is that in order to be happy, we need to consider what is meaningful to us and find meaning in what we do.
Fordyce states that individual career-choice is crucial to individual happiness hence one must choose wisely. He also goes on to state that we can find meaning in volunteering and therefore highly suggests it.

4. *Get better organized and plan things out.* This fundamental is based on research that shows that happy individuals are well-organized, punctual, efficient, non-procrastinating, and have a plan. Happy people tend to know where they are going in life and they have the skills to get there. Fordyce suggests that one should decide what he or she wants from life and then actively develop a strategy that will get him or her there. He also goes to state that in order to beat procrastination, one should list, rate, prioritize, and reinforce if necessary.

5. *Stop worrying.* Everyday, common worrying is a major destructor of one’s happiness. Fordyce suggests that using thought switching and changing one’s negative thinking should drastically reduce one’s duration of worrying. Fordyce (1977, 1983) suggests that people keep a journal in which they note all their worries, set that journal aside, and after some time reflect on it. They will find that they tend to worry much more than they imagine and will note that most of their worries did not happen at all. Fordyce (1983) states that research show that 90% of people’s worries never come true and points that most worries are uncontrollable (i.e. accidents and catastrophes). Research shows that happy people worry less than most others do (Fordyce, 1977, 1983).

6. *Lower your expectations and aspirations.* Fordyce claims that this fundamental seems to be most controversial as it sparks the most heated debates. While our competitive culture stresses ambitiousness and high goals, research clearly shows
that these are not efficient routes to happiness. In fact, happy people are very modest in their need for success and in their goals. Fordyce claims that happy people strive for goals that are realistically within their reach. Fordyce (1983) states that things are never perfect and those who expect them to be will be unhappy. He goes on to state that while happy people want what they can get, unhappy people set their sights too high and never seem to get what they want. As Fordyce states it, happiness is a not a destination but a journey.

7. **Develop positive optimistic thinking.** Research points to optimism as a major trait in happy people. Happy people are extremely optimistic, think in very positive terms, and always look for the bright side. Fordyce suggests that optimism may be the most significant difference between those who are happy and those who are not. He also states that optimism is an attitude that can be developed by focusing on the positive, looking on the bright side, concentrating attention on the good things happening in one’s life as well as one’s special qualities, listing one’s blessings and counting them regularly, checking one’s thinking patterns regularly, and thinking happy. Therefore, becoming more positive and optimistic is simply a matter of training.

8. **Get present oriented.** Happy people are present oriented and tend to get most out of each and every day. They are less preoccupied with their past hurts and their future and they savor every moment. Fordyce (1983) suggests that if one wants to be happy, one should focus on today. It could be something as simple as developing a hobby, spending more time socializing, or getting away from regular situations with a short-day trip.
9. *W.O.A.H.P.* -- *work on a healthy personality.* Simply stated, happy individuals are extremely healthy individuals. Fordyce (1983) states that in order for a person to become happier he or she should learn to like, accept, know, help, and be oneself.

10. *Develop an outgoing, social personality.* Happy individuals are extremely outgoing, extroverted, socially at ease, and friendly. Because of their personalities, they are presented with many social opportunities and hence are happier due to this. Social interaction is the primary source of happiness. Fordyce (1983) suggests that those who pursue happiness should join an organization or club, smile more, greet others more often, act like extroverts, keep relatively quiet during a conversation, and practice meeting new people. In a more recent study, Fleeson, Malanos, and Achille (2002) have confirmed Fordyce’s hypothesis that extroverted individuals are on average happier than introverted individuals. They state that a rather simple intervention such as encouraging a person to act more extroverted may be significantly successful in increasing happiness.

11. *Be yourself.* Research finds happy people to be expressive, spontaneous, and unaffected. In short, they are just real and authentic. The desire to fit in can significantly ruin one’s happiness, therefore, Fordyce (1983) suggests saying what you think, behaving the way you want to, being spontaneous, natural, real and honest.

12. *Eliminate negative feelings and problems.* Happy people have a lot of good things happening in their lives as we can see above but they also have less of the bad things. They have fewer fears, personal problems, anxieties, past traumas, or similar difficulties than most average people do. Fordyce (1983) suggests that
those looking for happiness must not bottle things up. He goes on to suggest that people need to express and deal with their feelings. They need to eliminate the tension those negative feelings may cause and ask for professional help if they cannot deal with issues themselves.

