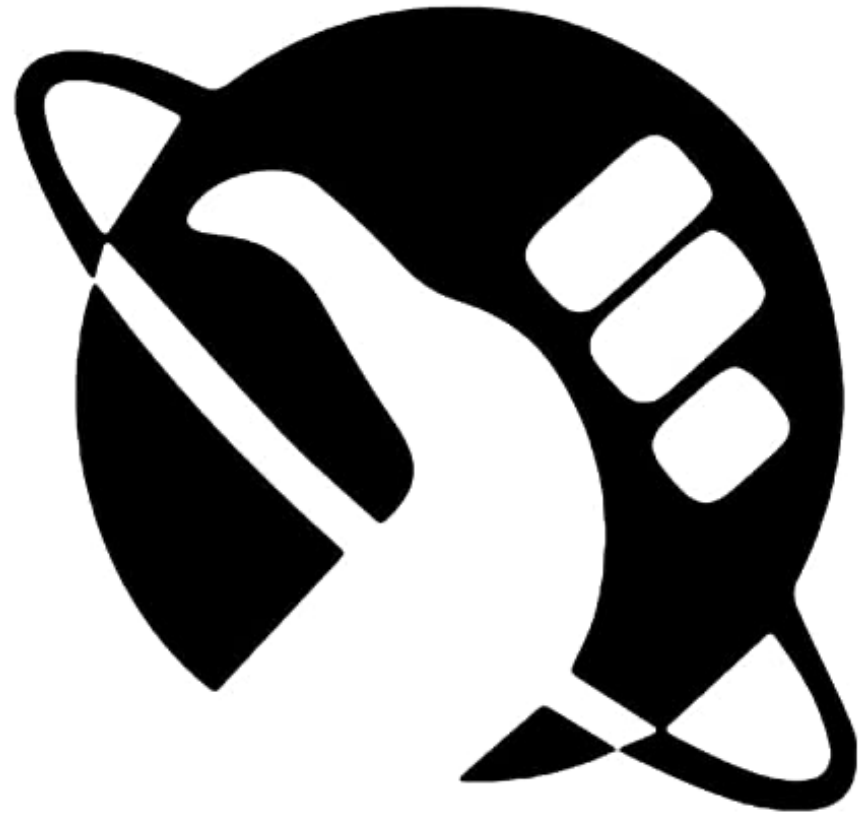




# THE IMPORTANCE & FOSTERING OF HAPPINESS DURING A PANDEMIC

SARAH PRESSMAN, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

STEP 1: IF  
YOU ARE  
CURRENTLY  
BURNED  
OUT,  
STRESSED,  
AND  
DEFINITELY  
NOT  
HAPPY....



**DON'T  
PANIC**

**YOUR  
NEGATIVE  
EMOTIONS  
ARE  
ADAPTIVE-  
ESPECIALL  
Y RIGHT  
NOW**





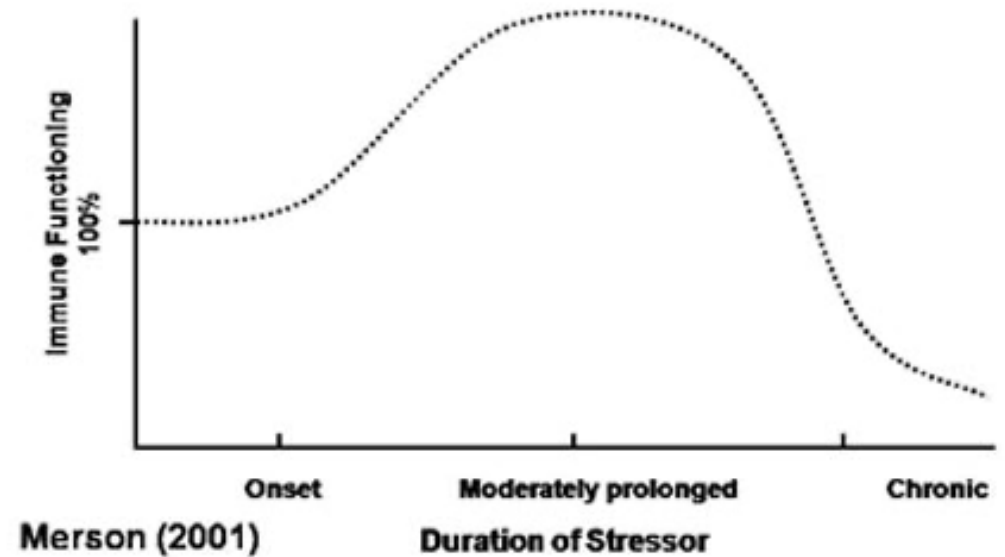
IN THE CASE OF  
A PANDEMIC,  
NEGATIVE  
AFFECT (E.G.,  
FEELINGS OF  
SADNESS,  
DEPRESSION,  
ANXIETY,  
STRESS) CAN  
ACTUALLY LEAD  
TO BETTER  
BEHAVIORS



- Things like:
  - Staying home
  - Wearing masks
  - Staying in bed
  - Avoiding Others
- Fear is a common public health tactic to change behavior (e.g., think about smoking labels on cigarette boxes)
- Depression and Sadness can produce behaviors we *want* right now such as avoiding social situation

# BUT WHEN STRESS BECOMES CHRONIC

- At high/lasting levels, feelings of stress and related negative emotions can lead to serious physical changes and downstream health effects
  - Worsened health behaviors (diet, exercise, sleep)
  - Dysregulated immune, hormonal and cardiovascular function
  - Increased risk of disease + increased disease severity/duration
  - Mental illness
  - Pain
- We need a way to BREAK this feeling so it's not how you ALWAYS feel.



