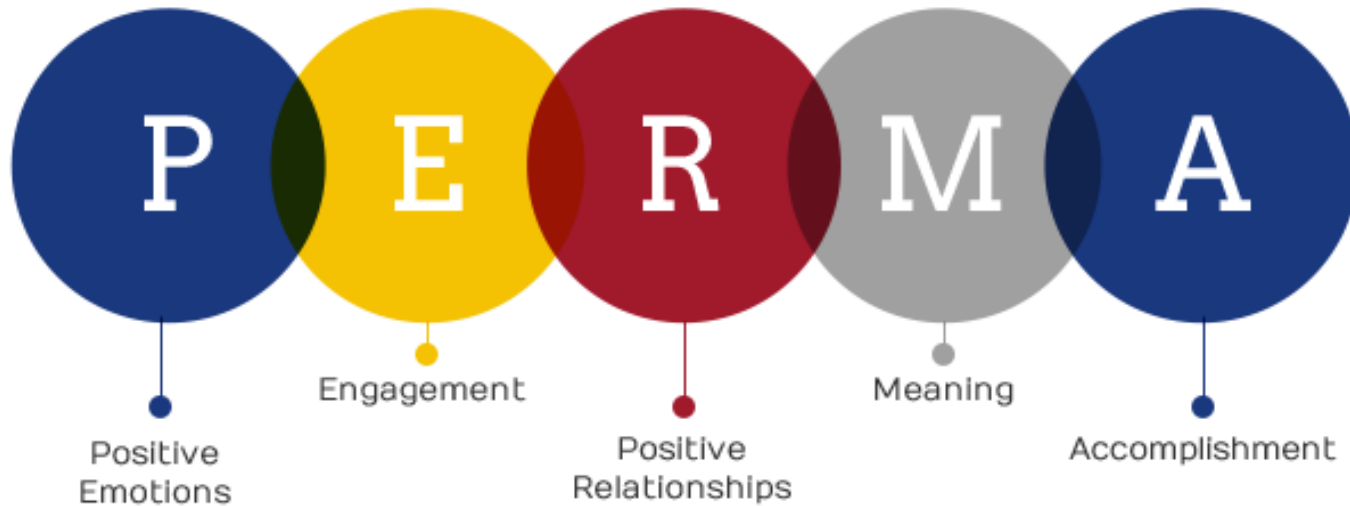# Positive Psychology Goes to School:
Theory, Practices, and Critical Issues
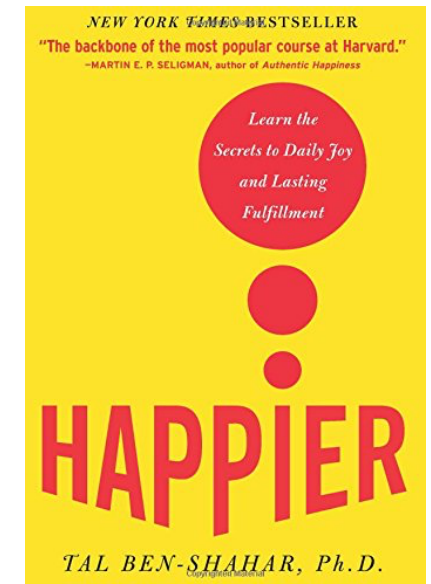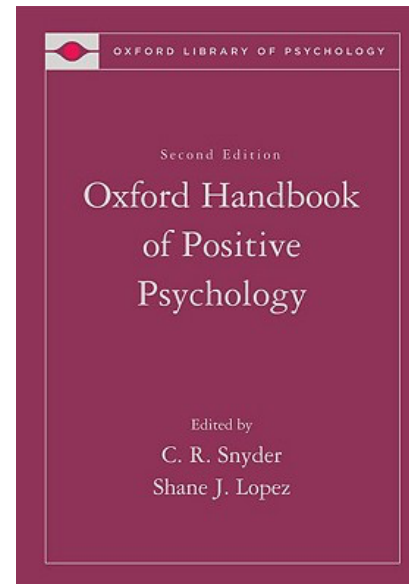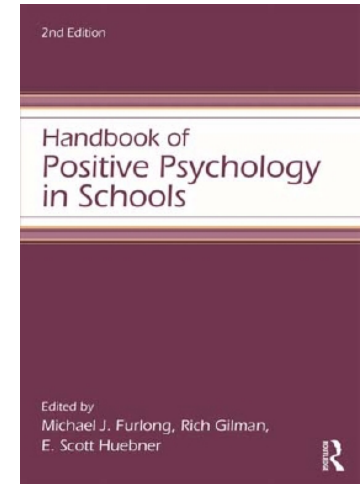
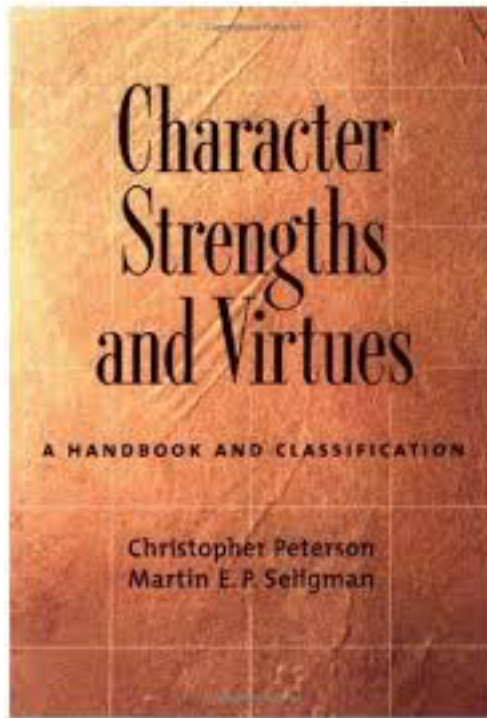Tyler L. Renshaw, Ph.D., NCSP

