The gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, ... their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither wit nor courage; neither our wisdom nor our teaching; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

—Robert F. Kennedy, 1968

The final lines in this 1968 address delivered by Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Kansas point to the contents of this book: the things in life that make it worthwhile. In this regard, however, imagine that someone offered to help you understand human beings but in doing so would teach you only about their weaknesses and pathologies. As far-fetched as this sounds, a similar “What is wrong with people?” question guided the thinking of most applied psychologists (clinical, counseling, school, etc.) during the 20th century. Given the many forms of human fallibility, this question produced an avalanche of insights into the human “dark side.” As the 21st century unfolds, however, we are beginning to ask another question: “What is right about people?” This question is at the heart of the burgeoning initiative in positive psychology, which is the scientific and applied approach to uncovering people’s strengths and promoting their positive functioning. (See the article “Building Human Strength,” in which positive psychology pioneer Martin Seligman gives his views about the need for this new field.)
Before World War II, psychology had three missions: curing mental illness, making the lives of all people more fulfilling, and identifying and nurturing high talent. After the war, two events changed the face of psychology. In 1946, the Veterans Administration was created, and practicing psychologists found they could make a living treating mental illness. In 1947, the National Institute of Mental Health was created, and academic psychologists discovered they could get grants for research on mental illness.

As a result, we have made huge strides in the understanding of and therapy for mental illness. At least 10 disorders, previously intractable, have yielded up their secrets and can now be cured or considerably relieved. Even better, millions of people have had their troubles relieved by psychologists.

Our Neglected Missions

But the downside was that the other two fundamental missions of psychology—making the lives of all people better and nurturing “genius”—were all but forgotten. We became a victimology. Human beings were seen as passive foci: Stimuli came on and elicited “responses,” or external “reinforcements” weakened or strengthened “responses,” or conflicts from childhood pushed the human being around. Viewing the human being as essentially passive, psychologists treated mental illness within a theoretical framework of repairing damaged habits, damaged drives, damaged childhoods, and damaged brains.

Fifty years later, I want to remind our field that it has been sidetracked. Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage, it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken, it is nurturing what is best within ourselves.

Bringing this to the foreground is the work of the Presidential Task Force on Prevention, headed by Suzanne Bennett Johnson and Roger Weissberg. This task force will take on a number of jobs: It will attempt to identify the “Best practices in prevention,” led by Karol Kumpfer, Lizette Peterson, and Peter Muehrer; it will explore “Creating a new profession: training in prevention and health promotion” by setting up conferences on the training of the next generation of prevention psychologists, led by Irwin Sandler, Shana Millstein, Mark Greenberg, and Norman Anderson; it will work with Henry Tomes of APA’s Public Interest Directorate in the ad campaign to prevent violence in children; it will sponsor a special issue on prevention in the 21st century for the American Psychologist, edited by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi; and, led by Camilla Benbow, it will ask what psychology can do to nurture highly talented children.
Building Strength, Resilience, and Health in Young People

But an underlying question remains: How can we prevent problems like depression, substance abuse, schizophrenia, AIDS, or injury in young people who are genetically vulnerable or who live in worlds that nurture these problems? What we have learned is that pathologizing does not move us closer to the prevention of serious disorders. The major strides in prevention have largely come from building a science focused on systematically promoting the competence of individuals.

We have discovered that there is a set of human strengths that are the most likely buffers against mental illness: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty, and perseverance. Much of the task of prevention will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to foster these virtues in young people.

Fifty years of working in a medical model on personal weakness and on the damaged brain has left the mental health professions ill equipped to do effective prevention. We need massive research on human strength and virtue. We need practitioners to recognize that much of the best work they do is amplifying the strengths rather than repairing their patients’ weaknesses. We need psychologists who work with families, schools, religious communities, and corporations to emphasize their primary role of fostering strength.

The major psychological theories have changed to undergird a new science of strength and resilience. Individuals—even children—are now seen as decision makers, with choices, preferences, and the possibility of becoming masterful, efficacious, or, in malignant circumstances, helpless and hopeless. Such science and practice will prevent many of the major emotional disorders. It will also have two side effects. Given all we are learning about the effects of behavior and of mental well-being on the body, it will make our clients physically healthier. It will also re-orient psychology to its two neglected missions, making normal people stronger and more productive as well as making high human potential actual.


Although other subareas of psychology were not focused on human weaknesses, 20th-century applied psychology and psychiatry typically were. For example, consider the statement attributed to Sigmund Freud that the goal of psychology should be “to replace neurotic misery with ordinary unhappiness” (cited in Simonton & Baumeister, 2005, p. 99). Thus, the applied psychology of yesteryear was mostly about mental illness along with understanding and helping the people who were living such tragedies. Positive psychology, on the other hand, offers a balance to this previous weakness approach by suggesting that we also must explore
people's strengths along with their weaknesses. In advocating this focus on strengths, however, in no way do we mean to lessen the importance and pain associated with human suffering.

Positive psychological science and practice are situated fortuitously for the identification and understanding of human strengths and virtues as well as for helping people to live happier and more productive lives. As we enter the 21st century, we are poised to study the whole human picture by exploring psychological assets and debits. We present this book as a guide for this journey and to welcome those of you who are new to this approach.

In this chapter, we begin by orienting you to the potential benefits of focusing on the positive in daily life and in psychological research. In this first section, we show how a positive newspaper story can shine a light on what is right in the world and how this type of storytelling can produce very favorable reactions among readers. In the second section, we discuss the importance of a balanced perspective involving the strengths and weaknesses of people. We encourage readers not to become embroiled in the debate between the strengths and weakness camps about which one best reflects the “truth.” Third, we explore the attention that psychology to date has given to human strengths. In the fourth section, we allow the reader to get a sense of his or her typical emotional reactions, and we discuss how this can color how the world is seen. Also, we share one of our Saturdays as an example of the thoughts and feelings that characterize positive psychology. In the ensuing fifth section, we walk you through the eight major parts of the book and give brief previews of the chapter contents. Finally, we suggest that positive psychology represents a potential “golden era” in 21st-century America.

We would like to make two final points about our approach in writing this volume. First, we believe that the greatest good can come from a positive psychology that is based on the latest and most stringent experimental methods. In short, an enduring positive psychology must be built on scientific principles. Therefore, in each chapter we present what we see as the best available research bases for the various topics that we explore. In using this approach, however, we describe the theory and findings of the various researchers rather than going into depth or great detail about their methods. Our rationale for this “surface over depth” approach stems from the fact that this is an introductory-level book; however, the underlying methods used to derive the various positive psychology findings represent the finest, most sophisticated designs and statistics in the field of psychology.

Second, although we do not cover in a separate chapter the physiology and neurobiology (and occasionally, the evolutionary) underpinnings of positive psychology, we do view these perspectives as very important. Accordingly, our approach is to discuss the physiology, neurobiology, and evolutionary factors in the context of the particular topics covered in each chapter. For example, in the chapter on self-efficacy, optimism, and hope we discuss the underlying neurobiological forces. Likewise, in the chapter...
on gratitude we explore the underlying heart and brain wave patterns. Moreover, in discussing forgiveness we touch upon the evolutionary advantages of this response.

**Going From the Negative to the Positive**

Suppose you were a newspaper reporter and your assignment was to describe the thoughts and actions of people who are stranded one Friday evening at a large airport because of bad weather. The typical content of the newspaper story about such a situation probably would be very negative and filled with actions that portray people in a very unfavorable light. Such stories are of the same ilk as the negative emphases displayed by many 20th-century psychologists toward human beings. But, as we shall see, not all stories are negative about people.

**A POSITIVE NEWSPAPER STORY**

Juxtapose such negative newspaper stories with the following tale reported by the senior author (Snyder, 2004d, p. D4) in a local newspaper. The scene is the Philadelphia International Airport on a Friday evening as flights arrive late or are canceled.

... people who were trying to make the best of difficult situations. For example, when a young Army soldier just back from Iraq noticed that he had lost his girlfriend’s ring, the people working at the airport and all of us in the waiting area immediately began to search for it. In a short period of time, the ring was located, and a cheer went out in the crowd.

Around 7:40 p.m., the announcer told us that there would be yet longer delays on several of the flights. To my amazement and delight, I found that my fellow travelers (and I) just coped. Some broke out supplies of food that they had stashed away in bags, and they offered their treasures to others. Decks of playing cards came out, and various games were started. The airlines people handed out snacks. There were scattered outbreaks of laughter.

As if we were soldiers waiting in the trenches during a lull between battles, someone in the distance began to play a harmonica. Small boys made a baseball diamond, and as their game progressed, no one seemed to mind when one of their home runs would sail by. Although there weren’t enough seats for everyone, people creatively made chairs and couches out of their luggage. The people who had computers took them out and played video games with each other. One guy even turned his computer screen into a drive-in-movie-like setup on which several people watched *The Matrix*. I used my computer to write this column.
I once heard it said that grace is doing the average thing when everyone should be going crazy. When hollering and screaming, becoming angry and upset, and generally “losing it” seem to loom just over the horizon, it is wonderful instead to see the warming grace of people—similar to the rays of the sun on a cold day.

**REACTIONS TO THIS POSITIVE STORY**

After this story appeared, I (CRS) was not prepared for readers’ reactions. Never have I written anything that ignited such an outpouring of heartfelt praise and gratitude. In the first week alone after this editorial appeared, I was swamped with favorable e-mails. Some recounted how it reminded them of times they had witnessed people behaving at their very best. Others wrote about how this story made them feel better for the rest of that day and even for several days afterward. Several people said they wished there were more such news stories in the paper. Not a single person among the responses I received had anything negative to say about this column.

Why would people react so uniformly and warmly to this short story about a Friday night at the Philadelphia airport? In part, people probably want to see and hear more about the good in others. Whether it is through newspaper stories such as this one or through the scientific studies and applications we present in this book, there is a hunger to know more about the good in people. It is as if the collective sentiment were, “Enough of all this negativity about people!” In writing this book on positive psychology, we have experienced the uplifting effects of reviewing the many research and clinical applications that are appearing on the study of human strengths and positive emotions. As you read about the assets of your fellow humans and about the many resources that promote the best in people, see whether you, too, feel good. There are many things for which we can praise people, and we will share many examples.

Positive Psychology Seeks a Balanced, More Complete View of Human Functioning

Seeing only the good in one’s own actions and the bad in those of others is a common human foible. Validating only the positive or negative aspects of the human experience is not productive. It is very tempting to focus on just the good (or the bad) in the world, *but it is not good science*, and we must not make this mistake in advancing positive psychology. Although we do not agree with the tenets of the previous pathology models, it would be inaccurate to describe their proponents as being poor scholars, poor scientists, poor practitioners, or bad people. Instead, this previous paradigm was
advanced by well-meaning, bright people who were responding to the particular circumstances of their times. Likewise, it is not as if these people were wrong in their depictions of people. They developed diagnoses and measurement approaches for schizophrenia, depression, and alcoholism and validated many effective treatments for specific problems such as panic disorder and blood and injury phobia (see Seligman, *What You Can Change and What You Can't*, 1994).

Thus, those operating within the pathology model were quite accurate in their descriptions of some people at some particular times in their lives. Moreover, they were able to help certain people with select problems. Nevertheless, advocates of the pathology approach were incomplete in their portrayals of humankind. Undeniably, the negative is part of humankind, but only a part. Positive psychology offers a look at the other side—that which is good and strong in humankind and in our environs, along with ways to nurture and sustain these assets and resources.

Although we explore the positive, we emphasize that this half is no more the entire story than is the negative side. Future psychologists must develop an inclusive approach that examines both the weaknesses and the strengths of people, as well as the stressors and the resources in the environment. That approach would be the most comprehensive and valid. We have not reached that point, however, because we have yet to develop and explore fully the science and practice of positive psychology. Only when we have done such detective work on the strengths of people and the many resources of positive environments will we truly be able to understand human beings in a balanced fashion. Our task in these pages, therefore, is to share with you what we do know about positive psychology at this relatively early point in its development.

We look forward to that future time in the field of psychology when the positive is as likely as the negative to be used in assessing people and helping them to lead more satisfying existences. That time will probably come during the lifetimes of the readers of this book; some of you may pursue careers in psychology in which you routinely will consider people’s strengths along with their weaknesses. Indeed, we feel strongly that your generation will be the one to implement a psychology that truly balances the tenets of a positive approach with those of the previous pathology orientation. We also hope that today’s parents will use positive psychology techniques to shore up families and bring out the best in their children. Likewise, we envision a time when school-age children and youth are valued as much for their major strengths as for their scores on state tests or college entrance examinations.

We have dedicated this volume to you. Because you may be the stewards of the eventual balanced positive–negative psychology, we warn you about the debate that is already in progress as to the superiority of one approach over the other. In the next section, we attempt to inoculate you against such “us-versus-them” thinking.
VIEWS OF REALITY THAT INCLUDE BOTH THE POSITIVE AND THE NEGATIVE

Reality resides in people's perceptions of events and happenings in their world (Gergen, 1985), and scientific perspectives thereby depend on who defines them. Accordingly, the positive psychology and pathology "camps" may clash over how to build meaningful systems for understanding our world. On this process of reality negotiation (i.e., moving toward agreed-upon worldviews), Maddux, Snyder, and Lopez (2004, p. 326) have written,

The meanings of these and other concepts are not revealed by the methods of science but are negotiated among the people and institutions of society who have an interest in their definitions. What people often call "facts" are not truths but reflect reality negotiations by those people who have an interest in using "the facts."

So, whether one is of a mind to believe the positive psychology or the pathology perspective, we must be clear that this debate involves social constructions about those facts. Ultimately, the prevailing views are linked to the social values of society's most powerful individuals, groups, and institutions (Becker, 1963). Likewise, because the prevailing views are social constructions that contribute to ongoing sociocultural goals and values, both the positive psychology and the pathology perspectives provide guidelines about how people should live their lives and what makes such lives worth living.

We believe that both the positive psychology view and the more traditional pathology view are useful. Accordingly, it would be a huge mistake to continue the "us-versus-them" debate between these two groups. Professionals in both camps want to understand and help people. To accomplish these ends, the best scientific and practical solution is to embrace both perspectives. Therefore, although we introduce positive psychology tenets, research, and applications in this textbook, we do so in order to add the strengths approach as a complement to insights derived from the previous weakness model. Accordingly, we encourage the readers of this book—those who eventually will become the leaders in the field—to avoid being drawn into the debate aimed at proving either the positive psychology or pathology model.

Where We Are Now and What We Will Ask

Positive psychology presently is in a period of expansion, not so much in terms of the relative percentage of the entire field that it represents but rather in terms of the influence of these ideas in gaining the attention of
the psychology community in particular and society in general. A notable accomplishment of the positive psychology movement in its first decade has been its success in increasing the amount of attention given to its theories and research findings.

University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin Seligman should be singled out for having ignited the recent explosion of interest in positive psychology, as well as for having provided the label positive psychology. (Abraham Maslow actually coined the term positive psychology when he used it as a chapter title in his 1954 book, Motivation and Personality.) Having grown tired of the fact that psychology was not yielding enough “knowledge of what makes life worth living” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5; note the similarity in this sentiment to Robert Kennedy’s lament about the gross national product in this chapter’s opening quotation), Seligman searched for a provocative theme when he became president of the American Psychological Association in 1998. It was during his presidency that Seligman used his bully pulpit to bring attention to the topic of positive psychology. Since that time, Seligman has worked tirelessly to initiate conferences and grant programs for research and applications of positive psychological research. Throughout his leadership of the developing positive psychology movement, Seligman has reminded psychologists that the backbone of the initiative should be good science. Without question, therefore, we owe a debt of gratitude for Martin Seligman’s continued efforts to see that positive psychology prospers.

At times, we will make mistakes in our search for human strengths. On balance, however, we firmly believe that our hunt for strengths will result in some marvelous insights about humankind. In judging the success of positive psychology, we hold that it must be subjected to the very highest standards of logic and science. Likewise, positive psychology must undergo the analyses of skeptical yet open minds. We leave this latter important role to you.