13. *Close relationships are primary factors of happiness.* Close relationships of all kinds have an enormous impact on an individual’s happiness. Happy relationships are the primary source of happiness so those looking for happiness need to spend more time with close ones and do what they can to enhance those relationships.

14. *VALHAP -- the "secret fundamental."* Happy people value happiness more than others, understand happiness better than others, and sense and enjoy their happiness more than others (Fordyce, 1983). They make happiness a priority, they think about happiness, they actively pursue it, and they modify their lives according to insights about happiness that they discover. So, think more about your happiness, make it your primary goal, and then act upon it (Fordyce, 1983).

**Suggestions for a Happier Life**

Social psychologist David Myers, one of the leaders in the field of positive psychology and psychological research, has revived thousands of recent scientific studies that have been conducted worldwide in search of happiness enhancement. Based on this review, Myers offers the following ten techniques for a happier life and finding true joy in living (Myers, 1993).

1. *Realize that lasting happiness doesn't come from success.* People adapt relatively quickly to changing circumstances from winning a lottery to losing the ability to
walk. More success will not make one happier. When a person reaches a comfortable income, more money will not result in greater happiness.

2. *Take control of your time.* Happy people know how to control their time and their behaviours. They set goals efficiently and often break them into daily steps and hence do not overestimate how much they can accomplish in a certain period. Daily-to-do lists often help.

3. *Act happy.* Acting like a happy person, smiling, putting on a happy face, being outgoing and optimistic even when one is a little down will make an individual feel better. Myers states that emotions can be triggered by going through certain motions.

4. *Seek leisure and work that engages your skills.* As described above, happy people are often in a state of flow. They are completely absorbed in a task that challenges them and encourages them to use their talents but that does not overwhelm them.

5. *Join the "movement" movement.* Daily aerobic exercise and working out will promote an individual’s health, energy, and happiness.

6. *Give the body the sleep that it wants.* Learn to rest and give yourself time for renewing sleep and solitude. A rested body feels good. Fatigue and sleep deprivation will cause gloomy moods and diminished alertness.

7. *Give priority to close relationships.* Research shows that intimate friendships are amongst the best predictors of personal happiness. Happy people nurture their closest friendships and do not take them for granted.
8. *Focus beyond the self.* Myers states that helping those in need increases happiness while at the same time happiness increases helpfulness. Happier people are also more helpful.

9. *Keep a gratitude journal.* If a person wishes to increase happiness in his or her life than he or she should take time each day to reflect on the positive (health, family, education, friends, natural surroundings, and such). People should count their blessings and express their gratitude.

10. *Nurture your spiritual self.* Numerous studies show that actively religious people are happier in general and better cope during crisis. For many, faith provides a supportive community, a sense of purpose, and hope.

In summary, Myers’s (1993) research shows that happiness is positively correlated with high self-esteem (in individualistic countries); close friendships or satisfying marriages; work and leisure that engage one’s skills; meaningful religious faith; plenty of sleep and exercise; and an optimistic, outgoing, and agreeable nature. On the other hand, in spite of common beliefs, happiness is not related to factors such as gender, age, education, physical attractiveness, or parenthood.

*Techniques for Rearing Happy Children*

With regard to nurturing happy children, Seligman (2002) offers eight techniques based on scientific research. These are:

1. *Sleeping with the baby.* This activity could create secure attachment through sustained attention.

2. *Synchrony games.* Giving children a sense of mastery through play and various games. The crucial ingredient in these games is contingency. The children need to
learn that their actions matter. Seligman (2002) suggests stackable blocks, books, magazines, and cardboard crates as toys for these games.

3. **No and yes.** Say *yes* a lot and *no* hardly ever.

4. **Praise and punishment.** Avoid punishment; praise worthy not easily achieved accomplishments.

5. **Sibling rivalry.** Give each sibling lots of attention to avoid sibling rivalry. Parents need to realize that all children want to feel trusted, important, and irreplaceably special.

6. **Bedtime nuggets.** Bedtime rituals should focus on positive experiences and the best moments of that day, or alternatively, preparation for pleasant dreams.

7. **Making a deal.** Future rewards for self-improvement should be negotiated and offered.

8. **New Year’s Resolutions.** Make New Year’s resolutions with your children about adding behaviours that are desired instead of with regard to stopping bad habits.