Louisiana State University

grit HOPE <u>*subjective well-being*</u>

P E R M A

Positive Emotions

Engagement

Positive Relationships

Meaning

Accomplishment

GROWTH MINDSET <u>*gratitude*</u> *flow*

Character Strengths and Virtues
A HANDBOOK AND CLASSIFICATION
Christopher Peterson
Martin E. P. Seligman

happy

2nd Edition
Handbook of
Positive Psychology
in Schools
Edited by
Michael J. Furlong, Rich Gilman,
E. Scott Huebner

Penn UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY CENTER

OXFORD LIBRARY OF PSYCHOLOGY
Second Edition
Oxford Handbook
of Positive
Psychology
Edited by
C. R. Snyder
Shane J. Lopez

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
"The backbone of the most popular course at Harvard."
—MARTIN E. P. SELIGMAN, author of Authentic Happiness
Learn the
Secrets to Daily Joy
and Lasting
Fulfillment
HAPPIER
TAL BEN-SHAHAR, Ph.D.

Take Home Messages

1. <u>Positive psychology is the scientific study of human wellbeing</u>—at both the objective and subjective levels, and for individuals as well as groups/systems

2. <u>Positive psychology is complementary to negative psychology</u>—it's not intended to replace or supersede a problem-focused approach to practice

3. <u>Promising positive practices are emerging for use in schools</u>—including assessment and intervention protocols

4. <u>Some findings from positive psychology aren't so positive</u>—much more research is needed—both basic and applied—to inform practice

5. <u>The future of positive psychology within school psychology is unclear</u>—many basic questions need to be answered, and much applied work is needed

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Positive Psychology is the Scientific Study of Human Wellbeing

- Christened in 1998, but born much earlier

- Positive psychology is the scientific study of . . .
  - (1) positive emotions, (2) positive character traits, (3) positive institutions
  - "The good life"
  - Psychological health
  - Strengths and virtues
  - Flourishing or optimal functioning

 (Seligman & Czikszentmihalyi, 2000; Peterson & Park, 2003; Gable & Haidt, 2005)

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Positive Psychology is the Scientific Study of Human Wellbeing

- In sum, it's the scientific study of . . .

  – Things going well for people, or *human wellbeing*

  (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2014)

- Core components of being human

  – Behavior vs. environment

  – Private (subjective) vs. public (objective) behavior

- *Optimal human wellbeing* = positive environment + positive private behavior + positive public behavior
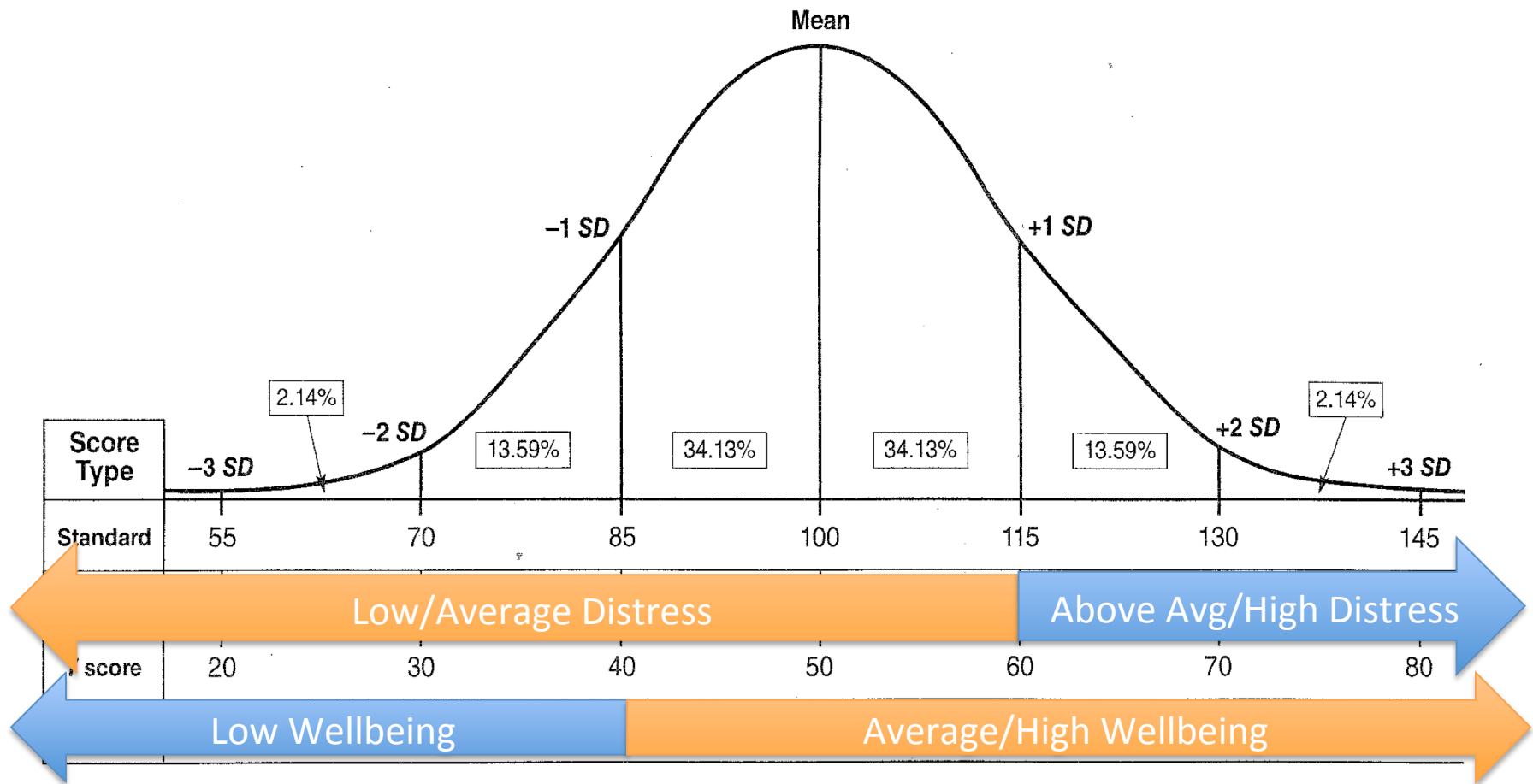
Positive Psychology is Complementary to Negative Psychology

