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Advances in the Psychology of Well-Being

Edited by Sara Spowart



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Volume 33

Aims and Scope of the Series

Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development endorsed by United Nations and 193 Member States, came into effect on Jan 1, 2016, to guide decision making and actions to the year 2030 and beyond. Central to this Agenda are 17 Goals, 169 associated targets and over 230 indicators that are reviewed annually. The vision envisaged in the implementation of the SDGs is centered on the five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. This call for renewed focused efforts ensure we have a safe and healthy planet for current and future generations.

This Series focuses on covering research and applied research involving the five Ps through the following topics:

1. Sustainable Economy and Fair Society that relates to SDG 1 on No Poverty, SDG 2 on Zero Hunger, SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, SDG 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 17 Partnership for the Goals
2. Health and Wellbeing focusing on SDG 3 on Good Health and Wellbeing and SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation
3. Inclusivity and Social Equality involving SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 5 on Gender Equality, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
4. Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability comprising SDG 13 on Climate Action, SDG 14 on Life Below Water, and SDG 15 on Life on Land
5. Urban Planning and Environmental Management embracing SDG 7 on Affordable Clean Energy, SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The series also seeks to support the use of cross cutting SDGs, as many of the goals listed above, targets and indicators are all interconnected to impact our lives and the decisions we make on a daily basis, making them impossible to tie to a single topic.

Meet the Series Editor



Usha Iyer-Raniga is a professor in the School of Property and Construction Management at RMIT University. Usha co-leads the One Planet Network's Sustainable Buildings and Construction Programme (SBC), a United Nations 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (UN 10FYP SCP) aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 12. The work also directly impacts SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities. She completed her undergraduate degree as an architect before obtaining her Masters degree from Canada and her Doctorate in Australia. Usha has been a keynote speaker as well as an invited speaker at national and international conferences, seminars and workshops. Her teaching experience includes teaching in Asian countries. She has advised Austrade, APEC, national, state and local governments. She serves as a reviewer and a member of the scientific committee for national and international refereed journals and refereed conferences. She is on the editorial board for refereed journals and has worked on Special Issues. Usha has served and continues to serve on the Boards of several not-for-profit organisations and she has also served as panel judge for a number of awards including the Premiers Sustainability Award in Victoria and the International Green Gown Awards. Usha has published over 100 publications, including research and consulting reports. Her publications cover a wide range of scientific and technical research publications that include edited books, book chapters, refereed journals, refereed conference papers and reports for local, state and federal government clients. She has also produced podcasts for various organisations and participated in media interviews. She has received state, national and international funding worth over USD \$25 million. Usha has been awarded the Quarterly Franklin Membership by London Journals Press (UK). Her biography has been included in the Marquis Who's Who in the World® 2018, 2016 (33rd Edition), along with approximately 55,000 of the most accomplished men and women from around the world, including luminaries as U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. In 2017, Usha was awarded the Marquis Who's Who Lifetime Achiever Award.

Meet the Volume Editor



Sara Spowart, Ph.D., DMFT, LMFT, MPA, MA, is a licensed marriage and family therapist, professor, and founder of *Compassion-Based Happiness and Happiness-Based Mindfulness*. She holds a Ph.D. in Public Health from the University of South Florida and master's degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy and Happiness Studies. Dr. Spowart specializes in trauma-informed and forensic family therapy, with a focus on healing through compassion, empathy, and mindfulness. She has taught at the University of South Florida, Middlebury Institute of International Studies, and New York University. Her work blends clinical practice with happiness-based mindfulness interventions to foster emotional regulation and resilience. A published researcher and international presenter, Dr. Spowart is committed to promoting well-being through culturally responsive, evidence-based, and compassion-centered care.

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Preface

For much of its history, psychology has focused on understanding and treating mental illness. Rooted in the medical model, the field developed powerful tools to diagnose disorders, reduce symptoms, and manage psychological suffering. This work has been life-changing and often life-saving for countless individuals. Yet today, despite these advances, the world is facing a profound mental health crisis. Rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and psychological distress are reaching historic highs across the globe. The paradox is stark: even as clinical knowledge has expanded, human suffering remains widespread and, in many ways, is worsening.

Why? The reasons are complex. Rapid technological and societal change, growing inequality, disconnection from the community, chronic stress, and global crises such as climate change and pandemics have contributed to a pervasive sense of isolation and disorientation. The erosion of social bonds, the pressures of performance culture, and a 24/7 digital environment have created a world in which people are constantly connected yet often feel deeply alone. Even in high-income nations with developed mental health infrastructure, individuals report burnout, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of purpose. Mental illness has become not just a clinical concern but a cultural and societal epidemic.

These challenges underscore a critical truth: treating what is wrong is not enough. Psychology must now evolve beyond a reactive, pathology-focused model into a proactive discipline centered on human flourishing. The future of psychology lies not only in treating illness but also in cultivating the conditions that enable individuals and communities to thrive.

Well-being and happiness are no longer peripheral or “soft” topics, they are central to the future of mental health and global stability. A science of well-being asks not only how we reduce suffering but how we foster joy, build resilience, and promote lives of meaning and connection, even in the face of adversity.

This requires a fundamental reorientation of the field. Traditionally, psychological health was defined by the absence of diagnosable symptoms. However, we now know that a lack of pathology does not necessarily equate to fulfillment, purpose, or peace of mind. True well-being is not merely the absence of illness, it is the presence of vitality, hope, and human potential.

One of the most powerful and most overlooked foundations of well-being is human connection. Decades of research consistently show that supportive relationships are the strongest predictor of long-term happiness. Relationships give life meaning. They buffer stress, build resilience, and provide the emotional nourishment that no amount of achievement or material success can replace. In fact, the Harvard Study

of Adult Development and similar longitudinal research confirm that the quality of our relationships is more predictive of happiness and longevity than genetics, career success, or even physical health.

And yet, we are living through a crisis of connection. Social fragmentation, digital overuse, and hyper-individualism have eroded the relational fabric that sustains us. Loneliness is now as deadly as smoking or obesity. The future of mental health must therefore place connection, not just cognition, at its core. Psychologists must be equipped not only to treat internal symptoms but also to foster empathy, strengthen relational skills, and support the social networks that sustain well-being.

This shift demands new tools and approaches. We need more effective ways to measure happiness and well-being, methods that go beyond diagnostic checklists and capture the full richness of lived experience. This includes assessing life satisfaction, emotional regulation, meaning, and relational quality. These are the elements that people most often seek in therapy, yet they remain underrepresented in standard clinical practice and psychological research.

Equally important is the development and implementation of interventions that promote flourishing. Mindfulness, compassion-based therapies, gratitude practices, positive psychology interventions, and well-being curricula are expanding our ability to support thriving, not just in therapy rooms but across schools, workplaces, and communities. These are not merely coping strategies; they are the building blocks of a life well-lived.

We must also embrace cultural and individual diversity in defining well-being. There is no singular vision of the “good life”. Different people and cultures derive fulfillment from various sources, including personal achievement, spiritual meaning, family ties, and community service. A truly global science of well-being must reflect and respect this pluralism.

At the same time, well-being should be integrated into the core of psychological training and education. Future clinicians must be prepared not only to diagnose and treat but also to teach the skills of emotional intelligence, hope, joy, and relational depth. General psychology curricula must include the science of happiness alongside traditional psychopathology. This is not about replacing one model with another but expanding the field to meet the needs of our time.

In this volume, *Advances in the Psychology of Well-Being*, we explore the research, practices, and innovations that are shaping this transformation. From new models of measurement to culturally sensitive interventions, this collection reflects a growing consensus: happiness and well-being are not luxuries; they are essential dimensions of psychological health and human development.

The path ahead is clear. To meet the mental health challenges of this moment and those yet to come, psychology must transform. We must shift from a model defined by illness to one inspired by possibility. We must create systems of care that help people not only survive but also thrive — emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

In doing so, we adopt a more compassionate and expansive vision of mental health, one that honors not only the mind but also the heart. This is the future of psychology and the direction of its progress.

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Section 1

Applications of the Psychology of Wellbeing

Chapter 1

Applying the Wellbeing Balance and Lived Experiences Model to Design Personalized Wellbeing Interventions

Troy Norris

Abstract

The WellBalance Institute's Wellbeing Balance and Lived Experiences (WBAL) Model and Assessment is a novel, validated comprehensive tool for measuring positive wellbeing. The assessment measures positive experiences and positive feelings across various activation and arousal levels. Compared to other wellbeing assessments, PERMA+ and WBA-24, the WBAL Assessment demonstrated convergent validity, measuring a similar concept of subjective wellbeing, and also divergent validity as a different construct of wellbeing that measures experiences demonstrated to enhance wellbeing, thereby extending the application utility of these "gold standard" assessments of subjective wellbeing. Findings from a U.S.-based cohort highlight the significance of meaningful connections and purposeful contributions for enhancing wellbeing, and the impact on wellbeing of situational factors such as relationships, parenting and employment, which have a substantially larger effect on wellbeing than age, gender, or income. These findings suggest tangible ways to enhance the wellbeing of subgroups of people with similar life circumstances. By identifying key modifiable sources of wellbeing alongside a spectrum of related positive feelings, the WBAL Assessment enables tailoring of individualized interventions to each person's unique wellbeing profile.

Keywords: subjective wellbeing, positive psychology, human flourishing, balanced wellbeing, wellbeing assessment, mindset, positivity, resilience, mindfulness

1. Introduction

Widely used measures of self-reported subjective wellbeing and flourishing generally focus on observing and quantifying subjective feelings of wellbeing and do not directly measure positive experiences from which those feelings of wellbeing and flourishing may arise. While these assessments have proven to be useful descriptive tools to assess wellbeing and monitor wellbeing longitudinally across populations

and can identify general domains of wellbeing around which to direct interventions, they have limited ability to support the design of personalized interventions around specific positive experiences that have the most potential to improve wellbeing for individuals.

In contrast, the Wellbeing Balance and Lived Experiences (WBAL) Model and Assessment takes an experimental approach to evaluating wellbeing and related feelings of wellbeing, in order to evaluate discrete modifiable sources of wellbeing to develop personalized interventions to improve individuals' wellbeing [1]. By measuring lived experiences over which individuals have a degree of control to change their level of engagement, this new model of wellbeing and corresponding assessment instrument extend the utility of "gold-standard" models of subjective wellbeing by evaluating the self-reported frequency of positive experiences and positive feelings of wellbeing, balanced across a range of activation and arousal levels.

A recent study used the WBAL Model to understand the impact of life situations, including relationship, parenting and employment status on overall wellbeing, as well as the specific sources of – or detractors from – wellbeing across subgroups in different life situations [2]. A key finding of this study is that respondents' life situations impacted wellbeing significantly more than socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and annual household income. Identifying key opportunities to improve wellbeing in targeted subgroups of individuals with similar life circumstances promises to enhance the design of wellbeing interventions targeted to these subgroups.

Furthermore, the WBAL Assessment defines an individual's highly personalized wellbeing profile, with a quantitative assessment of their overall wellbeing, key sources of their wellbeing, and specific prioritized opportunities to improve their wellbeing. The Assessment also quantifies the breadth of an individual's wellbeing sources, an indicator of wellbeing resilience, as well as overall mindset positivity based on the frequency of positive feelings relative to positive experiences. Because the WBAL Model evaluates a wide range of specific categories of wellbeing contributors, the WBAL Assessment indicates positive experiences to pursue, positive feelings to nurture, and mindful positivity practices that are most likely to improve an individual's wellbeing. The WBAL Method then enables the design of a personalized positivity plan for an individual based on their personal values and aspirations, either as an empowering self-directed program or to inform consultation with professional coaches or therapists.

2. Measuring wellbeing: Limitations of current methods

Advancements in wellbeing research have been significantly facilitated by the development of measures designed to capture its multifaceted and multi-domain nature. The concept of well-being expands upon "wellness," which traditionally refers to physical, mental, social, and spiritual health as a foundation for counseling or medical interventions [3, 4]. While wellness encompasses various health dimensions and lifestyle factors, well-being incorporates subjective evaluations of life satisfaction and personal fulfillment [5].

Numerous self-report instruments exist to measure well-being and related constructs, such as quality of life and wellness, differing in length, psychometric validity, and their underlying conceptual frameworks [6–8]. Well-being is often conceptualized within two primary traditions: hedonic and eudaimonic. The hedonic perspective

defines subjective wellbeing as the balance of positive and negative emotions coupled with life satisfaction [9], focusing on individuals' subjective life evaluations. Measures in this tradition assess the subjective experience of individuals, covering all aspects of life and emphasizing positive measures of well-being [10].

In contrast, the eudaimonic tradition highlights positive functioning and the achievement of a fulfilling, meaningful life. This approach includes domains such as relationships, accomplishment, positive emotion, engagement, and meaning (PERMA) [11–13]. These elements are often measured in combination with negative emotions, physical health, and loneliness, forming the expanded PERMA+ framework.

A comprehensive summary measure of human flourishing – the Flourish Index – incorporates happiness, life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships, with financial and material stability serving as proxies for sustained flourishing [14]. Another well-validated instrument – the Well-Being Assessment – integrates these flourishing domains to assess life satisfaction and evaluation, physical and mental health, meaning and purpose, character and caring, relationships, community and social support, financial evaluation and stability, and overall affect [15].

These psychometric assessments have primarily been used as observational tools to evaluate population-level wellbeing. Applications include longitudinal epidemiological monitoring [16, 17], cross-population comparisons [18–21], and assessing the impact of interventions on population well-being [22–24].

While these “gold standard” assessments of subjective wellbeing have proven to be very useful for quantifying feelings of wellbeing across populations, they do not measure lived experiences that have been demonstrated to improve wellbeing and thus are not able to provide insight into the relationship between feelings of wellbeing and respondents' lived experiences, nor directly identify actionable opportunities to enhance wellbeing through pursuing specific categories of positive experiences [25].

In today's world, modern society and technology conspire with our biology and psychology to pull our lives out of balance. Particularly in Western cultures, which have a generally hedonistic conceptualization of wellbeing, excitement is valued over contentment [26]. Meanwhile, modern media and technology compete for our time and attention [27, 28]. Our daily habits are shaped by evolution which designed our minds and bodies to survive times of scarcity not the abundance we enjoy today, leaving us vulnerable to over-stimulation and over-consumption [29–31]. With declining wellbeing among many sub-populations, such as adolescents and young adults in the United States and Western Europe and increases in the inequity of happiness in every region of the world except Europe [32], there is an urgent need to not only measure wellbeing but also to identify the specific sources of wellbeing changes and relate these to specific modifiable factors in order to design more effective interventions to improve wellbeing for targeted populations and individuals.

3. The wellbeing balance and lived experience (WBAL) model and assessment

The Wellbeing Balance and Lived Experiences (WBAL) Model of wellbeing, illustrated in **Figure 1**, builds upon and integrates the accumulated knowledge of hedonic pleasure and eudaimonic positive functioning and fulfillment to measure the frequency of experiences that produce hedonic and/or eudaimonic feelings of

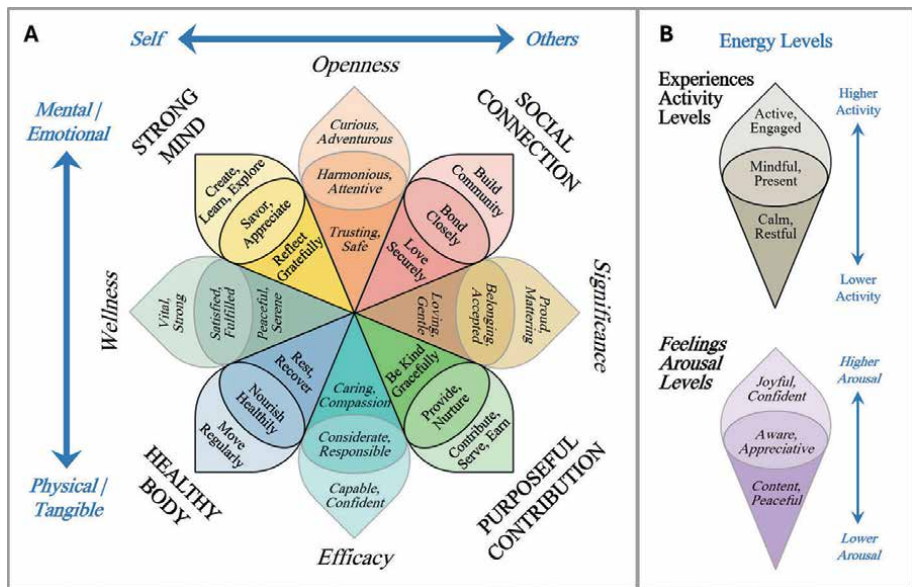


Figure 1.
Panel A: The WBAL model. Factors within the experiences domain are denoted with all capitalized letters and factors within the Feelings domain are italicized and denoted with only the first letter capitalized. Panel B: Activation and arousal energy levels within WBAL experiences and feelings domains, respectively.

wellbeing, thereby enabling more comprehensive and granular evaluation of discrete, modifiable aspects of individuals' positive wellbeing [1, 2]. By identifying specific categories of experiences more likely to improve feelings of wellbeing, the aim of the WBAL Assessment is to enable development of more effective personalized plans to improve positive wellbeing for individuals or groups with similar characteristics.

Specifically, the WBAL Model has been designed to extend the utility of previous wellbeing assessments along three dimensions:

1. Evaluate lived experiences that have been demonstrated to correspond with feelings of wellbeing
2. Assess feelings and experiences with an even balance of low, moderate, and high arousal and activation levels
3. Include a full range of positive experiences and feelings previously demonstrated to contribute to positive wellbeing.

Respondents are prompted to subjectively self-assess their recent frequency of specific categories of positive experiences and positive feelings. Frequency is not an objective quantitative metric tailored to each prompt, but rather a subjective self-assessment on a 5-point Likert scale (rarely, sometimes, often, usually, and very often).

Drawing together findings across positive psychology and wellbeing fields of research, the WBAL Model posits that our subjective sense of wellbeing arises from positive life experiences including caring for ourselves mentally and physically by attending to our minds and bodies, while engaging with others emotionally and

tangibly by nurturing positive social relationships and engaging in purposeful activities that contribute to others' wellbeing. Each category of positive experiences corresponds with a body of evidence supporting the positive impact of these activities and experiences on wellbeing [2]. Additionally, the WBAL Model aims to encompass the full range of hedonic and eudaimonic positive experiences and feelings, which balances mental and physical activity and stimulation with savoring and mindful engagement, and with rest and reflection [1].

These three dimensions of the WBAL Model of positive experiences that contribute to positive feelings of wellbeing are represented by the WBAL Lotus as depicted in **Figure 1**:

1. Balance positive experience and feelings directed towards self and others (x-axis)
2. Balance mental/relational and physical/tangible positive experiences and feelings (y-axis)
3. Balance active, mindful and calm activities and feelings (z-axis, from the outer to inner circles of the lotus)

Together, these dimensions create 12 “wellsprings” of wellbeing, categories of positive experiences that have been demonstrated to improve subjective feelings of wellbeing, in turn represented by 12 “blossoms” of flourishing, the categories of positive feelings that collectively represent the many facets of human flourishing and overall wellbeing.

A study validating the WBAL Model [1] demonstrated that more frequent positive experiences correspond with more frequent positive feelings, and that together, these correspond closely with an individual's self-reported overall wellbeing. Additionally, specific types of frequent positive experiences were shown to be more likely to correspond with specific types of frequent positive feelings, in accordance with their spatial relationships in the graphical lotus depiction of the model [1]. Furthermore, having more categories of frequent positive experiences and feelings corresponds with increased overall wellbeing, consistent with an upward spiral of positivity as predicted by the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions [33, 34].

The WBAL Model is illustrated in **Figure 1**, Panel A as a lotus flower (WBAL Lotus) that interweaves items of positive experiences with items of related positive feelings. WBAL scores represent averages of all items overall and within two domains of positive Experiences and positive Feelings, with 10 factors including four Experiences factors (Body, Mind, Connection, and Purpose), four Feelings factors (Wellness, Openness, Significance, and Efficacy), and two additional factors assessing the overall balance of Feelings Arousal levels and Experiences Activation levels.

Each factor contains three items representing low, moderate and high Arousal and Activation levels within the factor. As shown in **Figure 1**, Panel B: Experiences Activation levels include Active/Engaged, Mindful/Present, and Calm/Restful. Feelings Arousal levels include Joyful/Confident, Aware/Appreciative, and Content/Peaceful. Each discrete energy level within a factor is a distinct source of wellbeing that corresponds to an item on the WBAL Assessment (WBAL-30).

The WBAL Assessment (WBAL-30), shown in **Figure A1** in the Appendix, measures the frequency of distinct items of positive Experiences and positive Feelings related to wellbeing in the WBAL Model. The WBAL Assessment has 30 items scored

on a 5-point Likert Scale (from 0 to 4) measuring respondents' self-reported subjective frequency of these positive Experiences and Feelings over the past 2 weeks (0 = rarely, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = usually, 4 = very often). A total of 12 of these items correspond with each Activation level within each Experiences factor, and 12 of these items correspond with each Arousal level within each Feelings factor. Additionally, the WBAL Assessment includes three items to assess the overall range of Experience Activation levels and three corresponding items to assess the overall range of Feelings Arousal levels.

The WBAL Model is thus a comprehensive integrative subjective construct of positive aspects of wellbeing that:

1. expands the assessment of hedonic pleasures and positive affect by evaluating multiple distinct categories of positive feelings across the full range of emotional arousal levels, and
2. extends the eudaimonic assessment of human flourishing by integrating positive experiences alongside subjective feelings associated with various aspects of fulfillment, flourishing, and satisfaction with life.

In order to embody these features within the limits of a feasible assessment tool, the WBAL Model focuses on the frequency of emotions with positive valence and does not directly evaluate emotions with negative valence, such as loneliness, anger, or sadness. The WBAL Model also does not directly assess objective life situations, such as financial security, food security, or physical disability, that have been shown to impact wellbeing or flourishing but are not specific feelings or experiences *per se*.

3.1 A valid, comprehensive measure of positive wellbeing

In a study with 496 evaluable subjects [1], the WBAL Assessment was demonstrated to be a reliable and valid instrument to comprehensively measure positive aspects of wellbeing and evaluate multiple modifiable sources of individuals' wellbeing to guide the design of personalized assessment and intervention programs to enhance positive wellbeing. A confirmatory factor model showed good fit, indicating that each of the model factors are related but distinct, and all items load significantly onto their factors [1]. As shown in **Table 1**, the WBAL Assessment demonstrated high internal consistency and internal validity across wellbeing factors and Feelings and Experiences domains.

Experiences		Feelings	
Overall	0.94	Overall	0.96
Body	0.61	Wellness	0.85
Mind	0.70	Openness	0.82
Connection	0.75	Significance	0.86
Purpose	0.74	Efficacy	0.82

Table 1.
Correlations of WBAL domains and factors with overall WBAL score. Values are Pearson's r.

The WBAL Assessment also demonstrated strong convergent validity in comparison to the PERMA+ Profiler [11] developed by the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center to measure the five pillars of wellbeing identified by Dr. Martin Seligman, as well as the Wellbeing Assessment for Adults 24-item (WBA-24) [35] developed collaboratively by The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard's Institute for Quantitative Social Science with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's 100 Million Healthier Lives metrics team. This harmonized consolidation of wellbeing assessments incorporates both the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Wellbeing Assessment for Adults 12-item (WBA-12) [36] and the Harvard Flourishing Index [12]. Correlating strongly with these measures, as shown in **Table 2**, indicates that the WBAL Assessment measures a similar overall concept of wellbeing and flourishing [1].

Discriminant validity of WBAL factors was also demonstrated, with the main difference between instruments being the WBAL Assessment's inclusion of positive Experiences, as shown in **Table 3**, indicating that WBAL represents a different, experiential construct of wellbeing [1].

Each item within each factor representing the energy level of that factor (i.e., Activation levels of Experiences and Arousal levels of Feelings) was highly correlated with its factor. Each assessment item was significantly correlated with other items of the same energy level within the corresponding Experiences and Feelings domain and poorly correlated with different energy levels within each Factor. Each Experiences Activation energy level correlated strongly with the corresponding Feelings Arousal energy level. Correlations between items of different energy levels within each factor were lower than with the factor overall, with the lowest correlations observed between Active and Calm energy levels within each factor, whereas Mindful and Active or Mindful and Calm energy levels were somewhat more highly correlated [1].

	Comparator assessments				
	PERMA+	PERMA [*]	WBA-24	Flourish Index	WBA-12
Overall WBAL	0.80	0.81	0.75	0.77	0.69
Experiences	0.66	0.68	0.62	0.63	0.56
Feelings	0.83	0.84	0.79	0.81	0.73

^{*}PERMA excluding PERMA+ items for health, negative emotion, and loneliness.

Table 2.
Correlations of WBAL overall, experiences, and feelings with previously validated comparator constructs.

	WBAL Experiences with			WBAL feelings with	
	PERMA+	WBA-24		PERMA+	WBA-24
Overall	0.66	0.62	Overall	0.83	0.79
Body	0.45	0.41	Wellness	0.77	0.70
Mind	0.42	0.38	Openness	0.61	0.58
Connection	0.54	0.52	Significance	0.78	0.75
Purpose	0.46	0.46	Efficacy	0.69	0.68

Values are Pearson's r.

Table 3.
Correlations between WBAL factors and PERMA+ and WBA-24 domains.

Furthermore, the spatial arrangement of factors in the WBAL Lotus graphical framework accurately represents the relationships between different categories of Experiences and Feelings. Each Experiences factor was more strongly correlated with its two most closely adjacent Feelings factors than with their two more distant Feelings factors. As predicted by the WBAL Model, this indicates closer associations between Experiences factors and Feelings factors that are positioned more closely adjacent in the WBAL Lotus framework [1].

3.2 Extending the utility of existing measures of subjective wellbeing and flourishing

Thus, the WBAL Model and Assessment closely corresponds to, while differing from, these “gold standard” measures of subjective well-being and flourishing, extending their utility by identifying specific modifiable categories of experiences to develop personalized interventions to improve individuals’ well-being [1].

The WBAL Model enables a nuanced and comprehensive evaluation of well-being across various demographic groups and life situations by simultaneously assessing a wide range of positive experiences and feelings across a full range of activation and arousal levels [2]. Unlike existing measures which primarily assess feelings of well-being or focus on isolated aspects of well-being, the WBAL Assessment integrates both experienced and felt sources of well-being. This enables the investigation of relationships among the frequency and breadth of positive experiences and feelings, as well as mindset positivity and range of feelings arousal levels, providing a better understanding of the effects of socio-demographics, lifestyle situations, and other subgroup characteristics on well-being [2].

The WBAL Assessment’s ability to measure the number of frequent sources of positive well-being, and feelings with positive affect across a range of arousal levels, provides additional insights into the importance of having a breadth of positive experience and feelings with a balance of arousal levels for overall well-being. These measures not only serve as useful summaries of overall well-being but may also offer promising targets for interventions aimed at enhancing well-being [2]. For example, increasing the breadth of frequent positive experiences and feelings while expanding the range of positive feelings across low, moderate, and high arousal levels could be effective generalizable strategies for improving well-being.

3.3 Considerations for interpreting and applying the WBAL model

The WBAL Assessment offers a detailed perspective on the relationships between individuals’ Experiences and Feelings, serving as a tool to identify specific gaps in well-being that can inform personalized interventions. However, the WBAL Assessment is only able to measure correlations between positive Experiences and their associated positive Feelings, without establishing causality between these factors. Existing research suggests that causality is likely bidirectional – engaging in more positive experiences has been shown to increase positive feelings of well-being [37–41], while positive affect promotes healthier behaviors [42] and supports well-being and success behaviors [43]. Furthermore, substantial evidence indicates that enhancing mindfulness and participating in mindful activities can significantly improve well-being [44, 45]. Further research is needed to understand underlying causes of changes in well-being, mediating factors and potential benefits of individualized interventions for well-being.

The WBAL Assessment may be a useful practical tool to more precisely identify gaps in positive well-being for individuals who report low life satisfaction, subjective well-being or positive affect, as measured by abbreviated measures such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale [46], Subjective Happiness Scale [47], or Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) [48]. And because the WBAL Assessment covers such a broad spectrum of categories of positive experiences and feelings without precision within each category, the design of personalized interventions may benefit from further assessment interrogating more specific aspects of well-being indicated by WBAL to be of interest, or using localized or contextual models with greater relevance to the individual's particular situation and context [49, 50].

Because the WBAL Assessment only directly evaluates positive Experiences and positive Feelings, the instrument does not directly measure how negative Experiences and Feelings affect overall well-being. Future studies are needed to evaluate the effect of negative experiences and life stressors on the validity and interpretation of the WBAL Assessment, especially with regard to negative feelings, which have been shown to correlate inversely with positive feelings but coexist with a degree of independence [51].

As with other similar wellbeing assessment tools, WBAL implicitly assumes normative values regarding the meaning of wellbeing. Caution is therefore warranted to avoid normative judgment when interpreting responses of individuals or across populations that may have unique norms and values [49]. The WBAL Model and Assessment do not assign relative significance to any of the aspects of positive well-being measured, so interpretation and application must allow for respondents to assign different degrees of importance to different aspects of their well-being, based on their personal value judgments.