A hand holding a lit sparkler against a dark background with colorful bokeh lights. The sparkler is bright and glowing, with many small sparks radiating outwards. The background is dark with several out-of-focus circular lights in shades of orange, red, and blue. The text "SO WHY FOCUS ON HAPPINESS?" is overlaid on the left side of the image in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

**SO WHY FOCUS  
ON  
HAPPINESS?**

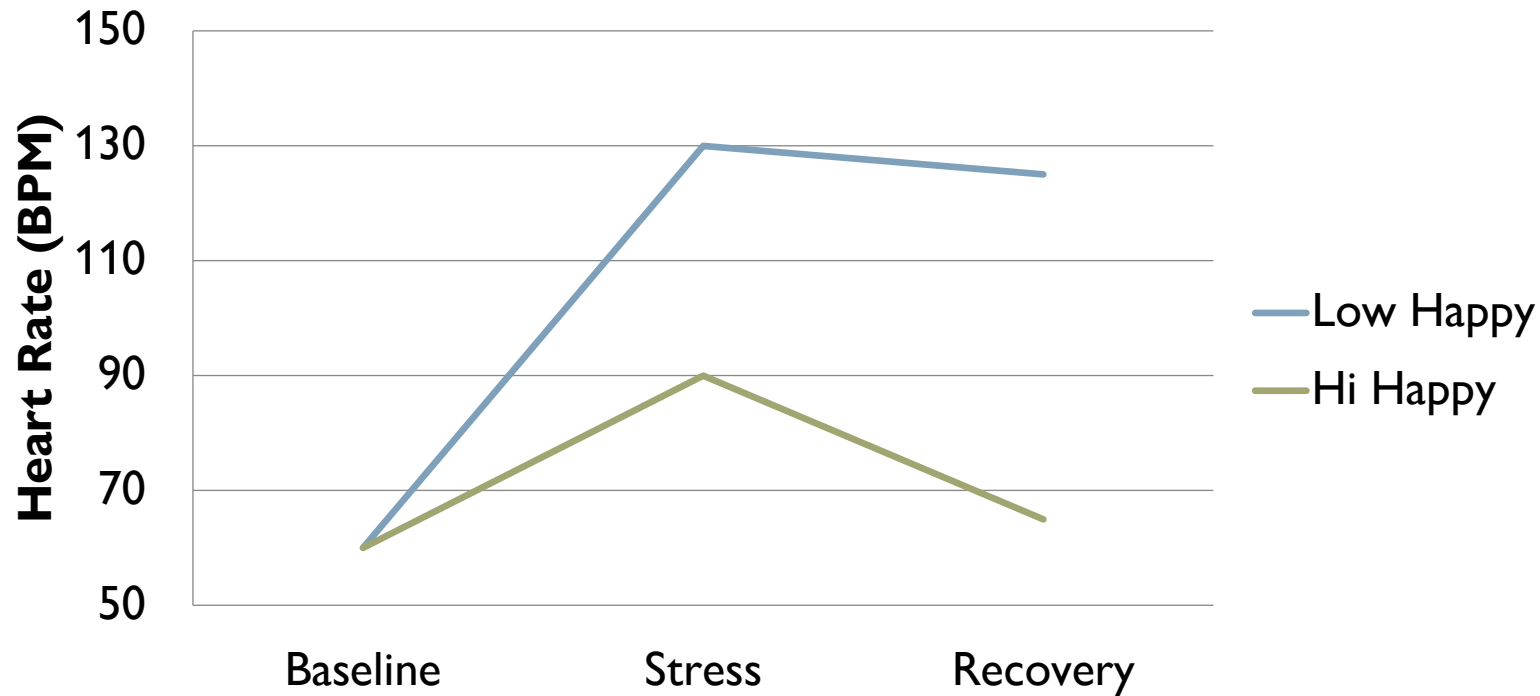


# REASON #1: HAPPINESS IS THE ANTIDOTE TO STRESS

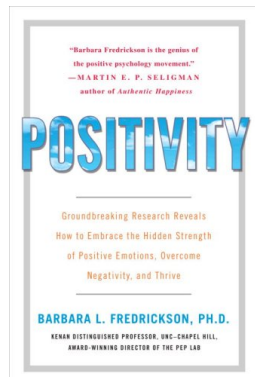


# WHY? WHAT IS HAPPINESS DOING?

Example Stress Responses



- Alters **perceptions** of severity and threat
- Thinking about happy thoughts displaces negative ones (incompatible)
- Broadening & Building resources that help