**Youth Development Programs**

Park and Peterson (2003) reviewed numerous studies that focus on youth development programs and found several factors that make these programs most successful. They stated that programs in which youths spend numerous hours over longer periods of time are more successful in encouraging positive outcomes and decreasing negative outcomes than weekend workshops and short lectures. They also stated that successful youth programs start with younger adolescents, are developmentally appropriate, have a clear plan that is continuously monitored, and are implemented with fidelity. These programs actively teach targeted skills, implement several systems
simultaneously (i.e. home and school), address both internal and external factors, are culturally appropriate and tailored to the cultural background of the participants, impart skills and competencies, and are guided by explicit theories about the mechanisms of change and the causes of outcomes. In addition, youths in these programs are supported by at least one adult, programs are carried out by well knowledgeable and trained staff, and these programs take multiple socializing agents and social norms into consideration.

Recent Interventions for Increasing Happiness

As mentioned above, there are a number of techniques that help increase one’s level of happiness. These include physical exercise, cognitive self-management, acting happy, socializing, and engaging in meaningful activities. In the next few pages, interventions that have recently emerged from scientific studies in the field of positive psychology are described.

Cultivating Positive Emotions

Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, and Larkin (2003) claim that positive emotions serve as active ingredients in peoples coping skills as well as in their ability to thriving despite adversity. As such, these emotions are worth of cultivating as a means to improved well-being and psychological growth. Evidence for the reverse effect of positive emotions suggests that individuals can improve their psychological and physical well-being by cultivating experiences of positive emotion and increasing one’s resiliency in order to cope with negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2001). For example, benefit reminding and benefit finding have been found to increase well-being in people who have a variety of medical problems (Afflect & Tennen, 1996).
Laboratory experiments have clearly demonstrated that experiences of positive emotions can undo the lingering cardiovascular effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Positive emotions broaden the scope of cognition, attention, and action and build physical, social, and intellectual resources. Therefore it is clear that these positive emotions have the ability to place both mind and body at ease as well as alter individual modes of thinking. Positive emotions produce flexible, unusual, creative, integrative, and efficient patterns of thought (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Hence, by experiencing positive emotions, people may truly transform themselves into healthier, more knowledgeable, creative, socially integrated, and resilient individuals.

People can find meaning and increase positive emotions in daily life by reframing unpleasant events in a more positive light, instilling ordinary events with positive significance, and pursuing and accomplishing realistic goals (Folkman, 1997). Fredrickson (2003) asked her students to record the positive meaning they found in their daily events along with the long-term benefits within their worst seemingly ordinary experiences. She discovered that overall they significantly increased their positive emotions and resilience while at the same time lowering their levels of depression in comparison with a control group. Fredrickson (2003) goes on to suggest that those wishing to be happier need to look for positive meanings within their current circumstances. Counsellors can encourage positive emotions in their clients by training them in relaxation, discussing the best parts of their past, and motivating them to engage in their favourite satisfying activities (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).
Write, Talk, and Think about Life’s Triumphs and Defeats

Lyubomirsky, Sousa, and Dickerhoof (2006) discovered that people who spoke into a tape recorder or wrote about their worst life experiences for fifteen minutes on each of three consecutive days reported improved health, life satisfaction, mental health, and well-being relative to those who thought about their worst life experiences privately. In addition, Lyubomirsky, Sousa, and Dickerhoof (2006) also found that those people who thought repetitively about their happiest life moments reported improved positive affect, health, and well being relative to those individuals who wrote analytically about their happiest life experiences. Authors concluded that the systematic analysis that occurs when a person is writing or speaking is beneficial when directed toward unhappy or traumatic life experiences but could be damaging when applied to happy times. In contrast, repetitive thinking is beneficial when the target is the individual’s highest moments but may be damaging if it is directed toward unhappy moments.

Visualizing Best Possible Future Selves

In this exercise, participants are asked to think about their best possible selves in the current time and in the future after everything turned out in the best possible way (King, 2001; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). This implies that after hard work, all of the life goals have been accomplished and all dreams have been realized. Participants were asked to keep thinking in this way for a few weeks. The research showed that this exercise produced significant increases in one’s positive affect.

Disputation

Seligman (2002) describes the ABCDE method of disputing as one of the routes for building optimism and lasting happiness. The ABCDE method is designed to combat
feelings of helplessness when misfortune strikes. He states that we need to understand
that our beliefs are just beliefs and that they may not necessarily be facts. In order to
successfully dispute our pessimistic thoughts, we first need to recognize that we have
such thoughts and then we need to treat them as if they were uttered by an external
person. Often we are more likely to speak up if someone else criticizes us unfairly than if
we criticize ourselves in an unfair way. In his ABCDE model of disputing, A stands for
the adversity one is currently facing, B stands for automatic beliefs, C for the common
consequences of the belief, D for disputation of one’s routine beliefs, and E for influx of
energy one feels when disputing successfully.

