Positive Psychology

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Introduction to Positive Psychology

by Daniel Tomasulo, PhD
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You have been called to the deep study of Positive Psychology.
Martin Seligman~from his course syllabus.

The evidence-based nature of positive psychology initiated by Martin Seligman has allowed its influence to spread out into a wide variety of academic and applied ventures around the world. This collection of articles, as well as the cover photo, represents the work of individuals at the forefront of the field. Each has made unique contributions and continues to be creative, dynamic, and prolific in their domains.

Yet, what has made this issue special for me is that I can call each of the contributors my friend. Joel Morgovsky has been my best friend for over 35 years and introduced me to the discipline through his course on positive psychology–the first in New Jersey. Bob Vallerand and I, prior to the 6th European Conference on Positive Psychology, traveled through Moscow together. Ryan Niemiec and I recently presented at the International Positive Psychology Association on the use of character strengths in disabilities; Tayyab Rashid and I did a role playing demonstration together on positive psychotherapy during the Los Angeles IPPA; and Robert "Reb" Rebele and his lovely wife, Amy, (and now new daughter), open their home to me when I come to work with the students in the Master of Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. These are treasured and evolving relationships–each with its own memories, reflections, and joys. What we share in our connection to positive psychology is our belief that it transcends being merely an academic discipline. Yes, we all do what we do in relation to positive psychology–but we practice the tenets of it as well. You can't study and immerse yourself in this field without being involved living it. As the late positive psychologist Chris Peterson noted, *"Happiness is not a spectator sport."* The work of the co-contributors is as diverse as it is intriguing. Joel Morgovsky's cover photo of the work of Asbury Park's legendary mural artist Porkchop <http://artofporkchop.com> is more than a perspective on the aesthetics of street art. It is a symbol of what is known in academic circles as a creative economy. As the Philadelphia Mural Program demonstrated, when creative artists come into an area of urban poverty and cover the graffiti on buildings with art, it is the beginning of urban vitality. As a recent New York Times article explains, Asbury Park's transformation continues and is now one of the top 10 beaches in New Jersey. Joel's most recent show of mural photographs was at the Soho Photo Gallery in NYC earlier this year. You can see more of his work at readingpictures.com.

Robert Vallerand, PhD, is past-president of the International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA) and professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal. His pioneering work invites us to think about a dualistic perspective on passion: do we control our passions or do they control us? His research distinguishes harmonious verses obsessive passion. This distinction focuses on the effect these approaches have on the ability to achieve high performance while still embracing life and being happy.

His new book, *The Psychology of Passion: A Dualistic Model,* is a brilliant and careful review of the literature. Over 200 studies on passion bring the topic to the forefront of our understanding with Bob's groundbreaking research leading the way.

Robert "Reb" Rebele, MAPP, is a consultant and educator with the University of Pennsylvania and IPPA, as well as a range of corporate, technology, non-profit, and educational organizations. Reb frequently collaborates with Dr. Adam Grant of the Wharton School on research and application projects related to employee motivation, reciprocity styles, and helping behaviors in the workplace. He takes us on an excursion into the very need for positive psychology as a separate discipline. He walks us through the history and current views of how positive psychology is understood. More on his work can be found at rebrebele.com

Ryan Niemiec, PsyD, is education director of the VIA Institute on Character. Character strengths are the backbone of positive psychology, and Ryan's extensive training, research, and understanding make his contribution on mindfulness and character strengths a distinctive fusion of two of the hottest topics in the field. He is uniquely qualified to inform us on this subject, as his most recent book, Mindfulness and Character Strengths: A Practical Guide to Flourishing, *is as innovative as it is revolutionary.* More about Ryan can be found at: ryanniemiec.com.

Tayyab Rashid, PhD, from the University of Toronto, is the leading researcher and authority in the field of positive psychotherapy. He, along with Martin Seligman, has demonstrated the use of evidence-based positive interventions as more effective in reducing the symptoms of depression, while simultaneously increasing well-being, than traditional psychotherapy and antidepressants *combined.* Tayyab's research and application are one of the most exciting developments for clinicians. His most recent article, "Positive psychotherapy: A strength-based approach," appeared earlier this year in *The Journal of Positive Psychology.* You can find more of his work at tayyabrashid.com

As a writer and first licensed psychologist and psychodramatist to come through the Master of Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, I've had the opportunity to modify and apply positive interventions to underserved populations (individuals with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities), develop and teach the first positive psychology course at New Jersey City University, and use creative nonfiction to highlight stories of transformation and resilience. Since 2012, I've worked for Marty Seligman as his assistant instructor in the MAPP program at the University of Pennsylvania, and more recently co-developed the positive psychology certification program at the Open Center in NYC. You can find more information about these and my other projects at Dare2BeHappy.com

This special issue was put together with the idea of giving members of NJPA a sample of some of the exciting developments in the field. I hope it piques your interest. If it does, Marty Seligman might say, you've been called. ❖

On the Importance of Passion for Positive Psychology

by Robert J. Vallerand, PhD

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Positive psychology focuses on the factors that allow individuals (and organizations and communities) to thrive and to be optimally functioning. One important question becomes "How best to attain such a level of high functioning?" We suggest that one answer is having a passion for a specific activity. Indeed, regularly feeling enthusiastic, alive, and passionate while engaging in an enjoyable and meaningful activity should affect people's lives in a positive and significant way. Research supports this assumption, but also reveals that passion may represent a risk factor with respect to experiencing some negative outcomes.

