# The Humanistic Approach & Positive Psychology

**Assumptions, Methodology, Evaluation**

© TemplatesWise.com

# Introduction

- The **humanistic perspective** focuses on the positive image of what it means to be human.
- The approach was developed mainly by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, in the US, in the 1950s.
- Humanist psychologists focus on **personal responsibility, free will** and the **individual striving for personal growth and development.**
- **Often referred to as the `third force` humanism developed as a response to behaviourism and psychoanalysis.**

# Introduction

The humanistic approach has an obvious appeal, as we often try to understand the personality of other people in our everyday lives, something which the approach does too.

1. In studying these issues, they relied heavily on **phenomenology**- i.e. a technique involving the reporting of direct experience, with no attempt of interpreting the experience.

# Assumptions of the Humanistic Approach

2. **Holism:** Humanism believes psychology should study the whole person.
3. **Idiographic:** Humanism believes psychology should study the individual case as people are unique.
4. Humanism believes that experiments do not give genuine insights into human behaviour as they have low **ecological validity**- i.e. the degree to which the behaviours observed and recorded in a study reflect the behaviours that actually occur in natural settings.

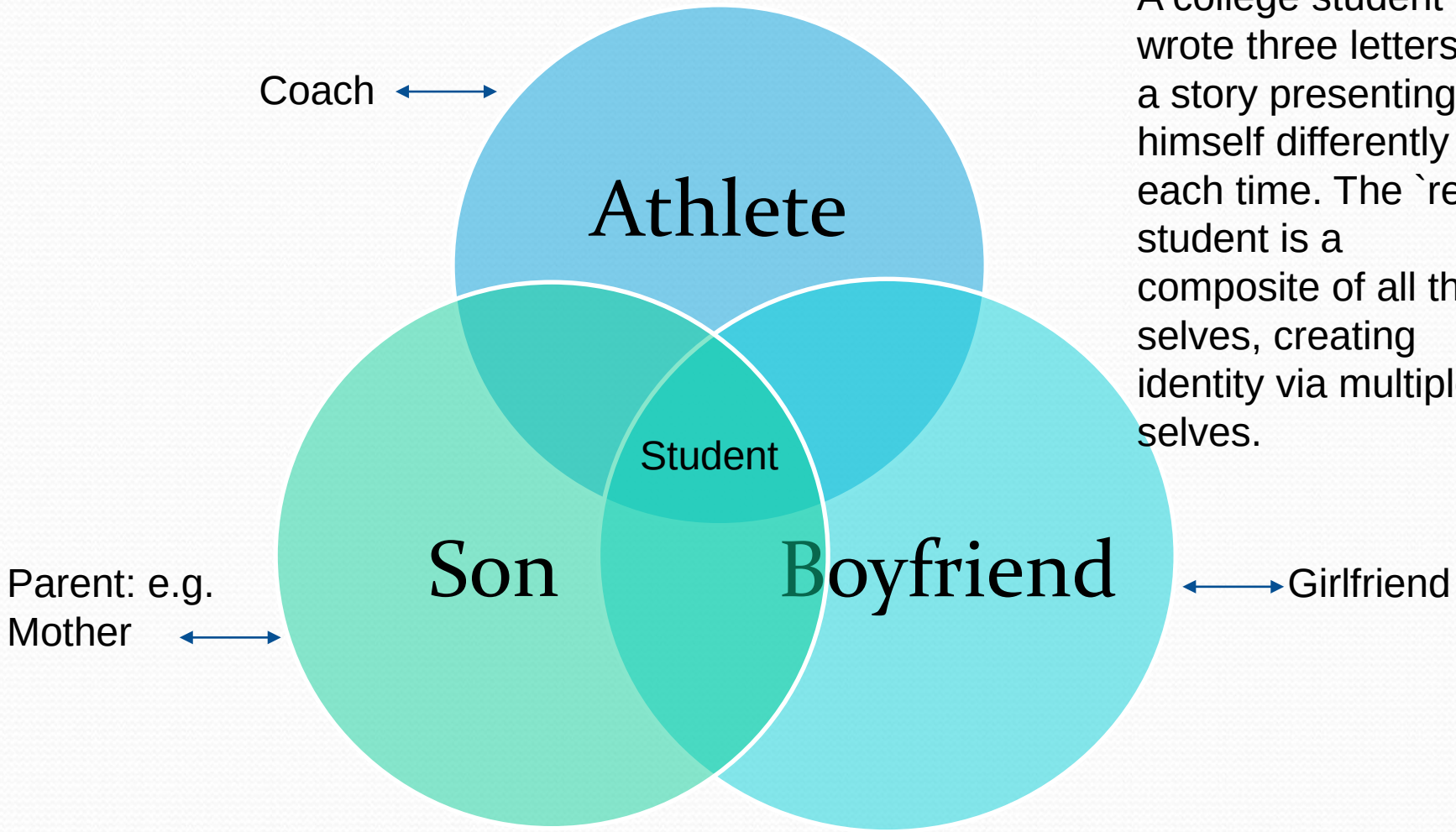
# Assumptions of the Humanistic Approach

