



HAPPINESS

Waikato Happiness and Resilience
Series, 27 March 2024
Dan Weijers



Positive Psychology

- Happiness
Science: 1925-
today
- Subjective
experience of your
life
- 100,000 articles
per year

Teacher: Okay, break off into groups for the next part of class

Introverts:

Hi my name is...



Oh shit -
what's my
name?!?

The research should be personalised

- Results are based on averages
- Individual differences matter
- Context matters
- Activities need to fit into your life

Introduce yourself to your neighbour/s

Eye contact

Real human interaction!



“What do you hope to get out of this?”

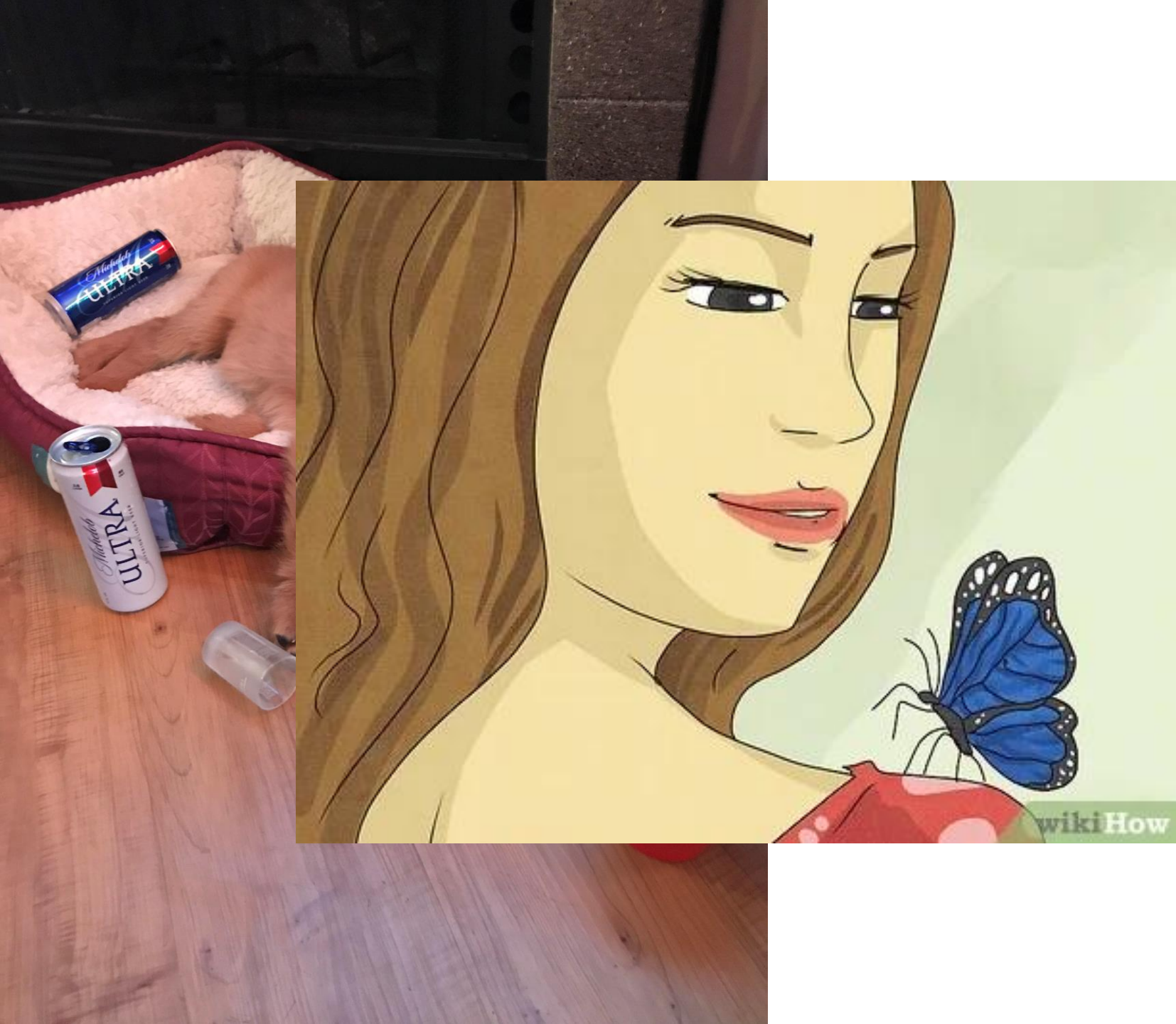


WHAT DO YOU WANT
FROM LIFE?