A Dualistic Model of Passion

Surprisingly, very little theorizing and research has been written on the psychology of passion, until recently (see Vallerand, 2015, Chapters 1 and 2). Vallerand and colleagues (2003) proposed a Dualistic Model of Passion (DMP). This model posits that people engage in various activities throughout life in the hope of developing their identities and satisfying basic psychological needs (see Ryan & Deci, 2000). With time and experience, most people eventually start to display a passion for one or two activities, particularly those that are enjoyable and have some resonance with their identities. Passion is defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that one loves (or strongly likes), finds important, in which one invests time and energy (Vallerand et al., 2003), and is part of identity. It should be mentioned that one can also be passionate about an object (e.g., a card collection), a concept or ideal (e.g., a political cause such as the independence of one's state), or even a person (e.g., the loved one).

On Two Types of Passion: Harmonious and Obsessive

The DMP further posits that there are two types of passion, harmonious and obsessive, that can be distinguished in terms of how the passionate activity has been internalized into one's identity. Harmonious passion results from an autonomous internalization of the activity into the person's identity and self. An autonomous internalization occurs when individuals have freely accepted the activities as important for them without any contingencies attached to it. This type of internalization emanates from the intrinsic and integrative tendencies of the self (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and produces a motivational force to willingly engage in the activity, and engenders a sense of volition and personal endorsement about pursuing the activity. When harmonious passion is at play, the activity occupies a significant, but not overpowering, space in the person's identity and is in harmony with other aspects of the person's life. In other words, with harmonious passion the person fully partakes in the passionate activity in a mindful (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and open way (Hodgins & Knee, 2002) that opens up access to adaptive self-processes (Deci & Ryan, 2000) that are conducive to positive outcomes.

Conversely, obsessive passion results from a controlled internalization of the activity. Such an internalization process leads not only the activity representation to be part of the person's identity, but also to values and regulations associated with the activity to be, at best, partially internalized in the self, and at worse, to be internalized in the person's identity, but completely outside the integrative self (Ryan & Deci, 2000), thereby leading to having access to less than optimal self-processes and outcomes. People with obsessive passions can thus find themselves in the position of experiencing uncontrollable urges to partake in the activities they view as important and enjoyable. Consequently, they risk experiencing conflicts and other negative affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences during and after activity engagement. In sum, with obsessive passion one is controlled by the passion, whereas with harmonious passion the person controls his or her passion.

Research On Passion

Since 2003, well over 200 studies have been conducted on the concept of passion. Additional information is presented in a recent book (Vallerand, 2015) and a meta-analysis (Curran et al., in press) devoted to passion.

On Measuring Passion: The Passion Scale

The very first task that we conducted was to develop a scale to measure the harmonious and obsessive passions. The Passion Scale consists of two subscales of six items each assessing obsessive (e.g., "I almost have an obsessive feeling toward this activity.") and harmonious passion (e.g., "This activity is in harmony with other activities in my life.") toward a given activity that the participant identifies as his or her favorite activity. Several studies have provided strong support for the psychometric properties of the scale, both in English and various other languages (see Marsh et al., 2013; Vallerand, 2015, Chapter 4).

Who Becomes Passionate and for Which Type of Activity?

Several studies show that a majority of the population is either highly passionate (75%) or moderately passionate (84%) for at least one activity. Such passion is not fleeting but, rather, persistent, as people typically engage in their passionate activities on average eight hours per week, and do so for several years and sometimes a lifetime (see Vallerand et al., 2003). A passion for a given activity typically develops in the teen years as people seek to develop their identities, and necessitates the support from the social environment to blossom (Mageau et al., 2009). Finally, it appears that most activities that include some interesting elements have the potential to become passionate for a given individual (see Vallerand et al., 2003).

The Role of Passion in Optimal Functioning

Research on passion and optimal functioning has been

typically conducted in field settings with a variety of real-life participants. In these studies, participants are asked to complete the Passion Scale with respect to their favorite activities, and scales assessing optimal functioning (e.g., flow, well-being, positive affect, performance, positive relationships, contributing to the community and society).