What’s Your Face? A Positive Psychology Passport Picture

As we begin this journey into positive psychology, we ask you to take your “passport picture.” This will serve as your identification picture as you move through the various lands of positive psychology. Close your eyes and relax for a few seconds. Then, think about the face that most people see as you go about your daily activities. Once you have that face in your mind, open your eyes and look at the row of simple faces in Figure 1.1. Go ahead and circle the one face that best fits you among these possibilities. Remember, this is not the face that you want others to see but the face that they really do see.

At various points in this book, we talk about how people react to others. The human face often is what others look at in forming an impression.
Indeed, the face is related to the root term for the subfield of psychology called \textit{personality}. In early tragedies and comedies, the actors (all of whom were males) held up masks to signify the roles that they were playing. The word for such a mask was \textit{persona}. Thus, our “masks” are what others see. The actor Jack Nicholson is known for his smile, which is his enduring means of displaying his happy-go-lucky, fun-loving approach to his life.

Having decided which face best fits you, we would hasten to add that how you are feeling will be influenced by the things that happened to you this month, this week, today, or perhaps just five minutes ago. Thus, we typically grin when we have succeeded in the pursuit of an important goal. Consider here the sheer glee experienced by cyclist Lance Armstrong as he finally realized that he was going to win his sixth straight Tour de France in the 2004 race. (Of course, a year later, in his final ride before retiring from cycling, Armstrong won his seventh Tour de France).

In the article “You Smile, I Smile” (2002), writer Roger Martin shares a personal incident in which he was profoundly influenced by the smile of a person he encountered. Have you ever suddenly come upon another person who smiled widely at you, and immediately responded with an equally big grin? We are social creatures, and, as we explore in Chapter 7, our emotions are part of our happiness and satisfaction in life. In the Personal Mini-Experiments on page 132, we present different activities you can try in order to improve your emotional state.

\textbf{A RECENT SATURDAY: AN EXAMPLE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY}

Let me (CRS) use today as an example of where to find positive psychology as well as where not to find it. This being a Saturday, I turn on the radio. My tastes in radio listening have changed recently. I used to listen to country music, in which I heard tales of how someone had lost his lover, his job, his dog, or his pickup truck. The melodies were remarkably similar, as were the lyrics of woe. It may well be that these repeatedly negative lyrics led me to a radio station that plays the classics—not the rock-and-roll classics of the 1960s and 1970s but works by Beethoven, Handel, Chopin, and others. Their melodies seem strong and uplifting.
You Smile, I Smile

ROGER MARTIN

I pass a stranger on the steps of the library. Her smile is bright, her greeting warm. She looks me firmly in the eyes, and her bravery is irresistible. I involuntarily smile back and say hello.

I swing around to watch her walk away.

What was that? I think.

Three days later, same thing happens.

I had this fantasy of people sitting in a living room, one of them saying, “This week, let’s smile at strangers and see what happens. Show them that love isn’t about receiving—it’s about sending. Then we’ll get together and talk about what happened.”

Just like you, everywhere I go, I see the glazed eyes and the faces behind barricades. In fact, mine’s often one of them. As I look around, I sense the rage and sadness and loss of meaning and preoccupation that have sunk so deep into our bones that we hardly know they’re there.

But the two strangers made me bold, so I took to having moments with those I don’t know. I started making stray remarks in the grocery line to the person next to me, hoping my volley [would] be returned. I rewrote the lines of the quick shop drama of Distracted Customer Meets Bored Clerk. . . . The strangers had given a gift without expecting a return—and in that moment, it no longer seemed strange.


What You Want to Experience

In this chapter, we provide numerous examples of how a focus on the positive can bring more good feelings and people into your daily life. Reorienting the focus of our thinking can help to determine whether we spend our days in pursuit of meaningful experiences or remain fearful of the bad that might happen. Too often, people act as if their thoughts were out of their control when, in fact, we are the authors of daily scripts that largely determine our daily actions. With the goal of focusing your thoughts on the positive, please go through each of these steps and follow the instructions. It is important to take your time.

• Identify three good things you would like to happen tomorrow.
• Think of one thing that you do not want to happen in the upcoming days.
• Imagine what you want not to happen as a circle that is getting smaller and smaller.

(Continued)
• Of the three good things you want to happen tomorrow, imagine the least important one getting smaller and smaller.
• Imagine the small circle of what you want not to happen getting so small it is hard to see.
• Let go of what you want not to happen. Say goodbye to it.
• Of the two good things you want to happen tomorrow, imagine the least important one getting smaller and smaller.
• Focus your mind on the one good thing that remains as the most important for tomorrow.
• See this good thing happening in your mind’s eye.
• Practice having this good thing happen in your mind.
• When you awaken tomorrow, focus on the good thing happening.
• Repeat to yourself during the day, “I make this positive possible.”
• Repeat the phrase “I choose how to focus my thoughts.”

The point of this exercise is to teach people that they have more control of their mental agendas than they often realize. Furthermore, by attending to what people want to happen, they are more likely to own their daily activities rather than to be reactive. In doing this exercise, feel free to tinker with the exact words that you may say to yourself, but try to retain the empowering message in the words we have selected. In our experiences in working with people, spending mental energies on avoiding certain unwanted outcomes tends to make people reactive to other people and events. On the other hand, thinking of what we want to happen helps to keep the negative away.

For lunch, I splurge and go to Baskin-Robbins for a scoop of chocolate almond on the bottom and a scoop of chocolate chip on the top. Afterward, I mow our lawn and, in a moment of altruism, decide also to mow my neighbor’s lawn. Halfway through her lawn, my neighbor bolts out and tells me that “there is no need to do that!” I know this, of course, and this probably is why it is so gratifying. I find helping others to be perhaps the most pleasurable activity in my life. (We will come back to this issue later.)

By now, it is 3:00 p.m., and I am back in the house, working on this chapter. I hear the front doorbell ring. I open it, and there is my 9-month-old grandson, Trenton. His dad asks if I would look after him for the rest of the day (including a sleepover), and I immediately agree. I didn’t used to be this gung-ho about being around little children, but a big change has happened to me as I have lived through my fifties. I am fascinated by babies and toddlers and enjoy playing with them, watching them, feeding them, and so on. For much of that afternoon, Trenton and I sit on the front lawn watching birds, squirrels, rabbits, and anything that moves—especially the people who smile as they seem to rush past on the front sidewalk. I wonder where they are going in such a big hurry.
For me, great pleasure comes from watching my grandson take in these sights for the first time—everything seems so fresh to him, and this rubs off on me. I feed him, and I am not bothered by the fact that he gets almost as much on me and the surrounding area as he gets in his mouth. I then put him in the stroller, and we take a long walk. He loves being outside, and I love being with him.

By the time we get back, my wife is home from work, and I am disappointed that she wants to spend time with the baby. So, I put up an old baby swing that we have been given, with my wife hollering at me because I am not using a ladder and instead am standing precariously on a small wooden table. The swing is now affixed to a branch of a redbud tree. After dinner, we decide to put Trenton in the baby seat, and he immediately goes all the way to the ground because he is so heavy. Rebecca and I are now laughing at my not-so-excellent planning.

All too soon, it is time for the bedtime ritual, and for any reader who has (or has had) children this probably is a very familiar process. It involves a tug of wills in which, in this case, the tired and exhausted grandparents and grandson all eventually collapse into sleep. (By the time we are asleep, my wife and I look like the antithesis of the pictures in the romantic and sexy Fredericks of Hollywood catalogues. Instead, our sleep attire typically involves ancient sweatpants, stains from dinner or the “project du jour,” dried grandchild spit-up, or worse. . . . Our outfits could be labeled “Fredericks of Kansas.”)

This brief chronicle of a Saturday illustrates several things about positive psychology. By far the most positive aspect of my day involves doing things for or with other people. Mowing the neighbor’s lawn and taking care of my grandson are very gratifying. These activities give you a sense of how and where positive psychology “works” for me. Much of the pleasure that flowed from this summer Saturday stemmed from my ability to keep the focus of my activities on those things that produce pleasure for me. Indeed, the positive is all around most of us. Also notice that not all of these activities result from positive hedonistic actions; instead, by far the most gratifying actions pertain to helping others. Giving is receiving. This is but one of the surprising paradoxes about positive psychology that we will unravel for you in this book.

A Guide to This Book

This book was written with you in mind. Throughout our collaboration, we asked each other, “Will this chapter bring positive psychology to life for the students?” These discussions helped us realize that the book needed to be an excellent summary of positive psychological science and practice and that it had to hook you into applying positive psychology principles in your daily lives. With that goal in mind, we have attempted to distill the
most rigorous positive psychology studies and the most effective practice strategies, and we have constructed dozens of mini-experiments and personal strategies that promote your engagement with the positives in people and the world. Our goal is that, by the time you have finished reading this book, you will be more knowledgeable about psychology and will have become more skilled at capitalizing on your human strengths and generating positive emotions.

We have divided this book into eight parts. In Part I, “Looking at Psychology from a Positive Perspective,” there are four chapters. Chapter 1, which you are about to complete, is introductory. Our purpose has been to give you a sense of the excitement we feel about positive psychology and to share some of the core issues driving the development of this new field. Chapters 2 and 3 are titled “Western Perspectives on Positive Psychology” and “Eastern Perspectives on Positive Psychology,” respectively. In them, you will see that, although there are obvious positive psychology ties to Western cultures, there also are important themes from Eastern cultures. Chapter 4, “Classifications and Measures of Human Strengths and Positive Outcomes,” will give you a sense of how psychologists apply labels to the various types of human assets. For readers who are familiar with the more traditional pathology model, this will provide a counterpoint classification that is built on human strengths.

In Part II, “Positive Psychology in Context,” we have dedicated two chapters to the factors associated with living well. In Chapter 5, “Developing Strengths and Living Well in a Cultural Context,” we examine how the surrounding societal and environmental forces may contribute to a sense of well-being. Moreover, in Chapter 6, “Living Well at Every Stage of Life,” we show how childhood activities can help shape a person to become adaptive in his or her later years.


In Part IV, “Positive Cognitive States and Processes,” we include three chapters. Chapter 9, “Seeing Our Futures Through Self-Efficacy, Optimism, and Hope,” covers the three most-researched motives for facing the future: self-efficacy, optimism, and hope. In Chapter 10, “Wisdom and Courage: Two Universal Virtues,” we examine positive psychology topics involving the assets people bring to circumstances that stretch their skills and capacities. Likewise, in Chapter 11, “Mindfulness, Flow, and Spirituality: In Search of Optimal Experiences,” we discuss how people become aware of the ongoing process of thinking and feeling, along with humans’ needs to believe in forces that are bigger and more powerful than they.
In Part V, “Prosocial Behavior,” we describe the general positive linkages that human beings have with other people. In Chapter 12, “Empathy and Egotism: Portals to Altruism, Gratitude, and Forgiveness,” we show how kindness-related processes operate to the benefit of people. And in Chapter 13, “Attachment, Love, and Flourishing Relationships,” we review the importance of close human bonds for a variety of positive outcomes.

Part VI, “Understanding and Changing Human Behavior,” describes how to prevent negative things from happening as well as how to make positive things happen. Chapter 14, “Balanced Conceptualizations of Mental Health and Behavior,” and Chapter 15, “Interceding to Prevent the Bad and Enhance the Good,” will help you to see how people can improve their life circumstances.

Part VII, “Positive Environments,” looks at specific environments. In Chapter 16, “Positive Schooling,” we describe recent findings related to positive learning outcomes for students. In Chapter 17, “Good Work: The Psychology of Gainful Employment,” we discuss the components of jobs that are both productive and satisfying. And in Chapter 18, “The Me/We Balance: Building Better Communities,” we suggest that the most productive and satisfying environments are those in which the inhabitants can manifest some sense of specialness and some sense of similarity relative to other people.

The book closes with Part VIII, “A Positive Look at the Future of Psychology.” This section comprises Chapter 19, “Going Positive,” in which we speculate about the advances in the field of positive psychology in the next decade. Moreover, we invite experts in the field to give their projections about the crucial issues for the field of positive psychology in the 21st century.

PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

In most of the chapters (including this one), we encourage you to put the ideas of leading positive psychologists to the test. In Personal Mini-Experiments, we ask you to bring positive psychology into your life by conducting the kind of experiments that positive psychology researchers might conduct in a lab or the field and that positive psychology practitioners might assign to their clients for homework. Some of these experiments take less than 30 minutes to complete, whereas some will take more than a week.

LIFE ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES

Finding the positive in daily life does not necessarily require a full-fledged experiment. In fact, we believe that a mindful approach to everyday living will reveal the power of positive emotions and human strengths. Therefore, for the chapters that focus specifically on positive emotions, human strengths, and healthy processes, we devised Life Enhancement Strategies, which can be implemented in a matter of minutes. We decided to develop
these strategies to help you attain life’s three most important outcomes: connecting with others, pursuing meaning, and experiencing some degree of pleasure or satisfaction. Specifically, love, work, and play have been referred to as the three great realms of life (Seligman, 1998e). Freud defined normalcy as the capacity to love, work, and play, and psychological researchers have referred to this capacity as “mental health” (Cederblad, Dahlin, Hagnell, & Hansson, 1995). Developmental researchers have described love, work, and play as normal tasks associated with human growth (Icard, 1996) and as keys to successful aging (Vaillant, 1994). Professionals interested in psychotherapy consider the ability to love, work, and play to be an aspect of the change process (Prigatano, 1992), whereas others view it as one of the primary goals of counseling (Christensen & Rosenberg, 1991). Although full engagement in pursuits of love, work, and play will not guarantee a good life, we believe it is necessary for good living. With this belief in mind, we encourage you to participate in numerous Life Enhancement Strategies that will enhance your ability to love, work, and play.

This concludes our brief rundown of where we plan to go in the ensuing chapters and of our many hopes for you. If you become fully engaged with the material and the exercises in this book, you will gain knowledge and skills that may help you lead a better life.

Rarely does a student have the opportunity to witness the construction of a new field from the ground up. If we have done our jobs properly, you will sense the excitement that comes from being present at the outset.

**The Big Picture**

Despite the horror and uncertainty of terrorism and natural disasters, the United States of the 21st century is prosperous, stable, and poised for peace. At such a positive point in its evolution, a culture can focus on such issues as virtues, creativity, and hope. Three earlier cultures faced similar positive eras. In the 5th century BC, Athens used its resources to explore human virtues—good character and actions. Democracy was formed during this period. In 15th-century Florence, riches and talents were spent to advance beauty. And Victorian England used its assets to pursue the human virtues of duty, honor, and discipline.

Like the gifts emanating from these three previous eras, perhaps the contribution of 21st-century America lies in adopting and exploring the tenets of positive psychology—the study and application of that which is good in people (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Certainly, never in our careers have we witnessed such a potentially important new development in the field of psychology. But we are getting ahead of ourselves, because the real test will come when new students are drawn to this area. For now, we welcome you to positive psychology.
1. **Wisdom & Knowledge**—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.

*Creativity:* Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
- *Shine* (1996)

*Curiosity:* Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience

*Open-Mindedness:* Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
- *No Man’s Land* (2001, Bosnian)

*Love of Learning:* Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
- *Billy Elliott* (2000)
- *A Beautiful Mind* (2001)

*Perspective (Wisdom):* Being able to provide wise counsel to others
- *The Devil’s Advocate* (1997)

2. **Courage**—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal

*Bravery:* Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
- *Life as a House* (2001)

*Persistence (Perseverance):* Finishing what one starts, persisting in a course of action despite obstacles

*Integrity (Authenticity, Honesty):* Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way

---

**Appendix Note:** These movies and classification are taken from Rashid (2006), with one alteration: “Vitality” has been moved to the “Transcendence” category. Reprinted with permission of Tayyab Rashid.
3. **Humanity**—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others

*Love:* Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people

- *Doctor Zhivago* (1965)
- *Sophie’s Choice* (1982)
- *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995)
- *Iris* (2001)
- *My Fair Lady* (1964)

*Kindness (Generosity, Nurturance, Care, Compassion, Altruistic Love):* Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them

- *As Good as It Gets* (1997)
- *Promise* (1986)

*Social Intelligence (Emotional Intelligence, Personal Intelligence):* Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

- *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989)
- *K-Pax* (2001)

4. **Justice**—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

*Citizenship (Social Responsibility, Loyalty, Teamwork):* Working well as member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share.

