

Living with Purpose and Mindfulness

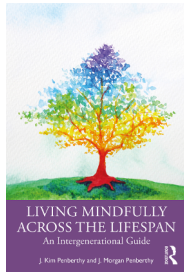
Improving Emotional Well-Being in Our Personal and Professional Lives



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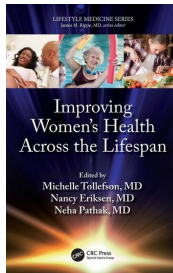
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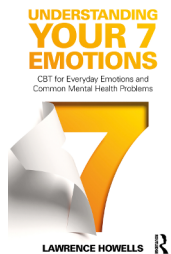
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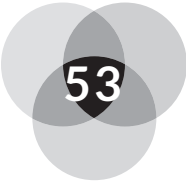
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Doing Less, Living More

On a Saturday afternoon, Yusun, a passionate journalist, after cleaning her apartment, taking a quick trip to the grocery store, and watering her Monstera plants, took a quick shower, groomed herself, and sat down for six hours straight in front of her laptop to work with clients in Malaysia. Hour after hour, she asked questions about the intersection of finances, politics, and well-being, listened attentively, and took notes on her iPad, while drinking three bottles of water. The afternoon unfolded, and around 6:23 p.m., she turned off her laptop, fed her puppy, took a deep breath, and turned on the TV to watch one of her favorite movies. Yusun wanted to watch the movie but in the background, her mind was replaying pieces of the interviews from earlier in the day one after another; Yusun tried to focus on different scenes of the movie but couldn't resist pondering about the conversations she had. After two hours of kind of watching the movie, laughing quietly, and drinking a cup of chamomile tea, Yusun called her best friend. They chatted for a bit, and even though Yusun wanted to hear about her best friend's new job, she noticed again how her mind was pulling her into more thinking about her next round of interviews.

Yusun spent the last hour of her day playing with her puppy. While it seemed that she was busy every hour of the day, in the back of her mind she had been organizing her writeup for the interviews, solidifying key points, connecting arguments, deconstructing misconceptions, and slowly having micro-aha moments. Fast forward to the next morning, Sunday: Yusun woke up, brewed coffee, washed her face, and sat down in front to her laptop to write her first article.

Yusun is very committed to journalism. She loves it and doesn't see herself changing careers. In fact, her friends have a running joke about this: they laugh that when they are all one day retired and relaxing on a beach, Yusun will be there . . . planning her next journal or magazine article.

It's really inspiring to live our passions, to find our purpose, and to do what truly speaks to our heart. I know, for me, once I started living my values, my precious gems, there was no returning back to my old ways of being. I have seen the same with my clients: once they get in touch with those life principles they want to live for, and keep moving toward them, everything shifts for them and those around them.

But what happens if you're overly focused on what matters to you at the expense of experiencing, savoring, and appreciating what's happening in front of you? What happens when you're consumed by and overly enthusiastic about something, and ultimately get lost in thinking that that one thing you care about is the only important thing in life?

Doing what matters most requires your full attention, investment, and dedication; that's a fact. Sometimes you may go into full plodding mode to make things happen (see chapter Finding Your Rhythm). And often, you will need to make tough choices.

But doing what matters doesn't necessarily mean that you cannot be present with what's happening around you. It doesn't mean that you cannot be present with the person sitting across from you. It doesn't mean that you cannot be present when watching a movie, relaxing or having a drink with a friend. In fact, doing what matters in a way that is uplifting, inspiring, and fulfilling requires that you learn the micro-skill of paying flexible attention.

In ACT, we think of paying flexible attention as your ability to be in contact with the present moment with intention (and that's why it's the ACT equivalent of mindfulness). But more than techniques or exercises, paying flexible attention and being in contact with the present moment are attitudes you develop to fully experience life as it's happening; it's like instead of running to "doing land," you stay in "being land."

I could write hundreds of pages citing the benefits of mindfulness and cultivating the skill of being present, but I don't want to bother you with that or turn this chapter into an academic one. I think we can agree that mindfulness has become mainstream, and thousands of books have been written about it; but perhaps most important, it's helpful to keep in mind that we don't need to be monks to cultivate it and we don't need to live in a monastery to practice it.

If you have a formal meditation practice, that's great. But, given the fast pace at which we're living, the endless list of errands on our to-do list, and all the other things we need to do, it's helpful to keep in mind that you can practice to stay in the present moment anytime, anywhere, and with whomever, not just when you're in a quiet space with your eyes closed.

You see, life can get so busy so often that learning to live life is also learning to shift the focus of our attention, intentionally and purposefully, when it matters, when it's useful, and when it's workable.

In Yusun's case, if someone had been next to her, it would have looked like she was watching TV, talking to her friend, and playing with her puppy. But where was her mind? It was trapped in what she had done during the day; clearly, those interviews and her job are important to her – and yet, that conversation with her friend and that play session with her puppy are moments that won't happen again.

Living with purpose invites you to notice when you're distracted, disengaged, or disconnected from what's in front of you. As that song by

the Byrds says, “There is a time for everything,” and while distraction, daydreaming, and fantasizing can be fun, they’re not activities to do all the time.

Check in with your experience: what happens when you’re hanging out with friends and, despite being physically there, your mind is running different hypotheses for your next project? Have you ever had an experience where you’re watching a movie, and at the end of it you notice that you finished all the cookies that were in front of you? Have you ever tried to read a book while your mind was listing all the reasons to be angry about something that had happened earlier that morning? Have you had moments when your kids were next to you playing and being silly, and half an hour later you realized you couldn’t say what they were playing with, what they were saying, and what they were laughing about?

Humans do human things, and being distracted is one of those things we all do. But the more distracted we are, the less life we experience; the more we engage in mindless behaviors, the less satisfying our lives will be; and the more disengaged we are, the less joy we feel.

One of my dear friends, Dr. Russ Harris, author of the book *The Happiness Trap*, likes to talk about savoring our experiences as they occur. Think about how many things happen around us every single moment: the sound of cars, the smell of a cup of tea, the sound of a dog barking, the warmth coming from the electrical heater, the ticktock sound of the clock, the feeling of your partner kissing you goodbye, the sound of the keyboard when typing, or the sensation of the sun on your face when you leave your home. What about starting to notice these things as they happen?

Pause and Play

Doing what works is an invitation to check often where your dynamic mind takes you, what’s important in those moments, and when it’s helpful or not to be absorbed in our minds.

Here are some tips for you:

- Open your eyes, ears, and all of your senses to what’s happening in front of you.
- When your mind wanders off into all those thoughts about what you need to do, want to do, and have to do, check where you are and ask yourself if going along with your mind right then is a move toward your values or away from them.
- When you’re doing something that matters to you, it’s understandable that your dynamic mind will try to keep you hooked on it 24/7. And yet, your mind is not your boss; it doesn’t get to decide where you put your attention and when. That’s your choice. And that means that, frequently, you will need to bring

your attention back to what's important to you in that particular moment.

- Build into your day a five-minute window to practice awareness of your experience: set a timer, and, in those five minutes, pay attention to each of your five senses. Describe to yourself – without adding any judgment – what you smell, see, hear, taste, and feel.

You cannot mess up practicing staying in the present because there is no right or wrong way to do it, even though your mind may come up with doubtful thoughts about what you're doing. As long as you practice noticing and describing what's happening in the moment, intentionally, and bring yourself back to it when your mind wanders, then you're cultivating awareness.

1 You Have Worth Just for Existing

The Concept of Self-Worth

Some of us go about our lives without much need to justify our worth. There are those among us, however, who spend more of our time agonizing and feeling unworthy and undeserving. More than 5% of Americans endorsed feelings of worthlessness or low self-esteem when asked about this in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) (Blackwell et al., 2012). There are approximately 327.2 million Americans in 2018 according to the U.S. Census Bureau's population clock, and if we assume the same rate of worthlessness (which may be a conservative estimate), that would mean we have over 16 million people in the U.S. today suffering from feelings of worthlessness. The same NHIS showed that being divorced or separated increases the odds of feeling worthless to 8.7%, and the numbers for those Americans who do not have a high school education are even higher, coming in at a whopping 19%! A survey by Aaron Beck, M.D., a famous researcher who studies the treatment of depression with psychotherapy called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), showed that over 80% of depressed people endorse dislike for themselves. There are also those of us who generally feel okay about ourselves, but have periods of time during our life when our self-worth is in doubt or flat-out in the gutter. I would wager this has happened to more than a few of us – including folks who may generally be successful, high achieving, and seem, at least from the 'outside,' to have no reason to doubt their worth.

We propose a concept that all sentient creatures have worth just by the nature of the fact that they exist. In this chapter, we also present the concept that this powerful truth can be learned and cultivated. We explore some mindful strategies, including compassion meditations, to help increase self-worth. Taken literally, gaining this knowledge and truly owning it can be an amazingly positive and profound insight for people, and can even save lives. We'll begin this chapter and this book with true stories about owning our worth.

Kim's Story of Self-Worth

I grew up in the 1970s and 80s in an upper-middle class family, the eldest of three children. I was a naturally happy, energetic child, who was independent and carefree. I grew into an upbeat, energetic adolescent who was somewhat of a people pleaser. I had a lovely childhood as the daughter of a surgeon and a nurse. My mother, the nurse, stopped working outside the home when my little brother was born in 1971. There was no alcohol or drug abuse, no violence, and my life was good – I had everything I needed – friends, safety, opportunity. My mother was loving, accepting, and as the daughter of an alcoholic herself, she had worked hard to provide a safe and supportive home. I felt it. I felt something different, however, from my father, who was more stoic and harder to read. Like many fathers of the time, I have come to learn, he did not say ‘I love you’ and rarely gave hugs. He was a good provider, he was quiet, never physically or emotionally abusive. But, I couldn’t get a read on him, and I couldn’t shake the feeling that what I was doing was not good enough. Most of the time, I couldn’t even get his attention, it felt. I was good in school – top of my class, attractive, popular, and tried to be a good person. I had been accepted into my number one choice for college, but felt like I couldn’t even get my father’s attention, let alone his approval. Over the years of talking with friends and acquaintances, I have heard many report similar experiences.

Many of us had parents, especially fathers, born in the late 1930s–40s who grew up in the 1940s–50s – the baby boomer generation – and many of us felt their particular style of parenting. My mother ran the household and raised the children, even though she had an advanced nursing degree and had worked professionally before and early into her marriage. My father worked hard and earned the money. He was not the emotionally supportive parent that my mother was. He was not the one to be overly effusive or even particularly obviously supportive. Why am I telling you all of this? One reason is that if you were raised by baby boomers, if you are a ‘GenXer,’ then you may be able to relate. The second reason is that I think this background is important in understanding my relationship with self-worth. I grew up strong and competent but was also trying to please. My self-worth became tied, at least in some areas of life, to my performance and accomplishments. I felt a strong desire to please and succeed in the eyes of authoritative others. If someone did not notice my success, I tried harder to succeed, achieve, accomplish ... and I was most often successful ... very successful. This state of affairs led to many accomplishments, but even as a young adult, it didn’t feel like I had impressed my father enough for him to say that he loved me or was proud of me.

Morgan's Story of Self-Worth

I am a millennial and an only child. I grew up with incredibly supportive parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family, and friends. Growing up, I was told over and over that I am a being of worth. I was (and still am) reminded on a daily basis how loved, supported, and cared for I am by those who love, support, and care about me. I was (and still am) told that the world is better with me in it. And I am continually thankful to have grown up with these beautiful reminders from those who love me and whom I love dearly. The teenage me believed these things as well. I knew that I was loved and supported, and that expectations were high for me because those who expected great things of me were confident I could accomplish them – and I, of course, expected the most out of myself.

And even with all of this love and support, I took my own expectations the most seriously. I experienced major doubt. I sometimes wondered if I'd be deemed a 'failure' if I got a B on a paper, or if I would lose my worth by being the loser whose parents picked them up from a party. In my early teenage years, I was stuck in this place where I sometimes listened to my parents' advice about things like academics and extracurricular involvement, but sternly refused to hear anything they had to say about my romantic relationships or social experiences. I didn't know who to listen to in order to navigate my teenage-hood and create the life I wanted. I look back now and realize my self-worth was low even though I could not recognize it. I would feel sad and not worthy for no reason and wondered if this was just me. Looking back, I realize how hard I was on myself and how so much of it stemmed from not feeling worthy.

The History of Self-Worth

Many of the religions and spiritual traditions of the world teach that humans have worth just for existing. For example, the Abrahamic religions typically teach that all people are made in the image of God. Accordingly, the value of human life is intrinsic, for it derives from God, who made human beings in his own image (*Genesis 1:26–27*; American Bible Society, 2002). This core belief is central to Christian, Judaic, and Islamic teachings, which express that there is value to be found in all people, no matter their appearance or social status. All religions recognize human beings as fundamentally equal, whether this is understood as a consequence of their status as children of God, such as in Christianity, Judaism, or Islam: *'So God created humanity in God's image, in the image of God, God created them'* (*Genesis 1:27*; American Bible Society, 2002), of their manifestation of the Divine in Hinduism: *'The human body is the temple of God'* (*Rig Veda*; Hooven, 1933), or of their common original nature and desire for happiness as in Buddhism: *'All sentient beings without*

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exception have the Buddha-nature' (*Nirvana Sutra*; Blum, 2013). Respect for human dignity is, therefore, a fundamental principle of spiritual traditions. With that equality comes a belief that all humans deserve a basic level of respect and dignity, regardless of their background.

Another way of saying this is 'humans – all humans – have worth just for existing!'

Imagine if you and others could truly and thoroughly fathom this as a fact. You have worth. This is the *absolute truth*. Whether you were taught this or not, what would it be like to believe it? You have worth just for existing. Imagine: if that is true, what does it mean for you?

For some rare few, this knowledge alone may work to help realize your inherent worth. But those of you who can simply 'read and believe' are few and far between. So, this means that most of you, if you are suffering from low self-worth or worthless feelings, will need more.

We are certainly not the only people who have ever dealt with feelings of low self-worth, self-doubt, or lack of self-acceptance. It seems like nearly all humans who have been around long enough to feel emotions and interact with other humans have experienced these feelings. The ways these feelings manifest and are approached vary widely based on a multitude of factors, probably because each individual is raised by unique individuals, in unique circumstances, and in unique places and times. Everyone learns about themselves, others, and the world in a similar way, but we all learn a bit of a different story – even siblings or family members who grew up in the same home at the same time! Although those who feel worthless share many commonalities, their individual experiences are unique to their own learning history and circumstances.

Challenges to Self-Worth

Throughout life we encounter multiple challenges to our own self-worth, including challenges from others and ourselves. Feelings of worthlessness are hypothesized to be a learned emotion and can also be an associated symptom of other devastating disorders, such as depression. Low self-worth is unfortunately often 'taught' to us by the very people who are around us from birth and who are tasked to care for and nurture us. Families act as an incubator for learned responses to life, both positive and negative. Messages can be blatant or subtle, but they are often well-learned.

We, as Morgan's parents, thought we were providing Morgan with loving and positive messages, and we were. Yet, our verbal messages were not all that she was listening to. She was listening to our disapproving body language and facial expressions when she told us that she had not started her homework yet or that she got a 'C' on a quiz. She was listening to the messages on social media about all of her

friends' and classmates' amazing achievements, great test scores, exciting weekend trips, wonderful boyfriend, etc. And she was listening to her own internal messages that she was not good enough. Even the most positive intentions of loving family and friends may fail, especially in the face of incessant challenging messages from other sources. Imagine the destructive impact of blatant messages of worthlessness and irrelevance or worse yet, open contempt or hatred! Unfortunately, there is no shortage of folks that I have spoken to who had these horrifying experiences growing up.

One example of such a situation was a patient of mine whom we will call Ruth. Ruth was a quiet, sad 62-year-old office worker who started seeing me for persistent depression when she could no longer function because of it. Her symptoms included feelings of worthlessness. In getting to know her over our time together in therapy, she hesitantly told me stories of her childhood and how her mother made it very clear to her from an early age that she was not worthy. Her mother shared that she resented Ruth, and never wanted to have a baby, and that she did not think much of her once she was born. Ruth's father was resentful of another mouth to feed, and let both Ruth and her mother know that he did not think he owed Ruth anything. Ruth was blamed for all the family financial troubles, and from an early age, reported feelings of worthlessness and shame. Ruth had no concept that she had worth because the primary people in her life told her, in no uncertain terms, that she DID NOT have worth.

Ruth suffered from low self-worth, to be sure, and she learned this from the people in her life. Due to the extreme nature of her conditioning, her symptoms manifested into a serious mental disorder, and she was diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder, among other things. We know that clinical depression and persistent depression (sometimes called dysthymia) are associated with feelings of worthlessness, as well as other significant negative emotions such as sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, tearfulness, anxiety, and other physical symptoms, like pain, insomnia, appetite changes, and fatigue. We also know that the causes of such depressive disorders are multifactorial, meaning that they are typically caused by genetics and environment, including the things we learn from those around us. While positive responses from others support our emotional equilibrium, negative responses can bog us down, making it difficult to remain afloat under the tide of life. Humans are very good learners and we do not discriminate between learning from healthy, well-intended individuals and hateful, malignant ones!

Another example is a friend of mine, Tad, who generally had a pleasant, what some would call 'normal' childhood with no trauma or abuse. When I met him as a young adult, he had a pleasant demeanor and happy outlook. He suffered from low self-worth after his divorce and the financial hardship that followed. He was a young father who had been easygoing

and funny, but began doubting his worth. After his wife cheated on him and then ultimately left him for her lover, he became withdrawn and reported that he felt worthless. He felt even worse after dealing with all the legal issues surrounding the divorce and finally sought help from a therapist when he started doubting that he could be a good father to his two young boys.

These examples can be viewed along a continuum. Low self-worth can occur to those with good upbringing who have healthy habits and supportive people in their lives. Self-loathing can also have more extreme manifestations due to impoverished or abusive conditions and can ultimately become associated with further disease and disability in the form of trauma-related depression, anxiety, and other psychological and physical symptoms. There are many areas in between as well, and of course, self-worth and self-esteem can be impacted in the moment by internal experiences and external events, respectively.

