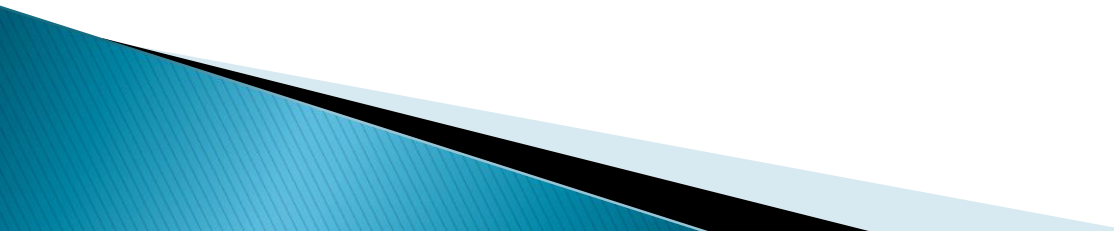# Understanding Today's College Student: Implications for Prevention and Intervention

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Have College Students Changed?

- Have students changed over the years you've worked in higher education?

- Do students have more problems, struggles, or difficulties then in the past?
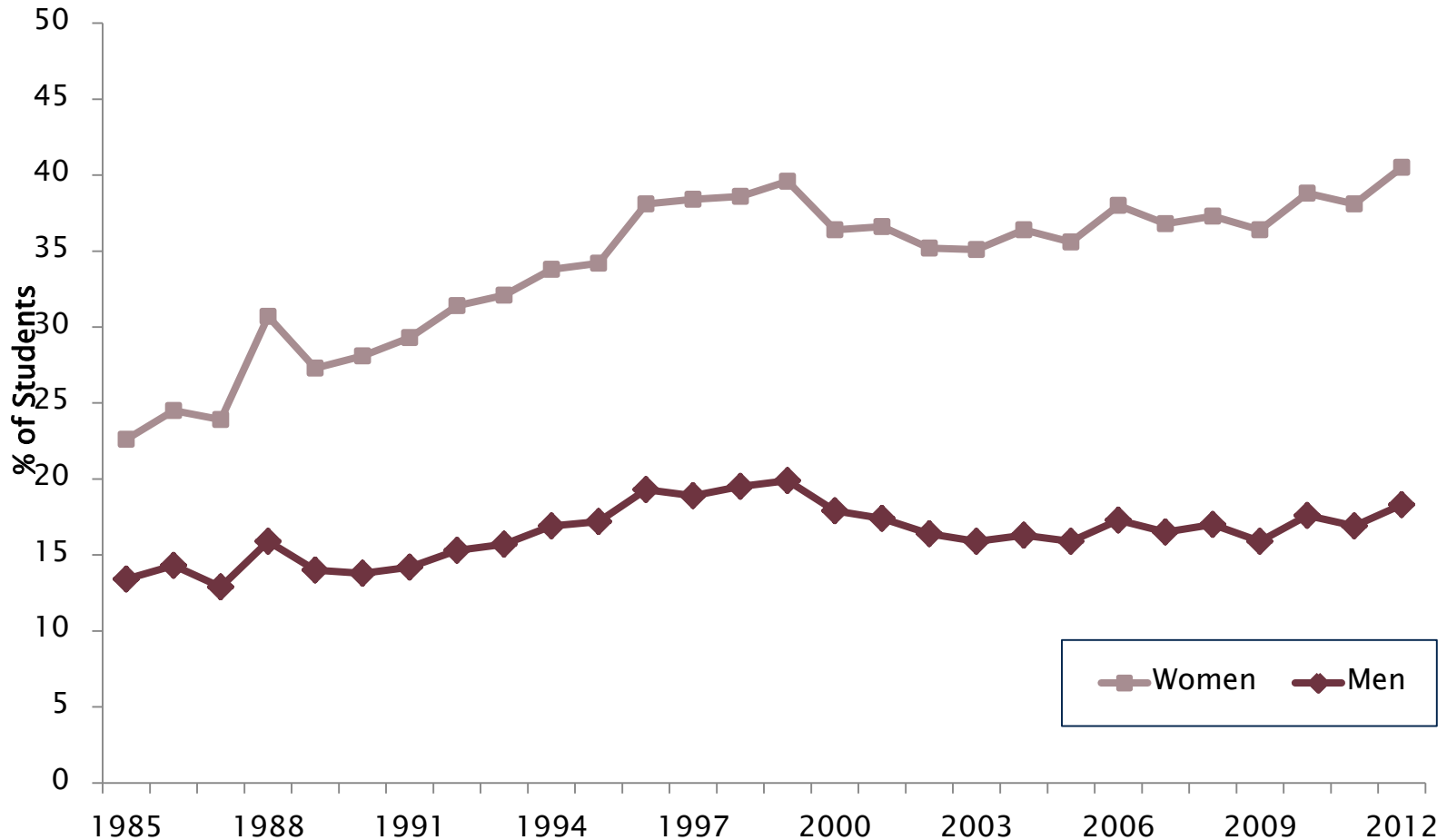
National Data: College Mental Health