The results of these studies yield remarkably similar findings irrespective of the methodological design used (e.g., cross-sectional, longitudinal, diary study) and can be summarized as follows (see Vallerand, 2015). First, harmonious passion leads to higher levels of optimal functioning than obsessive passion. Second, obsessive passion positively predicts maladaptive outcomes (e.g., general negative affect, anxiety, life conflict, rumination, burnout), whereas harmonious passion is either unrelated or negatively associated with these negative outcomes. Third, non-passionate people (the 15-25% of the population that does not experience passion for any activity) display lower levels of adaptive outcomes than those who display harmonious passions, but do not differ from those with obsessive passions. Where they do differ, however, is that while non-passionate individuals display a moderate level of well-being, those with obsessive passions are on a yo-yo pattern where their well-being goes up and down as a function of their performance on the activities that they are passionate about. Finally, the adaptive outcomes engendered by harmonious passion are experienced on a recurrent basis because people engage in the activities that they are passionate about regularly. Thus, contrary to the popular belief that psychological gains cannot be sustained (the so-called "tread mill effect"), the positive psychological effects are indeed sustainable (see Vallerand, 2012, 2015).

While these findings provide strong support for the DMP, one may question the fact that these findings have been mostly obtained in a string of different studies, or that they are mostly based on correlational studies. To this end, it should be underscored that results from a recent meta-analysis involving more than 94 studies and over 1,300 independent effect sizes coming from different laboratories provide strong support for the above conclusions (see Curran et al., in press). Furthermore, research using cross-lagged panel designs and experimental designs where either harmonious or obsessive passion is induced under controlled laboratory conditions leads to the same findings as those using the Passion Scale.

The above findings paint a picture in which harmonious passion is "good" and obsessive passion "bad." Let us qualify this conclusion in three ways. First, obsessive passion can predict some positive emotions such as self-related affect (e,g., pride) and excitement. While these types of emotions are not as conducive to well-being as other types of positive emotions, such as contentment and joy (see Vallerand, 2015), they nevertheless are more positive than negative affect and emotional suffering. Second, obsessive passion provides one with high energy when engaging in the passionate activity just as much as harmonious passion. However, obsessive passion leaves one with less energy *following* task engagement. If one is depleted of energy after engaging in the passionate activity, it is easy to understand why very little positive outcomes can be derived from obsessive passions. Third, obsessive passion predicts long-term performance just as much as harmonious passion. However, research reveals that such similar long-term high performance is achieved through different roads.

With obsessive passion, one seeks to achieve high performance in the passionate activity while neglecting other aspects of his or her life. In other words, one accepts to suffer as long as high performance is achieved in the passionate activity. Not so with harmonious passion. One seeks to achieve high performance while still embracing life and being happy. In the short term, obsessive passion may even lead to a higher performance than harmonious passion, especially under ego-threat. One will then expend high levels of energy to display high performance and avoid a loss of self-esteem. While high performance may be attained in these situations, it is attained at a cost, as such high expenditure may prevent one from fully engaging in other life activities.

Future research is needed to complement this first generation of research to identify the best practices to facilitate harmonious passion. Emerging research reveals that using one's personal strengths and interacting with people who provide us with autonomy and freedom in a given activity foster harmonious passion for this activity (see Vallerand, 2015, chapter 5). Research along those lines should allow us to develop scientifically informed applications that can be reliably used by practitioners in order to help people develop and sustain their harmonious passion.

Conclusion

Positive psychology has asked the question, "How can people's lives be most worth living?" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). We propose one answer to that question is by having a harmonious passion toward an enjoyable and meaningful activity. Having such a passion allows one to experience a number of positive outcomes and lead a fulfilling life worth living. The concept of passion would thus appear to be of great relevance for positive psychology. ❖

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What We Talk About When We Talk About Positive Psychology

by Robert Rebele, MAPP
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Four strangers were unexpectedly gathered in the campus coffee shop one day and discovered a common interest in positive psychology. As they began talking, though, each revealed a surprisingly different sense of what that was:

"Positive psychology has been great, but we don't need it anymore," said the professor. "It is just psychology."

"But it is such an exciting field," retorted the doctoral student. "I am writing my dissertation on positive psychology."

The consultant agreed. "Positive psychology is the fastest-growing part of my business."

"Positive psychology has changed the way I live my life," added the father of another local student.

Moments ago they had all expressed passion for "positive psychology," but now it seemed they were talking about very different things. Who was right? And, did they have anything in common, after all?

Defining A New Field

Though related ideas have circulated for decades, positive psychology, as a term, is much younger. Given its growing popularity, one might expect it to have a commonly accepted definition. Yet conversational confusion like that above remains a surprisingly frequent occurrence even in classrooms and at conferences specifically focused on "positive psychology." What is it we are talking about when we talk about positive psychology?

Seligman's (1999) first use of the term in his seminal speech to the American Psychological Association called positive psychology a "reoriented science that emphasizes the understanding and building of the most positive qualities of an individual: optimism, courage, work ethic, future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, the capacity for pleasure and insight, and social responsibility." He went on to call it "a new science and profession . . . whose aim is the building of what makes life most worth living."