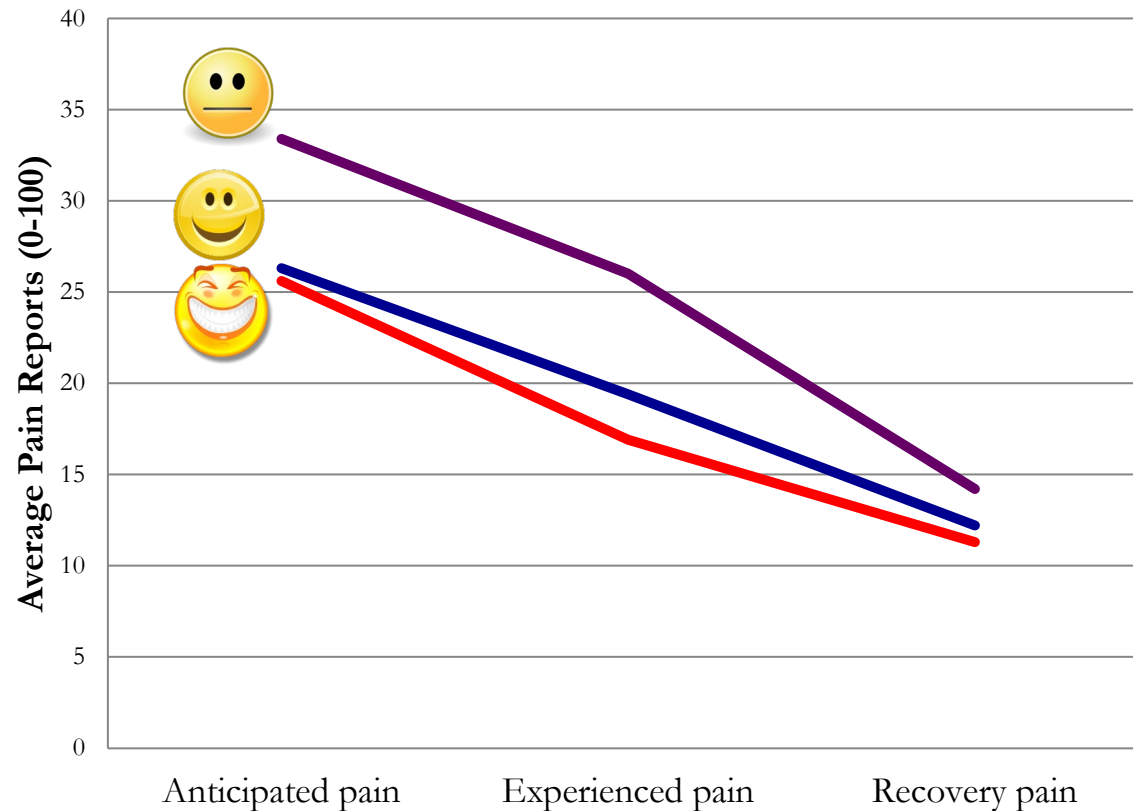
**THIS BENEFIT CAN  
BE OBSERVED WITH  
A SIMPLE  
EMOTIONAL TWEAK:  
JUST SMILE**

- **Facial Feedback Hypothesis:** Emotion can be aroused/changed with a shift of facial expression