5. Humanism believes that humans are unique and therefore **should not be compared** to other people or animals.
6. **Self-Actualisation:** Humanism believes people have the need of being motivated by the wish to grow and fulfil their potential.
7. Humanism believes people have **free will** to make their own decisions in life.

# Three human characteristics:

- **Subjectivity – the basic reality.** The study of personal private experience is the most meaningful way to understanding human beings. It is the `experience` of events rather than the events per se that is important.
- **Individuality and self-theory –** this is concerned with the way in which we differ from each other, physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and how we construct narratives (life stories) about themselves to seek meaning in their lives (see next slide).
- **The capacity for growth** – striving to reach ones true potential, prompting individuals to engage in activities that are right for them as individuals. It can alleviate maladjustment, by innate mechanisms it can promote the expression of all inherent capacities if not blocked by external mechanisms. * See Maslow later on.

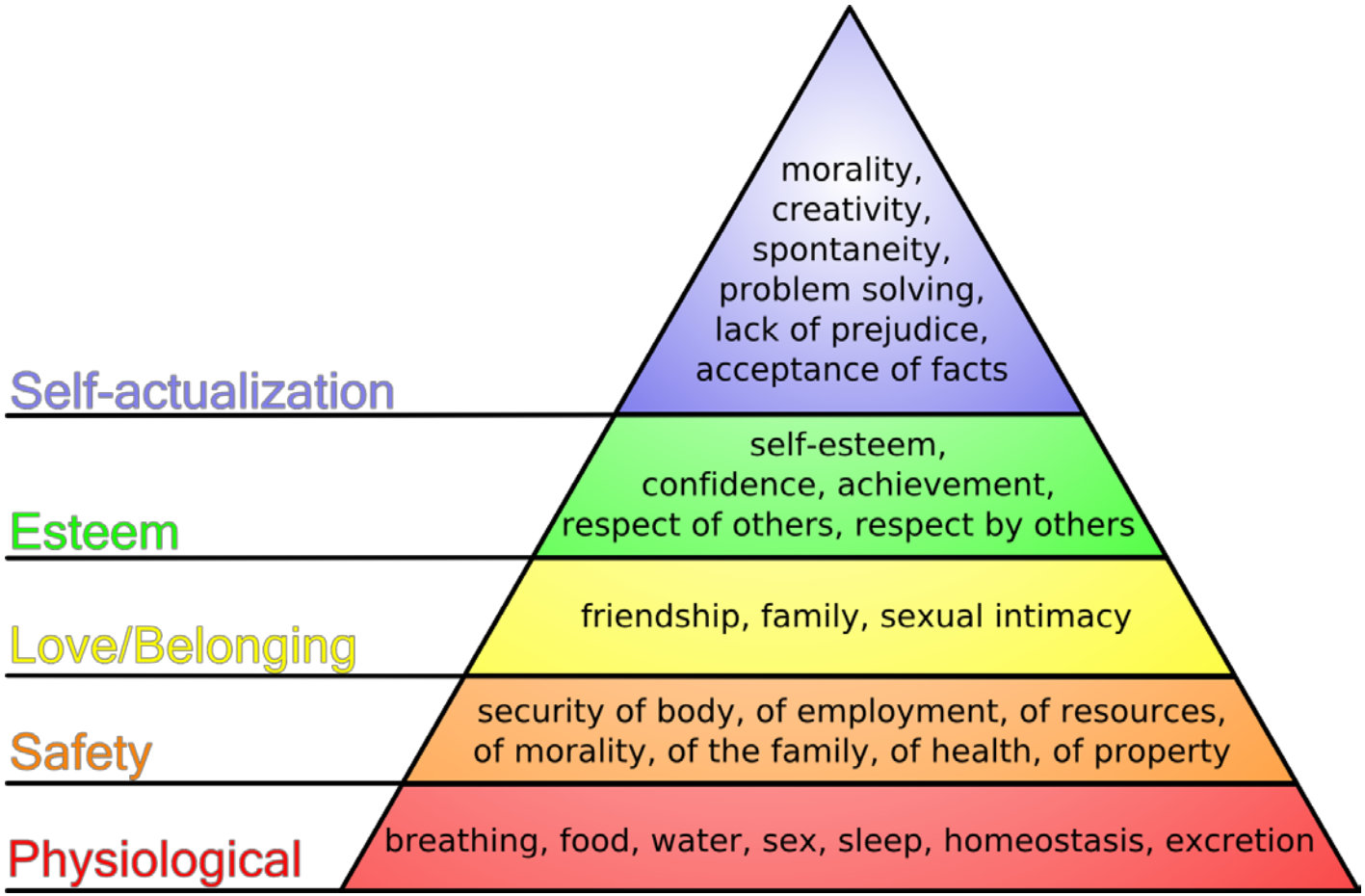
# Self – Theory
# (Multiple Selves and Personal Identity




A college student wrote three letters of a story presenting himself differently each time. The `real` student is a composite of all three selves, creating identity via multiple selves.

# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

(Actualising tendency)



# Methodology

- Humanistic psychologists assume that every person has their own unique way of perceiving and understanding the world and that the things they do only make sense in this light.
- The priority of humanistic psychologists is to understand people's **subjectivity**, asking *'what is it like to be this person?'*
- As a result, they reject the objective **scientific method** of studying people and their behaviour.

# Methodology (Continued)

Humanistic psychologists prefer **qualitative methods**

1. **Unstructured interviewing-** This allows access to other people's views and experiences without imposing on them the researcher's ideas about what is important.
2. **Participant observation**- This is where the researcher takes part in what the participants are studying in order to understand how their participants perceive it.
3. **Diaries, letters and biographical material- H**umanistic psychologists may also analyse all sorts of other qualitative materials that allow them insight into how people understand their world.

# Methodology- Carl Rogers' Person-Centred Therapy

- **Person-Centered Therapy** was created by **Carl Rogers (1951)**, to deal with the ways in which people perceive themselves consciously rather than having a therapist try to interpret unconscious thoughts or ideas.
- **Self-Concept:** An individual's concept of the **Self** as it is currently, consciously experienced. Roger's believes to understand the Self is central to understanding human personality.
- **Ideal Self**: The Self-Concept that an individual **would most like to have.**
- In other words, individuals who are happy and at ease with themselves have **a much smaller gap between the self-concept and ideal self**, than those who are unhappy with themselves.