- *L.A. Confidential* (1997)
- *Finding Forrester* (2001)
- *Awakenings* (1990)

*Fairness:* Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance


*Leadership:* Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

- *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)
- *Dances With Wolves* (1990)
5. **Temperance**—Strengths that protect against excess

*Forgiveness and Mercy*: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful

- *Pay It Forward* (2000)
- *Terms of Endearment* (1983)
- *Dead Man Walking* (1995)
- *Ordinary People* (1980)

*Humility/Modesty*: Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; not regarding oneself as more special than one is

- *Little Buddha* (1994)

*Prudence*: Being careful about one’s choices; *not* taking undue risks; *not* saying or doing things that might later be regretted

- *Sense and Sensibility* (1995)

*Self-Regulation (Self-Control)*: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions

- *Forrest Gump* (1994)

6. **Transcendence**—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

*Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (Awe, Wonder, Elevation)*: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to arts to mathematics to science to everyday experience

- *Out of Africa* (1985)
- *Colors of Paradise* (2000, Iranian)

*Gratitude*: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks

- *Sunshine* (2000)
- *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991)

*Hope (Optimism, Future-Mindedness, Future Orientation)*: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about

- *Gone With the Wind* (1939)
- *Good Will Hunting* (1997)

*Humor (Playfulness)*: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people, seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes

Spirituality (Religiousness, Faith, Purpose): Knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

Contact (1997)
Apostle (1997)
Priest (1994, British)

Vitality (Zest, Enthusiasm, Energy): Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly, living life as an adventure, feeling alive and activated

Cinema Paradiso (1988, Italian)
My Left Foot (1993)
One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (1975)

Key Terms

Face: In its most concrete sense, the human features on the front of the head. More generally, and borrowing from sociologist Irving Goffman, the impression that one makes in public display.

Mental illness: Within the pathology psychological approach, refers to a variety of problems that people may have. A catch-all term for someone having severe psychological problems, as in “he is suffering from mental illness.”

Positive psychology: The science and applications related to the study of psychological strengths and positive emotions.

Reality negotiation: The ongoing processes by which people arrive at agreed-upon worldviews or definitions.

Social construction: The perspective or definition that is agreed upon by many people to constitute reality (rather than some objectively defined “truth” that resides in objects, situation, and people).
Hope has been a powerful underlying force in Western civilization. Indeed, looking back through the recorded history of Western civilization, hope—the agentic, goal-focused thinking that gets you from here to there—has been so interwoven into the fabric of our civilization’s eras and events that it can be hard to detect, like yeast in bread. In this regard, the belief in a positive future is reflected in many of our everyday ideas and words. For example, words such as plan and trust carry assumptions about the length of the timeline that stretches ahead of us and the probabilities that our actions will have positive effects on these future events.

This chapter looks backward to foundational ideas and exemplary events that have shaped modern hope and the 21st century. We are purposefully linear in our historical accounting, starting with the Greek myth of Pandora’s box and ending with a modern tale of triumph. But first, we explore how and why a robust force such as hope has been absent from parts of the tale of Western civilization.

Hope: Ubiquitous Yet Hidden

Although hope has remarkable and pervasive power, we are often unaware of its presence. Perhaps this is because hope is embedded in many related
ideas. On this point, hope often is not identified by name in sources that are essentially all about it (e.g., for a thorough review of how hope is seldom discussed in philosophy, see Ernst Bloch’s book *The Principle of Hope* [1959; trans. 1986]). In fact, if we examine the tables of contents or indexes of prominent Western writings, the word *hope* cannot be found. For example, the book *Key Ideas in Human Thought* (McLeish, 1993), contains not one index listing for hope. Imagine the irony of omitting the term *hope* from a supposedly complete archiving of human ideas! According to Bloch, hope has been “as unexplored as the Antarctic” (quoted in Schumacher, 2003, p. 2).

**Hope as Part of Greek Mythology**

In all of human history, there has been a need to believe that bad could be transformed into good, that ugly could become beautiful, and that problems could be solved. But civilizations have differed in the degree to which they have viewed such changes as possible. For example, consider the classic Greek myth of Pandora’s box, a story about the origin of hope. There are two versions of this tale.

In one version, Zeus created Pandora, the first woman, in order to exact revenge against Prometheus (and against humans in general) because he had stolen fire from the gods. Pandora was endowed with amazing beauty and grace but also with the tendency to lie and deceive. Zeus sent Pandora with her dowry chest to Epimetheus, who married her. In using what may be one of the earliest examples of reverse psychology, Zeus instructed Pandora not to open her dowry chest upon arriving on Earth. Of course, she ignored Zeus’s order and opened the chest. Out spewed all manner of troubles into the world, except hope, which remained in the chest—not to help humankind but to taunt it with the message that hope does not really exist. In this version, therefore, hope was but a cruel hoax.

A second version of this tale holds that all earthly misfortunes were caused by Pandora’s curiosity rather than by any inherent evil nature. The gods tested her with instructions not to open the dowry chest. She was sent to Epimetheus, who accepted her despite the warning of his brother, Prometheus, about gifts from Zeus. When Pandora opened the dowry chest, hope was not a hoax but a blessing and a source of comfort for misfortunes (Hamilton, 1969). And in this positive version of the story, hope was to serve as an antidote to the evils (e.g., gout, rheumatism, and colic for the body, and envy, spite, and revenge for the mind) that escaped when the chest was opened. Whether hope was a hoax or an antidote, these two versions of this story reveal the tremendous ambivalence of the Greeks toward hope.
Religious Hope in Western Civilization

The history of Western civilization parallels the histories of Judaism and Christianity. This is why the phrase Judeo-Christian heritage often is linked to Western civilization. It is no accident that the timeline of Western civilization (see Figures 2.1 through 2.4) overlays the Judeo-Christian heritage, including the period before Christ (BC) and the period after the birth of Christ (AD). These timelines highlight significant happenings in the history of religion: the opening of Notre Dame Cathedral, the building of the west façade of Chartres Cathedral, and the publishing of St. Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica*. In this respect, the presence of hope in the early periods of Western civilization is illustrated clearly in such biblical passages as “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done” (Matthew 6:10) and “. . . there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8:18, 20, 21). These passages reflect a vision of hope for God’s reign on Earth as well as the hope for God’s will to be done on Earth as it is in heaven. Or consider Corinthians I, 15:19, in which St. Paul writes about faith in Christ for this life on Earth and beyond: “If our one hope in Christ is for this life only, we are all men most to be pitied.” In addition, Christianity’s doctrines hold that God’s kingdom on Earth is not only awaited—it is anticipated. Thus, it is logical that the belief in hope would influence secular intellectual assumptions and ideas.

As shown by these examples of hope in religion, impressive human endeavors can result from a hopeful disposition. In each case, an active verb is connected to a noun that refers to an outcome—an achievement. Note the words opening, building, and publishing. It should be noted as well that these verbs were followed by nouns denoting significant achievements in our civilization, such as the cathedrals at Chartres and Notre Dame.

These examples also are important because they are achievements along a road out of a period that is sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages. It is hard for us to appreciate the willpower and efforts of our ancestors, who strove to achieve significant milestones in a period known for the absence of such. Indeed, although these times were not truly dark, the Middle Ages (500–1450), before the Renaissance, certainly were enveloped in the shadows of oppression and ignorance; inertia and intellectual lassitude were the norms. As Davies (1996) writes,

There is an air of immobility about many descriptions of the medieval world. The impression is created by emphasizing the slow pace of technological change, the closed character of feudal society, and the fixed, theocratic perceptions of human life. The prime symbols of the period are the armoured knight on his lumbering steed; the serfs tied to the land.
of their lord's demesne [domain or property]; and cloistered monks and nuns at prayer. They are made to represent physical immobility, social immobility, intellectual immobility. (p. 291)

This intellectual and social immobility reflected a paralysis of curiosity and initiative. From the years of the Middle Ages (500–1500), such paralysis precluded the purposeful, sustained planning and action required by a hopeful, advancing society. The fires of advancement were reduced to embers during this dark millennium and kept glowing only by a few institutions such as the monasteries and their schools.

Eventually, as the Dark Ages were ended by of the brightness of the Renaissance and its economic growth and prosperity, hope was seen as more relevant to present life on Earth than to the afterlife (i.e., a better life on Earth became possible, even probable). Therefore, the religious hope that focused on a distant future, after life on Earth, became somewhat less important as the Renaissance emerged. Indeed, the focus during the Renaissance was on the contemporary anticipation of better days in the here and now. Related to this new focus, the philosopher Immanuel Kant decided that the religious nature of hope precluded its inclusion in discussions of how to bring about changes on Earth. With this shift, the religious conception of hope faded as the primary motivation for action.

Strengthening and hastening this change was another aspect of religious hope, identified by what Farley (2003) called “wishful passivity,” a perspective that still influences religious hope today. Farley notes, “Religious hope . . . gives a false sense that all is really well and ‘all shall be well.’ Belief in an ultimate future, in this view, short-circuits commitment to a proximate future” (p. 25). In other words, the religious hope that is oriented to the afterlife can become an unconscious barrier to taking action in this life. The problem with this kind of religious hope as described by Farley is that it may give a sense of delayed comfort about future conditions. Unfortunately, in focusing on a desired future state instead of upon what must happen to reach that state, the person’s attentions and efforts are drawn away from what is needed in the here and now.

Farley’s (2003) comment is similar to an important point made by Eric Fromm in his book, The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology (1974). Fromm states that some definitions of hope often are “misunderstood and confused with attitudes that have nothing to do with Hope and in fact are the very opposite” (p. 6). Fromm goes on to point out that hope is not the same as desires and wishes (i.e., products of envisioning a possibility for change without having a plan or requisite energy for producing such change). Unlike hope, these latter motives have passive qualities in which there is little or no effort made to realize the desired objective. An extreme level of this passivity yields what Fromm called nihilism (p. 8).
Revision of the History of Hope in Western Civilization

THE PRE-RENAISSANCE PERIOD

The positive beliefs and hope of Western civilization solidified after the Renaissance. It should be noted, however, that hope was not totally absent from earlier epochs. Consider, for example, the following brief listing of illustrative hope-related human activities that took place before the Renaissance:

- The building of the museum and library at Alexandria (established 307 BC)
- The opening of the first English school at Canterbury (598 AD)
- Publication of the Exeter Book collection of English poetry (970 AD)
- The development of systematic musical notation (990 AD)
- Revival of the artistic traditions in Italy (1000)
- The attempt to fly or float in the air (1000)
- Groundbreaking for York Cathedral in England (1070)
- The founding of Bologna University in Italy (1119)
- The building of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London (1123)
- Completion of the western façade of Chartres Cathedral in France (1150)
- The popularizing of chess in England (1151)
- The founding of Oxford University (1167) and Cambridge University (1200) in England
- The opening of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris (1235)
- The printing of Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (1273)
- Development of the Italian city of Florence into the leading commercial and cultural city of Europe (1282)

Consider these events on the timeline in Figure 2.1. They reflect people having the spirit and making the effort needed to reach goals. These historical markers required goal-directed actions instead of mere waiting for better times or good things to happen. With the advent of the Renaissance, these active and hopeful thoughts began to be coupled with goal-directed actions. We turn to the Renaissance and the crucial events in the next section.
THE RENAISSANCE

Beginning in Italy around 1450 and extending to approximately 1600, the Renaissance produced changes in the customs and institutions that had dominated Europe for the previous millennium. Feudalism, the dominance of the Catholic Church, and rural, isolated living all gave way to an emerging nationalism, trade and commerce, the growth of cities, and the expansion of arts and scholarship. Hope came alive during this period of rebirth. This historical period now is viewed more as an evolution than a revolution, and it was a turning point that facilitated the emergence of active hope.

Given that, in the Renaissance, part of the emphasis was on the past, how could it be seen as the beginning of “modern” hope? The answer to this question is that, although the Renaissance did analyze antiquity, much of the analysis was done to move forward and advance understanding. For example, Roman law emerged as a crucial area for legal studies because Renaissance lawyers wanted to examine the great codes of Roman law, the Digest and the Codex. Thus, the Renaissance perspective was that learning from the past was necessary to meet the demands of the complex, materialistic society that was emerging from the late Middle Ages. Similarly,
advances in other areas of public life and business were built on accurate understandings of previous literature, philosophy, and art. Although studies of these fields became goals in themselves, they were undertaken primarily to accomplish more worldly objectives, such as facilitation of trade and mercantilist economics. Therefore, Renaissance society began to see worldly fulfillment as more important than preparation for death or fulfillment after death.

During this period, people also began to view themselves as individuals rather than as representatives of a class. Moreover, this emerging interest in the merits of personal achievement led to a focus on doing things related to this life. Whereas medieval (500–1500 AD) men and women searched their souls, Renaissance citizens looked outward and forward to achieve the here-and-now goals that were based on their abilities and personal interests. See Figure 2.2 for important events and accomplishments of the Renaissance.

**THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

The period following the Renaissance, from approximately 1700 to the late 1700s, is known as the Age of Enlightenment. This era marked the
emergence from an immaturity characterized by unwillingness to use one’s own knowledge and intelligence. On this point, Immanuel Kant (1784) wrote, “Sapere aude! ‘Have courage to use your own reason!’—that is the motto of enlightenment” (cited in Gay, 1969, p. 11). In effect, the Enlightenment represented a declaration of independence from the long-established acceptance of authority in religion and politics that dated back to biblical times.

In a cultural atmosphere conducive to exploration and change, the Enlightenment was rooted in the Renaissance revival of interest in Greek and Latin books and ideas, along with an interest in this world rather than the next. As the religious authority of the Church weakened, commercial, political, and scientific influences began to play increasingly strong roles in the spiritual, physical, and intellectual lives of people.

Scientific is a key word in characterizing the Enlightenment. Isaac Newton’s 1687 publication of *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* has been used by some to mark the start of the Enlightenment and the rise of the scientific method. Although the roots of his work extended back to the biblical era, Newton’s ideas served other purposes to help in understanding and revering God.

The Scientific Revolution was an integral part of the Enlightenment, and it began when the political atmosphere became more favorable to a climate of discovery as manifested in the works of such scholars as Kepler, Galileo, Newton, and Descartes. Gay (1966) describes this group of thinkers as a kind of “coalition” of scientists and philosophers who viewed research efforts as “steps” in a cumulative process rather than mere accidental and isolated discoveries.

The Enlightenment reflected the nature of hope because of its emphases on rational agencies and rational abilities. These qualities were interwoven in the dominant belief of the age, that reason brought to life with the scientific method led to the achievements in science and philosophy. These latter perspectives are in direct contrast to the prevalence of ignorance, superstition, and the acceptance of authority that characterized the Middle Ages. Described in terms of the use of mathematics as a means of discovery and progress, this process emphasized the rational will. It should come as no surprise, then, that education, free speech, and the acceptance of new ideas burgeoned during the Enlightenment. Indeed, the consequences of such enlightened thinking were long lasting and reflective of the power of hope. On this last point, consider education and how it decreases the probability that actions will be impulsive; that is to say, education should promote thoughtful analyses and plans to reach desired goals. Furthermore, human dignity and worth were recognized during the Enlightenment. Taken together, the idea that knowledge and planning could produce perceived empowerment led Francis Bacon to the goal of improving the human condition. It is no wonder, therefore, that Condorcet noted in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795) that the Enlightenment assured the present and future progress of human beings.
The results of hopeful beliefs can be seen in the impact of these significant events of the Enlightenment:

The invention of the flying shuttle (1773), which initiated modern weaving
The drafting of the Declaration of Independence (1776)
The ridiculing of fashionable society by poet Alexander Pope in the *Rape of the Lock* (1714)
The opening of the British Museum (1759)
Publication of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781)
The writing of Mozart’s last three symphonies (1788)
Publication of Edmund Burke’s *Reflection on the Revolution in France* (1790)

Other events and milestones are noted in Figure 2.3.

**THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

Beginning approximately in the late 1700s and continuing to the end of the 1800s was the period known as **Industrial Revolution** (or the Age of
Industrialization). The movement of production from homes and small workshops to large factories vastly increased material benefits for individual citizens (see Figure 2.4). Although some results of this age were dysfunctional and counterproductive, very real and important contributions took place. Brogan (1960) describes these advances:

As a result of advances made in the 19th and early 20th centuries, people did live longer, fewer children died as infants, and many were better fed, better housed and better educated. The physical unity of the world was made possible by the steamboat, the locomotive, the automobile, and the airplane. The unity of science was exemplified by the adaptation, within a few years of its discovery, of Louis Pasteur’s work with bacteria in Paris to Joseph Lister’s practice of antiseptic surgery in Scotland. Areas of the world previously uninhabitable, or habitable only at a very low level of existence, became easier to live in. (in Burchell, 1966, p. 7)

As Bronowski (1973) wrote eloquently in his chapter “The Drive for Power” in *The Ascent of Man*, the Industrial Revolution made the world
“ours.” Indeed, the Industrial Revolution reflected a turning point in the progress of humankind because it provided so many material and personal benefits. Perhaps even more important, the Industrial Revolution created amenities that most citizens could obtain and enjoy. Goods thus become available for the many rather than only for the few. Such benefits included the steam engine and its many applications, iron and steelmaking, and railroads (efficient transportation and communication for all), to name but a few examples that appeared in the 20th century.

Western civilization has been defined by its critical mass of hopeful events and beliefs. Before the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, and even during the Middle Ages, hopeful thinking was a critical part of humankind’s belief system. If some historical eras do not reveal major signs, there nonetheless have been implicit markers of hope. Thus, although the Reformation and the Age of Reason (1600–1700) are not highlighted here, these periods nonetheless saw important advances that contributed to society. Following is a sampling of notable achievements in these periods:

- Francis Bacon’s *The Advancement of Learning* (1604)
- Galileo’s proportional compass (1606)
- The beginning of extensive road building in France (1606)
- Galileo’s astronomical telescope (1608)
- Harvey’s discovery of the circulation of blood (1619)
- Publication of the *Weekly News* in London (1622)
- The opening of the first coffee shop in London (1632)
- The abolition of torture in England (1638)
- The chartering of Harvard College (1650)
- Newton’s experiments with gravitation and his invention of differential calculus (1665)
- Establishment of the Greenwich observatory (1681)
- The opening of the first coffeehouses in Vienna (1683)
- Implementation of streetlights in London (1684)
- The first modern trade fair, in Leiden, Holland (1689)
- Peter the Great’s sending of 50 Russian students to study in England, Holland, and Venice (1698)

Looking back at the events of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, perhaps it is reasonable to consider all eras, starting with the Renaissance and continuing until 1900, as part of a new
period called the Age of Progress. This Age of Progress characterizes Western civilization and reflects the inherent component of hopeful thinking. As Nisbet (1980) writes in his History of the Idea of Progress,

No single idea has been more important than, perhaps as important as, the Idea of Progress in Western Civilization for 3,000 years. Its flaws and corruptions understood, the idea of progress has been overwhelmingly a noble idea in Western history, noble for what it has celebrated in countless philosophical, religious, scientific, and historical works, and most of all for what it has meant to the motivations and aspirations of those who have made up the human substance of Western Civilization. (p. 4)

This faith in the value and promise of our civilization is essential for the concept of hope, and vice versa. Thus, hope is the essence of faith in the value and promise of our Western civilization.

Conclusions

Hope is the belief that life can be better, along with the motivations and efforts to make it so. More than desires, wishes, or daydreams, hope taps thinking that leads to meaningful actions. A wish envisions change but may not lead to action. One may wish to win the lottery, but this does not necessarily lead to important or sustained activities to fulfill this wish. Furthermore, the conditions surrounding the fulfillment of a wish are not promising, because there may be few reasonable or even realistic means for doing so.

It should be noted that Western European civilization does not have a monopoly on the idea of hope. In every civilization and historical period, there have been hopeful beliefs and activities. But hope often does not appear to be as significant a driving belief in all cultural perspectives. For example, in the Native American culture there is less expectation of progress. Rather, if one respects and takes care of the environment, things should be all right but not necessarily great. The Native American belief is that proper traditions and beliefs may not bring prosperity but will help stave off disasters. Here, then, the difference in the two systems may be more one of degree than of kind. For Native Americans, positive actions are not assumed to lead to positive outcomes as much as they are in Western European civilization’s system of beliefs. Accordingly, hope may not be as prominent a motivational force within the Native American tradition as has been the case for other peoples in Western civilization (Pierotti, personal communication, 2005).

The idea of hope has served as an underpinning for thinking in Western civilization. As Bronowski (1973) has noted in regard to the Industrial
Revolution, hope helped to make our world ours. Where hope will take us, in turn, is perhaps the most important question about the unfolding 21st century.

Key Terms

**Age of Enlightenment**: The period from 1700 to the late 1800s. The Enlightenment brought with it the idea that people could use their own reason, knowledge, and intellect instead of relying on superstition or the authority of the Church and government. The Enlightenment included the Scientific Revolution. Hope was reflected in the belief that people had the ability to use their own rationality to improve themselves and their world.

**Hope**: As defined by Snyder, goal-directed thinking in which a person has the perceived capacity to find routes to desired goals (pathway thinking) and the requisite motivations to use those routes (agency thinking). Snyder believes that hope is not genetically based but an entirely learned and deliberate way of thinking. (See Chapter 9.)

**Industrial Revolution**: Part of the Age of Enlightenment; the movement of production from the home and workshop to the factory, which resulted in increased material benefits for the individual and greater mobility due to the invention of the steamboat, locomotive, and airplane. The Industrial Revolution made the hope of the Renaissance (prosperity and happiness in the here and now) possible for most people.

**Middle Ages**: The period from 500 to 1500 AD, sometimes called the Dark Ages. Social, physical, and intellectual immobility and various forms of oppression mark this period of time. Hope was tied to prosperity and happiness in the afterlife.

**Renaissance**: The period from 1450 to approximately 1600, which produced many changes in the customs that dominated Europe. During this period, people analyzed the past to move forward and advance the future. Hope was now tied to prosperity and happiness in the here and now. Hopeful thoughts were accompanied by motivation for action in this life instead of preparation for the afterlife.

**Wish**: The envisioning of the possibility for change without the pathway for action; a passive desire.
A Matter of Perspective

“A good fortune may forebode a bad luck, which may in turn disguise a good fortune.” This Chinese proverb exemplifies the Eastern perspective that the world and its inhabitants are in a perpetual state of flux. Thus, just as surely as good times occur, so, too, will bad times visit us. In turn, life’s challenges may be harbingers of our triumphs. This balance of good and bad is sought throughout life. Indeed, this expectation of and desire for balance distinguishes Easterners’ views of optimal functioning from the more linear path taken by Westerners to resolve problems and monitor progress (see Chapter 2). Easterners thereby seek to become one with the march of changes, finding meaning in the natural ups and down of living. Ever adaptive and mindful, Easterners move with the cycle of life until the change process becomes natural and enlightenment (i.e., being able to see things clearly for what they are) is achieved. Unlike Westerners, who search for rewards in the physical plane, Easterners seek to transcend the human plane and rise to the spiritual one.

Positive psychology scholars aim to define human strengths and highlight the many paths that lead to better lives (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2002; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). As Western civilization and European events
and values shaped the field of psychology as we know it today in the United States, it is not surprising that the origins of positive psychology have focused more on the values and experiences of Westerners. Increasingly, however, scholars are taking the broader historical and cultural contexts into account to understand strengths and the practices associated with living well (see, e.g., Leong & Wong, 2003; Schimmel, 2000; Sue & Constantine, 2003). The previously neglected wisdoms of the Eastern traditions are being consulted to add different viewpoints about human strengths.

In this chapter, we discuss Eastern perspectives and teachings in terms of their influences on positive psychology research and applications. First, we introduce the main tenets of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism and demonstrate how each tradition characterizes important strengths and life outcomes. Next, we discuss some of the inherent and fundamental differences between Eastern and Western value systems, thought processes, and life outcomes sought. We also articulate the Eastern idea of the “good life” and discuss the associated strengths (embedded more in Eastern cultures than in Western ones) that assist Easterners in attaining positive life outcomes. We then close with a discussion of Eastern views of the concepts of compassion and harmony as the two primary and necessary qualities for achieving the good life.

Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

To summarize thousands of years of Eastern ideology and tradition is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, we highlight the basic tenets of the four influential Eastern disciplines of Confucianism, Taoism (traditions generally associated with China), Buddhism, and Hinduism (rooted in traditions of Southeast Asia). As is the case in the Western historical context, the concept of the “good life” has existed within the Eastern tradition for many centuries. Contrary to the Western culture’s idea of optimal functioning as occurring intrapsychically, Eastern cultures hold that an optimal life experience is a spiritual journey involving transcendence and enlightenment. This latter search for spiritual transcendence parallels the Westerner’s hopeful pursuits for a better life on Earth.

CONFUCIANISM

Confucius, or the Sage, as he is sometimes called, held that leadership and education are central to morality. Born during a time when his Chinese homeland was fraught with strife, Confucius emphasized morality as a potential cure for the evils of that time (Soothill, 1968). Confucian
ethics, which have been compared to the works of the Western philosopher Immanuel Kant, have clear definitions and relatively inflexibile meanings (Ross, 2003; e.g., “Your job is to govern, not to kill,” Analects, 12:19, in instructions to rulers who resort to force). The tenets of Confucianism are laden with quotations that encourage looking to the welfare of others. In fact, one of Confucius’s most famous sayings is a precursor of the Golden Rule and can be translated, “You would like others to do for you what you would indeed like for yourself” (Ross, 2003; Analects 6:28). Such teachings are collected in several books, the most famous of which is the I Ching (the Book of Changes).

The attainment of virtue is at the core of Confucian teachings. The five virtues deemed central to living a moral existence are jen (humanity, the virtue most exalted by Confucius); yi (duty); li (etiquette); zhi (wisdom), and xin (truthfulness). The power of jen stems from the fact that it was said to encapsulate the other four virtues. The concept of yi describes appropriate treatment of others and can be defined as the duty to treat others well. The concept of li promotes propriety and good manners along with sensitivity for others’ feelings (Ross, 2003). Finally, the ideas of zhi and xin define the importance of wisdom and truthfulness, respectively. Confucian followers must strive to make wise decisions based on these five virtues and must be true to them as well. Continual striving for these virtues leads the Confucian follower to enlightenment, or the good life.

TAOISM

Ancient Taoist beliefs are difficult to discuss with Western audiences partly because of the untranslatable nature of some key concepts in the tradition of Taoism. Lao-Tzu (the creator of the Taoist tradition) states in his works that his followers must live according to the Tao (pronounced “Dow” and roughly translated as “the Way”). The Chinese character portraying the concept of the Way is a moving head and “refers simultaneously to direction, movement, method, and thought” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 42; Ross, 2003); moreover, it is meant to embody the ubiquitous nature of this force. Tao is the energy that surrounds everyone and is a power that “envelops, surrounds, and flows through all things” (Western Reform Taoism, 2005, p. 1). In this regard, Lao-Tzu (1994) described the Way in the following lines:

The Way can be spoken of,
But it will not be the constant way;
The name can be named,
But it will not be the constant name.
The nameless was the beginning of the myriad creatures;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.
Hence constantly rid yourself of desires in order to observe its subtlety;
But constantly allow yourself to have desires in order to observe what it is after.
These two have the same origin but differ in name.
They are both called dark,
Darkness upon darkness
The gateway to all is subtle. (p. 47)

Although Lao-Tzu is eloquent in depicting his views on the Way, many readers of these lines are left with some uncertainty about their actual meaning. According to Taoist traditions, the difficulty in understanding the Way stems from the fact that one cannot teach another about it. Instead, understanding flows from experiencing the Way for oneself by fully participating in life. In this process, both good and bad experiences can contribute to a greater understanding of the Way. It also is said to encapsulate the balance and harmony between contrasting concepts (i.e., there would be no light without dark, no male without female, and so on) (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2004). On this latter point, the yin and yang symbol (described in more detail subsequently) reflects this ever-changing balance of opposing forces and desires.

Achieving naturalness and spontaneity in life is the most important goal in the Taoist philosophy. Thus, the virtues of humanity, justice, temperance, and propriety must be practiced by the virtuous individual without effort (Cheng, 2000). One who has achieved transcendence within this philosophy does not have to think about optimal functioning but behaves virtuously naturally.

**BUDDHISM**

Seeking the good of others is woven throughout the teachings of “the Master” or “the Enlightened One” (i.e., the Buddha). In one passage, the Buddha is quoted as saying, “Wander for the gain of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world” (Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 17). At the same time, the Buddha teaches that suffering is a part of being and that this suffering is brought on by the human emotion of desire. Such desire is reflected in the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism:

1. Life is suffering, essentially painful from birth to death.
2. All suffering is caused by ignorance of the nature of reality and the resultant craving, attachment, and grasping.
3. Suffering can be ended by overcoming ignorance.

4. The way to relief from suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path (right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right-mindedness, and right contemplation).

As long as craving exists, in Buddhist ideology, true peace cannot be known, and such existence without peace is considered suffering (Sangharakshita, 1991). This suffering can be lessened only upon reaching nirvana, which is the final destination in the Buddhist philosophy. Accordingly, nirvana is a state in which the self is freed from desire for anything (Schumann, 1974). It should be noted that both premortal and postmortalm nirvana states are proposed as possible for the individual. More specifically, the premortal nirvana may be likened to the idea of the ultimate “good life.” Postmortal nirvana may be similar to the Christian idea of heaven.

Like the other Eastern philosophies, Buddhism gives an important place to virtue, which is described in several catalogs of personal qualities. Buddhists speak of the Brahma Viharas, those virtues that are above all others in importance (described by Peterson and Seligman, 2004, p. 44, as “universal virtues”). These virtues include love (maitri), compassion (karuna), joy (mudita), and equanimity (upeksa) (Sangharakshita, 1991). The paths to achieving these virtues within Buddhism require humans to divorce themselves from the human emotion of desire to put an end to suffering.

HINDUISM

The Hindu tradition differs somewhat from the other three philosophies discussed previously in that it does not appear to have a specific founder, and it is not clear when this tradition began in history (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998). In addition, there is no one text that pervades the tradition, though many refer to the Upanishads as the most commonly used set of writings. Instead of following written guidelines, many followers of Hindu “think of their religion as being grounded in a way of action, rather than a written text” (Stevenson & Haberman, p. 45). The main teachings of the Hindu tradition emphasize the interconnectedness of all things. The idea of a harmonious union among all individuals is woven throughout the teachings of Hinduism that refer to a “single, unifying principle underlying all of Earth” (Stevenson & Haberman, p. 46).

The Upanishads discuss two possible paths after death: that of reincarnation (or returning to Earth to continue to attempt to achieve necessary enlightenment), or that of no reincarnation (meaning that the highest knowledge possible was achieved in life). The latter path, no reincarnation, is the more glorified path and the one that Hindu followers would attempt
to attain. One's goal within this tradition would be to live life so fully and so correctly that one would go directly to the afterlife without having to repeat life's lessons in a reincarnated form (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998). Hindu teachings are very clear about the qualities one must embody to avoid reincarnation: “To return to this world is an indication of one's failure to achieve ultimate knowledge of one's self” (Stevenson & Haberman, p. 53). Thus, the quest of one's life is to attain ultimate self-knowledge and to strive for ultimate self-betterment (notably also a Western concept). This emphasis on personal improvement echoes Buddhist teachings but contrasts sharply with the Confucian belief that citizenship and group good are much more important than self-improvement (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This is not to say, however, that the focus is solely on the individual within the Hindu tradition. Individuals are encouraged to be good to others as well as to improve themselves; the Upanishads state, “A man turns into something good by good action and something bad by bad action” (Stevenson & Haberman, p. 54).

“Good action” is also encouraged in the sense that, if one does not reach ultimate self-knowledge in one's life and thus does have to return to Earth via reincarnation after death, the previous life's good actions correlate directly with better placement in the world in this life (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998). This process is known as karma. In this next life, then, the individual must again strive for self-betterment, and so on throughout his lives until the goal of ultimate self-knowledge is attained. The good life in the Hindu tradition, therefore, encompasses individuals who are continually achieving knowledge and continually working toward good actions (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Stevenson & Haberman).