- CIRP Fall, 2010
  - 279 colleges/universities; 201,818 freshman in Fall, 2010
  - Emotional Health self-rating at 25 year all time low since the question was first asked in 1985
  - Feelings of being overwhelmed was at its highest peak in the past eleven years
- CIRP Fall, 2011
  - 270 colleges/universities; 203,967 freshman in Fall, 2011
  - Emotional Health self-rating did not change appreciably
  - Those reporting that they were frequently "overwhelmed by all I had to do" as high-school seniors moving from 29.1% in 2010 downward slightly to 28.5% in 2011.

Students are Overwhelmed!

▶ CIRP Fall 2012: 283 colleges/universities, 192,912 students

◦ The percentage of incoming first-year students indicating that they frequently felt "overwhelmed by all I had to do" during their senior year of high school increased from 28.5% in 2011 to 30.4% in 2012, continuing an upward trend & being all time high.

◦ The percentage of incoming first-year women who report feeling "frequently" overwhelmed is at its highest point, 40.5%, since it was first asked in 1985. This is more then twice of first-year men at 18.3%.

Trend of "Felt Overwhelmed by All I Had to Do"
(% Indicating "Frequently")

National Data: College Mental Health

- ACHA
  - Over 30,000 college students in Fall, 2010
  - Over 28,000 college students in Fall, 2012
  - Top Ten Impediments to Academic Performance:
    - Stress, Sleep Difficulties, Anxiety, Cold/Flu/Sore Throat (same order for top four impediments in 2012)
    - Internet/Computer Gaming, Work (flipped for 2012)
    - Concern about Friend/Family Member, Depression (flipped for 2012)
    - Relationship Difficulties, Extracurricular Activities (flipped for 2012)

National Data: College Mental Health

- ACHA/NCHA in Fall, 2012
- 28,237 college students from 51 institutions
  - 12.1% treated for Anxiety in past 12 months
  - 10.6% treated for Depression in past 12 months
  - 5.7% Psychiatric treatment in past 12 months
  - 85.2% felt overwhelmed by all they had to do
  - 49.9% felt overwhelming anxiety
  - 32.9% felt overwhelming anger
  - 29.5% felt so depressed that is was difficult to function
  - 6.9% seriously considered suicide
  - 5.5% engaged in SHB (Cut, burned, hit until bruised, etc)
  - 1.2% attempted suicide

ACHA-NCHA, Spring of 2013

- 123,000 college & university students
- In the previous 12 months –
  - 56% had felt "very sad"
  - 31.3% had felt "so depressed that it was difficult to function"
  - 45% felt "things were hopeless"
  - 83.7% reported feelings "overwhelmed by all they had to do"
  - 79.1% felt "exhausted (not from physical activity)"

National Data: College Mental Health

- College students today are about 40 percent lower in empathy than their counterparts of 20 or 30 years ago, as measured by standard tests of this personality trait (U of MI Institute for Social Research, 2010)

- Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI) – Since 1982 scores on the NPI have increased .33 standard deviations. Almost two-thirds of recent college students are above the mean 1979-1985 narcissism score, a 30 % increase. The results complement previous studies finding increases in other individualistic traits such as assertiveness, agency, self-esteem, and extraversion. (2008)
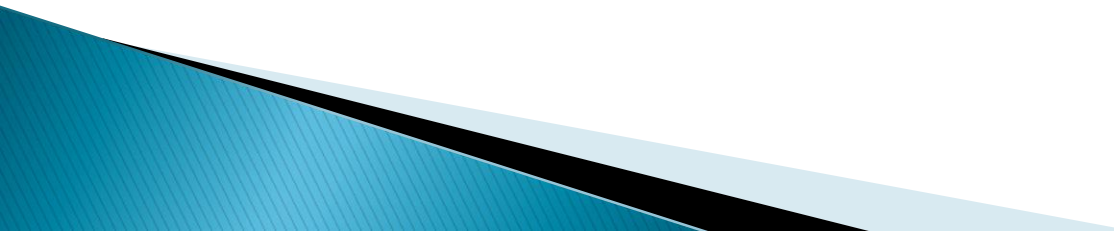
National Data: College Mental Health

‣ A meta analysis of the MMPI given to college students across cohorts from 1938 – 2007 found that the current generation of college students score about a standard deviation higher (average d=1.05) on the clinical scales Pd (Psychopathic Deviation), Pa (Paranoia), Ma (Hypomania), and D (Depression). Five times as many students now score above common cutoffs for psychopathology, including up to 40% on Ma (2010).

Sound Familiar???

▸ Students are not prepared/under prepared

▸ High levels of distress/frustration, easily overwhelmed

▸ Helicopter parents / Snowplow parents

▸ Don't take personal responsibility

▸ Want others to solve his/her problems

▸ *"I'm just not good at this"(talent mindset)*

▸ Entitled
  ◦ "If I show up for class I should pass the class, get a good grade in class"
  ◦ "I pay your salary" "You work for me"

How did this Happen?

- Observations at the counseling center
  - Who had more mental health issues, difficulty coping?
- Changing my frame, my paradigm
  - How can I better understand our students so I can change my thoughts and emotions when I'm interacting with them?
  - How can we have a positive impact on the students?
  - Turned to the literature.....

How did this happen? Increased Stress, Decreased Coping, Heightened Expectations

- Academic Pressure & Competition (A Race to Nowhere)
- Extracurricular Activities
- Parental Expectations, Family History
- Multicultural Environment–Stereotype Threat
- Financial Worries
- Social Fear
- Coping and Mental Health
  - Change in societal structure
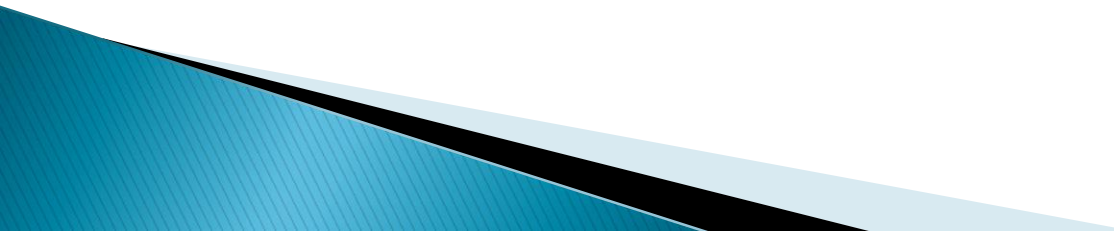 - Effect on Coping Skills / Deficits in Emotional Regulation

How did this happen? Changes in Societal Structure & Coping

▸ Baby Boomers, Gen X vs. Current Generation, Gen Y, Millenials
  ◦ Place of children within the family
  ◦ Role of authority within the home
  ◦ Independence outside of the home
  ◦ Discipline and reward and effects on self-esteem
  ◦ Role of Safety and Violence in Society
  ◦ Role of Technology on Relationships and interpersonal skills

