

Positive Psychology and a Modern Approach to Happiness and Resilience

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DESCRIPTION

Positive psychology represents a transformative shift within the field of psychology, one that moves beyond the traditional focus on diagnosing and treating mental illness to exploring the factors that enable individuals and communities to thrive. Developed in the late 1990s by psychologists such as Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, this branch of psychology emphasizes human strengths, virtues and the elements that contribute to a fulfilling and meaningful life. Rather than viewing well-being as merely the absence of distress, positive psychology seeks to understand the conditions that promote happiness, resilience and optimal functioning. This perspective encourages a more holistic approach to mental health—one that acknowledges struggles while also highlighting the innate capacity people have to grow, flourish and find purpose.

At the heart of positive psychology is the study of positive emotions, which include joy, gratitude, hope and pride. These emotions are not trivial pleasures; rather, they serve essential functions in human development. According to Barbara Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build theory," positive emotions expand an individual's range of thoughts and behaviors, allowing them to build lasting psychological, social and intellectual resources. For instance, feelings of joy may broaden one's creativity and problem-solving capacity, while gratitude strengthens social bonds and fosters a sense of connectedness. Over time, these emotional experiences contribute to greater resilience, enabling individuals to better navigate challenges and recover more quickly from adversity. Positive psychology therefore highlights the importance of cultivating these emotions intentionally through practices such as gratitude journaling, mindfulness and supportive relationships.

Practical use of strengths in education

Another major component of positive psychology is the emphasis on character strengths and virtues. Seligman and Peterson's ground-breaking work in developing the VIA Classification of Character Strengths identified 24 universal strengths, such as creativity, perseverance, kindness and

leadership. These strengths, found across cultures and societies, serve as the building blocks of well-being. Positive psychologists argue that when individuals recognize and apply their strengths in everyday life, they experience greater satisfaction, engagement and purpose. For example, someone with a strength in curiosity may thrive in environments that allow exploration and learning, while someone strong in teamwork excels in collaborative settings. By focusing on what individuals naturally do well, positive psychology empowers them to construct more authentic and fulfilling lives. This strengths-based approach also has practical applications in education, workplaces and therapy, encouraging environments where people can flourish rather than merely cope.

A key framework within the field is Seligman's PERMA model, which outlines five core elements of well-being: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. According to this model, a balanced and satisfying life requires nurturing each of these components. Engagement, often described as "flow," occurs when individuals become deeply absorbed in an activity that challenges and excites them. Positive relationships emphasize the role of social connection in emotional health, as strong bonds with others provide support, joy and belonging. Meaning refers to having a sense of purpose or contributing to something larger than oneself, while accomplishment involves pursuing goals and achieving personal milestones. The PERMA model has become a foundational tool in both research and practice, helping individuals and institutions design strategies that enhance overall well-being.

In addition to personal growth, positive psychology has important implications for mental health. It does not dismiss or minimize psychological suffering but instead offers complementary approaches that work alongside traditional forms of therapy. For individuals experiencing stress, anxiety, or depression, integrating positive psychology interventions such as identifying strengths, practicing mindfulness, or setting meaningful goals can improve emotional resilience and restore a sense of agency. Moreover, many of these techniques have shown long-term benefits, as they encourage individuals to build skills and habits that sustain mental health over time. This proactive

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stance contrasts with conventional approaches that often address problems only after they arise; positive psychology instead promotes a lifestyle that supports well-being continuously.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, positive psychology offers a hopeful and empowering framework for understanding human potential. By highlighting

strengths, nurturing positive emotions and promoting meaning and connection, it encourages people not only to survive life's difficulties but to thrive despite them. In a world often focused on problems and deficits, positive psychology provides a refreshing reminder that individuals have the capacity for growth, optimism and fulfillment. Its insights continue to influence education, healthcare, workplaces and daily life, making it a valuable guide for anyone seeking to build a more flourishing and purposeful existence.