- Although some initial claims about positive psychology were antithetical to negative psychology, most were complementary

- Research evidence has supported a complementary approach

- For example:
  - Behavioral functioning and complete mental health
  - Behavioral—environment relationships and marriage satisfaction

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- Unidimensional mental health
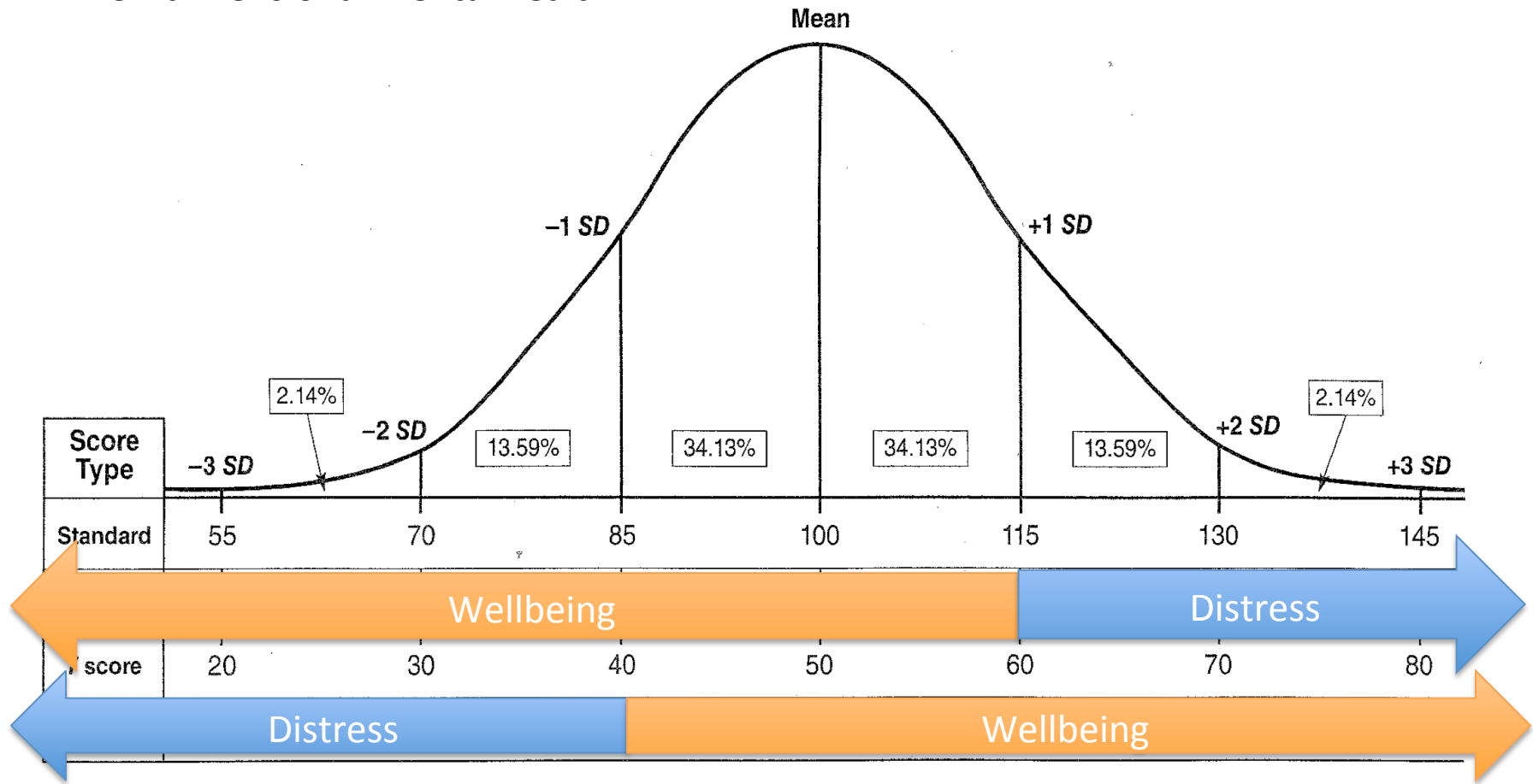
- Complete (bidimensional) mental health