[HTTPS://ATTAINABLEWEALTH.COM/](https://attainablewealth.com/)

Happiness etc.

- Money?
- A job!
- Fleeting pleasure to The Good Life
- Varieties of happiness
- Resilience
- Don't always leave yourself to last



The paradox of happiness

- Some evidence that folk hedonism is a bad approach
- Also evidence that planning for happiness can be helpful

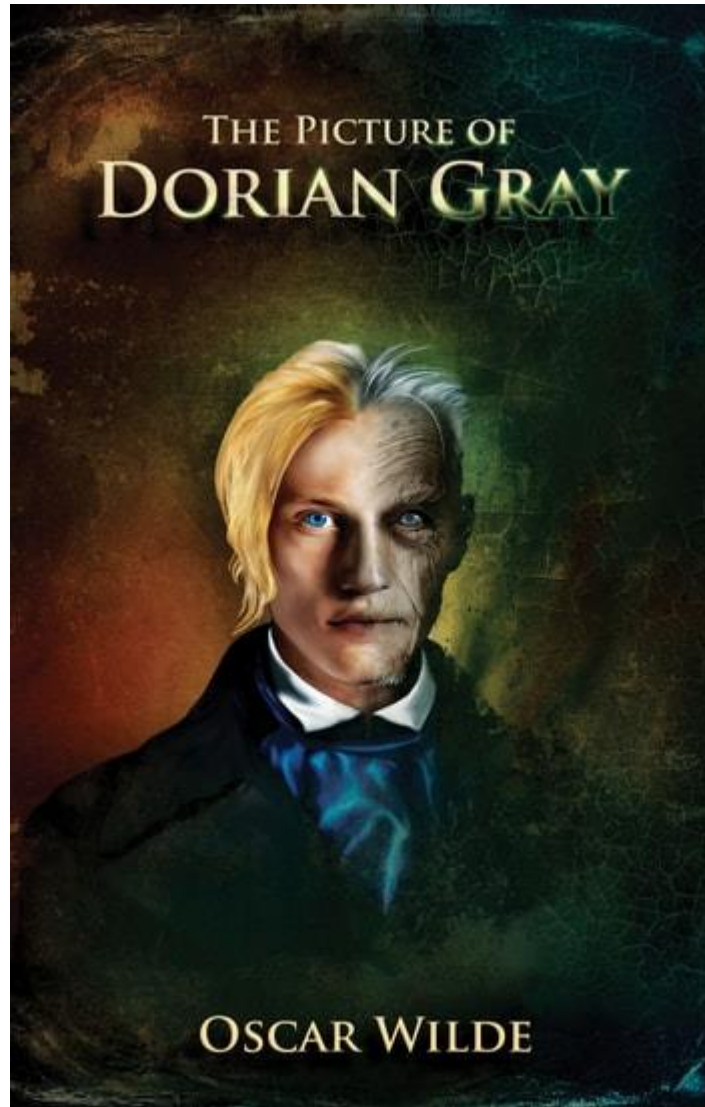
What approaches to happiness
have you/your friends taken?
How did they go?

Is it you? Pretend
it's a friend

Did they hurt
others?
Themselves?



Gee, I guess folk
hedonism is
unwise



Life isn't just
about
happiness

- ...for most of us,
anyway
- Being a good
person
- (Even if we get
away with evil
deeds, we still
have to live with
ourselves)

Goals and values

- Family, work

Why are they important?

- Relationships, job

Keep asking 'why?' until you find the things that 'just are' important to you

- Connection, freedom

Goals & kinds of value

- Prudential value - good for you
- Moral value - good for others / promotes moral goodness
- 'Why?' test

What are the things that
“just are” important to you
(for their own sake)?

I really like beer

But I also like
money



I value free beer!