Lastly, despite being a relatively short 30-item questionnaire, the WBAL Assessment encompasses a very wide range of positive experiences and feelings and therefore is inherently complex to interpret and apply to design tailored wellbeing interventions. As described more fully below, to design interventions that can be practically applied, multiple qualitative factors need to be taken into consideration and potential intervention targets may need to be prioritized or staged. Furthermore, this instrument is not intended to replace, but rather supplement and inform, more fully validated methodologies for improving wellbeing. As the psychology and coaching communities gain more experience using this novel tool in practice, more standardized applied approaches will likely need to be developed and validated, and practitioners trained on their use.

4. Applying the WBAL model and assessment to enhance wellbeing interventions for targeted subgroups in differing life situations

4.1 Impact of life situations on overall wellbeing and specific sources of wellbeing

Applying the WBAL Assessment to a US-based cohort of 496 evaluable respondents stratified by age and gender showed that relationship, parenting and employment status significantly impact wellbeing and sources of wellbeing across life situations [2]. The distribution of respondents by category is shown in **Table 4**. These life situations have a more significant effect on overall wellbeing than the demographic variables of age, gender, and household income.

	Category	<i>n</i>	%
All evaluable subjects		496	100%
Gender identification	Male	212	43%
	Female	284	57%
Age range	Young adults (20–29)	92	19%
	Established adults (30–44)	151	30%
	Midlife adults (45–60)	158	32%
	Older adults (61–69)	95	19%
Annual household income	Lower income (\$25 k–\$50 k)	141	28%
	Middle income (\$50 k–\$75 k)	131	26%
	Higher income (\$75 k–\$100 k)	117	24%
	Highest income (\$100 k+)	107	21%
Employment status	Unemployed (and seeking work)	10	2%
	Part-time employed	35	7%
	Self-employed	41	8%
	Student	20	4%
	Full-time employed	265	53%
	Homemaker (not working outside home)	40	8%
	Retired	78	16%
Relationship status	Single (not in a relationship)	80	16%
	Steady relationship	37	7%
	Living together	59	12%
	Married or domestic partnership	282	57%
	Divorced or separated	24	5%
	Widowed	7	1%
Parenting status	No children	182	37%
	Single-parent household (primary caregiver)	28	6%
	Co-parent (split time, custody arrangement)	13	3%
	Two-parent household	151	30%
	Parent with children not home	111	22%

Table 4.
Sample sizes by demographic and life situation category.

Reported wellbeing improved significantly with life situations, including companionate relationships, parenting, and more full employment, that provide greater opportunities for more frequent social connection and purposeful contribution to others' wellbeing, which in turn are associated with increased feelings of significance and efficacy, that is, the ability to positively impact their own and others' lives. In contrast, the impacts of age, gender, and household income on wellbeing as measured by WBAL were relatively small, except for a significant age-related positivity effect observed, with older adults reporting more frequent positive feelings than younger age groups.

4.1.1 Key sources of wellbeing and resilience

A range of positive experiences and feelings has previously been demonstrated in the wellbeing literature to contribute to subjective wellbeing and human flourishing. These include physical and mental wellness, social connection and openness, purposeful experiences, and feelings of significance and efficacy. Furthermore, breadth of positive experiences and feelings, as well as mindset positivity, has been shown to increase subjective wellbeing, human flourishing, and resilience. The WBAL Assessment instrument enables simultaneous study of these sources of positive wellbeing and their inter-relationships for individuals and across groups.

Overall, applying the WBAL Assessment to a US-based cohort [2], the most frequently reported positive experiences contributing to wellbeing among respondents were purposeful contributions, corresponding with frequent feelings of efficacy and significance, as shown in **Figure 2**. In contrast, respondents reported less frequent positive self-care experiences, corresponding with less frequent feelings of wellness, and less frequent social connection. On average, respondents reported having positive feelings more frequently than they engaged in positive experiences, indicating a generally positive mindset.

Physical and mental wellness has been shown to be important aspects of wellbeing. Physical activity is strongly associated with subjective wellbeing, and increasing physical activity improves happiness, positive affect, life satisfaction, and self-esteem [37, 52]. Eating nutritiously is important for maintaining psychological wellbeing [52, 53]. And, sufficient sleep is essential for emotional and physical wellness [52, 54]. Activities that benefit our minds, such as creative activity and behavior [55], flow experiences [56], being in nature [57, 58], esthetic appreciation of art [59], and making or listening to music [60], are each associated with higher wellbeing.

Feelings of meaning, significance and mattering has been shown to be important sources of wellbeing that are interwoven with social relationships [61]. Experiencing meaning in life is an important contributor to wellbeing and health [62] and perceiving life to be meaningful buffers against life stressors [63]. Meaning involves feeling that life matters,

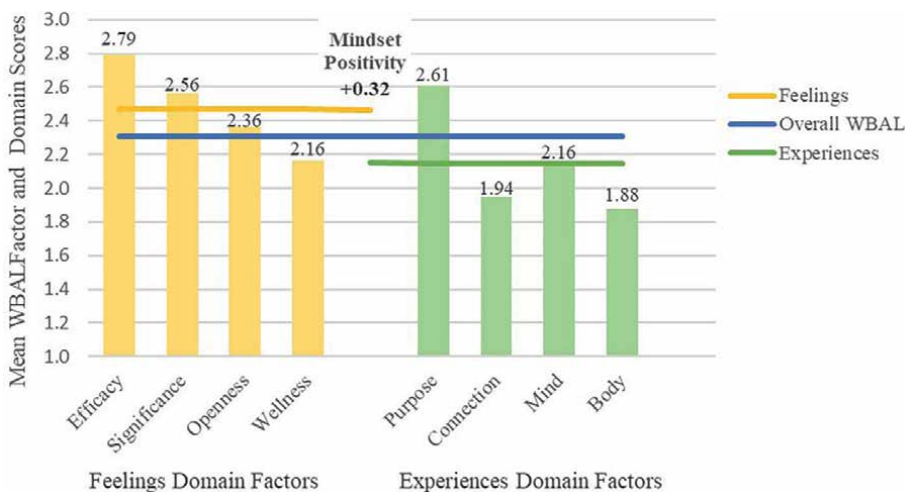


Figure 2.
Mean WBAL scores by WBAL domain and factor for all respondents.

follows a narrative that makes sense, and has a broader purpose [64]. These three components – significance, coherence and purpose – are each important for feeling that life is meaningful [65]. Having a sense of purpose with coherent life goals provides personal meaning that can be a renewable source of motivation and engagement [66].

Social relationships that entail reciprocally adding value and feeling valued, including self, others, work, and community are essential to feel that our lives have purpose and significance [67]. Previous studies have found that correlations between social connection and wellbeing, across individuals and within individuals over time, depend on both the number of social connections and individuals' evaluation of the quality and supportiveness of these relationships [68]. Meaningfulness involves being a "giver" to others over time [69]. Meaningful participation, a sense of belonging and connectedness are associated with wellbeing [70].

Experiencing a wider range of enjoyable activities with varying activation levels has been shown to be associated with improved psychosocial and physical wellbeing [41]. Participating in a variety of positive activities leads to a broader range of positive emotions, and sustainable happiness is possible through intentional activity changes, rather than changes in life circumstances [71]. According to the hedonic adaptation prevention model, increasing the variety of positive experiences, along with increased appreciation of these positive experiences through savoring and gratitude, reduces hedonic adaptation – the tendency for the degree of happiness derived from the same positive experiences to decrease with repetition- which in turn sustains and increases the stability of wellbeing improvements [72, 73].

Positive mindset practices, such as savoring, gratitude, and compassion, have demonstrated independent associations with more positive wellbeing. Increased savoring of positive experiences has been demonstrated to improve subjective wellbeing [74], including increasing happiness [75] and life satisfaction [76]. Gratitude has been shown to be positively associated with subjective wellbeing [77, 78], as has loving kindness and compassion [79]. Forgiveness is associated with higher subjective wellbeing, greater life satisfaction, and more positive emotions [80]. Mindfulness is an important driver for mindset positivity. Mindfulness practice is associated with both psychological and subjective wellbeing [81], with contemplative practitioners reporting higher wellbeing than non-practitioners [82]. Dispositional mindfulness is associated with more positive mindsets among emerging adult college students [83]. Dispositional mindfulness also appears to reduce stress in the work setting by encouraging decentering and reducing emotional reactivity to stressors, thereby reducing negative affect and interrupting negativity spirals [84].

Feeling a varied range of positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, serenity, and pride, has been shown to increase psychological and physical wellbeing [85]. Individuals who feel a variety of positive emotions in response to pleasant daily experiences report higher levels of subjective wellbeing [86]. Recent research has demonstrated the particular importance of lower arousal positive emotional states for wellbeing. For example, contentment and self-acceptance have been shown to be strong predictors of wellbeing and life satisfaction [87], and dispositional mindfulness and serenity are associated with lower stress and increased mental wellbeing [88].

Individuals who more frequently feel positive emotions spanning from low to high arousal levels, exhibit greater resilience and are better able to cope with stress and respond to adverse situations [89]. The broaden-and-build theory suggests that a diverse range of positive emotions broaden individuals' thought-action repertoire, causing them to build more personal resources that encourage exploration and pursuit of more novel positive experiences. This results in even more positive feelings which

can catalyze an upward spiral of positivity that increases psychological resilience and ability to cope with stressors [33, 34].

4.1.2 Indicators of positive wellbeing across life situations and demographics

Multiple key indicators of subjective wellbeing have previously been identified, although the underlying factors driving these differences in wellbeing are poorly understood. These include life situations such as relationship, parenting, and employment status, as well as demographic factors such as age, gender, and annual household income. In addition to confirming multiple previously demonstrated effects in a single instrument, the WBAL Assessment enables more granular evaluation of key wellbeing sources causing differences in overall subjective wellbeing across groups.

Applying the WBAL Assessment to a US-based cohort [2], higher wellbeing was most broadly and significantly associated with being in a companionate relationship and being a parent. Retirees and homemakers reported higher wellbeing, whereas unemployment was associated with lower wellbeing. Wellbeing among older respondents was significantly higher than other age groups, with reported wellbeing being lowest among midlife respondents. There were no significant differences in overall wellbeing between genders or across income levels, although some differences in underlying sources of wellbeing were observed between these groups.

Relationship status has been demonstrated to correspond with significant increases in subjective wellbeing as people move along the continuum from less to more committed relationships. Various components of romantic relationship quality are positively correlated with subjective wellbeing [90]. Married individuals report the highest level of subjective wellbeing, followed in order by individuals in cohabiting relationships, steady dating relationships, casual dating relationships, and individuals who date infrequently or not at all [91].

Marriage has been consistently demonstrated to have beneficial effects for wellbeing [92, 93], with lasting long-term benefits [94, 95], although whether marriage protects wellbeing [96] or is selected and sustained by people with higher wellbeing [97] is less clear. Marriage also helps mitigate mid-life drops in life satisfaction [98]. Positivity resonance, the interpersonal connection characterized by shared positivity, may be a key mechanism for this enhancement of wellbeing through more committed relationships [99].

Consistent with this prior research, being coupled, and particularly being married, improved wellbeing broadly as measured by WBAL [2]. This improvement corresponded with the most positive mindset, most frequently feeling efficacious, significant and well, as well as the most frequent experiences of trusted loving companionship and providing for and nurturing others. In particular, progression of relationship commitment from steady relationship to living together to marriage was associated with significant increases in the frequency of experiences entailing purposeful contributions to others' wellbeing.

As shown in **Figure 3**, wellbeing increased as groups move from being uncoupled to more steady committed relationships, with married respondents (or domestic partners) reporting the highest overall wellbeing and the most sources of wellbeing. Coupled respondents reported significantly higher wellbeing than uncoupled respondents with more positive mindsets and a wider range of sources of positive wellbeing. Coupled respondents also reported significantly more frequent positive feelings overall and across all WBAL factors, particularly feelings of significance and efficacy, with more frequent positive feelings across arousal levels. These coupled respondents

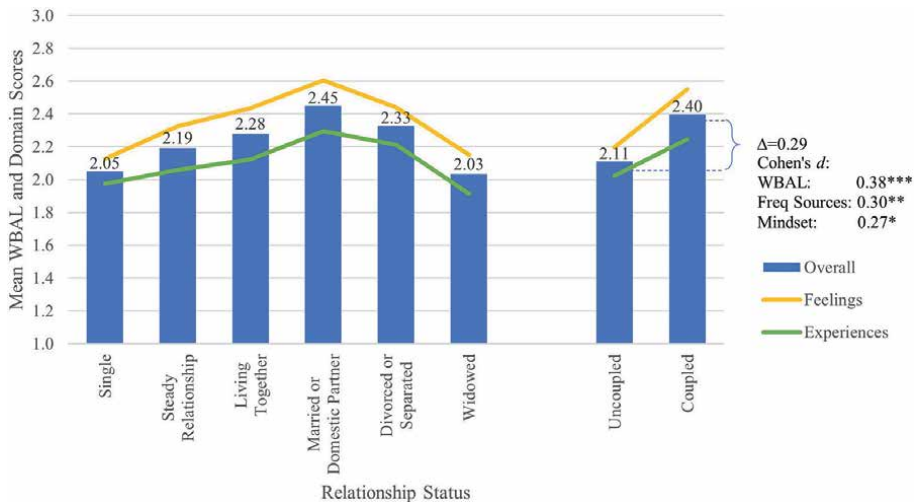


Figure 3. Mean WBAL and WBAL domain scores by relationship status, with Cohen's d effect size for change in the overall WBAL score, number of frequently positive experiences and feelings, and mindset positivity. Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, and *** $p < 0.001$. Symbols for Cohen's d represent statistical significance of the specific Tukey's HSD test.

reported more frequent positive experiences, particularly more frequently spending time with a loving companion, providing for and nurturing others and being calm and restful more often.

Among coupled respondents, those who are married or living together reported significantly more frequent experiences of purposeful contribution than coupled respondents not yet living together. Married respondents reported more frequently reflecting gratefully than other coupled respondents, and feeling efficacious, satisfied and fulfilled more frequently.

Among uncoupled (i.e., single, divorced, and widowed) respondents, there were no significant differences in overall wellbeing, positive feelings, or positive experiences. Divorced respondents reported the highest overall wellbeing among uncoupled respondents, comparable to those who are living with a companion and not yet married, suggesting that it is indeed better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. No significant differences were observed between single and divorced or single and widowed subgroups.

Parenting has also been shown to improve adults' subjective wellbeing [100] and is associated with greater meaning in life, positive emotions, and enhanced social roles, while marital stress can reduce parents' subjective wellbeing [101]. Parents, and especially fathers, report relatively higher levels of happiness, positive emotion, and meaning in life than do nonparents [102], whereas mothers report less happiness, more stress, and greater fatigue than fathers [100].

Consistent with this prior research, parenting was a major contributor to wellbeing, as measured by WBAL, with wellbeing increasing with increased sharing of parenting responsibilities [2]. Parents reported significantly more frequent experiences of social connection and purposeful contribution with more frequent feelings of significance and efficacy than non-parents.

As shown in **Figure 4**, being a parent was significantly associated with higher overall wellbeing, including positive feelings and experiences. Parents reported

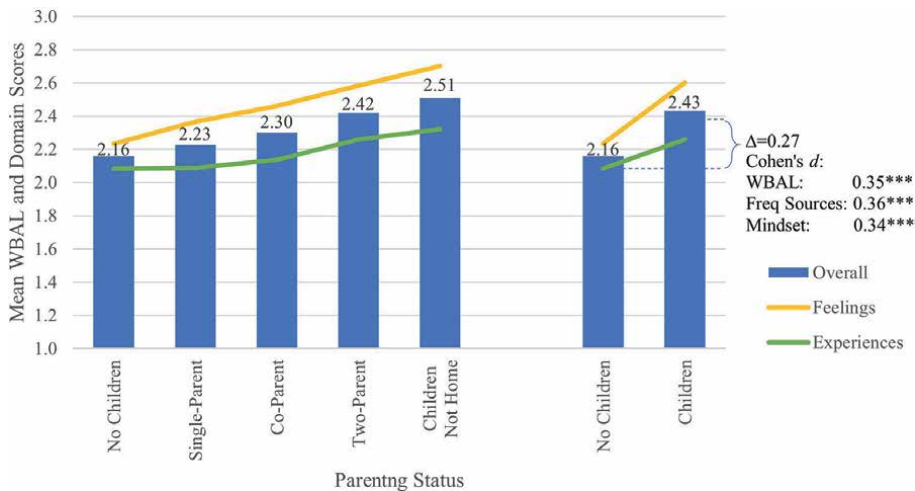


Figure 4. Mean WBAL and WBAL domain scores by parenting status, with Cohen's *d* effect size for change in overall WBAL score, number of frequently positive experiences and feelings, and mindset positivity. Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, and *** $p < 0.001$. Symbols for Cohen's *d* represent statistical significance of the specific Tukey's HSD test.

significantly more positive mindsets and more sources of positive wellbeing than those without children. Parents reported more frequent positive feelings across a wider range of arousal levels than non-parents, with more frequent feelings of efficacy, significance, and wellness. Parents also reported a wider range of positive experiences across activation levels with more frequent social connection, including time with a loving companion, and more frequent purposeful experiences, including providing for and nurturing others.

Parents whose children are no longer at home reported a significantly wider range of positive experiences across activation levels than active parents. They reported more frequent experiences of treating others with kindness and grace. Additionally, they experienced more frequent positive feelings across arousal levels, especially feelings of harmony and attentiveness, trust and safety, and awareness and appreciation.

The ability to share parenting responsibilities positively affected two key sources of wellbeing. In addition to reporting more frequently spending time with a loving trusted companion, respondents in two-parent households felt considerate and responsible more frequently than single parents. No significant differences were observed between single parents and co-parents.

More full employment – as employment changes from unemployed to self-, part-time, and full-time employment – has been shown to be associated with higher wellbeing, but the underlying factors behind this relationship are not well understood. Previous research has demonstrated a correlation between job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing [103], with perceived organizational support increasing career satisfaction which in turn improves subjective wellbeing [104]. Later in life, however, the pressures of working reduce subjective wellbeing, and those who do not work enjoy a higher level of life satisfaction [105].

In contrast, unemployment significantly reduces mental health and subjective wellbeing, due to a combination of psychological stress and financial strain [106]. This effect is reciprocal: unemployment reduces wellbeing, and poor wellbeing can

also lead to unemployment [107]. Additionally, non-standard employment arrangements, such as part-time and self-employment, are associated with lower global subjective wellbeing [108].

Retirees and homemakers reported the highest overall wellbeing, and significantly higher wellbeing than employed respondents, as shown in **Figure 5** [2]. Among those available to work, wellbeing trended upward with the degree of employment. Unemployed respondents seeking a job reported the lowest wellbeing, while full-time employees reported the highest. Part-time, self-employed, and students reported intermediate levels of wellbeing.

Compared to employed respondents, retirees, and homemakers reported significantly more sources of wellbeing, more frequent positive experiences and more frequent positive feelings across a wider range of arousal levels. Unemployed respondents reported significantly less frequent feelings of joy and confidence than those employed, retirees, or homemakers. No significant differences were observed between retired and home-maker respondents.

Among employed respondents, full-time employees reported significantly more frequent feelings of efficacy and fulfillment than part-time employees. Full-time employees also reported more frequent feelings of calm and restfulness than self-employed respondents. No significant differences were observed between part-time and self-employed respondents. Students reported overall wellbeing similar to employed respondents, with no significant differences observed between these groups.

Annual household income has previously been shown to correlate modestly with wellbeing within the US, following a log-linear relationship where increases in subjective wellbeing diminish at higher income levels [109–111]. Similarly, increases in positive feelings in the moment and evaluations of overall life satisfaction have also been shown to be log-linear, with diminishing marginal benefits as income rises [112].

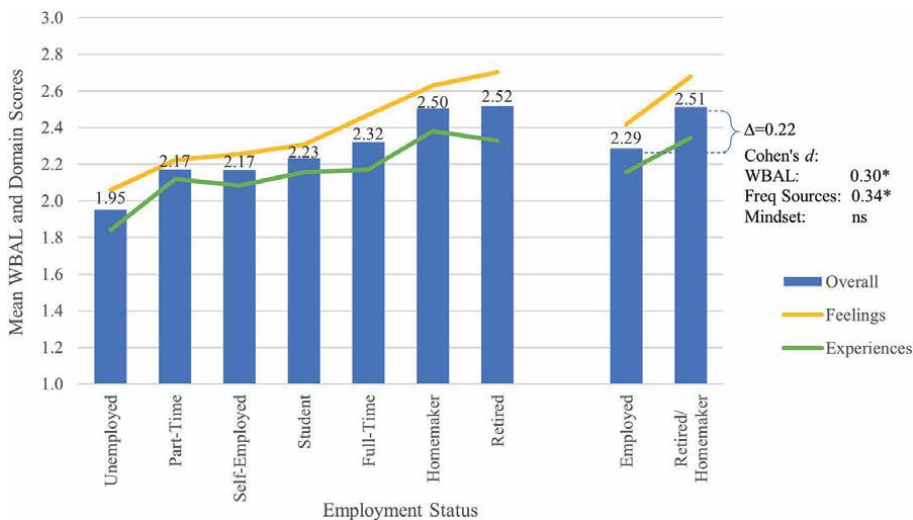


Figure 5. Mean WBAL and WBAL domain scores by employment status, with Cohen's *d* effect size for change in overall WBAL score and number of frequently positive experiences and feelings. Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, and *** $p < 0.001$. Symbols for Cohen's *d* represent statistical significance of the specific Tukey's HSD test.

As measured by the WBAL instrument, respondents reported very small differences in wellbeing by income bracket, as illustrated in **Figure 6** [2]. Household income showed a significant effect on mindset positivity, with a trend of increasing positivity from lower to higher income groups and a moderate effect size between the highest and lowest income groups. However, this trend towards improved mindset positivity did not translate to higher overall wellbeing as measured by WBAL, because respondents in higher income brackets reported a lower frequency of positive experiences.

Age has been shown to exhibit a U-shaped relationship with subjective wellbeing, with a low point occurring between the mid-30s and mid-50s [113]. Recent analyses suggest a more complex wave-like pattern that culminates in highest wellbeing later in life [114]. Additionally, wellbeing in adolescence and young adulthood is dropping in North America, flattening the curve through the first half of life [32]. Recent studies have begun to elucidate the psychological and social factors associated with age that may influence subjective wellbeing [115], including an age-related positivity effect, whereby improved wellbeing is accompanied by more positive mindset in later life [116, 117]. However, the underlying factors mediating the relationship between age and wellbeing are poorly understood.

As shown in **Figure 7**, age was a significant contributor to differences in overall WBAL score, as well as frequency of positive experiences and feelings of wellbeing [2]. Respondents aged 20 to 60 years old reported similar positive wellbeing, with no significant differences in any domain or factor, although with a non-significant downward trend towards mid-life. Reported wellbeing increased significantly in the older adult subgroup (aged 61–69), primarily due to a rise in the frequency of positive feelings.

Consistent with this age-related positivity effect, older adults experienced a greater increase in positive feelings compared to positive experiences. Older adults reported higher mindset positivity than other age groups, with significantly more

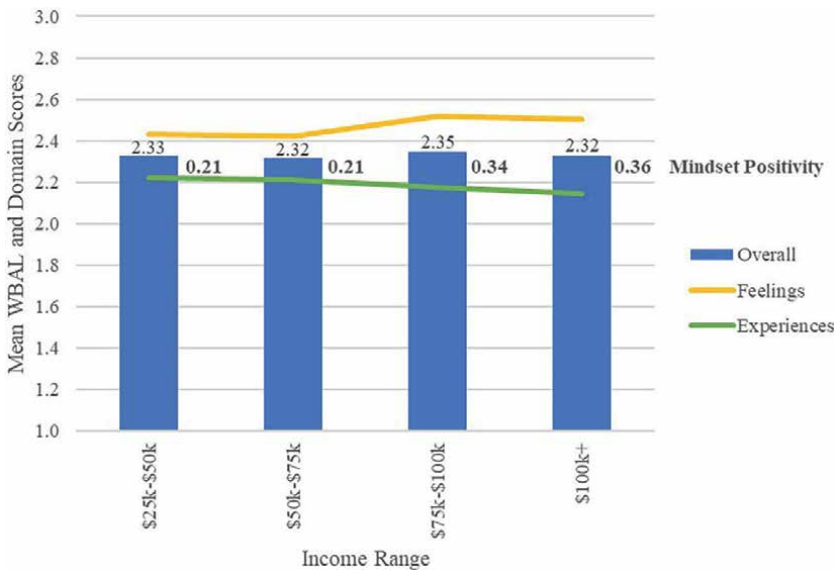


Figure 6.
Mean WBAL, WBAL domain scores, and mindset positivity by annual household income.

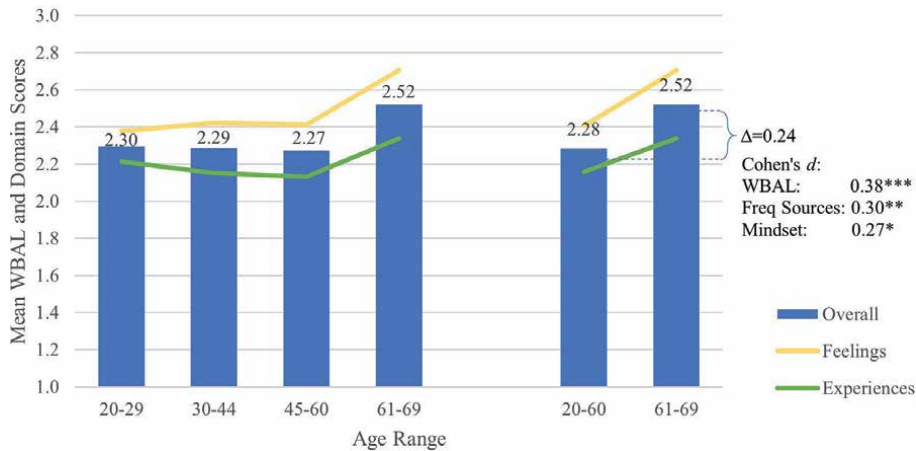


Figure 7. Mean WBAL and WBAL domain scores by age, with Cohen's *d* effect size for change in overall WBAL score, number of frequently positive experiences and feelings, and mindset positivity. Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, and *** $p < 0.001$. Symbols for Cohen's *d* represent statistical significance of the specific Tukey's HSD test.

frequent positive feelings across a wider range of arousal levels. They also reported more frequent positive experiences across a wider range of activation levels relative to younger age groups. Together, these findings suggest that age-related positivity increases the wellbeing resilience of older adults.

Midlife adults reported the lowest overall WBAL scores, although this effect is small. This result is consistent with recent findings for North America [32] showing wellbeing declining only slightly in early adulthood, with no significant differences among young, established and midlife adults, then increasing significantly in older adults. While midlife adults provided for and nurtured others more frequently than young adults, they were less frequently physically active and engaged and less frequently felt proud and that their lives mattered compared to young adults. No significant differences were observed between midlife and established adults or between established and young adults.

Gender has consistently been shown to have minimal impact on overall subjective wellbeing. Men and women generally report similar levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and other global measures of subjective wellbeing and human flourishing. No significant gender differences were observed in overall satisfaction with life or affect balance [118]. However, differences in wellbeing between women and men appear to be influenced by cultural and social factors [119]. For example, men have consistently been observed to be more physically active than women, with differences in impact of psychosocial variables such as self-efficacy and social support [120–122]. And women score higher than men in positive relations with others and lower in self-acceptance and autonomy [123]. Some gender-related differences by age have been observed, with younger women being more happy and older women less happy than men [124]. And, the negative impacts of unemployment are greater for men than women [107].

Consistent with these previous findings, there were no significant differences between genders, as measured by the WBAL Assessment, in overall WBAL, mindset positivity or overall frequency of positive experiences or positive feelings [2]. Men reported being physically active more frequently than women, whereas women reported connecting with friends and family more often than men.

4.2 Implications for designing and enhancing targeted interventions for subgroups in similar life situations

The deeper understanding of the interactions between positive experiences and feelings enabled by the WBAL Model and Assessment can guide the design of interventions to improve wellbeing across subgroups with similar life situations, which can also have important practical implications for community initiatives, workplace practices, educational programs, and public health. For example, as shown in **Figure 8**, findings to date from evaluating wellbeing with the WBAL Assessment suggest certain intervention targets may be more likely to have positive benefits for different subgroups.

Uncoupled and childless individuals may benefit most from wellbeing interventions to improve social connection, purposeful contributions and feelings of significance and efficacy, each of which are important drivers of intrinsic motivation and meaning. Whether considering relationship or parenting status, feelings of significance and efficacy closely correspond with experiences of social connection and purposeful contribution, suggesting that these factors work together to enhance wellbeing.