These same themes have been carried forward in subsequent definitions:

- Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) referred to positive psychology as "a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions" (p. 5).
- Sheldon and King (2001) called it "the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues" (p. 216).
- Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) used "the study of positive emotion, positive character, and positive institutions" (p. 410).
- The International Positive Psychology Association, founded in 2007, calls positive psychology "the scientific study of what enables individuals and communities to thrive."
- And more recently, Donaldson, Dollwet, and Rao (2015) called it "a new science of happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning" (p. 185).

There are of course many more articles that mention "positive psychology," but most use some variation of this theme: it is a science of things that are broadly labeled as positive. What exactly constitutes "the positive" is a matter of important debate (Pawelski, 2015), but that is unlikely the source of confusion above. To understand what is happening in that conversation, it can help to look at how terms are defined.

The Polysemy of Positive Psychology

A definition often comprises two parts: a genus (the type of thing being defined) and its differentia (that which distinguishes this particular thing from other things in the same genus). In the definitions of positive psychology above, the genus is usually "a science" or "the study," and the differentia is some variation of "the positive" (e.g., "what makes life most worth living"). In plainer terms, positive psychology is a type of science that differs from other types of science in its emphasis on so-called positive topics. This definition can be refined, but this form is clear enough to create a basic shared understanding. Indeed, this is likely what the four coffee shop conversationalists expected to have in common.

Positive psychology, though, like many terms, is polysemous its usage resists the simplicity of a singular definition and is instead pulled toward a more complex set of meanings that are interrelated, but not identical. In other words, "positive psychology" is more than one thing. Indeed, it has been referred to alternately as a new science and/or a reoriented science (Seligman, 1999), a movement (Gable & Haidt, 2005), a field (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), a sub-discipline within psychology (Donaldson, Dollwet, & Rao, 2015), a profession (Seligman, 1999), and a psychological framework (Vella-Brodrick, 2011).

When it becomes clear a term has multiple meanings or usages like this, what is needed is not a new single definition broad enough to encapsulate all possible meanings, but instead a definition that comprises multiple more specific senses in which the term can be used.

An Expanded Definition

This article proposes that, at this time in its etymological history, positive psychology is a term with at least four commonly used senses. For this article, I will use the term "the positive"

as a shorthand to refer to the range of topics mentioned above, while acknowledging that other efforts (e.g., Pawelski, 2015) to clarify that part of the definition remain much-needed.

Sense 1: Positive Psychology as a Movement to Reorient Psychology

positive psychology - n: A movement to encourage psychologists to broaden their focus from a perceived primary focus on pathology and the relief of suffering to include a complementary focus on scientific study of "the positive" and how it might be cultivated

This first sense is what Seligman (1999) referred to as a reoriented science. In this understanding, positive psychology was a corrective to psychology writ large that Seligman argued had become too narrowly focused on healing. This is the sense of positive psychology used by the professor in the opening conversation, and it is reflected in statements like these:

> *"Positive psychology is simply psychology . . . Positive psychology is thus an attempt to urge psychologists to adopt a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities"* Sheldon & King, 2001 (p. 216).

> *"If the positive psychology movement is successful in rebalancing psychology and expanding its gross academic product, it will become obsolete"* Gable & Haidt, 2005 (p. 104).

Sense 2: Positive Psychology as a Sub-Discipline within Psychology

positive psychology: n. A sub-discipline of psychology that uses scientific research and scholarship to understand "the positive"

This second sense positions positive psychology not as a movement across psychology, but instead as a sub-field within it. In this sense, positive psychology is like other sub-fields of psychology like social, developmental, and organizational psychology. Under this understanding, "Research findings from positive psychology are intended to supplement, not remotely to replace, what is known about human suffering, weakness, and disorder" (Seligman, Peterson, Park, & Steen, 2005, p. 410). Those are "two separable endeavors" that could be combined to create a more comprehensive psychology.

Positive psychology as a sub-discipline is what Seligman (1999) called "a new science;" likewise, Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2011) later wrote of positive psychology as a "domain." This is what the doctoral student in the opening conversation was excited about, and a recent analysis by Donaldson, Dollwet, and Rao (2015) supports that enthusiasm: " . . . positive psychology is a growing and vibrant sub-area within the broader discipline of psychology (p. 185)."

Sense 3: Positive Psychology as a Field of Professional Practice

positive psychology: n. A field of professional practice that brings findings from the scholarly study of "the positive" to bear on professional contexts such as education, coaching, consulting, clinical practice, and others

This third sense was also present in Seligman's (1999) Pres-idential Address, in which he called for the launching of a science and "a profession whose aim is the building of what makes life most worth living." A year later, he and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) predicted that positive psychology would allow psychologists to "build those factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish" (p. 13). Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2011) describe a field as "the human infrastructure that is needed to carry a set of ideas forward," and it is this field that the consultant in the opening conversation belongs to by building her "positive psychology" practice.