**SUMMARY OF EASTERN PHILOSOPHIES**

Each of the Eastern philosophies discussed here incorporates ideas about the importance of virtue, along with human strengths, as people move toward the good life (i.e., transcendence). Similarities also can be drawn among the four, especially in the types of human qualities and experiences that are valued. These are discussed in detail in the subsequent sections, but first it is important to contrast these Eastern beliefs with Western ideology to understand the differences in positive psychology viewed from each perspective.

**East Meets West**

Eastern and Western ideologies stem from very different historical events and traditions. These differences can be seen explicitly in the value systems
of each cultural approach to living, their orientations toward time, and their respective thought processes. These cultural differences give more information about strengths identified in each culture and ways in which positive life outcomes are pursued and achieved.

VALUE SYSTEMS

Cultural value systems have significant effects on the determination of strengths versus weaknesses (Lopez, Edwards, Magyar-Moe, Pedrotti, & Ryder, 2003). Whereas most Western cultures have individualist perspectives, most Eastern cultures (Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indian, and others) are guided by collectivist viewpoints (see also Chapter 18). In individualist cultures, the main focus is the single person, who is held above the group in terms of importance. Competition and personal achievement are emphasized within these cultures. In collectivist cultures, however, the group is valued above the individual, and cooperation is accentuated (Craig & Baucum, 2002). These different emphases on what is valued determine which constructs are considered strengths in each type of culture. For example, Western cultures value highly the ideas of personal freedom and autonomy. Thus, the person who “stands on her own two feet” is seen as possessing strength within this worldview. In an Eastern culture, on the other hand, such assertiveness on behalf of the self would not be viewed as an asset, as society seeks to foster interdependence within the group.

Closely related to the interdependence that is prized within collectivist cultures are the concepts of sharing and duty to the group. In addition, value is placed on staying out of conflict and “going with the flow” within the Eastern ways of thinking. The Japanese story “Momotaro” (“Peach Boy,” Sakade, 1958) gives an excellent example of the cultural importance of the traits of interdependence, the ability to avoid conflict, and duty to the group. The story begins with an elderly couple who have always wished for a child, although they are not able to conceive. One day, as the woman is washing her clothes in a stream, a giant peach floats to where she is standing and, upon reaching the woman, splits open to reveal a baby! The woman takes Momotaro (“Peach Boy”) home, and she and her husband raise him. Momotaro grows into a fine young boy and, at age 15, tells his parents that the ogres in the nearby country have tormented the people of his village long enough. To the great pride of his parents, he decides to go to fight the ogres and bring back their treasure to his village.

Along the way, Momotaro befriends many animals one by one. The animals want to fight each new animal they meet, but at Momotaro’s urging, “The spotted dog and the monkey and the pheasant, who usually hated each other, all became good friends and followed Momotaro faithfully” (Sakade, 1958, p. 6). At the end of the story, Momotaro and his animal
friends defeat the ogres by working together and bring the treasure back to the village, where all who live there share in the bounty. As the hero, Momotaro portrays the strengths valued in Japanese and other Asian cultures: (a) He sets out for the good of the group, although in doing so risks individual harm (collectivism); (b) along the way, he stops others from petty squabbling (promoting harmony); (c) he works with them to achieve his goal (interdependence and collaboration); and (d) he brings back a treasure to share with the group (interdependence and sharing). In comparison to this tale of Momotaro, the story of a Western hero might differ at several points, especially that of the hero needing help from others, because individual achievement often is valued above group achievement. Thus, the cultural orientation determines which characteristics are transmitted as the valued strengths to its members.

**ORIENTATION TO TIME**

Differences also exist between East and West in terms of their orientations to time. In Western cultures such as the United States, we often look to the future (see Chapters 2 and 9). Indeed, some of the strengths we seem to value most (e.g., hope, optimism, self-efficacy; see Chapter 9) reflect future-oriented thinking. In Eastern cultures, however, there is a greater focus on, and respect for, the past. This past-oriented focus is revealed in the ancient Chinese proverb, “To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.” Thus, certain personality characteristics might be defined as strengths in terms of their compatibility with a particular time orientation. For example, certain types of problem solving might be viewed as more advantageous than others. In a well-known Chinese fable, “Old Horse Knows the Way,” a group of soldiers travels far from their home in the mountains and, upon trying to find their way home, they become lost. One of the soldiers comes up with this solution: “We can use the wisdom of an old horse. Release the old horses and follow them, and thereby reach the right road” (Pei, 2005, p. 1). Thus, Eastern cultures value the strength of “looking backward” and recognizing the wisdom of their elders.

**THOUGHT PROCESSES**

When considering the unique aspects of Western and Eastern thought, we often focus on the nature of specific ideas, but we do not reflect on the process of linking and integrating ideas. Indeed, as researchers (e.g., Nisbett, 2003) have noted, stark differences exist in the very thought processes used by Westerners and Easterners, and this results in markedly divergent worldviews and approaches to meaning making. Richard Nisbett, a professor at the University of Michigan who studies social
psychology and cognition, illustrates how he became aware of some of these differences in thinking during a conversation he had with a student from China. Nisbett recalls,

A few years back, a brilliant student from China began to work with me on questions of social psychology and reasoning. One day early in our acquaintance, he said, “You know, the difference between you and me is that I think the world is a circle, and you think it is a line.” . . . The Chinese believe in constant change, but with things always moving back to some prior state. They pay attention to a wide range of events; they search for relationships between things; and they think you can’t understand the part without understanding the whole. Westerners live in a simpler, more deterministic world; they focus on salient objects or people instead of the larger pictures; and they think they can control events because they know the rules that govern the behavior of objects.” (p. xiii)

As Nisbett’s story shows, the thinking style used by the Chinese student, and not just the ideas themselves, was vastly different from Nisbett’s. This more circular thinking style is best exemplified by the Taoist figure of the yin and the yang. Most people are familiar with the yin and yang symbol. This figure represents the circular, constantly changing nature of the world as viewed by Eastern thought. The dark part of the symbol represents the feminine and passive, and the light side represents the masculine and active. Each part exists because of the other, and neither could exist alone, according to Taoist beliefs. As one state is experienced, the other is not far to follow; if hard times are occurring, easier times are on the way. This more circular thinking pattern affects the way in which the Eastern thinker maps out his or her life and therefore may influence the decisions a person makes in the search for peace.

An example of the effects of such different ways of thinking may be found in the life pursuits of the Westerner as compared with those of the Easterner. Whereas in the United States we give high priority to the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the goals of the Easterner might have a different focus. Take, for instance, the positive psychological construct of happiness (see Chapter 7). Researchers have posited that happiness (whether group or individual) is a state commonly sought by Easterners and Westerners alike (Diener & Diener, 1995). The difference in the philosophical approaches to life, however, may make the searches look very different. For example, a Westerner whose goal is happiness draws a straight line to his goal, looking carefully for obstacles and finding possible ways around them. His goal is to achieve this eternal happiness. For the Easterner who follows the yin and the yang, however, this goal of happiness may not make sense. If one were to seek happiness and then achieve it, in the Eastern way of thinking, this would only mean that unhappiness was close on its heels. Instead, the Easterner might have the...
goal of balance, trusting in the fact that, although great unhappiness or suffering may occur in one’s life, it would be equally balanced by great happiness. These two different types of thinking obviously create very different ways of forming goals to achieve the good life.

EAST AND WEST: IS ONE BEST?

There are substantial differences in the types of ideas and the way in which they are put together that emerge from Eastern and Western traditions. It is important to remember, however, that neither is “better” than the other. This is especially relevant for discussions regarding strengths. Therefore, we must use culture as a lens for evaluating whether a particular characteristic might be considered a strength or a weakness within a particular group.

Different Ways to Positive Outcomes

So far, we have discussed how thinking styles influence the development of goals in the lives of both Westerners and Easterners. Differences also exist, however, in the routes that each group uses to move toward its goals. Western-oriented thinking focuses on the individual’s goal, whereas Eastern philosophers suggest a different focus, one in which the group is highlighted. For example, Confucius said, “If you want to reach your goal, help others reach their goal” (Soothill, 1968, Analects 6:29). Accordingly, although hope may be the primary tool of the “rugged individualist” (i.e., Westerner; see Chapter 2) in moving toward the good life, other tools might take precedence in the life of the Easterner. For example, qualities that help to create and sustain interdependent relationships for Easterners may be more valuable in helping them to reach their goals. These virtues may be most important in helping Easterners to develop pathways that ensure that group goals are achieved, thereby assisting Easterners in completing their individual goals.

In the main Eastern philosophical branches of learning (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism), repeated mention is made of the two constructs of compassion for others and the search for harmony or life balance. Thus, each has a clear place in the study of positive psychology from an Eastern perspective.

COMPASSION

The idea of compassion has origins in both Western and Eastern philosophies. Within the Western tradition, Aristotle often is noted for early writings on the concept of compassion. Likewise, compassion can be
traced in the Eastern traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. In Confucian teachings, compassion is discussed within the concept of *jen* (humanity) and is said to encapsulate all other virtues. Within the Taoist belief system, humanity also reflects behaviors that must occur naturally, without premeditation. Finally, the Buddha often is described as “perfectly enlightened, and boundlessly compassionate” (Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 3). As such, the idea of compassion, or *karuna*, also is woven throughout Buddhism as a virtue on the path toward transcendence. Finally, within the Hindu tradition, compassion is called for in good actions toward others, which will direct followers upon the path that will not require them to return to Earth after death.

In recent writings in positive psychology, physician Eric Cassell (2002) proposes the three following requirements for compassion: (a) the difficulties of the recipient must be serious; (b) the recipient’s difficulties cannot be self-inflicted, and (c) we, as observers, must be able to identify with the recipient’s suffering. Compassion is described as a “unilateral emotion” (Cassell, p. 435) that is directed outward from oneself. In Buddhist teachings, the attainment of compassion means being able to “transcend preoccupation with the centrality of self” (Cassell, p. 438)—to focus on others rather than merely on ourselves. The ability to possess feelings for something completely separate from our own suffering allows us to transcend the self and, in this way, to be closer to the achievement of the good life. In fact, transcendental compassion is said to be the most significant of the four universal virtues, and it often is called Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*) to distinguish it from the more applied *karuna* (Sangharakshita, 1991). Similarly, although discussed in somewhat different ways as Confucian, Taoist, and Hindu principles, the capacities to feel and to do for others are central to achieving the good life for each of these traditions as well.

Possessing compassion helps the person to succeed in life and is viewed as a major strength within the Eastern tradition. Feeling for fellow group members may allow identification with others and development of group cohesion. Furthermore, acting compassionately fosters group, rather than personal, happiness.

Compassion also may come more naturally to the person from a collectivist culture than to someone from an individualist culture. On this point, researchers have argued that a collectivist culture may breed a sense of compassion in the form of its members’ prosocial behaviors (Batson, 1991; Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, 2002). When a group identity has been formed, therefore, the natural choice may be group benefits over individual ones. More information from qualitative and quantitative studies in this area would be helpful in defining the mechanisms used to foster such compassion.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) indicate that “humanity” may be viewed as a “universal strength” in their book, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. For both Western and Eastern traditions,
they hold that the ability to feel for others is a necessary part of the search for the good life. Compassion, an aspect of humanity, involves looking outside ourselves and thinking about others as we care for and identify with them. This other-than-self focus is needed to transcend one’s physical body, according to Eastern traditions. Thus, nirvana can be attained only when one’s independent identity and the self-motivated desires that accompany it are eradicated completely.

In moving toward the good life, therefore, compassion is essential for dealing with daily life tasks. As one walks along the path toward this good life, the continual goal is to transcend the human plane and to become enlightened through experiences with others and the world. Compassion asks people to think outside themselves and to connect with others. Additionally, as the person comes to understand others, she or he comes closer to self-understanding. This is yet another key component in attaining transcendence.

**HARMONY**

In Western history, the Greeks are said to have viewed happiness as the ability “to exercise powers in pursuit of excellence in a life free from constraints” (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 2–3). Thus, the good life was viewed as a life with no ties to duty and the freedom to pursue individual goals. There are clear distinctions in comparing this idea of happiness to Confucian teachings, for example, in which duty (yi) is a primary virtue. In Eastern philosophy, happiness is described as having the “satisfactions of a plain country life, shared within a harmonious social network” (Nisbett, p. 5–6, emphasis added). In this tradition, harmony is viewed as central to achieving happiness.

In Buddhist teachings, when people reach a state of nirvana, they have reached a peacefulness entailing “complete harmony, balance, and equilibrium” (Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 135). Similarly, in Confucian teachings harmony is viewed as crucial for happiness. Confucius had high praise for individuals who were able to harmonize; he compared this capacity to “a good cook blending the flavors and creat[ing] something harmonious and delicious” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 7). Getting along with others allows the person to be freed from individual pursuits and, in so doing, to gain “collective agency” (Nisbett, p. 6) in working out what is good for the group. Thus, the harmonizing principle is a central tenet of the Eastern way of life. The balance and harmony that one achieves as part of an enlightened life often are thought to represent the ultimate end of the good life. In Hindu teachings, one also can see that, as all humans are interconnected by a “single unifying principle” (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998, p. 46), harmony must be pursued. If an individual walks through life without thought of others as connected to him, the effects may be far-reaching for both the individual and the group (Stevenson & Haberman).

The concept of harmony has received minimal attention in the field of positive psychology to date, although some attention has been given to
the idea of appreciating balance in one’s life in reference to certain other constructs (e.g., wisdom; see Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, and Chapter 10). Moreover, Clifton and colleagues (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005) include a harmony theme in the Clifton StrengthsFinder (see Chapter 4); they describe this construct as a desire to find consensus among the group, as opposed to putting forth conflicting ideas. Little more scholarly attention has been paid to harmony in American psychological literature. Given the central role of harmony as a strength in Eastern cultures, more research may be warranted on this topic in the future. First, the concept of harmony often is mistakenly equated with the notion of conformity. Studies to ferret out the differences between these two constructs could be beneficial in defining each more clearly. Because the term conformity has somewhat negative connotations in our independence-oriented culture, it is possible that some of these same negative characterizations have been extended to the concept of harmony.

Second, qualitative research methods could be used to develop a better definition of harmony. At present, the concept of harmony is reflected in the virtue of justice as discussed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) in their classification of strengths. These authors note that the ability to “work well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share” (p. 30) may be a subset of the idea of civic strength. Although this may be one way to classify this strength, it might be argued that the idea of harmony is broader than this particular definition and may be thought of separately from loyalty and “pitching in.” Furthermore, the phenomenon of harmony may be both an interpersonal strength (as described in the previous paragraphs) and an intrapersonal strength.

Finally, after more conceptual work is completed, positive psychology scholars interested in harmony would benefit greatly from the development of reliable and valid measuring devices. Such tools would help researchers to uncover the primary contributors and correlates of harmony.

Final Thoughts

It is important to recognize that, in discussing Eastern thoughts in this chapter, a central tenet of Eastern ways of life is broken, in the decidedly Western, didactic teaching method used to bring this information to students of positive psychology. The traditional Easterner would object to the notion that the concepts here could be learned from mere words and would argue that only life experience would suffice. As part of Eastern teachings, self-exploration and actual hands-on experience are essential for true understanding of the concepts that are presented in only an introductory fashion in this chapter. Thus, you are encouraged to seek out more experience of these ideas in everyday life and to attempt to discover the relevance to your
own lives of strengths such as compassion and harmony. Although these ideas may stem from Eastern ideology, they are relevant for Westerners who want to discover new ways of thinking about human functioning. As a student of positive psychology, you can continue to broaden your horizons by considering ideas from the East. Challenge yourself to be open minded about the types of characteristics to which you assign the label strength, and remember that different traditions bring with them different values.

Key Terms

**Buddhism**: A philosophical and religious system based on the teachings of Buddha: Life is dominated by suffering caused by desire; suffering ends when we end desire; and enlightenment obtained through right conduct, wisdom, and meditation releases one from desire, suffering, and rebirth.

**Collectivism**: A cultural value that prizes the concepts of sharing, cooperation, interdependence, and duty to the group.

