

### Positive Psychology – Lecture 3

Good morning, everyone. This semester has started, officially today. Glad to see you here. Just a couple of announcement and also hi to the extension school students. Last time we say hi to New Zealand. Today we are saying hi to Ireland. In terms of sectioning for the undergrads and graduate students here, you'll get an email from Sean Achor tomorrow. And you'll put in your section preference. We are sectioning this weekend.

So it will be important that you submit your top preferences. And next week we are starting. Last time, if you remember the question that we ask, the guiding question was "why positive psychology?" And I mentioned three reasons, Why we need it as an independent field as opposed to just being "well, let's do some studies on happiness, on relationships" as it is always being done? The reason why we need positive psychology is to shift the pendulum from the 21:1 ratio that we have today: for every one study on depression or anxiety, we have 21 studies on-- sorry, for one study on happiness or wellbeing, we have 21 studies on depression and anxiety. We want to shift the pendulum slightly. And I mentioned three reason why we want to shift this pendulum despite the fact that there are rising levels of depression around the world, that anxiety has become epidemic globally— on college campuses in United States, China, Australia, UK. Despite that fact, I argue that we need to shift the pendulum and do more "positive research", or in other words, research that focuses on what works. And the reason is— the first reason that we gave and we are just finishing up is because the question that we ask, whether it's the research questions that we ask, or the questions that we ask of ourselves, or our partners, matter. And if our only questions, or primarily our questions are "what is not working? What is the problem? Why are so many kids failing as a result of their circumstances?" If we only ask these questions, we will miss, literally miss an important part of reality, just like you missed

the children on the bus in the exercise. Most of you did. And if we also ask the positive question, then some new possibilities, new quests open up, just like they did for the researchers when they started to ask no longer "why do so many individuals fail?" but started to ask "what do some individuals do and succeed? Why do some individuals succeed despite the unfavorable circumstances?"

And then we have the story of Marva Collins, who exemplifies so many of themes that we'll talk about throughout the course. What Marva Collins did was help her students shift from the passive victim— you are victims of your circumstances, of your upbringing, neighborhood ,country, whatever it is—from a passive victim to an active agent. Yes, it's difficult. It's tough. It's unfair. However, it's your responsibility. No one is coming. It's up to you to make that difference in your life. And she made a difference to thousands of people's lives and continues to do so. In other words, if we look at the case of Chicago school system where Marva Collins was teaching, the conventional, traditional question was-- if you remember— "how can we keep these students in school for as long as possible? How can we keep them in school beyond the age of 10 or 12 so that they don't join street gangs? So that they are not hurt by drugs or crime?" "How can we keep them safe at school?"— An important question to ask. However, not enough. Marva Collins comes along and reframes the question. And her question becomes "how can we cultivate the seed of greatness in our student?" And that, once again, made all the difference, because she saw the seed of greatness in each student. She saw the strength, the virtues in each single student. A seed, a strength, a virtue, a competence that other teachers did not see, because they did not ask this question; because they asked, metaphorically speaking, "how many geometric shapes do you see on the screen?" And they completely missed the children on the bus. They completely missed the seed of greatness. And when we don't see the seed of greatness, when we don't water it and shed a light on it, it withers and dies, which is unfortunately the fate of most human potential.

Wherever we go, that is the fate of most human potential— interpersonally, relationships, in most organizations, in most universities, in most individuals. Questions make a difference, which is why it is also important to ask the positive psychology question, which is the salutogenic question: "What is source of health? What is the source of success? What is the source of wellbeing?" So that's the first reason. The second reason— before I go to the second reason, if Marva Collins is here today, here's the question she would be asking us: "How can we cultivate the seed of greatness in ourselves and families, in our communities and organizations, in our nation and in our world?" When we ask this question-- this very important question, suddenly we see possibilities that we didn't see before. Second reason for having positive psychology's field of study and focusing on what works and focusing on research in happiness, relationships and wellbeing is because happiness does not spontaneously rise when take unhappiness away. Now happiness and unhappiness, or happiness and neurosis, psychosis and depression, are interconnected, of course. It's very difficult to be happy if we are experiencing severe depression or anxiety. So they are certainly interconnected. However, just getting rid of the anxiety and the depression will not in and of itself make us happy, which is the conventional wisdom today, which is the conventional wisdom of many psychologists practicing psychologies— "Well, let's just get rid of that depression and everything will be fine." It won't.

The analogy to explain this is think about the ability to enjoy food. A gourmet meal. Now if we have indigestion, it's very difficult to enjoy food. So yes, we first need to get rid of the indigestion. However, that in and of itself does not guarantee us that we enjoy food. We have to go out and eat the gourmet food to enjoy it. Just getting rid of indigestion is not sufficient. We need the next step. In many ways you can look at most of our experiences, psychological effective experiences on a continuum, where some of them fall below the zero, the negative experiences or the

painful experiences and the positive or the pleasurable experiences between the zero and the positive. Neurosis, anger, anxiety, depression, psychosis— to name a few-- on the negative side, the painful side; wellbeing, satisfaction, joy, excitement, happiness on the other side which is the side of positive psychology studies. Again, getting rid of the negative does not guarantee us the positive, which is why already in the 1940s, David Henry Thoreau (should be Henry David Thoreau), wrote that most men lead lives of quiet desperation. It's Ok. There's nothing really wrong. But it's just somewhere there in the words of Pink Floyd "people are comfortably numb". Comfortably numb. Not enough. How can we get beyond that "comfortably numb"? How can we get beyond that "quiet desperation"? To excitement, to joy, to happiness? In order to do that, we need to cultivate these traits. Once again, they don't spontaneously emerge once the painful experiences go away. And that is why we need positive psychology. Positive psychology essentially focuses on the health model, Salutogenesis. What is the source of health, physical, psychological, emotional? How do we get people to flourish, intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, interpersonally, intra-personally? How do we get them to thrive beyond just getting rid of what is not working in their lives?