Pendulum Swing

- Baby Boomers & Gen X vs. Generation Y & Millenials
- Developmental Tasks
  - Sense of Self: multiple identities
  - Non-cognitive/Self Regulation/Self Management
  - Psychosocial
  - Moral/Ethical
  - Cognitive/Intellectual
  - Sense of Purpose/Making Meaning/Spiritual
- Learning Opportunities through Frustration & Failure Experiences followed by success
  - Persistence, short-term vs. long-term gains, etc.
  - Increased Agency, Internal locus of control
  - Increased Self Esteem, Self Concept

Impact on You, Your Position

- "They never taught me this in school"
- Stress of position is increasing
- Over-functioning, Rescuing, Overwhelmed
- Confused about behavior, Personalize behavior, Pathologize behavior
- Scared due to increased violence, acting out
- Angry
- Helpless and Hopeless
- Decreased Functioning, Increased burnout

So What do we do? Training & Skill Building

- Combination of numerous fields of study
  - Emerging Adulthood
  - Interpersonal Neurobiology
  - Positive Psychology
    - Building Character in Larger Institutions
      - Education, Military
    - Increasing Well-being
      - Communities, Countries
  - Principal Based Treatment
    - Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
    - Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Emerging Adulthood

- Median age for Marriage for Women & Men
  - 1960: 20 for women and 22 for men
  - 2013: 27 for women and 29 for men
- Decline in Birthrate
  - 1960: 3.5 children; 2010: 2.0 children
- College Attendance
  - 1960:33% attended college, mostly men
  - 2012: 70% attended college, mainly women
- Job Changes
  - 7 times from 20 – 29. Most don't find long-term job until late 20s and beyond
  - Make a difference in society and personal fulfillment
- Community Service – States and Abroad
  - ¼ expect to work abroad at some point in career
  - (Jeff Arnett; Jean Twenge)

Interpersonal Neurobiology

- Attachment Relationships create the Models we form– Our early life experiences shapes our brain development – the brain firing patterns create deep neural pathways. We summarize across experiences and generate schemas that lets us anticipate what will happen next, how we should behave, what emotions we will have, and how we filter our perceptions.
- Dirt Path
- Similar Experience Actives our Models–
  ◦ Real vs. Accurate
- (Dan Siegel)

Emotions, Thoughts & Behavior

- Emotions , Thinking, and the Function of the Brain
  - Frontal lobe and amygdala
- Comfort with Others Expression of Emotions
  - Joy, Anger, Sadness, Fear
    - Surprise, Tenderness/Love, Disgust/Shame
    - Guilt: Justified, Unjustified
- Primary vs. Secondary Emotions
  - Immediate, spontaneous response to situations
  - Mixture of emotions, influenced by thoughts, perceptions, past experiences, last longer and change as they progress (i.e., schemas)

Emotions, Thoughts & Behavior

- Cultural Considerations & Expression of Emotions
  - Which emotions are you "allowed" to express?
  - How do you express these emotions?
  - How do you react to other's emotions?
- Regulating Our Emotions
  - Self-care to reduce emotional vulnerability – Eat, Sleep, Exercise, treat physical illness, avoid mood altering drugs, build mastery

Developmental Tasks & Building "Character"

- **Positive Psychology** – strengths & virtues that enable individuals & communities to thrive
- How do we Flourish? PERMA
  (Martin Seligman)
  - **P**ositive Emotion
  - **E**ngagement
  - **R**elationships
  - **M**eaning
  - **A**ccomplishment

PERMA: Well-Being

- **Positive Emotion**
- Habit of Gratitude
  - ◦ Three Good Things Exercise
  - ◦ Writing a Gratitude Letter
- Mindfulness, Flow, Meditation
  - ◦ Your body and mind in the same place at the same time
  - ◦ Being in the Moment (not the past or future)
- Acts of Kindness
  - ◦ Do something nice for someone else

PERMA: Well-Being

- **Engagement**
- Signature Strengths
  - Take assessment of your signature strengths
  - Think of the task you dislike most at work
  - Use your highest strength in the task you like the least at work for the week. Six months later, less depressed, increased happiness.
  - www.authentichappiness.org
- Post traumatic Growth
  - Gratitude, Kindness, Religiousness, Hope & Bravery

