

Chapter 2: Positive Psychology

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. The ancient Greeks during the Golden Age believed that the formula for the good life could be determined by logic and reason. Socrates (469-399 BCE) was the best known teacher of this approach. He believed in the Delphic motto, “ ____.”
- Speak thy truth
 - Know thyself
 - Trust in reason and logic
 - Logic leads to Reason. Reason leads to happiness.

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

2. ____ believed that the good life could be achieved by following the golden mean, the balance point between the extremes of life and believed that *eudaimonia* (i.e., happiness possessed of true well-being) was not a goal to pursue but rather a byproduct of living the virtuous life.
- Socrates
 - Plato
 - Aristotle
 - The ancient Hebrews

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

3. Aristotle’s approach is referred to as the ____ of happiness.
- subjective well-being theory
 - hedonic theory
 - logic and reason theory
 - virtue theory

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

4. Today, Aristotle’s theory of well-being is often contrasted with the more popular notion of happiness as ____ determined by one’s appraisal of life satisfaction and positive feelings.
- subjective well-being
 - hedonistic behavior
 - objective well-being
 - eudemonia

ANS: A PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

5. The idea of positive feelings, good moods, and pleasurable experiences leading to happiness embodies the ____ definition of happiness.
- anhedonic
 - hedonic
 - eudemonia
 - subjective well-being

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

6. Negative emotions lead to ____ through facilitating the employment of specific narrow options and positive emotions lead to ____ through setting the stage for use of a general wide range of options.
- long-term survival, short-term survival gains
 - instinct, equilibrium
 - action, pleasure
 - short-term survival gains, long-term survival

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Model

7. ____ is a learning theory concept where the novelty of a new stimulus eventually wears off after repeated exposure, i.e., the stimulus gradually has less and less impact on you.
- a. Hedonic treadmill
 - b. Hedonic adaptation
 - c. Habituation
 - d. Setpoint

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

8. There are individual differences in how people respond to extreme negative events such as severe disability. In fact, many people are called ____ in that they “not only cope with the event, they often learn and are transformed by their experiences” (Dunn, Uswatte, & Elliot).
- a. resilient
 - b. hopeful
 - c. well-adjusted
 - d. adaptive

ANS: A PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

9. What does it mean to thrive?
- a. To be content and meet basic expectations
 - b. To show vigorous growth or to flourish
 - c. To be successful at everything one tries and never fail
 - d. To be free of significant adversity or risk

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

10. A person who is ____ is not necessarily happier than a person who is just healthy.
- a. super healthy
 - b. chronically unhealthy
 - c. diseased
 - d. slightly health-eased

ANS: A PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

11. Gender seems to account for approximately ____ of any differences in happiness.
- a. .01%
 - b. 1%
 - c. 5%
 - d. 19%

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

12. Studies have found that intelligence is ____ to well-being.
- a. positively correlated to a significant degree
 - b. negatively correlated to a significant degree
 - c. only superficially related
 - d. not appreciably related

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

13. In addition to learned helplessness, people can also develop its opposite, learned _____. People who learn _____ can begin to see connections between their efforts and outcomes which then leads to a sense of hope.
- a. helpfulness
 - b. selflessness
 - c. optimism
 - d. hopefulness

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: Optimism

14. Sarah Schneider makes the case that _____, a form of optimism that does not “involve self-deception, or convincing oneself of desired beliefs without appropriate reality checks,” is the preferred form.
- a. stalwart optimism
 - b. realistic optimism
 - c. pre-surgery optimism
 - d. dispositional optimism

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: Optimism

15. ____ refers to “the experience of complete absorption in the present moment.”
- a. Flow
 - b. A subjective state
 - c. “Being out of the zone”
 - d. Goal-pursuit

ANS: A PTS: 1 REF: Flow and Goal Pursuit

16. Now, with over 30 years of research on flow, we have a much better understanding of its universality across cultures, gender, and age; in school, at work, and during leisure; and how it can lead to ____, that is, living life fully and in the moment.
- a. new pathways
 - b. optimal experiences
 - c. agency
 - d. perceived control

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: Flow and Goal Pursuit

17. ____ refer(s) to the ability to envision one or more routes toward reaching a desired goal.
- a. Potentialities
 - b. Agency
 - c. Optimal experiences
 - d. Pathways