# Person-Centred Therapy: Key Terms

There are several critical attitudes or values in Person or Client-Centred Therapy**:**

1. **Unconditional Positive Regard** (The need to be liked and respected by others, without any strings attached)
2. **Positive Self-Regard** (The need to like and respect oneself)
3. **Empathy** (Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives)
4. **Genuineness** or **Congruence** (harmony or agreement between the self-concept and ideal self)
5. **Actualising Tendency** ( the need to be open to experience and to express one's own true self- the inborn predisposition to seek the fullest expression of oneself)
6. **Q-Sort Method** ( A test to assess the self-concept and the ideal self, which comprises of sorting through descriptive statements written on cards). More on this later.

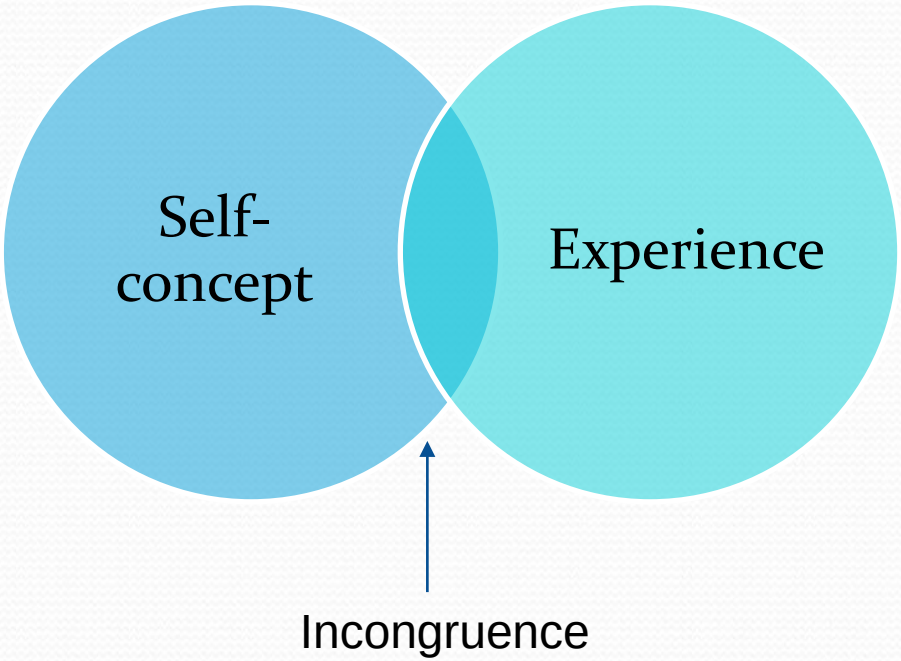
# The influence of early experience – Conditions of worth

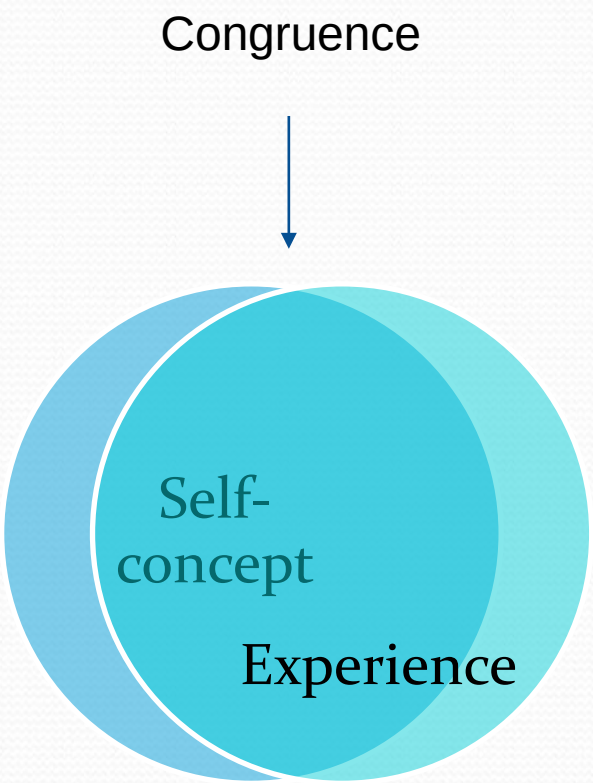
- Children require loving stimulation, but parents can exert an enduring influence; withholding or offering the love and attention so necessary for favourable growth.
- How/why does this occur? Human parenting is one of the lengthiest and complex forms of parenting within species. Inevitably the child`s behaviour may threaten their or others welfare and parents need to place restrictions on them.
- It can be very difficult to maintain unconditional positive regard, more often we impose conditions of worth.
- For the child that experience is distorted leading them to lose their own basic feelings.