Therefore, interventions focused on increasing social connection and tangible contributions to others may be more effective if coupled with mindfulness practices to nurture feelings of significance and efficacy. Interventions targeting these wellbeing sources could be particularly valuable for uncoupled respondents and individuals without children who have significantly lower experiences of social connection and purposeful contribution accompanied by lower feelings of significance.

Significantly lower wellbeing was also associated with less positive mindset for those without children and/or a companion. General interventions to help individuals in these life situations develop a more positive mindset may therefore improve overall wellbeing by increasing individuals' frequency of positive feelings relative to their frequency of positive experiences.

Because younger individuals and students are more likely to be uncoupled and childless, and more engaged in seeking a sense of meaning and purpose [125], educational programs that integrate wellbeing practices into their curricula – particularly

Subgroups: Intervention Target Areas	Key:				Primary Targets		Secondary Targets			
	Un- coupled	Child- less	Young Adults	Job Loss, Divorce, Widowed	Under- and Unemployed	Employed Workplaces	Lower Income	Higher Income	Women	Men
Broad Targets:										
Wellbeing Breadth										
Mindset Positivity										
Positive Experiences										
Social Connection										
Purposeful Contribution										
Healthy Body										
Strong Mind										
Positive Feelings:										
Efficacy										
Significance										
Wellness										
Openness										

Figure 8.
Summary of suggested primary targets for intervention by subgroup.

those that support students' search for purpose, meaning, and efficacy, and build mindful positivity practices into their lives – can help students develop life-long skills for building a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Loss of human connection, for example, through the loss of a job, the end of a companionate relationship or the death of a spouse can dramatically reduce wellbeing across multiple dimensions and especially social connection and associated feelings of belonging. Therefore, interventions for unemployed, divorced, or widowed individuals should include a strong component of social connection, with opportunities for purposeful contribution that enhance feelings of meaning and significance. Building social connections beyond our workplaces and companionate relationships – with friendships, family, and “third place” communities [126, 127] – can not only mitigate the impact on wellbeing from these losses of connection but also proactively build a more resilient social network to prepare us to withstand future major losses in our sources of human connection.

Under- and unemployed individuals actively seeking work suffer from a loss of agency despite having more time affluence. Together, agency and time affluence are important enablers of wellbeing, as shown by the differences in wellbeing between people with different parenting and employment statuses. Homemakers and retirees reported the highest overall wellbeing among employment status categories, with the widest range of positive experience activation and feeling arousal levels. These groups who have chosen not to work also reported the widest range of positive sources of wellbeing. Similarly, parents with children not at home reported the widest range of positive experience activation and feelings arousal levels, suggesting a higher degree of time affluence and agency.

In contrast, unemployment, part-time employment, and self-employment broadly reduce key sources of wellbeing. Unemployed respondents reported the lowest wellbeing among any subgroup studied, with significantly fewer sources of positive wellbeing than employed respondents. This finding is consistent with the broad-based downward spiral of negativity observed in previous studies [107]. Therefore, in addition to supporting increased social interaction and feelings of significance, under- and unemployed individuals are likely to benefit from wellbeing interventions focused on creating feelings of agency and exercising autonomy in parts of their lives that they do control, to mitigate the impact on their wellbeing and improve motivation and mindset while they continue their search for meaningful work with outcomes that are less within their control.

Higher and lower income individuals are likely to benefit from different wellbeing interventions. As measured by WBAL, annual household income had no independent effect on overall wellbeing, but mindset positivity was significantly associated with higher income. The frequency of respondents' positive feelings of wellbeing trended upward with income, as previously observed. However, the highest earners did not report higher overall wellbeing as measured by WBAL because their frequency of positive experiences trended downward with increased income.

Although these differences were small, higher earners felt more positively about their lives, whereas those with lower income engaged more frequently in positive experiences. A more positive mindset appears to enable higher earners to maintain wellbeing despite engaging in positive experiences less frequently than lower income respondents. Therefore, members of lower income households may benefit most from interventions aimed at improving mindset positivity, whereas those in higher income households may benefit from introducing a balance of more frequent positive experiences into their lives.

Workplace and community settings generally provide opportunities for social connection and purposeful contributions. The low frequency of community engagement across the US population sampled suggests that interventions within these settings designed to enhance social connections and create more opportunities to make purposeful contributions can be particularly effective for improving wellbeing. Programs that encourage physical self-care and positive mindset can also be beneficial in these settings. In these settings, supporting an environment that creates a healthy community and physical self-care, while providing a degree of agency and recognition, is likely to lead to greater increases in overall wellbeing, as well as motivation and feelings of efficacy and significance, which together are likely to improve productivity, engagement, and retention.

Different genders may benefit from different wellbeing interventions. Physical self-care and social connection were the least frequently experienced sources of wellbeing overall and the main factors with significant gender differences. As seen in prior research, while women and men in this study reported the same overall wellbeing, women reported being physically active less frequently, suggesting interventions to encourage more regular physical movement among women, while men reported less frequent social interactions, suggesting interventions to encourage men to seek and support more social connections.

The WBAL Assessment can be a useful instrument for measuring overall positive wellbeing and assessing changes in the nature, frequency, and range of feelings of positive wellbeing. This enables deeper understanding of these inter-relationships and allows for more tailored interventions for targeted populations in similar life circumstances.

5. Applying the WBAL model and assessment to design personalized wellbeing interventions

The WellBalance Model establishes that sustainable wellbeing requires that we care for both our minds and bodies while building deep, meaningful relationships. Contributing to others' lives and feeling a sense of significance and connection are the foundation of our wellbeing. We need to feel that we belong and our lives matter and have meaning. Breadth and balance across these dimensions with varying levels of activation and arousal create higher and more resilient wellbeing.

Having a valid tool to assess the frequency and range of positive experiences in an individual's life and relate these to the frequency and range of their positive feelings enables identification of specific modifiable sources of wellbeing which can form the basis of a personalized wellbeing intervention plan. By focusing on a comprehensive set of discrete categories of positive experiences that have been demonstrated to enhance wellbeing, the WBAL Model can enable individuals to identify and pursue specific experiences and mindful positivity practices with the greatest promise to improve their wellbeing.

Variety and breadth of positive experiences and feelings corresponds closely with overall wellbeing. Wellbeing that is narrowly focused on fewer positive sources of wellbeing is likely to be more fragile in the face of negative life events, especially losses or challenges within an individual's core sources of wellbeing. Therefore, focusing interventions on raising the frequency of positive experiences or feelings not currently experienced frequently by an individual can be expected to improve overall positive wellbeing and resilience.

Our lives are constantly being pulled out of balance by external forces, especially between work and home [128, 129], as well as our identities and personalities [130], and our desire to repeat familiar experiences that have made us happy in the past. Although most people know what they are supposed to be doing to be healthy and happy, our behaviors are deeply ingrained. Also, these behaviors, developed in response to past situations and experiences, may no longer be constructive adaptive responses for the individual at this point in their life. The WBAL Assessment identifies an individual's categories of less frequent positive experiences and feelings, establishing a starting point to design personalized wellbeing interventions to increase the frequency of these experiences and feelings and begin to create more positive habitual behaviors over time.

5.1 Using the WBAL model and assessment to support resilient positive wellbeing

Designing a tailored intervention plan to enhance individuals' wellbeing entails four components which can be incorporated to varying degrees, priorities, and timing. Together, these four elements of an effective wellbeing improvement plan can help individuals amplify joy and contentment, build resilience, and flourish in ways that are both achievable and lasting:

- a. Catalyze upward spirals of positivity
- b. Maximize wellbeing productivity
- c. Nurture mindset positivity
- d. Build wellbeing resilience

5.1.1 Catalyze upward spirals of positivity

In accordance with the broaden-and-build theory of positivity, positive experiences create positive feelings which in turn open us to explore new experiences, creating *upward spirals of positivity* [33, 34]. How we feel arises from what we experience and also affects the experiences we are inclined to pursue. By intentionally pursuing positive experiences, we can create positive feelings of wellbeing. By fully savoring these experiences, we can then enhance the positive feelings they create. Then by attending to and nurturing these feelings, we open and motivate ourselves to explore new positive experiences. These upward spirals of positivity – cycles where positive experiences create positive feelings, which then inspire even more positive actions – can transform individuals' wellbeing in profound ways. Importantly, this does not necessarily require a major change in life circumstances. Over time, small, purposeful choices to explore a balance of positive experiences and nurture the resulting positive feelings can broadly catalyze positive wellbeing.

5.1.2 Maximize wellbeing productivity

Individuals generally have a limited amount of discretionary time and while focusing on one thing and are not focusing on another, which can lead to neglecting important aspects of their lives. Therefore, *wellbeing productivity* – the amount of positive feelings of wellbeing we can create in our limited discretionary time – is an

important component of most individualized plans. For example, we can magnify the positivity in our lives by adding wellbeing “boosters” to activities we are already doing. Rather than spend an hour on a treadmill at the gym, we could exercise outside in nature, with a friend, help that friend with a challenge they are facing, and express gratitude for their friendship. In this same hour, by combining multiple positive aspects into our experiences, we can create more positive feelings of wellbeing. When identifying specific activities to address an individual’s gaps in sources of wellbeing, those that can address multiple gaps simultaneously should generally be prioritized.

In addition, pursuing positive experiences in one area of our life multiplies wellbeing in other areas of our lives. For example, restful sleep supports healthy eating and increases exercise tolerance. Restful sleep can also improve our mood, productivity, relationships, and kindness. Similarly, having a trusted companionate relationship provides security for us to more actively meet new people, while being more reflective, more kind, and sleeping better. Indeed, every category of positive experiences reinforces other positive experiences, often mutually.

5.1.3 Nurture a positive mindset

We need to nurture our *mindset positivity* – gaining more positive feelings from our positive experiences, primarily by attending to and being grateful for the good in our lives. We need to savor special moments we create, be grateful for what we have, and let ourselves anticipate, fully experience, and reminisce our positive experiences. Mindset positivity, independent of the breadth and frequency of positive experiences, is associated with more positive feelings about those experiences, which in turn corresponds with higher overall wellbeing [1].

WBAL evaluates each individual’s mindset positivity, the extent to which overall feelings scores exceed overall experiences scores, which correlates strongly with overall positive feelings but not positive experiences [1]. Mindset positivity may also be important for an individual’s response to stressful life events and thereby mitigate the wellbeing impact of these events. Individuals with more negative mindsets as measured by WBAL may benefit more from interventions targeted to improve positive mindset (e.g., mindfulness, presence, gratitude, forgiveness, intentions, affirmations, etc.) to improve overall subjective wellbeing and increase wellbeing resilience [131, 132].

Furthermore, the WBAL Assessment can identify specific contributors to or detractors from mindset positivity, based on differences in frequency of specific categories of positive feelings in relation to the categories of positive experiences from which these feelings are more likely to arise. This enables identification of specific mindful positivity practices that are most likely to address personal gaps in an individual’s mindset, supporting a highly individualized and targeted approach to developing and improving mindfulness skills that are most likely to improve the individual’s mindset.

For example, an individual with low levels of contentment may disproportionately benefit from practicing gratitude, whereas someone with low feelings of awareness would benefit most from savoring practices. Individuals who do not feel as proud and that their lives matter as frequently as would be expected from the positive contributions they are making may benefit disproportionately from reflecting on the positive impact their actions are having directly on others in their families, community, and beyond. Individuals feeling gentle and loved less frequently than they are actually being loved by a companion and being kind to others may benefit from practicing

loving kindness to make them more attuned to the gentleness, love, and kindness in their life. Otherwise, someone with less frequent feelings of wellness than warranted by their frequency of activities benefiting their minds and bodies may benefit disproportionately from practices involving mind-body awareness.

5.1.4 Build wellbeing resilience

Lastly, sustainable wellbeing requires balance and breadth to build resilience. By increasing the number of frequently felt and experienced WBAL categories an individual can also increase their *wellbeing resilience* in response to negative life events, thus enhancing the ability to maintain wellbeing in the face of life's inevitable challenges, setbacks and losses [33, 34]. If one area of our life suffers, we have other sources of wellbeing to sustain us. And in accordance with the hedonic adaptation prevention model, variety helps us sustain the wellbeing benefits from activities and relationships we enjoy [72, 73].

We need a healthy mix of active engagement and rest, excitement, and contentment. We need to care for ourselves mentally and physically and for others emotionally and tangibly. In addition, we need to feel that our lives matter, we have the ability to positively impact ourselves and others, we are well mentally and physically, and we are trusting and open to new experiences. By broadening our sources of wellbeing across these dimensions, we create a more resilient life.

Wellbeing that is too narrow – for example, relying heavily on a job, a relationship, or a hobby – can collapse when one of these wellbeing sources falters. To build lasting resilience, we need to cultivate breadth across many areas of our lives: physical health, emotional connection, mental growth, and meaningful contribution. To prevent hedonic adaptation, an effective personalized positive change program should incorporate a mix of enjoyable activities across these dimensions. Breadth and variety create a strong foundation to draw upon when life's challenges hit.

These four elements demonstrate that lasting wellbeing is not always built through grand life changes but through small, purposeful steps and mindful practices that reinforce each other and compound over time. By helping individuals make the most of their time to create positive moments, foster upward spirals of positivity, expand their sources of joy and contentment, and nurture a positive mindset, they can unlock a life that feels more full, steady, and vibrant.

5.2 WBAL method to design personalized positivity programs

The starting point to design a personalized positivity program is to understand the individual's current sources of wellbeing, balance of experiences activation levels and feelings arousal levels, breadth of wellbeing sources supporting wellbeing resilience, overall mindset positivity, and the key contributors to and detractors from mindset positivity. Assessment of these items then enables identification of the categories of activities that are experienced less frequently which are likely to improve their overall wellbeing and resilience if pursued more frequently. Methods to change these experiential behaviors can be paired with journaling [133] and daily intentions [134] to support positive change. Positive feelings to nurture can also be identified and prioritized, with affirmations [135] personalized to reinforce these specific feelings. In addition, identifying gaps between the frequency of positive feelings relative to related positive experiences can be used to define a tailored set of specific mindful

positivity practices that are more likely to support a more positive mindset for the individual.

As demonstrated above, individuals' experiences and feelings of positive wellbeing are greatly influenced by their particular life situations. Therefore, it is important to interpret the individual's personal wellbeing profile in relation to these life circumstances and focus on areas where they have a degree of autonomy and agency to make positive changes in their lives. Benchmarking against others in similar life situations can help identify which opportunities to improve wellbeing are similar to others in their life situation over which the individual may have less control, validating the impact of their life situation on their lived experiences and feelings, and reinforcing that they are not alone in their situation. This benchmarking can also assess which opportunities to improve wellbeing are independent of their life situations and thus over which they may be more likely to have influence, validating the individual's uniqueness and increasing the personalization of the program towards these intervention targets.

In some instances, the individual may feel they are already doing what they can to address a gap in their life balance, especially if important, challenging and requiring time and effort. For example, they may already be searching for a new job, actively seeking a loving companion, or working with a fitness trainer or nutritionist. Rather than replacing these efforts towards addressing recognized gaps in their wellbeing, a personalized positivity program should focus on identifying alternative positive experiences over which they have agency within these opportunity areas to mitigate the immediate wellbeing impacts they are experiencing while increasing resilience. For example, job loss often entails loss of connection and community, feelings of significance and mattering, and ability to contribute meaningfully to others' wellbeing. So, a highly productive set of experiences to pursue would bring more of these positive experiences and feelings into their life, such as joining a community initiative to make positive change in ways that are meaningful and interesting to the individual and utilizes their unique strengths and talents. Additionally, if transitioning through major disruptions or changes in their life, a personal positivity program can be crafted to incorporate positive activities that support other aspects of an individual's wellbeing which they have neglected and now have the opportunity to reincorporate into their lives.

Personal coaching has been demonstrated to be an effective approach for improving subjective wellbeing [136]. Wellbeing interventions based on positive psychology coaching techniques, including use by mental health practitioners, should build upon the individual's personal and social strengths [137, 138]. A range of methods has proven effective for personal and executive coaching based on empirical and theoretical knowledge as applied to a nonmedical, collaborative, and highly contextual process. Therefore, while a standard method is proposed below, practitioners should integrate their own expertise and the needs of their individual clients with the best current knowledge [139].

5.2.1 Prioritizing positive experiences to pursue

While individuals have a genetically determined set points for happiness, wellbeing interventions can effectively create sustainable improvements in wellbeing by addressing happiness-relevant circumstantial factors and happiness-relevant activities and practices [140]. In particular, when considering adaptation and dynamic

processes, positive activities offer the best opportunities for sustainably increasing happiness [140]. Therefore, an important part of the personalized program design process is to align with the individual's aspirations and prioritize opportunity areas of positive experiences based on their sentiments and motivation towards each potential area of change. Categories of experiences from which individuals are already gaining meaningful wellbeing, for which they are likely to have a good understanding of the benefits and their role in creating those experiences for themselves, should first be reviewed and reinforced.

Then, with the aim to motivate positive action – and utilizing demonstrated models of motivation such as self-determination theory which focuses on the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness [141] – opportunities to pursue new positive experiences can be triaged along four main dimensions to identify the areas that are most actionable and likely to have near-term benefits:

1. Desire: Importance and motivation to change specific parts of their life
 - a. How important is this area of their life to their wellbeing and how might it positively affect and reinforce other important parts of their life?
 - b. How motivated are they to make positive change and how negative are their feelings about the lack of positive experiences in this area of their life?
2. Empowerment: Ability and agency to make positive change with efficacy and autonomy
 - a. What is their perceived, and actual, ability to create each type of positive experiences and thereby positively influence the outcome?
 - b. What is their locus of control in the area, i.e., do they feel they have control over the experience or are they subject to or constrained by external factors?
 - c. How much influence do they have over this area of their life, i.e., do others need to be enlisted or convinced or can they introduce the change unilaterally?
 - d. Do they feel self-efficacy in the area, i.e., that they have the skills and ability to create and engage in positive experiences in that area?
3. Impact: Nature and magnitude of impact on the individual's wellbeing
 - a. In what ways will pursuing positive change in this area of their life impact their life and the lives of others around them?
 - b. What opportunities exist to boost wellbeing productivity of activities by combining multiple wellbeing sources into the activity?
 - c. How large would this impact be relative to other opportunities to improve their wellbeing?

4. Ease: Feasibility and timeframe for creating more positive experiences

- a. How easy or difficult will it be to create positive change in the area?
- b. How much effort would be required over what timeframe?
- c. Will there be immediate benefits for their wellbeing, or are the benefit likely to accrue over a longer time period?

Generally, the highest priority areas to begin a personalized positivity program are those categories of positive experiences a client is able and highly motivated to change and will have large positive impacts on their life in a fairly short period with less effort than other areas. Then, over time, as the individual begins to see gains in their wellbeing, reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy and motivation, more challenging or longer-term changes where they may have less control, can be pursued.

As with other similar wellbeing assessment tools, WBAL implicitly assumes normative values regarding the meaning of wellbeing, and to date, it has only been validated in a limited cultural context. Caution is therefore warranted to consider cultural context and avoid normative judgment when interpreting responses of individuals whose norms and values may differ [49]. The WBAL tool does not assign relative significance to any of the aspects of positive wellbeing measured, so interpretation must allow for respondents to assign different degrees of importance to different aspects of their wellbeing, based on their personal value judgments and situations. For example, someone may have made a conscious decision to focus on their children, family, or close friends rather than engage with a broader community. Or they may have made a conscious decision to temporarily sacrifice sleep and physical self-care in pursuit of an important life goal or to care for another.

Mental visualization of positive experiences has been demonstrated to increase motivation and behavioral change [142–144]. Thus, as opportunity areas are triaged, the individual should envision specific experiences they could create to bring more positive experiences into 2–3 of the most important and actionable parts of their life, including adding wellbeing “boosters” such as nature, movement, playfulness, mindfulness, and/or other people into activities they are already experiencing regularly. In addition to enhancing the wellbeing productivity of their current activities, a positivity plan could include previous experiences they have mastered and enjoyed or new activities they have a desire to try, thereby introducing the variety that can help sustain wellbeing by reducing hedonic adaptation. Activities should also be explored that simultaneously address multiple specific gaps in the individual’s wellbeing and thus are likely to be the most productive ways to enhance their wellbeing within limited discretionary time. Among these, a short-list of specific experiences or activities can be identified that the individual feels most motivated and empowered to pursue that are most likely to meaningfully improve their wellbeing in the near term. These early, easy, rapid, empowered actions can then become their initial steps towards broadening and balancing their wellbeing.

5.2.2 Prioritizing mindful positivity practices to cultivate positive feelings

WBAL identifies categories of positive feelings to nurture, around which affirmations and exercises can be designed and specific categories of positive

experiences can be pursued to produce more of these feelings. These opportunities should be reviewed with the individual to understand which deficiencies of positive feelings are causing the greatest emotional distress. The positive feelings likely to arise from the positive experiences prioritized for pursuit above should be considered, along with any other activities they are currently pursuing to try to create these positive feelings.

After reviewing an individual's overall mindset positivity and highlighting their key contributors to a positive mindset, it is important to understand any current mindful positivity practices they have tried in the past or are engaging in regularly, how proficient and comfortable they feel performing these practices, and how much wellbeing they feel they have gained or are continuing to gain from these practices.

Specific detractors from a positive mindset can then be explored, for which the individual is engaging frequently in categories of positive experiences without as frequent feelings associated with these activities. If the individual is already engaging in practices directed towards these feelings of wellbeing, hedonic adaptation may have reduced the benefits they are gaining, suggesting an exploration for other experiences or mindful positivity practices with similar benefits to introduce variety. These practices can be particularly beneficial if they address other wellbeing opportunities, for example, adding group yoga practices for someone who already does breathwork but is not frequently caring for their body or lacks social connection.

If the individual has not yet developed strong mindful positivity skills or engaged in any regular mindfulness practices, specific practices can be identified to reinforce and support mindset positivity in their mindset improvement opportunity areas. A positivity program can then be designed for them to develop core skills and practices to incorporate those practices into their life that will be most likely to improve their positivity and wellbeing. Alternative mindful positivity practices can be prioritized along two main dimensions:

1. Motivation: Interest and ability to regularly perform practice
 - a. Are they interested to learn the specific mindful positivity practice?
 - b. Do they feel they have the ability, physically and mentally, to learn and regularly perform the practice?
2. Feasibility: Ability to fit into their life
 - a. Do they have the time to pursue the practice, or would an alternative less time-consuming practice be more practical and feasible?
 - b. Do they feel they have the support they need to be able to begin and continue the practice, for example from their loved ones or employer?

Additional mental, physical, relational or spiritual benefits of each practice should also be considered in relation to the individual's other areas of opportunity to improve their wellbeing and fully flourish.

Most positivity programs should include mindfulness practices demonstrated to support generalized mindset improvement, such as savoring, gratitude [74], or guided meditation [81], especially for individuals with broader deficits in their overall feelings about the positive experiences in their life. Coming to understand the root sources of mindset negativity, such as intense chronic stress, a reaction to recent or ongoing events, past difficult or traumatic experiences, or strong personality traits, it is important to consider whether the individual should be referred to a professional mental health practitioner to evaluate whether they qualify for clinical diagnosis and more intensive therapy.

Having reviewed the top opportunities to improve an individual's wellbeing, balance, and resilience, they should now be prepared to decide where they want to begin and commit to the first steps towards transformation. Recapping the most important opportunities over which the client feels a sense of agency and potential impact, with examples of positive activities they have identified in each category, envisioning and describing their future life can be especially helpful to motivate positive change. Envisioning this life emphasizes that they already have these attributes within themselves and just need to prioritize and strengthen them through practice until their lived experiences grow into fulfilling their aspirations.

Because the WBAL Assessment measures individuals' experiences within the past 2 weeks, the resulting wellbeing profile represents a single point in time and each individual's situation, behaviors and emotions at this point in their life. As individuals' lives change, whether due to external events or through personal growth, the WBAL Method can be helpful throughout life stages and transitions. For someone in a period of active growth and change, re-assessment and prioritization of new aspirations to pursue every 9–12 weeks would allow the time needed to create lasting habit change [145], while evaluating their wellbeing progress to define a growth path for the next 9–12 weeks. If someone is anticipating a major life change – for example, a new child, a new job, marriage, or relationship difficulties, job loss or loss of a loved one - assessing their wellbeing profile before and after the transition can help prepare for the change by anticipating wellbeing gaps experienced by others in similar life situations, monitor and recognize positive change, and identify areas to maintain or restore balance following the transition. If someone's life is already full and flourishing, an annual wellbeing assessment can help make small life adjustments to remain authentically aligned with the individual's evolving values and identity, and thus prevent potential crises arising from growing misalignment over time.

6. Conclusions

The Wellbeing Balance and Lived Experiences (WBAL) Model and Assessment represent an innovative framework for measuring and enhancing positive wellbeing by integrating the experiential and emotional dimensions of human flourishing. Unlike traditional assessments that focus primarily on subjective feelings of wellbeing, the WBAL Model emphasizes the frequency and breadth of positive experiences across various activation and arousal levels, providing a more nuanced understanding of how lived experiences influence subjective feelings of wellbeing. This novel approach not only complements existing “gold standard” tools but extends their

utility to enable design of personalized wellbeing interventions tailored to an individual's unique life circumstances.

The application of the WBAL Model in a U.S.-based cohort revealed important insights into how life situations such as relationship, parenting, and employment statuses impact wellbeing, surpassing the effects of demographic factors like age, gender, and income. The WBAL Model enables more targeted approaches for subgroups in similar life situations, addressing their specific needs and challenges to enhance wellbeing outcomes. Meaningful social connections and purposeful contributions with feelings of significance and efficacy were found to be foundational for positive wellbeing, underscoring the importance of considering situations that impact these factors when designing wellbeing interventions.

By identifying specific, modifiable sources of wellbeing and observing the interplay between positive experiences and feelings, the WBAL Assessment provides a robust foundation for developing highly individualized wellbeing interventions. The WBAL Method, informed by the assessment's insights, empowers individuals to pursue balance and breadth in their positive experiences and feelings, fostering resilient wellbeing. Additionally, WBAL enables prioritization of mindfulness practices to target specific detractors from individuals' mindset positivity. This personalized approach facilitates the design of actionable plans for individuals to optimize their wellbeing by nurturing their mindset positivity and expanding their repertoire of positive experiences.

The WBAL Model and Assessment represent a significant advancement in the field of applied positive psychology, offering both a comprehensive understanding of wellbeing and practical tools to improve wellbeing. By moving beyond descriptive assessment of subjective feelings of wellbeing to a more experiential and prescriptive approach, the WBAL framework holds promise for transforming how practitioners, employers, and policymakers can help individuals, workplaces, and communities cultivate and sustain flourishing lives.

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Conflict of interest

The WBAL Model and Assessment, which is freely available for non-commercial use, is proprietary to WellBalance, LLC, in which the author has an ownership interest.

A. Appendix

Domain	Factor	Energy Level	Item	Item #	Prompt
Experiences	Body	Activation Level:			Over the past two weeks, how often have you had the following experiences? (0 = Rarely, 1 = Sometimes, 2 = Often, 3 = Usually, 4 = Very Often)
		Active	Move Regularly	1	My days are physically active, I exercise regularly, and my body is strong and able.
		Mindful	Nourish Healthily	2	I savor nutritious food and eat only until full, while hydrating regularly without too much alcohol or caffeine.
	Mind	Calm	Rest and Recover	3	I sleep well and let myself rest and recover when I'm sore, injured or tired.
		Active	Create, Learn and Explore	4	I learn new things, express my creativity and become fully absorbed in activities.
		Mindful	Savor and Appreciate	5	I spend time in nature, and appreciate and enjoy music, art, and good stories.
	Connection	Calm	Reflect Gratefully	6	I pause to reflect, feel grateful and connect to something larger than myself.
		Active	Build Community	7	I engage with groups beyond my close friends and family, and seek out new people that share my interests.
		Mindful	Bond Closely	8	I regularly connect with my close friends or family and we help each other when needed.
	Purpose	Calm	Love Securely	9	I spend undistracted time with a loving, trusted companion, and we listen to and meet each other's needs.
		Active	Contribute, Serve and Earn	10	I help make the world better, positively impact others, and am rewarded fairly for my work.
		Mindful	Provide and Nurture	11	I am responsible, provide for others' wellbeing and help make my home comfortable and safe.
	Activation Balance	Calm	Kindness and Grace	12	I am kind to others, supporting and comforting them, without judgment or resentment.
		Active	Active and Engaged	13	My body is active and fit, my mind is engaged, and I have a meaningful impact in my community
		Mindful	Mindful and Present	14	I pay attention to and take care of myself and others, am present in the moment and appreciate the world around me.
Feelings	Arousal Balance	Calm	Calm and Restful	15	My relationships are secure, I am physically safe, and I can relax and be at peace.
		Arousal Level:			Over the past two weeks, how often have you had the following feelings? (0 = Rarely, 1 = Sometimes, 2 = Often, 3 = Usually, 4 = Very Often)
		Joyful	Joyful and Confident	16	My life feels meaningful and fun, filled with purpose, joy and laughter.
	Openness	Aware	Aware and Appreciative	17	I savor life's special moments, am self-aware, and appreciate the people in my life.
		Content	Content and Peaceful	18	I feel content and satisfied with my life, at peace with myself and safe with others.
		Joyful	Adventurous and Curious	19	I enjoy meeting new people, exploring new cultures and trying new experiences.
	Significance	Aware	Harmonious and Attentive	20	I appreciate nature, art and music, and feel connected to people in my life and in harmony with my world.
		Content	Trusting and Safe	21	I trust myself and others to keep us safe, and believe things will work out.
		Joyful	Proud and Maturing	22	My life matters and has meaning, and I am proud of my accomplishments.
	Efficacy	Aware	Belonging and Accepted	23	I feel like I belong, am welcome and appreciated, and can be myself with people in my life.
		Content	Gentle and Loved	24	I feel loving kindness and am gentle towards others, and feel loved and cared for in return.
		Joyful	Capable and Confident	25	I feel confident and capable to contribute meaningfully and take care of myself and others.
	Wellness	Aware	Considerate and Responsible	26	Others can depend on me and I feel able to provide for myself and others.
		Content	Caring and Compassionate	27	I care for and feel compassion towards myself and others.
		Joyful	Vital and Strong	28	I feel alive and energetic, with a strong body and sharp mind.
		Aware	Satisfied and Fulfilled	29	I feel fulfilled and satisfied, appreciating small pleasures in the moment.
		Content	Peaceful and Serene	30	My life feels peaceful, serene and untroubled, with a restful body and calm mind.