PERMA: Well-Being

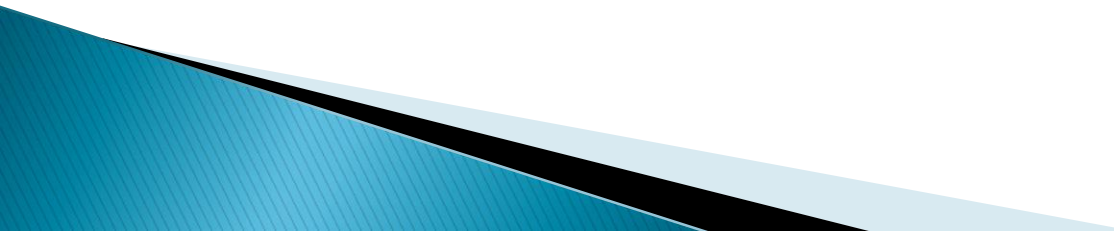| RELATIONSHIPS	CONSTRUCTIVE	DESTRUCTIVE
ACTIVE	Long focus on topic: "I've been watching you work….." "Exactly where were you when you found out?" "What exactly did your boss say?" "Why do you think you were really promoted?" "How can use those strengths in other areas of your life you care about?"	"You know what tax bracket that's going to put us into?"
PASSIVE	"Congratulations, you deserve it."	"What's for dinner?"

PERMA: Well-Being

- **Meaning**
- Belonging to and serving something bigger than yourself
    - Tell us your vision of a positive human future
    - How would you want your children/grandchildren to view you?
    - Write your obituary through your children/ grandchildren's eyes
    - What did you do to build a human future worth living?

PERMA: Well-Being

- **Accomplishment:**
- Self-Discipline and Grit (Angela Duckworth)
- Twice as important as IQ in predicting academic success
- Growth Mindset (Carol Dweck)
  - Talent Mindset
  - Fixed Mindset
- Dweck found that student's performance worsens if they always hear how smart they are. Students who get too much praise are less likely to take risks, are highly sensitive to failure and are more likely to give up when faced with a challenge.
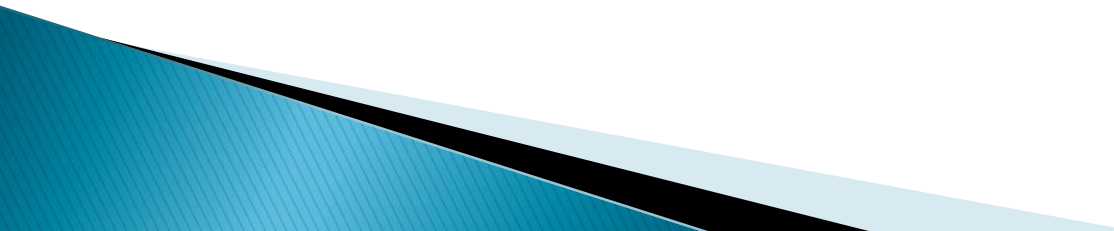- Praise students for their effort, their concentration, their strategies when they struggle

Principle Based Treatment that Builds Life Skills

- Mindfulness
- Emotional Regulation
- Interpersonal Effectiveness
- Distress Tolerance
- Value Informed Behavior and Decision Making
- Increased Effectiveness in Communicating with Distressed Individuals
- (DBT and ACT)

Human Emotions: Taking Hold of Your Mind – States of Mind

◦ Reasonable Mind
  • Rational
  • Thinking
  • Logical
◦ Emotion Mind
  • Emotions are in control
  • May lead to painful states of being
  • May be positive in the short term but negative in the long term
◦ Wise Mind
  • Integration of the two
  • You cannot overcome emotion mind with reasonable mind
  • Nor can you create emotions with reasonable mind
  • You must go within and integrate the two