Evidence for the rise of this practical sense of positive psychology can be found in the growing study of positive psychology interventions (Seligman, Peterson, Park, & Steen, 2005), the opening of graduate programs in "applied positive psychology," calls for the development of ethical standards (Vella-Brodrick, 2011), and even in the mission of *The Journal of Positive Psychology* that is "dedicated to furthering research and promoting good practice" (emphasis added).

Sense 4: Positive Psychology as an Organizing Philosophy

positive psychology: n. A philosophy or mindset characterized by a disproportionate emphasis of "the positive" and a corresponding de-emphasis of "the negative"

This final sense was not present in Seligman's (1999) Presidential Address, but instead has arisen as an unintended by-product of positive psychology as a movement and field of practice. In this (typically misunderstood) view, positive psychology is seen as a prescribed way of thinking and/or behaving, akin to positive thinking. This is how the father in the coffee shop seems to understand positive psychology, and it is a sense that has plagued the field since early on.

An oft-cited use of this sense came in a critique by Lazarus (2003) calling positive psychology "an ideological movement," the premise of which was "that if individuals engage in positive thinking and feeling and abandon or minimize their preoccupation with the harsh and tragic . . . they will have found a magic elixir of health and well-being" (p. 93). Despite numerous articles published since Lazarus's critique explicitly refuting this meaning of the term¾including many of those cited in this article¾this sense persists in usage and continues to dog those who identify with the first three senses of positive psychology.

Discussion and Conclusion

Positive psychology has been understood to mean each of these four senses at various times by various individuals. This paper does not declare any sense to be more "right" than the others. Instead, it acknowledges that positive psychology is polysemous in its everyday usage and it has been since Seligman's seminal speech.

Given that, in order to have robust conversations about positive psychology, we need to start asking one another "in what sense" we are using the term. Identifying our intended usage promotes greater clarity, especially when making claims about positive psychology. As just one example, the common maxim that positive psychology is "descriptive, not prescriptive" rings true when speaking of a sub-discipline, but not so much for a field of practice.

The most significant benefit of a multi-sense definition, however, is the possibility for more fruitful collaborations to arise from clearer discussions. Some critical thinkers have rejected positive psychology out of hand because they only think of it as philosophy; yet many in the movement, sub-discipline, and professional field of positive psychology also reject that meaning. Or, scholars who found the movement unnecessary may nonetheless want to conduct studies, on occasion, in the sub-discipline of positive psychology. In either example, the explicit acknowledgement of these subtle definitional differences might reveal common ground among colleagues after all. ❖

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Mindfulness and Character Strengths: Advancing Psychology to the Next Level

by Ryan M. Niemiec, PsyD
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The topics of mindfulness and character strengths are arguably the two most popular applied constructs in the science of positive psychology. Yet, each comes with baggage, a litany of misconceptions, confusion with related constructs, and application challenges. I will offer an overview of key concepts and research, discuss the relevance of mindfulness and character strengths for psychologists, and outline elements involved in integrating the two constructs.

Introduction and Conceptual Clarification

While there are many definitions for mindfulness, the scientific definition is not one of the more common ones. When mindfulness scientists gathered in the early 2000s to come up with an operational definition to better understand this interesting phenomenon and reduce confusion and mixed messages around mindfulness, a two-part definition emerged (Bishop et al., 2004): Mindfulness is: 1) The self-regulation of attention along with, 2) an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance. It is interesting that two character strengths are at the core of mindfulness itself, according to this conception (see italics). While relaxation, self-compassion, insight, and spiritual epiphanies are often viewed as mindfulness, these are better viewed as potential outcomes of some mindfulness experiences rather than as descriptions of mindfulness itself.

Research in mindfulness has increased 20-fold since the start of this millennium. The practice of mindfulness has hit its groove and has become popular in treatment centers, businesses, classrooms, workshops, and especially, research labs around the world.

The study of character also has its share of misconceptions and stereotypes. Character is commonly approached in an authoritarian manner (Linkins, Niemiec, Gilham, & Mayerson, 2013), such as all-or-none views (e.g., you either have good character or you don't), monolithic views (e.g., everyone needs to develop a finite number of qualities, usually 3-7), and flavor-of-the-week approaches (e.g., everyone will learn

about "respect" this week and "kindness" next week). All of these approaches are well-intended, but omit the nuanced, idiosyncratic, and dynamic nature of character strengths. In addition, prior to the mid-2000s, no "common language" for describing the best character qualities of human beings existed. To correct this and advance the science of character, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman led a team of 55 scientists in arguably the most wide-reaching project in positive psychology to date. Their work was to classify strengths of character, examining the wisdom from philosophers (e.g., Aristotle), theologians (i.e., all the world religions), virtue authors (e.g., Benjamin Franklin), institutions (e.g., Boy Scouts of America), and various research literatures across time and culture, and involved visiting some of the most remote groups on the planet (e.g., Inuit people in Northern Greenland and Maasai tribal people in Africa). Further analysis and criteria were applied to the positive qualities. The result? A universal classification of 24 character strengths nesting under six virtues (called the VIA Classification) and a valid, free online measurement tool (called the VIA Survey; see www.viacharacter.org). This cross-cultural, "common language" or technically speaking, consensual nomenclature is fully outlined in *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Classification and Manual* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), what some refer to, tongue-in-cheek, as the anti-DSM.