Depression, anxiety, and other mental conditions often happen to people who have low self-worth. At this point, it is not clear whether it's the mental condition and the stigma associated with it that causes the low self-worth or whether it happens the other way around. Either way, they build on each other, creating a persistent feeling of unworthiness and despair. People who don't value themselves may also tend to get into unhealthy relationships, and this can compound the challenges to their own worth.

Your Own Self-Worth

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines self-worth as 'a feeling that you are a good person who deserves to be treated with respect.' There are many ways for someone to value themselves and assess their worth as a human being, and some of these ways are more psychologically beneficial than others. Christina Hibbert, Ph.D., who is a clinical psychologist studying self-worth and self-esteem, proposes that 'Self-esteem is what we think and feel and believe about ourselves. Self-worth is recognizing "I am greater than all of those things." It is a deep knowing that I am of value, that I am lovable, necessary to this life, and of incomprehensible worth' (Hibbert, 2013). Self-worth can be thought of as a trait, which means something that you are born with, or as a state, which means it can be influenced and changed over time. In reality, self-worth is probably influenced by multiple factors, and can be thought of as impacted by biology, and psychological and social factors and thus, can also be changed through learning. This would imply then that some people are naturally more confident in their self-worth and some may be less confident. It also means that self-worth can be modified and increased with intention and effort.

Self-Worth Versus Self-Esteem or Self-Efficacy

In the psychological world, self-worth and self-esteem are often used interchangeably, although they are not exactly the same. Self-worth can be defined as the value that an individual gives to herself, specifically the value that an individual gives to herself internally, regardless of what is happening in the external world. Self-esteem refers to the appreciation that an individual has for herself. Having self-esteem is important as it allows you to appreciate your own talents and capabilities. It can also lead to comparing yourself to others. Thus, self-esteem can be said to depend on external factors, rather than internal factors. We will discuss self-esteem and its relationship to self-efficacy in [Chapter 3](#), but suffice it to say that self-esteem is impacted by others, and self-worth is not. In other words, self-worth is about who you are, not about what you do.

Your Story of Self-Worth

A good place to start your own work is to think hard about your own internal messages as well as the responses to life that you learned while growing up. What did you learn that may be hindering you now? What is helpful to you? The first step of this kind of assessment is to explore your own feelings and experiences and be really honest with yourself. We advocate doing an exercise where you examine your own ‘rules’ or ‘maps’ that you picked up during your childhood and youth. These are like the ‘sound track’ of your youth – the things you learned that you may not even remember learning. These may be rules that you are aware of or less aware of. They are probably assumptions that you have been carrying around with you unchecked ever since! You can write these things down or just talk them through in your own head or with a trusted other, such as a therapist or a close friend. Ask yourself: ‘What did I learn about myself, others, and life in general, growing up?’ These can be responses you’ve acknowledged, or those you observed but never really said out loud. You may want to try a journaling activity by finishing the following statements:

- The good things my family taught me about myself...
- The negative things my family taught me about myself...
- The good things my family taught me about others...
- The negative things my family taught me about others...
- The good things my family taught me about life...
- The negative things my family taught me about life...

Some positive examples of learning include: ‘I learned that I am strong,’ or ‘I learned that other people can be supportive and helpful,’ or ‘I learned that life is good.’ Some common negative examples I have heard in clinical practice include: ‘I learned that what I do doesn’t

matter.’ or ‘I learned that other people will let me down.’ or ‘I learned that life is scary and uncertain.’

Often the most negative responses to life are those unspoken truths of your family. We might think of these as family secrets or unspoken rules. They inform your ‘maps’ or view of things. Doing the above exercise may help you identify some of your negative maps about self-worth, and it may also help you discover other rules that you assumed were true, that may not be. For example, your family may have taught you that your worth is conditional upon performance – do well and you are worthy; fail and you are worthless. This is a common lesson in families and is guaranteed to set you up for feeling low self-worth at least some of the time. This is because nobody can succeed all the time. As we have already established, we are operating under the new assumption that worth is not conditional, but exists simply because you do.

You can also dig a little deeper and think about the specifics of what you may have learned about yourself and others by asking yourself these additional questions:

- What happened when I asked for help or needed others?
- When I messed up or failed?
- When I displayed negative emotions?
- When I disclosed or became vulnerable?
- Were these things even an option?

Often the experiences we had in these circumstances are what help shape and cement our ‘rules’ for better or worse. Understanding that these are learned assumptions and not hard and fast truths can be very freeing and help us liberate ourselves from old learning and old ‘soundtracks.’

Once you have a better understanding of where and how your own soundtrack came about, and maybe even what is currently maintaining it, you can get to work on improving it – grounding it more in the reality of today, instead of the past! You can begin to challenge the old maps and rules that are echoing in your mind and replace them with updated self-statements of encouragement and kindness toward yourself.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been quoted as saying, ‘If you don’t love yourself, you cannot love others. You will not be able to love others. If you have no compassion for yourself then you are not capable of developing compassion for others’ (Chola, 2019).

Benefits of Self-Worth

Positive self-worth is associated with lots of good things in life and seems to shield us from many types of mental illness and emotional problems. Specifically, emerging research indicates that self-compassion has

powerful positive effects on our mental and physical health. Social scientists like Drs. Barbara Fredrickson, Sonja Lyubomirsky, and Kristin Neff have documented how compassion and the positive emotions associated with it, such as gratitude, increase our ability to notice more possibilities, feel happier, take another person's perspective, perform better on cognitive tasks, and even decrease the susceptibility to physical illness like heart disease and cancer (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Neff & Costigan, 2014). When we gain the capacity for self-compassion it is often via mindfulness and may make it easier to be compassionate to others (Penberthy et al., 2016).

However, research shows that basing your self-worth only on external factors can be harmful to your mental health. In fact, a study by Dr. Jennifer Crocker, a psychologist who studies self-worth and self-esteem, showed that college students who based their self-worth on external sources (things like grades, physical appearance or looks) reported increased stress, anger, academic problems, and relationship conflicts. They also had higher levels of alcohol and drug use, and more symptoms of eating disorders. The same study found that students who based their self-worth on internal sources (like being a good person), not only felt better, they also received higher grades and were less likely to use drugs and alcohol or to develop eating disorders (Crocker, 2002). Thus, self-worth may be most effectively cultivated via mindful awareness of internal values and sources and compassion toward the self. This may be the best thing about positive self-worth – it can be cultivated! It is clear that it takes effort and intention, but with the right tools and motivation, you can increase your own feelings of self-worth and the benefits it entails!

How to Build Self-Worth

Knowing your own rules or soundtrack from your own history is the first step to helping (re)build your self-worth. Recognizing that these are learned assumptions and not reality is another powerful step toward gaining self-worth. This knowledge helps you to stop automatically buying into the negative rules or beliefs and begin to explore these assumptions in a gentle, curious manner. This is actually a very mindful act in that you are being with yourself in the moment and suspending automatic judgment.

This allows you to recognize that the voice in your head that says 'you don't deserve good things,' 'you are not good enough' is just an old voice from the past, which is not true and never was. This knowledge is extremely powerful and can help you pause long enough to stay in the moment, catch your breath, and then move into even more powerful activities to help improve your self-worth. You may be a product of your past, but you do not need to continue to be negatively impacted by it

in the present. Once you realize this, you can pause, be in the moment without judgment, and with clarity, focus on allowing yourself to be compassionate and kind to yourself. Self-compassion has been demonstrated to be an effective front-line strategy to improve self-worth (Neff, 2011; Neff & Costigan, 2014).

Strategies to Increase Self-Worth and Self-Esteem

As you might guess, the good news is that there are effective strategies to help people assess and challenge even severe feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem. There are essentially two overarching components that have been shown to be effective: 1) learning self-compassion and being compassionate to yourself to address self-worth and 2) learning self-efficacy to increase self-esteem. You may wish to work on both of them if you are going to overcome the monsters of worthlessness and low self-esteem! In the next section, we focus on strategies to improve self-worth. Strategies for increasing self-esteem will be covered in [Chapter 3](#).

Increasing Self-Worth by Cultivating Self-Compassion

An excellent strategy for increasing self-worth involves cultivating something called compassion for ourselves. This is also known as practicing self-compassion. Several researchers have examined the positive impact of practicing self-compassion, including Drs. Kristin Neff, Christopher Germer, Paul Gilbert, and Brené Brown, among others. The word compassion derives from the Latin phrase ‘to bear with.’ Compassion is like empathy in action. Empathy can be conceptualized as being able to feel for another, but compassion involves an active component of doing something about it! Just as compassion for others involves acting on feelings of empathy, self-compassion entails being warm and understanding toward ourselves when we suffer, fail, or feel inadequate, rather than ignoring our pain or beating ourselves up with self-criticism. For some of us, approaching our own feelings of self-criticism or low self-worth with compassion can be incredibly freeing, allowing us to embrace ourselves with loving kindness rather than with frustration or doubt.

Increased self-compassion is associated with a number of positive psychological strengths. Research by developmental psychologist, Kristin Neff, Ph.D., and others has demonstrated that people who have higher levels of self-compassion as a trait report feeling happier than those with lower levels (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Neff et al., 2007; Shapira & Mongrain, 2010; Smeets et al., 2014). People with high levels of self-compassion also display higher levels of optimism,

gratitude, positive affect, emotional intelligence, wisdom, personal initiative, curiosity, intellectual flexibility, life satisfaction, and feelings of social connectedness according to researchers in this area (Neff, 2003; Breen et al., 2010; Neff et al., 2007; Heffernan, et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2011). Thus, there are many good things that come from practicing self-compassion!

The best part of all of this is that even if you were not born with high levels of self-compassion, you can learn to do things to increase your self-compassion. Increasing self-compassion can be achieved in multiple ways, but it does take intention and practice! According to Dr. Neff, self-compassion can be increased by being gentle, kind, and understanding with yourself – accepting that you are not perfect, and accepting that there is potential for learning and growth in every mistake you make (Neff, 2003). This understanding of compassion means offering patience, kindness, and nonjudgmental understanding to others as well as oneself. Remember – self-compassion is not the same thing as selfishness! Showing compassion toward yourself is an intentional act of self-care that may help you feel stronger and more capable to help others!

There is increasing evidence that self-compassion meditation has such a wonderful impact on us due, in part, to what it does neurologically to our brains and physiologically to our bodies. The positive emotional and behavioral effects appear to be associated with changes in neural circuitry in the brain known to be related to empathy (Klimecki et al., 2013). Even better, it looks like it only takes a relatively short amount of training to significantly improve positive regard for self and others (Hutcherson et al., 2008) and prosocial behavior toward strangers (Leiberg et al., 2011). Additionally, practicing self-compassion appears to decrease our cortisol levels which helps us feel safe emotionally. Cortisol is a stress hormone that gets activated when we are under stress and it has been shown to have negative effects on our mood and body. Researchers Dr. Helen Rockliff and her colleagues, including Paul Gilbert (Rockliff et al., 2008), conducted research on self-compassion in volunteers and found that people who were asked to imagine receiving compassion and feeling it in their bodies had lower cortisol levels and increased physical heart-rate markers of feeling safe after the imagery than those in a control group who did not do the exercise. The safer people feel, the more open and flexible they can be in response to their environment. Additional research has demonstrated that self-compassion reduces inflammatory responses of the body, which again, are markers of stress (Breines et al., 2014). Being able to intentionally improve these physiological correlates of stress is a very adaptive and helpful skill, and appears to be a direct effect of practicing self-compassion. Imagine the profound positive impacts on society if everyone practiced compassion and self-compassion!

Three Components of Self-Compassion

Drawing on the writings of various modern-day Buddhist teachers, Kristin Neff (2003) has operationalized self-compassion into three main elements: kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. These three components all combine and interact to make up self-compassion. It may be useful to think of the three components of self-compassion in terms of loving (kindness), connected (common humanity), presence (mindfulness). When we practice ‘kind and loving connected presence’ we simultaneously generate positive emotions while lessening our negative emotions through self-soothing.

The first step to cultivating self-compassion is to acknowledge that you are not perfect and that it is OK. The idea is to accept this and be gentle with yourself and not punish yourself for your mistakes. You can do this in many ways, but it may be helpful at first to give yourself visual reminders. For example, you can place sticky notes with positive self-affirmations in places where you will see them daily. The one I have on my bathroom mirror says ‘I love you unconditionally, just as you are right now.’ I have worked with some people who wrote specific Bible passages or inspirational quotes on their sticky notes. A patient of mine who was a single mother suffering from low self-worth wrote affirmations on her bathroom mirror in lipstick. Her teenage son came in one morning and read them: ‘You are a worthy person... you have a right to be here... you have a right to a good life.’ She was initially embarrassed that he saw these statements and stayed quiet. He then asked if she had written them on her mirror, and when she said yes, he said matter-of-factly, ‘Well, they are all true!’

The main idea is that the statement needs to mean something to you and needs to help you remember to be gentle and kind to yourself – to put your empathy in action for yourself! Another good quote is:

There is no sense in punishing your future for the mistakes of your past. Forgive yourself, grow from it, and then let it go. (Koulouris, 2013, blog post)

I could go on and on with inspirational quotes, but you get the idea! These positive statements will help you remember to be gentle with yourself and thus may also lead to a different mindset.

Having a mindset of acceptance and understanding can be very helpful in cultivating compassion and help you *approach* situations instead of *avoiding* them or shutting down emotionally. This is often referred to as a ‘growth mindset’ in psychological terms and has been studied extensively by psychologist Dr. Carol Dweck and her colleagues at Stanford (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Research suggests

that a growth mindset is one that focuses on learning from adversity and hard work over time – in other words learning resilience. This kind of growth mindset can be taught and can have a positive impact on self-compassion as well as resiliency (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). We all have adversity in our lives, but not all suffer because of it. If you hold on to negative emotions related to your adversity, this is not a growth mindset. If you acknowledge and accept that you have experienced adversity – which is *not* the same as thinking it is okay or a good thing, but rather accepting that it is what it is – then you can actually learn from it. This is a growth mindset. A growth mindset can allow you to focus on the opportunities in the present because you are not hanging on to the negative past.

Dump Negative Self-Talk

Remember also that some of your negative self-talk will be related to your old ‘soundtracks’ of negative or limiting things that you carry with you from early years. Remember just because you think it, or feel it, does not mean it is true! Take the time to pause, remind yourself you have worth, and then focus on being **KIND** to yourself! Once you have some mastery of catching yourself when you are not being compassionate, you can then shift into strategies to begin to show compassion to yourself. Another wonderful strategy to use if you find yourself saying negative and harsh things to yourself is to ask yourself if you would say those things to someone you love dearly – like a friend or even a pet. If the answer is ‘no,’ then you may not want to say them to yourself. We often say harsh and hateful things to ourselves that we would never say to someone we love. Self-compassion starts with saying more loving things to yourself.

Remember, you have worth and you are worthy of love. So, next time you do not rise to the expectations you have for yourself, take a moment to pause and reassess. Practice kindness toward yourself. As we have noted, the practice of self-compassion is intimately tied to mindfulness and to taking the pause, being present, and not judging. Self-compassion comes from the understanding, gleaned through moments of mindfulness, that every human being suffers, that we all want to be happy but often don’t know how to find happiness, and that this commonality connects us with everyone else. Understanding these truths, recognizing our own vulnerabilities, and intentionally practicing self-compassion can help us gain feelings of self-worth and improve our lives in ways we may not even imagine.

We each have had experiences cultivating self-compassion and both of us can attest to the fact that it takes intention and effort, and that it does work!

Kim and Morgan Find Self-Compassion

Kim's Story

I was and still am a person who pushes myself hard. I worked hard most of my life, not just for myself, but looking back, I think I was also working hard to get my father's attention and approval. I guess one of my 'rules' I learned was that I was not good enough. I look back now and realize that I was making my self-worth contingent upon his approval.

It wasn't until I was in my early 40s, when my mother died, that I began to practice self-compassion and my self-worth and relationship with my father shifted. My mother's death was unexpected and sudden and shook my family's world. As the first born, at my mother's death, I automatically resumed my duties as the child who got things done. I made cremation and funeral arrangements, took care of my siblings and father, made sure we all ate, etc. My mother had the foresight to write down exactly what she wanted us to do when she died. She wanted a celebration of her life – no black clothing, no sad music, or dreadful funeral processions. She wanted her favorite music, and lots of color, flowers, children, and animals! We followed her explicit directions and had an outdoor party celebrating her life. People brought their pets. There were children and elderly people. Those who knew her brought lovely flowering plants and colorful balloons with scrolls of parchment to write notes to her and send them to the heavens on the string of a balloon. There was an abundance of music and dancing! At the conclusion we released a dozen white doves – just like you might see at a wedding, except this group of doves had one that broke away from the larger formation and headed up instead of across the sky! It was staggering in its beauty and meaning.

Most of all, my mother encouraged us to be compassionate with ourselves. She made it clear that we were and are loved and valued just for existing and that this did not change due to her no longer being on this earth in a physical form. I took her parting words seriously and began practicing self-compassion. Unlike my daughter, Morgan, I felt more comfortable approaching compassion meditations on my own. I took some of my mother's parting words and things she had written in her journal or in cards to me over the years, and meditated on them. They were mostly self-affirmations that I had seen or heard most of my life, but never really paid much attention to. In my own quiet space, I began to meditate on these phrases and began to believe them deeply. I believe this practice is part of what got me through her death and also what helped me approach my relationship with my father with a more open and accepting perspective. I began to interact with him not in a manner of trying to gain approval, but instead as a compassionate daughter and fellow human. I really listened to him, maybe for the first time, and gave myself permission to hear him not in a judging manner, but as a fully independent and worthy family member. I loved myself and gave myself permission to be human and in doing so, saw him as more human. I gained self-compassion, as well as compassion for my father, and this is what deepened my relationship with my father and still nourishes our connection.

Morgan's Story

I experienced one of my first tastes of true self-worth – one that came from a deep sense of meaning within myself, and not from external factors – on a cold, snowy morning in a large meditation hall.