# Congruence and incongruence

- When a person is raised with conditions of worth, some experiences are not incorporated into the self concept. They may be resisted or distorted.
- When a person`s positive self-concept has only minor discrepancies with daily life, this is known as congruence.
- When the discrepancy is large or the self-concept is negative, this is referred to as incongruence: the self-concept remains closed to experience and there is no integration.
- The sense of self and personal experience are incompatible (Rogers, 1951).

# A fully functioning person is open to experience



# Using the Q-Sort technique

- Using the word packs select 10 words that best describe you. Place them in order of importance in the table provided (A- actual).
- Next select 10 words that best describe your ideal self.
- Now, identify any words that do not appear in both lists. For any these terms, change the value to zero. For words which appear in both lists, give the value assigned for the term in list A to the term in list B.
- Perform the calculation: (total A + total B)/ (1.1)

| | |
|---|---|
| 10 | |
| 9 | |
| 8 | |
| 7 | |
| 6 | |
| 5 | |
| 4 | |
| 3 | |
| 2 | |
| 1 | |

# Results

- What do your results mean?
- The scores range from 0-100, with 100 representing a perfect match between self and ideal self.
- The lower the score, the less congruence between actual self and ideal self.
- For further reading refer to
- https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Yuksel_Ekinci/publication/222124616_An_investigation_of_self-concept_Actual_and_ideal_self-congruence_compared_in_the_context_of_service_evaluation/links/53e5509d0cf21cc29fcf3267.pdf

# Evaluating the Humanistic Approach

**Strengths**

1. The humanistic approach **emphasises important human motives,** which had been ignored by many previous theorists. E.g. believing in concepts like self-actualisation for better self-esteem.
2. It **deals with major issues relating to our sense of ourselves** and what we are trying to accomplish in life.
3. It **values the rights we deem every human individual needs** for their psychological wellbeing.

