Title
Hedonic Adaptation to Positive and Negative Experiences

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The What, How, and Why of Hedonic Adaptation

Hedonic adaptation is the psychological process by which people become accustomed to a positive or negative stimulus, such that the emotional effects of that stimulus are attenuated over time (Frederick & Loewenstein, 1999; see also Helson, 1964; Parise, 1995). The "stimulus" can be a circumstance (new home in the hills), a single event (a pink slip), or a recurring event (three-weekly dialysis), and it must be constant or repeated for adaptation to occur.

The homeowner will experience hedonic adaptation as long as her mantel remains unchanged, the worker as long as he is unemployed, and the kidney patient as long as disease progression is kept at bay. If the new home is renovated to include a tennis court, the employee is offered a new job 2 weeks from Monday, or the dialysis treatment is extended, a brand new adaptation process will unfold.

A question that is yet unresolved concerns whether the stimulus to which one adapts must be an actual situation (e.g., the situation of driving a particular car or being in a particular marriage or experiencing a particular offense) or the knowledge or recognition of that situation (e.g., "I own a hybrid" or "I am married to an alcoholic" or "She fired me"). It is undoubtedly difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle these two aspects—for example, to separate being married (i.e., the complex stream of experiences that make up a marriage) from one's identity and self-labeling as a married person, and researchers have yet to do so. Another unresolved question is whether reductions in emotional responses over time represent evidence of true adaptation or merely relabeling—that is, giving a different label to the same perception. As an illustration, both before and after moving away from her family, a woman may rate her overall life satisfaction as a 6 on a 10-point scale. The second rating may indicate hedonic adaptation to the move (i.e., her overall happiness has increased), but it may also reflect changes in her interpretation and use of the scale. For example, if her new reference group (her new-found colleagues and neighbors) is less happy as a whole, then her new 6 may be a result of her implicitly rating her happiness (or unhappiness) against this group instead of the old, happier reference group.

Multiple mechanisms are presumed to underlie hedonic adaptation, including cognitive processes (e.g., attention, goals and values, perceptions, aspirations, explanations, and social and temporal comparisons), behavioral effects (e.g., avoiding particular...
situations or seeking solace from friends), and physiological processes (such as opponent processes of emotion; Soloman, 1980). However, it is disputable whether hedonic adaptation must be passive and automatic (i.e., the person eventually adjusts to a disability without actively "doing" something about it or without any particular preference or intention) or whether active coping strategies (like intentionally trying to find the silver lining in the disability or reorienting family over work) are part and parcel of the adaptation process (cf. Wart, Jackson, & Banks, 1988). Because people do not have an incentive to hasten adaptation to positive experience, this question appears to apply to hedonic adaptation only in the negative domain.

Theorists agree that hedonic adaptation is adaptive (Fredrick & Loewenstein, 1995; cf. Carver & Schein, 1990; Frijda, 1988). If people's emotional reactions did not weaken with time, they would not be able to discriminate between more and less significant stimuli (i.e., new events that offer new information) and less significant stimuli (i.e., past events that should fade into the background). This property is important for the emotional system to function efficiently, as people must have the capacity, first, to safeguard themselves from psychologically arousing (and potentially destructive) long-lasting and intense affective reactions; and, second, to remain sensitive to the signal value of subsequent events (e.g., an opportunity for a new relationship or the danger of a snake underfoot). Indeed, in a world with no opportunity for a new relationship or the danger of a snake underfoot). Instead, in a world without hedonic adaptation, human beings would be overwhelmed by their emotions and lose the vital ability to be attuned to changes (rather than to absolute magnitudes) in stimuli or circumstances (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). To quote a line from the film Before Sunset (2004), if passion did not fade, "we would end up doing nothing at all with our lives." The same can be said for anger, anxiety, and grief.

**Previous Empirical Findings in the Negative and Positive Domains**

Empirical work on hedonic adaptation aims to determine the effect of a particular stimulus, event, or circumstance on the individual's emotional response. Studies have used a variety of "hedonic" measures, including scales of life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, psychological adjustment, and single-item indicators of happiness. Although there is a debate about whether different components of well-being (e.g., its cognitive and affective aspects) are unitary or, instead, show different trajectories over time (e.g., Diener et al., 2006), I will assume that the well-being measures used in the research herein are reasonably well correlated (e.g., Bussin, Sadava, & Decoursey, 2007; see Diener, 1994, for a review) and would likely produce similar results if interchanged.

**Negative experiences**

A growing body of research has explored the indicators and consequences of hedonic adaptation to negative circumstances and events. The first such studies used cross-sectional designs, yet nonetheless offered suggestive evidence that people adapt to some negative experiences but not to others. For example, 1 month to 1 year after becoming paralyzed, accident victims reported being significantly less happy than a control group (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978); 16 months after the building of a new freeway, residents were still not adjusted to the noise (Weinrein, 1982); but 1 to 60 months after surgery for breast cancer, the majority of patients reported that their lives had been altered for the better (Taylor, Lichtman, & Wood, 1984). Without a post-event baseline, however, researchers cannot determine whether and how much adaptation had actually taken place.

Prospective longitudinal studies, recently pioneered by Lucas and his colleagues, are much more instructive. In a 19-year investigation of representative German residents, Lucas (2007b) found that those who had experienced a government-certified disability during the course of the study showed a significant and sustained drop in their level of well-being from before to after the onset of disability, even after income and employment were controlled. Participants from the same data set who were followed up from 15 to 18 years reported significantly reduced well-being years after becoming unemployed (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004), divorced (Lucas, 2005), and widowed (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2005). Notably, in all these studies, whether individuals had experienced disability, unemployment, widowhood, or divorce (or all extremely negative experiences in the domains of health, work, and interpersonal relationships), their levels of well-being took a "hit" from the event and, on average, never fully recovered.1

**Positive experiences**

Compared to the negative domain, the literature on hedonic adaptation to positive circumstances and events is relatively scarce, with only a small number of published cross-sectional studies and even fewer longitudinal ones. Interestingly, every one of these investigations evidences fairly rapid and apparently complete adaptation to positive events. The most widely-cited study is that of Brickman and his colleagues (1978), who reported that winners of $500,000 to $1,000,000 (in 1976 dollars) in the Illinois State Lottery were no happier from less than 1 month to 18 months after the news than those who had experienced no such windfall. Findings that increase in citizens' average incomes have not been accompanied by increases in average well-being—for example, that Americans' mean happiness scores shifted slightly from 7.5 (out of 10) in 1940 to 7.2 in 1990, a time period when incomes more than tripled (Lane, 2000)—have also been interpreted to indicate the work of hedonic adaptation.