‘For this morning’s meditation, I invite you to close your eyes, find a comfortable seated position, and gently begin to notice your breath,’ the meditation leader, Leah, instructed with a voice that sounded like caramel. Her presence exuded calmness and a steady sense of peace.

I shifted my weight on the meditation cushion, trying my best to settle down my body after the soreness of my run earlier that morning began to set in. As if in unison with those around me, I gently allowed my eyes to become heavy, focusing on my breath as it deepened and slowed.

After a few moments of silent breathing, Leah’s smooth voice broke the silence.

‘Know, now, in this moment, that you have worth just for existing.’

At this moment, I felt my heart shift. Something deep within me was touched in a way that I’d never felt. Before I knew it, I broke into tears.

When I was reminded of my worth – the pure worth that I held just by existing – on that long winter retreat, on the first day of 2013, it occurred to me that this was a reminder that I didn’t even know I needed.

I realized that I had attributed so much of my worth to factors outside of myself, like how well I did academically and in my extracurriculars, how aesthetically attractive others perceived me to be, or how proud my parents and teachers were of my accomplishments. What hurt worse was how much pressure I felt to be perfect to everyone else. I wanted to look like the girls that every boy thought was attractive, even though I look back now and realize the foolishness of such a desire. I wanted to seem as cool as my party animal, don’t-give-a-damn-about-the-rules high school boyfriend. I wanted to have it all – brains, beauty, the ‘cool’ factor. It took me a long time to be proud of my academic accomplishments, anyway – but at the time of the sangha, I wanted to keep my academic success but also be the “perfect” 17-year-old girl.

Being told that I had worth for merely existing seemed so counter-intuitive. To have worth, didn’t I have to accomplish something phenomenal? Didn’t I have to look a certain way or act a certain way or go somewhere specific? Didn’t I have to be from a certain place, know certain people, be a part of a certain group?

Nope. I didn’t. And that shit shook me.

The time spent on those cushions in the main hall of Seven Oaks Retreat Center in Madison, Virginia, during the cold, snowy week of New Year’s Eve 2013 taught me that the person who’d guide me most, and remind me of my inherent worth, was me.

What You Can Do to Help Yourself Now

If you have taken an inventory of your own ‘rules,’ ‘maps’ and have a deeper knowledge of your old ‘soundtracks’ as we previously discussed, you can use this knowledge to understand yourself better. In doing this, you can begin to intellectually understand where some of the thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions you have come from, and also begin to accept them and accept yourself as you are right now. How could you be in anything else other than what you are right now? All that has happened to you has created you and led up to who you are today. Being with this is called acceptance. Acceptance doesn’t necessarily mean that you think it is okay or that you are fine with it. Acceptance means that you recognize that it is what it is. This allows you to be with it, approach it, instead of avoiding or denying it.

Remember the three components of self-compassion and focus on these in your work... *kind, connected, presence*. *Kindness* is the first step. With acceptance comes the ability to be gracious and kind to yourself. One thing you can do right now is to be kind in the face of difficulties. It is also important to remember that you are human and that no humans escape pain or failure. Adopting this viewpoint will help you recognize that you’re not alone in your experiences of pain and failure. This can also help you be more compassionate toward others – *connected*. Being *present* in the moment in a nonjudgmental way is the third component of self-compassion, and this is typically referred to as ‘mindfulness.’ An excellent practical strategy to help increase self-compassion combines these elements in an exercise that has demonstrated effectiveness. This exercise is called a ‘loving kindness meditation,’ also known as a ‘metta meditation.’ Metta is a Pali word that is most often translated as ‘loving kindness’ but can also be thought of as meaning ‘goodwill toward others.’

Loving Kindness Meditation

One initial way to practice self-compassion is to practice metta or loving kindness meditation. Below is one you can do alone or with someone. Start off by just setting aside a few seconds or minutes a day – it can be in the morning or evening, or anytime when you will remember and have the opportunity. Start by choosing a verbal affirmation that is meaningful to you. It is important that you make this your own – it needs to resonate with you. Here are some examples, but please use what works for you.

- May I be happy
- May I be healthy
- May I live with ease
- May I be kind to myself

- May I be gentle and loving
- May I experience love and joy
- May I live life to the fullest extent
- May I accept myself, just as I am
- May I feel peace and contentment

Next, sit comfortably in a chair with your feet firmly planted on the ground or lay in a slightly upright position bed, perhaps with your shoulders and head propped up with a pillow. If you are seated, allow your spine to grow tall toward the ceiling, then relax your shoulders. Place your hands in a comfortable position that feels supportive. Take a few deep breaths. With full intention, repeat your chosen affirmation.

As you continue to practice, extend these well-wishes to others. You can extend these wishes to others you love or are fond of, and then expand and offer these wishes to those you do not know well, or even eventually to people in your life that you do not get along with. It may feel awkward or even silly at first, but allow yourself to explore this and actively wish these things for others in addition to yourself.

- May my loved ones live with ease
- May my family experience love and joy
- May my neighbors feel peace and contentment
- May the strangers I walk with live their lives to the fullest
- May those I have a conflict with be accepting and loving to themselves
- May the people of the world be kind and supportive to themselves
- May all creatures of the earth feel peace and contentment

Spend some time reflecting on the concept of self-compassion. Whether it's a new concept for you or something you actively practice, think about where and how you can be kinder to yourself. What challenges do you have? At what points in your life has it been particularly difficult to be kind to yourself? How can you prepare yourself to be more self-compassionate in the future?

Remind yourself of what you have learned through all of these exercises, and know that you hold the power in your own life. Revel in your well-earned sense of self-worth and remember that you may have to work to maintain it. You will need to continue to practice self-compassion every day and eventually it may become second-nature! You can also help others learn about self-compassion.

What You Can Do to Help a Young Person

One of the best ways to promote self-worth is to start early! If young people are treated with compassion and informed of their worth, this can go a long way in promoting positive self-worth. If you have a child

or adolescent in your life right now, you have a great opportunity to help them build their own self-worth when they are young. You can help build a young person's self-worth in several ways, including modeling behavior! Children are excellent learners and one of the main ways they learn is via social learning or observing what others in their lives do. Thus, you can explain to young people how you are practicing self-compassion. You can explicitly teach them how to say more self-affirming things to themselves, and you can remind them of their own implicit worth.

Model Behavior

Notice how you behave and what you say in front of the younger people around you. Notice if you are saying negative, unkind things, or if your face or body language are reflecting judgment. If so, try to focus on self-compassion for yourself and then expanding compassion to others. Younger people will learn from watching what you do, so let them see you practicing self-compassion. Let them see you be resilient and kind to yourself, even under stress or when things have not gone well. You can make a point to say out loud compassionate coping statements such as 'This is frustrating, but we will get through it.' or 'I am disappointed, but I know that everyone tried their best.' Researchers, especially in healthcare and child psychology, are finding the key to a happy and successful life is resilience, that is, being able to rebound in the face of difficulties (Delaney, 2018; Cousineau et al., 2019). And the key to resilience is self-compassion. Learning this early can prevent a lifetime of low self-worth!

All the strategies and techniques that you may learn, create, and use to promote your own self-worth can be taught to a child or young person. You can teach even the youngest child how to wish good things for themselves and others. Research is increasingly demonstrating the positive effects of this kind of loving kindness meditation on well-being, resilience, positive emotions, as well as deepening social connections and prosocial behavior (Kok et al., 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Klimecki et al., 2013).

Would You Say That to Someone You Like?

You can also help a child who is struggling by asking them how they would support a friend with the same issue. What would they say to their best friend if their friend was in the same position? As we have pointed out, often we are all harder on ourselves than we are on our good friends and loved ones. If we teach young people to extend the same kindness and understanding to themselves as they would to a dear friend, they may learn early the benefits of self-compassion.

Mindful of Thoughts and Emotions

Learning to identify and label our own thoughts and emotions is another mindful technique that can help children and young people become more familiar with the content and impact of their thoughts and emotions and teach them to approach them with gentle curiosity and acceptance. You can do this by providing words to help them describe their thoughts, emotions, and even behaviors and actions. You can help a young person understand the connection between these things as well as how they are somewhat subjective. It is often helpful to discuss the range of words that can describe levels of intensity of an emotion. For instance, you can discuss the difference between hate, anger, irritation, and annoyance. We used to play a word game with Morgan where the goal was to think of as many emotions as you can that are similarly related – such as all the words for love or excitement. The fun part is that the game used the stem sentence ‘Why do you have to be so...’ The descriptive word would be inserted at the end of the sentence. Some folks got very sassy and it was very fun! ‘Why do you have to be so... angry?’ ‘Why do you have to be so cranky?’ ‘Why do you have to be so cantankerous?’ You get the drift...

You can use strategies to help young people understand the connection between what they think and their emotions, or the impact of both on their behaviors and actions. One idea is to help a child label their emotions on a chart and then help them connect the emotion to a behavior on the other side of the chart. Thus, ‘sad’ on one side may be connected to ‘crying’ behavior on the other side. This is a very helpful strategy and I have found that some children who will not verbalize are willing to draw lines connecting their thoughts to emotions and emotions to behavior. This not only helps them better understand what is happening to them but also communicates this information to others.

Validation and Acceptance

To help young people accept both their positive and negative feelings, many psychologists suggest validating their experiences and emotions and also providing a gentle reality check. Avoid being dismissive or rushing them to feel better. Give your young people the space and permission to process their feelings, whatever they are. You can help young people search for evidence that challenges their low self-worth statements. Remind them of other points of view while still being respectful of their feelings. If a child is rejected for a part in a school play and feels sad, and says something like ‘I am no good, I will never be picked for a part in the school play!’ You can allow the child to feel their legitimate emotions, and remember to put it in perspective. Both can be held and this helps build resilience.

Self-compassion is essential for all of us to learn, children and young people included. Self-compassion means accepting yourself as the

imperfect person that you are and allowing those you love to do the same. When you embrace the idea that you'll never be perfect, you can accept that mistakes are an important part of your life's journey that contribute to who you are. Being kinder to yourself can also boost your resiliency and allow you to be kinder and more compassionate toward others.

Exercises to Discover Your Worth

Breathe Deeply: You Are Here

This exercise includes practicing self-awareness and positive self-statements, as well as breathing techniques that enhance this sensation.

- Sit, stand, or lie down in a comfortable position – wherever you are
- Breathe deeply, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. If you want, you can count the breaths like so: *inhale, 1, 2, 3... exhale, 1, 2, 3...* Take three deep breaths
- Repeat to yourself this phrase: 'I am worthy of love. I am worthy of life. I am worthy of kindness. I am worthy of freedom'
- Continue to repeat this phrase for 30 seconds to a minute, or even longer if it suits you
- End the practice by breathing deeply, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. You can try to practice the same breathing technique that we began with, or you can do something different
- You can also wrap your arms around yourself in a hug if it feels right
- Thank yourself for reminding yourself of your worth

Growing and Trusting

Depending on your childhood experiences, this exercise may or may not feel totally comfortable to begin your self-compassion practice. If you'd like to try this first, go for it! But, also know that you can come back to this after you've had some practice if remembering your childhood can feel difficult sometimes.

- Take a comfortable seated, standing, or lying down position. If you're laying down, be sure to prop yourself up with something like a pillow to keep yourself alert during this practice
- Close your eyes and take three deep breaths (or more if that suits you). Imagine yourself as a child. You can be any age that comes to mind, but try to keep it before puberty/teenage years
- In your mind's eye, imagine reaching out to that child. How do they feel right now? Are they content, or lonely, or frustrated? Try to label how the child in your mind's eye feels without judgment

- Imagine what the child needs at the moment. If they're content, do they need a soft nudge or high-five? If they're lonely, do they need a hug or a kind affirmation? If they're frustrated, do they need someone to talk to, or to take a few deep breaths
- As the image of what the child needs comes to mind, imagine your grown-up self-giving your younger self what they need in this moment. Imagine giving yourself a hug, or a high-five, or helping them to take deep breaths
- As you do this, remember that while this memory may be of you as a child, you can still help your present-day self. You can find ways to give yourself reassuring words or breathe deeply. You can even hug yourself if you want
- Sometimes it can be easier to imagine helping your younger, child-like self because of the inherent innocence and worth associated with childhood. If your childhood did not feel that way, it can still be a beautiful reminder that the child within you can still benefit from your kind words and calmness. Maybe try to come back to this practice if you're ever feeling frustrated with adult life or need some extra help giving yourself some love. It may surprise you how beautiful and meaningful this practice can become

Journaling – Words of Worth

- Take out a pen and a piece of paper
- Take three deep breaths slowly, counting 1-2-3 on the inhale and 1-2-3 down the exhale. Close your eyes if it feels right
- If your eyes are closed, open them gently, focusing on the paper below you
- Write 'I Am Worthy Of' at the top of your paper
- Underneath that phrase, list at least three things that you'd like to believe you're worthy of. If it's difficult to find what you want for yourself, start by thinking of someone you deeply love. What do you think they're worthy of
- List the items below 'I Am Worthy Of.' For example, you may write, 'Love, Respect, Kindness'

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2

A SENSE OF WELL-BEING

The anthropology of a first-person phenomenology

Nigel Rapport

What does it mean to talk of ‘well-being’ as against ‘health’? One refers to something more subjective in its designation and evaluation, less accessible to technological intervention and objective measurement. Well-being is existential rather than metrical, and other adjectives that seem to pertain include personal, momentary, sensorial and variable. I might have a sense of well-being over and against the fact that I know myself to be dying. I have a sense of well-being but is it something of which I can be long assured? Will it abide? My sense of well-being might be connected to the fact that I know the world to be a purely material phenomenon without any supernatural warrant, significance or teleology; my neighbour, contrariwise – or myself at another stage of my life – has felt that well-being attaches to the watchful eye of a personal god. I measure my well-being, perhaps, in terms of my sense of satiation; my neighbour in terms of a sense of devotion. No sense of well-being for me can exceed, perhaps, the feeling I derive from viewing the art of Stanley Spencer; for my neighbour, who is blind, well-being comes from the intellectual assurance that his family is financially catered for. . . . What does this diversity, personalism, sensoriality and contingency tell us? Are there generalities here to elucidate? Is there a *human* story of well-being to tell, or a *cultural* or *social* one, a *geographical* or *historical* one?

In this chapter an anthropologist asks himself these questions, hoping to balance the intrinsic bodily state – a sense of well-being – against what might be said to provide contexts for that state: the individual is a member of humankind, also of a society and community (perhaps), also of a local or regional part of the world (perhaps), also of a particular historical epoch (perhaps). The chapter considers well-being from the comparative standpoint of individual human body against the world.

A department of social anthropology: a survey

I conducted a survey among departmental colleagues at the University of St. Andrews: ‘What does “well-being” (or its nearest conceptual equivalent) imply for your research subjects?’. The results are diverse. Here is a sample:

Huon Wardle works in Kingston, Jamaica. Here, human life is conceived of as an individual ‘adventure’, a movement and a development (Wardle 2001). A sense of well-being derives from ‘living good’ as one ‘passes through’, which in turn entails being able to give and receive good things from others – from spirits of the dead, and other beings possibly, as well as humans. ‘Good things’ might include ‘sipping a cup’ (of rum), and ‘running good jokes’ with friends and family at the ‘yard’ (the family household), or hanging out with contacts at the ‘corner’. The ‘good life’ is also progressive, where one increases the esteem in which

one is held and can imagine moving further afield; also where 'pressure' and the physical, mental or social impairments it causes are avoided. Pressure may derive from the 'bad mind' (malicious intent) of neighbours but also from the 'downpression' (oppression) of those in control of society's political and economic resources: government, big business, the police. Well-being is a matter of negative relationships as well as positive personal capabilities.

Mette High conducts research in Mongolia, on its extensive steppes, its growing capital city and its burgeoning mining industry (of minerals including gold). The local expression that best captures the concept 'well-being', High suggests, is *saihan amdral*, meaning a 'wonderful life'. *Saihan amdral* occurs when humans and non-humans – animals and spirit-beings – carefully and respectfully balance their interests and actions, allowing good fortune in fertility, prosperity and longevity to flow unhindered both between them and among them. The opposite of well-being occurs when one part of nature denies the existence of another – with the (eventual) result that it comes to deny itself (see High 2013).

Mark Harris's work explores the historical and social identity of Caboclo fisher folk who live on the banks of the River Amazon in Brazil, a 'floodplain peasantry'. Rather than identifying his research subjects in collective, ethnic and class terms, however, he is concerned to focus on their practical engagement with their environment and how they manage and negotiate this – and have done since the times of the Portuguese colonization and settlement (Harris 2000). Life beside the Amazon is literally a matter of flow, of shifting between land and water, between economic and social and religious adaptations. For Harris's research subjects, well-being is closely connected to a sense of being 'at ease' (*fiar a vontade* is the phrase in Portuguese), which means being one's own boss – *vontade* carries a sense of willingness or will. In essence, 'well-being' implies a sense of being able to come and go as one pleases.

Recent research of my own has concerned well-being at work, as an aspect of professional accomplishment: specifically, senses of well-being among porters in a large, hospital in Scotland (Rapport 2009). Here, 'well-being' derives from ways in which porters feel they move through the hospital plant on their daily rounds – ways that they largely control; also from the way in which they might move between work-site and home according to shifts that they determine; also from the way in which they might themselves move between the statuses of 'porter' and 'patient' without obstacle – working in a hospital it is their 'perk' to be routinely sick. Finally, well-being derives from a sense that hospital-portering need not be their lot always: they might move on. Belying the hospital's image as a total institution with a hierarchical management, the porters' well-being, individually and collectively, is a matter of negotiated movement.

Nominally extending this department of social anthropology, as it were, so as to include contributions from anthropologists based elsewhere than St. Andrews, the survey continues to deliver a diversity of results:

John Gray's research subjects are members of a clan of high caste 'Chhetris' living in the hamlet of Kholagaun in the southern Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Their aim, he explains (2009), is to prosper not just in the narrow sense of material wealth but also in a wider sense that is conveyed in the Nepali word *samfiddhi*: an abundance of those things that characterize the 'good life'. This includes the well-being of children, health and peaceful relations with oneself, other human beings and the deities. At the same time, 'Chhetris' are enjoined to remain detached from these manifold worldly attachments and to resist 'enslavement' by them so as to achieve 'liberation' and see through the veil of illusion that conceals the fundamental unity of the cosmos. The goal of a good life and the route to well-being is to live in detached attachment, in passionless passion.