# SMILING REDUCES YOUR HEART'S STRESS RESPONSE



# SMILING REDUCES PAIN



Possible pain range  
0-100



— Neutral  
— Smile  
— Duchenne Smile



$F(3,226) = 3.2, p < .05$

Similar benefits for self reported stress  
& anxiety relating to needle



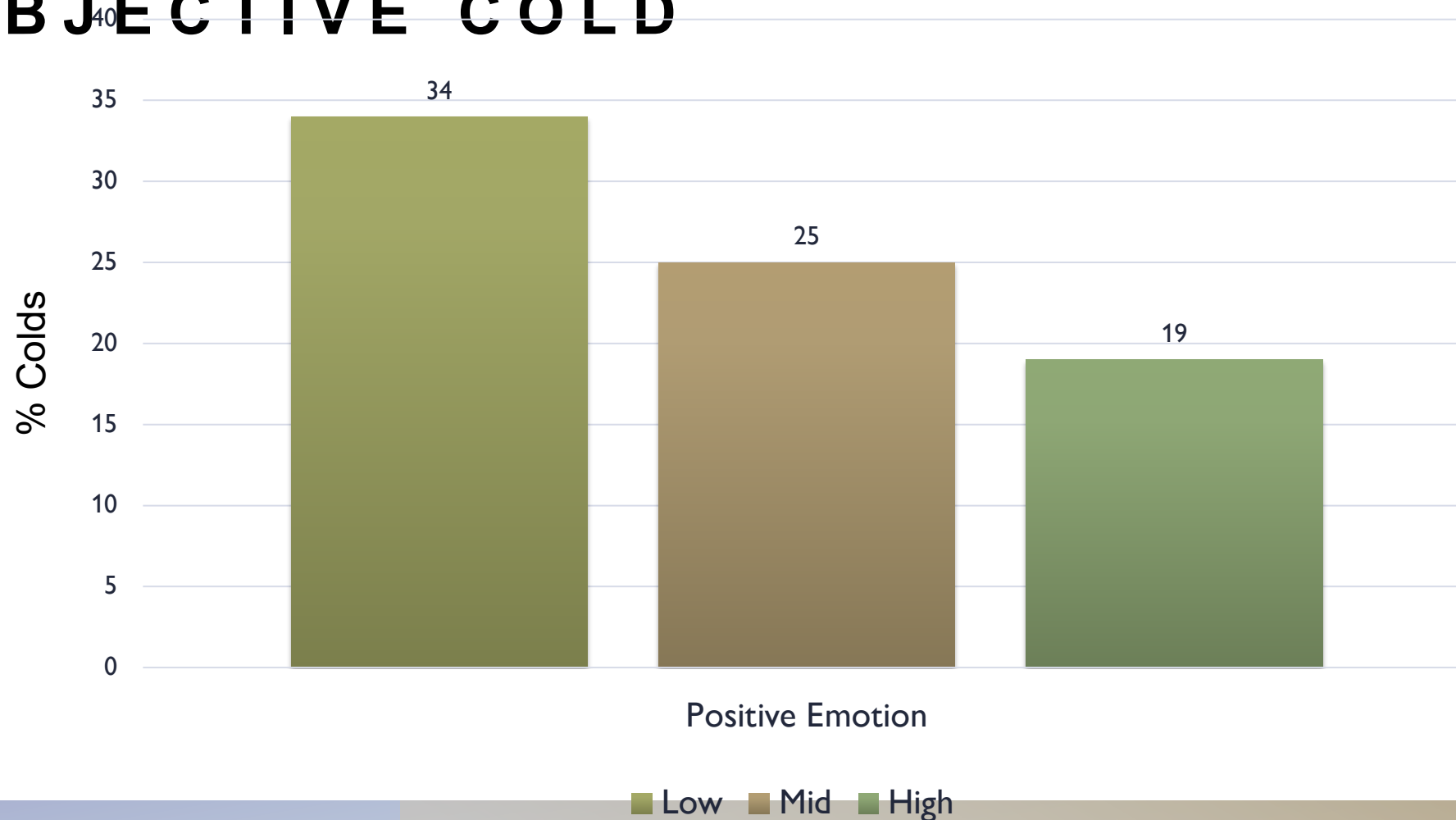
**REASON #2:  
HAPPINESS IS  
HEALTHY**



# **POSITIVE PEOPLE GET SICK LESS WHEN EXPERIMENTALLY EXPOSED TO CORONAVIRUSES**



# PROBABILITY OF DEVELOPING AN OBJECTIVE COLD





# NOT JUST COLDS...

- Happy people
  - Sleep better
  - Exercise more
  - Live longer
  - Survive illness better
  - Heal faster
  - Have fewer accidents
  - Just feel better



OK I'M  
CONVINCED  
- HOW DO I  
GET HAPPY?  
AND WHAT  
IS  
HAPPINESS?







# DEFINITIONS

- **Positive Affect:**
  - States & Traits that reflect a level of pleasurable engagement with the environment
  - **Feelings of happiness, joy, contentment, calm, excitement**
    - **\*cultural & individual differences on what people want the most**
  - Can come from a lot of places, both hedonic (pleasure) but also from long term life differences and traits (e.g., having life purpose, good relationships, positive behaviors)
- **Well-Being:**
  - Includes more categories (e.g., social, physical, cognitive, emotional)
  - **Subjective Well-Being** often talked about as “**Happiness**” a combination of life satisfaction + high positive emotion/low negative emotion



## Life Satisfaction Scale

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

\_\_\_\_\_ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

\_\_\_\_\_ The conditions of my life are excellent.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with my life.

\_\_\_\_\_ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

\_\_\_\_\_ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

- 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied
- 26 - 30 Satisfied
- 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied
- 20      Neutral
- 15 - 19 Slightly dissatisfied
- 10 - 14 Dissatisfied
- 5 - 9    Extremely dissatisfied

## PANAS Questionnaire

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings & items. For each item, click on the dropdown list next to the word and select one of the following options: **what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment**

All questions must be completed for this questionnaire to be scored.

1. Interested

Choose Answer

2. Distressed

Choose Answer

3. Excited

Choose Answer

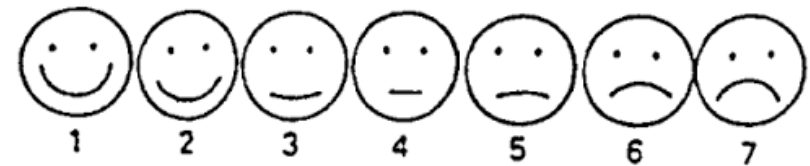
4. Upset

## Before you try out these activities...

Get a baseline or two... Try out some different activities and track how you feel the next day

e.g., the PANAS is easy to find & score + you can see how both your positive & negative emotions are changing

BUT even a simple smiley measure can work or a Simple APP (e.g., trackyourhappiness)





# WHERE DO I BEGIN?

THERE ARE COUNTLESS  
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND  
HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY  
INTERVENTIONS TARGETING  
WELL-BEING



# PROCEED WITH CAUTION

MATCH YOUR ACTIVITY TO WHAT YOU  
NEED AND HOW YOU ARE FEELING  
DEPENDING ON YOUR SITUATION  
SOME MIGHT NOT BE ADAPTIVE



# YELLOW LIGHT: POSITIVE PSYCH HELPFUL ACTIVITIES WHEN YOU HAVE MODERATE STRESS

- **GOAL:** TRAIN YOUR BRAIN to **focus on the good stuff and positive resources** rather than the stress
- **Key Lesson:** If stress isn't completely overwhelming it CAN be displaced by positivity



GOOD  
ACTIVITIES  
TO TARGET

Savoring

3 good things (gratitude) + cause

Positive expressive writing

General positivity enhancing social and leisure activities  
*(e.g., spending time with friends, watching funny movies,  
listening to happy music and avoiding negativity)*

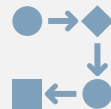
# GRATITUDE PRACTICE: 3 GOOD THINGS



I like this one b/c it's EASY to do and is a low time commitment



Tied to greater happiness, less pain, better sleep & a lot more



**“Write down three things that went well today and their causes. In addition, provide a causal explanation for each good thing.”**

Can vary this (e.g., daily, 2-3x a week, typically for a few weeks)



Why does this work? Fights Hedonic Adaptation & refocuses us on the positive rather than dwelling on the negative

# EXAMPLES



Bumped into Dave - haven't seen him for ages. I'd forgotten how much he makes me laugh"



"Really enjoyed lunch today - lovely to grab 20 minutes in the park and chat with Jo instead of eating at my desk. It happened because I thought it would be nice and suggested it. And Jo liked the idea too!"