Mindfulness

- Meditation, Mindfulness
- Focusing Your Mind
- Observe
- Describe
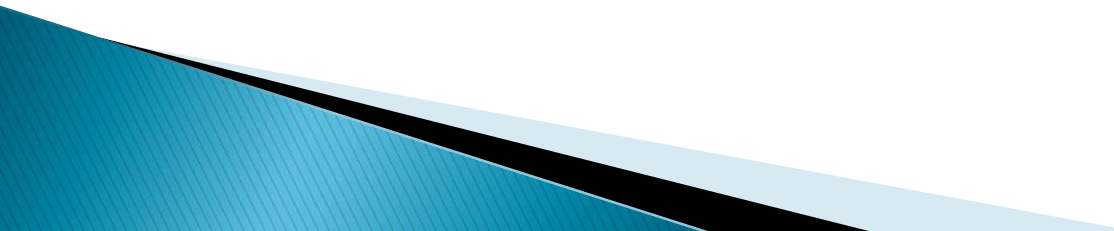- Non-judgmental Stance
- In the Moment (not past or future)

Emotional Regulation

- Mindfulness to increase awareness of emotion
- Emotions are NOT random
- Emotions ALWAYS have a trigger
- Triggers – Internal or External
- Sleep is our Reset Button
- Detectives for Emotional Triggers: SIFT
  - S– Sense; I – Images; F–Feelings; T–Thoughts
- PLEASE Skills to decrease emotional vulnerability

Interpersonal Effectiveness

- 3 Key components to every human interaction
  - Objective – meeting my goal
    - What do I want from this interaction?
    - What do I have to do to get those results? What will work?
  - Relational – importance of this relationship
    - How do I want the other person to feel about me after this interaction?
    - Balancing immediate goals with good of the relationship
  - Self- respect- maintaining self respect
    - How do I want to feel about myself after this interaction is over?

Distress Tolerance

- What do we do when we can't influence or change the situation????
- Radical Acceptance
- Self-care, TLC
- "Mini-vacations"
- Engaging in pleasurable activities

Increasing Effectiveness– Distressed Individuals

- Validate Emotion, not Interpretation
  - Don't challenge interpretation when they are in emotional mind (amygdala)
  - Don't agree with interpretation either
- Primary and Secondary Emotion
  - Which are you seeing?
  - What are you feeling?
- What is Needed?
  - Mindfulness
  - Emotional Regulation
 - Interpersonal Effectiveness
  - Distress Tolerance

University & Community Projects

- Stanford: The Resilience Project – rejection, failure, and disappointment are an important part of learning
  - https://undergrad.Stanford.edu/resilience
- Harvard Success–Failure Project
  - http://successfailureproject.bsc.Harvard.edu
- Military Resilience Project (Seligman)
  - https://Militaryresilienceproject.com
- Adelaide Thinkers in Residence, Australia
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxxBV7tg1wg
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4vPtz2O5mA

Measurement of Well-Being

- Questionnaires that measure well-being
  - Seligman Authentic Happiness website
  - http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/questionnaires.aspx
- Facebook and Twitter: Social Language Analysis - count the positive and negative emotions expressed in your community (45,000 words that measure PERMA and anti-PERMA words)