# Evaluating the Humanistic Approach

## Weaknesses

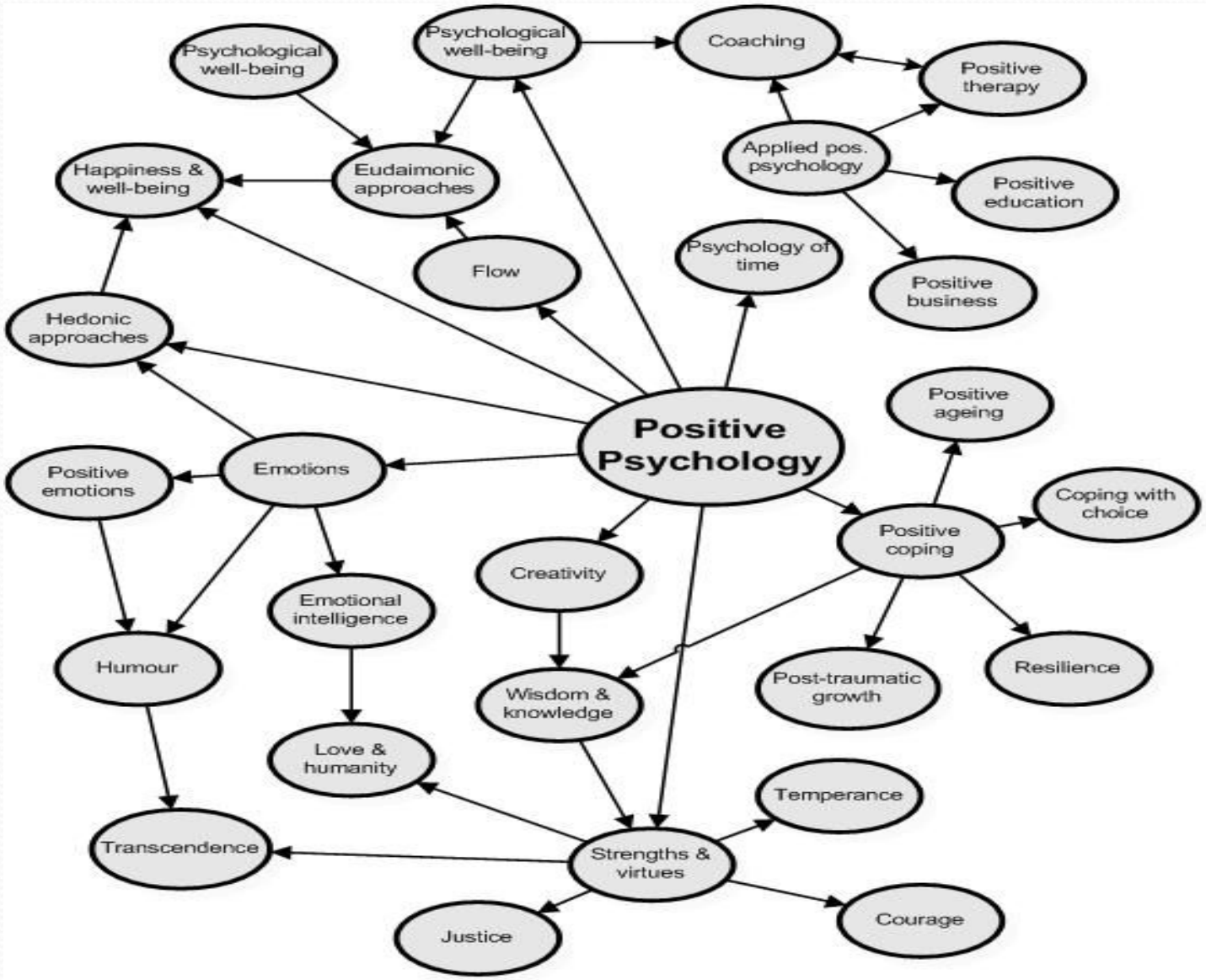
1. The strong reliance of people's accounts of their experiences and thoughts means that **processes lying below the level of conscious awareness are ignored.**
2. The contributions made by **genetic factors and childhood experiences to personality development are also largely ignored.**
3. Some of the concepts in this approach (e.g. Maslow's Self-Actualisation) are **hard to measure and therefore vague**.
4. Carl Rogers assumed that nearly everyone has a basically good nature, with problems and disturbances occurring due to particular experiences or influence by others. Many argue that **such assumptions are too optimistic!**

# The Positive Approach

# What is the Positive approach?

- The positive approach thinks that psychology should not just focus on mental illness, but also look at the good qualities humans have and how they can be nurtured
  - *The `scientific study of optimal human functioning [that] aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive'.*

# The Positive Psychology Approach



# The three levels of Positive Psychology:

- The subjective level includes the study of positive experiences such as joy, well-being, satisfaction, contentment, happiness, optimism and flow. This level is about feeling good, rather than doing good or being a good person.
- At the next level, the aim is to identify the constituents of the 'good life' and the personal qualities that are necessary for being a 'good person', through studying human strengths and virtues, future-mindedness, capacity for love, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, wisdom, interpersonal skills and giftedness.
- Finally, at the group or community level, the emphasis is on civic virtues, social responsibilities, nurturance, altruism, civility, tolerance, work ethics, positive institutions and other factors that contribute to the development of citizenship and communities.

# Assumption 1 – Positive aspects of human life

- The positive approach says we are self-directing and adaptive.
- A good life can be achieved if we use our strengths and virtues.
- Happiness does not depend on genes or luck.
- Happiness is recognising and developing our strengths to make our lives better and to minimise negativity.

