

Psycho-social substrates of Wellbeing

Lecture 6
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Variety of positive emotions

Discuss the difference between the following affective experiences:

1. Pleasure
2. Enjoyment
3. Euphoria
4. 'Dysphoria'
5. Gratification

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Seligman: Pleasure and Gratification

"The *pleasures* are delights that have clear sensory and strong emotional components, what philosophers call "raw feels": ecstasy, thrills, orgasm, delight, mirth, exuberance, and comfort. They are evanescent (fleeting), and they involve little, if any, thinking."

"The *gratifications* are activities we very much like doing, but they are not necessarily accompanied by any raw feeling at all. Rather, the gratifications engage us fully, we become immersed and absorbed in them... (like reading a good book). The gratifications last longer than the pleasures, they involve quite a lot of thinking and interpretation, they do not habituate easily, and they are undergirded by our strengths and virtues."

Selvam, Positive Psychology, 2014 Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*, p.103

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Characteristics of Pleasure

1. They involve the *sense organs of the body*, hence need some sort of stimulus.
2. From *evolutionary perspective*, pleasures are associated with survival – of the individual and species: eg. Pleasure in eating; sexual pleasure.
3. *Habituation*: organisms build tolerance to the stimulus, and hence every time we need stronger stimulus to reach previous levels of pleasure;
4. *Addiction*: Euphoric experiences can leave us in dysphoria, and hence trigger craving, and addiction.

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Concluding remarks about Pleasure

1. The need for pleasure seems very basic to human beings, yet the prefrontal cortex could choose to forego it.
2. Pleasure contributes to wellbeing. For instance, pleasurable experiences reduce stress through brain reward pathways (see Ulrich-Lai et al, 2010) yet human wellbeing cannot be wholly built on pleasure due to its nature of habituation.

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Gratification

- A state of wellbeing – psychological and social - generated through a set of *character strengths*.
- What distinguishes euphoric effects of pleasure and gratification (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999/2002) is the degree of effort that is involved in attaining the pleasurable state. Eg. the difference is seen in consuming a drug and playing football.
- Seligman (2002) wonders why human beings readily choose pleasures (that lead to euphoria and eventually to habituation) over those means that lead to gratification. He tentatively suggests six possible factors that could make the choice of gratification less likely: "The gratifications are constraining; entail the possibility of failing; require skill, effort, and discipline; produce change; can arouse anxiety; and have opportunity costs" (p.290).

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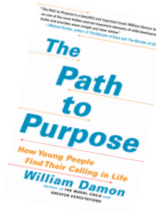
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Altruism & Wellbeing

- Wellbeing is strongly and consistently correlated in several studies to:
 - Engagement with others (just being in the company of others);
 - Unconditional giving (of resources including time) to others;
- In the present course, we will have a deeper look at this topic in the context of character strengths.

Role of Purpose in Life in Wellbeing

Damon William



- A four year project
- Studying how young people from the ages of 12 – 26 are struggling to find their purpose in life

Indicators of Purpose

- Stable intention to contribute to the world
- Positive self-identity
- Sense of right perspective of the self: humility
- Dedication to honourable ends and means

How purpose develops?

Purposeful people follow these develops:

- Observation and admiration of purposeful people;
- Revelation 1: Something needs to be done;
- Revelation 2: I can make the difference;
- Elicit social support: family, peers, mentors;
- Acquire necessary skills, and think of realistic plans

Distribution of Purpose in mixed U.S. sample ages 12-22, N = 444

Purposeful Engagement	High	Purposeful engagement (31%)	Strong purpose (20%)
	Low	No discernible purpose (24%)	Purposeful aspirations (24%)
		Low	High
		Purposeful Aspirations	

Meaning and Wellbeing

- Another related area that contributes to wellbeing is meaning.
- Watch video by Michael Steger on Meaning.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLFVoEF2R10>

Two meanings of meaning in life:

- Purpose:** wanting to achieve something with life (related to Damon William)
- Significance:** things around life make sense.