Counting Social Media Words

Counting Social Media Words

life satisfaction ➔
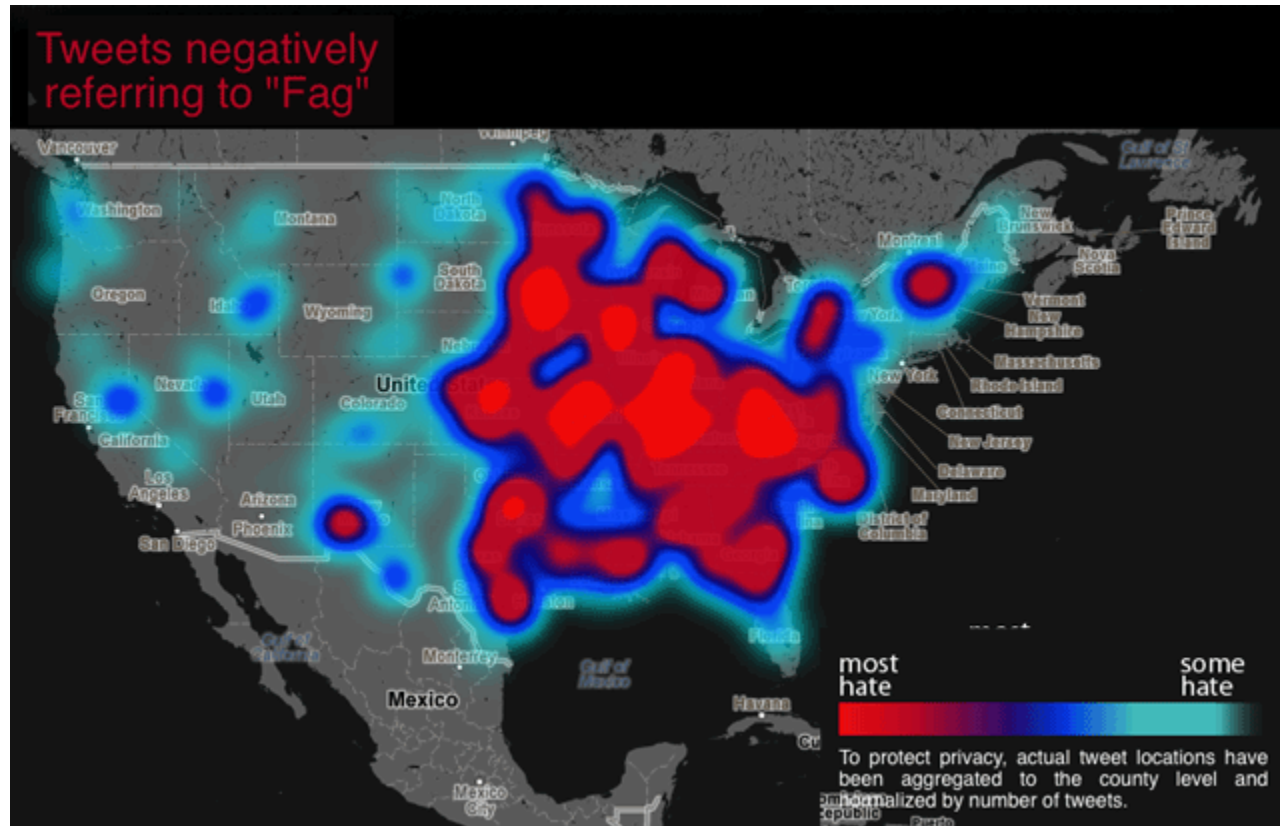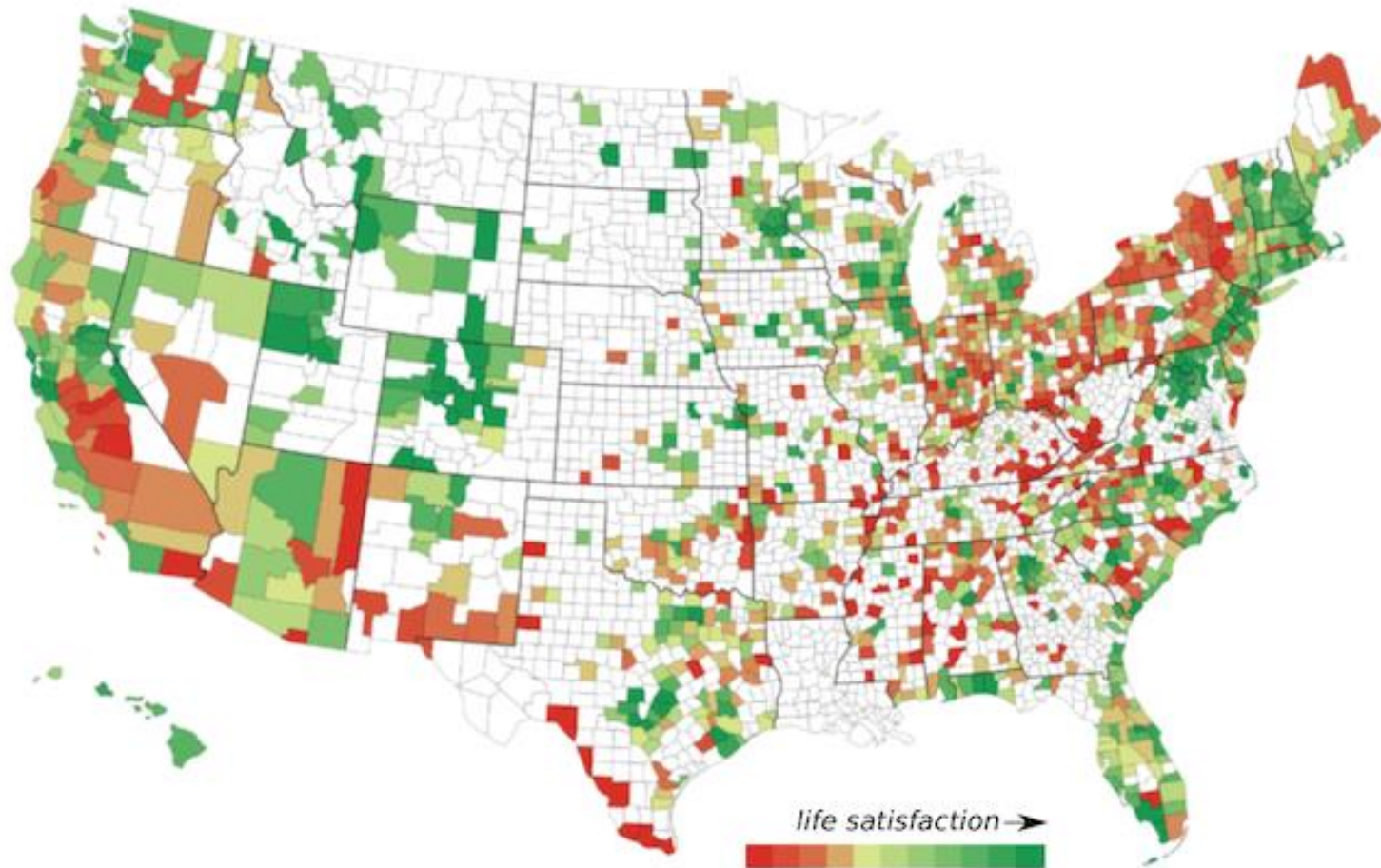
Measurement of Well-Being