And under that model we see, to extremes on many levels. Here, the first level: do we focus on weaknesses, which is the disease model, say let's get rid of weaknesses? Or do we focus on strength? While you ask people this question, and this was done by the Gallup organization. A poll-- global poll, whether it's in Japan, China, United States or Europe: most people think that it's more important to focus on their weaknesses if they are to succeed. Big mistake. The people who focus primarily, not only-- remember the "also"— who shift the pendulum, who focus more on their strength, are not only happier, they are also, on the long run, more successful. It applies to leadership as well. Positive psychology says let's focus also on our strength at least as much. In an organization, as well as on the individual level, are we focusing

most on overcoming deficiencies or building the competencies— what we are good at-- and getting better at it? What our natural inclination, individually or organizationally— do we focus on that and then build on that? Again, tie to success as well as wellbeing, if we are more toward the positive side. How do we live our lives? Running away from painful experiences? Or actively seeking pleasure? Running away from unhappiness? Or adhering to the Declaration (Declaration of Independence) and pursuing happiness?

Now that may look quite similar-- for example, someone may be working 80 hours a week, running away from something-- running away from issues at home, running away from dealing intra-personal issues and then may look exactly the same as the person who works 80 hours a week and who's extremely passionate about what she does. May look the same but from the inside, they feel very different. One is the disease model: let's run away from what is not working. The other is the health model: let's pursue my passions, what I love to do. The disease model, the optimum level is the zero: let's just be Ok; let's just not hurt. And again, that's important to get rid of hurt. It's important to get rid of depression. But with the health model, they are saying that's not enough; let's go beyond that. Let's go to the excitement, to the fun. Because the ideal is not just a tensionless state. It is the creative tension. We'll talk about it. We'll read about it. When we do "flow". Flow is the state where we are excited, where we are engaging what we are doing, where it's much more than being "comfortably numb". In fact, it's a little bit uncomfortable. It's being outside of our comfort zone. It's being in our stretch zone— not the panic zone, where it hurts-- the stretch zone, where there is excitement, where there's some nervousness. There is also growth there. So what do you want? Where do you want to go? What do you want to pursue? Do you want to run away from pleasure-- run away from pain? Do you want to run away from unhappiness? Or do you want to pursue happiness and pleasure? Do you want to focus primarily on your deficiencies or your weaknesses? Or your strength? What is

the optimum? what is the ideal? Is there a glass ceiling-- the zero? Or can it go on and on— more excitement, more enjoyment, more passion? Now there's something frightening about the health model. Because there is no limit and there is less prescription there certainly today than in the disease model. Positive psychology, the field of health psychology is in infancy. There's much more research, much more advice on how to get rid of depression and how do I pursue my strength. But fortunately, again, this is why positive psychology as a network of scholars applying themselves to these ideas and ideals.

It's so important because today you'll see throughout the semester that there are so many more tools that we can apply to our lives, to go beyond the zero. That's not all. So I said there are three reasons. It's about where we focus, focus creates reality; it's about happiness is not just a negation of unhappiness; the third reason why positive psychology is important is because positive psychology and the areas that we study and more importantly, apply within the field of positive psychology, do not just take us from the zero to the positive. They also help us deal with the negative. They help us deal with anxiety, depression and painful experiences and emotions. When we cultivate the positive, we are essentially focusing on prevention. Let me explain. What has been found over the last 10 years and a little bit longer is the most effective way of actually dealing with a rising levels of depression in our culture, with individual depression or anxiety is actually not to focus on the depression and anxiety directly—that is important as well. It is found that the most effective way of dealing with this phenomenon was actually to cultivate the positive, to cultivate personal strengths, to cultivate and identify one's passions, to ask a question such as "what is meaningful to me in my life? What's my purpose? Why am I here? What do I really, really want to do once I graduate?" People who ask these questions and spend time on these questions, are much more likely to begin a quest that is not the avoid of painful emotions— no quest is— but the quest is more enjoyable, more pleasurable, more



meaningful and also, more successful as it turns out. But more importantly, more successful in what I call the "the ultimate currency"— just as the currency of happiness and wellbeing.

The reason is because there are two different approaches to deal with illness: one, the positive psychological approach is that the illness is the absence of health, as opposed to health is the absence of illness. I mean, think about the disease model. The disease model is "we are sick because we are ill"— do you listen to that? We are sick because we are ill. That was very profound. You should think about it for a while here. I'll let a time just to marinate it little bit so that you can. Let me start that again. If we take away the illness, then we become healthy. That's the model, the conventional model. Take away the illness. You'll become healthy. It's good. The positive psychological model is slightly different. It is "you are ill because you don't have enough health in your life, because you are not pursuing those things that make you healthy". And what make you healthy? The things I spoke about before: pursuing meaning, purpose; cultivating healthy relationships. If we don't have these things, that's when the illness comes in. Now the difference between the two models, the health model and the disease model is more than just semantic. Here is Abraham Maslow talking about neurosis, "Neurosis is a falling short of what one could have been and even one could say, of what one should have been, biologically speaking that is if one had grown and developed in an unimpeded way. Human and personal possibilities have been lost. The world has been narrowed and so has consciousness. Capacities have been inhibited." Let me explain what he means here. What he means is that we are ill because we do not cultivate what we are about enough. We do not become self-actualized. We don't do what we are supposed to do. We diminish ourselves and that's when we become ill. That's when we are unwell. This is very different from the disease model that says, "Ok, you are unwell. Deal with that illness." What he's saying: "No. You are unwell. Focus on your health. Strengthen

your health. Because you are ill, because you are not focusing enough on your health." He calls that, and I quote, "a failure of personal growth".