Positive Psychology is Complementary to Negative Psychology

| Level of Psychopathology	Level of SWB	
	Low	Average to High
Low	II. Vulnerable SWB composite ≤ 30th percentile and Internalizing T score < 60 and Externalizing T score < 60	I. Complete mental health SWB composite > 30th percentile and Internalizing T score < 60 and Externalizing T score < 60
High	IV. Troubled SWB composite ≤ 30th percentile and Internalizing T score ≥ 60 or Externalizing T score ≥ 60	III. Symptomatic but content SWB composite > 30th percentile and Internalizing T score ≥ 60 or Externalizing T score ≥ 60

Note. SWB = subjective well-being.

(Suldo & Shaffer, 2008)

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- Marriage satisfaction
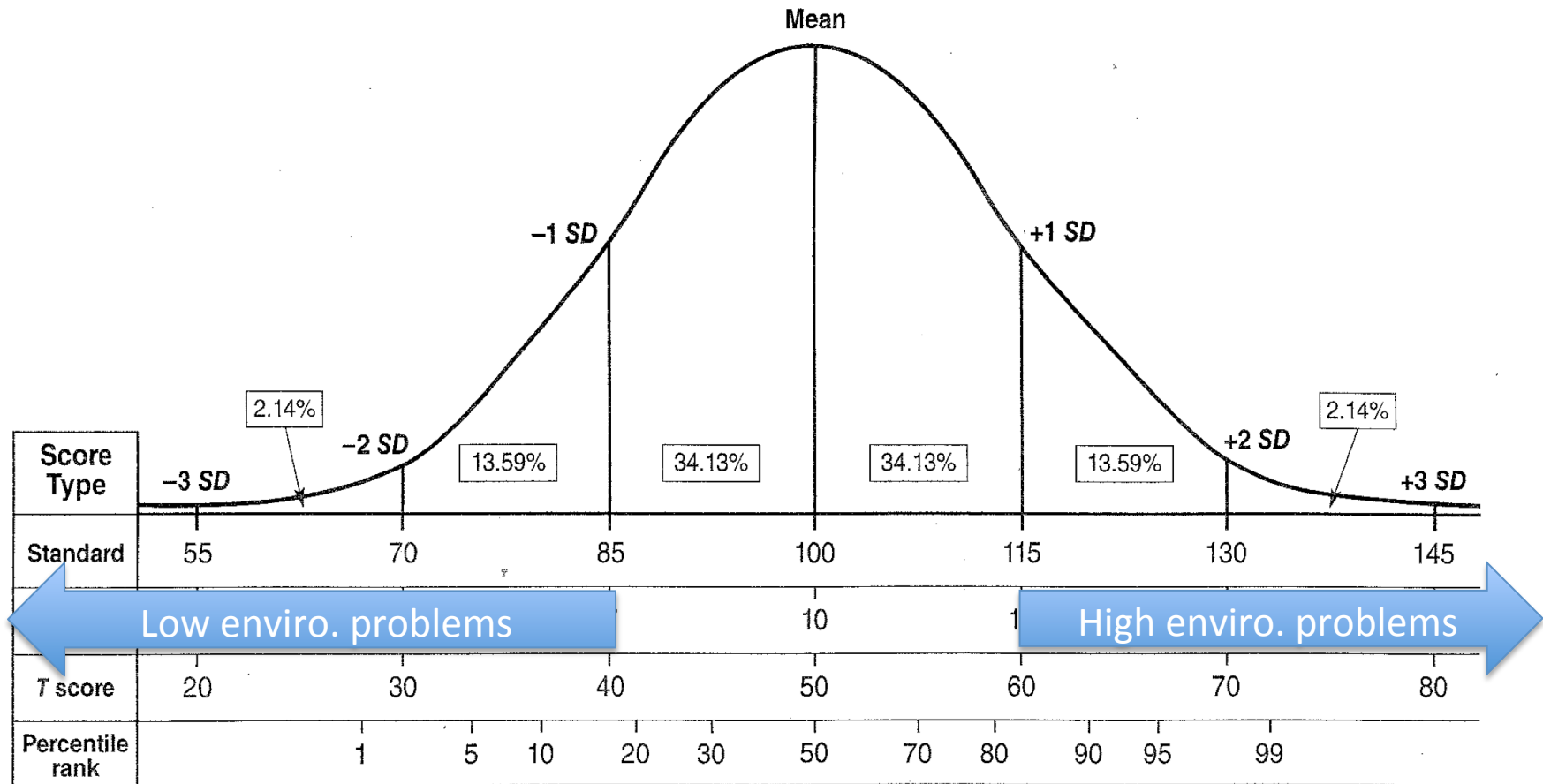
Positive Psychology is Complementary to Negative Psychology
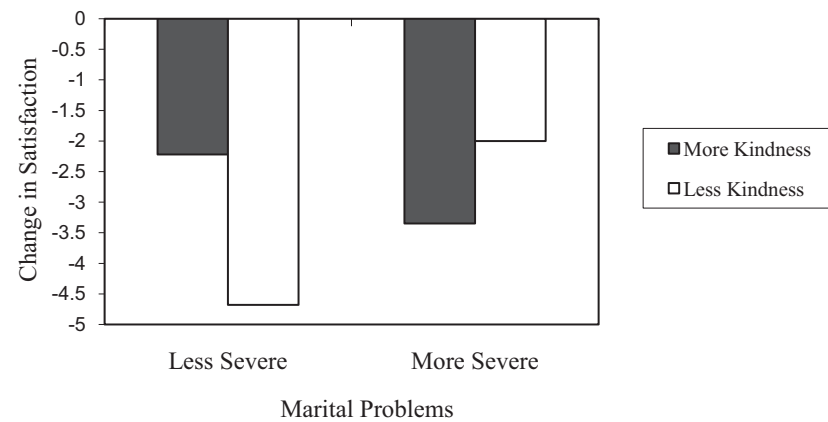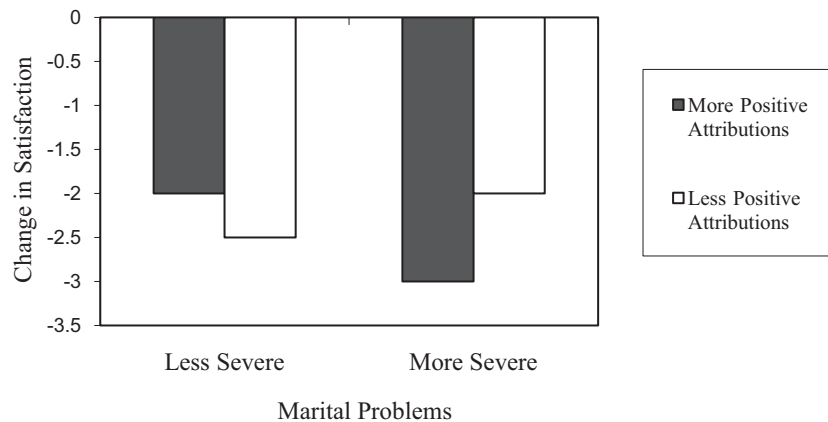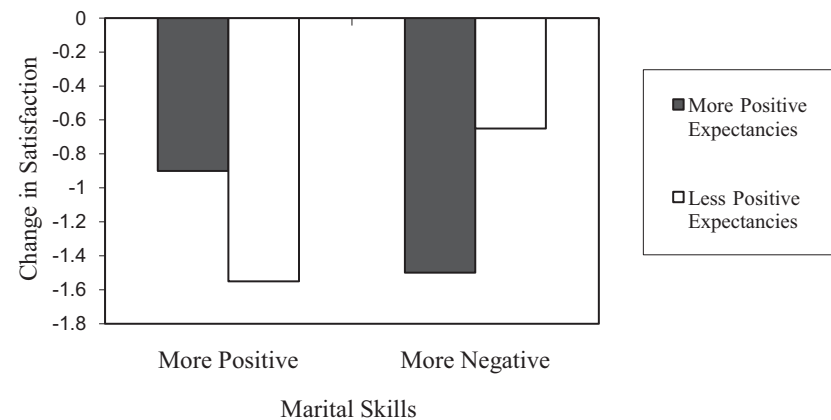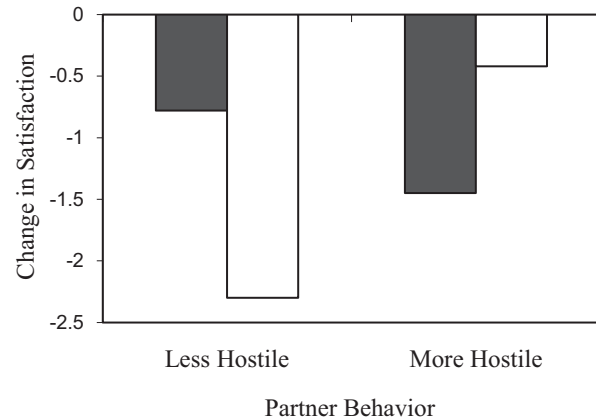
(McNulty & Fincham, 2012)