PPIs, WBIs

- Positive Psychological Interventions
- Values + purpose
- Strengths use
- Gratitude letter
- 3 things
- Savouring
- Connecting

Meta analysis (van Agteren et al., 2021)

- 419 RCTs on 53,288 clinical and non-clinical participants.
- Mindfulness-based and multi-component PPIs best in clinical and non-clinical populations
- Also useful: singular positive psychological interventions, cognitive and behavioural therapy-based, acceptance and commitment therapy-based, and reminiscence interventions
- Effect sizes mainly small, but differed according to target population and moderator, e.g. intervention intensity better for general + mentally ill
- Evidence quality generally low to moderate

Evidence for PPIs

- Mental health = WB - mental illness
- PPIs help all, CBT just clinical pop.
- Groups best, ex. for physical illness
- Lots of drop-outs increases bias

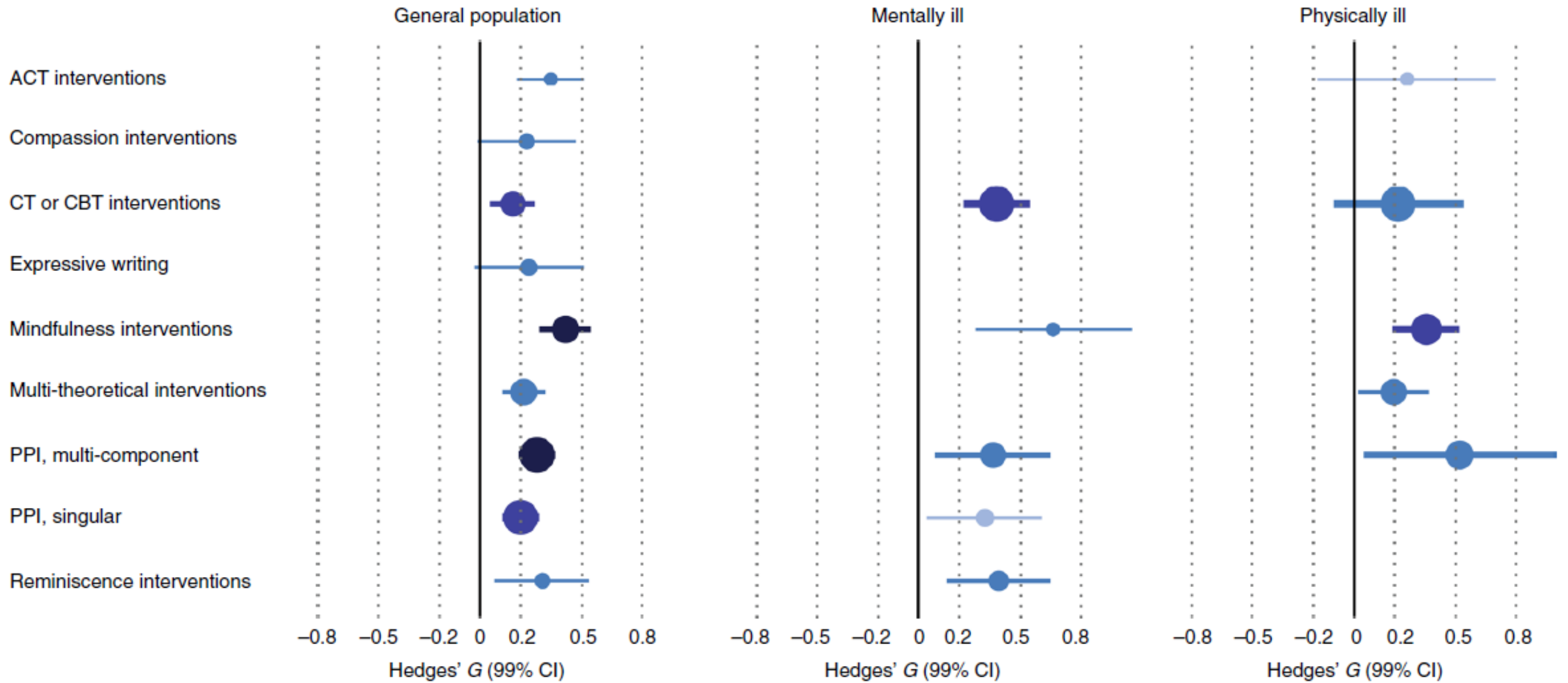


Fig. 3 | Forest plot visualizing the impact of each intervention type on overall wellbeing compared with control conditions split by population type.