Much more persuasive research showed that German residents who had married sometime during the 15-year period of their prospective longitudinal investigation initially obtained a significant boost in their happiness levels, but reverted to their baseline after 2 years on average (Lucas et al., 2003; see also Lucas & Clark, 2006). Another relevant longitudinal study followed high-level managers for 5 years to track their job satisfaction before and after a voluntary job change (Boswell, Boudreau, & Tichy, 2005). Much like what was observed, with marriage, the managers experienced a burst of satisfaction immediately after the move (labeled the honeymoon effect), but their satisfaction plummeted within the year (the so-called Amusement effect, but actually evidence of adaptation). In contrast, managers who chose not to change jobs during the same time period showed relatively stable job satisfaction levels. Furthermore, evidence from my laboratory suggests that feelings of enhanced well-being—triggered by receiving positive, self-relevant feedback 5 days in a row—disappear in a near-linear fashion within 2 weeks (Bothem & Lyubomirsky, 2008). To my knowledge, although a few longitudinal studies have assessed satisfaction with a particular event (such as acquiring breast implants) for months or years after the procedure (e.g., Cash, Duf, & Perkins, 2002), no investigations other than the two described above have tracked well-being both before and after the significant positive event. The change occurred, and hardly any have compared the well-being trajectory of individuals who experienced major life events with that of matched controls who did not experience such events.
events is more powerful and longer-lasting than that of positive events (e.g., Lawton, DeVoor, & Partemeie, 1995; Netzel & Gable, 2001; Sheldon, Ryan, & Reis, 1996; see also Ohishi, Diener, Choi, Kim, Frimbo, & Choi, 2007). For example, after a bad day, students reported lower well-being the following day, but, after a good day, their positive well-being did not carry over (Sheldon et al., 1996).

An intriguing line of research that may also shed light on the "bad is stronger than good" phenomenon is exploring the positivity (good-to-bad) ratios that distinguish flourishing individuals, couples, and groups; such ratios generally range from 3-to-1 to 5-to-1 (Fredrickson, 2009; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). For example, happily married couples are characterized by ratios of approximately 5-to-1 in their verbal and emotional expressions to each other, as compared to very unhappy couples (who display ratios of less than 1-to-1; Gurman, 1994). Tellingly, the exact same optimal good-to-bad ratios (5-to-1) characterize the verbal uterances of profligable and negative events. For these three reasons, people are more likely to hedonically adapt to positive experiences (see also Fredrickson, 1998). The three asymmetries—in attention, reaction, and explanation—are supported by ample evidence (see Baumeister et al., 2001, for an excellent review) and consistent with functional approaches to emotions (Chore, 1994; Frijda, 1994; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). In other words, positive affect signals to individuals that things are going well and that they may continue engaging with their environment. Negative affect, by contrast, warns people of potential danger or unpleasantness in the environment to which they must respond (e.g., attack, flee, conserve resources, engage). Because survival is arguably much more dependent on urgent attention to potential dangers than on passing up opportunities for positive experiences, it is thereby more adaptive for "bad to be stronger than good" (Baumeister et al., 2001).

Hedonic adaptation to positive circumstances and events is relatively rapid and complete leads to the intriguing hypothesis that such adaptation may be a formidable barrier to raising happiness. That hedonic adaptation to negative circumstances and events is relatively slow and curtailed raises the concern that such adaptation may critically interfere with successful coping. These two ideas—which I discuss in turn below—undermine the importance of studying hedonic adaptation in order to enhance researchers' understanding of how people can optimize well-being and manage stress and adversity.

Hedonic Adaptation to Positive Events

"Happy thou art not, for what thou hast not, still thou livest in great and what thou hast, forget'st."—William Shakespeare (1564/1616).

Although the desire for happiness has existed since antiquity, its pursuit is more vigorous than ever in today's society, both in Western nations like the U.S. and increasingly around the globe (Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, Smith, & Sha, 1995; Fredrickson, 1978; Triandis, Bontempo, Leung, & Hui, 1990). Moreover, well-being appears to be a worthwhile goal, because happiness not only "feels" good, but also has tangible benefits for individuals, as well as for their friends, families, and communities, and even society at large (see, e.g., Seckin, 1996). Happiness and positive emotions have been found to be associated with and to promote numerous successful life outcomes, including superior physical and mental health, enhanced creativity and productivity, higher income, more prosocial behavior, and stronger interpersonal relationships (see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener 2005, for a meta-analysis). Furthermore, positive emotions (feeling, joy, contentment, serenity, interest, vitality, and pride), which are the very hallmark of happiness (Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991; Ury et al., 2004), are also advantageous during the process of recovery from negative experiences (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008).

It is possible to enhance and sustain happiness in other words, how can an individual preserve well-being in the face of stressful or traumatic life events and maintain boosts in well-being following positive ones? For the average person not best by poverty or trauma, one of the biggest challenges to attaining and maintain happiness is undoubtedly the magnitude of his or her genetically determined happiness "set point" (or temperament; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005). Behavioral genetic studies show that about 50% of the variance in people's levels of well-being can be accounted for by genes (e.g., Breaugart, Kremen, DiFries, & Fulker, 1996; Tellegen et al., 1988; see also Hamer, 1995; Williams & Thompson, 1993). This set point or baseline may partially explain why happiness is remarkably cross-situationally consistent (e.g., Diener & Larsen, 1984) and stable over time (Costa et al., 1987; Heady & Weirin, 1989), despite notable life changes. For example, fully 76% of Fujita and Diener's (2005) longitudinal sample followed from 1984 to 2000 did not show a significant change in their baseline well-being from the first 5 years of their study to the last 5 years. Furthermore, a 2-year longitudinal study of that significant life events, such as being accepted into graduate school, becoming an uncle, experiencing the death of a close friend, having financial problems, and getting promoted, influenced well-being for 3 to 6 months and no longer (Suh et al., 1996). These studies suggest that trying to increase happiness is an effort that is doomed from the start, as people cannot help but return to their set point, or baseline, over time.

To address this pessimistic hypothesis, Sheldon, Schkade, and I developed a model that identified the most important determinants of the chronic happiness level (as the point (accounting for about 50% of the observed variance in well-being), (2) life circumstances (accounting for about 20%), and (3) intentional activity (accounting for the remaining 48%). Accordingly, we argued that the assumption of a fixed, genetically determined set point does not logically lead to the conclusion that well-being cannot be changed, even the existence of the set point leaves much "room" for improvement, as well as for resilience (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon et al., 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004). Specifically, up to 40% of the individual differences in happiness appear to be determined by what people do. In other words, our model suggests that, with intentional efforts, people can both preserve happiness and become sustainably happier. The individual's goals and happiness-supportive activities must differ, however, depending on whether or her circumstances are changing for the better or for the worse. I first discuss the mechanisms underlying hedonic adaptation to positive events—and implications for how to bolster happiness and manage coping—and then the mechanisms and implications of adaptation to negative events.