"Hooray - the kids did their homework without me having to remind them (too much). It was because we agreed to a quiet hour after tea... which is finally becoming part of the routine"

# GLUE VS. TEFLON



wiseGEEK





# SAVORING

- savoring involves **noticing and appreciating the positive aspects of life** – the positive counterpart to coping. Savoring is more than pleasure – it also involves mindfulness and “**conscious attention to the experience of pleasure**” . You can savor vicariously, enjoying another person’s pleasure.

# SAVORING ACTIVITIES



Share good news with  
someone- describe in  
DETAIL



Take a mental  
photograph



Sharpen sensory  
perception



Get absorbed in the  
moment



Remind yourself how  
quickly time flies

# PLEASURE OF A KISS

LOOK UP A “CHOCOLATE  
MEDITATION” TO PRACTICE THIS





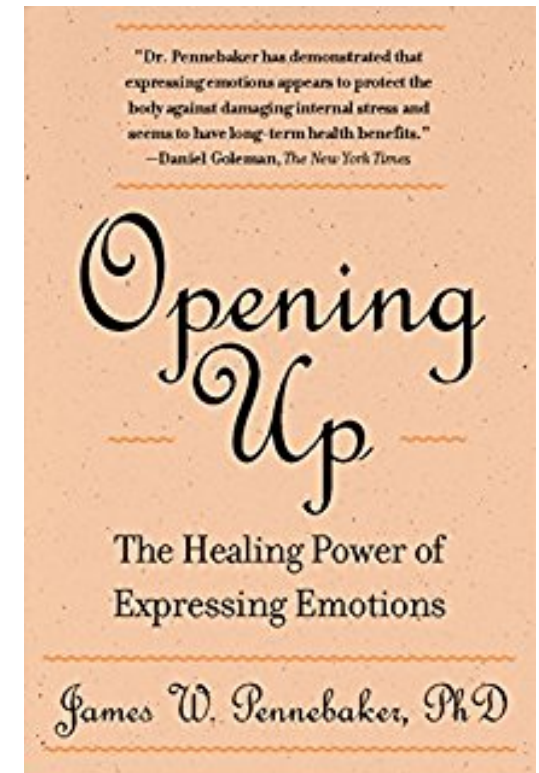
# SAVOR VIA WRITING

- Writing is often thought to be a way to process events, create a helpful narrative, find meaning and benefit in even BAD situations, and the result is many good wellness outcomes
- Has also been done in a positive light as a way to strengthen positive memories, relive them, bring them to mind etc.



# WRITE ABOUT POSITIVE THINGS

- I would like you to **write your very deepest thoughts and feelings about the most intensely positive experience of your entire life or an extremely important positive issue that has affected you and your life.** In your writing, I'd like you to really let go and **explore your deepest emotions and thoughts.** You might tie your topic to your relationships with others, including parents, lovers, friends or relatives; to your past, your present or your future; or to who you have been, who you would like to be or who you are now. You may write about the same general issues or experiences on all days of writing or about different topics each day. All of your writing will be completely confidential. Don't worry about spelling, grammar or sentence structure. The only rule is that once you begin writing, you continue until the time is up.



*20 minutes*

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a bright yellow raincoat, is smiling and looking upwards with her hand outstretched, feeling the rain. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting trees or foliage. The overall mood is joyful and refreshing.

**WITH A SIMPLE SHIFT OF  
BEHAVIOR AND FOCUS  
YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR  
MOOD.**



# GREEN LIGHT ACTIVITIES: WHEN YOU ARE FEELING PRETTY GOOD

- YOU CAN ALSO PROTECT YOUR MOOD – prevent adverse health and worsened mood by doing forward focused things less focused on the moment.
- Best when you have some time or feel like you have energy to take care of yourself and when you are not feeling overwhelmed by pandemic
- Green = Go! Go! Go!





# PLAN A VACATION OR TWO

Capitalizes on SAVORING  
ANTICIPATORY JOY  
EXPERIENTIALISM





# WRITE ABOUT YOUR FUTURE OR A GOAL

- Think about your life in the future. **Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realization of all of your life dreams. Now, write about what you imagined.** Do this for 20 minutes per day for three days in a row.
  - *(if you want- write about this 1 year from now, 3 years from now, 10 years from now)*
- Write a **HOPE PLAN** about something you hope to accomplish and how you will use your strengths to get there **OR** put these into your future writing *(how you did it, how you used your strengths to get to where you wanted)*





# DO SOMETHING GOOD FOR SOMEONE WORST OFF THAN YOU

FEELING USEFUL, DOING GOOD, ALIGNING YOUR BEHAVIORS WITH  
YOUR MORALS GIVE YOU SOME OF THE BIGGEST HAPPINESS BANG  
FOR YOUR BUCK THAT YOU CAN.