Character strengths are, therefore, defined as positive personality traits that contribute to personal fulfillment and the benefit of others. Each person is viewed to have a unique constellation of character strengths that best represent their positive identity and are most authentic, natural, and energizing for that person; such strengths that are *most essential* to one's self are referred to as signature strengths. Character strengths can be developed with deliberate intervention. Many studies now link the expression of character strengths with a variety of positive outcomes, such as happiness, work engagement, and achievement.

Why Should Psychologists Care?

Mindfulness and character strengths are relevant to psychologists, both personally and professionally. Each offers not only a range of professional tools (i.e., positive interventions) to add to the psychologist's professional armamentarium, but also provides a unique lens for viewing clients. Traditional, deficit-based psychology does not prioritize a strengths-based approach, but instead prioritizes the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of psychopathology. A character strengths-based approach complements and advances this medical model mentality by providing a unique lens for seeing clients for who they are at their core (i.e., positive identity), offering direct links to outcomes clients desire (e.g., greater happiness, overcoming problems, improving relationships), and integrating new ways of buffering, reframing, and overcoming problems. Indeed a character strengths-based approach can be viewed as an overlay and adjunct support to any theoretical orientation.

Indeed, shifting one's focus to prioritize strengths over the allure and heavy valence of problems is a challenging one.

But, it's an important element not to be taken lightly, and one that psychologists have potentially gotten wrong for decades. For example, research by Cheavens and colleagues (2012) found that depressed clients randomly assigned to therapists who focused on their unique "CBT strengths" had better outcomes and less depression relapses than those randomly assigned to therapists focusing on the client's unique "CBT weaknesses." Most traditional training would teach the opposite: If a client is struggling with dysfunctional thinking or with a difficult relationship, target and remediate that as much as possible. But, this research suggests otherwise: *Target and enhance what is best in the client.*

Many other studies support the use of strengths. For example, therapists randomly assigned to prime themselves prior to a therapy session by thinking about their client's strengths have improved outcomes (Fluckiger & Grosse Holtforth, 2008). Research shows repeatedly that the expansion and use of signature strengths is associated with less depression (Gander et al., 2012; Seligman et al., 2005), and that character strengths buffer people from problems and psychological vulnerabilities (Huta & Hawley, 2010). Character strengths have been successfully applied in a variety of psychological settings to positive effect such as inpatient units, neuropsychology settings, Veterans Administration rehabilitation, and traditional psychotherapy.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), one of many mindfulness programs used in clinical settings, has a number of meta-analyses and reviews that support its effectiveness in preventing depression (e.g., Piet & Hougaard, 2011), and as an adjunct to usual care for residual depression, some anxiety disorders, and anxiety in bipolar disorder (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011).

An Integration Called MBSP

The most popular and researched mindfulness training programs are mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013). These programs were originally created to help a specific population manage or overcome their problems (e.g., chronic pain, recurrent depression), and many other mindfulness-programs have followed suit and targeted binge eating, substance abuse, borderline personality, anxiety disorders, relationship conflict, and countless other disorders.

As discussed in Baer (2015), the only program to target and integrate both mindfulness and character strengths is mindfulness-based strengths practice (MBSP; Niemiec, 2014). MBSP integrates the science and best practices of mindfulness meditation, mindful living, and character strengths. MBSP emerged from an iterative process of group work over a decade, and integrates cross-cultural findings from expert practitioners. It was created with similar intentions as other mindfulness-based programs (i.e., help individuals cultivate mindfulness), but with a different focal point (i.e., start with what is best in people, and help people identify, explore, and cultivate their best qualities). The constructs (mindfulness and character strengths) are each explored as a lens for enhancing

the other and to thus cultivate virtuous circles of positivity. In MBSP, character strengths are used as a lens for approaching mindfulness that is termed creating "strong mindfulness" (Niemiec, Rashid, & Spinella, 2012) and helps to remedy the vexing problems people have in establishing mindfulness practices¾forgetting to practice, claiming one's mind wanders too much, and not having enough time to practice. Each of these can be treated as "obstacles" of the mind and body that act as barriers to present moment experiences; character strengths, such as bravery, gratitude, and perseverance, can be brought forth to manage these meditation obstacles.

When mindfulness is used as a lens for approaching character strengths, this is termed "mindful strengths use." With this type of integration, mindfulness helps the individual find balance in their strengths use, attend to situations to manage the overuse or underuse of strengths, to elevate signature strengths and manage problems, and to use strengths to improve oneself in areas of healthy lifestyle, mindful speech/listening, and mindful living (Nhat Hanh, 1993; Niemiec, 2012).