Figure A1.
 Wellbeing and lived experiences assessment instrument, 30-item (WBAL-30). Copyright WellBalance, LLC (2023); freely available for research use with permission.

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Section 2

Phenomena That Impact Wellbeing

Chapter 2

Emotional Poverty: How Inequalities Shape Engagement and Connection

Loredana Manasia and Andrei Parvan

Abstract

Inequality is an emotionally laden phenomenon. This chapter examines the concept of emotional poverty, shedding light on the intersection of emotions and inequalities. It investigates how socioeconomic inequalities deprive individuals of essential emotional resources, shaping emotional patterns that influence their engagement with the world. Using the framework of emotional enculturation, it explores how individuals internalize inequality, highlighting the shift from affiliative (socially engaging) emotions to distancing (socially disengaging) ones. This social engagement dimension is particularly important for patterns of exposure to educational inequalities, as such patterns can have far-reaching impacts on how “the emotions are done.” The chapter delves into the consequences of emotional poverty, such as heightened anxiety, frustration, and diminished motivation, particularly among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These negative emotions disrupt learning patterns, reduce emotional resilience, and impair personal development. This exploration redefines inequality as an emotionally impoverishing force, moving beyond objective metrics to emphasize subjective emotional dimensions. By framing inequality as a source of emotional deprivation, the chapter contributes to broader conversations on social justice, advocating for strategies to combat emotional poverty and foster resilience and well-being among those most affected by systemic inequities.

Keywords: emotional poverty, enculturation of inequality, acculturation of inequality, learning poverty, affiliative emotions, disengaging emotions

1. Introduction

Imagine stepping into a classroom or lecture hall. What do you see? Perhaps your mind pictures the physical setting—the desks, the chalkboard, and the bright fluorescent lights. Others might envision the dynamic of typical classroom activities: a teacher lecturing passionately, students engrossed in solving complex math problems, or maybe even the subdued energy of focused, quiet study. Then there are those who see beyond the surface—to the underlying emotions: bursts of joy, the quiet perseverance of grit, or the palpable frustration of struggle.

As educators, our initial motivation to enter this field was not just to teach but to truly see and connect with people in these educational settings. We wanted them to thrive in their learning journey, to find joy and meaning in the pursuit of knowledge. This deep-seated interest in the emotional landscape of education perhaps sprang from our own educational backgrounds. Both of us attended a pedagogical high school, which not only introduced us to the world of teaching but also to the profound emotional experiences within pre-primary and primary education settings.

Kindergartens, where we first dipped our toes into professional teaching, are indeed hotbeds of intense emotional interactions. Here, emotions swirl constantly—the joyous laughter of children playing, the anxious concerns of parents, and the supportive, sometimes stern guidance of teachers. Yet, many of these emotions were not just responses to the immediate happenings but were deeply influenced by broader, often unseen, living experiences.

Our journey from kindergarten classrooms to field researchers broadened our perspective, deepening our pool of emotional experiences and our understanding of their sources. We encountered stark realities that textbooks did not prepare us for: the quiet desperation of a teenage mother cradling her baby, resigned to the fact that motherhood had abruptly ended her educational aspirations; the fleeting spark of hope in a 5th grader's eyes as he confided his simple dream of 1 day owning a music player; the hurt in a teacher's voice when confronted with a parent's blunt declaration that education was merely a waste of time for their child; or the masked desolation of a schoolmaster upon learning that two students had dropped out to work abroad, a decision all too common in regions stricken by poverty.

1.1 Are emotions purely ours?

Our academic training and some scholarly perspectives once suggested so. As pre-service teachers, we were taught that our role was to manage pupils' emotions in the classroom, controlling them to keep the focus on delivering content and practicing skills. As young teaching assistants, more experienced colleagues often reminded us that there was not time to “do emotions” but to train minds.

In line with renowned scholarly voices, we have come to realize that many of the answers about emotions and how they shape learning are not to be found in our insides [1], but in more social roots [2, 3] or in the “field” [4, 5], because it is in our human nature to seek helpful connections with others [6]. What makes emotions social is their very social and cultural nature [7]. Equally important, we argue, is that schools are places in their social spaces [8], and consequently, they are indicative of the relationships with the society [9], and they “do emotions” [10].

To further unpack these emotional landscapes, we draw on the concept of *funds of identity* [11, 12], which highlights the cultural, historical, and social resources individuals use to define themselves and navigate their worlds. Emotional experiences in educational settings are deeply embedded within these funds of identity—shaped by family histories, socioeconomic conditions, cultural narratives, and personal aspirations [13].

Our approach is informed by Jewitt's [14, 15] perspective, which emphasizes that human learning and behavior are inherently *multimodal*—encompassing visual, actional, and linguistic dimensions. Multimodal learning theory suggests that meaning-making and cognitive development occur through the integration of various semiotic resources, including gestures, visual representations, and social interactions [16–18]. Just as students bring diverse linguistic and cognitive resources to the classroom, they also bring varied emotional repertoires influenced by their lived

experiences [19–21]. A child who has experienced economic precarity may engage with learning through a lens of resilience or anxiety [22]. Another, whose identity is rooted in a strong communal tradition, may express emotions in ways that contrast with dominant school norms [23, 24]. These emotional expressions are structured by social and cultural factors that either facilitate or hinder a sense of belonging in educational spaces [13, 25, 26].

Beyond the visible emotional expressions that shape students' educational experiences [27], there exist deeper, often unrecognized influences that silently structure their engagement with learning—the *invisible and sometimes dark funds of identity* [11, 13]. They refer to the implicit sociocultural forces—such as hegemonic norms, gender expectations, and systemic barriers—that shape how students experience and express emotions in academic spaces [28–31]. These hidden structures often dictate which emotions are considered acceptable or valid within educational settings, reinforcing patterns of inclusion or exclusion [23, 32]. For instance, students from marginalized backgrounds may internalize limiting narratives about their intellectual potential [24, 33], while others may struggle with unspoken cultural expectations that suppress certain emotional expressions [34]. By acknowledging these *invisible funds of identity*, we move beyond seeing emotional poverty as an individual or psychological condition and instead recognize it as a phenomenon deeply embedded in structural inequalities [7, 9, 35]. This perspective urges educators to adopt a more critical and empathetic approach, ensuring that all students—not just those whose emotional expressions align with dominant norms—find space for recognition and belonging in learning environments [23, 25, 36–38].

This chapter critically examines the concept of “emotional poverty”—a term denoting the deprivation of vital emotional resources, which often stems from perceived socioeconomic disparities [39]. We analyze how such inequalities strip individuals of crucial emotional support, thereby fostering patterns of disengagement that significantly impact both personal and community well-being, echoing on learning outcomes as well. This discourse aims to reconceptualize these disparities as economic or social deficiencies and as profound emotional deprivations that necessitate urgent and empathetic interventions.

Subsequently, we provide a conceptualization of emotional poverty and affective inequality. The chapter concludes with reflections on solutions and initiatives aiming at addressing the interplay between emotions and socioeconomic inequalities, arguing that recurrent exposure to such inequalities ingrains emotional responses that contribute to narratives of “social invisibility.” Through this analysis, we aim to shed light on the deeper emotional narratives underlying educational experiences and outcomes, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of inequality and its impacts.

2. Becoming socially invisible: The psychological enculturation and acculturation of inequalities

Ana: I loved school... but we are poor... what more did I need school for... Researcher (R): What do you remember about school?

Ana: It was nice... I liked it... We talked to the teachers and they talked to us. Not all of them, but some of them really listened.

R: Have you thought about going on and going to high school?

Ana: Not really. It wasn't for us. We were poor and my parents didn't have much to send me to school... "

Ana's narrative poignantly illustrates how perceived socioeconomic barriers and the "social pain"—that is, collective emotional experiences, including feelings of exclusion, humiliation, and loneliness, resulting from systemic inequalities [40]—shape individual aspirations and educational engagement. Her experiences reflect a broader pattern where prolonged exposure to poverty leads to significant psychological shifts—a process known as *psychological enculturation*. Herskovits [41] defines this as the individual changes that occur through (re)socialization into the cultural norms of a community, which includes shifts in identity, values, behaviors, attitudes, and worldviews.

Concurrently, *psychological acculturation* involves the modifications in knowledge, behaviors, values, and cultural identity that arise from interactions between different groups [23, 42–45]. Emotional enculturation and acculturation are crucial psychological processes through which individuals adapt their emotional responses based on the norms and expectations of their cultural environment. These processes not only aid in integrating into new or dominant cultures but also critically shape how individuals perceive and respond to socioeconomic inequalities. According to Zhang and Moradi [46], these processes are multidimensional and can progress independently of each other [43].

In a study by Sauerborn [47], the concept of emotional enculturation is central, as participants are taught that their emotions must align with culturally defined feeling rules to belong. This is often framed as part of personal development, where managing emotions reflects an entire lifestyle. The study highlights how marginalized individuals are burdened with the task of regulating their emotions to gain inclusion and avoid social exclusion. This reflects a hierarchy of emotional norms, where individuals from different social, economic, and racial backgrounds experience disparate evaluations of their emotional expressions. The institutional correction of emotions, labeled as "nudging," underscores how societal power structures dictate which emotions are deemed acceptable, reinforcing systemic inequalities and emotional disparities. This process, while appearing inclusive, functions as a tool of control to sustain existing hierarchies.

A key aspect of understanding emotional enculturation and acculturation concerning inequalities involves examining shifts in *emotional patterns* [1, 32, 43, 48] or *emotional regimes* [36]—specifically, the frequencies and intensities of particular emotions experienced by individuals. These emotional patterns align with a culture's predominant goals and concerns, causing emotions that resonate with cultural values to be felt more frequently and intensely. Emotions that fit well within these cultural frameworks are often socially valued. For instance, low-achieving students, often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may become "invisible" by internalizing feelings of resignation or disenfranchisement when they are systematically pushed out of educational opportunities [24, 36, 49]. This internalization of low performance is often socially validated by practices like the "Braila phenomenon" in Romania, where schools manipulated enrollments to boost performance metrics, reinforcing educational and emotional inequalities.

The intertwining of perceived inequality with subjective well-being further highlights the complex emotional landscape shaped by socioeconomic factors. High perceived economic inequality erodes social capital and undermines subjective well-being [50]. Additionally, perceived unfairness moderates the relationship between perceived inequality and subjective social status, amplifying the negative effects for those who perceive high levels of unfairness compared to those with lower perceptions of unfairness. This relationship is particularly strong among individuals with lower income, less education, and residents of Eastern European countries [51].

However, investigating perceptions of inequality can be challenging because such perceptions are inherently unobservable [52]. Instead, what can be observed are various manifest variables or indicators that provide indirect measures of people's views on inequality. Therefore, in order to study perceptions of inequality, researchers often have to rely on these indirect measures that capture observable aspects of the phenomenon rather than the phenomenon itself. By assembling and examining various observable indicators, researchers can reconstruct a respondent's overall view of inequality, which is commonly referred to as their *perception of inequality*.

Consequently, the perception of inequality refers to how individuals perceive and understand the distribution of resources, opportunities, and outcomes in society. It is a subjective assessment of one's own position relative to others in terms of social status, income, education, and other indicators of well-being. Research from sociology, psychology, economics, and other fields has also shown that perceived inequality can have a negative impact on mental and physical health, social cohesion, and economic growth. In the context of education, perceived inequality can affect young people's attitudes toward education, their academic performance, and their future prospects.

Following the path opened by Bavetta et al. [52, 53] and Faggian et al. [54], we explore three different interpretations of perceived inequality: *perceived inequality of outcome*, *perceived inequality of opportunity*, and *perceived unfairness*. The first interpretation focuses on individuals' views of the distribution of monetary or non-monetary outcomes, such as income, wealth, well-being, or happiness. The second interpretation is concerned with how individuals perceive the distribution of opportunities in their society, including access to health, education, inherited wealth, social connections, and other factors that contribute to success. The third interpretation of perceived inequality assesses whether a certain degree of inequality in a given distribution is considered fair or justifiable by the individual. While outcomes and opportunities can be directly observed and described, the assessment of fairness may depend on individual beliefs about personal responsibility. In addition, a second subjective dimension of inequality is incorporated, namely the "desired" level [54]. This dimension of inequality measures people's aspirations and hopes for the future. Although both perceived and desired inequality are subjective measures [55], they differ in nature. Perceived inequality requires people to be neutral and simply report their perception of reality, whereas desired inequality is a value judgment. Even though two individuals might perceive the same level of inequality, they could aspire to two completely different levels of ideal inequality. In fact, surprisingly, despite the growing interest in actual regional inequality [54, 56], little is known about subjective dimensions of inequality, especially at the regional level. This gap clearly needs to be filled, as the relation between actual, perceived, and desired inequality matters tremendously in our current societies.

3. A story of two patterns: Affiliative and disengaging emotions

We go into the classroom as educators, having built our lessons just so, believing that we are touching every student and making a difference. Yet, teaching in the real world provides situations that pull us back exactly when we need it: to the complexity of people's feelings and the different backgrounds of our students. This was evident during a music lesson that was meant to honor mothers and which, in doing so, brought deep emotional undercurrents to the surface, both revealing and healing.

In my last year of high school, during my teaching week, I was giving a music lesson on the 8th of March. We were learning a song dedicated to mothers. We sang the song in pairs, played some games, and the atmosphere and engagement of the lesson were excellent. I was so proud of myself! However, there was this kid, Samir, who wouldn't say a word or engage in any activity. At the end of the lesson, I mistakenly asked him in front of the whole class why he refused to sing or participate in any activity. He simply 'replied, "Because I don't have a mother!"

My teaching self felt hurt and perhaps even angry at some point because of Samir's lack of involvement and response. But his story was bigger than mine, so much more powerful! I was confident that I knew a lot about learning design, teaching methods, assessment, and classroom management, but I had no clue about Samir's story. That made the class I taught a failure. The other pupils in the classroom were learning something, they were listened to, and they were doing their thing. But not Samir! What happens with the stories that are not being told? Which stories are considered important? Which stories are deemed valuable? Which stories are presented as the dominant ones? In my example, I was trying to reinforce the dominant story that everyone has a mother to sing for. And I was so wrong! [57]

In education, inequality exerts a particularly insidious influence on students' emotional experiences and educational outcomes. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often burdened with negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration [24, 58]. These students frequently express emotions such as anger, sadness, and hope, which are deeply intertwined with their perceptions of inequality and injustice [36]. Such emotional states can significantly deter their participation in classroom activities, contributing to a relational disconnection that may further isolate them from educational opportunities [59].

The roots of these emotional responses are varied, encompassing discrimination, stereotype threats, and restricted access to resources, which collectively contribute to a sense of exclusion [60]. From an early age, children demonstrate acute awareness of social class distinctions, often expressed through material possessions like snacks and clothes. Those with less expensive or "inferior" belongings can be subject to ridicule by their peers, which fosters feelings of embarrassment and inferiority [61]. Such experiences can deeply affect a student's academic performance and their overall engagement in the educational process.

To conceptualize and address these emotions within the academic context, we adopt the *social engagement dimension of emotions*, which differentiates between socially engaging (affiliative) and socially disengaging (distancing) emotions [10, 62], highlighting their contrasting roles in social relationships.

Socially engaging emotions—such as shame, guilt, and gratitude—play a critical role in fostering connection, cooperation, and relational harmony [63]. These emotions emphasize an individual's responsibility toward others and encourage prosocial behavior, often serving to repair or strengthen social bonds. For example, guilt has been shown to motivate individuals to make amends or correct behavior that may have harmed others, ultimately enhancing cooperative relationships [64]. Similarly, gratitude reinforces mutual support and acknowledges the contributions of others, embedding individuals more deeply within their social networks [63]. Shame, while sometimes seen as a negative emotion, can also act as a regulatory mechanism to align personal behavior with social norms and expectations [65].

In contrast, *socially disengaging emotions*—such as pride, anger, and contempt—prioritize individual autonomy, personal achievement, and self-focused goals over

group cohesion [7]. Anger, for example, often arises when personal boundaries are violated or goals are obstructed, and it is associated with asserting one's status or resolving perceived injustices [66]. Pride, another disengaging emotion, underscores personal accomplishment and can create distance from others by focusing on individual superiority or success [35]. Together, these categories underscore the interplay between emotions and social structures, showing how emotions both shape and are shaped by cultural and relational environments [67].

In a complementary study, Barford [36] examines how secondary school teachers and trainees in Kenya, Mexico, and the UK respond emotionally to inequality, identifying regimes of "connecting" and "distancing" emotions shaped by their socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, Froyum [68] explores the enculturation of emotional capital in an after-school program for low-income Black girls, who were encouraged to reject the "dysfunctional" aspects of their cultural and familial backgrounds. This encouragement led to feelings of alienation and disengagement from their communities, fostering a requirement for emotional detachment from their lived realities.

Understanding these emotional dimensions from a developmental perspective highlights that learning is a relational and lived experience, influenced not just by academic curriculum but also by the emotional and social contexts students navigate [69, 70]. This perspective underscores the importance of affiliative emotions, which foster social bonds and support conducive learning environments, and how distancing emotions can impede these relational connections and diminish educational outcomes.

In settings of socioeconomic disparity, such distancing emotions as anger, resentment, and shame are prevalent, while affiliative emotions like empathy and connectedness are suppressed [62]. Humor, however, has been identified as a coping mechanism that students and educators in disadvantaged settings sometimes use to address and mock the absurdity of their situations, as seen in a study by Barford [36], where Kenyan teachers humorously noted their country's invisibility on a world map of high-income earners, reflecting their sense of powerlessness and frustration.

This bifurcation of emotional experiences perpetuates systemic disconnection and disengagement, particularly affecting those most impacted by inequality. In educational settings, these emotional patterns are especially salient. Students from marginalized backgrounds may experience negative emotions not just as reactions to systemic barriers but as adaptive responses to their challenging environments. For instance, frustration and resentment might arise from unmet needs or perceptions of unfair treatment, while distancing emotions may serve as protective mechanisms against the stigma of failure or exclusion [24, 58]. Inequality also fosters a competitive environment among students, which can lead to higher levels of anxiety and frustration, particularly among those disadvantaged, promoting antisocial behaviors like cheating and bullying, yet paradoxically encouraging prosocial behaviors when cooperation becomes a strategic advantage [59].

As we have argued before, schools are, in fact, spaces of intense emotional activity. But are they also oases for healing the divides, social and emotional, wrought by inequality? In an investigation among students of secondary schools located in the socioeconomically vulnerable areas of the Provinces of Buenos Aires [40], it was revealed that younger students reported greater availability for the circulation of emotions and supportive spaces than older students, thus reinforcing the relevance of working on all these emotional needs progressively throughout students' lives at school. This indicates how schools can respond by being restorative spaces for dialog and collective feelings interpretation, an essential intervention as children

move further in their educational journey. However, the perceived adequacy of these interventions tends to decrease over time, creating a void in the ongoing development of emotional involvement.

This developmental perspective underscores the necessity of addressing emotional poverty as a systemic challenge. Research suggests that fostering positive, socially engaging emotions can mitigate the effects of socioeconomic inequalities and enhance students' capacities to thrive despite systemic barriers. Educational practices and spaces that emphasize relational support, equity, and emotional resilience offer a pathway for counteracting the emotional toll of inequality. Therefore, understanding the emotional dimensions of inequality in a developmental and relational context is crucial. Schools have the potential to act as sites of symbolic reparation, but this is only achievable if they actively promote emotional connection and address systemic inequalities.

4. Emotional poverty

"One thing you'll never be able to measure is a kid without a dream. —Rep. Charles Rangel (New York), 2005" [9]

Emotional poverty, often overlooked yet deeply pervasive, erodes the foundation of dreams, potential, and achievement in education. Dreams, however intangible, are nurtured by emotional safety, connection, and support. Yet, for many students, the absence of these critical emotional resources leaves their dreams unrealized and their potential stifled.

In schools across the globe, emotional poverty operates as a silent barrier to both learning and teaching. It robs students of the emotional stability needed to focus, persevere, and engage. It drains teachers of the empathy and energy required to inspire and guide. Emotional poverty is not simply a personal struggle—it is a systemic issue that reflects larger social inequities, including poverty, trauma, and structural disinvestment in education. Its presence undermines the transformative power of schools, creating environments where emotional deficits, rather than aspirations, dictate outcomes.

Coined by Payne [39], the concept of emotional poverty describes a lack of emotional resources, such as the capacity to self-regulate, form trusting relationships, and process emotional experiences. These deficits do not emerge in a vacuum but are deeply rooted in systemic inequities, adverse childhood experiences, and environmental stressors. Other scholars frame similar phenomena through constructs such as *emotional deprivation* [71], *affective inequality* [72], and psychosocial neglect [73], each highlighting the multidimensional nature of emotional scarcity and its profound consequences. Similarly, affective inequality is defined as unequal access to care, love, and solidarity, compounded by economic hardship [74, 75].

Affective inequality is a critical yet often underexplored aspect of social inequity, rooted in the emotional and psychological toll imposed by systemic subordination. Unlike material or symbolic inequalities, affective inequality encompasses how individuals internalize their marginalized positions, resulting in embodied emotional states such as shame, fear, and unworthiness. Sara Ahmed's concept of the affective economy provides a lens to understand this phenomenon, emphasizing how emotions are socially mediated and circulate within institutional and cultural contexts. These emotions "stick" to certain bodies and groups, creating climates of exclusion and

alienation. Ahmed [76] argues that these emotions not only shape how individuals perceive themselves but also influence their interactions with the social structures around them, perpetuating cycles of emotional poverty.

In institutional settings like educational institutions, these emotional inequalities are exacerbated by the dominance of meritocratic and competitive cultures. Judith Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix [77], when generalized, highlights how dominant norms—whether related to gender, performance, or competence—police individuals' emotional experiences. In these spaces, individuals are often burdened by impostor feelings, which stem from pervasive discourses of failure and success that equate self-worth with measurable achievement. This affective burden manifests as self-doubt, fear of failure, and feelings of inadequacy, particularly for those positioned outside the dominant cultural ideals of competence or success [26]. These emotions are not individual pathologies but collective outcomes of environments that prioritize competition and hierarchy over inclusion and support.

Scholars such as Bottero [78] and Skeggs [21] have further developed this understanding by exploring how systemic subordination generates embodied emotional states. Shame, anxiety, and self-doubt are not merely personal struggles but reflect deeper structural inequalities that constrain individuals' agency and sense of belonging. Mirza's [79, 80] concept of embodied intersectionality highlights how various forms of marginalization, including those based on race, class, or institutional hierarchies, converge to intensify these affective experiences. These compounded inequalities result in emotional poverty—a state where individuals feel emotionally depleted, disconnected, and unable to fully participate in the social spaces they inhabit.

Affective inequality, therefore, is not only about what individuals feel but also about how institutions and social structures shape these feelings. Ahmed [76] underscores how dominant norms dictate which emotions are acceptable and which are dismissed, creating a disconnect between individuals and their environments. For many, the emotional labor required to navigate these inequities—such as “faking” confidence or suppressing vulnerability—becomes a survival strategy in hostile or competitive settings. While this labor can create temporary spaces of belonging, it often reinforces the very structures that demand such adaptation. By situating affective inequality as a central dimension of emotional poverty, these insights emphasize the importance of addressing systemic emotional imbalances to create more equitable and inclusive environments.

Within schools, emotional poverty manifests in ways that hinder learning, teaching, and the overall school climate. Students facing emotional poverty often arrive at school carrying the weight of unprocessed trauma, chronic stress, or relational instability [39]. This emotional baggage disrupts their ability to focus, engage, and thrive in academic settings.

Similarly, teachers experiencing emotional fatigue—often due to systemic pressures, underfunding, or vicarious trauma—may struggle to build meaningful connections with students, exacerbating the emotional deficits present in the classroom. Emotional poverty is not just an individual issue; it is a collective condition with deep systemic roots, requiring targeted interventions to break its cycle. Research suggests that teacher burnout, linked to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, negatively affects classroom dynamics, creating a ripple effect that diminishes both teacher well-being and student engagement [81]. Furthermore, systemic inequities, such as resource disparities and structural discrimination, amplify emotional poverty in underserved schools, underscoring the need for holistic approaches to teacher and student mental health [82]. Addressing emotional poverty demands systemic

changes, including institutional support, trauma-informed practices, and sustainable funding for mental health resources in education [83].

The connection between emotional well-being and academic performance is both undeniable and profound. Immordino-Yang and Damasio [19] assert that emotions are integral to learning, shaping how students process information, solve problems, and retain knowledge. When emotional needs are unmet, students often exhibit behaviors that reflect their internal distress: difficulty concentrating, impulsivity, and withdrawal. These behaviors are not simply disciplinary concerns but signals of an underlying struggle to manage the emotional demands of learning.

Neuroscientific research underscores how trauma and stress—key contributors to emotional poverty—disrupt brain development, particularly in areas related to executive functioning, memory, and self-regulation [84]. The consequences are stark: children exposed to high levels of stress and emotional deprivation are less likely to succeed academically, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality [85].

Equally significant is the role of emotional poverty in shaping school climates. Teachers facing emotional exhaustion are more prone to burnout, disengagement, and reduced efficacy in the classroom [81]. The emotional disconnect between teachers and students creates a feedback loop: emotionally impoverished students struggle to engage, which drains teachers' resources further, deepening the emotional deficits within the system. These dynamics are particularly acute in underfunded schools, where structural inequities compound the challenges of addressing emotional needs.

5. Case study: The NOESIS project

We will now describe an example of how emotions and inequalities shape learning experiences, as explored in the Cognitive and Emotional Narratives of Educational Inequalities among Romanian Youth Project (NOESIS). This study was developed to examine the emotional and cognitive dimensions of educational inequalities among Romanian youth, emphasizing how students' sense of belonging, frustration, resilience, and aspirations are intertwined with their learning environments. Rooted in the funds of identity framework [12] and extending approaches to emotional enculturation [1, 23, 43], the project sought to understand how structural barriers—such as socioeconomic status, access to resources, and social expectations—shape students' emotional engagement with education and their learning patterns [86, 87].

Given that *“emotions are central to how people are positioned in relation to a topic or situation”* [36], we adopt the previously discussed perspective of *affiliative* and *disengaging* emotions [10, 62] to further explore how emotional experiences mediate students' engagement with learning. Through this lens, we examine how socioeconomic inequalities elicit emotions that either foster a sense of connection and agency or contribute to detachment and exclusion, ultimately shaping students' learning patterns.

5.1 Velfies as a multimodal method for capturing emotional inequalities

A core methodological innovation of the NOESIS project was the use of velfies (video selfies [88, 89]) to capture students' emotional experiences of educational inequality. Unlike traditional qualitative methods such as interviews or written reflections, velfies allowed students to record their emotions in real time, integrating facial expressions, voice tone, gestures, and movement. This multimodal approach

provided a more nuanced and immediate representation of their affective states, making visible the emotional weight of structural barriers that often remain abstract in academic discussions.

For students from disadvantaged backgrounds, these videos revealed recurring emotional narratives of frustration, exhaustion, and detachment. These emotions, categorized as disengaging [10, 62], shape negative learning patterns by fostering alienation rather than active participation [90]. The NOESIS project found that many students who faced socioeconomic hardship struggled with a sense of invisibility in the classroom, where their emotions were often overlooked or dismissed.

In one velfie, *Mariana*, a 16-year-old student, recorded herself sitting at her kitchen table late at night, whispering so as not to wake her younger siblings. She flipped through pages of her history textbook and sighed, saying: *“I try to focus, but my mind is somewhere else. I think about how tomorrow I have to help at home, and I do not even know if I’ll have time to finish my homework. Sometimes I wonder, what’s the point?”* Her tired eyes and slow, deliberate speech reflected the emotional burden of balancing school with family responsibilities. For Mariana, disengaging emotions such as resignation and self-doubt shaped her learning behaviors, leading to minimal participation in class discussions and surface-level engagement with academic content.