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: Hope Theory

18. ____ is about the process of applying mindful awareness to enjoyment experiences—that is, applying “a deliberate conscious attention to the experience of pleasure.”
- a. Wakeful enjoyment
 - b. Loving-kindness meditation
 - c. Savoring
 - d. Mindfulness intervention

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: Mindfulness and Savoring

19. ____ is a feeling that we have when we witness suffering, and is described as “a process of connecting by identifying with another person,” according to Cassell.
- a. Altruism
 - b. Forgiveness
 - c. Gratitude
 - d. Compassion

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: Love and Relationships

20. ____ involves both identification and understanding, and is believed to be the driving force for acts of altruism, the act of helping unselfishly.
- a. Forgiveness
 - b. Empathy
 - c. Gratitude
 - d. Loving-kindness

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: Love and Relationships

SHORT ANSWER

1. What is the divine command theory of happiness?

ANS:

Western ideas related to today’s positive psychology have deep roots. Many of the philosophical underpinnings of these ideas can be traced to the ancient Hebrews and Greeks around 2500 years ago. The Hebrews and, later, many Christians followed what we now call the divine command theory of happiness that states that the path to happiness is to follow the commands of a supreme being. If one lives in accordance with divine laws and morals then one lives the good life. Today this influence is studied through research in religiosity, meaning, and spirituality and how these factors influence well-being.

PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

2. Define positive and negative affect and how they differ.

ANS:

Positive affect refers to an experience of positive emotions and negative affect to an experience of negative emotions. Each appears to have different evolutionary and adaptive values. Whereas positive affect is approach-oriented, moving the person toward situations or others that could yield pleasure and reward, negative affect is part of the withdrawal-oriented system designed to protect a person from threat, harm, or pain (e.g., fight-or-flight).

PTS: 1 REF: Positive Emotions

3. Explain Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build model. How do specific and non-specific action tendencies relate to this model?

ANS:

Barbara Fredrickson proposed a broaden-and-build model to explain the adaptive and evolutionary value of our positive emotions. Whereas negative emotions tend to narrow our options, positive emotions tend to broaden them. These specific action tendencies of negative emotions (e.g., fight-or-flight) stand in contrast with the non-specific action tendencies of positive affect. For example, it was not very adaptive for those primitive humans to ponder and contemplate a bevy of options for dealing with an approaching saber-toothed tiger unless they wanted to be the tiger's next lunch. Instead, their negative emotions helped them act quickly, sometimes without thinking, to either fight or flee the tiger.

PTS: 1 REF: Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Model

4. What are Fredrickson's thought-action repertoires?

ANS:

Positive emotions can evoke a wide range of options through broadening and building. By broadening what Fredrickson calls thought-action repertoires we are able to build personal resources. Thus, positive emotions evoke more flexible thoughts about actions we can take that in turn build resources. That is, we can think of lots of activities that give us pleasure and ponder them before we decide what potentially resource-building action to take (e.g., call a friend, go shopping, go out to dinner, take a walk, etc.). From this perspective, negative emotions lead to short-term survival gains through facilitating the employment of specific narrow options and positive emotions lead to long-term survival through setting the stage for use of a general wide range of options.

PTS: 1 REF: Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Model

5. What are three sources of information one could use to determine a person's subjective well-being?

ANS:

One source is global judgment about one's life, one's assessment of his life satisfaction. Second is important domains in one's life such as relationships with family and friends, and subjectively assessing if things are going well. And last, whether or not one generally feels good, that is, has frequent positive affect coupled infrequent negative affect.

PTS: 1 REF: Well-Being

6. What is Carol Ryff's model of psychological well-being (PWB)?

ANS:

Today, Carol Ryff's model of psychological well-being (PWB) embodies the eudaimonic concept, but instead of virtues, it substitutes dimensions of positive mental health. In her view a person must exhibit high levels of six dimensions of positive mental health in order to experience the highest levels of well-being. Ryff identified these six dimensions based on her understanding of classic theories of what determines good mental health along with research findings from personality, developmental, and clinical psychology. She named these dimensions self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

PTS: 1 REF: Well-Being

7. What is the happiness set point?

ANS:

Happiness researchers generally share a popular assumption that we each have a happiness set point. The happiness set point concept is based on the well known weight set point idea discussed in the weight loss literature. Think of how a thermostat works on an air conditioner and heater. The thermostat sets the point for the temperature so that when the ambient temperature gets too hot, the air conditioner blows to bring the temperature down to the set point. When it gets too cold, the heater blows to bring the temperature up to the set point.

PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

8. Discuss the concepts of hedonic adaptation and hedonic treadmill.

ANS:

Changes in happiness due to circumstances tend to be temporary because we generally adjust fairly soon to our new circumstances. This idea known as hedonic adaptation is based on the concept that we are walking on a hedonic treadmill. Though our feet are moving, our happiness levels are not. Can you think of a time when you made a new purchase, say a new car, and were happier for a while? According to this concept, possessing the new car was fun and novel at first, but eventually your life driving the new car became your new normal as you experienced hedonic adaptation.

PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

9. When people are resilient to disabilities or other life challenges, they may show positive growth. Explain the concept of positive growth.

ANS:

Those with disabilities who show resilience may also experience positive growth indicated by reduced anxiety and depression, enhanced well-being, and an uplifting of daily life satisfaction. At risk children who are resilient are said to exhibit "patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant adversity or risk."

PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

10. Why would conscientious people be more satisfied with their lives?

ANS:

Meta-analytic reviews report that conscientiousness (self-disciplined, efficient) ranks number one as the Big Five trait with the strongest positive relation to *life satisfaction* or number two behind extraversion. Why would conscientious people be more satisfied with their lives? Perhaps it is due to their greater likelihood of achieving their goals than impulsive or undirected individuals (those with opposite trait characteristics). Further, the process of setting challenging goals and working steadily toward them can create *flow* experiences, a concept that will be explored later, that lead to feelings of well-being.

PTS: 1 REF: Traits of Happy People

11. What is the relationship between neuroticism and happiness?

ANS:

Neuroticism is a consistent negative predictor of happiness and well-being. Lahey defines this trait as follows: "The personality trait of neuroticism refers to relatively stable tendencies to respond with negative emotions to threat, frustration, or loss." Individuals who score high in neuroticism are more prone to experience negative affect (e.g., anxiety, depression, anger, etc.), which by definition is associated with more unhappiness. Neuroticism is linked to many mental and physical disorders as well as to a poorer quality of life and possibly a shorter lifespan. Often people who score high in neuroticism use ineffective problem solving strategies such as rumination.

PTS: 1 REF: Traits of Happy People

12. Explain the bottom-up and top-down theories of happiness.

ANS:

In a review of the different types of influences on subjective well-being, Diener introduced the notion of bottom-up theories of happiness versus top-down theories of happiness. The bottom-up idea is predicated on life's circumstances influencing our happiness (i.e., the sum of our positive experiences)—all the things around us bubble up to affect our happiness levels. On the other hand, the top-down concept suggests that our happiness levels begin in ourselves, and as we look at our circumstances, we view them through our rosy or dark glasses. Although it appears that the top-down theory accounts for most of our happiness levels, we need to also be mindful that life circumstances may interact with top-down influences in a variety of ways. For example, a person who values achievement (top-down) will be happier when getting promoted (bottom-up) than a person who doesn't care about getting ahead.

PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

13. Are married people happier? What is the relationship between marriage and happiness?

ANS:

One study revealed that nearly double the number of married adults (40%) stated they were very happy than never married adults (24%). However, this study does not show us how marriage affects couples across time. Another study revealed that on average most individuals got a very small boost in happiness levels after marriage, then adapted over about a two year time period, and returned to their pre-marriage baselines. Further, the study found support for the idea that “happy people are more likely to get and stay married.” This finding probably accounts for some of the differences in overall happiness levels between married and unmarried individuals reported by Myers.

PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

14. What is dispositional optimism?

ANS:

As defined by leading experts in the area, Charles Carver, Michael Scheier, and their associates, “optimists are people who expect good things to happen; pessimists are people who expect bad things to happen.” Dispositional optimism is an enduring tendency to have global expectations of positive outcomes.

PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

15. Optimism can be seen as a type of explanatory style. What is meant by this?

ANS:

What we refer to as optimism can alternatively be seen as a type of explanatory style or way in which people make causal inferences about why things happen to them. Optimists tend to see bad events as temporary, specific to the situation, and caused by external factors (e.g. “We can chalk this one up to bad luck in this situation, but most of the time things go well.”), whereas pessimists show the opposite pattern of seeing bad events as more enduring (e.g., “This problem is never going to go away”), global (e.g., “This always seems to happen to me.”), and caused by internal factors (e.g., “If I were smarter this wouldn’t have happened to me.”)