Meta analysis (van Agteren et al., 2021)

Mega analysis (Carr et al., 2024)

- 198 moderate to high quality meta-analyses, 4,065 primary studies, 501,335 participants
- WBIs had a significantly small to medium effect on well-being, QoL, strengths, depression, anxiety, and stress
- Gains were partially maintained at 7.5-month follow-up
- Mind-body WBIs like yoga best for WB and depression/stress reduction
- Longer, face-to-face programs better than short-self-help

Evidence for WBIs

- Solid evidence
- Work body + mind
- Connect
- Stick at it
- Beware pop science: lower quality meta-analyses had higher effect sizes!

COMMUNITY



Some standouts

- Yoga
- Mindfulness
- Multi-component PPIs
- <https://workonwellbeing.com/wow-for-individuals/>

Are you interested in trying any of these things? Any concerns?

Want to do yoga

Worried your back will break



Can yoga be done in jeans?



Weakness of will

- I want to but...
- Marshmallow test
- Weakness of will is normal, but it can turn into excuses, bad habits & addiction

Recurring alarms,
buddies,
convenience /
proximity, 'note to
self', walking bus,
mini-breaks,
rewards, moving
the goal posts.

Works for
everything



Niche construction

- Organise your life / environment
- Make positive long-term behaviours fun, easy, and normal

What life hack niches have you constructed or are thinking of using?

Share idea

Explain it well



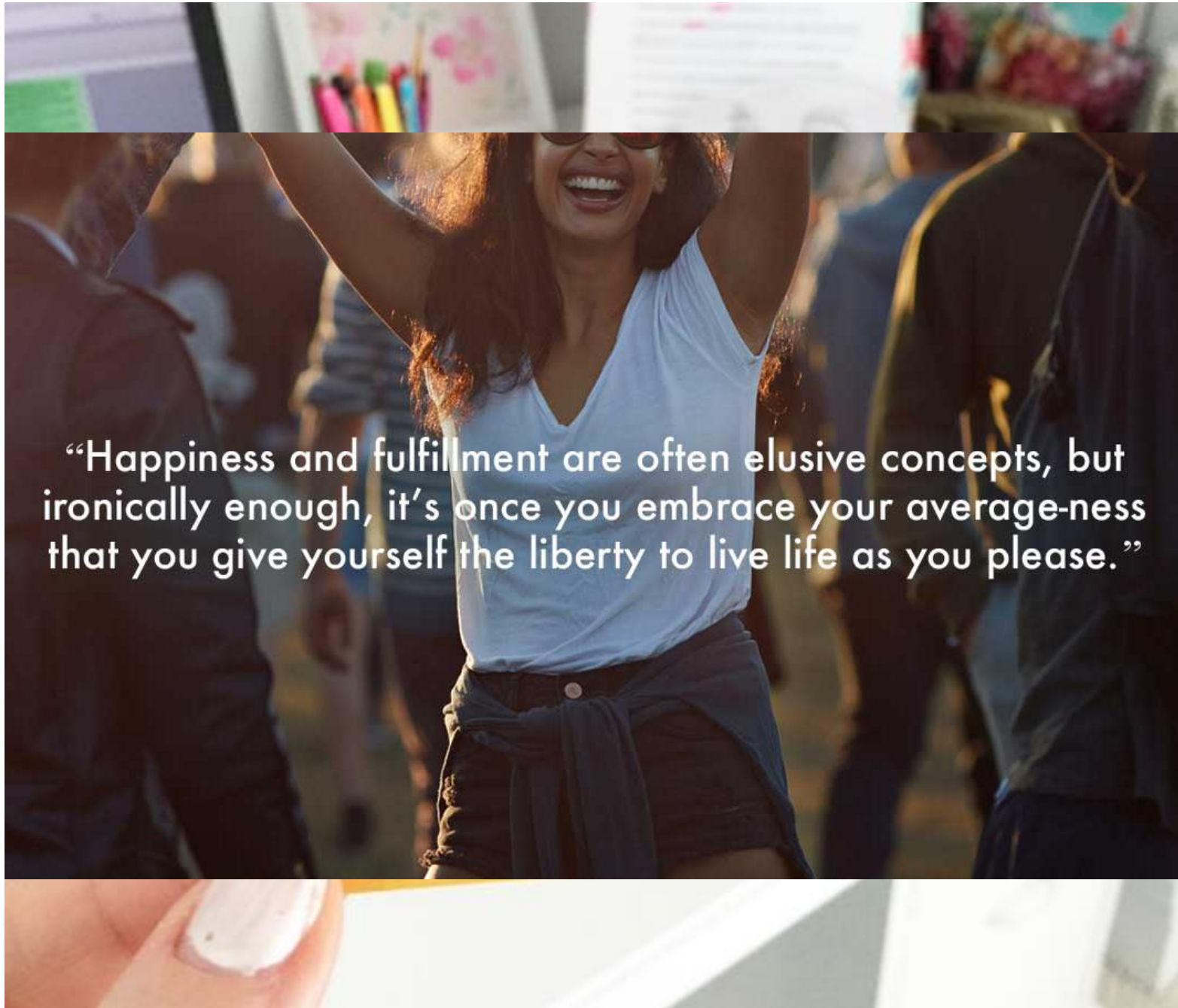
Become a living legend!