Hedonic adaptation as a barrier to sustainable well-being

As noted earlier, I propose that relatively rapid and complete hedonic adaptation to positive events and to improvements in life circumstances is one of the biggest obstacles to raising and sustaining happiness. This obstacle is, in itself, a formidable barrier to raising happiness. That hedonic adaptation to negative circumstances and events is relatively slow and curtailed raises the concern that such adaptation may critically interfere with successful coping. These two ideas—which I discuss in turn below—undermine the importance of studying hedonic adaptation in order to enhance researchers' understanding of how people can optimize well-being and manage stress and adversity.
become reliably happier over time. The chief reason, I submit, is that people have the capacity to control the speed and extent of adaptation via intentional, effortful activities.

Consequently, I argue that one of the secrets to achieving increased and sustainable well-being lies in strategies that prevent, slow down, or impede the positive and negative experiences that can be successful is asserted, albeit speculatively, by three types of data—the first showing that people's happiness can lastingly improve, the second indicating that people vary in how well and how rapidly they adapt to positive events, and the third demonstrating that specific adaptation-thwarting activities can bolster happiness.

**People's Happiness Can Improve**

The fact is that happiness can and does change over time. For example, a 22-year study that followed approximately 2,000 healthy veterans found that life satisfaction increased over these men's lives, created at age 65, and did not start significantly declining until age 75 (Mroczek & Spiro, 2005).

A positive correlation between age and well-being measures has also been found in a 23-year longitudinal study of four generations of families (Charles, Reynolds, & Gott, 2001) and in a cross-sectional study of adults aged 17 to 82 (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001).

In the 1984-2000 longitudinal study described earlier by Fujita and Dieper (2003), although 70% of the respondents remained unchanged in their well-being, 24% reported significant shifts (though, unfortunately, most of these were for the worse, not for the better). Lucas (2007) contends that stability estimates for well-being bottom out at around .30 and .60, pointing up the possibility of real change. Although these data are merely suggestive, they intimate the possibility that true changes in well-being may be related to people's capacity to resist adaptation.

**People Vary in Adaptation Rates**

As several theorists have noted (e.g., Diener et al., 2006; Lucas, 2007a), longitudinal studies of hedonic adaptation reveal variability in the extent to which people's happiness changes (and/or returns to baseline) following important life events. For example, just two examples, in the 15-year investigation of marital transitions, some individuals got much happier after getting married and then stayed happier, while others' well-being dropped even before their wedding day (see Figure 2 in Lucas et al., 2003). Furthermore, whereas some widows' and widowers' happiness plummeted (and never recovered) after their spouses' deaths, others actually became happier and remained that way (see Figure 4 in the same paper).

The mechanisms underlying this variability are undoubtedly complex, random, or dependent on people's unique situations; for example, some of the "happy widows" may have experienced terminal caregiving responsibilities and experienced a natural sense of relief when their spouses passed away. However, I suggest that these mechanisms are also coherent and systematic across individuals. Specifically, I propose that the primary source of individual differences in rates of adaptation (and in capacity to experience positive shifts in happiness over time) involves differences in intentional efforts that people can undertake in order to slow down adaptation to positive events and speed up adaptation to (i.e., cope with) negative ones. With the HAPNE model, I hope to elucidate these common processes and effects.

**Hedonic Adaptation to Positive Events**

"Life is too short; you must make the most of it, for this is the only way of being happy." – Jennie Jerome Churchill

"No life is without stress, adversity, or crisis. The possibilities are endless: death of loved one, illnesses, accidents, vicissitudes, natural disasters, abusive relationships, financial crises, stigmatizations, divorces, and job losses. Close to half of U.S. adults will experience one severe traumatic event during their lifetimes (Ozer & Weiss, 2004), and almost everyone will occasionally endure moderate to severe daily stress. In the wake of such challenges, many become depressed, anxious, or confused. They may find it difficult to concentrate on the daily tasks of living, and they may not be able to sleep or eat or function well. Some have such intense and long-lasting reactions to a trauma that they are unable to return to their previous ("normal") selves for many months or even years. Indeed, as revealed by the literature on hedonic adaptation, over time, people adapt to some negative experiences completely but show protracted or only partial adaptation to others. Which suggests that people should learn how to optimize their adaptive mechanisms in the positive domain and how to block or minimize them in the negative domain. One key adaptation-thwarting property is attention—that is, once we stop paying attention to a life change (e.g., stop appreciating it if positive or stop rummaging on it if negative), we have adapted. Furthermore, the types of both pleasant and unpleasant experiences that are best able to maintain attention are those that are (a) varied and dynamic and (b) novel and surprising. Although some of these properties undoubtedly interact with one another, I describe them separately in the three sections that follow. It is also worth noting that adaptation-foreshorting (and adaptation-accelerating) activities and processes can be engaged in effortlessly and intentionally, or automatically and habitually.

**Attention Enticing**

William James once made a remarkable and rather radical proposition: "My experience is what I agree to attend to." Indeed, what people pay attention to is their experience; it is their life. What grabs attention? That which people chew on, remember, emotionally react to, and factor into their judgments and decisions. If a thing, attribute, person, or idea fails to capture attention, one can be said to have adapted to it. When an individual suddenly obtains more disposable income than she ever had before, the shift in financial status is captivating and novel. She cannot help but be aware of all the extra money she has to spend and may think about it constantly. Importantly, she recognizes (1) that she has not always had this added income and (2) that the surplus may not endure forever. With time, however, the change in income will cease to be novel or surprising and other concerns, failures, upsets, and hassles will elicit emotional reactions, drawing attention away from the financial change and thereby compelling it to fade into the psychological background (cf. Kahneman & Thaler, 2000).

Similarly, after an individual unexpectedly loses a large proportion of his life savings in a Ponzi scheme, he will have recurrent and intense thoughts, memories, and worries related to the financial setback. In due time, however, these ruminations, and their associated negative emotions, will slowly recede. However, any object that continues to capture attention—that is, any object of which people are continually aware or that frequently and perhaps even unintentionally pops into their minds—will be less prone to hedonic adaptation. For example, owners of luxury sedans are no happier during car trips than owners of compact two-door coupes, unless their car's attributes are on their minds while driving (Schwarz, Kahneman, & Xu, in press); and people who continue to be aware of a positive activity change in their lives are less likely to adapt to it (Sheldon, Lyubomirsky, in press).

Thus, adaptation-foreshorting activities and processes have this very attention-grabbing capability.