Similarly, *Alexandru*, a 17-year-old student, filmed a velfie while walking home from school. The camera was unsteady, mirroring his hurried steps, as he spoke about how he felt after receiving a low grade in math. *“I studied for hours, but when I sat down for the test, my mind just went blank. I felt stupid. The teacher just gave me a look, like she expected me to fail. So why should I even try next time?”* His frustration and disappointment were palpable, reinforcing the link between repeated academic failure and emotional disengagement. The shame associated with low performance discouraged him from seeking help, contributing to a cycle of avoidance and further academic struggle.

Another student, *Iulia*, filmed herself outside the schoolyard, where she often stayed between classes to avoid interactions with classmates. She described feeling like an outsider, saying: *“I see my classmates talking about private tutoring, extra lessons, and their parents helping them. I do not have that. I just try to get through the day without anyone noticing that I’m lost.”* Her velfie illustrated how financial barriers extend beyond material deprivation to shape emotional experiences of exclusion and inferiority [24, 36, 58, 91]. The avoidance behaviors she developed—staying silent in class, not asking for help—were protective mechanisms against the affective inequality of constantly feeling behind.

Many students experiencing disengaging emotions exhibited undirected learning patterns characterized by uncertainty and passivity [87, 92]. Rather than approaching learning with curiosity and agency, they saw education as something imposed upon them—a space where they felt out of place, unheard, and undervalued [24, 36, 37, 93, 94].

5.2 Velfies as performative identity artifacts

The NOESIS project positioned velfies not just as self-expressive tools but as identity artifacts—multimodal representations of how students construct and negotiate their educational identities within contexts of systemic inequality [11]. Through their velfies, participants actively constructed their narratives, rather than being passive subjects of research, demonstrating the agentic role of emotions in identity formation [95].

Through velfies, students externalized their affective connections to education, illustrating both engagement and detachment, hope and frustration, and belonging

and exclusion. This method provided a more complex and dynamic understanding of educational inequalities, moving beyond statistical indicators to the lived emotional realities of students.

In implementing the NOESIS project, we found that velfies are not just reflective tools but powerful mediators of identity and educational experience. They capture how students emotionally respond to learning environments, providing valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to create more affectively inclusive educational spaces. Integrating velfies as participatory identity artifacts allowed NOESIS to expand existing methodologies for studying educational inequalities and emotional learning patterns. These findings reinforce the need for multimodal and participatory approaches [13, 96] that honor students' emotions as integral to their learning experiences.

Ultimately, the use of velfies in the NOESIS project underscores the critical role of emotions in shaping not just individual academic trajectories but also broader educational policies aimed at fostering equity and inclusion. Moving forward, we advocate for the integration of velfie-based methodologies into educational research and pedagogy, ensuring that students' emotional and identity-related funds of knowledge are recognized, validated, and actively incorporated into educational practices.

6. Conclusion

This chapter highlights the profound impact of emotional poverty, positioning it as a systemic challenge rooted in broader social inequalities. Emotional poverty erodes vital connections between individuals, communities, and institutions, creating barriers to personal and collective well-being. By examining the dynamics of affiliative and disengaging emotions, the chapter underscores the critical role emotions play in shaping educational and social experiences. Affiliative emotions like gratitude, shame, and guilt foster prosocial behaviors and deepen relational bonds. In contrast, disengaging emotions such as anger and pride often prioritize individual autonomy at the expense of community cohesion. The exploration of emotional enculturation and acculturation processes reveals how individuals internalize systemic inequalities, leading to emotional responses that perpetuate cycles of disengagement and alienation. Emotional poverty is not merely a byproduct of material deprivation but a condition deeply tied to cultural, social, and institutional contexts. Addressing it requires transformative interventions, such as trauma-informed educational practices, targeted mental health support, and systemic policy changes to create more equitable and emotionally inclusive environments. Ultimately, this chapter calls for a reframing of inequality as an emotionally impoverishing force and emphasizes the need to prioritize emotional well-being in education and beyond. By fostering environments that value emotional connection and resilience, we can break the cycles of emotional poverty and unlock the potential for more inclusive, equitable, and thriving communities.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

This text was reviewed and checked using AI assistance to enhance clarity, flow, and overall quality of writing.

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Chapter 3

Fandom and Wellbeing – Exploring the Psychological Link

Fathimath Sahala Poyil

Abstract

In the twenty-first century, fanship and fandom have emerged as powerful social phenomena, encompassing diverse areas such as music, sports, and other cultural forms. These shared interests enable individuals from varied backgrounds and cultures to connect and foster meaningful relationships. This chapter delves into the intricate relationship between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, particularly among young adults. Using a quantitative approach, the study analyzed data from 167 participants to explore how fanship and fandom influence factors like social connectedness and resilience. Key findings highlight significant correlations between fanship, fandom, and well-being, with men showing higher levels of social connectedness. Additionally, the research underscores the role of fanship and fandom in fostering collective resilience, providing valuable insights into their broader psychological and social impacts.

Keywords: fanship, fandom, psychological well-being, youth, resilience

1. Introduction

In recent years, the evolving phenomenon of fanship and fandom has garnered significant academic interest, transitioning from being perceived as an obsessive behavior to a central aspect of cultural and social interaction [1]. The emotional attachments and social identities formed within fan communities span a diverse range of interests, including sports, music, and entertainment franchises, demonstrating the profound influence of fandom on individual and group dynamics [2]. Understanding the psychological underpinnings of fanship and fandom is essential, as these concepts offer valuable insights into identity formation and their broader implications for psychological well-being. This study, grounded in the context of social identity theory, examines the nuanced relationship between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, focusing on factors such as social connectedness, self-esteem, and collective resilience. By delving into these facets, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychosocial benefits and impacts of fan engagement, particularly among young adults.

Understanding psychological well-being in the context of fanship and fandom is crucial, especially as these phenomena gain popularity. Despite this increasing prevalence, the area remains relatively unexplored, particularly within the Indian context.

While sports fans are often considered the prototypical ‘fan,’ with research heavily focused on them, other fan communities revolving around music, anime, and cosplay remain underrepresented in scholarly studies. Cosplayers, for instance, engage in fandom activities primarily to seek enjoyment, fun, and creative expression through embodying their favorite characters [3]. Examining such diverse fan communities provides an opportunity to delve into how participation in fandom activities influences psychological well-being, creativity, and social connectedness.

This study aims to address these gaps, shedding light on the psychological experiences and implications of being part of these underrepresented fan communities in India.

2. The psychological impact of fanship and fandom on well-being

Fanship and fandom have gained significant attention due to their impact on identity formation, social connection, and psychological well-being. This literature review examines the intricate relationships between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, exploring how individuals engage with fan communities and the underlying psychological mechanisms. By delving into existing studies, this review highlights the multifaceted nature of fan culture and its implications for human behavior and well-being.

2.1 Fanship and fandom

2.1.1 Evolution of fan culture

Social media has revolutionized fan cultures by enabling global communities and diverse participatory activities like cosplay and fan fiction [4]. These activities provide entertainment, stress relief, and a sense of belonging, yielding positive individual benefits [5]. Despite these changes, traditional fan identities and practices remain consistent [6].

2.1.2 Cultural and participatory aspects

Fan practices vary across cultures, with Western fan cultures receiving more attention than Asian counterparts [7]. Concepts like cultural capital and subcultural capital [8] explain how fan memorabilia and collectibles act as symbols of identity and status [9]. Participation in fan productions fosters creativity, escapism, and psychological well-being. Additionally, shared communication styles, or ‘fan talk,’ enhance the sense of community among fans [4].

2.1.3 Motivations and gender dynamics

Fan engagement stems from motivations like belongingness, empowerment, and value alignment [10]. Women’s sports fandom, for example, highlights values like gender equity and diversity while fostering fan identity through symbolic connections [11]. For stigmatized fan groups, belongingness is a key factor in navigating challenges and fostering group identification [12].

2.2 Fanship and psychological well-being

2.2.1 Social connections and identity

Fanship significantly influences social well-being, often mediated by team identification and friendships. Strong fanship is associated with higher trust, collective self-esteem, and reduced loneliness. Apparel linked to fanship also enhances social connection [13].

2.2.2 Positive impacts on students

Fanship impacts motivations for social media usage, influencing college satisfaction and social well-being. These effects vary based on cultural contexts and social media usage [14]. Social connections through fanship contribute to personal identity and a sense of belonging, although online interactions show mixed effects on well-being.

2.2.3 Parasocial relationships and K-Pop fandom

Parasocial relationships provide emotional support, particularly for fans with limited offline social connections. K-Pop fandom studies show varying effects, with some highlighting increased happiness and belonging, while others reveal weak associations with self-esteem and connectedness [15]. Unrealistic beauty standards and idolization may contribute to these disparities.

2.3 Fandom and psychological well-being

2.3.1 Role of social connections

Participation in fandom activities, especially live events, correlates with higher social well-being and reduced loneliness. Media fandoms like anime and furry communities also exhibit increased self-esteem and life satisfaction due to strong social ties [16]. However, excessive or pathological fan behavior, such as ‘Sasaengpaen’ phenomena, can negatively impact psychological well-being [15].

3. Research methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the study, which explores the relationship between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, as well as the impact of these factors on well-being.

3.1 Aim

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, and how these factors influence individuals’ well-being.

3.2 Objectives

- To examine the benefits of group involvement in fanship and fandom.

- To explore how fanship fosters social connectedness among young adults.
- To assess the effect of fandom on self-esteem.
- To analyze gender differences in fanship, fandom, and well-being.
- To determine whether fandom participation contributes to collective resilience.
- To evaluate the impact of fanship and fandom on psychological well-being.

3.3 Research design

Data was collected from 167 young adults (ages 18–25) across India who has been enrolled as undergraduate, postgraduate, or doctoral students through an online survey, using purposive sampling. Of the participants, 110 were women, and 57 were men. Consent was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality.

3.4 Measures

1. *Demographic details*: Participants provided information on age, gender, domicile, fandom membership, and their sources of information.
2. *Fanship scale [2]*: Measures emotional connection to a favorite figure or interest, with higher scores indicating greater fanship.
3. *Fandom functions scale [17]*: Assesses motivations such as purpose, escape, and belonging within a fandom.
4. *Social connectedness scale-revised (SCS-R: Lee et al. [18])*: Measures social connectedness with higher scores indicating stronger connection.
5. *Rosenberg self-esteem scale [19]*: Assesses global self-worth, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.
6. *Collective resilience scale [20]*: Assesses a group's capacity for resilience, with higher scores reflecting greater collective resilience.

3.5 Data analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS software, applying Pearson product-moment correlation and linear regression techniques to assess relationships between variables.

4. Results and interpretation

This section presents the findings from the study, divided into four parts: demographic characteristics, normality of variables, relationship analysis, and regression analysis.

4.1 Section I: Demographic details

Table 1 below presents the frequencies and percentages of sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (N = 167).

The majority of participants identified as female (65.9%), while 34.1% were male. In terms of education, most were pursuing undergraduate studies (65.9%), with smaller proportions in postgraduate (31.7%) and PhD programs (2.4%). Geographically, most participants were from Kerala (87.4%), with smaller groups from Andhra Pradesh (5.4%) and other states like Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

4.2 Section II: Fandom membership

Table 2 below shows the frequency of fandom membership among participants. Of the 167 participants, 43.7% identified as members of a fandom, while the remaining 56.3% did not participate in any fandom.

Table 3 highlights where participants get their news about their favorite artists.

A significant majority (82%) of the participants use social networking sites (SNS) to get updates about their favorite artists, while 16.8% still rely on offline sources like news magazines and papers.

Table 4 provides details about the attendance of concerts, events, or matches by the participants.

41.3% of participants have attended a concert or event, while the remaining 58.7% have not.

Table 5 presents the results of the normality tests for the variables.

4.3 Section III: Normality of variable

The normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk) show that the fanship variable is normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). However, other variables, such as purpose in

Demographic details	F	Percent	
Gender	Female	110	65.9
	Male	57	34.1
Education	UG	110	65.9
	PG	53	31.7
	PHD	4	2.4

Table 1.
Frequencies and percentages of sociodemographic characteristics.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	73	43.7
	No	94	56.3
Total		167	100.0

Table 2.
Frequency and percentage of fandom membership survey participants (N-167).

	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	SNS	137	82.0
	Offline (news magazines)	Paper, 28	16.8
	3	1	0.6
	Total	166	99.4
Missing	System	1	0.6
Total		167	100.0

Table 3.
Sources of news about favorite artists. From where you are getting news of your favorite artist?.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	69	41.3
	No	98	58.7
	Total	167	100.0

Table 4.
Concert or event attendance. Any concerts, event, or match that you have attended so far.

Statistic	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Fanship	046	167	0.200*	0.987	167	0.137
Purpose in life/						
Inspiration	0.085	167	0.005	0.966	167	0.000
Escape	0.146	167	0.000	0.888	167	0.000
Belonging	0.105	167	0.000	0.962	167	0.000
Social connectedness	0.085	167	0.005	0.989	167	0.198
Self esteem	0.086	167	0.005	0.983	167	0.040
Collective resilience	0.075	167	0.023	0.961	167	0.000

Table 5.
Results of the normality tests for the variables.

life/inspiration, escape, belonging, self-esteem, and collective resilience, were found to be non-normally distributed ($p < 0.05$ for several).

4.4 Section IV: T-test results

Table 6 presents group statistics and t-test results comparing male and female participants across various psychological variables.

T-test group statistics. Results indicate significant gender differences in *fanship* and *social connectedness*, with males reporting higher values in both areas. For other variables like *escape*, *belonging*, and *self-esteem*, no significant differences were observed.

Group statistics						
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Fanship	Female	110	55.22	12.504		
	Male	57	62.40	12.068	3.563	0.000
Pil/Inspiration	Female	110	24.09	6.410	0.115	0.909
	Male	57	23.96	7.302		
Escape	Female	110	15.98	3.793	1.192	0.236
	Male	57	15.14	4.576		
Belonging	Female	110	10.23	3.019	0.741	0.460
	Male	57	9.86	3.085		
Social connectedness	Female	110	67.91	5.865	2.257	0.025
	Male	57	70.19	6.810		
Self esteem	Female	110	26.41	5.835	0.602	0.548
	Male	57	25.89	4.901		
Collective resilience	Female	110	25.19	6.347		
	Male	57	24.47	6.931	0.671	0.503

Table 6.
Showing the T-test-group statistics (N=167).

4.5 Section V: Correlation analysis

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations (Pearson's r) for all variables. The analysis reveals several key relationships:

- *Fanship* has a strong positive correlation with *pil/inspiration* (0.629**) and moderate correlations with *escape* (0.395**) and *belonging* (0.443**).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Fanship	57.7	12.8	1						
2. Pil/ Inspiration	24.0	6.7	0.629**	1					
3. Escape	15.7	4.1	0.395**	0.733**	1				
4. Belonging	10.1	3.0	0.443**	0.703**	0.588**	1			
5. Social connectedness	68.7	6.3	0.136	0.073	0.019	0.079	1		
6. Self-esteem	26.2	5.5	-0.067	-0.053	-0.094	-0.023	-0.313**	1	
7. Collective resilience	25.0	6.5	0.251**	0.378**	0.342**	0.336**	-0.061	0.201**	1

Table 7.
Descriptive statistics and correlations (Pearson product moment correlation) for all variables in the study.

Predictor B	B	R	R2	ΔR^2	F	Df	P	P (Beta/sd)
1	0.251	0.251 ^a	0.063	0.057	11.107	(1,165)	0.001	0.019

^a*bc* Predictors: (Constant), FANSHIP.

Table 8.
Regression analysis between fanship and collective resilience.

Predictor	B	R	R2	$\Delta R^2 F$	Df	P	F ²
Pil/inspiration	0.204	0.399 ^a	0.159	144	10.283 (3163)	0.000	0.03
Escape	0.121	0.399 ^a	0.159	144	10.283 (3163)	0.000	0.029
Belonging	0.121	0.399 ^a	0.159	144	10.283 (3163)	0.000	0.039

a, b: Predictors: (Constant), Pil/inspiration, escape, belonging (fandom domains).

Table 9.
Regression analysis between fandom domains and collective resilience.

- *Self-esteem* shows a moderate negative correlation with *social connectedness* (−0.313).
- *Collective resilience* is positively correlated with most other variables, except for a very weak negative correlation with *social connectedness* (−0.061).

4.6 Section VI: Regression analysis

Table 8 presents the regression analysis between *fanship* and *collective resilience*. The results indicate that *fanship* is a significant predictor of *collective resilience* ($p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.063$), meaning that fanship explains about 6.3% of the variance in collective resilience. This suggests a positive relationship where higher levels of fanship are linked with increased collective resilience. Finally, **Table 9** provides the regression analysis between the fandom domains (pil/inspiration, escape, and belonging) and *collective resilience*.

5. Discussion

The results show that the fandom domains collectively account for 15.9% of the variance in *collective resilience* ($R^2 = 0.159$, $p < 0.01$). Each fandom domain—*pil/inspiration*, *escape*, and *belonging*—shows a positive relationship with *collective resilience*, confirming the role of fandom in fostering resilience. The study aims to explore the relationship between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being and to examine the impact of these factors on well-being. Data was collected through a quantitative approach. The hypotheses tested were:

1. There will be a relationship between fanship and fandom domains (purpose in life, inspiration, escape, and belongingness).
2. There will be a relationship between fanship and psychological well-being factors (social connectedness, self-esteem, and collective resilience).

3. There will be a relationship between fandom domains and psychological well-being factors.
4. There will be no gender difference in fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being factors.
5. Fanship and fandom will impact psychological well-being and fandom domains.

The findings reveal that fanship and fandom have a significant impact on psychological well-being. Participants were primarily female, undergraduates, and from Kerala, suggesting a skewed demographic. Most participants engage with fandoms through social media, but many have not attended events like concerts, likely due to financial and social resources.

The analysis shows that fanship and fandom domains are positively correlated with psychological well-being factors like social connectedness, self-esteem, and collective resilience. However, the negative correlation between self-esteem and social connectedness suggests that social exclusion within fan communities may affect well-being.

Additionally, the study highlights how fandom can positively impact social connectedness, self-esteem, and collective resilience, as found in other studies, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also finds gender differences in fanship and social connectedness, with men exhibiting higher levels in both.

Regression analysis supports the hypothesis that fanship and fandom domains can impact collective resilience. The study suggests that active participation in fandom communities may enhance psychological well-being, particularly through a sense of belonging and purpose.

Recommendations include encouraging individuals struggling with mental health to join fandom communities, as these could offer social support and a sense of purpose. Mental health professionals might consider incorporating fandom-related activities in treatment plans to promote well-being. Future research could explore ways to enhance the positive effects of fandom on psychological well-being.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the correlation between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, specifically focusing on variables such as social connectedness, self-esteem, and collective resilience. The findings revealed a significant association between fanship, fandom, and psychological well-being, highlighting a noteworthy negative correlation between social connectedness and self-esteem, while a positive relationship was identified between self-esteem and collective resilience. Moreover, the regression analyses conducted in the study emphasized the predictive significance of fanship and fandom domains on the psychological well-being variable of collective resilience, emphasizing the potential psychological advantages of active engagement within fan communities.

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Section 3

Special Populations and Groups

Strengthening Social-Emotional Skills in Schools: A Preventive Approach to Promote Teenagers' Mental Health

Ilona Schouwenaars and Carolien Gravesteyn

Abstract

Improving teenagers' mental health is a major challenge in today's society. Improving this requires a preventive approach with a focus on social-emotional skills. Education serves as an important environment for teenagers to develop these skills. School-based social-emotional learning programs are effective in enhancing teenagers' social-emotional skills (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). These programs, increasingly implemented in schools globally, have shown positive effects, including improved self-esteem, emotional regulation, social competence, as well as improved academic performance. Moreover, they have shown reductions in problematic behaviors such as bullying and substance use. Key factors in social-emotional learning programs that influence their effects include the integration of psychoeducation and skills training, the balance of program components, the duration of the program, and the involvement of the entire school community. However, social-emotional learning programs are not one size-fits all. Adapting these programs to meet the diverse needs of different teenage populations, including those with special educational needs, is important for their effectiveness.

Keywords: social-emotional skills, school-based, mental health, teenagers, social-emotional learning program, SEL

1. Introduction

Addressing the mental health of teenagers is an important challenge in today's society. While externalizing issues such as alcohol abuse and delinquency have shown a decline over the past 25 years [1], internalizing problems, including loneliness, psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety, and depression, have been on the rise [2]. Schools are increasingly aware of these internalizing problems among their students [3]. Furthermore, in recent years, teenagers themselves have reported a remarkable

increase in psychosocial problems, which include psychosomatic symptoms, hyperactivity, attention difficulties, emotional and behavioral issues, as well as challenges in their relationships with peers [4]. These mental health concerns are closely linked to social-emotional skills [5].

Social-emotional skills equip individuals with the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes necessary to effectively navigate daily tasks and challenges in life [6]. These skills include the capacity to recognize and regulate emotions, set and achieve meaningful goals, demonstrate care and empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions [5]. By strengthening social-emotional skills, teenagers are provided with essential tools that support their positive development, helping them to reach their full potential, improve their overall well-being, and build resilience in the face of challenges they may encounter [7]. Improving social-emotional skills plays an important role in promoting long-term success and emotional health.

Social-emotional learning is the process through which individuals develop their social-emotional skills [5]. The teenage years are a particularly critical period for social-emotional learning, as this is a time when teenagers are forming their self-identity, seeking greater independence from their parents, developing intimate and peer relationships, and making important decisions about their education and future careers [8]. Schools play an important role in facilitating teenagers' social-emotional learning [9]. Teenagers acquire these skills through everyday interactions with their peers and teachers, where they learn and practice social-emotional skills like emotion regulation, cooperation, relationship building, and conflict resolution [9]. The importance of social-emotional learning in schools is increasingly recognized by educators, school leaders, and teenagers themselves [10, 11] and supported by policy [5].

In this chapter, we discuss the importance of strengthening social-emotional skills, why it is essential to address them in schools, and how enhancing social-emotional skills in schools can help prevent mental health issues.

2. Enhancing social-emotional skills at school

Schools play an important role not only in promoting teenagers' academic development but also in supporting their social-emotional development [9]. Recognizing the importance of developing social-emotional skills in the school environment, many schools are implementing social-emotional learning programs [5]. These programs aim to strengthen teenagers' social-emotional skills, equipping them to navigate the challenges of society and helping them develop the skills needed for success in their lives.

2.1 Social-emotional skills

To identify and define social-emotional skills, we used the domains included in the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework [12]:

- *Self-awareness*: The ability to accurately recognize and understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior in various situations. This includes for example the capacity to assess one's strengths and limitations and experiencing self-efficacy. Developing self-awareness enables

individuals to better understand the link between their thoughts and feelings and the actions they take in response to different circumstances.

- *Self-management*: The ability to regulate and control one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively across different situations and to work toward achieving personal and academic goals. This competency encompasses a range of skills, for example, the ability to manage one's emotions, exercise self-discipline, and stay motivated in the face of obstacles. Effective self-management also involves the use of stress-management strategies, and planning and organizational skills, which enable individuals to set realistic goals, create actionable plans, and follow through on those plans. A strong sense of self-management helps individuals stay focused and adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining a sense of well-being and self-control.
- *Social awareness*: The ability to recognize, understand, and empathize with the perspectives, feelings, and experiences of others, including those from different backgrounds, cultures, and social contexts. This competency involves the capacity to appreciate the qualities and strengths of individuals. It also includes demonstrating empathy and respond with compassion and sensitivity. Furthermore, this skill encompasses the ability to identify and navigate various social norms and expectations, adapting one's behavior appropriately in different social settings. By developing strong social awareness, individuals are better equipped to build meaningful relationships, foster inclusive environments, and contribute positively to their communities.
- *Relationship skills*: The ability to build and maintain healthy, positive, and supportive relationships with others, while effectively navigating interactions with a wide range of individuals and groups. This competency involves for example clear and effective communication, active listening, and expressing oneself in a respectful and considerate manner. It also includes the ability to collaborate well with others, practicing teamwork and engaging in constructive problem-solving to address shared challenges. It requires the capacity to offer and accept support, recognizing when to seek help from others, and providing assistance when needed. Furthermore, relationship skills encompass the ability to resist negative social pressures. Strong relationship skills are necessary for creating a sense of trust, cooperation, and mutual respect in both personal and professional interactions, enabling individuals to form meaningful connections in diverse social environments.
- *Responsible decision making*: The ability to make thoughtful, informed, and positive decisions regarding one's personal behavior and social interactions across various situations. This competency involves the capacity to carefully anticipate and evaluate the potential consequences of one's actions before making decisions, ensuring that choices align with both immediate and long-term goals. Responsible decision-making requires individuals to engage in critical thinking, analyze relevant information, and consider various perspectives to arrive at well-reasoned judgments. It also includes the ability to identify and implement effective solutions for both personal and social challenges, while reflecting on the ethical implications of one's decisions. In this process, individuals must consider not only their own well-being but also the impact of their choices on

others, taking into account the health, safety, and emotional well-being of both themselves and others. Responsible decision-making allows individuals to make choices that contribute positively to their lives and that of others.

These skills can be divided into two distinct but interconnected groups: intrapersonal and interpersonal skills [13]. Intrapersonal skills are those that focus on an individual's internal processes, including self-awareness and self-management. These skills involve the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and attitudes. Interpersonal skills, in contrast, focus on the ability to engage effectively with others. These skills include social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making, which enable individuals to navigate social situations, understand roles and norms, and maintain positive relationships. It is widely agreed that emphasis on both intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills, which are intertwined, is important [5]. One's internal sense of self directly influences how they perceive and interact with others, and social experiences often shape how individuals view themselves [13]. Social-emotional skills help teenagers to understand and manage their emotions, develop a realistic and positive self-image, set and achieve meaningful goals, demonstrate empathy and compassion for others, build and maintain strong relationships, and make responsible, informed decisions [14].

2.2 School-based social-emotional learning programs

Social-emotional learning programs are thoughtfully designed, structured curricula aimed at creating environments where individuals can develop social-emotional skills. These programs are typically developmentally sequenced, ensuring that the content is appropriate for the age and stage of the teenagers involved and can take on a variety of forms [5], tailored to fit the needs and dynamics of different educational settings. Some programs are implemented as standalone classroom lessons that specifically focus on teaching social-emotional skills. Others are integrated within the broader academic curriculum, weaving the development of social-emotional skills into traditional subjects. There are also comprehensive whole-school approaches that engage not only students but also teachers, staff, and even the wider school community in the promotion of social-emotional development [5].

These programs can focus on developing a single social-emotional skill, such as self-awareness or relationship skills, or they can address a combination of skills [15]. Social-emotional learning programs are often divided into two categories. Universal school-based programs aim to reach all teenagers within a school, providing every individual with the opportunity to develop social-emotional skills [7]. On the other hand, selective or indicated programs are designed to meet the needs of specific subgroups or individual teenagers who face particular challenges, such as social, emotional, behavioral, or learning difficulties [15].

2.2.1 Program content

Most social-emotional learning programs focus on developing four or all five core social-emotional skills, with particular emphasis on relationship skills and self-management, which were the most commonly addressed skills [16]. The delivery of these programs typically involved trained classroom teachers who were equipped to guide students through the curriculum. However, in some instances, the programs

were facilitated by researchers or master's students with specialized knowledge in social-emotional learning [16]. In most cases, the programs included 10–21 lessons over the course of a single school year, with each lesson lasting between 45 and 90 minutes [16].

In general, most social-emotional learning programs are composed of various components. Commonly, these programs include the following elements [15]:

- **Psychoeducation:** This component focuses on the transfer of knowledge related to behavior, group processes, or social roles. It involves teaching teenagers about social-emotional concepts, such as understanding emotions, the impact of group behavior, and recognizing different social roles.
- **Psychophysical components:** These exercises are aimed at enhancing self-confidence and fostering trust in others. They may include physical activities that improve posture or relaxation techniques that help teenagers manage stress.
- **Skills training:** This element is focused on developing social-emotional skills through direct practice. It includes exercises in verbal and non-verbal communication, teamwork, and collaborative problem-solving. Teenagers engage in activities that encourage prosocial behaviors, like active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution. By practicing these skills in a controlled environment, teenagers are better equipped to apply them in real-life situations.
- **Cognitive-emotional components:** These exercises are designed to change emotions and cognitions. Teenagers engage in exercises that enhance self-awareness, help them recognize and understand their own and others' emotions, and improve impulse control. This component also involves activities such as cognitive restructuring and mindfulness practices, which help teenagers manage their emotions.
- **Booster components:** These are components focused on classroom management strategies, behavior reinforcement techniques, and the creation of behavioral contracts. Additionally, booster components often involve strategies for generalizing the skills learned in the program to everyday situations, as well as ongoing coaching and (self-)monitoring to ensure long-term success.