Promising Positive Practices Are Emerging for Use in Schools

- Assessment

    - Brief Students' Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner, 1997)

    - Positive Experiences at School Scale (Furlong et al., 2014)

    - Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (Renshaw et al., 2014)

    - Social and Emotional Health Survey (Furlong et al., 2014)

BSMLSS

- 1 scale

These six questions ask about your satisfaction with different areas of your life. Circle the best answer for each.

1. I would describe my satisfaction with my family life as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

2. I would describe my satisfaction with my friendships as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

3. I would describe my satisfaction with my school experience as
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

4. I would describe my satisfaction with myself as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

5. I would describe my satisfaction with where I live as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

6. I would describe my satisfaction with my overall life as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted
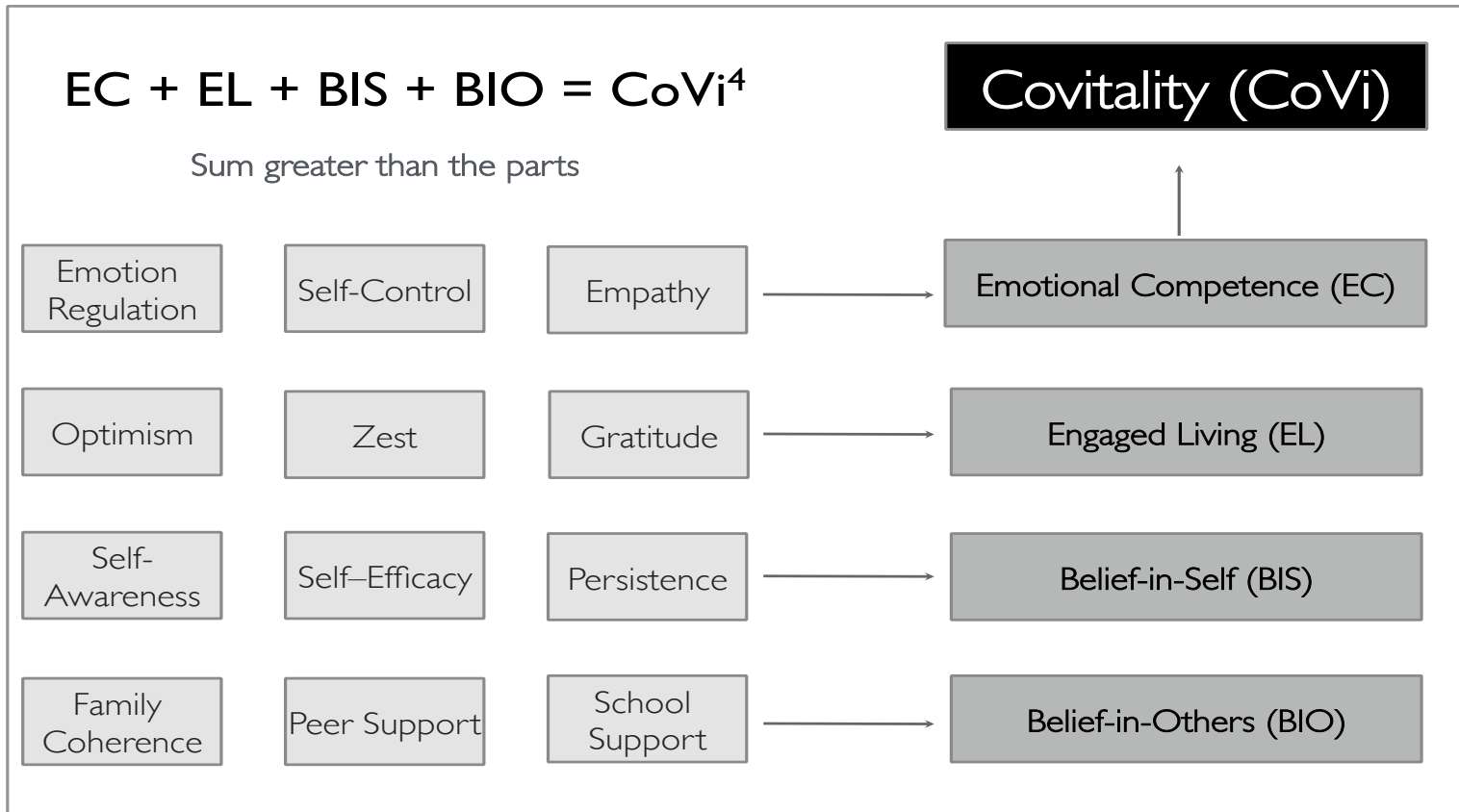
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PEASS

- Response scale: 1 = Almost Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Almost Always

1. I am lucky to go to my school. (1-4)	
2. I am thankful that I get to learn new things at school. (1-4)	
3. We are lucky to have nice teachers at my school. (1-4)	
4. I feel thankful for my good friends at school. (1-4)	
Gratitude (range = 4–16)	
5. When I have problems at school, I know they will get better in the future. (1-4)	
6. I expect good things to happen at my school. (1-4)	
7. Each week, I expect to feel happy in class. (1-4)	
8. I expect to have fun with my friends at school. (1-4)	
Optimism (range = 4–16)	
9. I get excited when I learn something new at school. (1-4)	
10. I get really excited about my school projects. (1-4)	
11. I wake up in the morning excited to go to school. (1-4)	
12. I get excited when I am doing my class assignments. (1-4)	
Zest (range 4–16)	
13. I finish all my class assignments. (1-4)	
14. When I get a bad (low) grade, I try even harder the next time. (1-4)	
15. I keep working until I get my schoolwork right. (1-4)	
16. I do my class assignments even when they are really hard for me. (1-4)	
Persistence (range = 4–16)	
TOTAL COVITALITY (range = 16–64)	

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SSWQ

- 4 subscales = Joy of Learning, School Connect., Educational Purpose, Academic Efficacy
- 1 composite scale = Overall Student Subjective Wellbeing
- 16 items (4 per subscale)

	Almost Never	Some-times	Often	Almost Always
1. I get excited about learning new things in class.	1	2	3	4
2. I feel like I belong at this school.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel like the things I do at school are important.	1	2	3	4
4. I am a successful student.	1	2	3	4
5. I am really interested in the things I am doing at school.	1	2	3	4
6. I can really be myself at this school.	1	2	3	4
7. I think school matters and should be taken seriously.	1	2	3	4
8. I do good work at school.	1	2	3	4
9. I enjoy working on class projects and assignments.	1	2	3	4
10. I feel like people at this school care about me.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel it is important to do well in my classes.	1	2	3	4
12. I do well on my class assignments.	1	2	3	4
13. I feel happy when I am working and learning at school.	1	2	3	4
14. I am treated with respect at this school.	1	2	3	4
15. I believe the things I learn at school will help me in my life.	1	2	3	4
16. I get good grades in my classes.	1	2	3	4