PTS: 1 REF: Life Circumstances

16. What is learned helplessness?

ANS:

Seligman proposed that whereas some people confronting stressors can learn to be helpless—known as learned helplessness (a passive state analogous to depressed states). Persons in a state of learned helplessness believe that their efforts will not affect outcomes--they expect defeat--because they do not see a relationship between their efforts and results.

PTS: 1 REF: Optimism

17. What is hope theory?

ANS:

Hope theory was introduced by C. R. Snyder as a way to better understand how people move closer to their goals. In his formulation, hope is seen as a combination of cognitive pathways and agency. Pathways refer to the ability to envision one or more routes toward reaching a desired goal and agency refers to the motivational trait-like perception that a wide range of goals will be pursued. Thus, “hopeful thinking requires both the perceived ability to generate routes to a goal and the perceived ability/determination to use those routes.”

PTS: 1 REF: Hope Theory

18. Explain the concept of mindfulness and its roots.

ANS:

The idea of actively cultivating conscious awareness and attention has roots in Buddhist traditions and is part of the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness can be defined as “the state of being attentive and aware of what is taking place in the present.” A similar but slightly different definition of mindfulness is “awareness of the present with acceptance.”

PTS: 1 REF: Mindfulness and Savoring

19. What is altruism and do you think it is a real phenomenon?

ANS:

Empathy involves both identification and understanding, and is believed to be the driving force for acts of altruism, the act of helping unselfishly. Altruistic people want to alleviate the suffering of persons they are helping. Though some believe that all behavior is motivated by self-interest, Daniel Batson demonstrated through over 30 experiments that pitted empathy-altruism acts of helping against egoistic (self-interest) motivated helping, that empathy motivated altruism is a real phenomenon.

PTS: 1 REF: Love and Relationships

20. What effect does gratitude have on one’s well-being and what traits is it linked to?

ANS:

Gratitude involves a feeling of appreciation for something good that another is responsible for bringing about. Those disposed to feel gratitude, like those disposed to forgive, are generally more agreeable, more religious, less neurotic, and less narcissistic. Trait gratitude is an even stronger predictor of well-being and satisfaction with life than any of the Big Five traits.

PTS: 1 REF: Love and Relationships

ESSAY

1. How old is positive psychology? How long has it been around formally? How old are its roots?

ANS:

Behavioral scientists have studied positive topics for at least 100 years. Prior to the relatively recent emergence of positive psychology as an integrated field, social psychologists were studying altruism, sociologists' happiness, and counselors' personality strengths. Former president of the American Psychological Association Martin P. Seligman is credited with organizing and bringing together scholars in the late 1990s into the area he framed as positive psychology.

Western ideas related to today's positive psychology have deep roots. Many of the philosophical underpinnings of these ideas can be traced to the ancient Hebrews and Greeks around 2500 years ago.

PTS: 1 REF: A Brief History of Positive Psychology

2. Why did it take so long for the field of psychology to be seriously interested in and study positive emotions?

ANS:

It's no surprise that the study of positive emotions attracted the attention of researchers in the area of positive psychology. However, what is surprising is that these emotions were largely neglected by investigators who, until the 1980s, focused almost exclusively on negative emotions. Why exclude positive emotions in favor of negative ones? There are a number of reasons.

First, we associate negative emotions with problems and the focus of psychology has historically been, with good reason, on how to alleviate suffering and help those with problems. Second, there are fewer positive emotions than negative ones. For example, there appears to be "only one positive emotion for every three or four negative emotions." Third, positive emotions seem less distinct from one another and more difficult to define operationally. For example, how do you sharply define joy or bliss so that they differentiate well from each other? Contrast that with how much easier it is to define anger or anxiety so that we can easily tell them apart. Fourth, in recent years, with the increased focus on how to live an effective life, there is a greater interest in the study of positive emotions. And last, we now know that strategies that support and sustain positive emotions can help those who experience problems like coping with stress and other difficulties.