# FUTURE AND PROSOCIAL BASED ACTIVITIES

- Best Possible Self/Best FUTURE self/Your best POSSIBLE FUTURE
- Goal Setting
- Hope Plans
- Building and Using Strengths (*VIA StrengthsFinder*) or Self-Affirmations on Values
- Volunteer or think about how you are or could help others and write about it (this helps with meaning, purpose, etc. that help foster long term well-being)
  - These are actions that are forward looking, plan oriented, esteem enhancing, and confidence building which will take you out of the despair/worry of now and mind time travel you to the future with the confidence you can get there

# RED LIGHT: OVERWHELMING STRESS



- No point in trying to tell someone to be happy
- **Manage the overwhelming stress first** and related negative feelings and behaviors
- Calm/Relaxation are likely more useful emotions vs. feelings of happiness and excitement at this point although in some cases ENERGY management may require activity



# SELF-CARE & SIMPLE GOOD BEHAVIORS FOR WELL-BEING

- Take a shower
- Prioritize Sleep\*\*\*\*\*
- Plan a safe social activity
- EXERCISE\*\*\*\*\*
- Leisure and creative activities
- UNPLUG and go into NATURE
- Meditation (see other UCI courses!), Yoga, Paced Breathing
- Buy a dog 😊
- FAKE CONTROL. Even when you don't have it.

EXERCISE  
GIVES THE  
BODY  
UNDER  
STRESS  
WHAT IT  
WANTS TO  
DO.  
IT FIXES  
THE  
MISMATCH.

## WHAT STRESS DOES TO THE BODY

### SHORT TERM

FEELING WORRIED, NERVOUS  
OR UNABLE TO SWITCH OFF.

HEART BEATS HARDER AND  
FASTER TO PUMP MORE  
BLOOD TO THE MAJOR MUSCLES.

BREATHING QUICKENS TO  
SEND MORE OXYGEN  
AROUND THE BODY.

TUMMY ISSUES DUE  
TO THE RUSH OF STRESS  
HORMONES.

SKIN BECOMES MORE  
SENSITIVE AND OILY.

PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE SHEETS.

MUSCLES TENSE UP AS  
IF THEY'RE PREPARING  
TO MAKE A RUN FOR IT.

### LONG TERM

TENSION HEADACHES  
AND MIGRAINES.

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS.

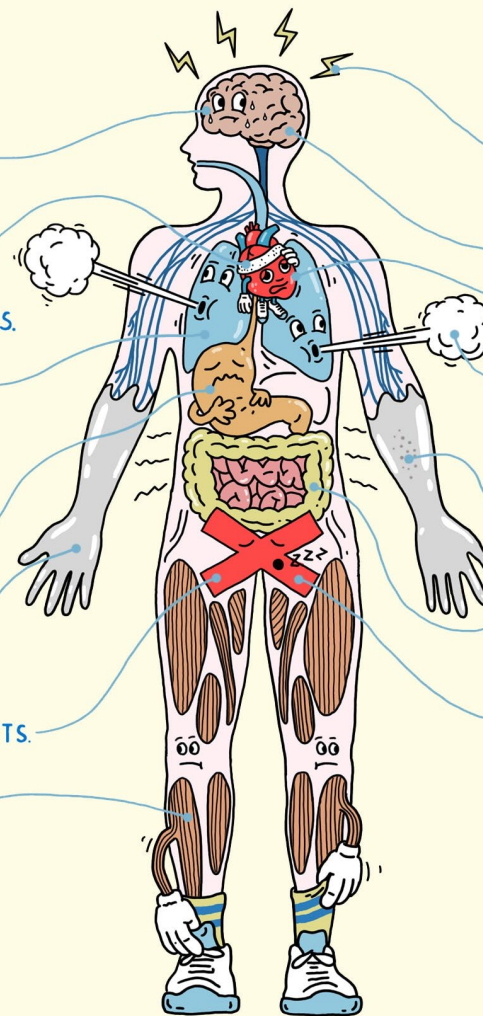
SERIOUS HEART PROBLEMS.

TROUBLE BREATHING,  
HYPERVENTILATION  
AND PANIC ATTACKS.

SKIN AND HAIR CONDITIONS  
EG. ACNE, HAIR LOSS.

INCREASED RISK OF  
TYPE 2 DIABETES.

FERTILITY PROBLEMS  
(FOR MEN AND WOMEN).



REGULAR EXERCISERS  
HAVE MORE THAN A  
20 TIMES GREATER  
LIKELIHOOD OF  
BEING IN THE  
HIGHEST LEVELS OF  
HAPPINESS  
COMPARED TO LESS  
FREQUENT  
EXERCISERS