That's when we experience neurosis. When we don't cultivate ourselves enough, we don't cultivate our relationship enough, that's when we fail. And what the positive psychology is all about is precisely that—cultivating personal growth, working on the positive. And we work on the positive on what comes of this side of the graph that you saw up there. On the positive side, when we cultivate these things, it also helps us deal much better with the negative when death arises. I want to quote Martin Seligman, who talks about precisely this idea: "In the last decade psychologists have become concerned with prevention. How can we prevent problems like depression or substance abuse or schizophrenia in young people who are genetically vulnerable or who live in worlds that nurture these problems? How can we prevent murderous schoolyard violence in children who have access to weapons, poor parental supervision, and a mean streak?" Now he's asking this question and the disease model response to this is we need to help them deal directly with depression, with their anxiety and with their unhappiness so that we can prevent all these social ills—whether it's violence, whether it's unhappiness. What he's saying here is the following: "What we have learned over fifty years is that the disease model does not move us closer to the prevention of these serious problems. Indeed the major strides in prevention have largely come from a perspective focused on systematically building competency, not correcting weakness." In other words, the health model: let's work on competencies. Let's work on strength. Let's work on relationship. Let's help them identify something meaningful in their life, their passion. And that's how we will, over time, also help what comes off on the negative side. Health model versus the disease model that goes directly to deal with the disease. Now again, Seligman is not saying "to the exclusion of"; he's saying "also".



He continues, "We have discovered that there are human strengths that act as buffers against mental illness: courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, the capacity for flow and insight, to name several. We've shown that learning optimism prevents depression and anxiety in children and adults, roughly halving their incidence over the next 2 years. Similarly, I believe that if we wish to prevent drug abuse in teenagers who grow up in a neighborhood that puts them at risk, the effective prevention is not remedial. Rather, it consists of identifying and amplifying the strengths that these teens already have." It's exactly what Marva Collins did: focused on the health and cultivated it, watered it and shed a light to it, realized it. We'll talk about all these ideas throughout the course. What health model does— this is the theme we go through all the course is cultivate capacity. It cultivates the capacity to deal with the negatives when these arrive— whether it's negative and painful experiences in relationships, or in ourselves. What does that mean?

Let me draw two analogies. Cultivating capacity is about creating a strong psychological immune system. These are the words of Nathaniel Branden. Psychological immune system. What happens when we have a strong physical immune system? Does it mean we don't get ill? Of course not. We do. But it means that we get ill less often and when we do get sick, we recover more promptly. This is exactly what cultivating strength, optimism, sense of purpose, meaning, mindfulness— this is exactly what these characteristics do. They enlarge transform—the way we see, the way we experience the world, enlarge the capacity of the form and that's we are better able to deal the inevitable difficulties. And there are inevitable difficulties. No life is completely immune to those. So it strengthens our immune system. And another analogy we can use is of an engine. If we have a small engine, and we have to pull the car up a steep hill, a difficult hill, the engine is more likely to collapse, to blow up. Whereas If our engine is large, we are much more likely to get

up that hill, and to do it gracefully with relative ease. So what we are doing: we cultivate the positive; we are strengthening our, metaphorically speaking, psychological "engine"; and we are better able to deal with the negative to zero, not to mention the fact that we are also able to become happier. Because happiness does not just come spontaneously when we negate unhappiness.

I want to go back to our local village. So remember last time I put up the article by the Crimson (Harvard Crimson magazine) that was unfortunately I couldn't find a more recent one-- that was 2004? But the situation is rather similar today. And one of the things that the Crimson article said is that we need to put more resources into mental health at Harvard. And that's important, I agree. However, it's only part of the picture. in some different places as well-- not only, as well. Because it's just not enough to put these resources in places that help us deal with our depression and anxiety and unhappiness directly. It is also important to put these resources in places that help us cultivate capacity, the capacity to deal with these difficulties and hardships when they arise and they will arise. In other words, there has to be more resources put in places such as helping students identify their passions when they come here, helping students identify their sense of meaning in life, helping students identify what they really, really, really want to do, helping students overcome the pull, the external pull that is often there, taking them away from their core, helping them chip away those limitations, those voices, helping students identify who they really are, helping students identify their strengths and pursuing those while here at Harvard. All these capabilities, all these skills or skills that are mostly— and I'm not just talking about Harvard— globally-- not taught in schools. And we need to teach them. This is not to say that what is going at Harvard with numerous resources that we do have here is not important. It is very important. Just take a small example: the Bureau of Study Counsel. I don't know how many of you have used that resource. I've used it as an undergrad. I still use it now, doing some work with them. I did some work with

them last year. And they are wonderful.

And at the same time, we also need to cultivate the positive, to think more of the zero to the positive side of the equation as well. And this is what positive psychology does and I hope this is what 1504 to some extent will help do. To summarize, "the message of the positive psychology movement is to remind our field that it has been deformed. Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage it also is the study of strength and virtue, Treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it also is building what is right. Psychology is not just about illness or health; it is about work, education, insight, love, growth, and play. And in this quest for what is best, positive psychology does not rely on wishful thinking, self-deception, or hand waving; instead, it tries to adapt what is best in the scientific method to the unique problems that human behavior presents in all its complexity." It's about bridging the Ivory tower and the Main Street in the area that I believe is the most important one and talks to each and every one of us. I want to move on now. I want to move on to the next selective lectures— two or two and a half lectures, where I am going to be talking about the basic premises of this course. As I said earlier, this course is not a survey course of positive psychology. It's very selective. It's about the question of questions. What can help us individuals, what can help our community become happier-- not happy, happier. So by the end of these three months semester, you are happier than you were before. You are from now, you'll be hopefully happier than you were at the end of the semester. And so on and so on. So what are the basic premises? Where am I coming here when I think about this course? Well what I want to do is to share with you the five basic premises. And these premises are going to be presented as something and— essentially it's opposite. So that were clear from the outset: where we are coming from, where I am coming from, where the teaching staff is coming from— and also so that we can build the foundation of the course.