PTS: 1 REF: Positive Emotions

3. Discuss Fredrickson's undoing hypothesis using an example from your own life.

ANS:

It is not very adaptive for humans to continue to feel negative emotions once a threat subsides. So Fredrickson also suggests in her undoing hypothesis that positive emotions help us recover more quickly from detrimental effects of negative emotions. Why do we laugh sometimes immediately after a false startle—think of someone suddenly and unexpectedly tapping us on the shoulder from behind in a dark movie theater during a scary scene? Would we startle and then laugh? If we do, we laugh because the positive emotions help us relieve tension and regain our equilibrium. It is adaptive for humans to regain equilibrium once the tiger is gone, then broaden attention to other people and resources to engender social support and resource sharing. Given that we humans are social beings, we wouldn't last long in a cave or on the savannah if we had to fend for ourselves, alone against predators, famine, and diseases.

PTS: 1 REF: Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Model

4. How do we define happiness? How do we measure it?

ANS:

The first and most prevalent view among psychologists is that happiness is defined as subjective well-being (SWB). For example, Sonja Lyubomirsky states that she uses the terms happiness, which she defines as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile,” and well-being interchangeably. This subjectivist view suggests that each person knows best his or her level of happiness. Since there is no test tube objective measure of happiness we can use to accurately determine a person’s happiness levels, we must then rely on the person’s subjective appraisals. These appraisals can be measured by self-report tests.

What do people base their subjective happiness appraisals on? They seem to rely on several factors. According to Kesibir and Diener, subjective well-being consists of the following general components: “These components include life satisfaction (global judgments of one’s life), satisfaction with important life domains (satisfaction with one’s work, health, marriage, etc.), positive affect (prevalence of positive emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (prevalence of unpleasant emotions and moods).”

PTS: 1 REF: Well-Being

5. How do you think your level of happiness would change if you won the lottery? What about if you were paralyzed? Justify your answers.

ANS:

Have you ever wondered if you won the lottery, would your problems mostly go away, and you would be happy for the rest of your life? A classic study by Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman sought the answer to this question. They looked at lottery winners and paralyzed victims of accidents to investigate the effects of extreme changes in fortune, both positive and negative, and whether these changes would result in long-term changes in happiness. The investigators demonstrated hedonic adaptation for the lottery winners in finding that after winning the lottery (one participant won the lottery less than a month before the study was conducted, but the rest won it within a range of 1 month to a year and a half prior to the study), in spite of their good fortune, they astoundingly later had roughly the same levels of happiness as the non-winner controls in the study.

Further, those selected for the study because they were paralyzed with spinal cord injuries (for 1 month to 1 year prior to the study) reported happiness scores above the mid-level (neutral zone). Though this study is often cited as evidence for hedonic adaptation, it should be noted that the hedonic adaptation effect was most pronounced for the lottery winners and less so for those who were accident victims. In fact, even though time had passed for adaptation, the paralyzed participants still “rated themselves significantly less happy in general than controls.”

PTS: 1 REF: Happiness Set Point and Hedonic Adaptation

6. Is there a connection between introverted or extraverted traits and happiness? Is your answer consistent with your own experience?

ANS:

Extraversion is a consistent trait characteristic associated with happy people. If you are an introvert, should you be worried? Does it mean that your happiness set point propels you toward unhappiness? Surveys consistently show that the majority of all people are happy, and that includes introverts. For example, Larsen and Kasimatis found that both introverted and extraverted students rated themselves above the neutral level in happiness (as defined by pleasant mood) when they reported their daily mood states for a week—with extraverts reporting a slightly higher level. Thus, though there are many happy introverts, extraversion gives a person a slight advantage toward feeling happy. Why? There are many possibilities, but one common belief among researchers in the field is that extraversion, probably in part influenced by neurological structure, predisposes the extravert toward experiencing positive affect.

Even though extraverts are happier when alone or with others than introverts their positive affect is conducive to building and maintaining quality relationships that, in turn, can lead them to experience even more positive affect.

PTS: 1 REF: Traits of Happy People

7. What is the relationship between wealth and happiness? Do you think your personal level of happiness would be different if you had a significantly greater or smaller amount of money or if you were from a much poorer or richer country?

ANS:

One study found that in spite of a steady increase in inflation-adjusted income from 1957 to 2002 in the United States, happiness levels stayed the same. The author of the study reported with irony that now “we are twice as rich and no happier.” A review of the results of the large number of studies on money and happiness suggests that if a person is living in poverty and his or her basic needs for food, shelter, and safety are not being met, then receiving more money to provide for these basic needs can make an upward difference in happiness levels. However, the hedonic treadmill starts to take effect as income rises above this basic level.