THIS PANDEMIC IS A  
GIANT EXPERIMENT  
IN  
UNCONTROLLABILITY

# THE PERCEPTION OF CONTROL HELPS...EVEN WHEN IT'S FAKE OR UNIMPORTANT



Langer's work in  
Assisted living homes



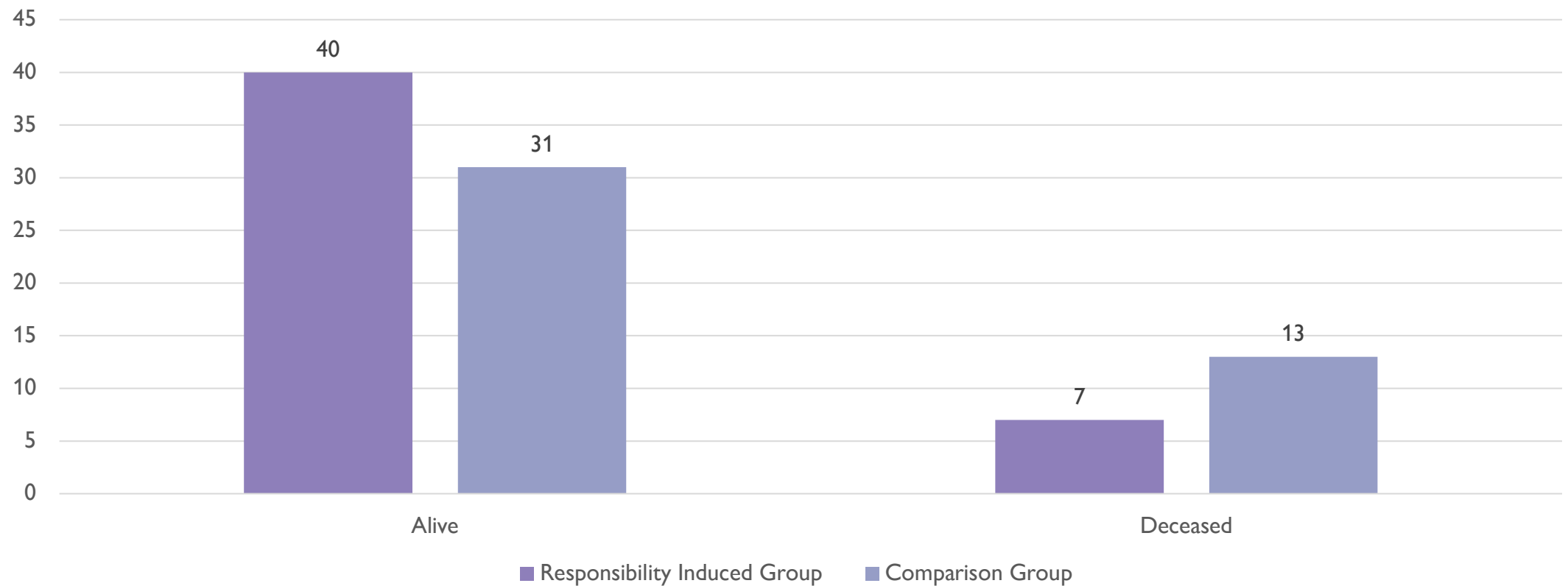
Rich Schulz  
Controlling  
time/length of  
visits



Sieber et al  
Fake control is as good  
As real when it comes to  
immune function



# EFFECTS OF CONTROL ON MORTALITY IN ASSISTED LIVING



15% mortality vs. 30% mortality



# HOW CAN YOU INCREASE PERCEIVED CONTROL IN YOUR LIFE?

- Spend 5 minutes **writing or thinking** about **ALL** of the things that you have control over
- **ADD some control and predictability to your life:** Create a schedule and stick to it. Plan your day.
  - **BONUS:** people who have structure in their lives report greater **MEANING** in life
- Stop panicking about things you can't control and focus on other positive or more controllable things





# THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO ENHANCE HAPPINESS

MANY EASY TO IMPLEMENT, ONLINE &  
NEARLY ALL OF THEM ARE COST FREE

# CAVEATS & IMPORTANT IDEAS

- **Don't expect ALL activities to work for EVERYONE**
  - Culture may matter, sex, context
  - E.g., mindfulness has been shown to be harmful to some people with serious trauma
- **Take before and after measures** when starting out new programs
  - PICK THE RIGHT TOOLS to figure out what is working for you – want to feel more energized? Measure energy? Want to feel more calm- make sure calm is in your self-assessment. WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL AFFECT right now?
    - Starting point but lots and lots more:  
<https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>
- Think about context! Is this the right time for what you are trying? Is it the right exercise-needs match?
- Recognize that sometimes you need clinical/medical help.

# HAPPINESS IS AN ANSWER IF STRESS IS A PROBLEM



Give yourself PERMISSION to focus on your happiness.  
You can't pour water from an empty cup.  
This isn't selfish. It's making sure that you are  
And STAY healthy enough to do your job and take care of others.

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING  
THE TIME TODAY TO  
FOCUS ON YOUR WELL-  
BEING**

WISHING YOU ALL HAPPINESS!