Anne-Katrine Brun Norbye has explored the summer 'pilgrimages' that take families of Norwegians 'back' from city to country, to revisit old homes and sample 'country produce'. For instance, *Kyrost*, a type of dairy cheese made of sweet, skimmed milk, for centuries provided Norwegian farmers with protein during winter. It is today sold at rural 'Women's Fairs', having been made in the traditional way at *støler* (mountain summer dairy-farms). City visitors buy this cheese, and serve it to friends and family, and so display a 'modern' attitude to 'local', 'authentic' and 'healthy' food, nature and tradition. There remains a generational divide, however, Brun Norbye explains (2010). For many Norwegian young adults and their children the

symbolic relevance of the cheese does not mean they actually *like* to eat it. Only older Norwegians once raised on *Kyrost* cheese find that the taste sustains memories of identities and way of life: for this generation, once more eating *Kyrost* cheese for dinner provides a sense of well-being that derives (however briefly) from a return home.

David Shankland's research subjects are Alevis, members of a heterodox Muslim minority in Turkey. The group is hierarchical, both men and women varying in rank according to the status of the lineage into which they are born. The highest rank is *efendi*, people regarded as being descended from Ali and thus from the Prophet Muhammed. Next in status is the rank of *dede*, and typically it is *dedes* who preside over a series of communal rituals that are regarded as essential for the well-being of village communities as a whole. The rituals are known as *cems*; without *dedes* there can be no *cems*, and without the *cems* the teachings of Ali have not been fulfilled. This sense of interconnection extends to the temporal as well, Shankland explains (2004): unless all are at peace within the assembly of villagers, the *cem* cannot take place. Well-being entails village peacefulness, an absence of dispute, and *cems* officiated by *dedes*.

Leo Coleman's research concern is political activism in the North Indian state of Uttarkhand. For many years, residents of the region – mountainous and under-developed – have agitated for the right to govern their own affairs. Political sovereignty is felt to be a prerequisite to well-being in a competitive global environment. Coleman's interlocutors impress upon him that the real problem is a lack of roads, construction of which would not only make their state the kind of traversable space that the rest of 'modern India' represents, but more importantly would almost magically connect this remote area to distant centres of wealth and prosperity. This single-minded focus on roads as route to well-being should be understood as more than a misguided fixation on the goods and Gods of modernity, Coleman insists (2014), a rustic false consciousness. The fervent embrace of these promises is to be understood as an aesthetics through which the world is known and grasped, certain connections to power and authority are made realizable, and a sense of well-being is hence secured.

Allison James's research subjects are British school-age children, and thence 'childhood health' as a globally authentic phenomenon. The issue for James (2004) concerns the ways and extents to which children may be enabled to take charge of their own health and well-being as subjects in their own right. For the very collective category of 'children' seems premised on questionable assumptions of fact and value: 'children' are identified as if objects 'at risk' and in need of others' constant guidance. It is the case, however, James argues, that any human child is capable of furnishing themselves with a sense of their own well-being. The human body is a work in process, and that of the child especially so: the child is capable, as part of its experience, of taking on the unfinished nature of its the body – of coming to terms with the shapes, sizes and proclivities of its embodiment – and finding its own meanings in them, its own ratios and sense of normalcy.

Michael Jackson's canvas is broader again: 'human beings'. Extensive long-term fieldwork in Aboriginal Australia and also among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone lead him to argue for a pan-human way of our being-in-the-world across these seeming cultural and social divides. 'Being' is precarious and unstable, Jackson concludes (2005): each human being possesses a fluid consciousness which oscillates between solitude and sociality, speech and silence, reflection and habit, aimlessness and purposiveness, body and imagination, passion and calm. A human sense of 'well-being' derives from the equilibrium that can be achieved amid this instability, and the equanimity with which one deals with subtle oscillations – such as one's perception of another's glance, gesture or remark.

The commonality of human being, finally, is intrinsic to an anthropological methodology of participant-observation in which the consciousness of the anthropologist is his or her key tool in gaining an understanding of the lives of those others who are the research subjects. In Trevor Marchand's case, for instance, working among stone-masons in Yemen, Nigeria and Mali, apprenticing himself as a member of the building community, transforms him into a practitioner with vested interests in the making of domestic, public and religious places. Much masonic communication is non-propositional in nature, Marchand notes (2010),

relying on an intercourse of visual, auditory and somatic forms of information; nevertheless, he is able to achieve empathy with the daily experiences of co-workers through regular reflection upon his own physical strains, emotional states and changing sense of tedium or accomplishment. *His* sense of well-being leads him to know how *they* take pleasure in a 'secure' edifice, in negotiating innovations in tradition, and in embodying the qualities that evince 'mastery'.

Discussion: the character of 'well-being'

'Well-being' appears in the above survey often as a translation of a local term. How precise or adequate can we expect this translation as being? Even if the translation is adequate, the terms commensurate, does a *linguistic* commensuration – the comparable place of concepts in a linguistic matrix – do the work we might wish in attempting to ascertain a commensuration of *sensibilities*? My survey was an attempt to discover the possibly different *senses* of well-being for different people in different places, not the possibly different senses of '*well-being*'; my search was a sensory one not a linguistic one, but how to distinguish the two? Furthermore, what kind of reification or entification has taken place when a conceptual name stands for a sense – whether within *or* between languages? There is translation involved *in any case* when giving a name, and making into a concept, something that is more inchoate in nature: a 'sense', a 'feeling'. What becomes of a *sense* of well-being when it is conceptualized as 'well-being' – what is secured, what invented, what corrupted?

Compounding such uncertainties is the way that very often the anthropologist is describing in the third-person what is essentially a first-person phenomenon. True, Marchand describes his own sense of well-being; it can be argued that Jackson and James, also, propose an understanding of well-being that places them and their research subjects on the same footing – the well-being of human beings and human children as experienced by researcher and research subjects alike. For others above, however, well-being is something that they *qua* researchers assert *on behalf* of their research subjects; 'translation' here concerns not merely the asserting of commensuration between different languages – and between sensory worlds and verbal ones – but also the possible commensuration of the experience of different human individuals. The anthropologist claims, 'This is how my research subjects formulate and experience well-being'; but there can be no certainty here.

Another issue concerns value. It is noteworthy that in their writings on the subject of 'community' anthropologists have found it difficult to make a clear distinction between their *descriptions* of an empirical situation and an implied *prescription* of an empirical situation; so freighted is community as a term of *positive* signification and evaluation – so much a 'hurray-word' – that it has been difficult to write about community without importing a version of the 'good life' as the anthropologist interprets this. In short: anthropologists have found it difficult to write negatively – accurately – of 'community'; however much a negative description might be warranted by facts on the ground (Rapport 1993: 31–39; Amit and Rapport 2002). Does 'well-being' not suffer from a similar difficulty? 'Well-being' appears so fine and positive a thing that its local conceptual equivalent must translate into 'hurray' terms. Can the anthropologist escape the importing of a positive evaluation into a description of what he or she takes to be research subjects' notions of 'well-being'?

Certainly it appears to be the case that well-being in the above anthropological survey is construed as a kind of part-concept: something positive that is paired with an absence and contrast. The positive sense of well-being exists alongside a recognition of how transient this state is. It is also something transactional: well-being is consequent upon a transaction or engagement with a world beyond the self. Edmund Husserl (1962), building on the work of Franz Brentano, famously proposed that 'intentionality' be understood as a transactional concept, always aimed at and focused upon something other: to 'intend' something was necessarily to place the self in relation to what could be wished for and willed. 'Well-being' would seem to be a sister-concept to intentionality, consequent upon what has been intended: if intentionality is a kind of

transmission *from* the self, then well-being is a kind of reception *into* the self, the outcome of an intention. Both engage or transact with the world but possessing an opposite directionality.

If well-being connects with something beyond the self, then what that connection entails – and, indeed, what that ‘self’ entails – are matters of great empirical diversity, as even a brief survey has evinced. For *James* what was key was that a child be allowed to take charge of their own relation to resources that they construe as instrumental in affording a sense of well-being; while for *Harris* being in charge of one’s movements through a home environment was key. For *Rapport*, too, movement within the work-place, and between that work-place and domestic and recreational spaces, added up to a sense that one’s environment was one’s own to determine.

Well-being for *High* was a matter of balance: that the interests and the actions of human beings, and non-human beings alike, should be in equilibrium. Materiality alongside spirituality figured for *Gray*, too, where peace and good health called for a kind of detached attachment to the world; also for *Shankland*, where a village at peace and village rituals officiated by the properly ordained figure were equally necessary. Materiality figured more narrowly in *Coleman’s* account where a sense of well-being derived from engaging with the world in modern ways: through a politically independent state and along paved roads. Similarly, for *Brun Norbye* a certain traditional cheese, eaten at home, brought together a sense of past and present: a tasting of memory.

According to *Jackson*, the self sought to achieve a balance between his or her personal desires and the subtle registering of others’ responses to him or her, so that there was both solitude and sociality in well-being, outward aims and inward purposes. *Wardle* described a situation of giving and receiving ‘good things’ (drink, gossip), and of increasing self-esteem while avoiding political and economic stresses. Finally, *Marchand* described first-hand the well-being that derived from mastery of bodily techniques that sat securely within a customary environment of living traditions of practice.

An anthropology of well-being

Given the above methodological and analytical issues – the anthropologist’s first-person sense of ‘well-being’ is difficult to dissociate from any account of the ‘well-being’ of his or her research subjects – and given the seeming empirical diversity (both sensory and linguistic), how have anthropologists sought to make a general contribution to an understanding of well-being? Three distinct approaches can be identified. The first can be termed a cultural-relativist one which sees difference and method and value as pertaining alike to worlds of cultural construction that are separate from one another and radically distinct (see Mathews and Izquierdo 2009). ‘A culture’ constructs a world for its members, through its language, its processes of socialization or ‘enculturation’, its immersing of individual bodies in environing routines of practice. Who its members become, what they become, how they exist in the world, what is ‘well’ for them, how they think of themselves (if at all) and how they evaluate ‘well-being’ all derive from what their culture causes them to take as customary and proper. The ‘moral’, Emile Durkheim concluded, is synonymous with the ‘social’ at particular times and places. For followers of Durkheim (or of Franz Boas), the diversity of notions of well-being marks the diversity of cultural worlds and the diversity of ways in which human beings are moulded into members. ‘Well-being’ might include an individual committing suicide, therefore, if this were to accord with what was allocated to that member as a necessary behaviour for the good of the whole (Durkheim 2002).

A powerful modern version of such relativism – beyond the world of academic anthropology – is the ‘identity politics’ that accompanies policies of multiculturalism. And the relativization of what ‘well-being’ might mean in a human life bears significant consequences. For instance, in Anne Sigfrid Grønseth’s sensitive ethnography of Tamil refugees in northern Norway, the discourse of multiculturalism deployed by the bureaucracy of the apparently liberal Norwegian state leaves ‘Tamil’ individuals trapped and isolated in a world of ‘cultural’ difference. Norwegian doctors, labelling their patients as ‘Hindu Tamil’, focus on their

presumed differences as representatives of a cultural category rather than recognizing the individual before them as moral persons equivalent to themselves. The 'culture' is treated rather than the person, Grønseth avers (2001: 509), the result being that her Tamil acquaintances feel they cannot emerge from the group as either individuals or Norwegians. Their 'well-being' remains a hidden quest only.

The second approach favoured by anthropologists to the diversity of ethnographic versions of 'well-being' might be called a social-structuralist one (see Corsin-Jimenez 2007). Here it is perceived as being in the nature of social organization that the functioning whole that is a society, or the congeries of discourses that is a society, contains difference within itself as part of its nature. 'A society' is, at any one time, a complex assemblage of positions and situations and ways of being and knowing, of classes or castes or statuses, of professions and genders and roles, of spheres or domains (domestic, jural, economic, religious). Members of a society will differ according to the spheres and statuses and roles, and so on, to which they are allocated, at birth or through another selective process such as academic examination. However, the sphere (and so on) to which they are allocated will determine their habits, their life-chances, their world-views, their very awarenesses, to a greater or lesser extent. Including what they take, and the wider society takes, to be their 'well-being'. Following Gramsci (and a notion of determining 'hegemonic' ideologies [Gramsci 2000]) or following Bourdieu (and a notion of determining embodied 'habitus' [Bourdieu 1977]) or following Foucault (and a notion of determining discursive ways of seeing, interacting and knowing [Foucault 2006]) might cause anthropologists to differ regarding the extent to which they allow the possibility of human beings freeing themselves from their social-structuration (and whether there *is* an abiding human being that might benefit from being 'free'), but all would concur in their social contextualization of well-being. A sense of 'well-being' derives from what is allocated to and expected from that human being as a result of their being a member of a particular section of a society: 'working class' or 'female' or 'academic' or 'mentally ill' or 'legally individual' or 'religiously orthodox', and so on.

The third approach adopted by anthropologists to the diversity of ethnographic versions of 'well-being' can be called a phenomenological or existential one (Cohen 1994; Jackson 2011; Rapport 1997, 2012). It does not read well-being as a manifestation of something else – a culture, its discourses and traditions; a social structure, its divisions and functionality. According to a phenomenological-anthropological understanding, a diversity of definitions and practices surrounding well-being reflects the diversity, multiplicity, even contrariety that is essentially contained in the sensorium of an individual human life. 'Humanity' describes a certain universal form of embodiment and mortality; humankind is a species with an evolutionary history that gives rise to certain common *capacities*. Those capacities then come to be *substantiated* in particular ways in different individual lives. Humanity presents itself as individuality. The individual substantiation of those universal and intrinsic capacities allows for a wide range of difference, both between individual lives and within individual lives. 'A sense of well-being' describes the way in which an individual human being takes his or her species inheritance and lives it, applies it, substantiates it, at a particular time and place. Between times and between places, an individual might experience different 'senses of well-being'; at the same time and place, different individuals might experience different 'senses of well-being'; at the same time and place, *the same individual* might experience different 'senses of well-being' *at once*, or very nearly 'at once': we human beings have the capacity to be internally diverse, contradictory, inconsistent, conflicted, to derive a sense of well-being, say, from partaking in a religious ritual with other family members *and* from knowing that the entire belief system and set of ritual practices is a shameful anachronism. And what drives these desires and gratifications need not be abstracted from the person, generalized and impersonalized, say as the outcome of social-structural habituations or emotional enculturations. (It is not consequent that humanity and individuality are constructed differently in different cultural worlds or different historical epochs; and it is not true that humanity and individuality derive their natures from positionalities within complex societal structures and discursive assemblages.) To know why and how an individual human being possesses particular senses of well-being is to know them and the life-project they construe for themselves (Rapport 2003).

Moving around as a hospital porter: the well-being of Phil Ward

Phil Ward had a ready grin, and when he smiled he revealed a black front tooth. Combined with his wiry, boyish and compact frame, he reminded me of an 'Artful Dodger', as Dickens might have portrayed him, albeit that Phil Ward must have been in his late thirties. The other porters at Constance Hospital in the Scottish port-city of 'Easterneuk' largely agreed that 'Wardy' was 'a real character'. I did not personally take to him because I was usually annoyed by what appeared to be an inveterate laziness and irresponsibility, and a petulance and belligerence when he did not get his own way. But there was no doubting his popularity. Many other porters – there were some 150 at Constance – seemed to extend towards him a generosity and a solicitude even at the expense of themselves, and this included the portering management. (Constance Hospital is a large, modern teaching-hospital, and the main employer in a post-industrial area of great male unemployment.) Phil Ward was granted the license to act as an artful dodger at the hospital's expense, as it seemed to me, and in the process maintained a routine – movements within the hospital plant and beyond, in the wider Easterneuk urban environment – that successfully fed his sense of well-being. Briefly I rehearse here a longer treatment of 'Wardy' and his place in a portering community (Rapport 2009: 157–182), for a closer examination of what I can understand that well-being to consist in and how Phil Ward achieved it. Some phrases of Virginia Woolf's provide me with an opening. 'The mere process of life is satisfactory', Woolf writes (1983: 177): to have things follow one another in good order – eating then sleeping, walking to work and then walking home, always with things to do next – repeats the same curve of rhythm, and in the process 'spreads the same ripple of wellbeing'. Identity becomes and remains robust, Woolf concludes, when a person's life possesses a certain methodicality and purposiveness. Let me suppose what might be the methodicality of Phil Ward's life.

At first glance, Phil Ward's life appeared anything but orderly or routine – it was barely in control. Other porters enjoyed hearing and imagining what Wardy might be up to now, and they embellished the sagas of his life: there was a thrill in living vicariously the life of the chancer and skiver. There was also a way in which other porters looked out for Wardy because *he* did not: his irresponsibility seemed to extend even to his own life and welfare, as well as that of his 'bairn' – the child of an ex-partner. Drinking, gambling, fornicating, fighting and lying, always short of money and doing his best to avoid income tax office or the Poll Tax, or Child Support, doing his best sometimes to distance the very ones who would show solicitude towards him, Phil Ward seemed content constantly to challenge his consociates into proving that they were his colleagues after all. In abusing his friends Wardy both asserted that the 'abuse' was not serious, and that others' response should be a continuation of solicitude towards him and trust. It was the success of the popularity and strength of Wardy's character that this strategy also seemed usually to work. People liked to be with him, to hear of him and to weave his derring-do into their worlds of gossip. Wardy's inclusion no-matter-what was part of the 'democracy' of the portering community, the way they ('we') engaged with one another in mutual support and in opposition to the impersonal organization, hierarchy and even regimentation of the wider institution of the hospital.

One morning in the porters' lodge – the two cramped rooms in which we gathered between being allocated jobs, and also to gossip, read the newspaper, listen to the radio, make tea and snacks (known by the porters as 'the buckie') – there was talk of new beds and mattresses coming into certain wards, and how the old ones were to be disposed of. Wardy, indeed, was to get one of the latter for the room he was presently occupying in the Nurses' Residences. Not long afterwards I heard a cheery Wardy himself boast how he was now able to come to work 'along the corridor . . . didn't even need a jumper!'. I asked him what he meant:

WARDY: I'm living in the Nurses' Residences 'cos I was kicked out of my house. Same old story – normal reason – too many arguments with my wife.