The aim of incorporating a combination of these components in social-emotional learning programs is to ensure that teenagers not only learn about social-emotional concepts but also have the opportunity to practice and internalize these skills.

2.2.2 Factors affecting program effectiveness

Although school-based social-emotional learning programs have consistently demonstrated their effectiveness, not all programs yield the same level of success. Research indicates that some programs achieve better outcomes than others [5]. This variation raises important questions about the factors that contribute to these differences in effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to explore and understand why certain programs are more successful than others. Exploring these factors, for example, program design, teacher training, or the involvement of parents, can provide valuable insights into how to optimize social-emotional learning programs.

An important aspect of social-emotional learning programs is the integration of psychoeducation (the transfer of knowledge) and skills training (the practice of skills). Research has shown that programs incorporating these two components are more effective at improving teenagers' social-emotional skills and reducing problematic behaviors compared to those without these components [13, 15]. This highlights the importance of not only teaching social-emotional concepts but also providing teenagers with opportunities to practice and internalize these skills. Importantly, the balance in the number of these components also plays a role in the effectiveness of the programs. Studies have indicated that the most effective programs include a mix of 3 to 6 psychoeducational exercises and 10 to 20 skills training exercises [15]. Programs that deviated from this balance, either by including more or fewer exercises, showed reduced effectiveness.

Additionally, the duration of social-emotional learning programs can have an impact on their success [15, 17]. Programs with duration between 10 and 16 weeks have been found to show the greatest improvements in teenagers' social-emotional development. In contrast, programs extending beyond 27 weeks often demonstrated smaller improvements in terms of effectiveness [15]. This suggests that there may be an optimal window for social-emotional learning programs, where sustained but not overly prolonged programs lead to the most benefits.

Moreover, research has shown that the involvement of the entire school community can enhance the impact of social-emotional learning programs [13]. When whole-school approaches are implemented, the positive effects of the program are amplified, as these initiatives stimulate a shared culture of responsibility and consistently reinforce the principles of social-emotional development across all levels of the school environment. This comprehensive approach seems to strengthen the message that social-emotional skills are important not just within the classroom but throughout the entire school community.

Parental involvement in social-emotional learning programs, however, has shown mixed results [5]. Some studies have found that when parents are engaged, the effectiveness of the program is enhanced. On the other hand, other research has suggested that parental involvement does not always lead to improvements in outcomes [5, 17]. This discrepancy highlights the need for further exploration into the types and forms of parental involvement that are most beneficial for supporting the social-emotional development of teenagers.

In addition to these program components, teacher training also plays an important role in the success of social-emotional learning programs. Research has shown that teachers who receive training in social-emotional skills themselves are better equipped to strengthen these skills in their students [17]. This stresses the importance of ensuring that teachers not only have the knowledge and tools to teach social-emotional concepts but also effectively model appropriate behaviors, which, in turn, enhances the learning experience for students.

Certain components, such as booster and psychophysical components, have not consistently been linked to the effectiveness of social-emotional learning programs [15]. Cognitive-emotional components are incorporated in nearly all social-emotional learning programs. Therefore, their specific effect on program outcomes could not be evaluated due to the lack of comparable studies [15].

Finally, research indicates that school-based social-emotional learning programs tend to focus primarily on self-management and relationship skills. However, these programs are most effective in improving self-awareness and social awareness in

teenagers, compared to other social-emotional skills [16]. Social-emotional learning programs seem to have a greater impact on self-awareness and social awareness than on action-oriented competencies, such as self-management and relationship skills. This may indicate that the development of awareness-based skills may precede the development of action-oriented competencies [16]. In other words, teenagers may first need to become aware of their own emotions and the perspectives of others before they are able to effectively manage their emotions or navigate relationships in a proactive manner.

3. Social-emotional learning programs and mental health

Studies on universal, school-based social-emotional learning programs show in general positive effects across various domains. These effects can be categorized into two types: direct effects, which focus on the development of social-emotional skills, and secondary effects, which include additional or indirect benefits that go beyond the immediate objectives of the programs. Additionally, these effects can be further differentiated into immediate effects observed shortly after program implementation and long-lasting effects that persist over time.

3.1 Effects of social-emotional learning programs

Regarding direct effects, research has shown that social-emotional learning programs are associated with improvements on the development and application of social-emotional skills. These skills include self-esteem, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, social competence, and positive social behavior [5, 7, 13–16].

Besides these direct benefits, social-emotional learning programs also contribute to several important secondary outcomes. For example, participation in social-emotional learning programs has been related to reductions in problematic behaviors among teenagers. Research shows that these programs can help decrease issues such as bullying, substance use, aggression, conduct problems, anxiety, and emotional distress [5, 7, 13–16, 18]. These reductions in problematic behaviors suggest that social-emotional learning programs do more than just strengthen social-emotional skills. They also protect against mental health problems.

Furthermore, academic performance can benefit from the implementation of school-based social-emotional learning programs. By improving teenagers' social-emotional skills, these programs create a better foundation for academic performance. Research indicates that teenagers who participate in social-emotional learning programs experience improvements in academic performance [5, 7, 15, 19], further stressing the positive effects of such programs.

Teenagers who participated in school-based social-emotional learning programs continued to show positive effects during follow-up assessments conducted 6 months or more after the program finished. These long-term effects included significant improvements in their ability to use social-emotional skills, as well as better attitudes toward themselves, their peers, and their school environment. In addition, positive effects were observed in their social behavior, academic performance, reduction in conduct problems, increased self-efficacy, and decreases in emotional distress, bullying, and substance use [5, 7, 18, 20]. Importantly, these effects were consistent across various subgroups, regardless of the participants' sociocultural or socioeconomic backgrounds [7].

Research has also identified a positive correlation between the development of stronger social-emotional skills immediately after participating in a social-emotional learning program and higher levels of mental health during follow-up assessments. This finding suggests that it is the enhancement of social-emotional skills that serve as the primary predictors of long-term benefits [7]. In other words, while changes in attitudes toward oneself, others, and school are important, the actual acquisition and application of social-emotional skills appear to be more critical in sustaining positive outcomes over time. This insight highlights the role of skill training in social-emotional learning programs. Strengthening skills that teenagers can use in their daily lives is what drives long-term improvements in their overall mental health. These skills help teenagers handle challenges more effectively, manage emotions in healthy ways, and engage in positive social interactions, all of which contribute to a stronger sense of mental health over time.

Interestingly, the effects of school-based social-emotional learning programs appeared to be particularly pronounced among teenagers in lower educational levels [20]. These teenagers are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, a factor that has been associated with lower social-emotional skills outcomes than their more affluent peers [21]. Teenagers from these backgrounds, therefore, might have greater potential for growth in social-emotional skills. The finding that social-emotional learning programs have a stronger positive impact on these teenagers suggests that such programs could be an effective approach to helping them not only to develop social-emotional skills but also to prevent the emergence of behavioral problems [20].

This finding stresses the potential of social-emotional learning programs in the reduction of broader social inequalities in educational environments. By creating opportunities for these teenagers to develop their social-emotional skills, social-emotional learning programs can equip teenagers with the skills they need to navigate both academic and personal challenges [22]. This emphasizes the role schools can play in addressing social-emotional learning. By incorporating these programs into the curriculum, schools can stimulate more equitable learning environments, ensuring that all teenagers, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to succeed.

3.2 Differential impact of social-emotional skills on mental health outcomes

Social-emotional skills are interconnected and are related to various mental health outcomes. However, each skill could have different effects on these outcomes. For example, research indicates that stronger self-management and relationship skills are associated with a reduction in aggressive behaviors, while higher levels of self-awareness have been found to promote prosocial behavior [8, 23, 24]. Despite these findings, further research is needed to understand the specific and distinct impact that each social-emotional skill has on mental health [24].

Research has shown that a combination of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making is associated with emotional and behavioral problems [24]. Teenagers who express higher levels of these skills tend to experience less emotional and behavioral problems. Additionally, a combination of self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making is associated with increased prosocial behavior [24], meaning that teenagers who have higher levels of these skills are more likely to engage in positive social interactions.

Additionally, self-management appears to act as a mediating factor in the relationship between self-awareness and emotional and behavioral problems [24]. In other

words, improving self-management not only enhances self-awareness but also plays a role in the reduction of emotional and behavioral problems. Similarly, social awareness mediates the relationship between self-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and prosocial behavior [24]. This means that enhancing social awareness strengthens these other skills but also plays a role in stimulating prosocial behavior. Both self-management and social awareness are therefore important in effectively addressing behavioral and emotional problems and promoting prosocial behavior [24].

4. Conclusion and implications

4.1 Importance and effectiveness of social-emotional learning programs

Social-emotional learning programs are important for enhancing teenagers' social-emotional skills, equipping them with the tools necessary to navigate challenges and succeed in life. These programs, which focus on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, are increasingly being implemented in schools worldwide. While these programs have demonstrated effectiveness, the success of such programs can vary. Key factors influencing their effects include the integration of psychoeducation and skill training, the balance of program components, the duration of the program, and the involvement of the entire school community. Although parental involvement has shown mixed results, it remains an important area for further exploration and to identify the success factors that contribute to its effectiveness. Teacher training is another element that enhances the impact of social-emotional learning programs. Overall, the focus on strengthening self-awareness and social awareness serves as a foundational step in the development of self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Studies on universal, school-based social-emotional learning programs show positive effects across multiple domains. These effects are categorized into direct effects, focusing on the development of social-emotional skills such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and social competence, and secondary effects, which include indirect benefits like reductions in problematic behaviors, bullying, substance use, and emotional distress. Social-emotional learning programs also contribute to improved academic performance. Long-term follow-up studies confirm that the positive effects of social-emotional learning programs persist over time. These effects are observed across different sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, with particularly strong outcomes for teenagers from lower educational levels, who may benefit the most due to their higher likelihood of facing behavioral challenges. Research also stresses the role of self-management and social awareness, which act as a mediating factor in addressing emotional and behavioral problems and prosocial behavior, reinforcing the need for developing this skills to promote mental well-being [24].

4.2 Adapting social-emotional learning programs to meet diverse needs

Although school-based social-emotional learning programs have been widely implemented across different educational settings, it should be noted that these programs are not "one size fits all" approaches. Given the diversity of teenage populations and the unique contexts in which schools operate, it is likely that program adaptations

are necessary to effectively meet the specific needs of different groups and align with the aims of individual schools [5]. Understanding how social-emotional learning programs have been successfully adapted in various settings is important for ensuring their effectiveness across different schools [5]. Research into the successful adaptations can provide valuable insights into what works best for different populations under what circumstances [5]. This knowledge would contribute to the development of programs that are inclusive and tailored to diverse teenage populations, ensuring that all teenagers, regardless of their background, can benefit from social-emotional learning programs [5].

In addition to tailoring social-emotional learning programs, it is important to consider the specific components of each program. Not all components of social-emotional learning programs contribute equally to its effectiveness [15]. Therefore, it is important to base interventions on evidence of effectiveness, rather than relying on what has been used in previous programs [15]. By evaluating the relevance and impact of each component, schools can ensure that programs are effective and relevant to their specific population. Thus, when developing social-emotional learning programs, it is important to use evidence-based components and evaluate the relevance and impact of each component for the specific population.

A remarkable gap in research on social-emotional learning programs is the limited focus on teenagers with special educational needs [25]. While the few studies that include teenagers with special educational needs show some positive outcomes, the overall effects have been modest [25]. This is concerning because most social-emotional learning programs are designed for mainstream education [16, 25], leaving a gap in resources tailored to teenagers with special educational needs. Given that these teenagers generally demonstrate lower levels of social-emotional skills compared to their peers without special educational needs [26–28], there is a need for programs that address their social-emotional development. It is important to adapt social-emotional learning programs to the specific needs of teenagers with special educational needs too and ensure they receive adequate support for their social-emotional development.

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Perspective Chapter: Women's Skills Development and Socio-Economic Empowerment Interventions – A Precursor to the Psychology of Well-Being and Life Satisfaction

Keba T. Modisane

Abstract

The psychology of well-being is strongly rooted on the attainment of skills and socio-economic empowerment that allows one to earn a living and thrive in any given society. Global communities ascertain that women's practical skills acquisition and socio-economic empowerment enables them to earn a living in their own right subsequently feeding their families and contributing to their communities. Through the chapter, readers are ferried to different communities around the world and even to Botswana in order to meet women who through resilience and a quest to feeding and supporting their families learnt new skills they never dreamt of acquiring during their lifetime and subsequently becoming economically independent. Through diverse skills development training programs, these women developed entrepreneurial and business skills that allowed them to place a bowl of food on the table for their families with dignity and satisfaction. It is through the rich stories and rich narratives shared by these women that a reaffirmation is made that support to women through skills development and socio-economic empowerment is a precursor to their psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Keywords: women's education and skills development, women's socioeconomic empowerment, women's leadership development acumen, entrepreneurial skills and value addition, psychology of well-being and life satisfaction

1. Introduction

The psychology of well-being to a large extent rests on good quality of life, mental, physical, and emotional well-being, and a comfortable lifestyle, among others.

Good quality of life imbues positive emotions, happiness, contentment, and having a purpose in life. Good quality of life is a precursor to life satisfaction among the global citizenry, and it is cherished and longed for by different communities all over the world, whether they are from developed or less developed nations. Feelings of well-being and life satisfaction require interventions, including undertaking intentional activities that could promote skills acquisition and socioeconomic empowerment that bring independence.

To many people, the psychology of well-being is strongly rooted in the attainment of skills and socioeconomic empowerment that would allow one to earn a living and advance in society. Socioeconomic status is a consistent and reliable predictor of a vast array of outcomes across the lifespan of an individual, including physical and psychological health [1]. Through this chapter, the psychology of well-being of women and girls is discussed in order to examine and analyze the extent to which women and girls utilize intentional interventions and activities availed to them for skills development and socioeconomic empowerment and for the betterment of their livelihoods. The world acknowledges that the attainment of practical skills and the socioeconomic empowerment of women translates to the betterment of these individuals, their families, communities, and nations. In an environment where opportunities for creating employment for women exist, and the starting of businesses and acquisition of business development skills, among others, are supported, as well as the opportunity to acquire and own land is within reach, such intentional plans and activities lead to the socioeconomic advancement of women subsequently their families, communities and nations. In fact, socioeconomic status is a key factor determining the quality of life for women and, by extension, strongly influences the lives of their children and family [1]. Through the provision of economic opportunities for women, both the People's Republic of China and Mexico created factory work suitable for women [2]. India has also made remarkable educational development of girls and has intentionally provided women with jobs in order to improve the economic welfare of families, consequently moving the Indian society toward gender equality [3]. In the developed world, technological developments and industrialization have led to larger investments in education, resulting in more women getting into the labor market [3].

Alam [4] posits that in order to bring changes to the lives of women, there is a need to follow a proactive approach in addressing issues affecting their empowerment and development. According to Alam [4], besides encouraging female education and participation in economic activities, changing the mindset of the general public is the most vital requirement, and all other issues could be looked at gradually. McKinsey [5] asserts that empowerment challenges tend to be concentrated in groups with lower education and in single-parent households, and these lower education and single-headed households are typically women-headed. Cawthorne [6] points out that poverty rates are higher for women than men, in fact, women are poorer than men in all racial and ethnic groups; hence, it is best to combine a range of decent employment opportunities with a network of social services to support healthy family growth [6]. If women are developed and given scope to be partners in production and economic growth, the payoff would be high, as the same situation works well in many other countries [4]. It is from this background information that readers through the chapter shall examine women's socioeconomic activities and skills development in order to assess the extent to which activities purposefully undertaken to support women have the ability to raise women's socioeconomic status, thereby bringing them independence and subsequently psychological well-being.

It is a universally known truth that both men and women have a fundamental role to play in raising a family [7]. However, women are more likely to bear the cost of raising children, and as posited by Cawthorne [6], eight in ten custodial parents are women, and custodial mothers are twice as likely to be poor than the fathers. Therefore, it could be surmised that the economic empowerment of women is vital for healthy family growth, as women remain the primary caregivers for children until they become teenagers. Even further, women instinctively provide a nurturing environment for children's growth, thus paving the way for a conducive environment for receiving education and training. The then Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, argued that achieving gender equality is a "prerequisite" to achieving the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including eliminating poverty, reducing infant mortality, achieving universal education, and eliminating the gender gap in education by 2015 [8]. The statement by Kofi Annan remains relevant to many African economies as they struggle to address issues of gender equality even today. African economies have a daunting task of ensuring that women, just like men, become active players contributing to economic and national development. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) stated that women who are economically dependent on others remain vulnerable to abuse and to leading undignified lives. UNICEF stated that;

...a woman who lacks economic independence is often more vulnerable to violence in the home: if she cannot obtain a living in her own right, it is more difficult for her to leave a home even if she is beaten and abused. ... If a woman's income depends entirely on selling her labor and there is no social safety network to fall back on she may be forced to work under exploitative conditions even to endure sexual harassment in the workplace. ...If a woman is illiterate or lacks technical skills she will be barred from more remunerative work. A woman who lacks access to ways of effectively controlling her own fertility is more likely to find herself in a position of economic dependence. An impoverished woman in an impoverished society is less likely to survive childbirth [9].

Women's vulnerability, seen through the eyes of UNICEF, portrays the reality that women's dependence on others for economic survival strips them of human dignity, leading to exposure to heartbreaking social ills, including abuse, work exploitation, sexual harassment, and violence, among others. Their economic disempowerment, in fact, leads to poverty, subsequently affecting children, society, and the nation. According to the US Census Bureau, as highlighted in the McKinsey Global Institute Report [5], three out of four single parents in the United States are mothers, and sixty percent (60%) of these families are headed by single mothers who are living below the poverty line; hence, economic growth should be distributed fairly across the society and opportunities should be availed to all. Dulfo [2] points out that women's empowerment and economic development are closely related, as development alone can drive down inequality between men and women, while empowering women could benefit economic development, thus reducing poverty. Research findings of a study conducted in Peru revealed that squatters in Peru who were given property title deeds for the land had fertility decline, but only in areas where the prescription to put both the woman's and the man's name on the title deed was effectively enforced [10]. The assumption that could be drawn from this situation is that as women come to be "co-owners" of any property including land, they develop a voice that did not exist before that now adds value to the outcome of serious

matters at home, including birth control discussions, since they are now joint owners of property in the home, including land. Unbelievable.

In Setswana, it is often stated that;

Mpha, mpha o a lapisa, motho o kgonwa ke se sa gagwe.

The literal translation of this proverb is that asking for assistance repeatedly is bothersome to the people it is directed to, and a person who owns his/her things is better off. Basing on this African proverb, empowerment of women should be considered in such a way that they have the ability to earn and own their material possessions, including money and land, so that they gain independence from other people. Worldwide, nations must shoulder the responsibility of dignifying the lives of women by availing economic empowerment opportunities that have the potential to uplift women from abject poverty and provide them with socioeconomic independence and subsequently give them a voice, however small and insignificant it may be.

Mckinsey [11] posits that lack of economic inclusion has disproportionately affected racial and ethnic minorities, women, and certain geographies; hence, leaders should intentionally embed equality into human development processes to support different groups, including women. Mckinsey [5] asserts that the private sector has a wide array of options to promote empowerment through core business, training programs, retention benefits, social initiatives, retail, hospitality, and many more. Through the chapter, readers shall be ferried around the world in order to explore socioeconomic interventions and activities available to women and how these have changed their lives and given them a voice to some extent. As readers globetrot throughout these vast lands to explore, examine, and systematically analyze women's socioeconomic empowerment activities and skills uplifting programs that nations have developed, it is hoped that we learn from these interventions and the extent to which these initiatives provide a testament that having your own material and financial resources is a precursor to the attainment of well-being and life satisfaction.

The following questions guided the chapter development:

RQ1: To what extent is the world committed to the effective socioeconomic empowerment of women?

RQ2: To what extent have women and girls been provided with opportunities for educational and skills development for the betterment of their livelihoods?

RQ3: To what extent has women's ability to lead been supported through leadership development programs that advance principles of good governance and ethical thinking?

Through a detailed literature review and systematic examination of programs and reports from around the world, the chapter provides a detailed examination and analysis of women's socioeconomic empowerment and skills development and their impact on psychological well-being. The chapter also explores women's entrepreneurship activities that have been intentionally selected in Botswana in order to document these entrepreneurship journeys of resilience and perseverance. A purposive sampling of the selected groups was done to ensure that research questions were answered and also that the objective of selecting business groups that were successful and resilient was met. The groups selected proved to be resilient and successful in running these businesses. Patton [12] asserts that selecting information-rich cases in purposive sampling could include critical case sampling in which critical cases are selected on the basis that they can make a point dramatically or because they are important. I.e., if it happens there, will it happen everywhere? [12].

The researcher believes that since these selected women-owned businesses moved out of their comfort zone to learn new skills and use the available resources, so could other women-owned businesses anywhere else around the world, under normal circumstances do the same. The logical generalization of the sample selection is based on inductive reasoning, which is usually used when making conclusions or inferences about a particular situation. According to Bhandari [13], inductive reasoning is usually based on facts and observations, and it is from these observations that the author drew conclusions that skills development coupled with availing resources could result in socioeconomic empowerment, well-being, and subsequently life satisfaction for women in general. Researchers at the University of Illinois [14] point out that inductive reasoning involves finding a path that leads to a known solution. Pieces of information that seem unrelated are combined to form general rules or relationships. According to Herr [15], a conclusion is drawn based on particular cases observed. This chapter asserts that women's socioeconomic empowerment and skills development remain critical to their well-being and life satisfaction. According to Alam [4], what women require most is active and cordial support, opportunity for development, and socioeconomic empowerment from all quarters, especially from state agencies, employers, and top management. The reader is invited to join in the journey.

2. Women's socioeconomic empowerment

McKinsey Global Institute report [5] indicates that 40 percent of the global population lives above the economic empowerment line since they can afford a standard basket of essential goods and services and even begin to save. According to the report, full economic empowerment is achieved when a household can afford basic goods and services, go to work, contribute to economic growth, and focus on more than survival [5]. Based on the report, it could be concluded that 60 percent of the global population, mostly in lower- and middle-income economies, live below the economic empowerment line. It could be deduced that economic empowerment is therefore out of reach for these diverse groups based on different reasons that could stem from the high cost of living resulting in the unaffordability of housing, high food costs, or even wars that disrupt the plowing of fields and the rearing of domestic animals, education that has tuition fees that are unaffordable or schools that are not within traveling distance of the learners, primary health care that is unaffordable or a lack of employment opportunities, among others.

Evidently, in economies where economic empowerment opportunities exist and have been intentionally supported by governments, parastatal organizations, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations, an enabling environment for achieving empowerment and the provision of opportunities to empower employees, suppliers, and customers as well as communities is created. For example, the provision of opportunities in the agricultural sector among African economies could ensure that women in these developing economies raise a variety of livestock and also plant crops that feed families and provide cash from selling the farm produce. For example, in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), there are signs that women's meaningful participation in the economy is being taken seriously by member states. In Zambia, the Ministry of Lands has gender disaggregated data on land distribution aimed at ensuring that at least one-third of all new land holdings are allocated to women [16]. Policies that support acquisition and land ownership by women in these states allow women to develop and own property, thereby ensuring

that they reach their full potential in terms of economic empowerment. The availability of loans for housing and entrepreneurship development projects ensures that women can start small businesses and build their own homes. For example, Women's Finance House (Botswana) finances women's small businesses in Botswana. The organization operates under the trade name "Thusang Basadi," which literally means "help women." Women use loans from the organization to start the mom-and-pop tuck shops, finance tailoring, and food catering businesses, among others.

It is crucial to point out that through collaborative partnerships forged between governments, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, the women's economic empowerment agenda could be taken to a higher level by focusing on the enhancement of innovative technologies like the telecommunication industry, affordable food reduction opportunities and affordable services that could intentionally support economic empowerment activities and the uplifting of low-income groups. For example, affordability of services including transport costs, water and electricity, and soft loans for affordable housing programs and food could cushion low-income groups, including women. Affordable access to telecommunication industries across Africa has ensured that women connect to their suppliers and customers while in rural settings, and this has boosted their small businesses, whether these are chicken rearing, egg production, tailoring, or small homemade bakeries. Mobile telephones offer wider coverage than traditional landlines, which are not easy to connect in Africa. Diverse mobile phone companies like MTN, Orange, Mascom, and Airtel Africa offer widespread communication coverage across Africa. Money-sending platforms like M-Pesa, Orange Money, Mukuru, MTN Mobile money, and others offer digital wallets, mobile pay system platforms, and the ability to spend money and send and receive it digitally throughout the African continent.

In Egypt, women's economic empowerment is a national priority highlighted in the 2030 National Women Empowerment Strategy. Through the UN economic empowerment portfolio, support to rural women in Egypt is promoted through an integrated approach. Financial training, entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities have been created through the UN economic empowerment portfolio. According to the CAPMAS [17] report, women's unemployment rates have declined from 21.7% in 2019 to 17.7% in 2021, an indication that empowerment initiatives and interventions support women and uplift their livelihoods in the long run. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Training Center of ILO, in partnership with Microsoft Philanthropies, introduced digital training programs that included building digital entrepreneurship skills that benefited over 25,000 women entrepreneurs across 15 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Such efforts are an indication that women who use these available opportunities could improve their socioeconomic status and attain financial independence.

3. Educational development and attainment of skills

Half of our lifetime earnings come from educational attainment and skills that we have [5]. Education is the step ladder that provides opportunities to have a career and profession to pursue. It opens doors for making better life choices, attaining independence from the control of others, and living a fulfilling life. In fact, education is viewed as a cornerstone to social empowerment [18] as it provides opportunities for one to contribute meaningfully to society, the community, and to take care of

the family. Increased decision-making about when and who to marry, when to have children, and economic opportunities of owning properties and land provides women with the opportunity to make choices that affect them personally in the short and long term. In India, the government has put in place several initiatives that would help women attain education and skills development, including the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, Balika Samridhi Yojna, and Nanda Devi Kanya Yojna, among others, to help women progress in education and skills development [18]. Education provides economic independence, the ability to contribute meaningfully in the profession, and the ability to develop expertise crucial for national development and national building.

UNESCO, through its website (<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/>, [19]), has documented several projects and programs that speak to women's empowerment and these include the women weavers' rich cultural tradition of weaving in Brazil's Central Amazon Biosphere Reserve for equitable education. Through the project, the weaving tradition is passed from generation to generation for the preservation of the rich cultural tradition. Another project documented is the Earth Network mission at Jozani-Chwaka Bay Biosphere Reserve in Tanzania, as well as the UNESCO and EEF (Thailand) that reaffirms mutual commitment to innovative financing. Through the project, UNESCO helps Thailand's most vulnerable learners access education. These are examples of projects that empower women and girls so that they find their feet for survival in the world, so that their storyline of poverty and vulnerability is altered and changed for their betterment.

4. Women's leadership opportunities

Women are no longer contained by the glass ceiling that prevents them from getting into oval offices and have since shattered glass ceilings across different nations and continue climbing the career ladder. It remains imperative that these women are provided with leadership development skills so that they are empowered to lead with humility, dignity, and good governance principles in mind. The ability to "read" and "decipher" the work environment and the culture of work, reflect on alternative approaches to supervision, requires a wide range of technical, interpersonal, and emotional intelligence skills. The acquisition of such skills requires coaching, mentoring, and adult learning methods, including instructional supervision know-how [20] that would bring out the best in leadership practice. The use of case studies, in-box exercises, and learning from best practices in order to inculcate ethical thinking approaches [21] remains critical to authentic leadership, accountability, and good governance principles.

Apart from expertise skills, women should be provided with skills to develop work-life balance, make hard decisions with the best interests of employees in mind, adopt optimistic attributes, and develop effective engagement practices and skills [22]. Increasing the share of women in areas of power and influence, such as corporate boards, is for a range of important reasons, ranging from business ability to instill justice and equality and effective board performance [23]. The balance of men and women on the boards allows diversity of membership and effective discussion of issues and availing of additional information critical to business ethics [24, 25]. Scholars posit that contributions made by women in terms of asking additional information, questioning business practices that seem unethical, and the ability to

bring different knowledge are critical to board functioning. In Pakistan, the learning organization model is considered to be a favorable model of career and skills development for women, especially for those who consider management as a prospective profession [4]. In the Arab Gulf States, it has been observed that though women have more tertiary-level qualifications, their impressive educational attainment does not necessarily translate to employment opportunities [26]. This is an area that needs the Arab Gulf States to intentionally support and nurture for women's empowerment and skills development. Leadership should cultivate optimism in followers since people who work with a positive mindset improve their performance level and their productivity, creativity, and engagement also improve [27]. Women should be nurtured to cultivate optimism and positivism as they climb career ladders and should be supported by employers, state agencies, and governments in order to reach their full potential.