**Compassion**: An aspect of humanity that involves looking outside oneself and thinking about others as we care for and identify with them. In positive psychology, compassion requires (a) that the difficulty of the recipient be serious; (b) that the recipient’s difficulties are not self-inflicted; and (c) that we, as observers, are able to identify with the recipient’s suffering.

**Confucianism**: A philosophical and religious system developed from the teachings of Confucius. Confucianism values love for humanity, duty, etiquette, and truthfulness. Devotion to family, including ancestors, is also emphasized.

**Enlightenment**: A human’s capacity to transcend desire and suffering and to see things clearly for what they are.

**Harmony**: A state of consensus or balance. Eastern traditions view harmony as essential to happiness.

**Hinduism**: A diverse body of religion, philosophy, and cultural practice native to and predominant in India. Hinduism is characterized by a belief in the interconnectedness of all things and emphasizes personal improvement with the goal of transcending the cycle of reincarnation.

**Individualism**: A cultural value that emphasizes individual achievement, competition, personal freedom, and autonomy.

**Nirvana**: A state in which the self is freed from desire. This is the final destination in the Buddhist philosophy.

**Taoism**: A philosophical and religious system developed by Lao-Tzu which advocates a simple, honest life and noninterference in the course of natural events.
Let us imagine that one could set up a kind of scale or yardstick to measure the success of life—the satisfactoriness to the individual and the environment in their mutual attempts to adapt themselves to each other. Toward the end of such a yardstick, positive adjectives like “peaceful,” “constructive,” “productive,” might appear, and at the other end such words as “confused,” “destructive,” “chaotic.” These would describe the situation in general. For the individual himself there might be at one end of the yardstick such terms as “healthy,” “happy,” “creative,” and at the other end “miserable,” “criminal,” “delirious.”

—Menninger, Mayman, & Pruysen (1963, p. 2)

Karl Menninger, one of the brothers who helped build the world-renowned Menninger Clinic, attempted to change the way that health care professionals viewed the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of mental illness. As part of his mission, he encouraged clinicians and researchers to dispense with the old, confusing labels of sickness. Then, he called for the development of a simple diagnostic system that described the life process rather than states or conditions. Finally, he reminded us of the power of the “sublime expressions of the life instinct” (Menninger et al., 1963, p. 357), specifically hope, faith, and love. Over
the last 50 years, psychology and psychiatry have busied themselves with the confused and miserable aspects of human nature, and, as a result of maintaining the pathology focus, health care providers have helped millions of people relieve their suffering. Unfortunately, too few professionals have engaged in the entire exercise in imagination described earlier, and this has resulted in the unmet needs of millions more people. We continue to add complexity to an ever-growing diagnostic system (American Psychiatric Association, 2000); we know little about the process of living; and we spend far too little time and energy making sense of the intangibles of good living—hope, faith, and love. If Menninger were alive, we think he would consider our professional acumen and knowledge lacking in utility and out of balance. Most important, he probably would ask, “What about the productive and healthy aspects of personal functioning?”

Although the missions of many positive psychologists bear similarities to Dr. Menninger’s ideas, there is a long way to go in measuring human strengths. (We subscribe to Linley and Harrington’s [2006] definition of strength as a capacity for feeling, thinking, and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes.) In this regard, the argument can be made that work on the classification of illnesses had a 2000-year head start on the more recent efforts to classify strengths and positive outcomes. Therefore, it is easy to understand why we have better understandings of human weaknesses than we do of strengths. In the Menninger et al. (1963) review of the history of classifying disorders, it is noted that the Sumerians and the Egyptians drew distinctions between hysteria and melancholia as early as 2600 BC. The earliest attempt to define a set of virtues is contained in Confucian teachings dating to 500 BC, where Confucius systematically addressed jen (humanity or benevolence), li (observance of rituals and customs), xin (truthfulness), yi (duty or justice), and zhi (wisdom) (Cleary, 1992; Haberman, 1998; see Chapter 2 for a discussion of Confucian philosophy and other Eastern perspectives on positive psychology).

In the 21st century, two classifications of illness have attained worldwide acceptance. First, the World Health Organization’s (1992) International Classifications of Diseases (ICD) is in its 10th edition and continues to evolve. Second, the American Psychiatric Association’s (2000) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) now is in its 6th iteration as the DSM-IV-TR (Text Revision). The ICD is broader in scope than the DSM in that it classifies all diseases, whereas the DSM describes only the mental disorders. Currently, no classification of human strengths or positive outcomes has achieved worldwide use or acceptance. Some classifications and measures, however, have been created, refined, and broadly disseminated in the last decade. In this chapter, we discuss the following three classification systems:
1. The Gallup Themes of Talent (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) as measured by the Clifton StrengthsFinder and the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer

2. The Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as measured by the adult and youth versions of the VIA Inventory of Strengths

3. The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998) as measured by the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors

Then, we explore the dimensions of well-being commonly used to describe mental health. Next, we call for greater attention to the development of broader descriptions and more sensitive measures of positive outcomes. Finally, we emphasize the need for a comprehensive classification of human behavior.

Classifications and Measures of Human Strengths

Whether for positive traits and behaviors or for negative ones, the development of classification systems and measures is influenced by the values of society and the professionals who create these values. As cultures change over time, it is important that these tools be revised regularly to remain applicable to their targeted groups. We now discuss the present three frameworks, along with measures of strengths and their psychometric properties (the measurement characteristics of the tools). Specifically, we comment on the reliability (the extent to which a scale is consistent or stable) and the validity (the extent to which a scale measures what it purports to measure) of these recently designed tools.

GALLUP’S CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER

Over his 50-year career at the University of Nebraska, Selection Research Incorporated, and The Gallup Organization, Donald Clifton studied success across a wide variety of business and education domains (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992). He based his analysis of success on a simple question: “What would happen if we studied what is right with people?” Furthermore, he focused on straightforward notions that stood the test of time and empirical scrutiny. First, he believed that talents could be operationalized, studied, and accentuated in work and academic settings. Specifically, he defined talent as “naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied” (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 257) and manifested in life experiences.
characterized by yearnings, rapid learning, satisfaction, and timelessness. He considered these trait-like “raw materials” to be the products of normal, healthy development and successful childhood and adolescence experiences. Likewise, Clifton viewed strengths as extensions of talent. More precisely, the strength construct combines talent with associated knowledge and skills and is defined as the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a specific task.

Second, Clifton considered success to be closely allied with personal talents, strengths, and analytical intelligence. Based on these beliefs, he identified hundreds of personal talents that predicted success in work and academics. Moreover, he constructed empirically based (grounded in theory and research findings), semistructured interviews for identifying these talents. When developing these interviews, Clifton and his colleagues examined the prescribed roles of a person (e.g., student, salesperson, administrator), visited the job site or academic setting, identified outstanding performers in these roles and settings, and determined the long-standing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with situational success. These interviews also were useful in predicting positive outcomes (Schmidt & Rader, 1999) and subsequently were administered to more than 2 million people for the purposes of personal enrichment and employee selection. When considering the creation of an objective measure of talent in the mid-1990s, Clifton and his colleagues systematically reviewed the data in these interviews and identified about three dozen themes of talent involving enduring, positive human qualities. (See Table 4.1 for a listing and description of the 34 themes in the Gallup classification system.)

The first step in developing the Clifton StrengthsFinder as an online measure (see www.strengthsfinder.com) was to construct a pool of more than 5000 items. Selection of items was based on traditional construct, content, and criterion validity evidence suggesting that the tool tapped underlying attributes, the full depth and breadth of content, and the shared relationships and predictive powers, respectively. A smaller pool was derived subsequently on the basis of item functioning. More specifically, the evidence used to evaluate the item pairs was taken from a database of over 100 predictive validity studies (Schmidt & Rader, 1999). Factor and reliability analyses were conducted in multiple samples to produce maximal theme information in an instrument of minimal length. Many sets of items were pilot tested, and those with the strongest psychometric properties were retained.

In 1999, an online version of the Clifton StrengthsFinder was launched. That version had 35 themes. After several months of collecting data, the researchers decided on the 180 item pairs (360 items, 256 of which are scored) and the 34-theme version currently available. Although some theme names have changed since 1999, the theme definitions and 180 item pairs have not been altered. See Figure 4.1 for a summary of the textbook author’s (SJL) signature themes.
Table 4.1  The 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>People strong in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activator</td>
<td>People strong in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>People strong in the Adaptability theme prefer to “go with the flow.” They tend to be “now” people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>People strong in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>People strong in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements that ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>People strong in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of those values emerges a defined purpose for their life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>People strong in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>People strong in the Communications theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>People strong in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>People strong in the Connectedness theme have faith in links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>People strong in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone in the world with consistency by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>People strong in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative</td>
<td>People strong in the Deliberative theme are best characterized by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate the obstacles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>People strong in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from those improvements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>People strong in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>People strong in Empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others’ lives and in others’ situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>People strong in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futurist</td>
<td>People strong in the Futurist theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their vision of the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>People strong in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don’t enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Table 4.1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>People strong in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includer</td>
<td>People strong in the Includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out and make efforts to include them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>People strong in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>People strong in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellection</td>
<td>People strong in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>People strong in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to improve continuously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximizer</td>
<td>People strong in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate professional and group excellence. They seek to transform strengths into something superb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>People strong in the Positivity theme have an enthusiasm that is contagious. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relator</td>
<td>People who are strong in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>People strong in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative</td>
<td>People strong in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Assurance</td>
<td>People strong in the Self-Assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>People strong in the Significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>People strong in the strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOO</td>
<td>WOO stands for “winning others over.” People strong in the WOO theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Reprinted with permission. Gallup®, StrengthsFinder®, Clifton StrengthsFinder™, and each of the 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder theme names are trademarks of The Gallup Organization, Princeton, NJ.

In the last six years, extensive psychometric research on the Clifton StrengthsFinder was conducted by Gallup researchers (and summarized in a technical report by Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005). Across samples, most scales (i.e., themes) have been found to be internally consistent (despite containing as few as four items) and stable over periods ranging from 3 weeks to 17 months. Specifically, the coefficient alphas have ranged
Your Signature Themes

Many years of research conducted by The Gallup Organization suggest that the most effective people are those who understand their strengths and behaviors. These people are best able to develop strategies to meet and exceed the demands of their daily lives, their careers, and their families.

A review of the knowledge and skills you have acquired can provide a basic sense of your abilities, but an awareness and understanding of your natural talents will provide true insight into the core reasons behind your consistent successes.

Your Signature Themes report presents your five most dominant themes of talent, in the rank order revealed by your responses to StrengthsFinder. Of the 34 themes measured, these are your “top five.”

Your Signature Themes are very important in maximizing the talents that lead to your successes. By focusing on your Signature Themes, separately and in combination, you can identify your talents, build them into strengths, and enjoy personal and career success through consistent, near-perfect performance.

Futuristic

“Wouldn’t it be great if . . . ?” You are the kind of person who loves to peer over the horizon. The future fascinates you. As if it were projected on the wall, you see in detail what the future might hold, and this detailed picture keeps pulling you forward, into tomorrow. While the exact content of the picture will depend on your other strengths and interests—a better product, a better team, a better life, or a better world—it will always be inspirational to you. You are a dreamer who sees visions of what could be and who cherishes those visions. When the present proves too frustrating and the people around you too pragmatic, you conjure up your visions of the future, and they energize you. They can energize others, too. In fact, very often people look to you to describe your visions of the future. They want a picture that can raise their sights and thereby their spirits. You can paint it for them. Practice. Choose your words carefully. Make the picture as vivid as possible. People will want to latch on to the hope you bring.

Maximizer

Excellence, not average, is your measure. Taking something from below average to slightly above average takes a great deal of effort and in your opinion is not very rewarding. Transforming something strong into something superb takes just as much effort but is much more thrilling. Strengths, whether yours or someone else’s, fascinate you. Like a diver after pearls, you search them out, watching for the telltale signs of a strength. A glimpse of untutored excellence, rapid learning, a skill mastered without recourse to steps—all these are clues that a strength may be in play. And having found a strength, you feel compelled to nurture it, refine it, and stretch it toward excellence. You polish the pearl until it shines. This natural sorting of strengths means that others see you as discriminating. You choose to spend time with people who appreciate your particular strengths. Likewise, you are attracted to others who seem to have found and cultivated their own strengths. You tend to avoid those who want to fix you and make you well rounded. You don’t want to spend your life bemoaning what you lack. Rather, you want to capitalize on the gifts with which you are blessed. It’s more fun. It’s more productive. And, counterintuitively, it is more demanding.

Arranger

You are a conductor. When faced with a complex situation involving many factors, you enjoy managing all the variables, aligning and realigning them until you are sure you have arranged them in the most productive configuration possible. In your mind, there is nothing special about what you are doing. You are simply trying to figure out the best way to get things done. But others, lacking this theme, will be in awe of your ability. “How can you keep so many things in your head at once?” they will ask. “How can you stay so flexible, so willing to shelve well-laid plans in favor of some brand-new configuration that has just occurred to you?” But you cannot imagine behaving in any other way. You are a shining example of effective flexibility, whether you are changing travel schedules at the last minute because a better fare has popped up or mulling over just the right combination of people and things that makes a plan possible.
resources to accomplish a new project. From the mundane to the complex, you are always looking for the perfect configuration. Of course, you are at your best in dynamic situations. Confronted with the unexpected, some complain that plans devised with such care cannot be changed, while others take refuge in the existing rules or procedures. You don’t do either. Instead, you jump into the confusion, devising new options, hunting for new paths of least resistance, and figuring out new partnerships—because, after all, there might just be a better way.

**Ideation**

You are fascinated by ideas. What is an idea? An idea is a concept, the best explanation of the most events. You are delighted when you discover beneath the complex surface an elegantly simple concept to explain why things are the way they are. An idea is a connection. Yours is the kind of mind that is always looking for connections, and so you are intrigued when seemingly disparate phenomena can be linked by an obscure connection. An idea is a new perspective on familiar challenges. You revel in taking the world we all know and turning it around so we can view it from a strange but strangely enlightening angle. You love all these ideas because they are profound, because they are novel, because they are clarifying, because they are contrary, because they are bizarre. For all these reasons, you derive a jolt of energy whenever a new idea occurs to you. Others may label you creative or original or conceptual or even smart. Perhaps you are all of these. Who can be sure? What you are sure of is that ideas are thrilling. And on most days this is enough.

**Strategic**

The Strategic theme enables you to sort through the clutter and find the best route. It is not a skill that can be taught. It is a distinct way of thinking, a special perspective on the world at large. This perspective allows you to see patterns where others simply see complexity. Mindful of these patterns, you play out alternative scenarios, always asking, “What if this happened? Okay, well what if this happened?” This recurring question helps you see around the next corner. There you can evaluate accurately the potential obstacles. Guided by where you see each path leading, you start to make selections. You discard the paths that lead nowhere. You discard the paths that lead straight into resistance. You discard the paths that lead into a fog of confusion. You cull and make selections until you arrive at the chosen path—your strategy. Armed with your strategy, you strike forward. This is your Strategic theme at work: “What if?” Select. Strike.

*Source:* Reprinted with permission. Gallup®, StrengthsFinder®, Clifton StrengthsFinder™, and each of the 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder theme names are trademarks of The Gallup Organization, Princeton, NJ.

from .55 to .81 (.70 or above is a desirable psychometric standard) with WOO having the highest internal consistency (.81) and Connection and Restorative having the lowest (both below .60). Regarding the stability of scales, most test-retest correlations were above .70 (considered appropriate for a measure of a personal trait).