**Dynamic and Varied**

In his widely quoted classic book, The Joyless Economy, Scitovsky (1976) argued that focusing on "consumption" (e.g., consumption change) is joyless because individuals eventually adapt to them. Instead, people should spend their money on joyful things, which yield continual fascination, challenge, and fulfillment, like the "pleasures of roaming good friends or backpacking through a gorgeous landscape" (cf. Van Boven, 2005). The so-called pleasures...
Scitovsky described, which deliver partial and intermittent (rather than continuous) satisfaction, are parallel to the intentional activities in which people engage in to thaw or slow down adaptation in the positive domain. What such activities have in common is that they are dynamic and episodic—that is, variable and intermittent—and thereby share the critical attribute of supplying changeable and dynamic experiences. After all, when it comes to their activities, people are not doing only one thing and doing it the same way each time. Of course, as applied to negative life changes, precisely those ones that give rise to varied and intermittent negative events (such as the diagnosis of a chronic illness, a loss of a cherished friend, or a change in living conditions), there are few benefits, and many costs, that would encourage persistent effort and engagement in them in an intentional, self-conceptualized process. Such efforts have the property that they can be varied and episodic and can produce a fluid and diverse set of positive experiences, opportunities, and possibilities. Consequently, positive changes in such activities should presumably produce stronger and more sustained increases in well-being relative to positive changes in life circumstances.

Supporting this argument, Sheldon and I found that undergraduates reported that positive changes in their relationships (e.g., deciding to study a new subject) were more "variable" and that they were less likely to become "accustomed" to them, relative to positive changes in their circumstances (e.g., acquiring a better dorm room or more financial aid; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2000). In addition, longitudinal studies showed that both changes in activities and changes in circumstances made participants happier 6 weeks after the start of a study, but only changes in activities continued to have a significant effect on happiness 6 months later (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schimmack, 2005). By the 12th week, students appeared to have already adapted emotionally to improvements in their circumstances, but not to their intentional activities. This result was replicated in a 6-week-long study in which students were prompted to make dynamic and variable changes versus static, one-time changes in their lives (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, in press). Interestingly, among participants who took up a new dynamic activity, the effects on well-being were stronger for those who reported that the change added variety to their lives and who reported remaining aware of the change—that is, a strong sense of flow and enjoyment of the activity. Among participants who took up a new static activity, the effects on well-being were stronger for those who reported that the change added variety to their lives and who reported remaining aware of the change—that is, a strong sense of flow and enjoyment of the activity.

Indirect evidence for this hypothesis comes from a recent fMRI study that found that individuals who performed different acts of kindness every week (e.g., did an extra household chore, sent e-cards to family members) had more activation in the brain region associated with the experience of joy than those who performed the same act every week (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, in press). Similarly, participants who reported that the change added variety to their lives and who reported remaining aware of the change—that is, a strong sense of flow and enjoyment of the activity—had higher activation in the brain region associated with the experience of joy than those who performed the same act every week (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, in press).

Supporting this argument, Sheldon and I found that undergraduates who reported that positive changes in their circumstances (e.g., acquiring a better dorm room or more financial aid; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, in press) were more "variable" and that they were less likely to become "accustomed" to them, relative to positive changes in their circumstances (e.g., acquiring a better dorm room or more financial aid). Conversely, positive changes in their circumstances (e.g., acquiring a better dorm room or more financial aid) were more likely to remain constant and to remain constant for a longer period of time and thus less prone to hedonic adaptation. This work was motivated by the argument that circumstantial changes are particularly prone to adaptation, because they are generally one-time improvements that represent relatively static "facts" about one's life (e.g., "I live in Beverly Hills," "I am married to my second husband").

As earlier studies suggest, experiences that are variable and dynamic can serve to inhibit adaptation, a conclusion that applies to both the positive and negative domain. With respect to positive events, the dynamic and varied nature of activity suggests that its impact can be maximized by attending to its timing—that is, an optimal frequency of engagement that permits the activity to remain novel, consequential, and positive. Indeed, studies from my laboratory have shown that how frequently and close together individuals commit acts of kindness (five acts in a single day vs. spread across the week) and "counts his blessings" (once vs. three times per week) determines the extent to which his happiness is boosted over time (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005). Analogous recommendations can be made with respect to negative events. For example, a schedule of medical treatments can be devised in such a way that the individual becomes accustomed and "jaded" to its frequency.

Adaptation-forestalling activities not only can be timed in optimal ways; they can be varied—mixed up, spaced out—into optimal ways as well that permit a positive experience to remain fresh, meaningful, and pleasant. Recall that, by definition, adaptation occurs only in response to constant or repeated stimuli, not to changing and dynamic ones. Variety, in both thoughts and behaviors, appears to be linearly stimuliating and rewarding (Berridge, 1979; Proctor & Jacobs, 2008; Roll et al., 1981; e.g., Eysenck, 1996; Patel, 1996; Schaie et al., 2001). Moreover, it was found that people who were prompted to make dynamic and variable changes versus static, one-time changes in their lives (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, in press) were more likely to remain constant and to remain constant for a longer period of time and thus less prone to hedonic adaptation.

Notably, surprising events often prompt a search for understanding ("why did this happen?"). The emotional punch of surprising events may diminish when understanding is reached. Wilson and Gilber's (2008) AREA model (attend, react, explain, adapt) illustrates that surprise and understanding are in a sense two poles of the same continuum; to be surprised is to face what is not expected or not yet understood. Indeed, Wilson and Gilbert proposed that "lack of understanding" is a general principle that accounts for the adaptation-forestalling effects of many other properties of events—not only surprise but also novelty, predictability, and certainty.

Stream of emotions and events
As it concerns the positive domain, all of the features of adaptation-forestalling strategies described above appear to have the consequence of yielding (or preserving) a persistent stream of positive events, thoughts, and emotions. Such efforts as viewing the world in an optimistic light, becoming less cretinous, or adopting a more generous personality, reading all the classics, or starting a new fitness regimen all have the property of providing varied and novel experiences, which invite one's attention, savoring, and appreciation. Hence, after a positive change, they are most likely to produce a sustainable boost in one's happiness, keeping one in the upper portion of one's set range of happiness potential.

With respect to the negative domain, however, those stressors, setbacks, and traumas that entice attention and rumination, and that continue to vary and surprise, are precisely the ones likely to generate an inflow of negative emotions, thoughts, and events. Accordingly, if individuals suffer declines in well-being after such upheavals, the stream of negative events will help sustain those declines, keeping them in the lower part of their happiness set range.

