



Techniques and Levels of Positive Psychology: A Review

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Abstract

Psychology has more often than not emphasised the shortcomings of individuals as compared with their potentials. This particular approach focuses on the potentials. It is not targeted at fixing problems, but is focused on researching things that make life worth living instead. In short, positive psychology is concerned not with how to transform, for example, -8 to -2 but with how to bring +2 to +8. This orientation in psychology was established about ten years ago and it is a rapidly developing field. Its aspiration is to bring solid empirical research into areas such as well-being, flow, personal strengths, wisdom, creativity, psychological health and characteristics of positive groups and institutions.



Key words: Psychology, orientation, transform, individuals etc.

Introduction

Positive psychology emphasizes meaning and deep satisfaction, not just on fleeting happiness. Martin Seligman, often regarded as the father of positive psychology, has described multiple visions of what it means to live happily, including the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life. Positive psychologists have explored a range of experiences and behaviors involved in different versions of positive living, including specific positive emotions, "flow" states, and sense of meaning or purpose.

Proponents of positive psychology have also sought to catalog character strengths and virtues. The 2004 book *Character Strengths and Virtues* proposed the categories of Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence (including strengths such as gratitude, hope, and humor).

Definition

‘Scientific study of optimal human functioning [that] aims to discover and promote the factors that allows individuals and communities to thrive’.



Three Levels of Positive Psychology

The science of positive psychology operates on three different levels – the subjective level, the individual level and the group level.

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 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.

Techniques used in positive psychology

Positive psychotherapy is the application of positive psychology principles in a professional therapeutic setting. It is based on the concept that happiness may be broken down into three more manageable components:

- Positive emotion
- Engagement
- Meaning

The exercises used in positive psychotherapy are designed to enhance one or more of these components in a person’s life.

Some of the techniques used in this form of therapy involve examining the activities of the person in therapy. In therapy, the positive implications of each activity are explored. A common practice is the use of beepers or pagers. Therapists may, with the consent of the person receiving therapy, beep the individual to remind them to record their experiences. These records are expanded upon when a person adds daily entries to



describe the details of the past day. They are then evaluated with long-term appraisals. These methods are often referred to as short-term sampling.

People in therapy are also often encouraged to keep a gratitude journal. This record is a reminder of the positive events and accomplishments of each day. The practice may help offset rumination on things that did not go according to plan.

How can positive psychology help?

Humans are hardwired to pay more attention to negative experiences. As such, it is often the case that people in therapy do not know what influences the happiness in their life from one event to the next. Some mental health care professionals believe this incongruity may be due to perception. A person may not be able to identify specific emotions during an experience. But they might clearly recognize these emotions when they reflect upon the experience later. Positive psychology aims to bring a person's attention, expectation, and memory away from the negative. It focuses on the positive in an attempt to achieve a balanced perspective.

Positive psychology has led to the development of several key concepts. These have proven to be highly therapeutic for people with depression and anxiety. Some studies show that a lack of positivity may contribute to a low or depressed mood. However, depression does not develop solely because of this lack. Positive psychology does not solely target negative symptoms. It also seeks to enhance character strengths and positive emotions. It can benefit people who wish to develop in these areas.

positive psychology and cognitive behavioral therapy are effective in reducing symptoms of depression. The results of one study between the two approaches indicated that positive psychotherapy may be more effective at boosting happiness. It was shown to increase the overall happiness of people with depression.

Positive psychology vs. Positive psychotherapy

Though their names are similar, positive psychology and positive psychotherapy are two distinct approaches. One approach is grounded in the positive psychology theory developed by Seligman in 1998. The other is a cross-cultural approach developed in 1968 by Nossrat Peseschkian. It incorporates psychodynamic and humanistic influences.



Seligman's positive psychology and Peseschkian's positive psychotherapy are similar in some ways. They both assume humans are innately good. They also attempt to encourage personal development. However, there are still some key differences between the approaches.

Seligman's approach does not deny negative experiences. But Peseschkian's approach views all negative experiences in a positive light. It sees them as opportunities for growth.

Seligman's approach is primarily Westernized. Peseschkian's approach is more transcultural.

Seligman's approach distances itself from its humanistic influences. Meanwhile, Peseschkian's approach embraces its humanistic and psychodynamic background.

History and development

Influential psychologists such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm, and Albert Bandura helped develop ideas and theories about human happiness and productivity. But it was not until 1998 that Martin Seligman brought new focus to the concept of "positive psychology" as president of the American Psychological Association. Seligman wrote about positive psychology in his book *Authentic Happiness*, published in 2002. He expressed his belief that the field of psychology's decades-long exclusive focus on mental health concerns was not the most helpful approach. He encouraged psychologists to instead focus on the promotion, nurture, and enhancement of positive human attributes and talents.

The first positive psychology summit was hosted in 1999. In 2002, the First International Conference on Positive Psychology was held. Positive psychology caught the attention of the general public in 2006. Professor Tal Ben-Shahar's positive psychology class became Harvard's most popular course with an enrollment of 855 students. In 2009, the University of Pennsylvania hosted the First World Congress on Positive Psychology.

There has been an increasing divide between proponents of positive psychology and humanistic psychology. This divide has existed since the emergence of positive psychology in 1998. Supporters of positive psychology hold that positive psychology



theories are based on solid scientific evidence. They claim these are superior to humanistic theories, which lack supportive empirical evidence. On the other hand, some humanistic psychologists have criticized Seligman. They propose he is attempting to claim credit for decades of research conducted by his predecessors in humanistic psychology. Martin Seligman has been the major driving force behind the movement. But other individuals have made significant contributions to the development of positive psychology.

Conclusion

The term "positive psychology" is a broad one, encompassing a variety of techniques that encourage people to identify and further develop their own positive emotions, experiences, and character traits. In many ways, positive psychology builds on key tenets of humanistic psychology. Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy, for example, was based on the theory that people could improve their lives by expressing their authentic selves. And Abraham Maslow identified traits of self-actualized people that are similar to the character strengths identified and used in some positive psychology interventions. Although initially developed as a way to advance well-being and optimal functioning in healthy people, positive psychology techniques are now being promoted as a complement to more traditional forms of therapy. For example, University of Pennsylvania psychologist Martin E.P. Seligman, a well-known advocate of positive psychology, has described its core philosophy as a "build what's strong" approach that can augment the "fix what's wrong" approach of more traditional psychotherapy.

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