5. Botswana government initiatives in supporting women's economic development and empowerment

The Botswana government acknowledges that gender inequalities have existed for a long time in the country. To address gender inequalities at a national level, the government in 1981 established the Women's Affairs Unit in the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. Through the Women's Affairs Unit, the government strived to operationalize the mandate of creating a conducive environment for eliminating gender inequalities by adapting relevant standards and making necessary adjustments at a national level. In 1996, the government developed a National Policy on Women in Development. The policy aimed to have an integrated and multisectoral approach in addressing women's issues. The policy was followed by the National Gender Programme (NGP) framework and a Plan of Action (POA) that was developed in 1997–1999.

The National Policy on Women in Development has since been replaced by the National Gender and Development Policy (NPGAD). It is envisaged that NPGAD will direct, coordinate, and facilitate gender development implementation in Botswana. Through the NPGAD policy, Botswana pledged commitment to international protocols of achieving gender quality objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals; fulfill the nation's commitment to the National Development Plan 11 and the National Vision. Priorities of NPGAD are economic development of women, prosperity and poverty eradication, social protection, and offering social services that include health and wellness, quality education, and safe housing. NPGAD also emphasizes access to justice, human rights, and freedom from violence. Botswana now has a National Operational Plan that responds to gender at a national level, a gender strategy, and mobilization guidelines for the National Gender Program. These initiatives are meant to take gender initiatives to a higher level by involving different stakeholders. It is hoped that the operational plan will enhance stakeholder commitment through consultations and collaborations at all levels so that a more gender-balanced mode of operation is enhanced.

The Botswana government is committed to the creation of an environment that ensures effective participation of women in economic governance structures. The government aims to achieve this by increasing women's share in the total economically active population and through the use of gender budgeting. Gender budgeting intentionally targets the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women while at the same time raising and allocating financial resources to support gender projects and programs. It is

worth mentioning that the Botswana government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed an agreement that targeted the provision of financial assistance to economic empowerment projects for women from 1997 to 2003. The program resulted in several products made from locally available products. During the 1997–2003 period, different government ministries funded women projects, including the Financial Assistance Policy (FAP) and the Small Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME). Through multistakeholder participation, Botswana continues to make strides in women's socio-economic empowerment and skills development through different agencies, including the Citizen Entrepreneurial Agency (CEDA), Local Enterprise Authority (LEA), and the Department of Out of School Education and Training (DOSET).

6. A journey to explore women's entrepreneurial activities in Botswana

Using an intentional selection of businesses that were started and managed by women, five companies were visited in and around Gaborone in Botswana in order to examine how these businesses were started, where they received financial and skills support, challenges they experienced, and their achievements. Intentional concentration was made on businesses that were thriving in order to reaffirm the narrative that if women are supported with financial resources and skills training and they have set clear goals to uplift themselves from poverty, through resilience and hard work, such individuals go against any odds to achieve their full potential and succeed, subsequently attaining life satisfaction and well-being.

Since this was qualitative research by nature, the researcher collected data using unstructured interviews that provided lengthy information about these businesses from the start. The role of the researcher was to listen. Paper and pencil recording was used to record details about the work, challenges, and achievements of these women businesses. The physical environment of work operations and financial factors were also discussed. The observation method was also used to understand more about business operations. Documents and photographs were also collected as part of the extensive data explaining work activities and work achievements of these business groups. According to Leedy and Ormrod [28], a typical interview looks more like a formal conversation, with the participant doing most of the talking and the researcher doing most of the listening. ...throughout the data collection process, the researcher suspends any preconceived notions and personal experiences that may unduly influence what the researcher “hears” the participants saying. Such a suspension can be extremely difficult for a researcher who has personally experienced the phenomenon under study. Since the researcher is not running a business, it was unlikely that during the data collection process, documentation of events and information would be biased or swayed to a particular angle of thought. The researcher requests readers to join in the journey to different locations in and around Gaborone in order to meet the women-led businesses and draw their conclusions.

7. Coffee making from roots of the Motlopi tree

From Gaborone, I drove to a village called Gamodubu, in the Kweneng District, where I met one woman who was part of a group of ten women making coffee from the roots of Motlopi trees. The Motlopi tree is called the Shepherd's tree in English. Arriving at the homestead, I was greeted by the tall, beaming woman who received

me with warm, open arms. Though this was our first encounter, her demeanor portrayed her as someone I had known for a long time. With a hearty laugh, she looked at me and asked, “What sort of person comes all the way from the city to meet someone of my caliber in a small dusty village?” I liked her friendly and warm welcome. I introduced myself and told her the purpose of my trip. She, in turn, introduced herself and her two children. We sat under the shade outside the house since it was already hot, and she immediately narrated her story, and I listened.

Masego, a single mother of five, was brought up by a strict mother who instilled in her hard work so that she could fend for herself in the future. Despite not receiving any formal education, Masego grew up with a strong determination to succeed in life. When she was allocated a residential plot in Gamodubu, she immediately moved into the plot, built a wooden shack, and used plastic to roof the structure. That evening, she and her children slept in the shack, happy as they now owned their own home. Though she was scared that it might rain during the night, she derived solace and happiness from the fact that it was her own plot—something she had yearned to have for years. Early the next morning, Masego woke up to the reality that the family did not have anything to eat. In no time, Masego moved from one homestead to another, looking for part-time jobs. Soon she cleaned yards, washed laundry, and did part-time babysitting jobs. As months went by, she was employed in the Ipelegeng Community Development Program temporarily, and life became much better as the job was stable and she received a reliable monthly salary. She used the money to buy cement for constructing the family house. She has since completed building the house and is happy that the family has moved from the shack to a permanent structure after enduring nights of many cold and rainy seasons. While saying these last words, she looked at me and smiled, and I could see contentment in her eyes. She pointed to the shack and said that it was now used as the cooking place.

Through the Department of Out of School Education and Training (Doset), Masego and nine other women who are members of her business cluster were trained in making coffee from Motlopi roots. Though she acknowledges that making coffee from Motlopi roots is a tedious job that involves many processes ranging from digging the roots to pounding and roasting the powder, she remains content with the fact that sometimes she makes up to \$30.00 from the coffee sales—money that she states she cannot acquire from anywhere if she lazily sleeps at home.

In the previous year, Masego borrowed a field from one of her neighbors. Together with her children, they debushed the field and planted maize, sweet reed, watermelons, and beans. After the harvest, the family never went to sleep hungry. Unfortunately, the owners of the field demanded it back, and she returned it, to the devastation of the young family that was used to plowing and feeding from the harvest. Her eldest son started raising chickens for business. He sells live or dressed chickens to the villagers and passersby. The chickens are kept in the round hut, and Masego and her eldest daughter help with the slaughtering and dressing of the chickens. Masego counts herself as one of the luckiest women—she has her own plot, is able to feed, clothe the family, and has a proper house for the family. Her three youngest children attend school nearby. She thanks God for the life she now enjoys and hopes that her three children successfully complete school. She still gets temporary employment through the Ipelegeng program, makes coffee from the roots of the Motlopi tree, and gets part-time jobs in the village. Well, Masego ended her story here, looked at me, and smiled. Wow. I commended her for the resilience in working hard to earn a living and congratulated her for the beautiful house she constructed and for raising children as a single parent. After buying two chickens from the son, I

bid the family farewell and left. I learned an important lesson from this interview: a lesson of contentment and happiness in life that does not arise from owning a lot of clusters or from having a lot of money, but from contentment derived from living a simple life and owning a home that provided a measure of independence and satisfaction. Having a plot and a house for the family, and the fact that her three youngest children were enrolled in school, is all that mattered to Masego.

8. Making a living from fermented pumpkin mixture

Departing from Gamodubu, I drove to Molepolole to meet a group of five women who were making a living from the sales of kgodu ya lerotse mixture. In English, lerotse is pumpkin. The mixture is cooked with sorghum or millet, or could be used as a smoothie. I visited two of these women and interviewed them at their homesteads. All five women are housewives, and they have been operating the business for 5 years now. The skill of making fermented pumpkin mixture (kgodu ya lerotse) is traditionally passed from parents to children among the Batswana tribes. The women usually sell the fermented mixture at the Mafenyatlala Shopping Mall, but they said that they preferred preparing the mixture after receiving customer orders. These women, just like Masego, stated that they used money from the sales to feed and clothe the children and to buy personal items. Since this is a seasonal business, the women said that they struggled to make money in wintertime when pumpkins are out of season. Currently, these five women are assisted by the Kweneng District Council to start a business of extracting oil from morula pods. The group is excited about the new business opportunity and remains optimistic that it will take off well. Their wish is that the new business should be profitable enough to augment their seasonal kgodu ya lerotse business.

8.1 White angels produce indigenous flavored yogurt

The next group of women I visited called themselves “White Angels.” These five women belong to a Christian denomination group called the Church of Nazareth. They all dress in white and stated that the five families have strong ties. Before working as a group, each of them operated a small business independently, ranging from running a tuck shop, making ice pops, selling clothes from the car boot, making handicrafts, and selling books. After forming the White Angels business group, the five women approached the Department of Gender Affairs and requested funding. The Department of Gender Affairs, in response, requested them to come up with a business idea. After conducting a feasibility study, White Angels settled for producing yogurt upon the realization that locally, there was no company producing yogurt. Their greatest challenge was that none of them had the skill and knowledge to produce yogurt. Nonetheless, after submitting a business proposal that subsequently passed assessment, the Department of Gender Affairs in 2009 funded their project for P271,000.00 (approximately \$27,000) that was used to buy the required machinery and to pay for their training. The women attended training in South Africa, and their trainer became their mentor until they were competent in producing quality yogurt.

The biggest challenges they experienced during the initial stages of operation of the business included spontaneous electricity cuts that affected the production cycle, rendering the milk that was already in the production cycle unusable; unethical

business suppliers who supplied milk that was diluted with water to increase volume, resulting in yogurt that did not meet the required taste, texture, and quality; and stiff competition from imported brands like Parmalat and Clover that are well known to customers, jeopardizing their chances of penetrating the local market and not having their own place to operate the business. White Angels did not operate their own business premises and borrowed a premise to operate from one of the church mates. Despite the challenges experienced, the women found comfort in the fact that they got raw materials locally without incurring the extra costs of transporting raw materials from outside the country.

White Angels continuously learned from the challenges that they encountered, and they have now established themselves locally as a yogurt-producing company. They have managed to penetrate the local market to sell their yogurt to local chain supermarkets, local restaurants, and hotels. In order to offer the market unique yogurt flavors, White Angels use indigenous products like pumpkin, aloe, mogorogoro, and motoroko to add flavor to the yogurt instead of using the commonly used flavors used by their competitors. White Angels have since expanded their business and now employ several people to help in the production line. Operating the yogurt business has been a blessing to the women since they are able to feed their families and take care of the children. The women receive a monthly salary just like the employees and invest the remaining in the business. These women remain thankful for the financial assistance they received from the Department of Gender Affairs; from the business management training periodically offered by the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA); and their churchmate who borrowed them a building while they look for a permanent place. After touring their production line, I bid White Angels farewell and left.

Departing from the place, I reminisced over the interview and came to a conclusion that these women's close working relations and their ability to successfully tackle challenges rested partly on the good communication skills they have cultivated, their frankness, and their homogenous background—they belong to one religious affiliation and have close family ties that ensure remaining honest and sincere to each other despite business challenges experienced. The women share a common vision and leverage each other's skills, resulting in the formidable team that they built. For example, a member who is skilled in accounting and financial management ensures that the business finances are handled with prudence and accountability, while others handle the management and marketing of the product.

8.2 Vero: A tailor and an artist

The next woman I met on my journey is Vero, a tailor and an artist. She makes school uniforms for children attending a nearby kindergarten and church uniforms for members of the Eloyi Church. She also makes wedding gowns and takes individual orders from customers. Vero is also an artist in her own right, producing artistic drawings, paintings, and handicrafts that are beautifully displayed in her workshop. I met Vero for the first time at a fair organized by the Kgosi Kgari Sechele Museum in Molepolole. I arranged to visit her workshop. Vero's business was funded through the Youth Development Fund operated by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports, and Culture Development. She received a loan of P100,000 (approximately \$10,000) that was used to build a workshop and buy sewing machines. Since the loan required that she return P50,000.00 (\$5000) after establishing the business and making a profit, Vero managed to pay installments of P600.00 (\$60.00) monthly and has since completed paying off the P50,000.00. Vero was trained to acquire skills

in operating the business by the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA). Currently, Vero receives many orders, but she is not yet ready to hire helpers for the business. In order to prevent order backlog, Vero works until the middle of the night. Vero faces the challenge of the unavailability of clothes in local shops, leading to a delay in delivering customer orders. Despite the challenges, Vero is thankful to the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports, and Culture Development for the funding and states that she is now able to look after her siblings and her child, feed and clothe the family, while taking care of their school needs.

8.3 Producing perfumes from scented Egyptian oils

The last woman visited on this journey is Badundu; she operates a perfume shop called House of Scents in Gaborone. The business is a 50/50 ownership with one man whom she has known for some time. The two started the business in 2009 after an initial contribution of P1500.00 each (\$150). They used the contributions to buy scented oils from Egypt. Initially, the two learned to mix the oils and produced scented perfumes. They sold the perfumes from backpacks wherever they traveled. As time went by, the two rented a display table at Molapo Crossing Mall where they sold the oil perfumes on Saturdays and Sundays. Working throughout Saturdays and Sundays resulted in the establishment of a stable clientele that they still keep even today. The reliable clientele base resulted in using the order and drop delivery of customer orders to their respective workplaces in and around Gaborone. In 2013, when one of the shops was vacated at the Molapo Crossing Mall, the two partners moved from the table into a shop where House of Scents was born. Upon moving into the shop, they each took a personal loan to expand the business by buying more varieties of scented oils from Egypt. The partner resolved to go to Egypt twice a year to sample and buy the scented oils. Initially, they hired two people to help with running the business. In 2014, when Badundu's contract of employment came to an end, she resolved to move into the shop to manage the business full time. In 2018, they opened a Kiosk in Gaborone, BBS Mall, and also opened another shop in Palapye, where they hired two people. Currently, the business has expanded to different shopping malls and employs several youths. The two partners have trained their employees on how to mix scented oils to produce different perfumes and have also provided their employees with basic training on customer care.

The biggest challenge House of Scents experiences is stiff competition from competitors. To counter the competition, they source the best quality oils in Egypt. They also practice in earnest customer care by addressing customer complaints timely, including replacing customer perfumes if the customer is not happy with the purchased product. House of Scents also conducts customer surveys to assess customer satisfaction. The two partners also attend short courses dealing with the employment laws of Botswana and maintaining good labor relations. The training has kept the business growing, increased staff satisfaction, and opened doors for new business opportunities. The two pay their business liabilities, receive monthly salaries, and invest profit into the business for growth. Badundu says that she uses her salary to support her aged parents and provide necessities to her two children.

On the sidelines, Badundu operates a wedding décor and a personalized gifting business. Badundu attended Tokafala Business Entrepreneurship training offered by Debswana in partnership with the Government of Botswana, De Beers, and Anglo American. She has also benefited from the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women Mentorship Program, which she attended for 1 year. The program helped her develop

business management skills and provided opportunities for networking with a pool of women who attended the program. She has also attended the Young African Leadership Initiative, funded by Barack Obama. The Young African Leadership Initiative training helped her gain community leadership skills. Since 2015, Badundu has been the Chairperson of the Community Relief Day Care Center operated by the Botswana Retired Nurses Association. Children enrolled at the center come from vulnerable families who may be affected or infected with HIV/AIDS, poor parents who may not be working, or who are chronically sick. The children are given a good environment to play and use the library facilities to learn. The children are provided with meals and toiletries while at the center. Lewis Foundation sponsors the center's day-to-day financial running, while the Lady Khama Charitable Trust contributes toiletries, food, and pays utilities for the center. The Blue Lupin Foundation built the Community Library facility, which is popular with all children in the community as they visit to read and borrow books. Badundu says that engaging in this community project is a fulfilling activity as it provides vulnerable children with the opportunity to learn while they receive unconditional love, care, and support despite difficult family moments experienced. Badundu is also one of the organizers of the annual Sanoto Cultural Festival that takes place in Tlokweng village. To conclude the interview, I asked Badundu to provide her opinion on how women's economic empowerment should be enhanced, and she stated that women in Botswana should work hard to earn a living and should not wait for government support, as it cannot reach all women in the four corners of Botswana. After the interview, Badundu walked me out of the House of Scents, where the interview was conducted. Well, I guess the country is blessed to have young women of her caliber and strength.

9. Discussion

9.1 Life's satisfaction to women comes when they shoulder responsibilities with candor

Women who are socioeconomically empowered and have received education and training are in a position to shoulder their responsibilities with candor. If women are intentionally supported with resources and programs, they are likely to work hard to succeed so that they can provide for their families. We met women who learned new skills like yogurt making, making coffee from Motlopi roots, making perfumes from scented oils, and producing drawings and paintings in a quest to lead a fulfilling life. These women cultivated a love for these tasks and put in many hours of hard work to ensure success.

9.2 Women put bread on the table for the family: A quest for well-being and life satisfaction

In this chapter, readers were taken on a journey to visit successful businesses owned by a number of women in Gaborone and the Kweneng District- the journey took readers to meet a woman who is part of a group of ten who make a living out of selling coffee made from the roots of the Motlopi trees; the journey took us next to meet two women who are part of a group of five who ferment pumpkin mixture to sell in weddings and traditional gatherings; next we visited five women who produced yogurt that is flavored from indigenous fruits; then the journey took us to a young woman

who is a tailor and artist and finally, we journeyed to Gaborone to meet a young woman who makes a living by mixing scented oils to produce rich oil perfumes. All these women work hard not just for profit, but we see in them a desire and quest to succeed, motivated by the obligatory responsibility of feeding and clothing the family. These women have children and parents to look after; hence, the crucial reason behind their entrepreneurial acumen and the quest to succeed rests on the desire to help support the family, and subsequently, this provides them with psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

9.3 Women have dual obligations to fulfill: Formal work and performing household chores

The chapter discussed issues of work-life balance and shattering the glass ceiling so that women can climb the career ladder. It is noteworthy to highlight that women who were interviewed, whether working full-time or part-time in the business, had the responsibility of performing household chores in addition to running the business. Despite some of these women working longer hours for more than 8 hours, they also cooked, cleaned, and took care of children and the family after work. This provides light into understanding that women who are employed work for far longer hours than imagined, as household work is also a demanding job in itself. One adult woman in Bhutan stated that;... for a woman to be rated as a 'good wife' one has to be a superwoman, working very hard both at home and in the office, fulfilling every demand of your family members as if we do not have any rights to enjoy [29]. As they desire to climb the corporate ladder and become entrepreneurs, their work-life balance and welfare require rechecking to ensure that they maintain good health. Flexible work hours and periods of relaxation from dual work roles should be encouraged as a way of relief from demanding work roles and responsibilities.

9.4 Through empowerment, women can grow businesses through savings and investments

Women are keen on investing and saving for that rainy day. The women interviewed acquired investment and savings skills for their businesses, and these skills were successfully put into use. White Angels, House of Scents, and Vero's tailoring plow profits back into their business for growth. Women making traditional coffee and fermented melon mixture said they kept small savings for the rainy day. These women participate in various Motshelo group savings schemes so that they reap rewards at year-end despite small profit margins. Masego saves money from the Ipelegeng temporary employment as a contribution toward the monthly Motshelo savings scheme. It is heartwarming knowing that the house Masego built to completion attests to her prudence in financial investment skills, something commendable to the training she received from the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA) and the Department of Out of School Education and Training (DOSET) skills training program. With a savings plan, these women can have life satisfaction knowing that they have kept something for a rainy day to support the family.

9.5 Botswana supports women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment

The Botswana government's support for women's socioeconomic empowerment and entrepreneurship activities is evident in education and skills training programs as

well as leadership positions held by women. Botswana established the Department of Women Affairs to ensure that women's concerns were addressed at the national level [30]. Work done by the government in supporting women financially and providing them with business management skills is evidently seen from the interviews conducted with these budding entrepreneurs. During interviews, some women mentioned that they received financial support from the Department of Gender Affairs under the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs, and from the Youth Development Fund operated by the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Culture Development. The Poverty Eradication Program operated by the Office of the President also provided assistance to women in rural areas through the Ipelegeng program. Besides government support, it is evident that parastatal organizations and the private sector also play an important role as stakeholders equally responsible for driving women's economic empowerment projects. Women also receive financial support from the Mabogo Dinku loan operated by the Citizen Economic Development Agency (CEDA), Women in Business, and local banks. During the interviews, women mentioned that they received entrepreneurship and business skills from different institutions like the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA), Tokafala Mentorship Program, and from the Department of Out of School Education and Training (Doset) skills development training offered by the Ministry of Basic Education. Such training opportunities equipped women with entrepreneurship and business management skills that enhanced chances of business success and growth, including the acquisition of business investment skills. The potential to further women's leadership is also through contextualized leadership development initiatives [30, 31] and through engaging women's nongovernmental organizations.

9.6 The global community supports women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment

Empirical research findings reveal that well-being and life satisfaction domains worldwide are more homogenous in terms of their significance to individuals' happiness than they have differences [32, 33]. Global communities support women's socioeconomic empowerment initiatives, for example, UNESCO, UN Women portfolio, as well as the WHO undertakes skills development initiatives globally in support of different nations and different communities in order to help women reach their full potential. Collaborations between international organizations, governments, the private sector, and other nonprofit organizations remain critical to women's economic empowerment initiatives. For example, projects undertaken by the Arab Gulf States, the SADC region in Africa, and Asia are a testament that support to women through interventions and entrepreneurial initiatives promotes socioeconomic empowerment and subsequently life satisfaction.

10. Conclusion

The chapter deliberately focused on socioeconomic empowerment of women and skills development interventions that helped support and provide women with opportunities to participate in family, community, and national development agendas. Through a desk review, it has evidently been shown that the global world supports women's socioeconomic empowerment and skills development. Globally, through integrated collaborations and networking, women's well-being and life

satisfaction could be improved through intentional interventions and empowerment activities. The chapter also captured the rich narratives provided by women operating businesses in Botswana to affirm that women can be entrepreneurs in their own right. Women who were interviewed came from different educational qualification levels but proved that the quest for business entrepreneurship acumen knows no educational background level but rests specifically on the determination to succeed, resilience, acquisition of skills, and optimism. In the chapter, multistakeholder participation in women's economic empowerment initiatives yielded more fruits as parastatal organizations and the private sector extended a helping hand to work together with governments. The researcher urges governments, especially in Africa, to support women's socioeconomic empowerment and entrepreneurship programs, knowing fully well that profits from these businesses support children and families, translating to feeding the nation. In Setswana, it is often stated that;

“mosadi ke thari ya sechaba”

The literal translation of this proverb is that a woman is the cradle of the nation, thus implying that the nation's growth rests upon women's shoulders. It is the responsibility of women to feed, clothe, and care for the family, thus translating to caring for the whole nation [34]. Therefore, a positive bias toward upscaling women's business initiatives should be viewed as a step toward the fulfillment of national development agendas and the building of sustainability in nations. Yes, the joy derived from socioeconomic empowerment interventions and skills development through responsive government initiatives and partnerships in environments that nurture women's advancement is welcome in the twenty-first century. Business environments should welcome women to the real world of entrepreneurship so that the benefits that translate to value additions to national economic agendas and the achievement of numerous United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are subsequently reaped.

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Section 4

The Future of the Psychology of Wellbeing

Beyond Gratitude Exercises: The Future of Positive Psychology Lies in Transforming Negative Emotions and Habits

Martin Kreienkamp

Abstract

Innovations in the field of positive psychology are rare nowadays, so new research approaches are needed to develop the field further. In the article, the incorporation of therapy effectiveness factors into positive psychology interventions is suggested. Furthermore, it examines the benefits and limitations of the integration of cognitive behavioral therapy methods, psychedelics, breathing techniques like Holotropic Breathwork, or methods from resilience research into positive psychology interventions to enhance well-being. Current interventions often show only small effect sizes in the enhancement of well-being measures and are not designed to help people get rid of unhealthy habits, for example. Therefore, there is still great potential to help people improve their well-being, because all humans have unhealthy habits, negative emotions and dysfunctional thought patterns, which can be transformed into positive emotions with the right techniques. Further research is required to validate these approaches on a larger scale.

Keywords: positive psychology, mindset, well-being intervention, Positive Psychology 2.0, transforming thought patterns, transforming habits, habit change

1. Introduction

The scientific origins of today's positive psychology lie with the representatives of humanistic psychology: A.H. Maslow, C.R. Rogers, G.W. Allport, Warner Wilson, Norman M. Bradburn, and others wrote articles and books on the scientific discussion and measurement of happiness and well-being from a psychological perspective as early as the 1960s. For other researchers at the time, see Cowen and Kilmer [1] and Wissing [2]. Further research was also conducted in the 1980s by Ed Diener and Ruut Veenhoven, among others. But before the research branch of positive psychology was founded at the end of the 1990s, there was actually already a very long cultural history, as the preoccupation with happiness in life is as old as human philosophy. Two and a half thousand years ago, famous minds like Aristotle and Confucius were already devoting themselves to the question of how to live a virtuous

and supposedly right life. In 2000, the two founding fathers of the new branch of research, the psychologists M. E. P. Seligman and M. Csíkszentmihályi, described fields that could be further scientifically investigated using positive psychology: Well-being, contentment, hope and optimism, happiness, flow states, positively connoted personality traits such as extraversion, and several behaviors and virtues generally considered positive [3], such as nurturing social relationships. Further discussion on the emergence and definition of the field of positive psychology can be found, for example, in the articles by Seligman et al. [4] and Lambert et al. [5]. Seligman and colleagues postulated positive psychology as a complementary antithesis to traditional psychology, which had previously focused more on pathological conditions: “The aim of positive psychology is to catalyze a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life” ([6], p. 3).

This was not only a milestone in modern psychology research, but also a demarcation between research into positive emotions and well-being and research into negative emotions and mental illness. However, philosophers have already described how important it is to deal with negative emotions and emotional states: The philosopher Albert Camus considered it desirable that every person should become aware of the absurdity or mortality of life, described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Without accepting their own mortality and the negative emotions associated with it, a person cannot develop a positive and active attitude to life and become happy [7, 8]. Even before him, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, wrote that every person has to adjust to happiness and suffering in life [9]. He describes this in detail in his work *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*. Rousseau locates happiness beyond the suffering that occurs, e.g., due to mistrust, inequality and social ills, or contempt. In Rousseau’s opinion, introspection and self-reflection could help to curb this suffering—promoting behavior in order to return to a more natural existence as a human being and to freedom and independence. Even before him, the philosopher Spinoza explained that only contemplation and self-reflection can help to transform feelings experienced as negative, such as sadness, into joy [10]. In later times, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche also pointed out that only if a person is prepared to accept pain and suffering in order to overcome challenges can they also experience euphoria and happiness [10–12].

From a philosophical point of view, it therefore seems problematic if a person tries to feel only positive emotions and negates their negative thought patterns and feelings. Negative emotions, such as fear, sadness, anger or insecurity, are part of the human experience and carry important information [13]. From an evolutionary perspective, emotions that are perceived as negative can have an important function: Fear protects us from danger or risky behavior, anger can motivate people to redress injustices and sadness helps to process losses, for example. Toxic positivity—i.e., negating or suppressing negative feelings—is a form of dysfunctional emotion management and can lead to physical or mental illness [13, 14]. It therefore makes no sense to only deal with emotions that are experienced as negative in the context of mental illness and therapies. From a scientific point of view, attention should also be paid to the aspects already described by Rousseau and Spinoza, i.e., the contemplative and self-reflective exploration of negative emotions and the possibilities of transforming them into positive evaluations and emotions. Many more people could experience a happy life if they learned to deal with negative emotions and habits in a healthy way.

2. Criticism of the research direction of positive psychology

In addition, there are further points of criticism of the research direction of positive psychology, such as (a) the lack of a coherent theoretical framework and an overarching guiding theory of positive psychology, as Seligman's PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) model only picks out a few arbitrary aspects of human well-being. (b) In addition, a variety of terms and instruments are used (e.g., happiness, well-being, satisfaction, psychological well-being, quality of life, positive development), some of which are not clearly or uniformly defined and differentiated from one another. Critical researchers have noted that (c) a large number of intervention studies in the field of positive psychology have only been conducted with students or with only small numbers of cases or (d) only in Western societies or (e) that old ideas are sold as new (see, for example, [2, 15, 16]). There are also (f) replication studies (e.g., by Mongrain and Anselmo-Matthews [17]) that show that positive psychology interventions only work to a limited extent. These points of criticism of the research area cannot all be dealt with here, but there have already been further developments in the field of positive psychology in the direction of research into negative emotions as well, not just interventions for positive emotions. Unfortunately, these have been very limited and, like many other efforts to refute the criticisms of research in the field of positive psychology, have come to nothing. The field of positive psychology therefore also needs further development in terms of content.