Seligman (2002) points out that there are four ways that make disputation
convincing: evidence, alternatives, implications, and usefulness. Gathering evidence for
certain beliefs can be the most convincing way of disputing. Evidence is gathered and
checked for each belief. Since most events have more than one cause, one needs to scan
for all possible causes especially those that are changeable, specific, and non-personal.
One needs to look for alternative beliefs. Sometime, people will realize that their negative
beliefs are in fact true and in these cases they need to use de-catastrophizing. In this case,
people need to focus on implications and ask themselves what are the worst-case
scenarios. In addition to gathering evidence, looking for alternative beliefs, and analyzing
implications in order to successfully make disputation convincing, people also need to
reflect on the usefulness of negative beliefs.

*Have a Beautiful Day*

Similar to Fordyce’s (1983) suggestion that people need to get present oriented,
Seligman (2002) suggests an exercise that involves savoring the present, increasing one’s
pleasures, and reinforcing memories of good times. Seligman asks those who wish to be happier to use their talents and attributes to create and have a beautiful day. This can be done by scheduling enjoyable events and activities such as visiting a museum, pampering oneself, or having dinner with an old friend.

*Counting One’s Blessings*

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) describe a six-week study of two happiness-enhancing interventions in which gratitude was concluded to be one of the main ingredients of happiness enhancement. In the first of the two interventions, participants were asked to reflect on things for which they were grateful. Participants were able to choose to do this activity either once or three times a week. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) state that only those participants who performed an activity once a week reported a significant increase in happiness and well-being. They believe that the counting of blessings three times a week could have caused individuals to become bored with this activity.

*Committing Acts of Kindness*

In the second intervention described by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005), participants were asked to carry out five acts of kindness a week over a course of six weeks. Participants were able to choose whether they wanted to spread the five acts of kindness over the entire week or perform them all in one day. These acts were behaviours that benefited others and made others happy while they held some cost to an individual performing them (e.g. donating blood). Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) point out that only those individuals who performed all five acts of kindness in one day experienced a significant increase in well-being and happiness. They believed that this
could be mostly due to the fact that random acts of kindness that were performed were small and hence their collective strength could have been diminished when they were spread out over the week.

Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) recruited 577 participants in a placebo-controlled, random-assignment, six-group Internet study with a six month follow up. They found three interventions that increased happiness lastingly and decreased depressive symptoms. These interventions were: the gratitude exercise, three good things, and using your signature strengths in a new way. The participants were required to engage in only one activity per week.

*Gratitude Exercise*

The gratitude exercise is designed to lastingly and measurably increase positive emotions, engagement, and meaning in one’s life. Seligman (2002) points out that people do not often have the tools or the means to tell people who mean a lot to them how thankful they are for their support and friendship. He suggests the use of a gratitude letter. This exercise involves selecting one important person from the past who had a major impact on one’s life but who was never properly thanked. After this selection, one is asked to write a page of testimonial fully thanking the other person. Once this page is finished, the writer should invite the chosen individual to his or her home for something like coffee or wine, never disclosing the real reason for meeting. Once this meeting happens in person, a laminated version of the testimonial should be read aloud slowly, with eye contact, and expression. The other person should be given time to react. When all this is done, both people should reminisce about specific events that made their bond so special.
People are also encouraged to set aside a few minutes before bedtime each night for a period of two weeks. On the first night, they should complete the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the General Happiness Scale described at the beginning of this chapter. Then, for the each of the next fourteen days, people should write down up to five things in their lives that they are thankful and grateful for. After two weeks, the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the General Happiness Scale should be completed again and scores compared. If people find that this works for them then they should incorporate this exercise into their nightly routine.

*Three Good Things in Life.*

In this exercise, participants were asked to keep track of and to write down three things that went well in their day every night for one week. For each positive occurrence they also write down a casual explanation. This exercise can be adopted as stress-management and part of one’s self-care.