# Assumption 1: Positive aspects of human life

- Seligman and Diener (2002).
- People who choose to invest time and effort into important relationships – friends and family – report high happiness levels.
- Negative correlation between happiness levels and depression.

# Assumption 2:
# Authenticity of goodness and excellence

- Happiness, goodness and excellence are natural human states.
- These states should get as much attention from psychologists as feelings of anxiety or stress.
- Seligman says we have “Signature strengths” such as kindness, humour and generosity which need to be developed so they can enhance (improve) our lives.

# Assumption 2: Authenticity of goodness and excellence

- So instead of simply focusing on all the problems humans have (mental disorders and negative states of mind) we should also celebrate the good things about humans.
- This assumption changes the way some psychologists look at therapy:
- Instead of fixing problems, they focus on developing a client's strengths to help them feel fulfilled.

# Assumption 2:
# Authenticity of goodness and excellence

- They are encouraged to help others (altruism) or develop their own abilities.
- So, as a person's self-esteem grows, they will develop strength to protect them from depression and other issues they might face in life.
- By recognising their own good qualities, clients will learn that they can continue to grow in their ability to cope.

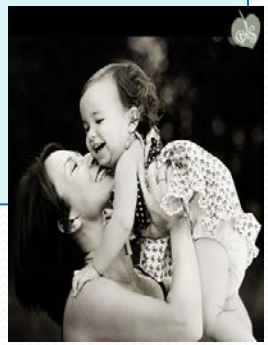
# Assumption 3:
# Focus on "The Good Life"

- Happiness is achieved through living a "good life", which involves 3 things:
- **Positive connection to others** – love, trust, enjoy happiness, forgiveness, spiritual connections with the self and others.
- **Positive individual traits** – integrity,

Morality, creativity, courage and humility.

# Assumption 3:
# Focus on "The Good Life"

- **Life Regulation qualities** – these are qualities we need to **regulate, monitor and control** our behaviour in order to achieve our goal.
- **Examples** – a sense of autonomy, independence, faith in our decision-making and wisdom.