3. Introduction to positive psychology 2.0

Researcher Paul Wong advocates taking into account the dialectical interaction between positive and negative experiences. In an article in 2011, he coined the term Positive Psychology 2.0. By this he means, among other things, that the complex interactions between different types of emotions should not go unnoticed [18]. The so-called second wave in the field of positive psychology is also about recognizing that positive feelings can arise from supposedly negative life events or the processing of these. Alongside Wong, this was also described by researchers Lomas and Ivztan as a further development of positive psychology [2]. This is because positive behaviors can also arise from negative life experiences as a conclusion, not only in situations of posttraumatic growth. Therapies (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy) can also include methods and exercises to find meaning in past events perceived as negative, as well as exercises to strengthen self-efficacy by overcoming victimization. The so-called second wave of positive psychology research strives to promote a balanced understanding of human well-being, which includes dealing with both positive and negative feelings and provides a holistic foundation for personal growth. So one of the points made by critics of positive psychology seems to be history. But that is not true.

Positive psychology interventions serve to stimulate positive thoughts, behaviors and emotions and are thus intended to contribute to an increase in happiness, both in healthy individuals and in clinical populations [19]. This can also reduce feelings of loneliness, brooding or a negative self-view, among other things [19, 20]. A comprehensive literature review by Miñoza et al. [21] showed that interventions and exercises from the field of positive psychology as a treatment method can help to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. In addition, depending on the exercise

used, life satisfaction or the frequency of positive emotions is also increased. There are also psychotherapies that are either intended as a supplement to traditional psychotherapy, such as *Well-Being Therapy* [22] with exercises for emotionally positive activities, and psychotherapies that already contain a large proportion of positive psychology exercises, such as *Quality of Life Therapy* [23]. For these two forms, as well as other forms of therapy that have been supplemented with exercises from the field of positive psychology, such as *positive psychotherapy* or *positive behavioral therapy*, there are usually only evaluations with small numbers of cases and therefore no statistically reliable statements [24, 25]. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that positive psychology interventions can help to reduce emotions that are perceived as negative and allow positive emotions to emerge more frequently. In these interventions and new forms of therapy, however, exercises from the field of positive psychology are either used on their own or embedded in existing clinical psychology interventions. But what has not yet been researched:

(1) In-depth methods of clinical psychology embedded in interventions of positive psychology and (2) exercises that combine methods of clinical psychology and positive psychology into an overall exercise. Such exercises and interventions could be even more successful in promoting positive emotions and life satisfaction by better processing negatively experienced emotions and transforming them into neutral or positive emotional states. This is ultimately what Wong, Lomas and Ivztan called for as a further development of positive psychology. As described in the Introduction here, toxic positivity can quickly lead to physical or mental illness [13, 14]. It is therefore considered to be the best direction for the further development of this branch of research if methods are developed that could work through deep-seated negative feelings, e.g., from difficult childhood experiences or other forms of negative experiences, or even traumas, and transform or convert them into neutral or positive response patterns. The aim is still to increase feelings of happiness, satisfaction and well-being, but not by reinforcing them, but by integrating and transforming negative emotions. An example could be that someone learns to develop from attachment anxiety to a neutral view of stable attachments and ultimately even experiences positive feelings such as joy or love when entering into a long-term partnership.

4. From emotional avoidance to positive experience

But this is precisely the crux of the matter: most people are reluctant to deal with their negative feelings. Avoidance has also been given a name, the theory of emotional avoidance. By consciously experiencing and accepting emotions, people could develop in a more emotionally stable way and gain maturity in life. Only by recognizing the necessity of emotions that are perceived as negative can people take full personal responsibility and conscious emotional control mechanisms into their own hands so that they can freely decide how they want to act in a given situation. Rejecting negative emotions, on the other hand, increases the risk of illness and leads to even more negative feelings in the long term, as described above. In addition to this, Kazimierz Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration states that people can often reach a deeper level of psychological development through crises and inner conflicts if they process them well. Negative emotions are not the problem in this process, but the means of transformation. The situation is similar in the area of posttraumatic growth: Downstream positive mental changes after a negatively incisive life event are meant. The positive changes can include, for example, an improved sense of meaning

in life as well as, for example, more compassion for others or increased self-efficacy in dealing with challenges [26–28].

Ancient philosophies and theologies, such as Buddhism, Taoism, Brahmanism and Stoicism, already describe the need to engage with the entire spectrum of human emotions. A modern theory on this is Susan David's concept of emotional agility. She describes an emotionally agile mindset as a way of thinking that does not evaluate emotions as good or bad, but rather experiences them flexibly and consciously and reacts to them. However, in order to stop the automatic, unconscious evaluations and categorizations into positive or negative emotions, you need to be permanently mindful and monotask your own tasks in everyday life. However, no one can maintain such a concentrated focus over the long term, as distractions, illness, tiredness and concentration problems can affect anyone. Mind-wandering, i.e., wandering off and thinking about all sorts of things, is something that everyone experiences from time to time. Living permanently in a state of emotional agility is therefore probably impossible. A different approach is therefore needed to deal with negative emotions in a healthy way. Instead of paying attention to negative emotions in a permanent focus of perception, it would also be possible to change the perception of negative emotions as such depending on the situation. This means changing cognitions and thought patterns about situations, people or objects so that negative feelings and evaluations no longer arise when we think about or encounter them. Attributional emotion theories (e.g., by Meinong or Lazarus as well as those by Weiner) are the central approaches in emotion psychology today. According to these theories, a person's emotions and behavior depend on how they evaluate an object or a situation. The individual's interpretation and evaluation of their own wishes and goals play a decisive role in the development of emotions and their intensity. Cognitions, i.e., perceptions and thought patterns, determine our emotional behavior. This means that human evaluations turn the emotions that arise into negative experiences. Anger or sadness, for example, is not negative per se, but simply an emerging emotion. The rejection or the desire not to feel them only makes them stronger, the acceptance of emotions simply helps to perceive them and quickly return to neutral composure or to no longer interpret them fundamentally as negative [13, 29].

To summarize, it can therefore be stated: So, in order to avoid being plagued with the same unloved negative feelings over and over again, most people prefer to avoid mentally dealing with their feelings and emotions, even if they know that this can make them happier and wiser. An emotionally agile mindset could help in dealing with recurring negative feelings, but this is reserved for long-time meditation gurus, if at all, as such an immense focus of concentration is not possible for the vast majority of people. If you want to overcome toxic positivity or emotional repression in order to achieve more happiness, contentment and well-being in the long term, then the only way seems to be to fundamentally reflect on and change your individual interpretation and evaluation of people or situations instead. To change perceptions and thought patterns, there are currently only methods from clinical psychology or coaching.

5. Well-being is more than just the absence of illness

The question now arises as to whether it is not enough to address pathological symptoms and mental illnesses with the help of clinical psychology and therapy methods and to simply promote well-being with positive psychology exercises. It is not enough, because using a confirmatory factor analysis with data from the MIDUS

(Midlife in the United States Surveys) studies, Keyes [30] was able to demonstrate that mental or psychological health is more than just the absence of mental illness. Both are separate factors in his calculations, i.e., there is another area between the area of pathological conditions and mental illnesses and the area of great well-being. This middle segment of the health spectrum between mental illness and great well-being, so to speak, is where most people find themselves emotionally. Only when several aspects, such as self-acceptance, having goals in life, autonomy, positive social relationships, etc., are experienced (see more in [30], p. 91), can we speak of mental health in the sense of happiness, according to Keyes. Wood and Tarrier [31] also argue that happiness and depression exist on the same continuum and confirm this using a confirmatory factor analysis. They are the two ends of one spectrum. According to the Gaussian normal distribution, most people are located where the mean or average lies on this spectrum. This means that many people are still far from their optimal well-being. Martin Seligman hoped that with a few exercises in positive psychology, people would be able to achieve a dream life with a very high level of well-being and happiness from what could be described as a normal life [6]. However, reviews, e.g., by Sin and Lyubomirsky [20], show on average only slight improvements in feelings of happiness, satisfaction and well-being among participants in positive psychology interventions. Quinlan et al. [32], Seligman et al. [4], Sin and Lyubomirsky [20] and Sastre et al. [33] recorded constant values without change in a before-and-after comparison of positive psychology interventions and training. There are therefore interventions from the field of positive psychology that have good effects, while others do not lead to improvements in well-being.

The avoidance of dealing with one's own feelings and emotions therefore applies to a large number of people who, according to the normal distribution in the health spectrum, are somewhere between mentally ill and very high life satisfaction, but in the middle. Since current positive psychology interventions are not able to help many people achieve great happiness, other methods are needed. These other currently available methods are methods from clinical psychology or the coaching sector for working through feelings, perceptions and thought patterns. As described, these methods should therefore either be embedded in positive psychology interventions or mixed with exercises from positive psychology.

6. Transforming thought patterns and habits: Ways to more satisfaction and health

There are approaches to mixing activities from the field of positive psychology and forms of therapy, such as the therapies already mentioned. Mindfulness and acceptance practices can also help people to focus not only on the positive, but also to accept the negative with compassion. Examples of this are acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) or mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). Acceptance and commitment therapy uses methods, such as reinforcing strengths, activating existing resources, training mindfulness and learning, to accept critical situations in order to ultimately promote the patient's sense of happiness and change behavioral or thinking habits [34]. These positive psychology exercises are alternated with classic therapy techniques such as the Socratic Dialogue. This is a step forward in blending the techniques of the two fields of psychology to help the mentally ill. But there is still a lack of blending the techniques from both fields for many people who are not mentally ill, but not very happy either.

In order to make methods of clinical psychology and therapy research accessible to mentally healthy people and to embed them in new exercises of positive psychology, an understanding of therapy effect factors is required. Grawe [35] names five generally important aspects that serve as effective factors in many forms of therapy: Resource activation (activating the patient's physical abilities, psychological strengths and social resources), problem actualization (raising awareness and increasing perception of problematic situations and views, sometimes even in an emotional, experiential way, e.g., in role-playing games, and thus increasing the meaning of the therapy) in role plays and thus changes in meaning, problem-solving (support in concrete problem-solving), motivational clarification (showing the background, e.g., on the basis of lived values and biographical origins of the problematic behavior) and therapy relationship (quality of the relationship between the psychotherapist and the patient). This list can be expanded by means of detailed literature reviews by Pfammatter et al. [36] and Pfammatter and Tschacher [37] as well as Pfammatter and Tschacher [38]. Summarized from the studies by Pfammatter and Tschacher [38] and Grawe [35], the following self-compiled list results:

- Problem actualization: Awareness and insight into the problematic views and previous behaviors that lead to negative emotions, improved self-perception and perception of others in relation to the emergence of negative emotions, review of the previous self-image and its causes, multi-perspective thinking about situations and patterns of action, conscious reflection and dealing with one's own problems cognitively and emotionally, psychoeducation about human development and general life challenges
- Problem-solving: Increasing topic-specific self-efficacy expectations, activating resources (e.g., skills, strengths, social contacts), catharsis through the release of suppressed emotions, affective experience of negative emotions in a safe setting and thus mitigating them, desensitization of emotional reactions through repeated experience, corrective and new emotional connections with the topic, e.g., through contrasting techniques, learning how to deal with negative emotions in a safe setting and thus mitigating them, through contrasting techniques, learning improved emotion regulation strategies, mindfulness training for mindful perception without judging situations and emotions, expansion of behavioral skills, successful problem-solving experiences through experiencing new behaviors
- Therapy relationship: a positive therapy relationship or basis of trust and sympathy between the psychotherapist and the patient, experiencing understanding and empathy in relation to one's own problem issues, building hope for improvement, increasing the patient's willingness to change, active patient participation in the exercises

The hypothesis is that, first, these general impact factors in psychotherapy are just as useful in positive psychology interventions, which means that these aspects should also be taken into account in the content and didactic design of exercises and training in the field of positive psychology in order to achieve greater effectiveness of the interventions.

The second hypothesis is that it is necessary to consciously address negative feelings as well as dysfunctional perceptions and thought patterns using methods and exercises consisting of a mixture of techniques from positive psychology and therapy research in order to get people out of the middle of the health continuum and to achieve a very high level of life satisfaction.

Recognizing that many people around the world could be much happier (see, for example, the World Happiness Report or the Eurobarometer surveys) helps to understand that more methods are needed to make people happier and more satisfied. For example, all people have the problem of unhealthy habits in common: some eat too many sweets, others do too little exercise, others drink too much alcohol, while some procrastinate on important tasks. As described in the attributional emotion theories, the negative emotions and problematic behaviors largely depend on inappropriate mindsets that an individual has. Wood and Neal [39] describe that this also applies to habits, as habits are formed through the gradual learning of new associations (see also Hebb's learning rule). Schwartz [40] emphasizes that habits are based on thought patterns and emotional evaluations of people or situations. By repeatedly thinking and experiencing the same thought patterns, thought routines or learned habits are formed, which then result in the same behavior patterns, e.g., being constantly on the cell phone, using alcohol to reduce shyness or stress, buying clothes to feel good, etc. In their systematic review, Gardner and de Bruijn [41] find evidence that habits strongly influence behavioral intentions and that habits play a major role in the development of health-promoting behavior, in addition to other aspects such as current mood. It is therefore essentially about establishing new associative ways of thinking in order to ultimately make mentally healthy people even healthier, more successful and more satisfied with their lives. However, most people are not able to change their thought patterns on their own. Letting go of unhealthy habits or establishing new habits is a difficult process. In a study with more than 3000 participants, Wiseman [42] found that after 1 year, only 12% had managed to implement their New Year's resolution and stick to it for a year. In a smaller study, Norcross and Vangarelli [43] were already able to show that many people do not manage to build new habits, as only 19% of participants were still able to keep their New Year's promises after 2 years. For example, regular exercise or sport requires learned habits. According to Phillips et al. [44], motivation or positive rewards alone are not enough for most people to be able to implement a new health behavior permanently. Duhigg [45] also writes on the basis of several studies that the key to changing a habit is changing beliefs. He also notes that at least 40% of our daily actions are habitual and not based on conscious decisions. For him, habits are not just regular behaviors, but also help to define our personality. People identify themselves as smokers, athletes, etc., so to speak.

So, there is great potential if there were methods that could help people successfully break their unhealthy habits or develop healthy habits. Most people do not go to a therapist for this, but try New Year's resolutions or similar. However, as studies have shown, most people fail, partly because they are unable to change their thought patterns and beliefs themselves. However, this is a major key to improving the well-being of many people. For example, overcoming difficult emotions and inappropriate thought patterns can be an opportunity for personal and psychological transformation, fear can become courage or living through grief can lead to a deeper sense of purpose. For this to happen, people must be prepared to address their issue, and a transformation of feelings and thought patterns is crucial for this.

7. From negative emotions to positive growth: Innovative methods of psychology

The second hypothesis is about consciously transforming negative feelings and dysfunctional thought patterns by means of exercises consisting of a mixture

of techniques from positive psychology and therapy research. In principle, this is possible because brains and their synaptic connections can be changed throughout a person's life. Familiar thought patterns and typical behaviors as well as automatically occurring emotional reactions can be relearned, as research on neuroplasticity shows. Of course, this requires more than just a low level of self-efficacy, the knowledge that change is possible, a fundamental willingness to change and a desire to learn [46]. This willingness can also be summarized under the term *growth mindset*. This refers to seeing negative emotions as a learning opportunity in life and the will to develop further, even if this is associated with challenges [46]. The fear of failure is low and the commitment to actively adapt to challenging situations is high. In contrast, people with a fixed mindset think that their abilities cannot be changed and that their lives are largely controlled by fate or chance. Further summaries and studies on this topic can be found in Carol S. Dweck, who has been researching this topic for a long time [47]. People with a growth mindset are therefore more willing to utilize the neuroplasticity of their brain and to deal with negative feelings for personal development.

Here are some different techniques and ways that people can get in touch with their negative feelings and dysfunctional thought patterns instead of therapy and that could be incorporated into positive psychology interventions to further develop the field of positive psychology, e.g., to transform negative habits:

1. Holotropic breathing: As early as 1995, Metcalf [48] demonstrated in a non-peer-reviewed study that the technique of holotropic breathing may be an effective therapeutic tool for the treatment of alcoholism and drug addiction. At the same time, he found reductions in depression and anxiety parameters as well as an improvement in self-esteem in the 20 patients based on the small sample. In a more recent study, Geum [49] found moderate, positive correlations between Holotropic Breathwork and sense of purpose and perceived quality of life. These two studies are not yet proof, but suggest that Holotropic Breathwork can help to reduce or overcome negative emotions and can also increase positive emotions. For the ancient and recent history of hyperventilation and holotropic breathing, see Fincham et al. [50]. They also describe different variants, of which Holotropic Grof Breathwork, Rebirthing Breathwork and Wim Hof Breathing are the best known in modern times. High-ventilation breathing or holotropic breathing involves changing states of consciousness by means of deep and rapid breaths, sometimes mixed with pauses in breathing. The modulation of neurometabolic parameters and interoceptive sensory systems can often lead to deep trance and meditative or even psychedelic states of consciousness—depending on the method and duration of the exercise, according to Fincham et al. [50]. Typical physical symptoms that occur include sweating, dizziness, light-headedness, paresthesias on the skin, palpitations, shakiness, a dry mouth, crying or cathartic sounds, such as laughing, screaming, or moaning. In summary, Fincham et al. [50] describe that initial studies show improvements in anxiety and trauma-related disorders, as well as reductions in subjectively experienced stress or symptoms of depression. Nevertheless, much more research is still needed in this area. Many more articles and research on this can be found, for example, in Puente et al. [51].
2. Psilocybin and other psychedelics: Psilocybin is the active ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms and causes expanded states of consciousness as well as partial visual hallucinations, uncontrolled laughter, joy, euphoria, but dizziness, vomiting or panic attacks can also occur [52]. Interestingly, Bahi et al. [53] write in their

study with 20 test subjects that the measured experiences in a group of volunteers who underwent a one-off 45-minutes session in Holotropic Breathwork were comparable in effect to experiences after medium to high doses of psilocybin. The expansion of consciousness through psychedelics such as psychedelic mushrooms brings to light insights from the preconscious or long-term memory. Thus, when used correctly, repressed emotions and negative thought patterns can be retrieved and processed [54, 55]. Neuroplastic restructuring can occur quickly. An altered perception and ability to regulate emotions provide a greater opportunity for concentrated introspection, so that in a meta-analysis by Vargas et al. [52], consumers came to the conclusion that they were able to emotionally detach themselves from difficult life events while intoxicated and felt increased confidence and serenity in their ability to control their lives. Walther and van Schie [55] describe the same in their review paper: Psychedelics, such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), psilocybin, ayahuasca, etc., led to catharsis in study participants, as the drugs led on average to improvements in mental well-being and reductions in psychopathological symptoms. According to Walther and van Schie [55], the awareness and intense experience of previously barely or not at all conscious cognitions and emotions can evoke deep insights, relief and the release of negative emotions. In a systematic review, Fuentes et al. [56] also attribute such effects to LSD, saying that in addition to working through negative emotions such as anxiety, it would even be suitable for the treatment of addictions such as tobacco addiction or alcohol addiction. In an intervention study with ayahuasca, Khubsing et al. [57] also reported trance-like states and increased values in self-compassion and well-being measurements. There is therefore a whole range of psychedelics that could be suitable for allowing people to process negative emotions and experience more positive emotions in a safe setting and at an appropriate dose. More on this can be found in Walther and van Schie [55] or earlier works, for example, the overview book by Jungaberle [58] on psychedelic drugs such as LSD or MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) and their use as new therapy methods. Even if these psychedelics still need to be tested far more, this can be combined with microdosing methods, for example, and possibly also with positive psychology interventions.

3. The Wim Hof method: This method is named after its founder, Wim Hof. It is a combination of a breathing technique that involves intermittent hypoxia, i.e., repeated exposure to oxygen deficiency, and cold showers (or, in the more difficult version, ice baths) as well as a few exercises from the fields of yoga and meditation [59–61]. The Wim Hof method uses a form of holotropic breathing as a breathing technique, which is alternated with oxygen pauses or holding the breath for several minutes. Blades et al. [59] describe an intervention study with 41 female participants who experienced a reduction in depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms as well as a reduction in feelings of stress and negative emotions as a result of the Wim Hof intervention. These improvements were maintained at the 3-month follow-up. Kopplin and Rosenthal [60] also found moderate to strong stress reduction effects in their Wim Hof test study. However, the 86 participants in their study were divided into four study arms, so that the sample with the Wim Hof exercises remained small. Ketelhut et al. [62] also only conducted their study with a small intervention group of just over 20 people. However, they were unable to measure any physical or psychological (e.g., stress measurements) changes based on various parameters after this short form of the Wim Hof intervention. In a systematic review, Almahayni and Hammond [63] come to the conclusion that the

Wim Hof exercises can reduce inflammatory markers in the body and that stress is probably also reduced. However, the results still need to be investigated further due to the different durations of implementation in the studies and the small number of cases. Based on measurements of brain chemistry with markers and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) procedures, Muzik et al. [61] were able to determine improvements in mood and anxiety symptoms through regular application of the Wim Hof methods. It therefore appears that these methods, like psychedelics or holotropic breathing, are also able to change people's feelings in the long term.

More research is currently needed in all three areas described in order to systematically record and clarify clearer influencing factors, modes of action, areas of application and framework conditions for the applications. However, all three areas give reason to hope that new therapeutic options can be created in the future, as well as intervention options for healthy people. The research field of positive psychology could also benefit from this.

The other hypothesis, that general impact factors of psychotherapies are just as useful in the content and didactic design of positive psychology interventions, can be demonstrated by research and interventions from the field of resilience research. Interventions and exercises from both the field of positive psychology and clinical psychology are already being used in resilience research. Resilience can be seen as mental resistance to negative life events or stress [64]. Resilient behavior involves using healthy coping strategies, i.e., not using alcohol, for example, to reduce one's own stress, but using healthy behaviors such as meditation or exercise. However, people often use a variety of coping mechanisms, not just one way to deal with stress in everyday life. The COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) letter is a short version of the longer COPE questionnaire on coping strategies. Prinz et al. [65] calculate a factor analysis with Varimax rotation for a study in order to be able to break down the items of the Brief COPE questionnaire into a few factors. They were able to extract three factors: active-functional coping (e.g., asking others for advice or help or looking up solutions), cognitive-functional coping (e.g., finding meaning in negative life events or reacting to negative events with humor) and dysfunctional coping (blaming oneself strongly, drinking alcohol as a solution, etc.). If people are made aware of these healthy and unhealthy coping strategies, they can try to get out of their behavioral automatisms. The effective factors of therapies discussed can also be used in resilience and positive psychology training. By discussing coping strategies, awareness and insight into the problematic views and previous behaviors would take place. There is also, for example, the coping style of positive reframing, which helps people to find meaning in negative life events. This encourages multi-perspective thinking about situations and patterns of action. Psychoeducation about the frequency of negative life events can also be provided by resilience research, see research by George Bonanno. Exercises can also be found in resilience training on the topics of accepting negative emotions, strengthening self-efficacy expectations, learning improved emotion regulation strategies and activating resources (see [66, 67]). The systematic review by Helmreich et al. [66] and the high effect sizes in the intervention study by Kreienkamp et al. [67] suggest that a large number of therapy effect factors are already included as exercises in resilience studies. These should now be combined more with positive psychology interventions in the future. Instead of distracting themselves with shopping addiction, alcohol, social media distractions, escaping into a constant hectic pace, etc., many people could learn how to successfully deal with stress and negative emotions and ultimately evoke more positive emotions.

8. The need for new methods of positive psychology for long-term well-being

The assumption that general effectiveness factors of psychotherapies are just as useful in positive psychology interventions in order to achieve a higher effectiveness of the interventions seems to be given, as some of these factors are already used in studies on resilience. These aspects could therefore also be used in positive psychology interventions. Some aspects such as psychoeducation or activating resources are easy to implement in many types of interventions, other aspects such as desensitization of emotional reactions through repeated experience or catharsis through the release of suppressed emotions are not possible with all types of interventions, and probably only with a few at least.

The second hypothesis of this article is about the possibility of transforming negative feelings and dysfunctional thought patterns through a combination of positive psychology techniques and therapy research. Studies on neuroplasticity show that the brain can change throughout life. People with a growth mindset recognize negative emotions as learning opportunities and are more willing to deal with these negative emotions decisively. In this context, methods such as holotropic breathing, psychedelics such as psilocybin and combined exercises such as the Wim Hof method could serve as possible ways of processing and transforming negative emotions. Initial studies show positive effects of these methods on anxiety, depression symptoms, stress perception and parameters of well-being, although more research is still needed. The field of positive psychology research could benefit from these techniques to expand interventions to promote well-being.

The first interventions that attempt to incorporate the general effectiveness factors of psychotherapies into positive psychology interventions already exist. Interventions by Kreienkamp [34], Kreienkamp et al. [67] and Kreienkamp [68] already use a large number of the impact factors. The general effectiveness factors of psychotherapies mentioned in the methods section are already used in the studies, with the exception of the two aspects of establishing a positive therapeutic relationship or basis of trust between the psychotherapist and the patient and active patient participation in the exercises. In addition, the two interventions by Kreienkamp et al. [67] and Kreienkamp [68] also looked at how the aspects of catharsis through the release of suppressed emotions, affective experience of negative emotions in a safe setting and thus mitigation of these, desensitization of emotional reactions through repeated experience, corrective and new emotional connections with the topic, e.g., through contrasting techniques, can be used more intensively. Advanced methods are required in order to have profound emotional experiences that have a corrective effect. For these interventions, intervention exercises have been developed and tested over many years, which include holotropic breathing from the field of breathing therapy with mindfulness exercises and meditation techniques as well as techniques from behavioral therapy (e.g., Socratic Dialogue) and emotional contrasting techniques. Resilience exercises are also incorporated into the interventions and are combined with exercises from positive psychology (e.g., gratitude exercises) to create an exercise. The aim of the training is to work with negative emotions, not to avoid them, but to work through them and feel more positive emotions as a result. This article has already discussed that holotropic breathing can have a similar effect to a psychedelic trip. These breathing techniques were modified for the studies so that they can be used more easily and safely, i.e., without physical risk and with mental exit options. In just a few minutes, the participants achieve a trance state, in which they can reflect on and work through their preconscious thought patterns and emotions on certain topics using guided meditations. Methods from resilience research

(several positive emotion regulation strategies: Reevaluating one's thoughts, acceptance, expressing feelings, solving problems through goal setting and working out solution steps, and mindfulness), methods from positive psychology (method for relaxation and gratitude), methods from mindfulness and meditation techniques (breathing therapy techniques for deepened states of meditation, techniques for guided meditation), methods from the field of systemic coaching (setting coaching goals, questions for behavioral reflection), methods from the field of cognitive behavioral therapy (free association, Socratic Dialogue) and others such as psychoeducation. Psychoeducation was mixed together and used to create a longer, approximately 3-hour exercise, which was successfully applied in both studies. The results show strong effect sizes in the improvement of several measures of well-being, such as life satisfaction, resilience, optimism, self-esteem and a strong reduction in perceived stress and psychosomatic symptoms.

One limitation is that these experimental exercises have not yet been tested on representative samples and the exercises are embedded in courses on resilience and positive psychology, i.e., they have not yet been tested individually. Nevertheless, these and other methods (e.g., reframing, meditation practices) can be used in the future, for example, for (a) very rapid personality development, which could shorten the normal span of development over a lifetime to just a few months or years. In this way, states of high life satisfaction and wisdom could already be achieved in young adulthood. Another application scenario (b) is that such interventions could perhaps be used to treat clinically mentally ill people much more quickly, so that depression, for example, could be treated in just a few months instead of years. A third variant (c) of the application could be that, through profound emotional and behavioral changes, people would be able to successfully and permanently abandon negative habits such as the desire for unhealthy food, brooding and problems falling asleep, procrastination with important tasks, not exercising regularly, etc., i.e., not just the few 10–20% of people who manage to stick to New Year's resolutions or habit changes.

The pursuit of happiness can lead to people feeling overloaded, stressed, depressed or anxious, see Toxic positivity. Platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, often convey unrealistic images of happiness or an ideal everyday life. The same applies to advice literature, which pretends that everyone can always be happy and successful. Negative emotions are a natural part of life and avoiding them can lead to alienation. The methods presented offer promising approaches for working with negative emotions, transforming them and increasing positive emotions. Holotropic Breathwork, psychedelics and the Wim Hof method, as well as other innovative methods presented here, have the potential to bring about deep emotional and cognitive changes, but still require more extensive research. These techniques could be used in therapy as well as in positive psychology interventions to help people deal with stress and negative feelings and strengthen their emotional well-being. The field of positive psychology can benefit from a more holistic approach in the future and focuses not only on increasing positive emotions across disciplines, but also on the transformative power of negative emotions toward greater well-being and life satisfaction [69], for example in the area of habit change.

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Advances in the Psychology of Well-Being explores the cutting edge of psychological science in a world increasingly in need of hope, resilience, and meaning. This academic volume brings together leading research on how to measure well-being more effectively, examines populations where happiness and flourishing are especially vital, and redefines what it means to live a psychologically healthy life. Moving beyond a deficit-based model, this work calls for a future in which psychology prioritizes human potential, joy, and fulfillment over pathology alone. As global mental health challenges rise, the science of well-being offers not just solutions but a new direction. This is the future of psychology: one centered on thriving, not just surviving, a vital resource for today and tomorrow.

*Usha Iyer-Raniga,
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