Remember I talk those of you who were here the first time: this course is built like a spiral Everything is intra-connected, what I talked about in the first class is connected to what I'm going to talk about today, is going to be connected to lecture 19. So in many ways the premises, coupled with what we discussed in the first two lectures, build the foundation of that spiral, upon which everything else will be built. So here are the five basic premises. I'll go through them briefly now and elaborate on each in the next couple of lectures, interweaving them with studies, research as well as applications. First, this course as I mentioned first is about bridge building: bridge building among disciplines, eclectic, and bridge building in terms of academia and Main street. the specialization is very often dominant in academia. The approach of this course, with all its challenges, is the opposite. Once again I wouldn't be teaching this class, if I didn't change is possible. There is a lot of research in psychology, a lot of evidence that shows how difficult change is. So I will argue that change is possible, whether it's individual change, organizational change. And we'll start to look at how it's possible. Just the very basic level of the spiral. We have an entire week just devoted to change. We will elaborate on that: techniques, methods, tools. Third, premise related to the first internal factors primarily determine happiness— this is what I'm going to argue for— is opposed to happiness which is primarily function of external circumstances.

Not saying that the external circumstances are not important, we should focus also on improving them, bettering them, whether for ourselves, for society at large. However, happiness primarily— not only, primarily—is dependent on how we perceive the world, on the form, on our interpretation, on our perception. Human nature must be obeyed This, in many ways, captures conflict that has gone throughout human history, whether you look at politics, whether you look at religion, whether you look at philosophy as well as today, psychology. How do we look at human nature? Is human nature flawed and therefore needs to be perfected? Or is human

nature flawed maybe something we don't like but we need to accept it and work with it? I'm going to argue for the latter of what I just said, for the fact that human nature needs to be obeyed with all its flaws, with all its shortcomings, as opposed to attempting to perfect it on the psychological level. We'll get to that next time. Controversial, the very important foundation of mental health and wellbeing. And finally, what I am going to argue for is that happiness isn't ought to be the ultimate end which we pursue and that is also a moral claim, as opposed to happiness just being another secondary pursuit and there are pursuits— there are higher, more important, more moral than that. Once again, may sound controversial. I'll try reconcile the disease, the unhappiness that you may experience thinking about that. Again, more on that next time. So let me begin with bridge building. Here I am going back to what I talked about right at the very beginning of the first lecture. The idea of bridging Ivory tower and Main Street. There are many people in academia, outside academia, who divide the world essentially into two. They talked about the real world that is outside, that is dirty, impure, profane versus academia, which is lofty, idealistic, sacred. Sacred versus the profane. This distinction hurts. It hurts academia and hurts people who are outside of academia. Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher: "The careful shielding of a university from the activities of the world around us is the best way to chill interest and to defeat progress. Celibacy does not suit a university. It must mate itself with action." This is very important for university.

Talked about a second psychology. He said second psychology is a psychology that leaves the labs that draws on the research done in the labs that is important and meaningful, however, doesn't only focus on that. It goes out to the outside world, interacts, gets its hand and mind dirty, does work outside and then applies its work and learns from "the dirty experiences" and brings it back to the lab and so on and so on in an upward spiral. He called it the important second psychology, which is what Alfred North Whitehead is also talking about. Now you may be sitting here and most

of you aren't going to academia. And you are thinking to yourself, "Ok, fine. So university, academia must make itself with action. What does it have to do with me? How is relevant to me?" Not only is it relevant to you, it has everything to do with you. And here's why. What the world needs, more than anything else, are practical idealists.

For 6 years, I was a resident tutor in Leverets House when I was a graduate student and then I also started to teach. And what struck me most about conversations that I had, either in Leverett or other houses, were students is their sense of mission, your sense of mission, your desire to do good, to make the world a better place. And as I followed many of the students after they graduate, whether the students who work with me here as undergrads or students who I tutored, when I followed the path, it wasn't just empty words. These students went ahead and did wonderful things, whether it was right out of college, whether it was once they established themselves, but there was always this, the back of their mind, very often fore of their minds, "How can I make this world a better place?" Passionate. Idealistic. Good-- in the deep sense, good. This desire to make a difference come into just about all students. There are many people who talk about this generation as the "ME" generation: all I care about, all this generation cares about is "well, let me just make more money", "let me just get a bigger house", "let me just be more successful and accrue more eclats, more prestige". This is a false stereotype. Yes, eclats, prestige, money is important. It's important to most people in the world. A big deal. But were these people who have these stereotypes— were they (?) is that they see just that? And they don't see the desire to make a difference.