NIGEL: Have you got kids?

WARDY: No, no kids. Well, I do, but I've not seen him for years. I don't see him. Won't see him. He's got a new daddy now, and a brother, and a sister.

NIGEL: How old?

WARDY: Nine now: 'Little Phil Ward'. But I've not seen him since he was one.

NIGEL: You probably will one day: he'll want to.

WARDY: Aye. Probably see him again in end – when he's 16 and hooked! [He laughs]

It was typical of Wardy that this information was conveyed without emotion, barring the final black humour. Having fights with one's spouse and being homeless was presented as a normal old story: there was no shame attached. Wardy would claim normalcy for his life and challenge others to see it differently.

Another porter, Kaj, lived in the Nurses' Residences with his fiancée. Soon there was joking talk in the buckie about Kaj being kept awake by Wardy: his music blaring through the wall and the noise of him fornicating. Ian conjured up the picture of Kaj trying to watch television as the picture bounced and there was an overwhelming squeaking from Wardy having sex on the bed next door. 'Why shouldn't I make a noise?' was Wardy's straight-faced rejoinder: 'I pay my Council Tax. *I* can hear Kaj watching *Brookside*! [a soap opera for adolescents]'. The saga of Wardy's marital relations and his sex life was a popular and ongoing one, fuelled both by Wardy's cryptic statements and others' fanciful embellishments. The tattoo on his right arm, Wardy explained to me, was meant to be a rose with flames rising from it, and then with 'Sharon' inscribed beneath. (Above the rose and flames, and normally covered by his shirt sleeve, was also 'Sonya' [presumably the mother of his son].) Soon, Wardy laughingly added, 'there'll be a black panther beneath the Sharon!' – or not, he reconsidered: she might fight the panther like a wild thing; and 'It's still Sharon I love'. Not long after, however, Wardy was announcing, in response to a query, that 'Sharon is binned: it's definitely over between us'.

The uncertainty regarding Wardy's amorous relations, the bachelor status he had reclaimed for himself, and what might happen next, were a constant source of titillation amid a tedious work-shift:

IAN: You know how that receptionist, Moira, always drapes her leg over yours when she's in here, on the sofa?

Well, she couldn't do that to Wardy 'cos after 30 seconds he'd need to be off to the loo and wanking off!

DAVE: You know what your problem is, Wardy? Too much . . . what's that stuff? Testosterone! [Wardy grins and moves to make a phone call] There he is now! On the phone to his lover!

IAN: It's that nurse from Ward 16. I can lip-read what Wardy's saying to her 'cos I've seen it so often now: 'You're gonna get it tonight!'.

With his Delphic words and grins, combined with his boasts, Wardy was happy to play The Porter's Fornicator. Yes, he admitted: he might have had 'a woman' in the Nurses' Residences, keeping Kaj awake with his 'entertaining'. . . . Yes: he was off work on Sunday, so they would be 'going at it like bunnies' – the last time they did it, it felt like his 'knob was coming off'. . . . Yes: if Peggy Cox [the portering sub-manager] was snooping around the buckie earlier, then it was probably to check on the bulge in his trousers. . . . Alongside this play, however, were moments of truthful admission from Wardy where he claimed a human sympathy:

WARDY: She's not talking to me at all now, Sean! I just made it far worse. . . . You know how you do something as a reaction? Without thinking. Like you do. Then you regret it. So, I said yesterday: 'I'll kill the both of them!'. Just as a reaction. And I would have done, yesterday. [He leaves the buckie]

SEAN: [explains to others in the buckie] This is about Linda in [Ward] 16. The blond one. You know. Wardy heard she was at a car-boot sale and had left with a bloke. And he thought the worst. . . .

That Wardy had been accommodated in the Nurses' Residences amid his marital and domiciliary troubles was thanks to the generosity of the portering management. I was struck by how sympathetic the

hospital managers generally were, taking wider social and economic circumstances into account when instrumental considerations alone (of performance at work) would have warranted dismissal. One morning not long after Wardy had acquired his residential sinecure at the hospital, Peggy Cox and her deputy Mark Hodges had come upon him in the buckie looking unshaven and unkempt. Wardy's makeshift style of dress was often an item of note among the porters: he was teased for wearing the same malodorous, wrinkled blue shirt for ages, also for his skin-tight trousers and for his brogues worn with white socks. On this occasion, Mark Hodges announced that being unshaven might look fine for a night out on the town, but not at work. Wardy replied by complaining that the management had not given him the overtime he had requested – and warranted – to pay for his upcoming court case and counsel ('I can't afford insurance on £130 per week!'). Peggy commiserated but asked him nicely, and teasingly, to please, next time, shave on *his* time not the hospital's. 'What am I going to do with you?', she concluded maternally (though not being that much older in terms of years).

Wardy's tone when discussing his plight – financial as well as sentimental – with management as well as fellow porters was in terms of kinds of rights. The factors that had brought him to this plight were 'human' ones, we have heard – 'same old story: normal reason' – and his actions, he wanted us to understand, were 'human' too; he was not differently responsible to the rest of us. Wardy was quite open about his situation, therefore, and openly demanding that he be given the means – by management or anyone else – to improve upon it. If assistance was not forthcoming, Wardy took it as a personal affront: he was not receiving his due; he was surrounded by 'two-faced c***s who stab you in the back!'.

I found it difficult to sympathize with Wardy, as I have said, because he seemed to me so blatantly hypocritical, selfish and self-exculpatory. I was always surprised at the license granted Wardy by the other porters as he aggressively lambasted them, and blamed them for his own failings. . . . It was not his fault, Wardy insisted, that numerous hospital wards were desperate for oxygen cylinders that had not been delivered since Monday because it had only been *his* job since Thursday (today was Friday). . . . It was not his fault that his name appeared nowhere in the job-roster book for the past two hours: he had been allocated the job of clearing the rubbish and, knowing he was going on holiday today, Desmond (one of Wardy's friends) had left everything for him to do: rubbish piled up everywhere! . . . Having kept friends waiting 30 minutes when they had generously offered him a ride home, he then asked the chargehand to sign him in for an extra half hour's overtime for the period he had just spent joshing in the locker room. . . .

In part I think the other porters' generosity was a recognition of a genuine innocence on Wardy's part. He did not (always) appear to know he was being cheeky, hypocritical, lazy, self-exonerating. When Wardy returned to the buckie from a job – his first for a while – with the laconic utterance 'Robot!' as he settled himself back to studying the betting pages in *The Sun*, he genuinely seemed to believe that he was being put to work as if an automaton ('Them nurses will be wanting us to give them a rub soon, lying on the beds!'). There was a likeable innocence to Wardy's enjoyments, scams and derring-do. Also, Wardy appeared not able to help himself, needing others to protect him from his own self-destructive (and belligerent) tendencies. When a notice went up in the buckie that a new chargehand (a minor position in portering management) would be taken on and trained and 'all names will get consideration', the name 'Phil Ward' soon appeared on the list – and Wardy seemed genuinely hurt and embarrassed at the general hilarity this caused. When Lee, a current chargehand, even told him he had no chance – 'That's just my opinion, like: you could prove me wrong' – a shocked Wardy retorted: 'Well, why don't you keep your opinions to your f***ing self!', before going on to add that the first thing he would do with his new power would be to ban people from going for smoking breaks. . . . Perhaps it was more fun to see what mishap would befall Wardy next, rather than getting (pointlessly) annoyed. The sagas of his life became something of a cherished possession among the porters. He was *their* trickster.

The porters also put up with Wardy, I think, because of a recognition that his troubles could easily be anyone's. There was a kind of integrity to Wardy, an authenticity: there was a recognition that Wardy was who he was, his own person, and could not help being this anymore than anyone else could. This integrity

was due respect: amid the institutionalism of the hospital, amid the shaming limitations of broader social and economic aspects of the portering life, Wardy resolutely remained the person he had to be. Indeed, Wardy *demand*ed the notice of others, and the porters – if they at all liked him – gave this to him with solicitude and a certain respect.

Moreover, it was the case, as we have seen, that Wardy saw *himself* as normal and average: trying to make do in difficult circumstances but making choices and having priorities that were to be expected, accepted. He insisted on the routineness of his life, and this, too, was something that demanded respect from the other porters. Wardy succeeded in convincing himself – as it seemed to me – and to convince other porters that how he acted was normal, however abnormal the circumstances he was reacting to. It was this claim to normalcy, coupled with the other porters' solicitous responses to the claim, that afforded Wardy the sense of well-being that his life possessed.

Coda: from individual diversity to human universality

In a passage of subtle ethnography, Friedrich Nietzsche in 1889 considered the diversity of ways in which a general concept such as 'peace of soul' – and I take this as a further possible synonym of 'well-being' – might be 'honestly' understood in personal terms:

'Peace of soul' can be, for one, the gentle radiation of a rich animality into the moral (or religious) sphere. Or the beginning of weariness, the first shadow of evening, of any kind of evening. Or a sign that the air is humid, that south winds are approaching. Or unconscious gratitude for a good digestion (sometimes called 'love of man'). Or the attainment of calm by a convalescent for whom all things have a new taste and who waits. Or the state which follows a vigorous gratification of our ruling passion, the well-being of a rare satiety. Or the senile weakness of our will, our cravings, our vices. Or laziness, persuaded by vanity to give itself moral airs. Or the appearance of certainty, even a dreadful certainty, after the protracted tension and torture of uncertainty. Or the expression of maturity and mastery in the midst of action, creation, endeavour, volition, a quiet breathing, 'freedom of will' *attained*.

[1979: 44]

I can imagine no better description of the ways in which different individuals might derive a sense of well-being. At the same time I am drawn to the promise held out by John Stuart Mill, from 1859, concerning well-being as a universal human condition:

As mankind improve, the number of doctrines which are no longer disputed or doubted will be constantly on the increase: and the well-being of mankind may almost be measured by the number and gravity of the truths which have reached the point of being uncontested.

[1963: 168]

The anthropologist meets local individual lives for whom 'a sense of well-being' is a diverse accomplishment of engaging with the world in particular ways at particular moments. But this diversity evinces a commonality, nevertheless. The diversity is the individual substantiation or operationalization of a universal human capacity to 'sense' and to achieve 'well-being'. The very diversity and its individual provenance – the fact that the well-being is a sense of a particular living person and no other – is evidence of a universal humanity. The challenge for a phenomenological and an existential anthropology is to move from Nietzsche's insights to Mill's: from individuality to humanity; from an ethnographic recognition of the diversity of ways in which human beings might experience and conceptualize – substantiate – 'well-being' to a moral-cum-political programme that secures the ontological capacity to substantiate well-being in

individual ways as a universal human right. What are the best conditions whereby the universal capacity to possess and exercise a personal sense of well-being may be individually substantiated?

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4 Emotional Wellness and Stress Resilience

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KEY POINTS

- Stress describes an individual’s response to a stressor and involves both physiological and psychological components. In particular, chronic stress can dysregulate hormonal systems important in maintaining homeostasis, predispose individuals to medical and psychiatric illness, and produce long-lasting epigenetic changes.

- Women are especially susceptible to the deleterious effects of stress during times of significant hormonal change, such as puberty, childbirth, and menopause.
- Effective coping strategies and stress management techniques attempt to counter the stress response and elicit the relaxation response, restoring our bodies to homeostasis.
- Clinician burnout describes the emotional exhaustion and reduced sense of accomplishment from work that clinicians may experience when working in the healthcare environment. Combating the rise in clinician burnout requires changes in both organizational and personal levels.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When physical and mental stress becomes overwhelming and prolonged, the risk for both medical and psychiatric illnesses increases. There are limitations to the pharmacological approach for treating psychiatric illness, as many major classes of psychiatric drugs create neurotransmitter imbalances, physical and psychological dependence, and undesirable side effects. While medications are necessary or helpful in many cases, there are also non-drug lifestyle strategies and mental health techniques that can help to manage stress. This chapter explores the concept of stress and how it relates to wellness, and provides practical strategies, both physiological and psychological, to manage stress and optimize long-term emotional wellness and happiness.

4.2 EMOTIONAL WELLNESS DEFINITION AND STRESS

Emotional wellness is “an awareness, understanding, and acceptance of our feelings, and our ability to manage effectively through challenges and change.”¹ Challenges and change are inevitable in our daily lives and the lives of our patients, which can result in stress. For women, stress also becomes more pronounced during periods of significant transitions during the lifespan, such as puberty, childbirth, and menopause.^{2,3,4} Prolonged stress can precipitate or exacerbate both medical and psychiatric illnesses.^{5,6} Stress is the most time-consuming topic that primary care physicians discuss with their patients who have chronic illness.⁷ In fact, it is estimated that 60–90% of primary care physician visits involve stress-related complaints or an illness augmented by stress.^{8,9} Therefore, to achieve optimal health and wellness, effective counselling of patients on effective stress management techniques appears an important skill to develop.

4.3 STRESS RESPONSE

Stress is a “condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.”^{10,11} It is important to remember that any change can induce a stress response. Even events that are commonly thought of as positive, such as marriage or childbirth, can increase stress level, as an individual may question whether or not they have the adequate resources to adapt to the change.³

As defined by Hans Selye, there are two types of stress: eustress and distress.¹² Eustress refers to positive stress that motivates individuals to invest more effort on improving performance.^{11,12} Distress, however, is associated with anxiety and decreased performance, and can have numerous detrimental consequences on medical and mental health.^{11,12}

The stress response in humans evolved as a mechanism for survival.¹³ The brain has evolved two phases for the stress response: the more rapid-acting sympathetic-adrenal-medullary (SAM) pathway and the more delayed but longer-acting hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) pathway.¹⁴

The brain constantly scans the environment for danger. If an immediate threat or stressor is detected, the amygdala of the limbic system becomes activated.^{15,16} The amygdala then signals the hypothalamus to elicit the “fight or flight” response.¹⁷ In the SAM pathway, the hypothalamus relays signals through autonomic nerves to the adrenal medulla.^{14,18} The chromaffin cells of the adrenal medulla then secrete epinephrine and norepinephrine into the systemic circulation, activating the sympathetic nervous system.¹⁴ The body prepares to respond to the danger by enhancing alertness, increasing heart rate and blood pressure, elevating plasma blood glucose, diverting blood flow from the digestive system to skeletal muscles, and activating blood clotting in preparation for tissue damage.^{19,20,21} If the stressor becomes resolved or is no longer present, the sympathetic nervous system becomes downregulated. The parasympathetic nervous system is then mobilized and promotes recovery and healing of the body through the *relaxation response*.²⁰

However, if the brain still detects that a threat is present, the HPA axis of the stress response predominates. The paraventricular nucleus of the hypothalamus releases corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which causes the release of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) from the corticotroph cells of the anterior pituitary.¹⁴ ACTH then acts on the adrenal cortex, where cortisol synthesis and release is induced.¹⁴ The cortisol then ensures that the body has adequate energy to respond to chronic stress by increasing production of glucose in the liver and decreasing glucose uptake in peripheral tissues.^{22,23} Cortisol then provides negative feedback to receptors in the hypothalamus and anterior pituitary, which inhibits further release of cortisol.^{24,25}

4.4 RELAXATION RESPONSE

The relaxation response works in opposition to the stress response to promote recovery and healing of the body.^{20,26} The relaxation response is based on the parasympathetic pathway.^{27,28} During the relaxation response, circulating levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol are downregulated, while acetylcholine and nitric oxide levels are upregulated.²⁰ Heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen consumption decrease and gastrointestinal activity resumes.^{20,29} The parasympathetic pathway also regulates the inflammatory reflex, which is a physiologic mechanism through which the vagus nerve inhibits pro-inflammatory cytokine production and has an important role in metabolic regulation.³⁰ Through the relaxation response, the body is returned to homeostasis after a stress response. Many modern-day therapies,

STRESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

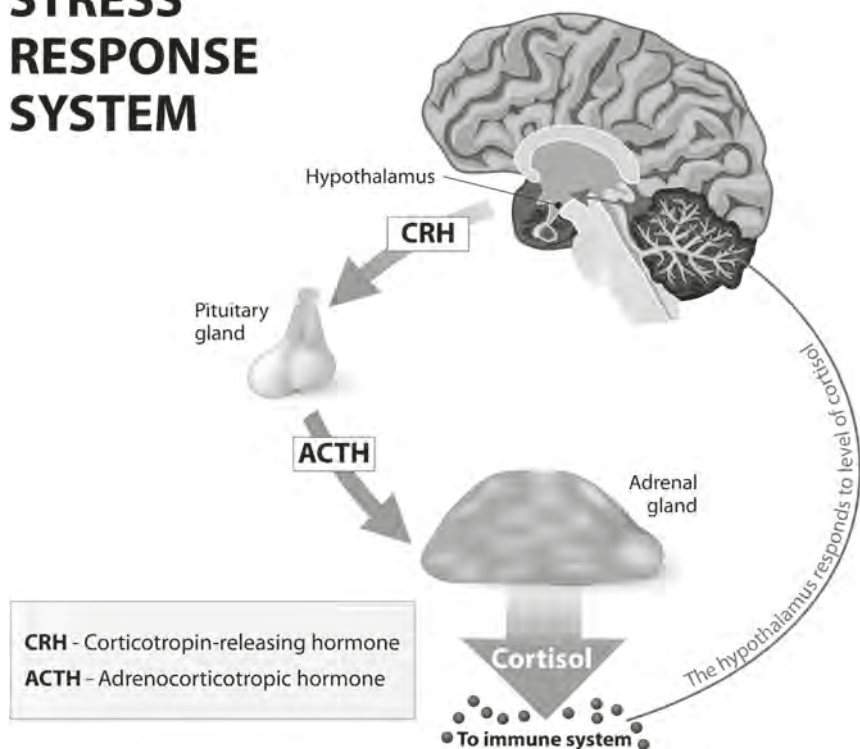


FIGURE 4.1 Stress response system.

such as mindfulness and meditation, attempt to elicit the relaxation response while decreasing the stress response.^{20,27,28}

4.5 GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME (GAS) MODEL OF STRESS

The GAS model was proposed by Hans Selye in the 1940s to describe the body's responses in an attempt to restore homeostasis in the face of a prolonged stressor.³¹ There are three stages of the model. The first stage is the *alarm reaction*, which occurs when we first perceive a stressor and the "fight or flight" response of the sympathetic nervous system is mobilized.^{31,32} The second stage is *resistance*, during which the body remains activated at a higher energy level to maintain physiologic function in the face of the stressor.³¹ However, since the resistance stage is energetically demanding, it cannot last long before the third and final stage of *exhaustion* (or *recovery* through the relaxation response) sets in.^{20,31} If the stressor is prolonged or the individual does not effectively adapt to the stress, the exhaustion stage depletes the body's resources and renders the individual susceptible to disease.^{31,33}

4.6 CONSEQUENCES OF CHRONIC STRESS

Because the chronic stress response is centered on the HPA axis, stress exhaustion may cause significant damage to this important system of neuroendocrine activity.³⁴ Prolonged stress may cause epigenetic changes in the expression of glucocorticoids through altering methylation patterns in glucocorticoid receptor gene NR3C1.³⁵ Dysregulation of normal glucocorticoid feedback is associated with numerous systemic effects, including increased serum blood sugar levels, accumulation of fat in visceral areas, breakdown of muscle and bone, atrophy of neurons in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, increased blood clotting, atherosclerosis, and infertility.^{36,37,38,39,40} In chronic stress, the inflammatory reflex of the vagus nerve is disrupted; the body is left in a state of excessive pro-inflammatory cytokine production, which increases the risk of developing obesity, insulin resistance and type II diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, and other debilitating conditions.³⁰ Chronic stress can also produce epigenetic changes associated with mood and anxiety disorders, such as through the downregulation of the serotonin transporter gene SLC6A4.⁴¹

Thus, the stress response involves complex interactions between neurochemical, genetic, epigenetic, and environmental components. The stress response was initially an adaptive response that evolved in times when physical damage and deficiencies were the predominant stressors.⁴² However, many modern-day stressors involve social and mental threats that are often prolonged.⁴² As exhaustion from various stressors compounds, chronic mental illness, medical illness, or burnout may arise.