▸ Losada Ratio (Fredrickson & Losada, 2006)

▸ Went into companies and counted number of positive and negative words and looked at the ratio. Losada ratio predicts financial success.

▸ Positive to negative ratio:
  ◦ ≥2.9:1= Flourishing
  ◦ 1.1 to 2.8: 1= Stagnating
  ◦ ‹ 1.0: 1 = Going Bankrupt

▸ Marriage, ›5:1 ratio (Gottman, predict non-divorce)

▸ Emerging Adults ????

Next Steps for Your Institution

- Individual Focus
  - Bibliography – Books, Ted Talks, articles, links to self-assessments
  - Learn and Practice, Incorporate into your life
- Training of Department, Divisional Staff
  - Professional Development, In-Service for SHS, CC, and other Student Affairs Departments
  - All Counseling Center staff learned Positive Psych, DBT, ACT upon hiring
- Training University Staff, Faculty
  - Gatekeepers – Residence Life staff, University 101 faculty, support staff with high public contact, academic advisors
  - 1.5 hour class and 6 hour class (4-1.5 hour)
- Creating Programs and Projects for Students
  - Stand alone and series of workshops
  - 12 week Life Skills Class through CC, 20 students per semester
  - Stanford and Harvard Resiliency Projects
- Changing Institutional Climate
  - Seligman – South Australia Adelaide Thinker in Residence Project; UK Public Policy to Increase UK National Well-being; US Military Resilience Project
  - University of Pennsylvania – Penn's World Well Being Project
  - Resilience Consortium – Institutions of Higher Education to aid college students in developing resiliency capacities.