1800 students at Harvard each year, about 1800 students are members of PBHA (Phillips Brooks House Association). That's not all. There are other students who outside PBHA and who volunteer. Just about every single one of you. At least if we



look at the statistics, just about every single one of you, very soon, after you leave Harvard, will join an organization, whether--it could be your primary job or not— an organization that is a social enterprise, not for profit, something to better the world. You'll be on boards of such organizations. You'll donate money to such organizations. Harvard grads are generous with their time, with their money, with their efforts, whether the business school, the law school, college, Med school, Ed school— you give a lot, because you care. Again whether it's money, whether it's time-- usually both. False stereotypes. There are also false stereotypes about Americans. Americans, empirically speaking— just empirically speaking about the Harvard students, looking the trends and statistics-- empirically speaking, Americans are the most generous people in the world. Not just because they have more money to give, yes, Americans have more money to give and they give a lot more money, whether it's in food, whether it's in medical aid. Americans also spend the most time-- this is a research done (?)— Americans spend the most time out of any other people in the world volunteering in average four hours a week, volunteering outside their job which may also have a social objective more than any other people in the world. Once again, false stereotypes about this wonderful country. And this is wonderful. This is wonderful to see, wonderful to be here, whether it's Harvard, whether it's America-- a real privilege. You see, many of you, not far from now, you will be in influential positions. Will you be able to do a lot of good in a for-profit organization, not for profit organization, on the board of your previous school, with your money, with your time?

However— and here is the however— I've met many grad students with me or students when I was a tutor who express their frustration to me. They said to me, “You know, I had all the good intentions in the world. I have all the good intentions in the world. I want to do good. I've donated my time, my money. But I feel that something is missing. I feel that I've fallen short of my potential to really make a difference.”

Why? Because good will and idealism, while necessary, they are not sufficient. Not enough. Because very often, with very good intentions, we may fall short of what we are capable of doing, or in some situations, even hurt more than help. And we'll look at some of these studies, hopefully still today, with very good intentions actually hurt more they helped. Psychologists for decades had very good intentions about helping at risk population. A lot of money-- millions, millions of dollars went into that. With very little effect. Why? Because they didn't ask the question that they needed to ask, which was, in that particular case, the salutogenic question: why do some individuals succeed despite unfavorable circumstances? There were very good intentions before this question was asked. There was a lot of idealism. It wasn't enough. Very often, some of these interventions engendered the passive victim mentality, as opposed to the active agent mentality that Marva Collins instilled, the programs by Karen Reivich and Martin Seligman instill. And this is where psychology can help. Because we can take the research and apply it. We can take the research and apply it, which goes back to the point why it is so important to bridge Ivory tower and Main Street. Most of these research is not applied. So for example: how many teachers working in the classroom day in and day out know about the Pygmalion effect? The Pygmalion effect that we are going to talk about next week or the week after, shows how teachers' expectations are self-fulfilling prophecies.

And if we have high expectations, if we see the seed of greatness in the students, that seed of greatness is more likely to flourish. Or if we don't appreciate it, it will depreciate—wither and die. How many teachers know about these studies? And how they create through their beliefs the self-fulfilling prophecy when it comes to their students? How many teachers know about Marva Collins? Every teacher in the world on the first day of teacher training need to learn about Marva Collins and Pygmalion effect. They don't do that. How about this? Self-esteem. How do you increase self-esteem? If I have to do a poll here, most people, guaranteed, would say praise

people. Praise people. Praise children. It will enhance their self-esteem. Right. Partially right. And if it's taken as the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, it's detrimental. Because there is a lot of research that shows when we praise people indiscriminately, we are actually in the long run potentially hurting them more than helping them, whether it's their wellbeing, as well as their success. But the self-esteem movement mostly says praise people, praise children all the time. And again, that's important. But it's also important to know how to praise. How many people are familiar with the work of the Stanford psychologist, Carol Dweck. Well, you are going to be familiar with it in a few weeks. Many idealists with good intentions are not. And they continue to support or to practice self-esteem as indiscriminate praise, ultimately hurting more than helping. How many psychologists, or rather how many interventionists with good intentions are familiar with the work of Albert Bandura on self-efficacy? And how you cultivate that? Not enough. And very often, more harm than good is created. How many psychologists are familiar with this new emerging field of the mind and the body? How many know about the studies that cheerful example that yoga practice diminishes significantly, more than any other interventions that they tried, the likelihood of second-time offenders when they practice it in jail? After their release, they are much less likely to return to jail if they do some yoga there. Strange, but true.

How many people know that— and this is connected to my first point— that doing meditation actually literally transforms our brain, making us more susceptible to positive emotions and more resilient in the face of painful emotions. How many people know that three times a week physical exercise, 30 minutes each time has the same effect as our most powerful psychiatric drugs? Three times a week for 30 minutes. How many psychologists or psychiatrists prescribe "run three times a week and see me in the morning"? Not enough. That's practical idealism coupled together. How are in conflict resolution, the dominant theme of most people with good

intentions want to resolve conflict is let's get the people together, let's get them to talk, and they and we will live happily ever after. Well we have research from 1954—those of you who take social psych—Muzafer sheriff, showing that the contact hypothesis which is just get people to talk to one another, doesn't work; in fact very often it worsens the situation— very often the conflict actually gets worse as a result of just getting together and talking, that the contact is not enough, that what you need, in the words of Muzafer sheriff and later elaborated on by Elliot Aronson— what you need is a super ordinate goal— a goal that you have carry out together, that you cannot do by yourself— carry out together with a conflicting group. And that's how over time you resolve conflicts, not just bring people together. Now as you can imagine, this is very close to home for me. Because there were many people on both sides of the Arab/Israeli conflict who wanted to end it, many people in this country who wanted to end it. So what did they do? Let's just get them together. Let's get them in a room, whether it was in Camp David, whether it was in Oslo or in Egypt. Let's just get them together to talk, to resolve their conflict and their issue and then we will all live happily ever after.

