

# **15 positive psychology abstracts** **november/december '14 newsletter**

(Bègue, Beauvois et al. 2014; Brule and Veenhoven 2014; Brymer, Davids et al. 2014; Hilbrecht, Smale et al. 2014; Kauffman 2014; König and Glück 2014; Kruse, Chancellor et al. 2014; Marselle, Irvine et al. 2014; Nenkov, Haws et al. 2014; Pasanen, Tyrväinen et al. 2014; Passmore and Howell 2014; Pierre 2014; Sheldon and Krieger 2014; Su, Tay et al. 2014; Van Tongeren, Davis et al. 2014)

Bègue, L., J.-L. Beauvois, et al. (2014). **"Personality predicts obedience in a Milgram paradigm."** *Journal of Personality: n/a-n/a*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12104>

This study investigates how obedience in a Milgram-like experiment is predicted by interindividual differences.

Participants were 35 males and 31 females aged 26–54 from the general population who were contacted by phone 8 months after their participation in a study transposing Milgram's obedience paradigm to the context of a fake television game show. Interviews were presented as opinion polls with no stated ties to the earlier experiment. Personality was assessed by the Big Five Mini-Markers questionnaire (Saucier, 1994). Political orientation and social activism were also measured. Results confirmed hypotheses that Conscientiousness and Agreeableness would be associated with willingness to administer higher-intensity electric shocks to a victim. Political orientation and social activism were also related to obedience. Our results provide empirical evidence suggesting that individual differences in personality and political variables matter in the explanation of obedience to authority.

Brule, G. and R. Veenhoven (2014). **"Freedom and happiness in nations: Why the Finns are happier than the French."** *Psychology of Well-Being* 4(1): 17. <http://www.psywb.com/content/4/1/17>

(Free full text available) Cross-national studies on happiness have revealed large differences, not only is average happiness higher in rich nations than in poor ones, but there are also sizable differences in happiness among rich nations. For instance, the Finns are happier than the French, while GDP per capita is similar in France and Finland. In this paper we discuss whether freedom can explain that difference. The Finns feel more free than the French do. Does this discrepancy in perceived freedom correspond to a difference in actual freedom? Following Bay, we distinguished three kinds of actual freedom: social freedom, potential freedom and psychological freedom. In a comparative analysis of 49 nations we find that actual freedom reflects only partially in perceived freedom and that all kinds of freedom have some independent relation with average happiness. Psychological freedom is most strongly related to happiness in rich nations. The Finns are happier than the French because they dare more to be free.

Brymer, E., K. Davids, et al. (2014). **"Understanding the psychological health and well-being benefits of physical activity in nature: An ecological dynamics analysis."** *Ecopsychology* 6(3): 189-197. <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/eco.2013.0110>

(Free full text available) There is growing evidence that contact with nature and physical activity in nature have considerable benefits for human health. Exposure to nature has been shown to improve psychological well-being, relieve stress, increase positive mood, enhance life skills, reduce mental fatigue, increase concentration, and reduce aggression. In this paper, we propose a functional perspective from ecological dynamics, which emphasizes the person-environment scale of analysis for understanding the psychological benefits of physical activity in nature. From this viewpoint, psychological benefits of green exercise emerge from a rich landscape of affordances or behavioral opportunities during interactions with natural environments to enhance human health and well-being.

Hilbrecht, M., B. Smale, et al. (2014). **"Highway to health? Commute time and well-being among Canadian adults."** *World Leisure Journal* 56(2): 151-163. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2014.903723>

(Free full text available) This paper examines commute time, time spent in activities beneficial to well-being, and the relationship to self-assessed well-being. Using cross-sectional data from the 2010 Canadian General Social Survey, Cycle 24, time use patterns and feelings of well-being are assessed for a subsample of 3409 men and women who regularly commute to work by car. Drawing upon a resource drain model, daily activities known to affect well-being were selected for analysis, and well-being was measured by life satisfaction and time pressure. Time spent commuting is associated with lower levels of life satisfaction and an increased sense of time pressure. Reduced time for physically active leisure and experiences of traffic congestion mediate the association of commute time with well-being, consistent with a resource drain model. Results suggest workplace practices aimed at increasing opportunities for physical activity and government-led efforts towards more integrated solutions to reduce traffic congestion may help increase well-being.

Kauffman, S. B. (2014). **"Is kindness physically attractive."** *Scientific American*.