Hedonic Adaptation to Positive and Negative Events (HAPNE) Model
In a nutshell, people generally adapt, and do so rather quickly, to most positive changes in their circumstances—to an apartment with a view, a face-lift, recovery from illness, a new job, a 15% higher
salary, a bigger house, and even getting married. People also adapt, though less rapidly and less completely, to many negative circumstantial changes and events, including chronic diseases, widowhood, ends to relationships, layoffs, and moves from larger homes to smaller ones. What is the process underlying this adaptation, and how can people intervene in it, such that they can forestall it in the case of positive events (Fig. 11.1) and speed it up in the case of negative ones (Fig. 11.2)? In other words, what should we do more of for positive events (to maintain well-being gains) and what should we do less of for negative events (to prevent maintaining well-being drops)? Sheldon’s and my HAPNE model was developed to address these questions.

**How do people adapt?**

Imagine a hypothetical individual who has experienced a discrete positive change, like moving into a nice new house, finding a new love, starting a new hobby, buying a work of art, or having plastic surgery. According to the model, the life change, when large enough, triggers a boost in well-being (WB; labeled +a) and produces a stream of (more or less discrete) positive events. This process is displayed in Figure 11.1.

Next imagine a hypothetical individual who has experienced a negative change, like downsizing to an apartment after foreclosure, suffering a breakup, renting the car, or gaining weight. In an analogous process (shown in Fig. 11.2), that change triggers a drop in WB (labeled -a) and generates a stream of negative events.

In line with my earlier theoretical articles (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007), I define WB in terms of both cognitive and emotional components—namely, as high life satisfaction and positive affect, and low negative affect (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

My primary question is, how do people ultimately adapt to the positive or negative change? In other words, what precise mechanisms erode the positive emotions resulting from these events and lead to a return to baseline levels of well-being?

Adaptation, though, of course, the positive path will unfold more rapidly than the negative. The first, bottom-up route is through declines in the number or frequency of experienced emotions (see the bottom path in Fig. 11.1, number of positive emotions, and in Fig. 11.2, number of negative emotions). That is, the emotions that the individual will initially derive from the change will become less and less frequent over time and may cease altogether. For example, one may experience many positive emotions after buying a Prius, but those occasions will become less and less numerous, and the positive emotions (excitement, happiness, pride, relief at the reduced gas bill, etc.) will recur less and less over time. Similarly, experiences of negative emotions after losing a beloved pet (pain, sadness, longing) will become more and more sporadic over time. The idea of an aspiration-level path to adaptation, especially in the positive domain, is very similar to Kahneman’s (1999) notion of the operation of a “satisfaction treadmill” or “aspiration treadmill,” which arises when the standard with which experiences are judged is itself changed. Kahneman suggested that people can essentially adapt to their new level of positive experience and thus require that new level simply to maintain their baseline happiness. Changes in aspiration level can provide a top-down route to changes in global well-being, by shifting how ongoing positive (or negative) experiences are framed and contextualized. Notably, then, the HAPNE model incorporates both bottom-up and top-down routes to adaptation, though of course the positive path will unfold more rapidly than the negative. The first, bottom-up route is through declines in the number or frequency of experienced emotions (see the bottom path in Fig. 11.1, number of positive emotions, and in Fig. 11.2, number of negative emotions). That is, the emotions that the individual will initially derive from the change will become less and less frequent over time and may cease altogether. For example, one may experience many positive emotions after buying a Prius, but those occasions will become less and less numerous, and the positive emotions (excitement, happiness, pride, relief at the reduced gas bill, etc.) will recur less and less over time. Similarly, experiences of negative emotions after losing a beloved pet (pain, sadness, longing) will become more and more sporadic over time. The idea of an aspiration-level path to adaptation, especially in the positive domain, is very similar to Kahneman’s (1999) notion of the operation of a “satisfaction treadmill” or “aspiration treadmill,” which arises when the standard with which experiences are judged is itself changed. Kahneman suggested that people can essentially adapt to their new level of positive experience and thus require that new level simply to maintain their baseline happiness. Changes in aspiration level can provide a top-down route to changes in global well-being, by shifting how ongoing positive (or negative) experiences are framed and contextualized. Notably, then, the HAPNE model incorporates both bottom-up...
How do people forestall or hasten adaptations?

Now I turn to the implications of the model for how to slow or slow down hedonic adaptation after positive life changes and to accelerate it after negative ones. Figures 11.1 and 11.2 also highlight several important variables (shown in numbered hexagons) that Sheldon and I propose moderate these two paths towards adaptation, such that they help forestall or expedite it.

The first set of moderators suggest that, in the case of positive changes, the more variable and surprising one's positive events (see Fig. 11.1) or the more likely they'll produce frequent positive emotions (see moderator 1a) and the less likely they'll raise one's aspiration level (see moderator 1b; R = reverse). Analogously, in the case of negative changes (see Fig. 11.2), the more variable and surprising one's negative events, the more likely they'll produce frequent negative emotions (again see moderator 1a) and the less likely they'll lower one's aspiration level (again see moderator 1b; R = reverse). In addition, the more variable and surprising one's positive or negative emotions, the more likely they will maintain well-being gains or drops (see moderator 1c in both figures). These predictions, as discussed above, are supported by research on the consequences of variance (e.g., Boehm et al., 2007; Lefever et al., 2007) and surprise (e.g., Wilson & Gilbers, 2007) and should be noted that although variety and surprise can be distinguished theoretically (e.g., experiences can be varied but not surprising), they often co-occur.

To consider an example in the positive domain, after purchasing a work of art, the events that the owner experiences regarding that object (e.g., friends admiring it, relishing it in his home, having ideas for how to place it) may eventually become fairly predictable and similar to one another over time. As a result, he will become used to the positive events, deriving fewer and fewer positive emotions from them; at the same time, his aspirations will increase, such that he will desire an even greater number of such positive events. This is a perilous combination for sustained happiness. A parallel process will occur in response to negative changes, such as financial setbacks. The individual's emotional reactions will become more predictable over time, leading her to become accustomed to the negative emotions (e.g., bill payments missed, inability to buy her child a toy), which would thereby trigger fewer and less intense negative emotions over time, while simultaneously lowering her desires regarding the positivity of her life. In contrast, to the positive domain, this may be a desirable outcome, if one's objective is to return to earlier levels of well-being.