What happened? The situation worsened. Now we've known that. Muzafer sheriff showed that in 1954 that it is the most likelihood outcome of just contact hypothesis, just getting them to be together. And there were many people trying to resolve the conflict, not just in the Middle East, else in the world, with very good intentions but very often making inadvertently the matters worse. Idealism and good intentions are not enough. We need to merge, to mate the research with the practice. And this is where you come in, taking it seriously. Now when I take it seriously, there is a problem here because sometimes research doesn't deliver good news. It would be much easier and nicer if we could just simply get Israelis and Arabs together and the conflict would end. It would be much nicer and easier, smoother, it would be much easier, if we could just cultivate children self-esteem by giving them positive

feedback— telling them how wonderful they are. It's easy to do, right? It feels good. They feel good. We feel good. But in the long run, it doesn't help, if it's only that. Much easier. And research very often delivers bad news, saying it's not enough-- the contact; it's not enough to praise. And then people choose subconsciously, not consciously to ignore the research and go with her heart. And that's important to go with your heart. But it's important to with the heart and the mind.

Imagine if an aeronautics engineer woke up in the morning and said, "you know, the Law of Gravity thing really makes things difficult for me. It's a pain. Things would be so much easier without the law of gravity. The design would be simpler." And he designs airplane and he ignores the law of gravity. What kind of airplane machine would he or she design? A failure. Aeronautics engineer takes into consideration of reality. And reality-- there's Law of Gravity. We deal with that. Similarly, what research shows us is reality: what's out there, what's working and what's not working. And we need to conform to it. Take it into consideration. And it's up to you, to take responsibility, to bridge the Ivory tower and Main Street. You are being exposed in 32 classes fraught your Harvard career to the most rigorous thinking on different topics have you take it and apply it, whether it's psychology, whether it's in economics, obviously in engineering or computer science, where it's done much more readily than in social sciences and humanities. It's important to take responsibilities, because no one else is going to do it for you. No one is coming. Premise 2: To be a practical idealist, the foundation of it has to be the belief that change is possible. Because if the change was not possible on the individual level, on the society level, why am I doing what I am doing? Why would I spend time? Let me just be a hedonist, trying to enjoy my life as much as possible. Now for many of you, when you look at this you may say, "Well, Ok, yes, change is possible. I believe that and why do we need to have it as a basic premise of the course, as opposed to change is illusive?"

Well, in the context of a psychology course, it's anything but trivial that change is possible. Let me share with you one study to illustrate what I mean. The Minnesota Twin study, one of the most famous studies in the field of psychology, was done by Lykken and Tellegen, two prominent psychologists. And what they did was they wanted to understand how much do genes matter. How much is it about nature versus nurture? So how do you test that? You look at identical twins, monozygotic twins who share the same genetic profile. And you look at those who are reared apart. Because if they are reared by the same parents, one could argue, "Well they came out very similar because same environment: they look the same; they go to the same schools; same parents, and so on." But what if you are able to find identical twins who were separated at birth, and reared in radically different environments. Well you could. And they found significant number of those, reared in, sometimes different continents. And they studied them. And what they found remarkably was significant similarities among these twins, sometimes to the points of unbelievable. Like one set of twins—I think they found the wives with the same name. They were reared in different countries, didn't know about each other until the age of 37— married similar wives, enjoyed drinking the same beer, called their children by the same names. There were some mind-boggling similarities. And this is an exception, but there were quite a few of those exceptions. But more interesting for psychologists was that their personality was incredibly similar. And very interesting for positive psychologists, those concerned with wellbeing and happiness: their wellbeing and happiness levels were incredibly similar. Even if they were raised in radically different environments. Lykken and Tellegen published a paper, a very influential paper in the 80s, which they called "Happiness is a Stochastic Phenomenon". And they end this paper with the following quote: "It may be that trying to be happier is as futile as trying to be taller and is therefore counterproductive." This quote made me very unhappy on two accounts. This was a very influential quote. This appeared in New York Times. They talked about on television. They were interviewed. Very problematic.



Coz what are we doing here? If this is the outcome of the research, a rigorous research that they did— not an easy research to go and look around the world, what can we do about it? Here is my response to that: Very simply, change is possible. And again, don't take my word for it of course. Let me discuss that further-- elaborate. There is account of evidence where people actually do change and we have research showing that people going to therapy very often change as the a result of therapy. Work by Albert Bandura, Stanford psychologist shows that very often people encountering one special sentence, reading it or hearing it from something, that sentence can change their lives, reading it on certain book, having certain experiences— there is this concept of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There is also a concept of Post-Traumatic Growth. So people change-- up or down in their level of happiness is a result of their experiences. So there is counter evidence that shows that not everyone, level of wellbeing is determined by their genes. In fact, there is research that shows yes genes do matter and they matter a lot, as we'll talk about during the week on change. Other things matter as well. And the error that Lykken and Tellegen and many others make when they generalize and say "change is not possible" is what I call "the error of the average". Yes, on average, when you look at this group of 40 or 50 twins reared apart, when you look at the average, they are just about the same. However, that's not looking at the individuals because while many of them are the same, not all are the same.

It reminds me of a joke about the statistician who drowned in a pool with an average height of 10 inches. You see you cannot tell the height or the depth rather of a pool based on the average. Because that pool may be average of 10 inches, but maybe it has places that are 20 feet deep, if it's a large pool. The same when you look at the average of individuals and twins. The majority on average, they are extremely similar. But there are also outliers. And very often, it's the outliers, the differences that are the most interesting. Because they stretch— not just our imagination-- they stretch our

ability to understand when and where change is possible. The question when we see exceptions, whether it's the Lykken and Tellegen study, where we do see exceptions—not all twins were the same, majority were, but not all—the question is no longer whether or not change is possible, but rather how is change possible. Once again, the exception proves the rule. And the research that argues that it's not possible to change, is detrimental. Think about an eight year old girl, who's very unhappy, and then reads some magazine about that study, saying that basically you are genetically set point what you are born with is there for life. She's unhappy. She feels anxious and miserable as an 8 year old. And she says to herself, "That's it. That's my lot in life. I was born unlucky." And that, very often, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. And she remains unhappy. Sometimes it even makes her less happy than she was before. Because now she's also helpless.