*Using Signature Strengths in a New Way*

Seligman (2002) points that people often don’t know themselves very well and hence they exaggerate their strengths and minimize or even deny their faults. Individuals may confuse their weaknesses as strong commendable traits and in the process fail to recognize their more valuable strengths. On his authentic happiness website, www.authentichappiness.com, Seligman offers a self-ratings scale that can help people measure and realize their signature strengths. Participants were asked to take inventory of character strengths in order to discover their top five signature strengths. After they discovered these, participants were asked to use one of their top strengths in a different and a new way everyday for one week.
There are numerous ways that people can use their signature strengths in a different way as well as ways to develop one of the twenty-four strengths that presently does not rank as a top strength. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2002) at the University of Virginia compiled a list of suggested activities for his Psychology 101 Strengths/Weaknesses Project. Haidt suggests that the most efficient way could be by picking one activity and sticking with it for up to two weeks. If that activity is not working, then a person could switch to something else. Some of the activities compiled by Haidt include: “discover new places”, “take part in a multicultural event”, “keep a journal”, “find a new word everyday”, “learn a new quote every day”, “speak up for an idea that you believe in but that is not popular”, “volunteer”, “organize a study group”, “go to a museum”, “notice your negative thoughts”, “watch a funny movie”, and “learn and perform a magic trick”. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) advised those who wish to increase their happiness level to find activities that fit their interests and values and then to engage in these activities.

Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) examined five hundred ethnically diverse undergraduate reports in order to determine what specific strategies people use in order to maintain or increase their happiness level and to evaluate how effective these particular strategies are. Using factor analytic procedures, Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) extracted eight out of sixty-six happiness interventions originally reported as being used by people in order to boost and maintain their happiness levels. These included mental control, instrumental goal pursuit, direct attempts, affiliation, religion, active leisure, passive leisure, and partying. They discovered that men most often chose to use active leisure and mental control in their pursuit of happiness while women favour goal pursuit, affiliation,
passive leisure, and religion. After analyzing these strategies for various factors, Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) concluded that a strategies’ relation to happiness and its effectiveness varied significantly. Their examinations also found that these self-regulatory happiness-enhancement strategies are inter-related with personality traits. Therefore, personality traits serve as the best predictors as to the utilization of certain strategies. They stated that more research is needed to further test the effectiveness of these strategies and to draw definite conclusions. However, they identified the following six strategies as potentially effective and worthy routes toward individual happiness. They suggest that these strategies can be directly converted into prescriptive suggestions aimed at boosting happiness.

Social Affiliation

Social Affiliation was the most frequently used strategy in the pursuit of happiness and it showed a strong positive relation to happiness (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). This strategy included things such as communicating with friends and helping others. We can recall that Fordyce (1977, 1983) also found socializing as an effective route to increasing and maintaining one’s happiness. Previous studies also showed social affiliation to be an effective intervention for combating dysphoria (Thayer, Newman, & McClain 1994).

Instrumental Goal Pursuit

In this strategy, individuals are active agents attempting to change their situations or themselves (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). The goals varied from abstract and global such as “organize one’s life” to specific and daily such as “study.” This was one of the most used and the most effective strategies examined by Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006).
Previous studies showed that people’s commitment to and attainment of personal goals is highly linked to well-being and positive moods (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). For example, Sheldon, Kasser, Smith, and Share (2002) conducted a study that was based on participants' personal goals. They taught their participants early in the semester to a set out four strategies for broadening their horizons as well as for achievement of their personal goals. Participants in this study were first taught how to “own a goal”, then how to “make it fun” followed by “keeping a balance” and “remembering the big picture.”

Researches found that goal attainment predicted increases in happiness at the end of the semester. In addition, they also observed that only those participants whose goals actually matched their values and interests did in fact benefit from this strategy. This is in concordance with the importance of matching goals to personal values described above.

*Active Leisure*

Active Leisure such as exercising, working on hobbies, and maintaining health and fitness were strategies that were strong predictors of happiness. This link has been supported by a number of studies (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Exercise is connected to lower levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and negative mood and higher levels of positive mood (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Both Fordyce (1977, 1983) and Myers (1993) have stressed the importance of exercise in increasing individual’s happiness and well-being.

*Mental Control*

This strategy is characterized by people’s experience of negative feelings and thoughts, their focus on these negative themes, and then their subsequent avoidance or contemplation of these thoughts and feelings in order to control and suppress them. This
technique includes methods such as not thinking about unhappy thoughts or focusing on what is wrong with life (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Our culture embraces the notion that when people encounter life challenges and become depressed, they need to try and evaluate their negative thoughts and feelings in order to find solutions to their problems (Lyubomirsky & Tkach, 2003). However, numerous studies have found that this repetitive rumination actually maintains negative thoughts and feelings and even impairs an individual’s ability to solve problems. Hence, Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) found that the mental control strategy was inversely related to happiness. Lyubomirsky and Tkach (2003) suggest the use of neutral or pleasant distractions such as going to a movie or on a bike ride with a friend in order to improve one’s mood and then, only if necessary, engaging in problem solving.