<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/2014/10/09/is-kindness-physically-attractive/>

One of the most robust findings in social psychology is the beauty-is-good stereotype: physically attractive people are perceived and treated more positively than physically unattractive people [1]. But here's the thing: I have definitely met attractive people who went from hot to not the second they opened their mouths! Vice-versa, some people are so kind and awesome that you can't help but be attracted to them, regardless of their score on hornotnot.com. Which has me wondering: I know beautiful is often perceived as good, but isn't good also beautiful? I mean, I know we are an extremely looks obsessed culture, and research does show that the people we initially perceive as physically attractive tend to follow a very predictable pattern: they are average, symmetrical, and have hormone-dependent features [2]. But don't things like character and goodness also factor into our perceptions of physical attractiveness? Enter a new study by Yan Zhang and colleagues. The researchers randomly assigned Chinese participants to one of three groups and had them rate 60 photographs of unfamiliar Chinese female faces. All the photographs were taken from Google, and all of the faces had neutral emotional expressions. After two weeks, the participants rated the same pictures again. But this time, one group of participants were given positive personality descriptors of the people in the photographs (e.g., decent, honest), another group of participants were given negative personality descriptors (e.g., evil, mean), and the third group were given no information about the people in the photographs. During the first rating, there were no significant differences in ratings of attractiveness among the three groups. But after the second rating, the group given positive personality descriptors of the people in the photographs rated them the most attractive, and the group given negative personality descriptors of the people in the photographs gave the lowest ratings to the photographs. These results suggest that having a desirable personality may indeed be a factor when judging physical attractiveness. As the researchers note, "This findings indicates that human interior psychological activity is related to exterior physical feature[s], and that a human is the whole entity of psychology and physiology." But perhaps this study was too

artificial. Maybe the same effects wouldn't occur for people who we know intimately. There is a series of really fascinating studies conducted by Kevin Kniffin and David Sloan Wilson, in which they address this very issue. As they note, there are evolutionary reasons why personality traits can inform our perceptions of physical attractiveness. Even though beauty is an assessment of fitness value, there is no reason why assessment of fitness needs to be purely physical. Fitness value of a potential social partner can be influenced by both physical and non-physical traits.

König, S. and J. Glück (2014). **"Gratitude is with me all the time": How gratitude relates to wisdom.** *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 69(5): 655-666. <http://psychsocgerontology.oxfordjournals.org/content/69/5/655.abstract>

(Free full text available) Objectives. This study investigated the relationship of gratitude to wisdom. Both constructs are conceptually related to self-reflectivity, but they differ in their emphasis on extrapersonal resources. Previous wisdom research has focused mainly on intrapersonal capacities. Method. In Study 1, 47 wisdom nominees and 47 control participants were interviewed about their most difficult and best life event and filled out a questionnaire on sources of gratitude. Study 2 was a quantitative study (N = 443) of the relationship between a wisdom scale and scale measures and individual sources of gratitude. Results. Significantly more wisdom nominees expressed feelings of gratitude spontaneously in their interview. Wisdom nominees reported gratitude for their life in general, religion, and partner more often than control participants. In Study 2, wisdom was related to all gratitude scales and to similar sources of gratitude as in Study 1. Both studies found gender differences in gratitude but not wisdom. Discussion. Two important implications of these findings are that wisdom entails an appreciation of life and its experiences, especially the growth opportunities that may result from negative events, and that there may be substantial differences between male and female pathways to wisdom.

Kruse, E., J. Chancellor, et al. (2014). **"An upward spiral between gratitude and humility."** *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5(7): 805-814. <http://spp.sagepub.com/content/5/7/805.abstract>

In two experiments and one diary study, we examined the relationship between self- and other-oriented processes by considering how gratitude can influence humility and vice versa. Humility is characterized by low self-focus, secure sense of self, and increased valuation of others. Gratitude is marked by a sense that one has benefited from the actions of another. In the first experiment, participants who wrote a gratitude letter showed higher state humility than those who performed a neutral activity. In the second experiment, baseline state humility predicted the amount of gratitude felt after writing a gratitude letter compared to a neutral activity. Finally, in a 14-day diary study, humility and gratitude mutually predicted one another, even after controlling for the other's prior level. Our results suggest that humility and gratitude are mutually reinforcing.

