life-span perspective, from the time of conception (How do prenatal stressors influence birth outcomes?) to the end of life (How can clinicians help people die with dignity?). Others are now discovering how cultural and gender differences in lifestyles, stress reactivity, and coping can influence health outcomes. As the population ages and many develop chronic diseases, it will be increasingly important to focus on health promotion and how to help individuals cope with their diagnoses and improve their quality of life. As the biopsychosocial model gains acceptance in the medical community, health psychologists have increasingly important roles to play on interdisciplinary teams of health care providers. Health psychologists have the potential to have a dramatic impact on the health of individuals by conducting research that contributes knowledge of how psychosocial factors can influence behavioral and disease processes and by intervening to promote health and prevent illness.

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See also Personalities and Behavior Patterns, Type A and
Type B; Stress and Coping

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HEDONIC TREADMILL

It is widely assumed that material circumstances strongly affect human happiness. However, as the example of the "poor little rich girl" suggests, objective outcomes and happiness are not perfectly correlated. Indeed, many studies suggest that they are hardly correlated at all. For example, winners of lotteries do not report themselves as being much happier than other people, and those who were paralyzed in an accident do not report themselves as being much less happy. Similarly, as nations get wealthier, the reported well-being of its citizens does not increase.

The lack of evidence for a relation between objective circumstances and reported well-being has given rise to the concept of a hedonic treadmill, on which humans' happiness remains stationary, despite efforts or interventions to advance it. The metaphor is also interpreted to mean that humans' happiness will decline if their material circumstances remain constant.

The hedonic treadmill metaphor draws support from adaptation in other domains. Pleasant smells usually become less intense (and less pleasurable) with continued exposure, and a 70° Fahrenheit room that initially feels delightful when one comes in from the cold ceases to confer pleasure after one has been inside for a while.

Despite the appeal of these analogies, the suitability of the treadmill metaphor remains in question. The conclusion that material circumstances have no effect on welfare seems implausible and objectionable, because it implies that economic inequality is irrelevant, that the poor would be no better off if they were rich.

The principal critique of the research cited on behalf of the hedonic treadmill is that happiness measures rely on subjective self-reports whose interpretation is unclear. When asked "How happy are you on a scale from 0 to 100?" respondents must judge for themselves what the end points of the scale represent. Someone who has lived a tough life might interpret 0 as unrelenting torture and 100 as pleasant comfort, whereas someone who has lived an easy life might interpret 0 as the absence of joy and 100 as heavenly bliss. If these two people each declared their happiness level to be a 60 (out of 100), it would obviously be wrong to conclude that the two people really are equally happy, since one person has adopted a higher standard for the internal feeling that warrants that rating.

Thus, data showing that subjective ratings of happiness remain constant despite objectively improving circumstances could instead be explained by a satisfaction treadmill, whereby improving circumstances lead individuals to adopt successively higher aspirations for the amount of enjoyment they regard as acceptable. To illustrate, consider someone who moves from an apartment with a view of a parking lot to one with a view of the ocean shoreline. According

to the hedonic treadmill hypothesis, the pleasure conferred by the better view diminishes over time, until gazing upon waves crashing into the shoreline brings no more pleasure than formerly derived from gazing upon cars parked on asphalt. By contrast, according to the satisfaction treadmill, the ocean view continues to confer more pleasure, which satisfaction or happiness ratings fail to reflect, because the person has come to adopt higher standards for what constitutes a "great" view or a "great" life (a label they now reserve for living in a home with unobstructed and panoramic ocean views on a more scenic part of the coast).

Though the hedonic treadmill and satisfaction treadmill are competing metaphors, they are not mutually exclusive, and each might contribute to the finding that groups in different circumstances report more similar levels of happiness than one would expect. Resolving the relative role of each is a central challenge for happiness researchers. Researchers are relying increasingly on more objective indicators of happiness, including biological indicators of stress and measures of activation in the areas of the brain that are associated with feelings of pleasure and pain. Some have also advocated moment-based measures, which attempt to reconstruct someone's well-being from his or her moment-to-moment reports of mood. Moment-based measures are simpler and may be less susceptible to scale norming. Respondents need only report how they currently feel when engaged in some particular activity, rather than being required to simultaneously recall and evaluate every aspect of their life.

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See also Happiness; Research Methods; Self-Reports

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HELPING BEHAVIOR

Definition

Helping behavior is providing aid or benefit to another person. It does not matter what the motivation of the helper is, only that the recipient is assisted. This is distinguished from the more general term *prosocial behavior,* which can include any cooperative or friendly behavior. It is also distinguished from the more specific term *altruistic behavior,* which requires that the motivation for assisting others be primarily for the well-being of the other person or even at a cost to oneself.

History and Background

The value of one person helping another is an ancient virtue discussed by the Greeks, evident across cultures and civilizations, and pervasive in world religions. One ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, suggested that groups of people needed to form social contracts to ensure that individuals would restrain their own selfish behavior for the good of others. Aristotle saw human nature as more innately good. He also described the relative positive feelings of the giver and receiver for one another. According to Aristotle, these feelings are greater for the person giving help than the help recipient. The ancient Chinese Confucian value "Jen" is a benevolence or charity toward others and is regarded as the highest of Confucian values.

The ancient Greeks and Chinese are not the only ones concerned with helping behavior. Almost all world religions have some version of the Golden Rule—people should treat others as they would like to be treated. The Christian Bible promotes care for each other, the poor, and the needy. It also tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, who helped a stranger in distress along the roadway. This parable has become the modern ideal model of positive helping behavior. Maimonides, the Jewish Rabbi and philosopher, described the Golden Ladder of Charity, or eight degrees of goodness in helping others. Charity toward others is the third Pillar of Islam (Zakat) and involves an annual obligation to give to those in need. Buddhism's Noble Eight Fold Path encourages helping others through right speech, action, and livelihood. In Hinduism, kindness to all creatures is important because all creatures are manifestations of