Religion

While Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) did not find “performing religious ceremonies” and “praying” to be used often by their participants, they did find religion to be an effective strategy for boosting one’s happiness. They point out that this is consistent with various other studies that support a connection between well-being and faith. Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006) suggest that this strategy could be effective because it provides people with both a sense of life purpose and social connectedness while also keeping them away from partaking in such maladaptive behaviours as alcohol and drug abuse.

Direct Attempts

Consistent with Myers’s (1993) suggestion for happier living, the Direct Attempts strategy includes “acting happy” and “smiling” and was found to be an admirable predictor of happiness (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Tkach and Lyubomirsky (2006)
point out that previous experiments were able to intensify and even trigger the emotion of happiness by just assigning participants to physically express happiness. These previous experiments prove that people are able to make themselves happy by simply acting happy.

It is certain that more experimental designs are needed in future investigations in order to validate the above described strategies and reach conclusions between them and happiness enhancement (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). Overall, however, we can already see an emergence of validated, empirical, and effective interventions from various studies and hence we can be very hopeful about the future of happiness-enhancement and the field of positive psychology. It is hoped that the examinations of happiness-enhancement strategies can provide a guide for future research. These strategies clearly prove that people are not genetically predetermined to experience a certain amount of happiness, but instead “finding happiness may be as simple as finding the right happiness strategy” (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006, p. 221).
Conclusion

People now live longer, healthier, and most likely happier lives than ever before (Veenhoven, 2005) and this will almost certainly continue in the near future. As life gets better, people will increasingly seek methods to fulfill their need for self-actualization and happiness. The positive psychology movement has a chance to lead the field of psychology in the mission of guiding people toward more meaningful lives; however, in order for positive psychology to succeed in this undertaking, it needs to provide a theoretical framework that can be scientifically tested (McLafferty & Kirylo, 2001) and ground itself firmly in scientific knowledge (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). This will require the development of new methods (McLafferty & Kirylo, 2001), the testing of its theories and strategies, as well as the engagement of professionals in the field (Ruark, 1999) in more quantitative and qualitative work (Rich, 2003). Future research will have to include more experimental and longitudinal studies as well as integrate previous psychological research. Furthermore, it will demand the understanding, documentation, and promotion of factors that make lives most worth living and encompass strategies that help individuals and communities to flourish (Seligman &Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Research-based studies in happiness reveal that we can teach happiness and that we can understand what happiness is, what it means, and how it can be attained, if we study it scientifically (Fordyce, 1981, 1983).

The positive psychology movement appears to have a secure future. There is now an increasing amount of funding dedicated to the further development of positive psychology at the various Universities (Vitz, 2005). The positive psychology movement has sponsored conferences and encouraged publications of scientific works relating to

Practitioners need to recognize that they can help their clients the most by focusing on happiness, making the understanding of what makes life worth living their primary task, and amplifying their clients’ strengths rather than repairing their weaknesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This will make their clients more resilient when encountering challenges in their future. In addition, the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* needs to expand to include personal strengths and facilitators of growth.

Seligman (2002) claims that the positive social science of this century provides the probability of preventing serious mental illnesses by focusing on human strengths, scientific understanding of happiness, and the building of what makes life most worth living. Moreover, this will provide a scientific understanding of human strengths that can act as buffers against mental illnesses (Seligman, 1998). For example, by cultivating optimism and hope in young people with a genetic risk of depression, we can prevent this mental illness.

The positive psychology movement and its focus on happiness can help health professionals reconnect with the positive side of life, make them and their clients stronger, more resilient, and happier human beings; bringing a once vague picture of what makes people happy into focus (Seligman & Peterson, 2000). There is no reason for people to fidget until death (Seligman, 2002). Happiness can add years to life, as well as life to years (Seligman & Pawelski, 2003). As Seligman stated (2004), we can learn
more by lighting candles than by cursing the darkness. After all, “those who understand happiness have the best chance of attaining it” (Fordyce, 1983, p. 497).

With an increased knowledge of happiness, as we age and look back at our accomplishments and failures, we will be able to ask ourselves how close or how far we are from a good life (Seligman, 2002) and using happiness-enhancing strategies, we will be able to make vital adjustments. As King (2003) stated, the positive psychology movement will succeed when people begin to ask psychologists to tell them what is “right” with them.
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