Change is possible. You know I often say that I am the right the person to teach positive psychology. Why? Because I wasn't born with "happy genes". I was born with, genetically speaking, relatively high level of anxiety, inclination toward rumination, over-examination—we'll talk about that later in the course. I went into the positive psychology, into the field of psychology, as I mentioned in the first lecture, because I was unhappy here. And over time, as a result of many of these studies, result of examination result of asking also the right questions, I have become happier. So on a personal level, I know it's possible to become happier. Now I am happier today than I was fifteen years ago when I started. I hope to be happier 15 years from today than I am today. It's a life-long process. But it is possible. And many people show that it's possible. And those who argue it's not possible and use science to argue for that, very often, are hurting more than helping the field. Now by the way Lykken and Tellegen were interviewed recently in TIME magazine issue of happiness. Let me quote to you what they said. This is in 2005-- Lykken: "I made a dumb statement. It is clear that we can change happiness levels, up or down." So they went

back on their statement. It was a sensational statement at the time. It certainly is possible. So how do we do research that's more responsible, that does not lead to detrimental results?

And at the same time, true. We don't want to invent research. Research is about identifying things that really occur/happen in reality. So one of the first things that I'll argue for in terms of healthy research is "let's also focus on what is working". That's first thing that we discussed in the past lecture. The second thing that I will argue for in addition to studying what works is also to study the best. What do I mean by best? Let's not just study what makes people happy. Let's not just study happy people. Let's not just study happy relationships and good relationships. Let's study the happiest people. Let's study the most successful relationships and learn from that. That is a radically different approach than studying just the average. Because what I am saying here is "let's not study the average", let's study the top five percent so that we can understand the phenomenon better. The person who talks about this is Abraham Maslow. When he talked about "growing-tip" statistics. Let me read to you-- this is taken from his book: "What this kind of research design means is a change in our conception of statistics, and especially of sampling theory. What I am frankly espousing here is what I have been calling "growing-tip statistics," taking my title from the fact that it is at the growing tip of a plant that the greatest genetic action takes place." What he's saying is that "let's study the sages, the saints, the extraordinary people, the arrowhead" so that we can understand and realize the potential in all people. Let me quote him in greater length. This is very important, which is why I am doing it: "If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a "good sample" of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do. If we want to know the possibilities for spiritual growth, value growth or moral development in human being, then I maintain that we can learn most by studying our

most moral, ethical, or saintly people. On the whole I think it fair to say that human history is a record of the ways in which human nature has been sold short. The highest possibilities of human nature have practically always been underrated. Certainly it seems more and more clear that what we call "normal" in psychology is really a psychopathology of the average, so undramatic and so widely spread that we don't even notice it ordinarily."

You see, the implications of what he's saying here? Essentially what he's saying is "let's not just study why do most individuals fail; let's also study why do some-- not many— but why do some individuals succeed despite the circumstances". Let's not study just the average that says that people can't really change. Let's study those people who have changed, who have literally transformed their lives and those lives around them. This is a radical approach to research. This is a radical approach to the search, to studying ourselves as well. Because very often, if we only study the average, we only see the average, we only see the geometric shapes and completely missed the children on the bus. And very often, the answer to some of our most pressing questions lies in the extraordinary— lies on the children on the bus. Now does anyone other than me— because I admit that I fall into this category— but anyone other than me feel a little bit disease when I talk about this? Seriously, a little bit disease when I talk about "let's focus on studying the best— the saint, the sages, the extraordinary"? I feel disease. I'm sure some of you feel that too. Because after all, isn't that elitist? Shouldn't we study the average because we concern not just with elites? We are concerned with the average. So there are two answers to that— why I still maintain, and I must admit I still feel some disease every time I teach this, every time I think about this and I think too, why it is so important to study the best, why the "growing-tip" statistics is such an important approach to research that I encourage my students to carry out.

First of all, because it is not to the exclusion of the average. Just like positive psychology does not say "let's exclude what's not working; let's exclude study of pathology". Similarly, "growing-tip" statistics is not saying "let's not study the average". It says "let's also study the best". So this is the first thing to alleviate the concern of elitism. The second issue, the second response is even more important. Because everyone benefits, when we study the best. And the "average"-- whatever that means, the "average" benefits even more than the best of this kind of studies. Why? For example: the study of resilience. We could have gone on and studied the average at-risk population for decades and centuries. And very little advances would have been made. Very little advances were made. It was only when we started to study those "best" examples, those successful kids, those "super" kids as they were initially named. It was only when we started to study those that we actually understood how we can best help that population. And once we applied our studies-- the resilience issue, everyone benefited and continued to benefit from it. That's an example of "growing-tip" statistics research. Or how about the study of meditation? So I want to study how to meditate. Do I go out to Harvard yard and take a random sample of sophomores to study meditation? Or do I go to a mountain top in Tibet and study the people who have been doing it for decades? Of course I go and study them! This is exactly what psychologists did! And they studied their brain— we'll talk about it when we talk about meditation— and they illustrated how their brain is transformed through meditation. Psychologists, like Jon Kabat Zinn, Richard Davidson and Herbert Benson, were able to take what they learned from these extraordinary, best individuals and apply it to other people's lives so that now I benefit from meditation when I do it for 15 minutes or 20 minutes a day. And millions of other people, "the average", benefit a great deal because of the study of the best, of the "growing-tip". How about relationships? Can you imagine a study of relationships throughout human history that focuses on the average? What's the average relationship in human history? The average relationship in human history is one in which the woman is subjugated.