Marselle, M. R., K. N. Irvine, et al. (2014). **"Examining group walks in nature and multiple aspects of well-being: A large-scale study."** *Ecopsychology* 6(3): 134-147. <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/eco.2014.0027>

(Free full text available) Purpose: Outdoor walking groups can facilitate interaction with nature, social interaction, and physical activity, yet little is known about their efficacy in promoting mental, emotional, and social well-being. National group walk programs are especially undervalued for these outcomes. The present study sought to identify the mental, emotional, and social well-being benefits from participating in group walks in nature. Design: Drawing on an evaluation of the Walking for Health program in England, a longitudinal study investigated the mental, emotional, and social well-being of individuals who did (Nature Group Walkers) and did not (Non-Group Walkers) attend group walks in nature. Both groups were statistically matched using propensity score matching (n=1,516). Between-group t tests and multiple regressions were performed to analyze the influence of nature-based group walks on depression, perceived stress, negative affect, positive affect, mental well-being, and social support. Findings: Group walks in nature were associated with significantly lower depression, perceived stress, and negative affect, as well as enhanced positive affect and mental well-being, both before and after controlling for covariates. There were no group differences on social support. In addition, nature-based group walks appear to mitigate the effects of stressful life events on perceived stress and negative affect while synergizing with physical activity to improve positive affect and mental well-being. Originality/Value: The present study identifies the mental and emotional well-being benefits from participation in group walks in nature and offers useful information about the potential health contribution of national outdoor group walk programs.

Nenkov, G. Y., K. L. Haws, et al. (2014). **"Fluency in future focus: Optimizing outcome elaboration strategies for effective self-control."** *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 5(7): 769-776. <http://spp.sagepub.com/content/5/7/769.abstract>

The current research sheds new light on how individuals can best use the consideration of future outcomes as a self-control strategy to enhance their likelihood of goal attainment. Across three studies, the authors find that the effectiveness of positively versus negatively valenced outcome elaboration is dependent upon the construal level at which the potential outcomes are considered. This research demonstrates that positive outcome elaboration is more effective when it is abstract, whereas negative outcome elaboration is more effective when it is concrete. Moreover, the authors explore the process underlying these effects and demonstrate that the increased effectiveness of matching the outcomes' valence and construal level is due to outcome elaboration fluency, as increased ease of generating outcomes that are positive and abstract or negative and concrete promotes more effective self-control.

Pasanen, T. P., L. Tyrväinen, et al. (2014). **"The relationship between perceived health and physical activity indoors, outdoors in built environments, and outdoors in nature."** *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* 6(3): 324-346. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12031>

Background: A body of evidence shows that both physical activity and exposure to nature are connected to improved general and mental health. Experimental studies have consistently found short term positive effects of physical activity in nature compared with built environments. This study explores whether these benefits are also evident in everyday life, perceived over repeated contact with nature. The topic is important from the perspectives of city planning, individual well-being, and public health. Methods: National survey data (n = 2,070) from Finland was analysed using structural regression analyses. Perceived general health, emotional well-being, and sleep quality were regressed on the weekly frequency of physical activity indoors, outdoors in built environments, and in nature. Socioeconomic factors and other plausible confounders were controlled for. Results: Emotional well-being showed the most consistent positive connection to physical activity in nature, whereas general health was positively associated with physical activity in both built and natural outdoor settings. Better sleep quality was weakly connected to frequent physical activity in nature, but the connection was outweighed by other factors. Conclusion: The results indicate that nature provides an added value to the known benefits of physical activity. Repeated exercise in nature is, in particular, connected to better emotional well-being.

Passmore, H.-A. and A. J. Howell (2014). **"Nature involvement increases hedonic and eudaimonic well-being: A two-week experimental study."** *Ecopsychology* 6(3): 148-154. <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/eco.2014.0023>

(Free full text available) Given experimental evidence of enhancement of well-being as a result of brief exposure to nature, we sought to study the effect of ongoing nature involvement on well-being. Undergraduate participants (N=84) were randomly assigned to either a nature intervention condition or a control condition. Results indicated that, at the end of 2 weeks, net-positive affect and feelings of elevation were significantly higher, and meaning was marginally higher, in the nature intervention condition relative to the control condition. Self-concordant motivation was also higher for the nature condition, suggesting that the nature intervention was perceived as intrinsically pleasant. Levels of trait connectedness to nature did not moderate the impact of the nature intervention on well-being, suggesting that nature involvement is beneficial among a variety of individuals. High levels of nature involvement were voluntarily sustained throughout the 2 weeks of the study. For the most part, participants engaged in simple activities involving nature close to home, indicating that drastic life changes need not be made in order to improve positive functioning and feelings. This research provides important empirical groundwork for future research concerning daily nature involvement as an effective positive psychology intervention.

