

Psychological Disorders, Humanism & Therapy

Martin Seligman

Learned Helplessness
Positive Psychology

Learned Helplessness

- Condition resulting from the perception we have no control over the environment
- Lab experiments on dogs
 - Conditioned: High pitched sound w/ shock
 - Large box w/ 2 compartments
 - Shock delivered on 1 side of box
 - Dog needed to jump over barrier to escape shock

Learned Helplessness

- Experiment results:
 - Dogs did not cross barrier
 - Lied down and took the shock
 - During part 1 of study, dogs learned they were helpless to avoid the shock paired with the noise
 - Futility of escape

Research Support

- Loud noise experiment
 - No correct sequence of steps to stop the noise
- Observation of helpless models
- Elderly patrons in nursing home
 - Those with more control over the situation were happier and more physically active

Explanatory Style

- Way of explaining to ourselves our relative lack of control over the environment
- Optimistic
 - More likely to have better immune system functioning, live longer, report less stress and depression when compared to pessimistic
- Pessimistic

Depression

- Association between learned helplessness and depression
 - Symptom: Inability to control outcomes
 - Ultimate pessimism
 - Formulate explanations about negative situations into personal and pervasive terms

Attribution Model

- We attribute our lack of control or failure to some cause
- Pessimists:
 - Internal, stable and global causes
- Optimists:
 - External, unstable and specific causes

Development of Learned Helplessness in Childhood

- Particularly vulnerable as infants and children
- Early interactions with environment will determine later feelings of control over environment
 - Consistency of response from externals

Positive Psychology

- Deals with happiness, excellence and optimal human functioning
- Critical of older approaches that focused on deficits

The Happy Personality

- Subjective well-being/ Life satisfaction
 - Cognitive evaluation of the quality of one's life experiences and the possession of positive affect
 - Happiness has both rational and emotional aspects

Who are the Happy Personalities?

- **Money**
 - Absence can lead to unhappiness
 - Having significantly beyond what is needed does not increase happiness
- **Health**
 - Necessary, but not sufficient

Who are the Happy Personalities?

- Age and gender
 - Little bearing
- Age and subjective well-being
 - Positive relationship between life satisfaction and orientation to the future
 - Satisfaction maintains across the lifespan

Happy Personalities

- Social support
 - Older married persons happier than unmarried
- Job satisfaction and level of education
 - Modest correlation with happiness
- National wealth
 - Citizens of wealthier nations happier

Personality Factors in Happiness

- Big 5: Low neuroticism, high extraversion and conscientiousness
- Autonomy, competence, self-esteem
- Self-acceptance
- Environmental mastery

6 Variables Associated with the Happy Personality

- Repressive-defensiveness
- Trust
- Internal locus of control
- Hardiness
- Emotional stability and positive affect
- Self-esteem

Contributions of Seligman

- Concept of learned helplessness
 - Relation to variety of domains
- Reiterate positive psychology
 - Focus on strengths over weaknesses