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$$EC + EL + BIS + BIO = CoVi^4$$

Sum greater than the parts

Covitality (CoVi)

Emotion Regulation	Self-Control	Empathy	→ Emotional Competence (EC)
Optimism	Zest	Gratitude	→ Engaged Living (EL)
Self-Awareness	Self–Efficacy	Persistence	→ Belief-in-Self (BIS)
Family Coherence	Peer Support	School Support	→ Belief-in-Others (BIO)

SEHS-S Content and Measurement Model

(Furlong, 2014)

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SEHS

- Response scale: 1 = Almost Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Almost Always

1. I can work out my problems. (1-4)	
2. I can do most things if I try. (1-4)	
3. There are many things that I do well. (1-4)	
4. There is a purpose to my life. (1-4)	
5. I understand my moods and feelings. (1-4)	
6. I understand why I do what I do. (1-4)	
7. When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher again and again until I understand.	
8. I try to answer all the questions asked in class. (1-4)	
9. When I try to solve a math problem, I will not stop until I find a final solution. (1-4)	
Belief in Self (range 9–36)	
10. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who always wants me to do my best.	
11. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who listens to me when I have something to say. 10-12 = 1-4	
12. At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who believes that I will be a success.	
13. My family members really help and support one another. (1-4)	
14. There is a feeling of togetherness in my family. (1-4)	
15. My family really gets along well with each other. (1-4)	
16. I have a friend my age who really cares about me. (1-4)	
17. I have a friend my age who talks with me about my problems. (1-4)	
18. I have a friend my age who helps me when I'm having a hard time. (1-4)	
Belief in Others (Range 9–36)	

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SEHS

- Response scale: 1 = Almost Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Often, 4 = Almost Always

19. I accept responsibility for my actions. (1-4)	
20. When I make a mistake I admit it. (1-4)	
21. I can deal with being told no. (1-4)	
22. I feel bad when someone gets his or her feelings hurt. (1-4)	
23. I try to understand what other people go through. (1-4)	
24. I try to understand how other people feel and think. (1-4)	
25. I can wait for what I want. (1-4)	
26. I don't bother others when they are busy. (1-4)	
27. I think before I act. (1-4)	
Emotional Competence (9–36)	
28. Each day I look forward to having a lot of fun. (1-4)	
29. I usually expect to have a good day. (1-4)	
30. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad things. (1-4)	
31. Since yesterday how much have you felt GRATEFUL. (1-5)	
32. Since yesterday how much have you felt THANKFUL. (1-5)	
33. Since yesterday how much have you felt APPRECIATIVE. (1-5)	
34. How much do you feel ENERGETIC right now? (1-5)	
35. How much do you feel ACTIVE right now? (1-5)	
36. How much do you feel LIVELY right now? (1-5)	
Engaged Living (range = 9–42)	
TOTAL COVITALITY (range = 36–150)	

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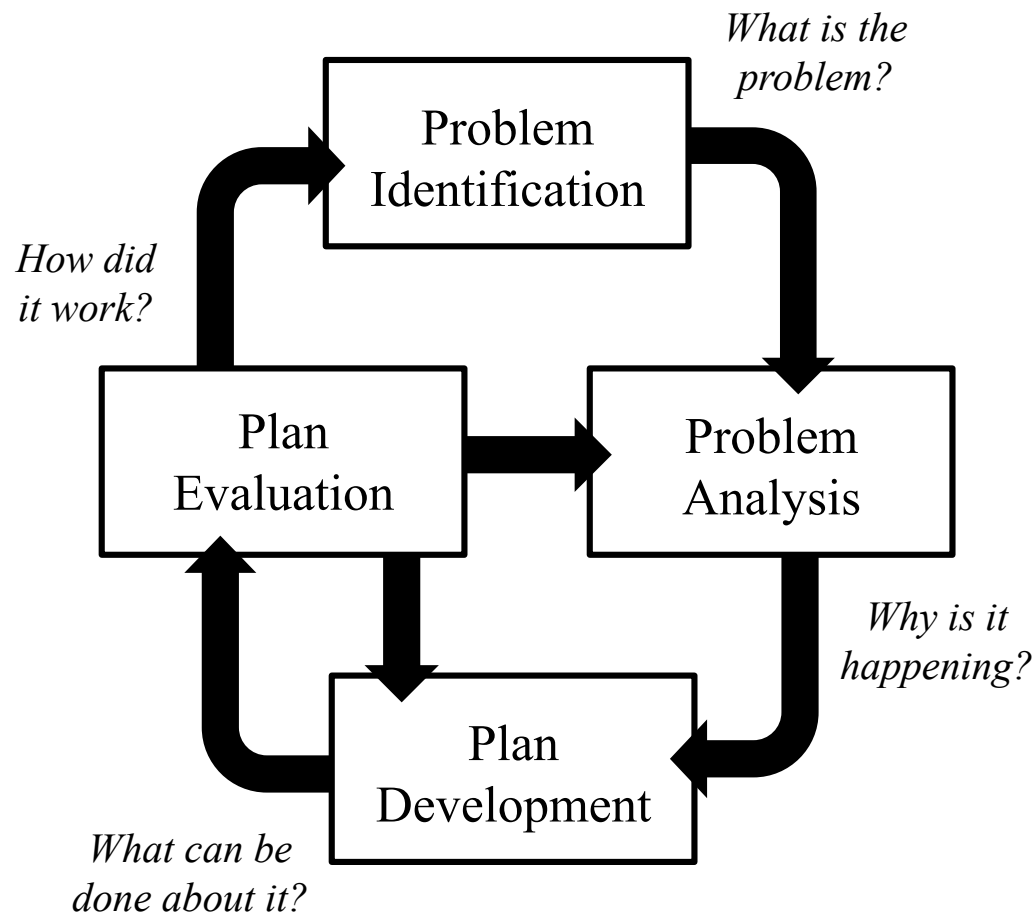# Promising Positive Practices Are Emerging for Use in Schools