Pierre, J. M. (2014). **"The neuroscience of free will: Implications for psychiatry."** *Psychological Medicine* 44(12): 2465-2474. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0033291713002985>

Belief in free will has been a mainstay in philosophy throughout history, grounded in large part in our intuitive sense that we consciously control our actions and could have done otherwise. However, psychology and psychiatry have long sought to uncover mechanistic explanations for human behavior that challenge the notion of free will. In recent years, neuroscientific discoveries have produced a model of volitional behavior that is at odds with the notion of contra-causal free will and our sense of conscious agency. Volitional behavior instead appears to have antecedents in unconscious brain activity that is localizable to specific neuroanatomical structures. Updating notions of free will in favor of a continuous model of volitional self-control provides a useful paradigm to conceptualize and study some forms of psychopathology such as addiction and impulse control disorders. Similarly, thinking of specific symptoms of schizophrenia as disorders of agency may help to elucidate mechanisms of psychosis. Beyond clinical understanding and etiological research, a neuroscientific model of volitional behavior has the potential to modernize forensic notions of responsibility and criminal punishment in order to inform public policy. Ultimately, moving away from the language of free will towards the language of volitional control may result in an enhanced understanding of the very nature of ourselves.

Sheldon, K. and L. Krieger (2014). **"Walking the talk: Value importance, value enactment, and well-being."** *Motivation and Emotion* 38(5): 609-619. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11031-014-9424-3>

Prior research on intrinsic versus extrinsic values has focused on the comparative importance subjects assign to the two types of values, showing that relative intrinsic versus extrinsic value orientation (RIEVO) predicts higher or increased well-being. In two studies, we show that rated action taken regarding the two types of values is just as essential to study. Support was found for four hypotheses: (1) there was a significant behavior/importance gap, such that participants "walked" (acted on values) less than they "talked" (endorsed those values); (2) this was especially true for intrinsic values, an interaction suggesting that the intrinsic ideals of personal growth, community, and connection often receive only lip service; (3) the "walk" (behavior ratings) measure of RIEVO subsumed the "talk" (importance ratings) RIEVO measure's effects on well-being outcomes, suggesting that researchers interested in predicting well-being from values should perhaps focus on rated value enactment, not value importance; and (4) participants with higher meaning in life, lower search for meaning, more self-concordance at work, and greater chronological age evidenced more consistency between their talking and their walking.

Su, R., L. Tay, et al. (2014). **"The development and validation of the comprehensive inventory of thriving (cit) and the brief inventory of thriving (bit)."** *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being* 6(3): 251-279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12027>

In this article we present the development and validation of two new measures of psychological well-being: the Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving (CIT) and the Brief Inventory of Thriving (BIT). These measures were developed with two specific goals in mind: (1) to measure a broad range of psychological well-being constructs and represent a holistic view of positive functioning; and (2) to predict important health outcomes that are useful for researchers and health practitioners. The CIT includes 18 subscales with 54 items in total, covering a broad range of well-being components. The BIT has 10 items in total and can serve as an indicator of psychological well-being and a brief screening tool of mental health. The new measures were evaluated in five samples of a total of 3,191 US participants with diverse demographics. The CIT and BIT had excellent psychometric properties and exhibited convergent validity with existing measures of psychological well-being and discriminant validity with measures of ill-being. Both measures contributed over and above existing measures of psychology well-being in predicting a variety of health outcomes, including self-reported and objective health status, physical functioning, and health behaviors. In addition, we showed the relative importance of thriving compared to ill-being for health outcomes and the benefits of assessing individuals' positive functioning beyond ill-being. Potential uses of the new measures are discussed.

Van Tongeren, D. R., D. E. Davis, et al. (2014). **"Social benefits of humility: Initiating and maintaining romantic relationships."** *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 9(4): 313-321. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.898317>

(Available in free full text) Previous research has highlighted the social nature of humility. In three studies, we provide evidence that humility facilitates the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships. In Study 1, very humble potential dating partners, relative to less humble partners, were rated more favorably and were more likely to elicit intentions to initiate a romantic relationship. Study 2 was a conceptual replication of Study 1 that provided evidence that participants find humble potential dating partners more attractive than arrogant dating partners. In Study 3, we examined perceptions of humility in participants in proximal or long-distance relationships. We found that humility buffers against unforgiveness in long-distant relationships. Although long-distance relationships were associated with greater unforgiveness, this effect was only present when partners were viewed as having low humility. Together, these findings highlight the social benefits of humility in initiating and maintaining romantic relationships.