That's the average relationship in human history. Now what if we just study that? Would that be helpful?

No, it was when people like John Stuart Mill, who studied his relationships which was at the time extraordinary, realized the potential of what all relationships can be that he wrote his book on subjugation of women, one of the most important books of the 19th century that has led to the feminist movement and to the equality movement. What if he only studies the average? Would that help relationships? Not at all. How about teaching? What do you want to do in order to learn about teaching— go and study the average teachers or go and study Marva Collins and then apply what Marva Collins does to all teachers? Everyone benefits when we focus on the tip of stamen— this is why Maslow said human nature and human potential has been sold short, when we only study the average. It's also about studying our personal best, not just other people's best, whether it's our personal best experiences because if we study our best experiences when we are at our happiest, when we are at our most successful, when we thrive the most within the relationship, we can learn from it and apply it to our future as well. When we study our average, we are describing our lives. When we are studying the best within ourselves, we are potentially prescribing. Maslow again: "Few in number though they be, we can learn a great deal about values from the direct study of these highly evolved, most mature, psychologically healthiest individuals, and from the study of the peak moments of average individuals, moments, in which they become transiently self-actualized."

If we learn from these experiences in ourselves, the question is no longer whether or not it's possible to experience it more and more in our lives. The question is "how is it possible to experience it". Alright. So we talked about changing ourselves, how it's possible the "growing-tip" statistics which is the second significant idea within research in positive psychology: first significant idea is "let's study what works" the



second significant idea is "let's study what works best". But this is about individual change. How about societal change? I want to share with you at the end today a study, one of the most famous studies in the field called "the Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study psychology". This was the study that was run, starting in the 1930s right here between Harvard and MIT, were the best minds— psychological minds, philosophical minds, psychiatrists— got together and said, "let's create the Rolls-Royce—there wasn't a Rolls-Royce then— but best intervention program that we can think of." There was no limit in terms of how much money was put into it. As much as they needed, they got and they chose 250 kids from an at-risk population. And the intervention is not a quick fix, overnight change," we can" seminar-- five-year intervention. And here is what they got. Twice a month, case workers visited them, helped them deal with the conflicts in the family, helped them deal with issues in their lives. Half of them had academic tutoring, those who needed it— got help, academic help. Psychiatric attention— all those who needed it, they were there. No limits on how much you needed it. Whatever you needed, you got from the best minds in the field. They joined the boy scouts, YMCA, other youth movements, benefited a great deal, supposedly from these experiences.

They got everything. This would be a dream treatment— not just in the 1930s, today as well. This is what psychologists dream about at night. Just introduce this. And then measuring outcomes was as serious as the program itself. There was a random assignment— there were 250 kids who got nothing, who were also studied, just like the kids who got the five-year intervention were studied— 250 kids in the control group. 40 years follow-up. This was not just about today, tomorrow for the five years; they followed them through much of their lives. This was serious study. This was serious intervention. And the results were shocking. Even though all those who participated in this study— whether it was the mental health workers, whether it was the philosophers, psychologists, the professors and the psychiatrists— praise the

program as the best, as highly effective, when they looked at the raw objective data, the results were shocking.

Juvenile offenses: control group versus intervention group-- no difference. Over a third had official records and 20 more percent had unofficial records for misdemeanors. No difference in juvenile offenses. Adult offenses later on in their lives. Again, no difference. Over 20 percent offenses— whether against property or against person— in both groups: the 250 here versus 250 here, which is significant sample size. No difference whatsoever. other measures: physical health and mental health—no difference whatsoever. But finally, there was a significant difference on alcoholism, the number of people who became alcoholic later on in life as well as job status— how many people were able to getting to do "the white collar" jobs. So at least there are results there. At least they found statistically significant results when they came to that. That's good, right? Not at all. Because these results were "in the wrong direction", meaning there were alcoholics in the intervention group than in the control group; there were more people in the control group making it at work "raising their status at work" than in the intervention group. In other words, intervention did more harm than good. Idealism, good intention, a lot of money wasn't practical. Now many people who look at this study— this is a seminal study—very few studies in the history of psychology that were that serious. They say, "Well, societal change is probably not possible". Give me one minute and I'll finish. Societal change is not possible, they say. Is it? First of all, there are exceptions and we have exceptions that prove the rule--there are programs that actually work, whether it's the work again of Karen Reivich and Martin Seligman from U Penn," resilience program", whether it's Marva Collins who's certainly an exception, who shows how interventions work. And it's interesting to think about the difference of what Marva Collins does, or she doesn't give the students in sense of entitlement, or she praises them but she gives them hard love as opposed to free lunch, or she doesn't label them as needy and the study

perhaps labeled these kids as needy. There are many differences. But the keys to study this exception and for practical idea is to come together and to say "what is working? Let's study the best; let's study what works and then apply it." Let's spread the word.

Let's do what Maslow talked about back in 1950s. What he suggested is "Manhattan-Project-type attacks upon what I consider to be the truly Big Problems of our time, not only for psychology but for all human beings with any sense of historical urgency". The Manhattan Project, when they created the atomic bomb and whether or not you agree with the Manhattan Project normatively. One second. I'm almost done. Positively, what they did there was bring together the best minds Oppenheimer, Zillart, Fermi Feinman, Bore— bring them together with a mission of saving the free world. Again whether you agree or not with the project is beside the point, it was the greatest, positively speaking, scientific project in history where the minds got together. This is what Maslow is suggesting that psychologists do. This is also the aim of positive psychology, no less than this. You get people around the world to think about these problems, these issues-- practical idealists who will study what works, who will study the best and through that, make a difference.

I'll see you next week.