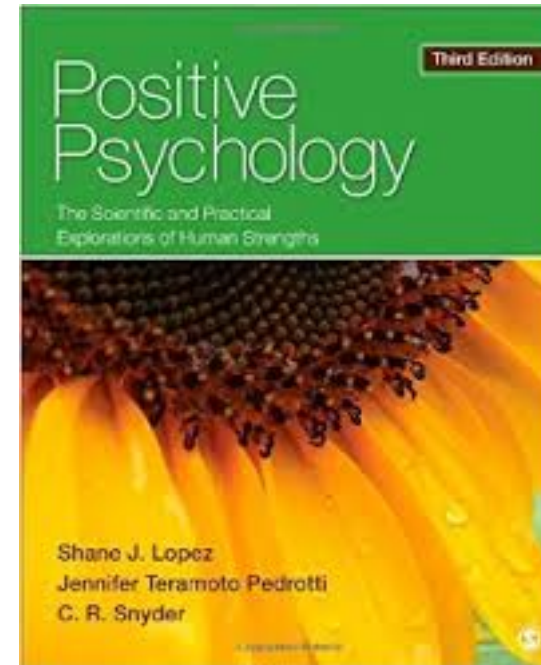
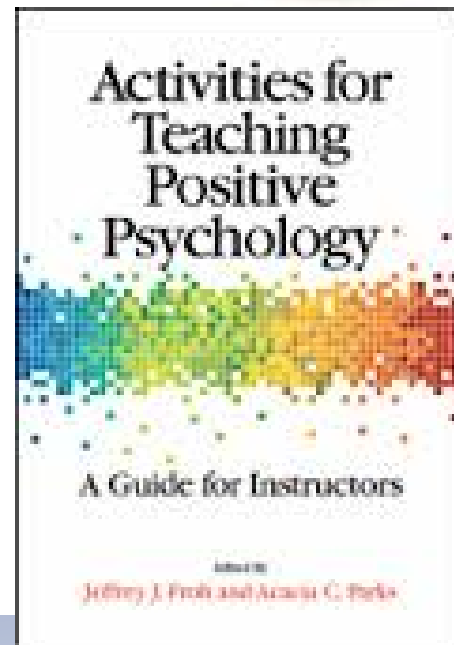
Questions? Want a Peloton Discount Code?

[Pressman@uci.edu](mailto:Pressman@uci.edu)

Twitter @sarahpressman



# GREAT RESOURCE ON PP ACTIVITIES



# **EXTRA SLIDES**

# IDENTIFY & BUILD STRENGTHS

- We're all very good at identifying our weaknesses: What about our strengths?
- Gallup or the VIA can teach you to do this
- *What's the task you are really good at? What tasks MATCH your passions, interests, and likes?*
- Not only does this boost esteem to know you are good at something, but you can bring this to mind regularly by savoring and working on your strengths

# EXAMPLE ITEM

The screenshot shows the online assessment interface for StrengthsFinder 2.0. At the top, the logo 'gallup strengthsfinder 2.0' is visible, along with a 'Sign Out' button. A progress bar at the top indicates the user is between 'Start' and 'Finish'. Below the progress bar is a five-point Likert scale with labels: 'Strongly Describes Me', 'Describes Me', 'Neutral', 'Doesn't Describe Me', and 'Strongly Doesn't Describe Me'. The first item, 'I can get other people excited.', is currently selected, and its corresponding dot on the scale is filled. The second item, 'I can calm others down.', is also visible. A red 'Next >' button is positioned below the scale. At the bottom of the interface, there is a footer with copyright information: 'Copyright © 2000, 2006, 2007 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved.' and links for 'Terms of Use', 'Privacy Statement', and 'Help'.



# StrengthsFinder

Achiever  
Activator  
Adaptability  
Analytical  
Arranger  
Belief  
Command  
Communication  
Competition  
Connectedness  
Context  
Deliberative  
Developer  
Discipline  
Empathy  
Consistency  
Focus

Futuristic  
Harmony  
Ideation  
Includer  
Individualization  
Input  
Intellection  
Learner  
Maximizer  
Positivity  
Relator  
Responsibility  
Restorative  
Self-Assurance  
Significance  
Strategic  
Woo

Feedback ex:

<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/643/communication.aspx>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHfT7D8tEeg&list=PLxDaK7wlyw94F9rI1gV50QNoFr9HCdjnA&index=3>

# VIA

- **Wisdom and Knowledge**  
Creativity  
Curiosity  
Judgment, Open-Mindedness,  
critical thinking  
Love of Learning  
Perspective, wisdom
- **Courage**  
Bravery  
Perseverance, industriousness  
Honesty, authenticity, integrity  
Zest
- **Humanity**  
Capacity to Love and Be Loved  
Kindness, generosity and  
nurturance  
Social Intelligence
- **Justice**  
Teamwork  
Fairness  
Leadership
- **Temperance**  
Forgiveness & Mercy  
Modesty & Humility  
Prudence  
Self-Regulation, self-control
- **Transcendence**  
Appreciation of Beauty and  
Excellence  
Gratitude  
Hope, optimism, future-  
mindedness  
Humor  
Religiousness&Spirituality

# BUILDING YOUR STRENGTHS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQHPSRLt32k>

- Other ideas:
  - PICK one of your strengths that you most ID with
  - PRACTICE using that strength FIVE times a day for the next 4 days. You may want to keep a list of what you tried & how it made you feel!
  - TIPS on [www.strengthsquest.com](http://www.strengthsquest.com) or [www.reflectivehappines.com](http://www.reflectivehappines.com)
- Put lists up to remind yourself to use your strengths
- At work- have them somewhere obvious so people know how to interact with you (why would this help? Good for those of you heading to I/O psych)
- Why do you think this will improve wellbeing?

# BUILDING A HOPE PLAN

- Hope is not the same as optimism
  - Optimism- you EXPECT good things to happen
  - HOPE- same + you MAKE them happen with strategic planning & goal directed thinking
- Great resources here: <http://hopemonger.com/>



# EX. HOPE PLAN

1. Set a goal (e.g., for school, work, personal)
  1. I will \_\_\_\_\_
2. I plan on reaching this goal by \_\_\_\_\_
3. My strengths can help me reach this goal by \_\_\_\_\_
4. Roadblocks on the way to this goal are \_\_\_\_\_
  1. Here are pathways I can use to get around these blocks
5. I know I reached my goal when \_\_\_\_\_
6. I will celebrate by \_\_\_\_\_