- Intervention

  - Optimism training (Seligman, 2007)

  - Gratitude training (Renshaw et al., 2015)

  - Mindfulness training (Renshaw et al., 2015)

  - Multi-component treatment package (Suldo et al., 2014)

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Some Findings From Positive Psychology Aren't So Positive

- Assessment
  - Negligible correlations between individual subjective wellbeing indicators and objective academic performance indicators
  - Lacking reliability of measures in small or diverse samples
  - No research available regarding the *treatment utility* of measures

- Intervention
  - Optimism interventions with youth haven't been published in peer-reviewed journals
  - Meta-analysis of gratitude interventions for youth yielded mixed effects
  - Promising treatment packages don't have component analyses

- Next steps
  - More basic measure development research
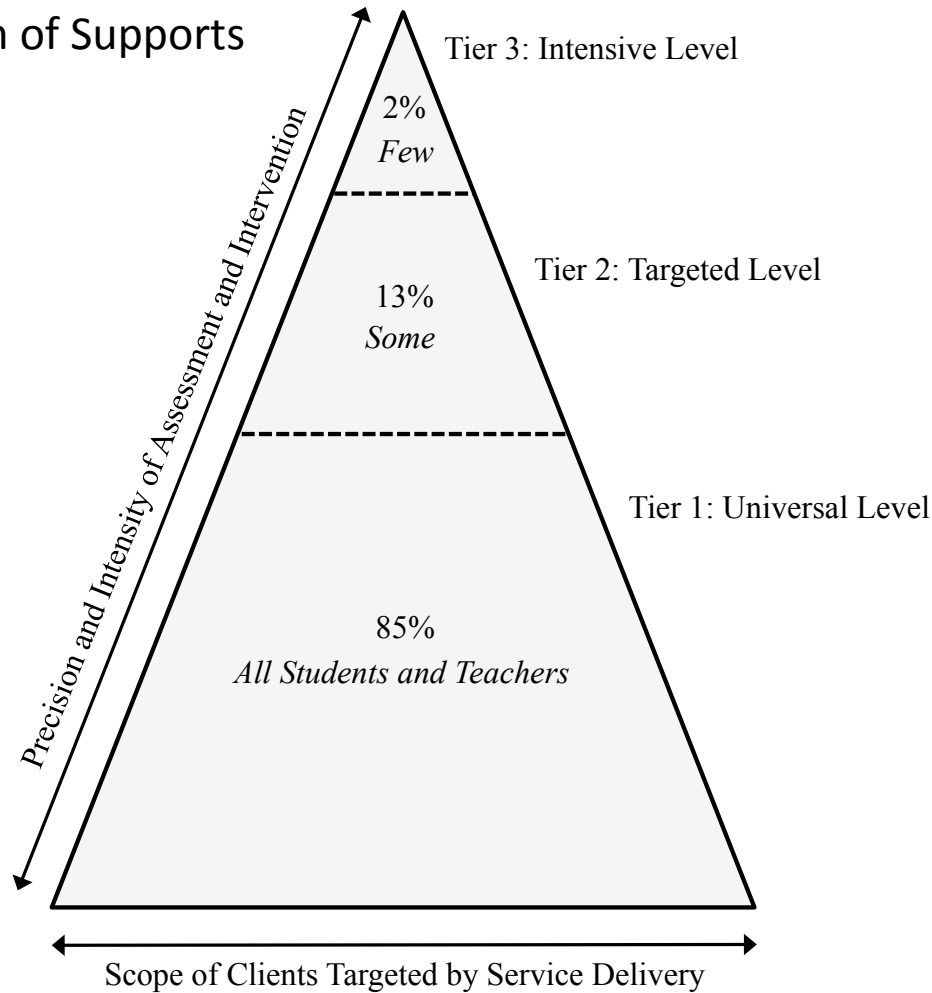 - More applied work looking at assessment-to-intervention practices

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The Future of Positive Psychology Within School Psychology is Unclear

- Problem-Solving Model

What is the problem?

Problem Identification

How did it work?

Plan Evaluation

Problem Analysis

Why is it happening?

Plan Development

What can be done about it?

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The Future of Positive Psychology Within School Psychology is Unclear

- Multitiered System of Supports

Tier 3: Intensive Level

2%
Few

Tier 2: Targeted Level

13%
Some

Tier 1: Universal Level

85%
All Students and Teachers

Precision and Intensity of Assessment and Intervention

Scope of Clients Targeted by Service Delivery

Take Home Messages

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Questions?

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