As a second moderator, the HAPNE model specifies that continued attention to the positive life change—purchase of a new house versus foreclosure, new weight loss versus weight gain—can forestall rising aspirations in the case of positive events or forestall declining aspirations in the case of negative ones (and thus thwart adaptation in both cases) (e.g., Kohneman & Thaler, 2006; Lyubomirsky et al., 2008). As discussed earlier, by recognizing that the change producing a person's inflow of positive or negative experiences never have come to pass and that its future is uncertain, the person keeps the change "fresh" in her mind. As long as these experiences remain "new," aspirations will be maintained; the moment they get "old," one starts getting used to them and/or taking them for granted and aspirations rise. As discussed earlier, attention to positive changes is also likely to trigger gratitude or appreciation, and attention to negative changes is likely to trigger negatively biased rumination. To extend my earlier examples, appreciation of how his life experiences have improved after the art purchase (cf. Wilson, & Ross, 2001)—e.g., that this improvement is neither inevitable nor permanent—will prevent a person from taking for granted the positive events associated with the art and from desiring even more. Similarly, maintaining awareness of how her life has worsened after an income plunge will prevent a person from becoming unused to the negative events following that event (see moderator 2).

The remainder of the HAPNE model (see table A.14, B. C, and D in both figures) suggests ways that individuals can consciously and deliberately intervene in (i.e., slow down or averr vs. speed up or accelerate) adaptation to life changes. Because people essentially hold opposite goals depending on whether they are confronting good or bad experiences, the first way to intervene in the adaptation process is to actively try to generate—or be open to—unexpected and variable experiences following a positive life change and to actively try to reduce unexpected and variable experiences following a negative life change (see A). For example, one might deliberately plan to do different things in one's new house or wish one's new iPhone or wish one's new genre, or to try new opportunities and activities after losing weight or beginning a new hobby. Supportive evidence for such positive strategies comes from research showing that couples who engage together in novel and arousing activities (Jeon, Norman, Ann, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000; Kohneman, Ann, & Berger, 1993) show greater improvements in the quality of their relationships. By contrast, after gaining weight or losing the ability to engage in a favorite hobby, the goal is to curtail the variety of activities and experiences associated with the unfortunate turn of events—for example, by avoiding situations that evoke painful feelings, such as visiting hobby websites, trying on clothes that no longer fit, or spending time with people who evoke unfavorable comparisons.

When such experiences are repeated over and over, however, the individual's negative emotional response to them is likely to weaken over time, which helps promote adaptation.

Second, one can intentionally try to maintain attention and awareness of one's positive or negative experience (e.g., new job, car, hobby, facelift) and the daily positive events it yields (e.g., learning a new skill at work) (see B in Fig. 11.1). Positive attention per se is associated with increased well-being and reduced adaptation (Swartz et al., in press; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007). Also, as described earlier, studies that have induced people to appraise and express gratitude for the things and people in their lives have revealed significant benefits for well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Dickerson, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2006; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2005). The act of attention is aimed at maintaining one's awareness that one has good things in one's life that were not always there and (2) those good things may not continue. Indeed, Koo, Algoe, Wilson, and Gilbert (2008) found that mentally substracting positive events led to bigger improvements in mood than simply reviewing them. Of course, if one's attempts at attention lead one to consider negative implications (e.g., "What if it's taken away?" or "Are my friends jealous?" or to explain or understand the change (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008), this would likely be problematic.

A parallel recommendation applies to ways to intervene with respect to attention to negative changes. After one is forced to trade in a luxurious car for a junker, one can deliberately try not to ruminate about the downgrade (see B in Fig. 11.2) and/or to mentally subtract them (Koo et al., 2008). Research suggests that this goal can be accomplished through distractions—namely, cognitions and behaviors that help divert one's attention away from the negative life change and turn it to pleasant or benign thoughts and activities that are absorbing and engaging (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991, 2004; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; cf. Cukorscanchkutriyihi, 1990). This can essentially be achieved via any activity that turns attention away from the negative change, and from its associated negative emotions and negative events—for example, concentrating on a project at work, going for a bike or hike ride, or setting a film with friends.

The third way to intervene in the adaptation process is to directly increase the number of positive emotions that one experiences in response to a positive life change and to decrease the number of negative emotions that one experiences in response to an adverse one (see C in both figures). A multitude of strategies can be used to accomplish this, with recommendations found in literatures on positive mood inductions (e.g., Cahn & Allen, 2007; Gerrard-Heas, Spies, & Hoce, 1994), positive activity interventions (e.g., Fredrickson, 2002), and cognitive-behavioral therapy (e.g., Hollon, Haman, & Brown, 2002).

Finally, an individual can take steps to reduce his or her aspirations regarding a positive change and to keep them low after a negative change (see D in both figures). In Aristotle's words, "Bring your desires down to your present means. Increase them only when your increased means permit." This may be the most challenging way to thwart adaptation, necessitating the full arsenal of psychological tools at the individual's disposal, including most of the recommendations described above. For example, a person who has just obtained a hefty raise might remind himself of what life was like before (Lieberman, Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Ross, in press) and limit his spending habits to match earlier patterns and a person who has recently been furloughed might resign herself to the loss of income and instead focus on productive ways to use her newfound extra time. Because my goal is to describe the process by which well-being boosts and drops can be sustained, the question of whether reduced aspirations are adaptive in the long term with respect to future performance and goal success will be set aside as falling outside the scope of this chapter. However, following the logic of Heath, Larrick, and Wu (1999), I speculate that people may seek to regulate their aspirations dynamically and optimally...
to fit their idiosyncratic goals and situations—for example, by raising aspirations immediately before attempting to realize a goal (i.e., feeling confident that one will win a tournament) but downgrading them after the tournament is over (thereby feeling satisfied with whatever one's performance).

Intervening in the Adaptation Process: Empirical Evidence Regarding Positive Activities

A primary assumption of this chapter is that people can control the extent and speed of their hedonic adaptation and thus, by developing and practicing the relevant skills, they can both mount one of the biggest challenges to increasing happiness (in the positive domain) and forever coping and resilience (in the negative domain). How precisely one can go about doing so comes in part from the small but growing work on “happiness interventions,” which is showing that effortful strategies and practices can instill new ways of thinking and behaving and thereby preserve well-being in the context of stress and trauma, and produce potentially lasting increases in well-being in their absence. Although dozens, even hundreds, of such strategies arguably exist (see Lyubomirsky, 2008, for a review), only a few will be described here for purposes of illustration. It is worth noting that what all the strategies have in common is that, first, they direct the individual's attention to positive aspects and away from negative aspects of experiences; second, they keep positive experiences “fresh” (i.e., dynamic, varied, novel, or surprising); and, third, they preserve (or preserve) a stream of positive emotions, positive thoughts, and positive events, thereby serving as a foil to negative states (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Waterman, 2000). Feelings of joy, satisfaction, interest, serenity, or pride can help people view their lives with a larger perspective and provide a “psychological time-out” in the midst of stress or hardship, thus lessening the sting of any particular unpleasant experience. Thus, even brief or minor positive emotions, positive thoughts, and positive events instilled in the face of adversity can build resilience by helping people bounce back from stressful experiences (Fredrickson, 2001; Keitner & Bonanno, 1997; Conger, Bergeman, & Slonim, 2000; Wallace, 2006).

