Positive Psychology in Practice

Edited by
P. Alex Linley and Stephen Joseph

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
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We dedicate this volume to the memory of Donald O. Clifton, PhD, 1924–2003.

“The father of strengths-based psychology and the grandfather of positive psychology.”

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It has been seven years since Nikki, age 5, told me that if she could stop whining, I could stop being such a grouch, and positive psychology (at least in my own mind) came into being (Seligman, 2002). In that moment, I acquired the mission of helping to build the scientific infrastructure of a field that would investigate what makes life worth living: positive emotion, positive character, and positive institutions. In these seven years, much has been accomplished, enough perhaps to call it a movement (but not, please, a paradigm shift since it uses the same tried and true methods of mainstream science to merely shed light on the relatively uninvestigated realm of happiness). Among the accomplishments are:

- A Positive Psychology Network that supports over 50 pods of scientists around the world
- An annual International Summit held at the Gallup headquarters in Washington the first weekend every October (mark your calendar now, please)
- A Classification of the Strengths and Virtues published by Oxford University Press and the American Psychological Association
- Measurement devices, psychometrically respectable, of many aspects of positive emotion, positive character, and positive institutions
- A substantial prize for the best research in positive psychology and a new, even more substantial prize in memory of Don Clifton to be announced this year for the best research on strengths and virtues
- Undergraduate, graduate, and even high school courses on positive psychology the world over, with several textbooks about to appear
- Positive Psychology Centers at several major universities, one of which will soon become degree granting (Pennsylvania)
- Many millions of dollars in research funding
- Active web sites for research and teaching in positive psychology:
  www.authentichappiness.org
  www.psych.upenn.edu/seligman
  www.bus.umich.edu/Positive
  www.authentichappinesscoaching.com
- Active Listserves in positive psychology
  FRIENDS-OF-PP@LISTS.APA.ORG
  POSITIVE-PSYCHOLOGY@LISTS.APA.ORG
  ppttf@lists.apa.org (Teaching Positive Psychology)
- The first Nobel Prize for a positive psychologist (Danny Kahneman)
• Empirically documented interventions that build happiness lastingly tested in random assignment placebo-controlled studies

So the science is well underway. The current challenge is to apply the science in the world. Analytic thinking and experimentation is only as good as the synthetic applications to practice. As my department was writing the ad for a social psychologist a few years ago, I got an e-mail note that gave me a sleepless night.

“Marty,” my colleague Jon Baron wrote, “do you think it would be all right if one of the interests listed was industrial psychology?”

I wrote back, “Of course—the three great realms of life are work, love, and play, and industrial psychology is the psychology of work. I remember that Morris Viteles [who had just passed away at age 98] was a distinguished member of our department for 75 years and a founder of industrial psychology.”

Then I couldn’t get to sleep. It bothered me that my department did not have anyone whose main interest was work, love, or play. As I mentally ran through the rosters of several other fine academic departments, I couldn’t think of anyone whose primary research was work or love or play. I happened to see Jerome Bruner the next day. Jerry, in his 80s, is still yeasty and going strong and is a walking history of modern psychology.

“How did this come to be?” I asked him.

“It actually happened at a moment in time,” he replied. “About 60 years ago the chairmen [the gender is intentional] of Harvard, Princeton, and Penn got together at a meeting of the Society of Experimental Psychologists and agreed that they would hire no applied psychologists! This set the hiring pattern of many of the great departments to this very day.”

This is a symptom of a larger problem. Complete scientific activity requires both analysis and synthesis. Synthesis is needed when you are not sure that the elements of your analysis carve nature at the joints. The only way to test the validity of your elements is by reconstructing natural phenomena with them. What entitles academic physics and chemistry to be almost solely analytic is their long, accompanying history of synthetic activity, which demonstrated the validity of their elements: predicting eclipses, tides, synthetic fibers, rockets, the green revolution, and computers. What those august chairmen forgot was that psychology did not have a history of engineering, so there was real danger that its laboratory elements might not be the elements out of which mind, emotion, behavior, and psychopathology are made.

There are a very large number of potential analysands, and the best way to tell which ones are valid is to apply them to real world practice and ask if they work. The scientific psychological literature of the twentieth century is littered with well-done analytic science that applied to nothing at all, and this is a fate that positive psychology must avoid.

Doing synthetic thinking to complement analytic thinking has several benefits: It moves significance claims from hand-waving toward rule-governed, rigorous discourse. It tests whether our analyses are valid. It helps link our findings to more complex phenomena as well as to simpler systems. It will help our scientists communicate effectively with the press, the public, and policymakers. And not least, it brings science and practice closer together.

Hence this volume. It contains the practical applications of the science of positive psychology to issues such as good versus bad materialism, optimal levels of
choice and freedom, what makes people lastingly happier and what does not, exercise and the body, future mindedness and present mindedness, wisdom, teaching positive psychology, leadership, the successful and unsuccessful corporation, executive coaching, physical health and illness, positive therapy, clinical applications, building hope and optimism, posttraumatic growth, emotional intelligence, building gratitude, forgiveness, curiosity, eudaimonia, resilience, positive aging, rehabilitation of sex offenders, flow and optimal experience, and public policy.

This volume is the cutting edge of positive psychology and the emblem of its future.

MARTIN E. P. SELIGMAN

REFERENCE