Regarding construct validity, the theme score intercorrelations support the relative independence of themes, thereby showing that the 34 themes provide unique information. Finally, a study correlating Clifton StrengthsFinder themes with the Big 5 personality constructs (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; McCrae & Costa, 1987) provided initial evidence for the measure’s convergent validity (i.e., they were correlated, but not at such a high level suggesting redundancy). To date, there are no published studies examining the intercorrelations between the 34 theme scores and personality measures (other than the Big 5 measure).
Today, the Clifton StrengthsFinder is available in 17 languages, and it is modifiable for individuals with disabilities. It is appropriate for administration to adolescents and adults with reading levels at 10th grade or higher. Although it is used to identify personal talents, the related supporting materials (e.g., Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992) can help individuals discover how to build on their talents to develop strengths within their particular life roles. It should be noted, however, that this instrument is not designed or validated for use in employee selection or mental health screening. Another caveat also is warranted: namely, given that Clifton StrengthsFinder feedback (presented as your “Five Signature Themes”) is provided to foster intrapersonal development, using it for comparisons of individuals’ profiles is discouraged. (A respondent’s top five themes, in order of potency, are included in the feedback. Remaining themes are not rank ordered and shared with respondents. This is also the case with the strengths feedback that results from the Values in Action measure, to be discussed subsequently.) Furthermore, the Clifton StrengthsFinder is not sensitive to change and, as such, it should not be used as a pre-post measure of growth.

The Gallup Organization is in the process of developing a new talent classification system and a measure that is appropriate for children and youth (ages 10 to 14). This is called the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer, and it will be released in 2006. StrengthsExplorer developers believe that knowledge about young people’s strengths will help in directing their energies to maximize their potentials (personal communication, Pio Juszkiewicz, November 7, 2005). The version of the StrengthsExplorer tested in the summer of 2005 taps 10 themes ( Achieving, Caring, Competing, Confidence, Dependability, Discoverer, Future Thinker, Organizing, Presence, and Relating). (The psychometric report for the measure will be available upon its release.) When respondents complete the measure, they will receive a Youth Workbook summarizing their top three themes and including action items and exercises that, if completed, could help youth capitalize on their strengths. Parent and educator guides also will be available so that caregivers can help youth in developing their positive characteristics.

**THE VIA CLASSIFICATION OF STRENGTHS**

The VIA (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) Classification of Strengths serves as the antithesis of the DSM, and it holds promise for fostering our understanding of psychological strengths. Peterson and Seligman make the point that we currently have a shared language for speaking about the negative side of psychology, but we have no such equivalent terminology for describing human strengths. The VIA Classification of Strengths provides such a common language, and it encourages a more strength-based approach to diagnosis and treatment (treatment manuals focused on enhancing strengths may one day accompany the diagnostic manual).

*Source: Reprinted with permission.*
As these pioneering positive psychologists write, “We... rely on the ‘new’ psychology of traits that recognizes individual differences... that are stable and general but also shaped by the individual’s setting and thus capable of change” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 5).

The VIA classification system, originally commissioned by the Mayerson Foundation, was generated in response to two basic questions: “(1) How can one define the concepts of ‘strength’ and ‘highest potential,’ and (2) how can one tell that a positive youth development program has succeeded in meeting its goals?” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. v). These questions led to more philosophical and practical questions about human character. Ultimately, Peterson and Seligman and many colleagues decided that components of character included virtues (core characteristics valued by some moral philosophers, religious thinkers, and everyday folk), character strengths (psychological processes and mechanisms that define virtues), and situational themes (specific habits that lead people to manifest strengths in particular situations).

The generation of entries for the classification system first was attempted by a small group of psychologists and psychiatrists after dozens of inventories of virtues and strengths and perspectives of character were reviewed. Upon applying 10 criteria for strength (e.g., a strength is morally valued in its own right; a person’s display of a strength does not diminish other people) to a long list of potential constructs, 24 strengths were identified and then organized under 6 overarching virtues (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) thought to “emerge consensually across cultures and throughout time” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 29). Table 4.2 lists and describes the 6 virtues and 24 strengths. Peterson and Seligman state that their classification approach is sensitive to the developmental differences in which character strengths are displayed and deployed.

The measure of this system of virtues and strengths, the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), was designed to describe the individual differences of character strengths on continua and not as distinct categories. The development of the measure was influenced by a tool once known as the “wellsprings” measure (Lutz, 2000), and it “took inspiration from the Gallup Organization’s StrengthsFinder measure... by wording items in extreme fashion (“I always...”) and by providing feedback to respondents concerning their top—not bottom—strengths of character” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 628).

To date, the VIA-IS has been refined several times, and the current version appears reliable and valid for the purposes of identifying strengths in adults (based on summary information presented in Peterson & Seligman [2004] which is referenced heavily in this paragraph). Regarding the reliability of the measure, all scales have satisfactory consistency and stability across a four-month period. Correlations among scales are higher than expected given that the inventory was designed to measure 24 unique
Wisdom and Knowledge—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
  Creativity: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things
  Curiosity: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake
  Open-mindedness: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
  Love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
  Perspective: Being able to provide wise counsel to others

Courage—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external and internal
  Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
  Persistence: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles
  Integrity: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way
  Vitality: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing anything halfheartedly

Humanity—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
  Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which caring is reciprocated
  Kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
  Social intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself

Justice—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
  Citizenship: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to a group
  Fairness: Treating all people the same according to the notions of fairness and justice
  Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done

Temperance—Strengths that protect against excess
  Forgiveness and mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others’ faults
  Humility/Modesty: Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves
  Prudence: Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks
  Self-regulation: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined

Transcendence—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
  Appreciation of beauty and excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life
  Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
  Hope: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it
  Humor: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
  Spirituality: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe

constructs. Women score higher on humanity strengths than men, and African Americans score higher than members of other ethnic groups on the scale of the spirituality strength. Evidence of the measure’s validity includes the following three sets of findings:

1. Nominations of strengths by friends and family correlate at about a .50 level with matching scales’ scores for most of the 24 strengths.
2. The majority of the scales correlate positively with scores on measures of life satisfaction.
3. Factor analyses provides some support for the existence of 6 virtues.

The results from the factor analysis conducted on existing data, however, actually suggest 5 factors (strengths of restraint, intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, theological strengths) instead of the 6 proposed virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004) described studies comparing strengths across groups of people, and they reason that the VIA-IS is an outcome measure that is sensitive to change. The researchers at the VIA Institute plan additional examinations of the psychometric properties of the measure.

The 6th iteration of the VIA-IS currently is available as an online (www.positivepsychology.org) and paper-and-pencil measure in English and several other languages. The 240 items (10 for each strength), answered with a 5-point Likert scale, can be completed in about 30 minutes. The feedback report consists of the top 5 strengths, which are called signature strengths. See Figure 4.2 for the summary of the textbook author’s (SJL) findings from the VIA-IS.

An adolescent version of this measure, referred to as the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), has been developed and is undergoing validation; it may be available in 2006 (Christopher Peterson, personal communication, October 15, 2004). Preliminary information about the VIA-Youth, which contains 198 items (6 to 12 items for each of the 24 strengths with a 5-point Likert scale), suggested that internal consistency of the scales is adequate for most and that the basic structure of the measure may be best described by 4 factors rather than 6 (Peterson & Park, 2003). Child and youth versions of a strengths cardsort (Quinn, 2004; Lopez, Janowski, & Quinn, 2004), based on the 24 VIA strengths, have been developed, initially validated, and widely used by practitioners.

**THE SEARCH INSTITUTE’S 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS**

The Search Institute’s Developmental Assets (Benson et al., 1998), which originally were conceptualized in the 1980s in response to the question, “What protects children from today’s problems?” considers internal and external variables that contribute to a child’s thriving. The Search Institute researchers, headed by Peter Benson, conducted numerous research projects
and also held informal discussions and focus groups to ensure that the developmental assets included in their framework were applicable to all people, cultures, and settings in America.

The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets are considered commonsense, positive experiences and qualities and are identified as reflecting primary contributors to the thriving of young people. The Developmental Assets framework categorizes assets according to external and internal groups of 20 assets each. The 20 external assets are the positive experiences that children and youth gain through interactions with people and institutions; the 20 internal assets are those personal characteristics and behaviors that stimulate the positive development of young people. (See Table 4.3.)

Classifications and Measures of Human Strengths and Positive Outcomes

### Version 6.8.2004

**VIA Strengths Scale**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Its goal is to measure the extent to which people see themselves possessing various human strengths (for details see http://www.psych.upenn.edu/seligman/classification.htm).

Please take these tentative results with a grain of salt, but we would be interested in knowing your reactions to this assessment.

Christopher Peterson
chrispet@umich.edu

**Feedback**

You completed a preliminary version of this questionnaire. Here is the feedback we promised you. If you would like to save a copy, use File–Save As in your browser's menu and save it as Feedback.html on your computer.

We are just beginning the process of ascertaining the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. However, if we go simply by the face validity of the questions you answered, **your five most notable strengths** are as follows:

1. **Gratitude**
   - You are aware of and thankful for the good things that happen. You take time to express thanks.

2. **Perspective [Wisdom]**
   - You are able to provide wise counsel to others. You have ways of looking at the world that make sense to yourself and to other people.

3. **Curiosity [Interest, Novelty-Seeking, Openness to Experience]**
   - You take an interest in all of ongoing experience for its own sake. You find subjects and topics fascinating. You explore and discover.

4. **Hope [Optimism, Future-Mindedness, Future Orientation]**
   - You expect the best in the future and work to achieve it. You believe that a good future is something that can be brought about.

5. **Vitality [Zest, Enthusiasm, Vigor, Energy]**
   - You approach life with excitement and energy. You don’t do things halfway or halfheartedly. You live life as an adventure. You feel alive and activated.

**Figure 4.2** VIA-IS Signature Strengths for Shane Lopez

Table 4.3 The Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL ASSETS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Family life provides high levels of love and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive family</td>
<td>Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>to seek advice and counsel from parent(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other adult relationships</td>
<td>Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring neighborhood</td>
<td>Young person experiences caring neighbors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring school climate</td>
<td>School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent involvement in</td>
<td>Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schooling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowerment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community values youth</td>
<td>Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth as resources</td>
<td>Young people are given useful roles in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to others</td>
<td>Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boundaries and Expectations</strong></td>
<td>Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family boundaries</td>
<td>School provides clear rules and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School boundaries</td>
<td>Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood boundaries</td>
<td>Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult role models</td>
<td>Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive peer influence</td>
<td>Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructive Use of Time</strong></td>
<td>Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative activities</td>
<td>Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td>Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious community</td>
<td>Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### INTERNAL ASSETS

**Commitment to Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement motivation</th>
<th>Young person is motivated to do well in school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School engagement</td>
<td>Young person is actively engaged in learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding to school</td>
<td>Young person cares about her or his school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for pleasure</td>
<td>Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positive Values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caring</th>
<th>Young person places high value on helping other people.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equality and social justice</td>
<td>Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restraint</td>
<td>Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Competencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning and decision making</th>
<th>Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal competence</td>
<td>Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural competence</td>
<td>Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance skills</td>
<td>Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful conflict resolution</td>
<td>Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positive Identity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal power</th>
<th>Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Young person reports having high self-esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of purpose</td>
<td>Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive view of personal future</td>
<td>Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* The List of 40 Developmental Assets™ is reprinted with permission. Copyright © 1997 by Search Institute™. No other use is permitted without prior permission from Search Institute, 615 First Avenue, NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413. [http://www.searchinstitute.org/](http://www.searchinstitute.org/). All rights reserved. Search Institute™ and Developmental Assets™ are trademarks of Search Institute.
IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONAL STRENGTHS

Over the years, we have asked hundreds of clients and students about their weaknesses and strengths. Almost without exception, people are much quicker to respond about weaknesses than strengths. (See the

DISTINGUISHING AMONG THE MEASURES OF HUMAN STRENGTH

Although the Clifton StrengthsFinder, the VIA-IS, and the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life were created for different reasons, they currently are used for similar purposes. Namely, they identify a person’s primary strengths. Table 4.4 illustrates some of the similarities and differences among the measures. This information may help in the selection of the correct instrument for specific purposes, but more data should be solicited from the developers of the measures before making the final choice.

Table 4.4 Characteristics of Measures of Human Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Completed in &lt; 45 Minutes</th>
<th>Multiple Age-Specific Versions</th>
<th>Direct Focus on Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallup’s Clifton StrengthsFinder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values in Action—Inventory of Strengths</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Institute Profiles of Student Life</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONAL STRENGTHS

The 156-item survey, Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors, was developed in 1989 and revised in 1996 (see Benson et al., 1998, for a review). The measure (appropriate for children and youth) describes the respondent’s 40 Developmental Assets, along with 8 thriving indicators, 5 developmental deficits, and 24 risk-taking behaviors. Unfortunately, there is little information in the public domain about its psychometric properties.

Additional lists of developmental assets (for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, etc.) have been created by Dr. Benson and the Search Institute researchers. Parents and other caregivers are directed to observe the assets manifested by children and available in the environment.
Personal Mini-Experiments to examine this issue and to explore your strengths by taking the measures discussed in this chapter. We also have observed that people struggle for words when describing strengths, whereas they have no shortage of words or stories that bring their weaknesses to life.

**Discovering and Capitalizing on Your Strengths**

In this chapter, we have discussed classifications and measures of human strengths. We encourage you to learn more about your strengths and to share them with friends, family, teachers, and coworkers.

**Getting to Know Your Friend’s Weaknesses and Strengths:** Ask a friend (or several friends), “What are your weaknesses?” and note how quickly they respond to the question, how many weaknesses they identify, and how descriptive they are when telling the story of weaknesses. Then, ask that friend, “What are your strengths?” Make similar mental notes about reaction time, number of strengths, and descriptiveness. If you are asking these questions of more than one friend, alternate between asking the weakness question first and the strength question first. In turn, share your thoughts about your strengths (before or after you complete the measures presented in this chapter), and ask for your friend’s feedback on your self-assessment.

**Discovering Your Strengths:** In just over an hour, you can identify 10 of your personal strengths by completing the Clifton StrengthsFinder (www.strengthsfinder.com) and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (www.positivepsychology.org). We encourage you to take both inventories and share the results with people close to you.

**Capitalizing on Your Strengths:** There are numerous strategies for capitalizing on your strengths (see www.strengthsquest.com, www.reflectivehappiness.com). For now, we would like you to capitalize on one strength. Pick 1 of your 10 strengths and try to use that strength 5 times a day for 5 days. Your 25 attempts to capitalize on that strength have the potential to bolster it and create a habit of using that strength more each day.

We hope that readers take advantage of the opportunity to discover their strengths and that in several decades people will have as much to say about their strengths as they do about their weaknesses. Our observations of people upon the completion of a strengths measure suggest that the new or validated information about your personal strengths will give you a slight, temporary boost in positive emotions and confidence. Also, you will want to share the results with people around you.
THE CASE OF SHANE

As positive psychologists, we have committed ourselves to the development of the positive in others and, of course, we try to practice what we preach. We both have identified our strengths through formal and informal assessment, and we try to capitalize on our strengths every day. Here is a brief account of how one of us (SJL) uses his strengths in daily life.

When I received the results of the Clifton StrengthsFinder (see Figure 4.1) and the VIA-IS (see Figure 4.2), I reflected on the findings and tried to figure out how I could put them to immediate use. Then, I realized that I have been using these strengths every day... that is why they are my strengths! Nevertheless, I decided to be more intentional in my efforts to make my strengths come alive. That goal of intentionality addressed how I would capitalize on my strengths, but I hadn’t addressed why. It turns out, however, that it was pretty simple—I wanted to make my good life even better. That was the outcome I desired, and I thought that these “new” strengths would provide pathways to that goal.

Admittedly, my initial efforts to intentionally use my strengths every day were not that successful. Although I thought the findings were accurate, and I was excited to receive the strengths feedback, I was overwhelmed by the idea of refining my use of 5 or 10 strengths at the same time. For that reason, I decided to capitalize on the strengths that I thought would help me the most in making my life better. I chose the top two themes (Futuristic and Maximizer) from the Gallup feedback and the top strength (Gratitude) from the VIA results. Right away, focusing on three strengths seemed doable.

With those “three strengths that matter most” (as I began to refer to them) in hand, I consulted the action items (shared in a printable form as a supplement to the Signature Themes presented in Figure 4.1) associated with my Futuristic and Maximizer themes. For Futuristic, I settled on one daily activity that might spark my tendency to project into the future: Take time to think about the future. Pretty straightforward, but reading this action item made me realize that I would go for a considerable time without thinking about the future, and this led to dissatisfaction with how my life was going. Putting this guidance into action has involved taking daily walks dedicated to thinking about the future. Often, I walk in the evening, and I chat with my wife about the future of our work and our family. At other times, I leave the office around midday and walk through the campus reflecting on some of my aspirations. These walks have turned into a cherished time that yields exciting ideas and considerable satisfaction.