Gratitude, savoring, and positive thinking:

POSITIVE DOMAINS

I begin with a discussion of the cultivation of gratitude, because it is a strategy that essentially involves appreciative attention—notably, a particular kind of attention, albeit a positive kind. Appreciative attention—in the form of gratefulness, as well as “savoring” (Bryant & Veroff, 2006), in which one consciously attends to an activity’s enjoyment potential—implies that people would normally have impeded adaptation to positive circumstances and events both directly and indirectly. Expressing gratitude involves noticing and appreciating the good things in one’s life, both concrete and abstract—a comfortable house, a kind friend, strong arms, a thrilling European vacation, the exquisiteness of a Caravaggio painting—and re-evaluating them as gifts or “blessings.” The concomitants and consequences of grateful thinking appear to include bolstered resources for coping with adversity, enhanced self-worth, reduced materialism, fortified social bonds, and the countervailing of negative feelings like envy, bitterness, aversion, and irritation (Emmons, 2007).

The practice of gratitude may directly forestall adaptation by prompting people to extract the maximum possible enjoyment and satisfaction from their life circumstances, thereby helping them to relish these things and keep them from being taken for granted. Indeed, to appreciate a positive life change is to recognize that it may never have occurred (cf. Koo et al., 2008) and that it can be taken away. The genuine expression of gratitude may achieve this in large part because it helps combat two important mechanisms underlying hedonic adaptation—notably, elevating expectations and social comparisons (Layard, 2005). The joy of savoring a novel address subsides after the person becomes “spoiled” by the view, garden, pool, and famous neighbors, desiring an even better location, and after the person begins to notice that everyone else on the block drives an even more expensive car and shower fancier parties. Punishing the appreciative in one’s life—to focus on what one has lost, as opposed to what other people have or what one could potentially have—is a step toward inhibiting or reducing the impact of the rising aspirations and upward comparisons that result from positive circumstantial changes (cf. Twersky, 1988; Griffin, 1991). Other ways to accomplish this are by savoring the here-and-now and by maintaining a positive and optimistic perspective. When a person relishes his garden, mentally transports himself to his happiest day, luxuriates in the sound of his new speakers, or truly lives in the present moment, he is not taking his daily life for granted. When an individual perceives the silver lining in her situation (“I don’t have the biggest house in the neighborhood, but it’s right for me”), she is not becoming jaded to the house’s pleasures.

A number of experiments from my laboratory, as well as those of others, have demonstrated that the regular practice of gratitude, optimism, and savoring, performed over the course of anywhere from 1 to 12 consecutive weeks, bring about significant increases in well-being. For example, the interventions enhance the expression of gratitude, whether through “counting one’s blessings” once a week (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Shildon, et al., 2005) or penning gratitude letters to individuals who have been kind and meaningful (Lyubomirsky et al., 2008; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), has been shown to produce increases in happiness for as long as 9 months relative to control groups. Furthermore, experiences that have prompted individuals to express optimistic thinking by visualizing the realization of their very best hopes and dreams have demonstrated subsequent increases in physical health (King, 2001), happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2008), and positive affect (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2005). Although a mere 202 hours and 1446 studies did not provide direct evidence for the efficacy of gratitude, optimism, savoring, or any happiness-enhancing strategy for that matter in forestalling adaptation to positive aspects of a person’s life. Nevertheless, to date, they offer the only available evidence consistent with the notion that such activities may delay positive adaptation.

NEGATIVE DOMAIN

As discussed above, growing research supports the power of positive thinking, especially in the form of gratitude and savoring, to direct attention to positive life changes and prevent the individual from taking them for granted. However, the empirical evidence also underscores that the very same strategies can help people cope with stress and trauma and deter negative emotions. In other words, the capacity to appreciate one’s life circumstances may be an adaptive coping method by which the individual is able to postpone or ameliorate stressful or aversive life experiences (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Lazarick, 2003). For example, traumatic memories are less likely to come to the surface, and one is less prone when they do, in individuals who are generally more grateful (Watkins, Grimm, & Kols, 2004). Interestingly, many people instinctively express gratitude when confronted with adversity. For example, Fredrickson and colleagues (2003) found that in the days immediately after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, gratitude was found to be the second most commonly experienced emotion (after sadness).

In sum, practicing gratitude, savoring, and optimism during adversity can help people adjust, adapt, and perhaps begin anew. For example, positive thinking appears to be incompatible with negative emotions and may actually diminish or inhibit such feelings as anger, bitterness, and greed (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). Furthermore, those individuals who tend to savor and reminisce about the past—for example, summarizing up happy times, reliving joy from happy memories—are best able to buffer stress (Bryant, 2003).

Finally, research on optimism suggests that optimistic thinking prompts people to engage in active and effective coping (Net & Segresem, 2006; Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). Indeed, optimists routinely maintain relatively high levels of well-being and mental health during times of stress. Optimistic women are less likely to become depressed subsequent to childbirth than women who are less optimistic, and optimistic college freshmen are less likely to experience distress 3 months after enrolling in college (see Scheier & Carver, 1993).

Stop making sense

POSITIVE DOMAINS

Wilson and Gilbert (2005, 2008) have proposed that people need to think too much about and make sense of their successes, windfalls, and love affairs. In other words, one should know but not explain. For example, in these studies, the participants’ pleasure was prolonged when they remained uncertain about the source of an unexpected act of kindness (Wilson et al., 2005). Another implication of their model is that one strategy to inhibit adaptation to a positive experience is to keep reminding oneself not to think about the experience, as this practice would likely produce the ironic (but desired) consequence of the positive event also becoming dissolved into consciousness and doing so oneself (Wegner, 1994). Future studies to test these ideas will be instructive.
NEGATIVE DOMAIN

Interestingly, the opposite recommendation applies to the domain of negative events, as research suggests that it is actually valuable to systematically analyze and come to terms with losses, traumas, and hurt feelings—for example, by writing “expressively” about them (e.g., Lyubomirsky, Sosa, & Dickerhoof, 2006; Pennebaker, 1997). As Pennebaker and his colleagues have persuasively shown, writing is inherently a structured process that forces a person to organize and integrate their thoughts, to reflect on what caused what, to create a coherent narrative about her, and to consider systematic, step-by-step solutions (e.g., Pennebaker, Mayone, & Francis, 1997; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Thus, writing is an effective strategy when one needs to cope with negative experiences because it appears to reduce how often and how intensely a person experiences intrusive thoughts about them, by helping her make sense of them, find meaning in them, and get past them. (In contrast, one does not aim to “get past” positive experiences.)