# Assumption 3:
# Focus on "The Good Life"

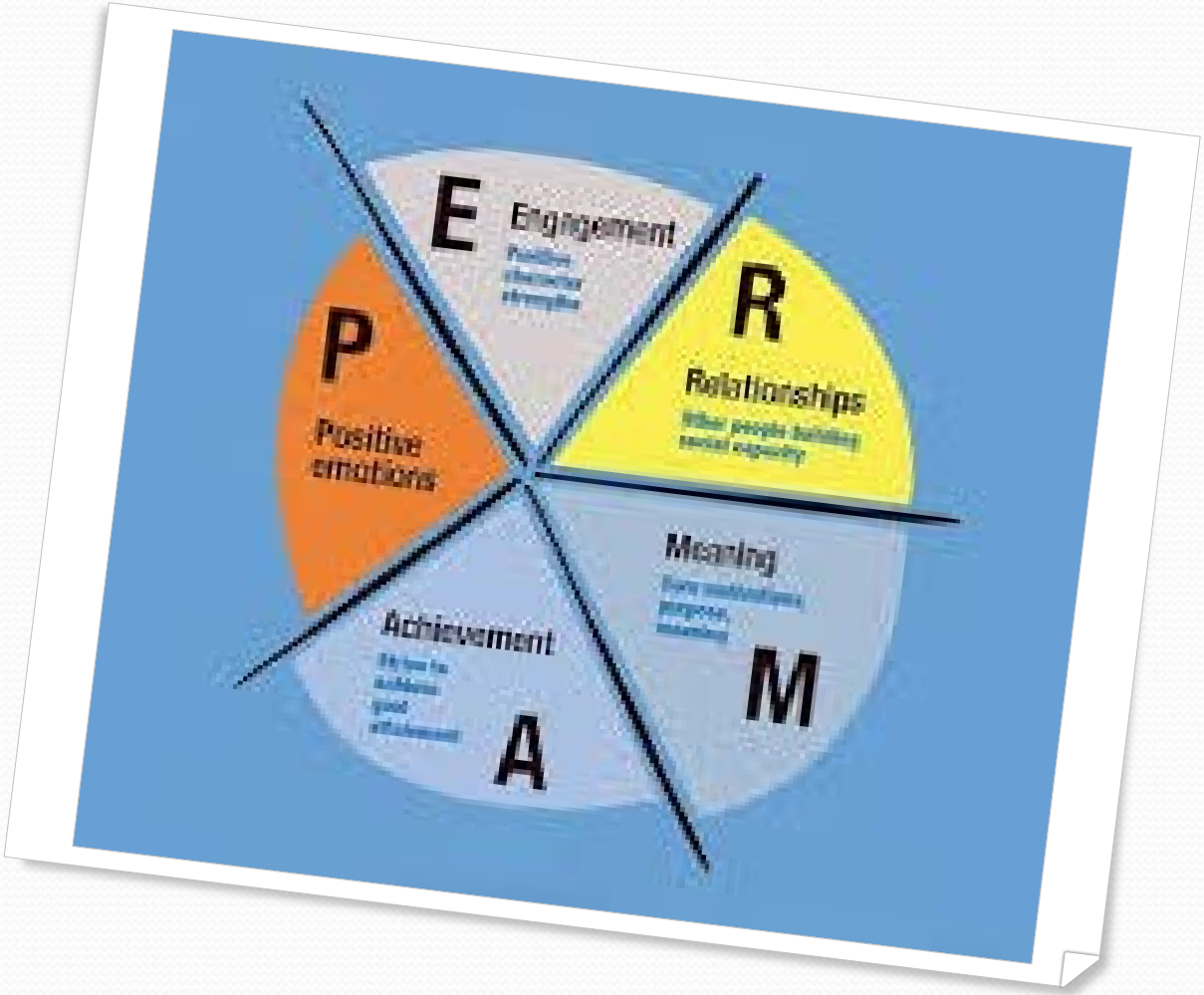
- **Seligman says we should aim high in life to be truly happy:**
- Not just a **Pleasant** life (pursuing good feelings).
- Not just a **Good** life (pursuing interesting activities).
- But a **Meaningful** life – living for a purpose greater than oneself.

# Explaining relationships

- How could the positive approach apply to human relationships?

  - Friendships
  - Romantic relationships
  - Sibling relationships
  - Parent/child relationships
  - Pet/Owner relationships

# Putting it all together



# Consider the following:

- On May 23, 2014, Elliot Rodger killed six people and injured fourteen others in Isla Vista, California, near the campus of University of California, Santa Barbara, before committing suicide.
- The attack began when 22-year-old Rodger stabbed three men to death in his apartment.
- He then drove to a sorority house and shot three female students outside, killing two. He drove to a nearby delicatessen and shot to death a male student who was inside. Then, he sped through Isla Vista, shooting and wounding several pedestrians and striking several others with his car.

- Rodger exchanged gunfire with police twice during the attack, receiving a non-fatal gunshot to the hip.
- This ended when his car crashed into a parked vehicle and came to a stop. Police found him dead in the car with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.
- Before driving to the sorority house, Rodger uploaded a video to YouTube, titled "Elliot Rodger's Retribution", in which he outlined details of his upcoming attack, his motives; a desire to punish women for rejecting him and to punish sexually active men for living a more enjoyable life than his.

- After uploading the video, he e-mailed an autobiographical manuscript to around a dozen acquaintances and family members.
- The document, entitled "My Twisted World", was made available on the Internet and became widely known as his "manifesto".
- In it, he describes his childhood, family conflicts, and frustration over not being able to find a girlfriend, his hatred of women, his contempt for racial minorities, interracial couples, and his plans for what he described as "retribution".
- Using each Psychological Perspective, provide an explanation for his behaviour.