WARNING

Perfectionism
without
delusions of grandeur
leads to
self-loathing

Perfectionism

- The good life is becoming the perfect human being
- Difficult to define
- Depressing to try to achieve



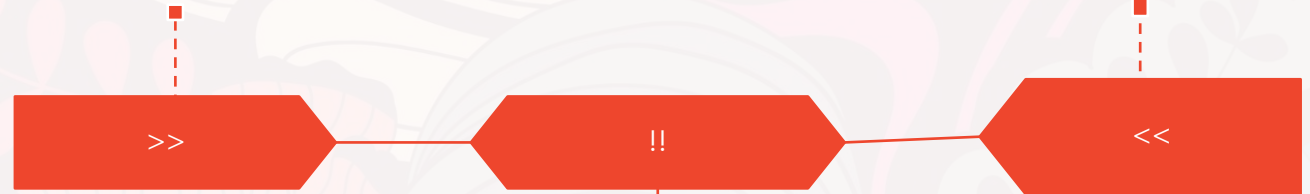
“Happiness and fulfillment are often elusive concepts, but ironically enough, it’s once you embrace your average-ness that you give yourself the liberty to live life as you please.”

Cut yourself some slack

- Perfection is unrealistic
- Trying to be the best at something requires giving lots of other things up
- Most people are average

What are you average at?
Do you feel OK owning
that?

I could say,
"driving"



No one cares
much about
driving

Bonus: I won't be
asked to give people
a ride to the airport!



Try to remember

It's just a game

(If you lose)

Psychological flexibility

- You need to emotionally invest in your goals
- But you also need to be flexible
- Move on to new goals and challenges when you need to

Take a moment to think about all of this. Will you do anything differently?

I will ask my neighbour to be my wellbeing buddy

I'm going to do squats instead of sitting at my desk



I'm gonna boss my life!

- Carr, A., Finneran, L., Boyd, C., Shirey, C., Canning, C., Stafford, O., ... & Burke, T. (2024). The evidence-base for positive psychology interventions: A mega-analysis of meta-analyses. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 19(2), 191-205.
- Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of clinical Psychology*, 65(5), 467-487.
- van Agteren, J., Iasiello, M., Lo, L., Bartholomaeus, J., Kopsaftis, Z., Carey, M., & Kyrios, M. (2021). A systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological interventions to improve mental wellbeing. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5(5), 631-652.

References

- Ask Dan for a link to PPIs:
dan.weijers@waikato.ac.nz
- Or use Work on Wellbeing etc.:
<https://workonwellbeing.com/wow-for-individuals/>



You're
such a
maximiser

Can't you see how
important it is to
paint the shelves
the right shade of
white?

Personality - Maximisers

- Want the best possible from every opportunity
- Take longer to decide
- Feel less satisfied with decisions
- Difficult flatmates



Why does it matter if we just bring a bag of chips to the pot luck - they're crispy bacon!

You're such a satisficer

Personality - Satisficers

- Aim for 'good enough'
- Lots of outcomes will satisfy them
- 'Good enough' could be pretty bad... or immoral... or unreliable, etc.