Early research on MBSP is promising, indicating substantial benefits for individuals in boosting well-being, purpose, meaning, positive relationships, and the management of stress and problems (Briscoe, 2014; Niemiec, 2014; Niemiec & Lissing, 2015).

Next Steps for Psychologists

Mindfulness and character strengths are complex areas that are best utilized after not only engaging in training that builds knowledge and skills, but also personal practice that deepens understanding of the concepts, the obstacles and challenges, and the management of these challenges. Each can be developed with practice over time. Thus, the primary approach is to apply mindfulness and character strengths to oneself personally, and then secondarily to use with clients. Such an approach adds depth and authenticity to the work.

Conclusion

The great philosopher William James observed that, "The single greatest accomplishment of any generation is that a human being can alter their life by altering their attitude." Mindfulness and character strengths practices assist us on this beautiful adventure of life to make those changes that can bring benefits to ourselves and our clients. ❖

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Positive Psychotherapy: Integrating Symptoms and Strengths Toward Client Well-Being

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Positive psychotherapy (PPT) is a therapeutic endeavor within positive psychology to broaden the scope of traditional psychotherapy. Its central premise is to assess and enhance positive resources of clients, such as positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments, in treating symptoms. Amplifying these positive resources may serve clients best not when life is easy, but when life is difficult, because the human brain is hard-wired to attend and respond more strongly to negatives than to positives (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). Psychopathology exacerbates this propensity. Therefore, accentuation of strengths, along with amelioration of symptoms, is a better therapeutic approach.

Psychotherapy, over and beyond placebo, is effective and fares better in the long run than medication (Seligman, 1995; Castonguay, 2013; Leykin & DeRubeis, 2009). Its efficacy, however, is examined by a reduction of symptomatic stress, not by the cultivation of well-being. Clients seeking psychotherapy may not articulate explicitly, but do they only want to be less sad, anxious, angry, or ambivalent? They want their lives filled with satisfaction, engagement, meaning, connection, and intrinsically rewarding pursuits. But, these pursuits are typically not the focus in psychotherapy. However, these often are the focus of multi-million dollar self-help recipes and remedies that may produce ephemeral change, but enduring behavioral change remains elusive. Furthermore, the typical role of the psychotherapist is to assess dysfunctions and deficits, and formulate them into diagnosable disorders. This role not only maintains the stigma against mental health, but it also renders psychotherapy as a place to discuss troubles and transgressions.

Psychotherapy is not generally known to be a place where growth is fostered, where potential abilities, skills, and talents are explored, acknowledged, and enhanced. Compared to the baby boomer generation whose parents were scarred by traumas of world wars, poverty, and social inequalities, the current clientele of psychotherapy is likely to be the Millennials and Generation Z. These are young people who are largely urban, culturally diverse, ambitious, socially active, and digitally and visually connected in real time with trends and twists of every moment. They may be less interested and invested in examining themselves largely through Euro-centric diagnostic lens and labels.

Focusing exclusively either on negatives or positives might be easier, but striking a balance between the two is difficult, and not many therapeutic approaches have done so. PPT is unique in this regard as it attempts to strike a balance by engaging clients in discussions, for instance, about an injustice done, while also focusing on recent acts of kindness. Similarly, along with insults, hubris, and hate, experiences of genuine praise, humility, and harmony are deliberately elicited. Pain associated with trauma is empathetically attended to, while also exploring the potential for growth. The aim of PPT is to integrate symptoms with strengths, attachment with isolation, risks with resources, weaknesses with values, and hopes with regrets, in order to understand the complexities of psychological problems utilizing the positives to treat negatives. The integration does not come at a cost of dismissing, denying, or minimizing the client's concerns. Nor is this integration necessarily meant to create a new genre of psychotherapy. The goal is to establish an evidence-based therapeutic approach that gives equal attention to strengths as is given to symptoms.

PPT is based on three assumptions: First, clients inherently aspire to growth, fulfillment, and happiness, not just to avoid misery, worry, and anxiety. Psychopathology engenders when the growth is thwarted. Second, positive resources such as strengths are authentic and as real as symptoms and disorders. These are not defenses, Pollyannaish illusions, or clinical by-products of symptom relief that lie at the clinical peripheries without needing attention. The final assumption is that effective therapeutic relationships can be formed through the discussion and manifestation of positive resources.

These assumptions are operationalized in Seligman's conceptualization of well-being (Seligman, 2002 & 2012). Seligman sorts well-being into five scientifically measurable and manageable components: 1) positive emotion, 2) engagement, 3) relationships, 4) meaning, and 5) accomplishment, with the first letters of each component forming the mnemonic PERMA (Seligman, 2012). This list of elements is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, but it has been shown that fulfillment in three elements (positive emotions, engagement, and meaning) is associated with lower rates of depression and higher life satisfaction (Bertisch et al., 2014; Asebedo & Seay, 2014).