4.7 GENDER IS A RISK FACTOR FOR STRESS

It is particularly important to consider stress within the context of women's health across the lifespan, as stress is heightened at times of significant hormonal change, such as puberty, childbirth, and menopause.^{2,3,4} Before the onset of puberty, men and women appear similar in their physiological responses to stress and prevalence of mood disorders.^{43,44,45,46} During puberty, anatomical and physiologic changes between men and women become pronounced, as each gender expresses different levels of sex steroid hormones.⁴⁷ In the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal (HPG) axis of women, the hypothalamus secretes GnRH in a pulsatile manner, which stimulates the gonadotroph cells of the anterior pituitary to release follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH).⁴⁸ The FSH and LH then act on the female ovaries to release sex hormones estrogen and progesterone.⁴⁸ However, the predominant sex hormone in men is testosterone released from the testes.⁴⁹

The interplay between the HPA and HPG axis can explain stress response differences between men and women. Testosterone in men is believed to inhibit stress reactivity through the HPA axis, while estrogen in women enhances HPA axis reactivity.^{50,51} Thus, the HPA axis of women becomes more sensitized, with enhanced glucocorticoid secretion in response to various stressors.⁴³ After puberty and during the transition into adulthood, women become twice as likely as men to develop stress-related disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.⁵² The HPA axis dysregulation is also believed to explain symptoms in premenstrual

syndrome (PMS) and premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD).^{53,54} However, in functional hypothalamic amenorrhea, an overactive HPA axis in women who suffer from chronic stress can downregulate the HPG axis through interference with the pulsatile secretion of GnRH; subsequently, chronic stress can delay puberty, suppress menses, or reduce fertility in these women.⁵⁵

Throughout pregnancy, the HPA axis undergoes significant change with the rise of cortisol, which is essential for normal brain development in the fetus.⁵⁶ By the third trimester, serum cortisol levels increase to three times that of non-pregnant levels.⁵⁷ Although the HPA axis is normally under negative regulation, it enters a positive feedback loop during pregnancy.⁵⁷ Increased maternal cortisol levels induce the placenta to release more CRH.⁵⁷ The CRH then stimulates the maternal pituitary gland to release ACTH, which then stimulates the maternal adrenal gland to further increase cortisol.⁵⁷ The enzyme 11-beta-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase type 2 (HSD11B2), which converts active cortisol into inactive cortisone, partially protects the fetus from the pro-apoptotic and growth-inhibiting effects of high cortisol.^{58,59} Under normal conditions, 80–90% of cortisol becomes inactivated by the placenta through HSD11B2.^{57,60}

Psychosocial stressors, infection, and inflammation experienced by the mother during pregnancy can weaken the barrier so that excess cortisol reaches the fetus.⁵⁷ Overexposure to cortisol has negative health effects on the offspring. High maternal cortisol levels during pregnancy are associated with greater risk of early miscarriage, shorter gestation at delivery, and lower birth weight of offspring.^{61,62} Fetal glucocorticoid overexposure is also related to greater anxiety levels, more mood disturbances, lower intelligence quotient levels, and greater susceptibility to cardiometabolic diseases that later develop in these children.^{62,63,64}

During the postpartum period, maternal plasma cortisol levels fall and the HPA axis gradually returns to its pre-pregnant state.⁵⁷ Following the delivery of the newborn, there is a sharp decrease in placental CRH levels.⁵⁷ The HPA axis is relatively hyporesponsive to up to 12 weeks postpartum.^{57,65} However, anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and/or postpartum depression have been observed among 13% of women who recently had a child.⁶⁶ This may be due to the HPA axis remaining dysregulated during the postpartum period, with impaired glucocorticoid negative feedback regulation of the stress response.⁶⁷

Menopause involves significant changes in the HPG axis in women with decreased release of sex steroid hormones and subsequent dysregulation of the HPA axis.^{68,69} Subsequently, cortisol levels in perimenopausal and postmenopausal women increase.^{70,71} During the transition to menopause period, there is a significant increase in the development of psychiatric disorders, especially depression, anxiety disorder, sleep disorder, and bipolar disorder.^{72,73}

Mid-life and elderly women also face numerous psychosocial stressors, such as marital issues, career responsibilities, and changes in caregiving responsibilities that also partially explain the increase in depression and anxiety disorders.⁷³ Studies have found that women are more likely than men to devote time for caregiving responsibilities.^{74,75} These studies have also found that women experience greater mental and physical strain, greater caregiver burden, and higher levels of distress while providing

care.^{74,75} When compared to women without caregiving responsibilities, women with caregiving responsibilities are more likely to rate their own health as fair or poor, more likely to suffer from one or more chronic illnesses, and are less likely to have received needed medical care in the past year.⁷⁶

4.8 STRESS APPRAISAL

How can we help ourselves and our patients deal with distress, and mitigate the negative effects on physical and mental health? Stress may be inevitable, but we do have some control over our response to the stressor.

When confronted with a stressor, we undergo two forms of cognitive appraisal, as described by Richard Lazarus' transactional model of stress⁷⁷: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal assesses if an event is stressful or harmful to our well-being.⁷⁷ Secondary appraisal gauges if we have the resources to effectively deal with the stressor.⁷⁷ According to this model, our stress response is not directly a reaction to the stressor, but instead to our cognitive appraisal and perception of the stressor.⁷⁷ Thus, through reframing our perception of a stressor in a more positive light, we can attenuate and more effectively manage our stress.

4.8.1 A GROWTH MINDSET AND SELF-COMPASSION CAN PROMOTE RESILIENCE AGAINST STRESS

There are two processes that can allow for more positive cognitive restructuring in response to a stressor: a growth mindset and self-compassion.

A *growth mindset*, as defined by Carol Dweck, is the view that an individual's skills and traits are fluid and develop with time and practice.⁷⁸ In contrast, a *fixed mindset* assumes that one's skills and traits are static and innate.⁷⁸ Those with a fixed mindset demonstrate reduced confidence when confronted with a stressor, and are more likely to view failure as representation of a lack of ability. However, those who practice a growth mindset are motivated by challenge and view failures as opportunities to expand one's abilities.⁷⁸ As a result, those with a growth mindset are more effectively and confidently able to manage difficult life events by reappraising stressors in a more positive light.

Self-compassion entails:

[B]eing kind and understanding toward oneself in instances of pain or failure rather than being harshly self-critical; perceiving one's experiences as part of the larger human experience rather than seeing them as isolating; and holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness rather than over-identifying with them.⁷⁹

Individuals who are self-compassionate are less likely to catastrophize difficult life events, are better able to mitigate the stress response, and are better prepared to cope with a given stressor.⁸⁰

Self-compassion is related to the concept of *resilience*, which is a dynamic process that reflects an individual's ability to positively adapt to adversity.⁸¹ Resilience is founded on mitigating the stress response, promoting the relaxation response, and

fostering a growth mindset.^{82,83} Being diagnosed with a medical condition can be extremely stressful for our patients, but resilience can protect against the negative effects of stress on an individual's health and wellness. For example, a study found that more resilient women report higher quality of life during a gynecological cancer diagnosis. These women were more likely to express positive emotions, reappraise the experience in a positive light, and find a sense of peace and meaning in their lives.⁸⁴ Resilience may also protect women from depression and anxiety symptoms and allow them to more effectively manage their health.⁸⁵

4.9 POSITIVE AND ADAPTIVE ASPECTS OF STRESS: COPING

Lazarus and Folkman provided the widely accepted definition of coping as “thoughts and behaviors that people use to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful.”⁷⁷ Coping is a multidimensional process that can vary based on the individual, situation, and environment.

Lazarus and Folkman divided coping strategies into two major types: *problem-based coping* and *emotion-focused coping*.⁷⁷ Problem-based coping focuses on specific actions to confront the stressor and alter the source of stress, such as active coping (taking steps to eliminate or alleviate the stressor), planning (thinking about how to deal with the stressor), suppression of competing activities (putting other distracting projects aside to focus on dealing with the stressor), restraint coping (waiting for the right moment to act on the stressor), and seeking of instrumental social support (seeking advice, assistance, or information from others).^{77,85} Emotion-focused coping focuses on regulating the emotions that the stress may trigger, such as through seeking of emotional social support (seeking moral support, sympathy, or understanding from others), positive reinterpretation (reframing the stressor in a positive light), acceptance of the problem, denial, and turning to religion for support.^{77,85}

Evidence suggests that problem-based coping strategies are associated with a greater sense of personal control and reduced depression and anxiety.⁸⁶ This relationship may be related to a growth mindset, as those who believe that stressors can be addressed and altered are likely to engage in problem-based coping. While some data has found that emotion-focused coping is associated with increased anxiety and depression, the data is conflicting.^{77,86,87,88,89,90} For example, when the source of stress is outside an individual's locus of control, emotion-based coping strategies such as mindfulness and meditation can be effective for dealing with the stressor.^{77,89}

However, it is important to avoid the use of maladaptive coping strategies, which relieve stress symptoms temporarily but maintain or exacerbate the stressor. Maladaptive coping is associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression long term.⁹¹ Several maladaptive coping methods include behavioral disengagement, denial, self-blame, and substance use.⁹²

While many stressors are inevitable and out of our control and the control of our patients, we are able to develop effective coping strategies that can manage stress and challenging situations. The rest of the chapter discusses three of the coping and stress

management strategies that we ourselves can practice and counsel our patients on. A more comprehensive list of stress management techniques is presented in Table 4.1. Remember that the most appropriate and effective coping strategies depend on the individual and the situation.

TABLE 4.1
Common Stress Management Techniques

Technique	Concept
Positive cognitive restructuring	Through reflecting on past events to which an individual has had negative feelings toward, an individual is able to evaluate beliefs, modify behaviors, and shape responses to future events. For a more detailed explanation, refer to the chapter subsection.
Gratitude	Expressing more consistent appreciation for one’s life improves resilience and allows for a more positive response to stressors. For a more detailed explanation, refer to the chapter subsection.
Mindfulness and meditation	Mindfulness and meditation involves focusing one’s awareness on the present moment and attempt to elicit the relaxation response. For a more detailed explanation, refer to the chapter subsection.
Building social support systems	Higher levels of social support may improve resilience to stress, facilitate the use of adaptive coping techniques, and buffer against the full impact of mental and medical illness. ¹⁰⁸
Exercise	Exercise can be used as primary and secondary prevention for numerous medical and psychiatric conditions. Through one mechanism, physical exercise enhances the conversion of kynurenine into kynurenic acid. The reduction of kynurenine protects the brain from stress-induced changes associated with depression. ^{109,110}
Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)	PMR aims to reduce the sympathetic stress response and stimulate the parasympathetic relaxation response by decreasing muscular tension. Through PMR, an individual tenses and then relaxes specific muscles, while concentrating on the differences between the tense and relaxed states. ^{109,111}
Deep or diaphragmatic breathing	Diaphragmatic breathing involves contraction of the diaphragm, expansion of the abdomen, and deepening of inhalation and exhalation in order to decrease respiratory rate and maximize oxygen saturation. ¹¹² Deep breathing also works to enhance the relaxation response while reducing the stress response. ¹⁰⁹ This method has potential for reducing the emotional and physiological consequences of stress in healthy adults. ¹¹²
Bright light therapy	Bright light therapy can improve emotional regulation in individuals with depressive disorders and alleviate stress and fear conditioning in individuals with anxiety disorders. ¹¹³ Bright light therapy was also shown to be effective in reducing elevated cortisol levels and improving mood. ^{109,114}

4.9.1 POSITIVE COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

Positive cognitive restructuring is one of the most effective coping mechanisms because it addresses the negative feelings that contribute to stress. In doing so, we may approach future stressful situations with a more positive outlook.

One method incorporating positive cognitive restructuring is the ABC model from cognitive behavioral therapy.⁹³ The ABC technique aims to help one to analyze past events to which they have had an emotional response. At its core, it requires the recognition of a cause-and-effect relationship between an event and one's feelings. The "A" in the model refers to the *activating event*, which refers to any event that may have led to negative feelings. The "B" refers to our *beliefs* which may influence or may be influenced by the activating event. Lastly, the "C" represents the emotional or behavioral *consequences* that we face due to how our beliefs interact with the activating event. The ABC technique focuses on the cognitive space between B and C, pushing us to identify and reflect on our beliefs, recognize that they may be unhealthy and irrational, and modify them in order to reshape the negative consequences. Furthermore, by doing so, we may be able to proactively shape their response to future stressors.

4.9.2 GRATITUDE

Gratitude is a related proactive coping mechanism that allows us to reframe our stressors. Gratitude represents a life orientation to the positive in the world, and may allow for increased social support and wellness.⁹⁴ Gratitude can also reduce symptoms of burnout and improve resilience.^{95,96} An easy way to practice gratitude in our daily lives is to keep a gratitude journal. Each day, by writing down three to five things you are grateful for, and by reflecting on why you are grateful, you may be able to reframe your negative thought patterns and refocus mental energy towards positive thinking. A seminal study by Robert Emmons and colleagues found that people who kept gratitude lists were more likely to make progress in personal goals, be more optimistic, exercise more regularly, and feel better about their lives as a whole.⁹⁷

4.9.3 MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION

Meditation originated as a religious tool to deepen spiritual understanding and has been practiced for thousands of years. While many still practice meditation with a religious purpose, it is also commonly used as a tool for relaxation and stress reduction and is increasing in practice in the United States.⁹⁸ Meditation has been associated with improved depression, anxiety, and pain symptoms.⁹⁹ Meditation may decrease the stress response through eliciting the relaxation response to lower heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen consumption.^{82,100} Functional magnetic resonance imaging studies indicate that meditation also acts on the brain, activating neural structures involved in attention, such as the frontal and parietal cortex, as well as structures involved in autonomic control, such as the pregenual anterior cingulate, amygdala, midbrain, and hypothalamus.¹⁰¹

However, many are wary to meditate due to misconceptions about the practice.¹⁰² Some may believe that meditation takes too long, or that one must be spiritual to meditate, or that meditation is difficult. Although becoming proficient in meditation requires practice like any other skill, it can be as simple as closing your eyes and focusing on your breathing for a minute. There is not a single, correct way to practice meditation, and taking just a few minutes out of your day to meditate in a way that works for you may help tremendously for coping with stress.

Mindfulness may be more attractive as an option for those who may be wary of the spiritual connotations of meditation. Mindfulness refers to the practice of maintaining a state of awareness of one's thoughts, emotions, or experiences. Many of the same techniques used in meditation are used to develop mindfulness, such as mindfulness meditation, body awareness, and exploration of thoughts. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a popular mindfulness program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn to help people to be aware of and respond consciously to external stressors.¹⁰³ Mindfulness is associated with improved psychological well-being and reduced perceived stress.^{104,105} Like meditation, mindfulness also has effects on the brain, such as through changes in gray matter concentration regions involved in learning, memory, and emotional regulation.^{105,106} Crucially, MBSR has been shown to increase self-compassion in healthcare professionals, allowing us to develop a growth mindset that is inherently more resilient to stress.¹⁰⁷

4.9.4 CLINICIAN BURNOUT

While this chapter focuses on the effects of stress on patients, clinicians are also vulnerable to the negative effects of prolonged stress through clinician burnout. Clinician burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment from work.¹¹⁵ As emotional exhaustion is exacerbated, clinicians may feel like they are no longer able to give of themselves to their patients.¹¹⁵ Burnout not only leads to increased physician dissatisfaction, turnover rates, likelihood for substance use, depression and suicide rates, and risk for medical illness, but also results in higher rates of medical error, reduced patient satisfaction, and negative patient outcomes.

Clinician burnout has been shown to be primarily a systemic issue that has become more prevalent over time. Changes to the healthcare landscape in how care is delivered, documented, and reimbursed have led to decreased autonomy, increased clerical workload, and decreased trust in the system. For example, the widespread adoption of electronic health records (EHRs), and its resulting interference with physician–patient interactions and increased clerical burden, has been a frequently cited factor for the increase in burnout. An imbalance of job demands and the resources available to deal with them, compounded with administrative pressures and reimbursement models that incentivize seeing as many patients as possible, may be another factor.