Regarding my Maximizer theme, I believe this talent of making good ideas, projects, and relationships better contributes greatly to my success at work. Through examining my habits at home and work, I realized I was doing a fairly good job of systematically using this strength. This left me feeling unsure about how to proceed in my efforts to capitalize on
this strength. Then, one day I encountered a person who prided herself on playing “the devil’s advocate” every time an idea was presented during a meeting. I thought about the many devil’s advocates whom I have encountered over the years, and I concluded that these people were not necessarily providing constructive feedback that made a good idea better. They also were not offering alternative ideas that would work better. In my opinion, all they were doing was undercutting my creativity and enthusiasm (or that of other people). To maximize, I realized that I had to surround myself with people who knew how to make good ideas better. That criterion has become a critical one when I select friends, colleagues, and students, and I believe it has boosted my creativity and the quality of my work.

I have used Futuristic and Maximizing themes both at work and at home, and I think my efforts have helped me in both domains. I believe that capitalizing on these strengths has led to more creativity and productivity at work and greater sense of purpose for my family and me. Using gratitude (my third “strength that matters most”) with more intentionality has not generated more productivity or greater clarity in my personal mission, but it has been rewarding in that it brings joy and a sense of closeness to people. To make the most of my gratitude, I decided to spend part of most Friday afternoons writing thank-you notes (handwritten and mailed the old-fashioned way) to people who have touched my life that week, and at other times I thank people who have done something nice for me that week. Occasionally, I write to a person who did a good deed for me years ago (and whom I had never thanked or whom I wanted to thank again.) Finally, I also write to people who have done good works (I may or may not know them personally) to express my gratitude for their efforts. This practice has enriched my emotional life, and it has strengthened many of my relationships.

By focusing on three of my strengths, I have been successful at making an already good life even better. Over time, I have become more facile at capitalizing on other strengths, particularly ideation, hope, and wisdom. Living my strengths has become a way of life for me, and I look forward to finding out how this will influence the futures of my loved ones and me.

Positive Outcomes for All

DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

The pursuit of happiness has been the topic of discussion in religious writings, philosophical texts, and proclamations of the American forefathers. Most recently, magazine articles and trade books have positioned happiness as the de facto central outcome of positive psychology research and practice. Yet, as described in this text, the pursuit of happiness is only
one aspect of positive psychology. As positive psychology researchers and practitioners, we certainly want our participants and clients to be happy, but we also are interested in whether they are realizing their potentials, pursuing their interests, nurturing others, and leading authentic lives. To date, however, happiness (spontaneous reflections of pleasant and unpleasant feelings in one’s immediate experience) and life satisfaction (a sense of contentment and peace stemming from small gaps between wants and needs) are of major interest in the positive psychology field. In this section of the chapter, we discuss happiness and life satisfaction as components of emotional well-being but not as the single or most important outcome in positive psychology. (This chapter provides a basic description of happiness as a meaningful life outcome. The basic research on happiness is discussed in Chapter 7.)

Theories of subjective well-being (also referred to as emotional well-being and happiness), such as the emotional model posited by Diener and others (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), suggest that individuals’ appraisals of their own lives capture the essence of well-being. Objective approaches to understanding psychological well-being and social well-being have been proposed by Ryff (1989) and Keyes (1998), respectively. Our view is that psychological and social well-being provide useful frameworks for conceptualizing human functioning. Taken together, subjective descriptions of emotional well-being (i.e., happiness) and objective descriptions of psychological and social well-being constitute a more complete portrayal of mental health (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). Table 4.5 presents the descriptions of the three types of well-being and sample items that tap these components of positive functioning.

Emotional well-being consists of perceptions of avowed happiness and satisfaction with life, along with the balance of positive and negative affects. This threefold structure of emotional well-being consists of life satisfaction, positive affect, and the absence of negative affect, and it has been confirmed in numerous studies (e.g., Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Shmotkin, 1998). Indeed, the coupling of satisfaction and affect serves as a meaningful and measurable conceptualization of emotional well-being.

Ryff (1989) posits that some of the favorable outcomes described by positive psychologists can be integrated into a model of psychological well-being (see Table 4.5). Self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others are the six components of Ryff’s conceptualization of positive functioning. This model of well-being has been investigated in numerous studies, and the findings reveal that the six dimensions are independent, though correlated, constructs of well-being. Specifically, Ryff and Keyes (1995) conducted an analysis of the six-part well-being model and found that the multidimensional model was a superior fit over a single-factor model of well-being.
Table 4.5  Elements of Psychological, Social, and Emotional Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Well-Being</th>
<th>Social Well-Being</th>
<th>Emotional Well-Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Self-Acceptance:** Possess positive attitude toward the self; acknowledge and accept multiple aspects of self; feel positive about past life.  
  - I like most parts of my personality.  
  - When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.  
  - In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life. (−) | **Social Acceptance:** Have positive attitudes toward people; acknowledge others and generally accept people, despite others’ sometimes complex and perplexing behavior.  
  - People who do a favor expect nothing in return.  
  - People do not care about other people’s problems. (−)  
  - I believe that people are kind. | **Positive Affect:** Experience symptoms that suggest enthusiasm, joy, and happiness for life.  
  - During the last 30 days, how much of the time did you feel cheerful; in good spirits; extremely happy; calm and peaceful; satisfied; and full of life?** |
| **Personal Growth:** Have feelings of continued development and potential and are open to new experience; feel increasingly knowledgeable and effective.  
  - For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.  
  - I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world.  
  - I gave up trying to make big improvements/changes in my life a long time ago. (−) | **Social Actualization:** Care about and believe society is evolving positively; think society has potential to grow positively; think self/society is realizing potential.  
  - The world is becoming a better place for everyone.  
  - Society has stopped making progress. (−)  
  - Society hasn’t improved for people like me. (−) | **Negative Affect:** Absence of symptoms that suggest that life is undesirable and unpleasant.  
  - During the last 30 days, how much of the time did you feel so sad nothing could cheer you up; nervous; restless or fidgety; hopeless; that everything was an effort; worthless?** |
| **Purpose in Life:** Have goals and a sense of direction in life; past life is meaningful; hold beliefs that give purpose to life.  
  - Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.  
  - I live life one day at a time and don’t really think about the future. (−)  
  - I sometimes feel as if I’ve done all there is to do in life. (−) | **Social Contribution:** Feel they have something valuable to give to the present and to society; think their daily activities are valued by their community.  
  - I have something valuable to give to the world.  
  - My daily activities do not create anything worthwhile for my community. (−)  
  - I have nothing important to contribute to society. (−) | **Life Satisfaction:** A sense of contentment, peace, and satisfaction from small discrepancies between wants and needs with accomplishments and attainments.  
  - During the past 30 days, how much of the time did you feel satisfied; full of life?**  
  - Overall these days, how satisfied are you with your life? (0–10, where 0 = terrible and 10 = delighted)  
  - Satisfaction may be measured in life domains such as work, home, neighborhood, health, intimacy, finances, and parenting or it is measured globally (see the Satisfaction With Life Scale, Diener et al., 1985). |

(Continued)
Table 4.5 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Well-Being</th>
<th>Social Well-Being</th>
<th>Emotional Well-Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Environmental Mastery:** Feel competent and able to manage a complex environment; choose or create personally suitable community.  
  - The demands of everyday life often get me down. (−)  
  - In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.  
  - I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life. | **Social Coherence:** See a social world that is intelligible, logical, and predictable; care about and are interested in society and contexts.  
  - The world is too complex for me. (−)  
  - I cannot make sense of what's going on in the world. (−)  
  - I find it easy to predict what will happen next in society. | **Happiness:** Having a general feeling and experience of pleasure, contentment, and joy.  
  - Over all these days, how happy are you with your life?***  
  - How frequently have you felt (joy, pleasure, happiness) in the past week, month, or year?  

| **Autonomy:** Are self-determining, independent, and regulated internally; resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways; evaluate self by personal standards.  
  - I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions. (−)  
  - I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.  
  - I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important. | **Social Integration:** Feel part of community; think they belong, feel supported, and share commonalities with community.  
  - I don't feel I belong to anything I'd call a community. (−)  
  - I feel close to other people in my community.  
  - My community is a source of comfort. |  |
| **Positive Relations With Others:** Have warm, satisfying, trusting relationships; are concerned about others' welfare; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understand give-and-take of human relationships.  
  - Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me. (−)  
  - People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.  
  - I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others. (−) |  |  |

Note: A negative sign in parenthesis indicates that the item is reverse scored. Response options range from strongly disagree (1), moderately disagree (2), or slightly disagree (3) to neither agree nor disagree (4), slightly agree (5), moderately agree (6), or strongly agree (7).  
** Indicates response range from all the time (1), most of the time (2), some of the time (3), a little of the time (4), none of the time (5).  
*** Indicates response range from worst possible situation (0) to best possible situation (10).
Keyes (1998) suggests that, just as clinicians categorize the social challenges that are evident in an individual's life, so should they assess the social dimensions of well-being. On this point, he proposes that the dimensions of coherence, integration, actualization, contribution, and acceptance are the critical components of social well-being.

Keyes (Keyes & Lopez, 2002) also suggests that complete mental health can be conceptualized via combinations of high levels of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. Individuals with these high levels are described as flourishing (see the criteria in Table 4.6). Accordingly, individuals who have no mental illness but who have low levels of well-being are described as languishing. (We have found that informal assessment of levels of well-being provides valuable information about the range of functioning between flourishing and languishing.) This conceptualization of mental health describes a syndrome of symptoms that might be amenable to intervention techniques aimed at increasing levels of emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Conceptualization and treatment are well connected in this model.

A new, integrative theoretical perspective on well-being may provide additional assistance in bridging the gap between our research-based understanding of living well and the ability to promote it (Lent, 2004). By describing one model that explains our capacity for positive functioning during normative life conditions and one that provides direction for restoring well-being during difficult life circumstances, Lent highlights numerous treatment alternatives (e.g., setting goals, enhancing efficacy, building social support) that promote this much-prized life outcome.

TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES

As discussed in this chapter and suggested elsewhere throughout this book, we believe that human strengths are the active ingredients of positive living. This belief can be tested empirically in everyday life and in research studies if, and only if, the definitions and measures of strengths capture the true essence of the best in people. Therefore, we submit information in this chapter about three classifications of strengths and their respective measures for your critical evaluation.

Most of the remaining chapters of this text focus on the science of human strengths (some of these strengths are not listed in the classification systems) that is being developed by clinical, counseling, developmental, health, evolutionary, personality, school, and social psychologists. Numerous chapters address the practice of leading a good life and how you and your friends and family capitalize on strengths and build on positive emotions to attain positive life outcomes. Notice that we do not address the "science of good living." Positive psychology research initiatives have done
FLOURISHING IN LIFE

A. Individual must have had no episodes of major depression in the past year.

B. Individual must possess a high level of well-being as indicated by the individual’s meeting all three of the following criteria:
   1. High emotional well-being, defined by 2 of 3 scale scores on appropriate measures falling in the upper tertile.
      a. Positive affect
      b. Negative affect (low)
      c. Life satisfaction
   2. High psychological well-being, defined by 4 of 6 scale scores on appropriate measures falling in the upper tertile.
      a. Self-acceptance
      b. Personal growth
      c. Purpose in life
      d. Environmental mastery
      e. Autonomy
      f. Positive relations with others
   3. High social well-being, defined by 3 of 5 scale scores on appropriate measures falling in the upper tertile.
      a. Social acceptance
      b. Social actualization
      c. Social contribution
      d. Social coherence
      e. Social integration

positive to describe and measure outcomes other than those associated with happiness and life satisfaction, or “the pleasant life” (Seligman, 2002). Although we encourage a focus on objective aspects of well-being, we contend that a more expanded conceptualization of living well is needed to guide our efforts at change and positive growth. Here, in the remaining portion of this chapter, we dream a little about the future of positive psychology, one where romantic and agapic love, rewarding school and work and civic contributions, and resource-producing play share the spotlight with happiness.

Positive Outcomes Associated With Love

Agape is a spiritual love that reflects selflessness and altruism. This type of love involves concern for another’s welfare and being relatively undemanding for oneself. Although this is not the most celebrated form of love, it may be the most beneficial. Our view is that we could use our strengths to be more giving and to build relationships founded on selflessness.
Romantic love, especially passionate romantic love (described further in Chapter 13), is much desired and talked about by people of all ages. There is little celebration, however, of resilient romantic love or sustained romantic love. What strengths does it take to make a relationship work despite hard times and thereafter flourish for 10 years, 30 years, and 50 years? We could determine this through more systematic study of couples who report high levels of romantic love many years into their relationships.

Positive Outcomes Associated With School, Work, and Civic Contributions

Schools are becoming more accountable for the educational outcomes of their students, and businesses continue to keep a close eye on the bottom line. Although desired outcomes for students and employees are fairly well articulated as learning and productivity, respectively, there must be other positive outcomes associated with these important activities that occupy us for our entire lives.

Certainly the meaningfulness of academic pursuits and work can be described. But could we measure the extent to which positive schooling (see Chapter 16) and gainful employment (see Chapter 17) stimulate psychological growth? And what about distal outcome measures of school and work? Civic contributions of students and employees could be linked to developmental gains attained early during important periods in school or work.

Positive Outcomes Associated With Play

Play introduces us to the social, emotional, and physical skills needed to make the most out of life. Indeed, play is regarded as a “form of practice, or proximal growth, or mastery of skills” (Lutz, 2000, p. 33). The positive outcomes of childhood play are undeniable . . . yet we do not value the role of play in adulthood. The benefits of competitive and noncompetitive adult play have not been delineated, and this topic is ripe for more research.

Identifying Strengths and Moving Toward a Vital Balance

The staid view of mental illness as progressive and refractory was challenged by the noted psychiatrist Karl Menninger (Menninger et al., 1963). He called for psychiatrists to view mental illness as amenable to change. Thus, this new view of mental illness would bring the old view into balance. Positive psychologists now call for a different type of balance—a view of human life that gives attention both to weaknesses and to strengths. Although there is no question that we presently know much
more about human fallibilities than about assets, a strong science and robust applications aimed at human strengths will yield not only a more thorough but also a more accurate view of the human condition.

Note

1. In January 2003, Dr. Clifton was awarded an American Psychological Association presidential commendation in recognition of his pioneering role in strengths-based psychology. The commendation states, “Whereas, living out the vision that life and work could be about building what is best and highest, not just about correcting weaknesses, [Clifton] became the father of Strengths-Based Psychology and the grandfather of Positive Psychology.”

Key Terms

Agape: A spiritual love that reflects selflessness and altruism.

Construct validity: The extent to which a scale measures the underlying attributes it intends to measure. Construct validity can be achieved by comparing your measure to other measures that assess a similar construct.

Content validity: The extent to which the actual content of the scale represents the domain it is intended to address. In other words, a content-valid measure covers all aspects of the construct it is trying to measure.

Criterion validity: The extent to which scores on a scale can predict actual behavior or performance on another, related measure.

Emotional well-being: A type of well-being consisting of perceptions of affirmed happiness and satisfaction with life, along with a balance of positive and negative affect.

Empirically based: Developed using available research knowledge.

Flourishing: A term pertaining to individuals who have simultaneously high levels of social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Languishing: A term pertaining to individuals who do not have a mental illness but who are low in social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Life satisfaction: A sense of contentment and peace stemming from small gaps between wants and needs.

Psychological well-being: A type of well-being that consists of six elements: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others.
Psychometric properties: The measurement characteristics of a scale that include its reliability, validity, and statistics on items of the measure.

Reliability: The ability of a scale to produce consistent and reliable results over a number of administrations or after the passage of time.

Social well-being: A type of well-being that consists of coherence, integration, actualization, contribution, and acceptance by others.

Strength: A capacity for feeling, thinking, and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes (Linley & Harrington, 2006).

Talent: Naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied and manifested in life experiences characterized by yearnings, rapid learning, satisfaction, and timelessness.

Validity: The ability of a scale to measure what it is intended to measure.
Part II

Positive Psychology in Context