A large and still growing literature in this area reveals that such “expressive writing” about past negative or traumatic events has many beneficial consequences. For example, compared with control groups, people who spend 3 days exploring their deepest thoughts and feelings in a journal about ordeals or traumas make fewer visits to a doctor in the months following the writing sessions, show stronger immune function, report less depression and distress, obtain higher grades, and are more likely to find new jobs after unemployment (e.g., Frentzelli, 2006; Pennebaker, 1997, for reviews).

Investing in relationships, practicing kindness

This narrative—expressive writing about past negative or traumatic events—appears to work for a variety of reasons. One is that the process of writing forces people to confront and reflect on their deepest thoughts and feelings. In doing so, they are able to make sense of them, find meaning in them, and get past them. This, in turn, helps them to move on from their past experiences, to let go of their past traumas, and to focus on the present and future. In this way, expressive writing helps people to move on from their past experiences, to let go of their past traumas, and to focus on the present and future.

POSITIVE DOMAIN

The process of writing also helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. For example, writing about past negative or traumatic events helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives. This is because the process of writing helps people to develop a more positive outlook on their lives.
For example, students who pursue and attain self-generated personal goals over the course of a semester are happier at the end of the semester, in part because they accumulate positive daily experiences along the way (see Sheldon, 2002, for a review). Notably, the pursuit of goals also helps individuals satisfy their basic human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and thereby increase their well-being (e.g., Reis, Sheldon, Ryan, Gable, & Roscoe, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001).

NEGATIVE DOMAIN

How does goal pursuit help people manage stress and negative emotions in the wake of negative life changes? For many of the same reasons that it fosters well-being during the good times. First, committed goal pursuit offers people a sense of purpose and a feeling of control over their lives (Cannor, 1990)—both invaluable resources during efforts to cope. Whether the valued activity is becoming an inventor or raising a child, it is given the individual something to work for and to look forward to. Second, possessing meaningful goals bolsters people's self-efficacy and self-worth. Indeed, the accomplishment of each goal is yet another opportunity for an emotional enhancement of the person's aim to do something they are interested in (cf. Diener, 1984). Person's aim is to do something they are interested in (cf. Diener, 1984).

Another question raised by the work described in this chapter concerns the role of possible individual differences in happiness. For example, do individual differences in personality, life goals, and strategies that are desirable and adaptive when the person's aim is to intervene in hedonic adaptation to positive and negative events. The choice to focus here on intentional behaviors (rather than life events) was not arbitrary, as people have a fair amount of control over their behavior, and thus, are potentially able to heed specific happiness-enhancing recommendations arising from the literature on hedonic adaptation. However, people can also control to some degree the life changes that take place (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Headley & Wearing, 1989; Scarr & McCartney, 1983). Thus, an area ripe for future research concerns the question of what kinds of life changes generate more positive events and emotions than others, thus buffering negative states and cumulating to enhanced global well-being. A potential target of intervention are positive events based on intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) life changes. Kaeser and colleagues (Kaeser & Ryan, 1993; Kaeser, 2002; Sheldon & Kaeser, 2008) have shown that intrinsic values and goals (community, growth, intimacy) produce greater well-being than do extrinsic ones (popularity, wealth, physical attractiveness), because the former better satisfy innate psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, in press).

Directly pertaining to the HAPNE model, future studies could test whether the type of life change that occurs (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) moderates the effects of downstream positive events on both experienced emotions and rising aspiration levels. Concerning positive emotions, research suggests that positive extrinsic events deriving from a particular life change (e.g., getting a compliment on one's new car) do not deliver as much happiness as positive intrinsic events (e.g., serving as a Big Brother, Duan, Akinin, & Norton, 2008; Kaeser, 2002). Thus, positive events based on intrinsic life changes should produce more actual positive emotions, and be better able to neutralize negative emotions, compared to positive events based on extrinsic changes. Concerning aspirations, extrinsic experiences do not satisfy basic needs and instead are likely to lead to ever-increasing desires for psychologically unfulfilling goals and objects (Myers, 2000), much like addiction (Koob & Le Moal, 2001). In contrast, building closer interactions or seeking novel discoveries activates feelings of satisfaction and contentment, which are more likely to be appreciated and less likely to be taken for granted.

Conclusion

The sports car manufacturer Porsche has a print ad showing a Boxster speeding down a rural highway. The caption says, "Every time you drive it, it puts a smile on your face. How much is that worth?" Not much, according to a great deal of research, because the bursts of pleasure one may experience from powering up the car are destined to last even less than the non-material circumstantial change, like moving cross-country or beginning a new job. One might be tempted to conclude that sustained happiness cannot be bought with Porsches or any other material possessions. I actually believe that that conclusion is wrong. Hedonic adaptation can be resisted, even to material objects, but only with conscious, active efforts. If the Porsche owner strives to overcome his auto-envy by appreciating his enormously good fortune, if he uses his sports car as a vehicle for pleasurable renewable experiences and for strengthening relationships (e.g., road tripping with friends, loaning to a family member), if he puts effort into savoring the stereo system and the speed (e.g., revelling in the wind in his face, luxuriating in the music), he will continue to derive happiness from his purchase.

The good news is that the same processes that make it easy to adapt to material gains also make it easy to adapt to material losses. In due course, the individual's attention is captured less and less by the contrast between the old and new standard of living, and unpleasant experiences become more and more rare. Accordingly, when it comes to managing the slings and arrows of life's misfortunes (when one's aim is to speed up rather than inhibit adaptation), similar strategies are likely to be effective—namely, appreciating what one has rather than yearning for what one would like to have, searching for
opportunities to generate positive experiences, cultivating a sense of connection with others, building competence and expertise, and looking outside of oneself to contribute to others.

If we fail to adapt to positive experiences and slow-going adaptation to negative ones are the enemies of lasting happiness, then self-deradicalizing, socializing, and attention-capturing positive activities are the weapons to surmount it. Such activities can serve as part of a broader strategy to accelerate adaptation when things go awry, but they can also act as a strategic circumstances (like the Boxster, an ocean view, or one’s good health) in order to preclude adaptation to those circumstances and forreal adaptation to one’s job, marriage, friends, and leisure, and to do life in general.

Notes
1. It is worth noting that all but one of Lucas and colleagues’ influential longitudinal studies have used the same 10-point life satisfaction question from the German dataset—namely, "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?" 
2. A recent study by Baumeister, R. (1971) found that satisfaction questions from the German dataset—namely, "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?" This question asks respondents to report on the significant events that are currently facing in their lives, and that is why the model uses it as an outcome variable.

References