Medscape's National Physician Burnout & Suicide Report 2020 found that female physicians were more likely to report burnout compared to their male counterparts, and this finding has been consistently observed over the past several years.¹¹⁶ The clinician burnout phenomenon is especially prominent in obstetrician – gynecologists

(OB/GYN), as 46% of OB/GYN physicians reported burnout in the 2020 survey.¹¹⁶ A study published in *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology* estimated that there will be OB/GYN physician shortages of 17% by 2030, 24% by 2040, and 31% by 2050.¹¹⁷ The high rate of burnout, increasing female population in the United States, and increased access to healthcare that has heightened the demand for healthcare services have made OB/GYN especially susceptible to the impending physician shortage.

The physician burnout phenomenon is a public health concern, and a problem that needs to be addressed, for the well-being of physicians and their patients alike. A systems approach to address physician burnout that focuses on improving the structure, organization, and culture of healthcare has been suggested by the National Academy of Medicine's Action Collaborative on Clinician Well-Being and Resilience.¹¹⁸ Initiatives by healthcare institutions and policymakers to address burnout are also beginning to arise. Among these are the American Medical Association's Practice Transformation Initiative and STEPS Forward Program, and formation of wellness committees in medical schools and residency programs across the country.¹¹⁹ A concerted effort by all stakeholders to modify the systems of healthcare will be required to address the roots of the problem.

Nevertheless, we are not powerless as individuals. As medical professionals, we also have a mandate to take care of ourselves, just as we aim to take care of our patients. There are steps we can take to abate and adapt to the stresses of the medical profession and protect ourselves from burnout. Adaptation is a normal response that follows a newfound stimulus, and all physicians adapt to the stressors of the healthcare environment in one way or another. Crucially, though, adaptation can be either positive or negative, and when we engage in maladaptive responses to occupational stress, we may be putting ourselves at risk of burnout. By developing an understanding that stress is normal and not any fault of our own, and by training for adaptive and healthy coping responses, we may be able to develop resilience against burnout at the individual level. Additionally, by learning how to adaptively cope with the stressors inherent in our jobs as clinicians, we will be better able to help our patients mitigate their own stress, deliver better quality of care, and improve our patients' outcomes.

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Happiness

Happiness is arguably the most important of the seven emotions. We make lots of decisions on the basis of our happiness, both now and in the future. We change jobs, move house, go on holiday, start relationships and end relationships all with the aim of being happier. When we're finding things difficult, we think about what can make us happier. We also do lots of things to try to make other people happy – our children, partners, parents and friends. But what do we know about happiness? Do we know when we're feeling it, and are we doing the right things to achieve it? Even though happiness is such an important part of our lives, it has not received the same level of study as the other emotions in this book.

This chapter explores our understanding of happiness, what causes it, its impact on us and its function. There aren't any specific problems with happiness, but there are some beliefs about happiness that can lead to problems that we'll cover.

The final part of the chapter outlines the happiness wheel and the four spokes of the wheel that can help promote happiness in our lives.

Understanding and accepting happiness

Happiness has an impact on our feelings, bodies, facial expressions, thoughts and behaviours. It is a pleasant emotion and one that we work to enhance and increase. Happiness has important functions too, although we may not have stopped to think about them much before. Have a look at Exercise 7.1 to start thinking about your experience of happiness.

Exercise 7.1 Feeling happy

Think about a recent time when you felt happy.

How would you describe the experience?

What did you notice/were you most aware of?

What made you feel happy?

How did you respond/what did you do?

What happened afterwards?

What causes happiness?

What made you happy in Exercise 7.1? The reason you gave is most likely to be a social situation or some kind of satisfaction or achievement.

Happiness commonly arises out of connection with others. Babies start to smile when they are 4 or 5 weeks old, usually in response to other people. This melts the hearts of parents who are exhausted from looking after a demanding, often mostly crying baby! As children grow, it is still interactions with others – like making funny faces – that make them smile and laugh the most. There's nothing quite like the uncontrolled laughter of a small child at a repetitive game, laughter that is usually directed towards and shared with the adult playing with them. For adults, too, closeness and interaction with others still produce happiness.¹

The other cause of happiness is a sense of achievement or accomplishment. Can you think about a time when you did something that was challenging or difficult? There might have been horrible or difficult points along the way, but getting to the end of something can bring the reward of happiness. This experience of happiness tends to be less intense or a 'slower burn' and is probably not associated with so much laughter, but it is still a powerfully pleasant experience.

Happiness is related to socialising or achievement

Sometimes these causes of happiness – feeling connected with others and achievement – can come together. In team sports, for example, winning can provide intense feelings of happiness of having achieved something as a group.

What happens when we feel happy?

The important thing to remind ourselves about happiness is that it is an emotion like the others in this book. It is a temporary response to what is going on around us and what we're doing. It is not a place we get to and stay or something we can get and keep. Happiness is also not our neutral emotional state; we're not happy just because we're not sad angry or scared. Happiness is an emotional response to particular situations, and it has its own impact on the five elements of emotion.

**Happiness is not our neutral emotional state;
it is an emotional response to particular situations**

Feelings

Happiness is a pleasant emotion. It is quite intense and long lasting, and we tend to share it with others.² We can experience happiness at different intensities, and common words for happiness include content, cheerful, joyful, delighted, ecstatic, elated, blissful and jubilant. There are some interesting phrases to illustrate happiness too, including 'pleased as punch' and 'like a dog with two tails'. 'Pleased as punch' comes from the old puppet show 'Punch and Judy', where Mr Punch behaves outrageously (for example, dropping his baby or hitting policemen) but appears very pleased with himself. 'Like a dog with two tails' emphasises the happiness that dogs signal by wagging their tails.

Bodily responses

Happiness feels warm or hot. Neither the sympathetic nervous system (accelerator) nor the parasympathetic nervous system (brake) is activated very much. But happiness feels energising: there is an increase in heart rate and an increased sense of vigour, energy and strength. We have a greater sense of confidence and competence and the body functions better when we're happy. The way in which we stand and walk, for example, is much broader and higher than when we feel more neutral or sad.³ We can tolerate more pain when we're happy and feeling happier enhances the immune system and protects against illness.⁴

Happiness invites a broad attentional focus, a focus on the whole rather than the detail. We are more likely to appreciate things rather than analyse them or dissect them. Our attention is also focused on the present

moment – the now – not on the past or the future, like in many other emotional states.

**Happiness is focused on the big picture
and on appreciating the present**

Facial expression

We smile when we're happy, and the link between smiling and happiness is captured in some of the expressions used to indicate happiness: 'grinning like a Cheshire cat' or 'grinning from ear to ear'. A smile indicating happiness is one of the easiest facial expressions to recognise.⁵ The simplest smile involves a single pair of muscles to pull the corners of the mouth backward and upward. This fits with common sayings about smiling requiring fewer muscles than frowning. However, most smiles involve the muscles around the eyes as well as the mouth, pulling the eye lids closer together, lifting the cheeks and creating 'crow's feet' next to the eyes.⁶ Genuine smiles that link to happiness are more likely to involve 'smiling with the eyes' than smiles that are displayed for social purposes or to hide other feelings.⁷

Smiles are a part of the experience of happiness as well as a part of the experience of sharing happiness. Do you remember the last time you went bowling? Bowling alleys are great places to study the different impacts of accomplishment and social interaction, because the pins are on one side of us and our fellow bowlers are on the other. We usually smile not as we score a strike or a spare but as we turn to face others, suggesting that our smiles are important in expressing happiness as well as experiencing it.⁸

Thoughts

Happiness has a broad attentional focus on the present moment and doesn't tend to result in lots of thought. Instead, we are focused on the whole rather than dissecting or analysing. Think about Exercise 7.1; what did you do when you were happy? Did you go and find somewhere to sit down and think? You were probably lost in what you were doing and didn't stop to consider why you were happy.

When we're happy, we approach things in more flexible, creative ways: we are better able to make links between ideas and to think

about the big picture rather than the detail. Socially, we are more inclusive when we're happy, thinking about other people in terms of what unites us rather than what separates us; we are better able to empathise with others, including those from different groups; and we are more compassionate.⁹

Overall, there is a sense of connection and possibility – a sense that things are good, that ‘everything is right with the world’.¹⁰

Behaviours

Happiness often comes from connection with other people, and we want this connection to continue. It makes us want to approach people, to be near them, talk to them, hug or kiss them, remain in their company. When we are happy, we are more likely to judge others in a positive light, to be more interested in social interaction and more willing to share things about ourselves. We are more likely to trust others and to want to help them.

One of the signs of happiness in social situations is laughter. Think about social situations when you were happy, and think about how much laughter there was. Laughter is a common part of happy social interaction, and there is a strong link between laughing and happiness.¹¹ Laughter is often thought of as a uniquely human activity, but chimpanzees also laugh – although with less of a vowel sound than humans – mostly in physical interaction like tickling or games of chase.¹²

The importance of laughter in happy social situations is shown by the contagious power of laughter, where the experience of somebody else laughing can prompt laughter even without any other prompt. A lovely example of this is the ‘O’keh Laughing Record’ featuring a cornet player and two other people laughing.¹³ Have a listen, and you’ll most probably find yourself laughing!

While laughter is an important component of happiness in social situations, it is not always linked with happiness. “Laughing with” is usually linked with happiness, while “laughing at” is linked with humiliation and shame (Chapter 6).

In Exercise 7.1, what did you do when you were happy? Did you laugh? What else did you do? As well as making us take in more of the world and think more broadly, happiness makes us want to do more. We have more motivation to do things like experiment and discover, explore new ideas and new surroundings, meet new people and have new experiences.

What is the function of happiness?

What do you think is the function of happiness? Have you ever wondered why happiness might be helpful? In the example in Exercise 7.1, what did being happy lead you to do? Did it ‘help’ in some way – was it beneficial?

Many of the other emotions in this book function to make us do particular things: run away from threat, face up to a confrontation or right a wrong. These are often difficult and challenging things to do. Happiness is our reward. Feeling as though we’ve done something difficult, we’ve done the right thing or we’ve improved things for ourselves or others is a significant accomplishment that makes us feel happy. Happiness is a sense that all is right with the world and if we respond in helpful ways to other emotions, things will feel more right in the world; we will have closer relationships with others, more respect from others and for others; and we will have more fulfilling and healthy lives, all of which makes us feel happy. So happiness can be seen as the carrot to other emotions’ stick.

Throughout this book, we have highlighted the role of various emotions in supporting social bonding. Happiness is also important socially, encouraging socialising and deepening social bonds. For example, remembering a time when we did something nice for somebody else can make us feel happy. Feeling happy as a result of this makes us more likely to give our time to others again. This supports another of our old sayings: from a happiness point of view, it does seem that it is ‘better to give than to receive’.¹⁴

The final function of happiness links with the play and creativity it inspires. Working with others, playing and exploring new territory with a focus on the big picture and a sense of appreciation can lead to growth in skills, experience and relationships. Doing things without a clear goal in mind and exploring for exploring’s sake all lead to learning, discoveries and new skills, which help the individual and wider society. The aimless wandering around our local areas becomes a detailed navigational map when we need to get somewhere quickly, the enjoyable times spent with friends become invaluable connections in times of need and the skills learnt in play become important in times of threat.¹⁵

**Happiness is our reward for difficult things;
it deepens social bonds and encourages exploration**

Happiness is an important emotion. It is the reward for responding in healthy ways to other emotions, leading to a sense that all is right with the world. It is one of the social emotions, enhancing and deepening social bonds and rewarding positive social interaction. Happiness also encourages creativity and exploration that helps us develop our lives in all sorts of important ways.

There are few problems with happiness other than not experiencing enough of it. We will focus on how to promote happiness, and in this section cover some of the barriers and misconceptions that might get in the way of these things.

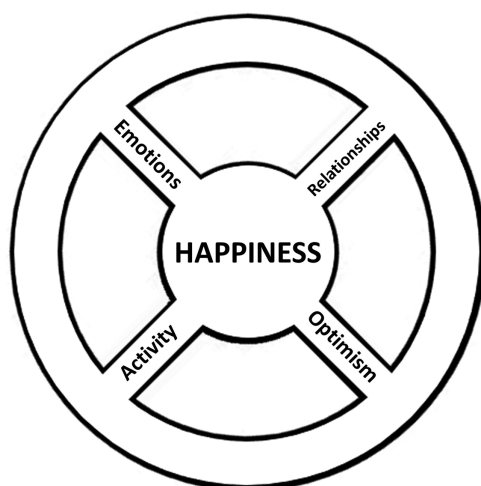
Promoting happiness: happiness wheel

Like all emotions, happiness is a response to a particular situation, and it moves and changes as the situation changes. It is not possible to be happy all of the time. However, some people tend to be happy more often than others, and some people have a general sense of contentment with their lives even when they're not feeling happy. There are many different terms for this kind of happiness, including 'wellbeing', 'flourishing' and 'fulfilment'. These terms are used not to describe an emotion but a general experience of life.

It is worthwhile exploring what we can do to improve our overall happiness, wellbeing or fulfilment, because it has significant benefits. Happier people tend to:

- Be more productive at work and more creative
- Make more money and have better jobs
- Make better leaders and negotiators
- Be more likely to marry, have fulfilling marriages and less likely to divorce
- Have more friends and social support
- Have stronger immune systems, be physically healthier and live longer
- Be more helpful and philanthropic
- Cope better with stress and difficulty¹⁶

This section will explore the factors that can increase our wellbeing and sense of fulfilment and make us more likely to flourish, all of which will lead us to be happier more often. There are four main ways to a happier life, and each relates to and supports the others. To illustrate this, we use a happiness wheel with four spokes.



The first spoke of the happiness wheel is emotions. Throughout this book, we have come back to the importance of emotions – all emotions – in supporting us to lead fulfilling and healthy lives. Accepting, understanding and responding to our emotions, whatever they may be, is an important component of happiness.¹⁷ Related to this is the value placed on happiness itself. Being willing to do things that will make us happy and savouring the experience when we have it are important parts of happiness. Whilst this might sound obvious, think of situations where there were tensions between happiness and other aspects of life – for example, choices about whether to spend money on an activity that would make you happy, or choices about whether to continue doing something that made you happy or getting on with a job that needed doing.

**Happiness involves understanding, accepting,
tolerating and responding to all emotions**

Relationships are the second spoke of the happiness wheel. Throughout this book, we have seen how important socialising is for humans. Many of our emotions come from our interactions with others, and many emotions are important in enhancing social connections. Happiness is no different. Simply put, socialising is the most happiness-inducing of all

human activity. Happy people tend to be sociable people. A rewarding social life is more strongly linked with happiness than success, wealth or indeed any other factors.¹⁸ Just being with people is not enough to generate happiness, though; we are happiest spending time with close friends and family.

Activity is the third spoke of the wheel: the way in which we spend our time. Spending most of our time on things that are meaningful and enjoyable is strongly linked to greater happiness. Meaningful activities are those that relate to things that are important to us, and they may not always be enjoyable at the time (like work or learning, for example), but they give us a sense of achievement and accomplishment that is closely linked with happiness. Activities that are enjoyable are those that we like doing for their own sake and that are enjoyable as we are doing them. Of course, some activities will be both meaningful and enjoyable. Physical exercise, for example, is likely to be linked with both and is closely linked with happiness.

The fourth and final spoke of the happiness wheel is an optimistic outlook. Throughout this book, we have seen that thinking and interpreting situations in particular ways can be a cause and a consequence of particular emotions. Having a tendency to view things in a positive light is associated with higher levels of happiness. Another old saying – seeing a glass as ‘half full’ (rather than ‘half empty’) – holds some truth!

So these are the four spokes of the happiness wheel. Hopefully there is nothing too surprising in here, but the process of thinking about what makes us happy can give us a chance to think about each of these elements in turn and how we are doing on each one. Exercise 7.2 talks you through how to draw your own happiness wheel. This should help you to think about which spokes you might want to make some changes to, and the next section gives some ideas about how you can do this.

Exercise 7.2 Draw your own happiness wheel

Take a blank piece of paper and pens (ideally, some coloured pens).

What would you like in the middle of your wheel? You might want ‘happiness’, or you might want another phrase, like ‘better life’, ‘fulfilment’ or ‘more enjoyment’.

The easiest way to do this is probably like a spider diagram, so think about each spoke, and off each one, draw some more spokes to highlight the things you are doing in relation to each one. Use different colours to make it look attractive and highlight particular areas.

You might want to include the areas that are going well and those that are not going so well.

Emotions:

Are you struggling with some emotions more than others?

Do you get stuck in any of the traps described in this book?

What about happiness? Do you notice feeling happy? Do you prioritise it?

Relationships:

Who do you spend the most time with?

Who are you closest to?

Do you spend time with people you don't really like?

Meaningful and enjoyable activities:

What do you spend lots of time doing?

Do you feel like you have 'spare' or 'free' time?

Are there things you enjoy you don't spend much time on?

Are there things you do that don't make you happy?

Optimistic outlook:

Are you a 'glass half-empty' or 'glass half-full' person?

Are there particular times when you see things more positively or negatively?

Are there people around you who encourage a particular way of seeing things?

Improving happiness

Now that you've got a sense of your own happiness wheel, we'll go through and think about what can improve things. You can add these onto your own happiness wheel in a different colour, so you can see what you need to focus on.

Emotions

Happiness is one of the most important emotions we experience, and it is linked with all of our other emotions. It arises out of socialising with others and accomplishment – activities that are fraught with the risk of other emotions. To feel intense happiness – exhilaration, maybe – we might have to do something really scary. For example, 'adrenalin' activities like skydiving, bungee jumping or whitewater rafting all involve challenge and overriding fear to achieve feelings of happiness and excitement. So to feel intensely happy, we have to be willing to feel terrified. To experience the good things from our connections with others, we have to experience the pain and the suffering that comes alongside. Remember Exercise 2 from the Introduction? You wrote the name of somebody important to you on one side and all the emotions you felt on the other. There were probably difficult emotions like sadness, guilt, fear or maybe shame, but there was also probably happiness. We cannot experience the benefits of our social connections without also experiencing the pain, and the happiness we can feel from being close to others is enriched by our other emotions.