The wealth of the country the person lives in also seems to make a difference. As Diener et al. noted, “wealthy people are only somewhat happier than poor people in rich nations, whereas wealthy nations appear much happier than poor ones.” So overall, the country’s wealth seems to set the conditions that determine how much influence its residents’ personal wealth has on happiness. In very poor nations, where poverty threatens life itself, being rich does predict greater well-being. In wealthier nations, however, where almost everyone has a basic safety net, increases in wealth have negligible effects on personal happiness. In the United States, the very poor are lower in happiness, but once a person is just barely comfortable, added money adds little to no happiness.

PTS: 1 DIF: Life Circumstances

8. What is the relationship between forgiveness and well-being? Can you think of a situation from your own life where the knowledge of this relationship has been, or would be, beneficial to your well-being?

ANS:

Forgiveness and gratitude research has expanded rapidly over the last decade. Both concepts link to positive well-being. Forgiveness is an act of giving up resentments towards those we perceive to have harmed us or another and letting go of claims for retribution or restitution. McCullough and his colleagues note that forgiveness helps to restore relationships that are impaired by past aggression or conflict. Rather than engaging in an endless cycle of revenge and counter-revenge for perceived wrongs, forgiveness represents a prosocial tool for relationship restoration.

One study found that when people experienced normal fluctuations in forgiveness levels, elevated forgiveness was later followed by higher levels of psychological well-being in the form of greater positive affect and satisfaction with life and less negative affect and physical health symptoms. These findings suggest that elevated forgiveness may lead to increases in well-being. They also found evidence for a bidirectional relationship suggesting that high well-being may lead to more forgiveness.

PTS: 1

REF: Love and Relationships

9. What creates meaning or purpose in life, in general and for yourself? What difference does having a purpose make?

ANS:

Why do we exist? What is our purpose in life? These age-old questions relate to our search for life's meaning. As you will recall from Chapter 1, Antonovsky's salutogenic model includes a sense of coherence (SOC) concept, and meaningfulness is the most important of SOC's three components (i.e., comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness). Though there are many different definitions of meaning, Steger defines meaning in life as "the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or overarching aim in life." From this definition we can see that meaning in life reflects both a cognitive component (comprehension) and a motivational component (purpose).

Steger states that "across many studies, most people have indicated that relationships with others are the most important source of meaning in their lives." As we can see, themes of comprehension, purpose, meaning, and coherence seem to interweave to form the complex patterns and fabric of our world view that we can then apply not only to ourselves, but to others in our lives, and to our relationships. From this world view we gain a big picture perspective that promotes a better understanding of our place in the world and what we are meant to do with our lives. There is also growing evidence that engaging in religious/spiritual organizational activity confers positive effects on both health and well-being.

PTS: 1

REF: Meaning and Purposeful Living

10. What is the correlation between religion/spirituality and health and well-being? What are some of the specific impacts of practicing religion or spirituality on health?

ANS:

Spirituality is defined as "a search for the sacred" and religion refers to the practice of spirituality within the context of formal institutions. A person searching for the sacred has a desire for self-transcendence (i.e., going beyond one's normal self) or to form connections with a higher power, a divine being, or ultimate reality. Although the correlations tend to be modest, there is now a large body of research demonstrating that engaging in religious/spiritual endeavors is associated with higher levels of health and well-being. In a review of the well-being research, Diener et al. concluded that subjective well-being is positively associated with how certain one is of one's religious beliefs and one's degree of participation in prayer and other devotional practices. They noted that participation in religion has psychological benefits, such as among other things, providing meaning and social support.

George and his colleagues concluded from their review of the health and religiosity research that the practice of religion (e.g., attendance at religious services) was the strongest predictor of speed of recovery from illness or surgery, and that those who reported greater religiosity had lower rates of illness, and had fewer deaths from heart attacks and cancer, which translated into an overall longer life-span. Researchers found that the benefits could not be explained by “behavioral factors (smoking, drinking, exercising, and socioeconomic status), negative affect, and social support”. The authors suggested that religiosity/spirituality may enhance disease resistance perhaps through reducing sympathetic nervous system responsiveness to stress, but once a disease takes hold, it no longer has a positive effect on preventing early mortality. Though the exact mechanisms for the health benefits has yet to be determined, the boost in well-being could be due to a number of factors including social support, meaning, and religious-oriented coping and practices.

PTS: 1

REF: Meaning and Purposeful Living