Evidence

Following an initial randomized control trial (RCT) study with moderately and severely depressed clients (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006) almost ten years ago, feasibility and empirical validation of PPT has been explored through 14 studies, including eight randomized controlled studies, nine published

in peer-reviewed journals, and three dissertations. Seven of these studies treated community samples from Canada, China, Chile, France, Iran, and the United States, addressing clinical concerns including depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, psychosis, and nicotine dependence. An outcome measure, Positive Psychotherapy Inventory (PPTI), to assess the specific active ingredients of PPT has been devised and validated (Guney, 2011). In summary, PPT is effective as a protocoled treatment for a variety of clinical concerns in symptom reduction as well as in enhancing well-being, and works as effectively as well-established treatment protocols (for review of these studies, see Rashid, 2015).

PPT: Structure and Process

From the onset, the therapist builds a congenial and positive relationship with clients by encouraging the clients to introduce themselves through a real-life story that shows them at their best (Rashid & Ostermann, 2009). Through Gratitude Journals, an ongoing exercise, clients begin noticing, acknowledging, interpreting, and writing about positive experiences and events in their lives. Next, clients compile their signature strengths profiles that incorporate collateral data from multiple resources regarding character strengths. The character strengths in PPT are based on the Values in Action model (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Clients learn to translate their strengths into concrete actions and habits that target their presenting symptoms and psychological distresses. They explore nuanced and adaptive uses of their signature strengths, including over (excess) and under (a lack of) use of their signature strengths, especially in relation to their presenting problems. For example, a client with low mood, isolation, and procrastination may not be using the strength of zest and vitality sufficiently. In contrast, another client, making spontaneous decisions and being hyperactive in domains of life, might be overusing zest and might benefit from a dose of prudence and self-regulation.

In addition, clients learn practical wisdom (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010). Practical wisdom is the know-how of strengths, and includes developing awareness regarding an adaptive and contextualized use of salient strengths (also known as signature strengths). For example, frequent usage of signature strengths of kindness, forgiveness, and social intelligence for a depressed client could actually maintain her symptoms. PPT teaches the client to explore specific situations where use of some of these strengths doesn't allow her to assert her legitimate needs. She may benefit from using and developing her lesser strengths, such as courage and perspective that may equip her with skills to develop perspective regarding specific situations, and a balanced use of strengths that meet her needs. Overtime, clients grasp the notion of nuanced and contextualized use of strengths and start using them adaptively.

With this skill harnessed, client confidence increases gradually and they are invited to explore negative or open-book memories. These are adverse and unprocessed experiences that may range from a pun or verbal punch delivered by a sibling or friend, to perceived or real criticism from a parent or partner, and often evolve into specific cognitive or emotional

rigidities. Without minimizing or avoiding the pain associated with these adverse experiences, clients learn to use their strengths, such as perspective, self-regulation, curiosity, and forgiveness, to deal with them adaptively. This is based on the premise that adverse experiences can also be a source of growth (Pennebaker, 1997; Bonanno & Mancini, 2012). Throughout the course of the therapy, regular discussions about small but meaningful positive experiences and positive emotions of everyday life help clients awaken and widen their cognitive awareness to spot, acknowledge, and savor good experiences to improve their day-to-day well-being (Fredrickson, 2009). In the final few sessions, PPT exercises primarily focus on fostering positive relationships, intimate and communal, and the search and pursuit of meaning and purpose.

Flexibility and Caveats

Despite the title, the focus of PPT is not exclusively on the positive aspects of human experience. It would be naïve and utopian to conceive of a life without negative experiences. As such, PPT does not deny negative emotions, nor does it encourage clients to see the world through rose-colored glasses. PPT validates these experiences and gently encourages clients to explore their meanings and be cognizant of potential growth from them. However, this potential growth is not explored or encouraged by offering empty platitudes. The therapist creates a milieu of warmth, understanding, and goodwill, and listens mindfully to help clients explore, reflect and discuss, and integrate both negative and positive aspects of the personality toward deeper self-understanding and self-development. When and if unavoidable negative events and experiences surface, they are dealt with using standard clinical protocols.

Some clinicians or clients may find the thrust of PPT as prescriptive. Converging lines of research document the benefits of gratitude, kindness, altruism, and forgiveness, and are describing human experiences. Therefore, despite having constructs that historically have been part of religious and spiritual traditions, PPT incorporates them on their empirical merit. Moreover, PPT is not, nor should it be, perceived as a panacea, nor is it appropriate for all clients in all situations. Simply put, PPT is not a "one size fits all" approach. Finally, in PPT, therapists should not expect a linear progression of improvement, as the motivation to change long-standing behavioral and emotional patterns fluctuates during the course of therapy. ❖

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Sacred

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The words that I issue
Delicate as tissue
Slowly come to the surface
Escaping the purpose
Of repressed memory
To now unbury me
They have unburdened me
And allowed you to see
The burden I bear
The terror I wear
Imprisoned so deep within
Buried beneath my hardened skin
So sacred is this place
That I can unwrap my face
You caress the tear
As it does appear
Together we meld
My burden is held
In this sacred place
You see my true face