This whole book is about noticing our emotions, making sense of them and then responding in helpful ways. There will be some emotions that you're probably fine with and others that you find more difficult. You might find that you get stuck in some of the traps in this book, and you might need to do some work to get out of these traps. The aim is to get to the point where you can notice how you feel, no matter what the feeling, and you can understand and accept it, tolerate it and respond in helpful ways most of the time.

What we haven't covered so far are the things you can do to notice and savour happiness.

Be in the moment

Happiness is linked with an experience in the moment – of just doing what we're doing, being where we are and enjoying it. This might sound

easy, but there are temptations, which often come from misconceptions about happiness, to overanalyse it. Many people, particularly if they don't feel happy very often, find that when they do notice it, they start to think "How long will this last?" or "How can I hang on to this so it doesn't disappear?". The problem is that trying to analyse our happiness, to pull it apart and figure it out when we're happy, is not what happens naturally when we're happy. Thinking about the future and how we might feel then and trying to cling onto happiness in a fearful way moves us away from happiness. This can confirm our sense that happiness is fleeting and not something we feel very often.

Happiness is an emotion of now. When we're happy, we're usually focused on what's going on around us now or what we're doing now. Our task is to remain in the now, to keep our attention on the now and to savour it. This can be a difficult task, but there are some things that can help. In the chapters on fear and anger, we covered how to use our focus of attention to move it away from the sense of immediate threat, which can allow us to calm the reptilian brain and allow the rational brain to start to think. These same skills are useful in relation to happiness. Often, this skill is called 'mindfulness', and there are lots of ways to develop it.

Smile

Our facial expressions are powerful elements of our emotions, and this is just as true of happiness. Being aware of our facial expression and adjusting it can make us more likely to feel happy. Another old saying, 'turn that frown upside down', seems to have some truth to it. You can try it now: notice your facial expression and bring on a smile, keep going to make a cheesy grin. What did you notice? Often, it lightens our mood, perhaps making us laugh. If we do this around other people, it can have an even greater impact. There is some truth in the old phrase 'smile and the world smiles with you', as smiles tend to produce smiles in other people (the same is not true of frowns).¹⁹ Happy faces also make others want to approach, and happy faces are seen as more attractive.²⁰

Just bringing on a smile seems almost too simple to have an impact on how we feel, but studies in runners have shown it to have a significant impact. Runners who are asked to smile feel like the run is less effortful than those who are asked to frown. Smiling runners also have improved biological function (in terms of rate of consumption of oxygen when running) relative to frowning runners.²¹

Laugh

Laughter is closely related to happiness, and it seems that regular laughter improves happiness. There have been quite a few studies of ‘laughter therapy’, where groups of people are brought together to laugh in response to funny things (like comedy or funny films), or just to laugh for no reason. These groups have been found to have a positive impact on a whole variety of things, like emotional wellbeing and physical health, in all sorts of different people.²² Importantly, most of these studies were done in groups, and laughing as a group is a powerful way to bring people together.

Like smiling, laughing – whether through doing or watching more humorous things, or just for its own sake – is likely to help us feel happy and connected with those around us.

**Being in the moment, smiling and laughing
all boost happiness**

Relationships

Happiness is closely linked with our social worlds. From the point of view of our happiness, the decisions about who we spend time with and the invitations we ignore or accept are some of the most important in our lives.

Exercise 7.3 will help you think about your relationships. There are all sorts of people in our lives – family members, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and even pets. Building a diagram that illustrates these different relationships can help you to consider what you might be able to do to improve your happiness. Once you have a diagram that shows you whom you feel closest to, there are three main ways to make improvements. The first is maximising time with the people you’re closest to; the second is improving particular relationships; and the third is making new relationships. Finally, we can think about acts of kindness in relation to all other people.

Exercise 7.3 Your social life

Take a blank piece of paper and a pen (ideally, some coloured pens).

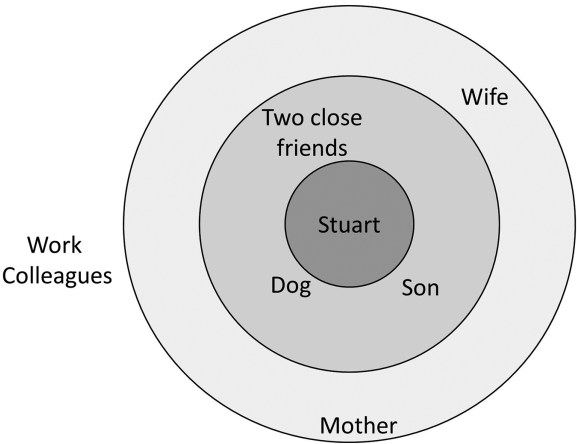
Write your name in the middle of the page, nice and big and in your favourite colour. You are the most important person on this page.

Now, using a different colour for each person (if you can), start to write the names of other people around your name. Put the other people on the page at a distance from you that represents how close you *feel to them*. The people you're closest to should be close to you, and the people you don't feel close to should be farther away. This should be how close you *actually* feel, rather than how close you'd *like* to feel or *think* you should feel.

Here is an example:

Stuart felt that he was doing okay. He had reached his mid-40s with a fairly happy marriage, a grown-up son, and a job in which he was quite successful. He had two longstanding friends he saw most weeks, and they'd stuck together through some difficult times. Stuart's father, with whom he was close, had passed away a few years ago, and he visited his mother regularly because he thought she needed the company. He had been feeling in a bit of a rut and wanted to feel a bit happier, a bit more fulfilled.

Stuart's diagram shows how he connects with those around him.



Stuart's diagram highlights some aspects of his social life that he had not really thought that much about. He was close with his two friends, his son, and his dog, but he noted that he had felt less close to his wife recently, and he also had the sense that his mother did not really appreciate or understand him. Stuart was also struck by how disconnected he felt from his work colleagues, given that he spent so much time at work.

Maximising time

To get the most out of our social lives, we want to spend the most time with the people we feel closest to. Do you spend most time with those nearest you on your diagram? Is there a pull to spend lots of time with the people farther away? Work is an activity that often demands we spend time with people we might not feel close to. Sometimes we might spend lots of time with friends or family whom we're not very close to. We might spend quite a lot of time on our own, perhaps more than we'd like.

Maximising the time that we spend with others can be a helpful way to improve our happiness. There may be things we can do fairly quickly to make some changes. We may be able to change how we work, when we work or how much we work. We may be able to make an effort to have more contact with people, arranging things or planning in advance. We may want to make changes so that we spend less time with particular people.

Even if there aren't particular things we can change immediately, we can give ourselves little rules to follow that will improve things when the opportunity arises. For example, "I'll accept when I'm invited to do things with people", "If I've met up with somebody, I'll suggest or arrange to do it again before I leave" or "I'll make an effort to talk to more people when I go out".

Improving particular relationships

On your diagram, there may be people whom you have placed farther away from you but with whom you would like to be closer. There may be people who you used to be close to but have fallen out with, grown apart from or lost contact with. We might feel distant from our partner, or we might often think of a sibling we fell out with long ago.

Thinking about particular relationships that are important and trying to improve the quality of these relationships can be really helpful from a happiness point of view, and there are a whole variety of things we can do. If we spend a lot of time at work, for example, but don't feel close

with our colleagues, we could spend less time at work or we could get closer to our colleagues. There may be people at work we like and want to get to know.

On other occasions, there might be significant difficulties in relationships. Tensions, conflicts and animosity in relationships are not going to make anybody happy, and so there may be a need to try to resolve or face up to difficulties with people. Particularly where it feels as though the situation is stuck, it is important to consider our choices and push for some kind of resolution or improvement. This might result in an improvement in the relationship, or it might make it break down further and result in separation or greater distance. Either way, this is likely to be beneficial in the longer term, as frequent, unfulfilling contact with others is not likely to result in happiness for anybody.

Making new relationships

Commonly, this kind of process highlights that there are gaps in our social lives. Perhaps there are not enough people close to us, maybe we would really like a partner or perhaps we would like to build more friendships. This can be an intimidating task, but the diagram highlights how to approach it. We are not going to be able to immediately find people to be close to. Our task is to put ourselves in situations that allow connections to develop. We might need to do things to meet more people, like joining a sports team, gym or book group, doing a class of some kind or going online to meet others looking for similar things. We might need to consider the people around the edge of our diagrams, whom we could get closer to by talking with them more and spending a little more time with them. We might spend more time with friends of friends and see what happens there, because they have shared interests or because we enjoy their company. The important thing about connecting with others is that it is never completely within our control; all we can do is make choices about where to spend our time and energy. Trying to be around people we value and enjoy should, for the most part, help us feel happier, and any further development in these relationships will be positive.

Acts of kindness

Performing acts of kindness is something that happens regularly anyway, but deliberately setting out to do more, and to make a note of them, can enhance our happiness in many ways. Acts of kindness are small behaviours carried out for others, like letting somebody else go in front

in a shop, giving somebody a card or a small gift, helping somebody do something, giving a donation or thanking somebody for something.

Acts of kindness are based on an understanding of others, so in doing them we have to empathise. Doing things for others makes us happy, but it also tends to result in gratitude and appreciation from others and deepens social connections. All of these are likely to bring us closer with others and make everybody feel happier.

Improving particular relationships, progressing others, and letting some go are all ways of increasing happiness

Looking back at our example, Stuart gained more clarity about which relationships were most important to his happiness, and he made changes that were all quite small but served to increase the amount of time he spent with those he was closest to, improve some of his relationships and widen his social circle a little:

Stuart decided that he would make more of an effort with the people at work, rather than focusing so much on just getting the work done. He started to talk to people about their weekends, went for lunch every now and again with colleagues and attended more work social functions. He also started to delegate a bit more so that he wouldn't have so many late nights at work, and he started to prioritise time with his wife so they could do more together and start to feel closer. Stuart also made the difficult decision to spend less of his energy visiting his mother, particularly because when he spoke to his wife about it, they agreed that this was driven more by his guilt about her living alone than by a need either he or his mother had. Stuart continued to see his friends, but they sometimes also met in a bigger group (with partners, children and friends of friends) so they could expand the circle a little. Finally, he started to prioritise morning walks with his dog more clearly in his mind, pushing back commitments in the morning to make room for it because he could see that this set him (and his dog) up for a better day.

Activity

One of the four spokes of the happiness wheel is activity. In the chapter on sadness (Chapter 2), we talked about three principles of activity to get out of the sadness trap: right amount of activity, balance of different activities, and routine. For greater happiness and fulfilment, we can

build on these ideas. The key is to spend the most time on those activities that are most important and most enjoyable. Exercise 7.4 helps you to consider different aspects of your life and clarify what is most important to you.²³

Exercise 7.4 Values

Happiness is closely linked with spending time on things that are meaningful and enjoyable. What is meaningful to you? Are there particular things you enjoy? What do you want to stand for? There are ten areas of life, outlined as follows; think about each one and about what is important in relation to each. Think not about achievements and goals but about values and principles – HOW you want to spend your time rather than WHAT you want to achieve, e.g., “playing music is important to me” rather than “I want to get a gig/pass a grade”, or “I am interested in the world around me” rather than “I want to go to xxx and see xxx”.

Some of these areas will be more important than others, so when you have put something in each box, pick the top few that are most important for you.

Romantic/Intimate Relationships	Leisure and Fun
Physical Health and Wellbeing	Citizenship, Community and Environment
Job/Career	Spirituality and Religion
Personal Development and Education	Parenting
Family	Friendships and Socialising

Once you have a clearer idea about the activities that are most meaningful to you, you can start to prioritise them. You might need to schedule these activities so they become part of your routine and are less likely to get forgotten or overlooked. Physical exercise is likely to be something that brings significant happiness, although it is also something that can be difficult to maintain if it is not included in a routine. It is also important to make realistic choices about the balance of different activities and the amount of activities. Very often, when we try to make change to improve things in our lives, we aim for too much too quickly, so starting very small – so small that it doesn't really feel like much of a change at all – will produce more sustainable change.

If you are a busy person, then making changes to how you spend your time will involve some tough choices. If you have too many priorities, then you don't really have any priorities! So if you really are prioritising the most important things, you will have to deprioritise other, less important things. One way to do this is to think not just about importance but also about those things that are essential to your happiness.²⁴ There should only be a few, and if you are really going to pursue them, you will have to turn down opportunities to do other things. You can do this by being very clear about what is important to you, even writing down your priorities somewhere to refer to whenever you have to make a choice about whether you can do that 'extra little thing'.

Developing optimism

The way in which we see the world is often thought of as fixed, almost like a character trait: "I'm an optimist, they're a pessimist". However, we have seen from various chapters in this book that different things can give us a negative slant on the way we think. Sadness, for example, can lead us to remember other times when we were sad; guilt can lead to dwelling on things we've done wrong. It is possible to do things about these negative ways of thinking and reduce the power they have on how we see the world. It is also possible to go a step further and work on cultivating a more optimistic outlook.

To increase happiness, cultivate optimism

The first step in all of this is to become more aware of our thinking styles and to notice when we're using a 'glass half-empty' (or 'glass half-full') approach. The next two tasks can help you to rebalance these thinking styles with other ones.

Positive logs

We can foster and develop an optimistic outlook by teaching ourselves to focus on the positive and remember it. Positive logs are not designed to discount the difficult things in life or the struggles we might have. The point is to focus on the positive to try to help us notice and take account of it. They start from the assumption that we're already good enough at noticing and remembering the negative, so we don't need help with that!

In their most basic form, positive logs involve writing down some of the good stuff that happened to us and that we did during the day. This reminds us that there was some good in amongst the rest. Taken further, positive logs can be used to focus on particular aspects of our lives. For example, we could collect information about a positive sense of ourselves by collecting data consistent with the idea that 'people value me' or 'I'm able'. We could also use this data to collect information about a positive sense of the world, like 'most people are caring' or 'most people are friendly'.

The way you use the data depends on where you're coming from and where you're headed to. You may have a particular negative belief that gets in the way of other aspects of your happiness, like a belief that people don't help each other. Doing a positive log on this, in combination with other things you might do in the happiness wheel, can be a powerful step to take.

Counting blessings

This intervention comes from one of our old sayings that are so popular in this chapter. It seems that 'counting our blessings' is actually likely to help us feel happier. Remember the focus of happiness on appreciating what's around us and what we're doing now? Encouraging a focus on appreciation can support us to do more that is consistent with being happy. It also disrupts a tendency to keep looking forward, striving for the next thing or dwelling on the last thing, and encourages us to focus on where we are now and to appreciate it. Trying to do this a little more than usual, perhaps once a week, can help us feel happier.²⁵

Summary

Happiness is one of the most important emotions we experience, and it arises out of accomplishments and social connection. Happiness not only feels pleasant but also comes with other benefits, making our bodies

more efficient and bringing lots of other longer-term benefits to health, success and fulfilment. To be truly happy, we have to value all emotions, develop strong connections with others, spend our time meaningfully and cultivate an optimistic outlook. This whole book has been written to help you to lead a happier life, and there are some ideas in this chapter to help you build on this work and move towards flourishing.

Notes

- 1 Izard (1991), Scherer et al. (1986)
- 2 Scherer and Wallbott (1994)
- 3 Gross et al. (2012)
- 4 There is a helpful review of many of these findings in a chapter about happiness by Diener et al. (2009).
- 5 Calvo and Lundqvist (2008)
- 6 Izard (1991)
- 7 Ekman & Friesen, 1982.
- 8 Kraut and Johnson (1979) watched lots of bowlers, as well as hockey fans and pedestrians, to investigate what it was that best linked with their smiles. They found that there were associations between smiling and social interactions, as well as between smiling and situations that were likely to evoke happiness.
- 9 There is evidence to support this assertion that individuals who have been experimentally encouraged to be happy, and those more prone to happiness in general, think in broader ways and are more inclined to focus on the global rather than the specific, with lots of real-world results – for example, in relation to steering in a driving simulator. These ideas all come from the ‘broaden-and-build’ theory of positive emotions, outlined by Barbara Fredrickson (e.g., 2013).
- 10 Meadows (1968)
- 11 Vlahovic et al. (2012)
- 12 Robert Provine spent much of his working life studying laughter from lots of different perspectives. Many of these ideas come from a beautifully written and illustrated paper in *American Scientist* (1996) summarising his work.
- 13 This is a track by Lucie Bernardo and Otto Rathke released in 1922, where the two of them laugh, accompanied by a cornet played by Felix Siberts. It was a best seller and is thought to have sold around a million copies.
- 14 Aknin et al. (2012)
- 15 These ideas come from the broaden-and-build theory, where there is evidence that more experiences of happiness and related pleasant emotions link with a variety of factors, like resilience, life satisfaction and close relationships (Fredrickson, 2013).
- 16 Lyubomirsky et al. (2005)
- 17 All models of wellbeing include an element of pleasurable or ‘positive’ emotion, and many also include an emotion regulation component. This spoke of the wheel combines these two into valuing emotion to highlight the importance of all emotion in our lives.

- 18 Fordyce (1981)
- 19 Hinsz and Tomhave (1991)
- 20 Scherer and Wallbott (1994) and Golle et al. (2014).
- 21 A study in 2017 found that running economy, as measured by aerobic performance, was significantly improved when runners were given instructions to smile compared to frowning. The facial expression was more powerful than a conscious focus on relaxing, which did not make much difference to anything (Brick et al., 2018).
- 22 van der Wal and Kok (2019).
- 23 This exercise comes from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which highlights the importance of our values in our daily life and suggests that difficult emotions will arise as a result of pursuing these values (Hayes et al., 2011).
- 24 For a thorough and persuasive exploration of the need to stop doing things that feel important (but are not essential), see *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown (2014).
- 25 People who were encouraged to count their blessings once a week were happier than those who weren't encouraged to do this practice. They were also happier than those who were encouraged to count their blessings three times per week, which may have become repetitive and artificial (Seligman et. al., 2005).

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