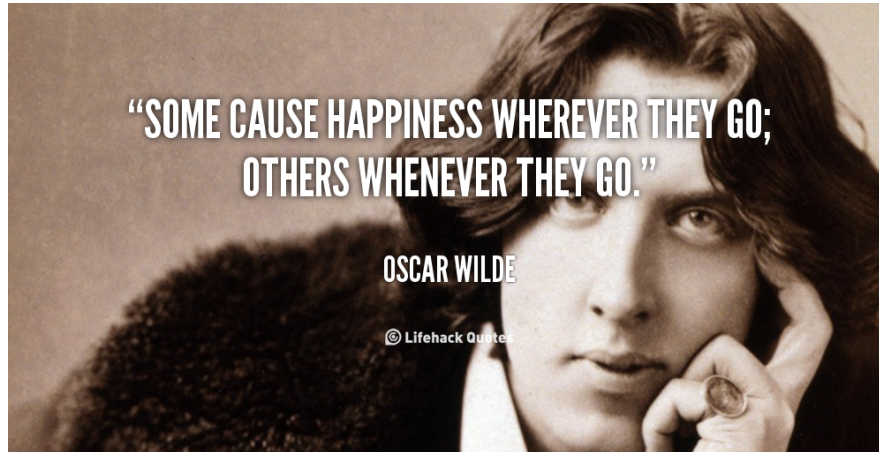# Top entry page

Non-clinical benefits

1) Introduction

Happiness is something that everyone wants, but few people know how to get. Positive Psychology is the scientific study of positive human functioning, and seeks to understand human strengths and virtues (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). While there are ways in which Positive Psychology can have implications for clinical disorders such as depression (Sin & Lyubomisrky, 2009) and even physical health (Taylor et al., 2000), this wiki page is focused on the benefits of Positive Psychology in non-clinical settings. The following topics will be covered:

- The **history of Positive Psychology** and its benefits to non-clinical populations. This will be looked at both in general and within Psychology specifically, looking at religious practices and philosophical theories, along with Positive Psychological ideas in the work of William James and Humanistic Psychology. It will also address the old cultural connections of non-clinical Positive Psychology to Buddhism.
- Benefits of Positive Psychology for **leadership and the workplace**. Theories of leadership related to Positive Psychology will be discussed, including charismatic leadership, which focuses more on the personal characteristics and vision of the leader. Servant Leadership is also considered, in which employees are of high importance and are served by the leader, rather than the other way round.
- Benefits of Positive Psychology for **education**.
- **3 key readings**. Three important and highly useful papers are identified and summarised, which try to cover this very broad topic as much as possible. The first establishes some of the basic theories in positive psychology; the second is an experimental study which looks at the benefits of positive writing on health; the final paper is fairly recent which provides a good overview of current thinking in Positive Psychology.
- Positive Psychology **exercises**. Two exercises that you can carry out yourself will be described briefly, the first being Counting Kindness, in which you keep track of the kind acts you perform. The other is mindfulness meditation, which began in Buddhism, and is focussed on acceptance and awareness of experience.
- **Criticisms**. Finally, some arguments levelled against Positive Psychology are discussed. The idea

that some of the arguments behind the theories are flawed, that there are issues with the empirical research, that it is simply a 'rebranding' of ideas, and whether too much happiness can be bad for you.

2) History and Old Cultural Connection

In this section, we will first explore a general history of the pursuit of happiness, ranging from religious beliefs such as the the 10 commandments, to philosophical theories such as utilitarianism. Then, we will turn specifically to the history of happiness within psychology, and finally some old cultural connections will be made to the non-clinical benefits of positive psychology.

Search for happiness and well-being in history

The path to happiness is something which has been investigated and theorised long before the advent of Positive Psychology. For example, the Ancient Hebrews have the 10 commandments, which are often viewed as a set of rules by which to live your life in order to attain peace and happiness. In philosophy, this idea is known as the **Divine Command Theory** (Bunnin & Yu, 2008, p.188), which suggests that happiness is attained through living in agreement with these commands set down by God; an action is

good if it is in line with the divine command. The Ancient Greeks were also concerned with **the good life**, and believed that the way to achieve happiness could be found through rational thought and logic. Socrates believed that happiness could only be discovered through the understanding of human nature, and what humans require in order to be happy. In his famous text 'The Republic', Plato suggests that happiness is beyond a sensory experience, and a **deeper meaning in life** is needed (Compton, 2005). Similarly, according to Aristotle, happiness is not a subjective state, but something which encompasses the whole of your life (Aristotle, p. 18). Another philosophical approach to happiness is **utilitarianism**, which proposes that the correct policy of government is that which causes the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011, p. 8). Christianity has also been consistently concerned with happiness, believing that true happiness is found by following the **message of Jesus**; love and compassion (Compton, 2005). They also believed that in doing this, you would achieve happiness not in life, but after death in heaven. **Mindfulness meditation** is at the heart of Buddhism, and is one of the core teachings of the Buddha (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It is believed to help overcome greed, hatred and ignorance, and is highly important in order to achieve enlightenment.

Psychological roots of Positive Psychology

The father of American Psychology, **William James**, had elements of Positive Psychology in his influential works (Froh, 2004). For example, he recognised the importance of **positivistic methodology** in science. Pawelski (2004) talks about James' analysis of the people he called healthy-minded, who had a happy and meaningful life. Deiner (Lopez & Snyder, 2011, p. 7) also suggests that throughout the history of psychology, there have been psychologists that study positive topics, for example, social psychologists have looked at **altruism**, and counsellors investigated **personality strengths**. However, the most obvious psychological roots of Positive Psychology are in **Humanistic Psychology**, a reaction against the dominant 'disease model' of psychology (Froh, 2004). In fact, the phrase 'Positive Psychology' first appeared in the title of a chapter in Abraham Maslow's book 'Motivation and Personality' in 1954. Humanistic Psychology was focused on the **quality of human experience**: the types of areas studied were love, growth and self-actualisation, which Froh (2004) suggests are highly reminiscent of Positive Psychology's strengths and virtues. Despite these similarities, the pioneers of Positive Psychology, Seligman and Csikszentimihalyi (2000) have decided to separate Positive Psychology from Humanistic Psychology because of its' unscientific methods and a lack of empirical base.

Old Cultural Connections

An example of an old cultural connection to non-clinical benefits of Positive Psychology has already been mentioned; **Mindfulness**. There is another wiki page which covers mindfulness in much greater depth, but it is worth mentioning briefly here. As we have seen, mindfulness meditation is something which has been around for thousands of years, beginning with the Buddha. However, in recent years mindfulness meditation has been bought to the West, particularly by **John Kabat-Zinn** (2003). While therapies based on mindfulness meditation are being developed to **treat clinical disorders**, such as anxiety and depression, mindfulness meditation is also useful for non-clinical individuals, in order to **improve overall well-being** (Smith, Compton & West, 1995). Similarly, another old cultural connection to Positive Psychology which began in Buddhism is **yoga**, which is aimed at relaxing the mind and body via gentle stretching, breath control and meditation. Yoga has also been proved to be not only useful in both anxiety and depression (Kirkwood, Rampes, Tuffrey, Richardson & Pilkington, 2005), but also increased **positive affect** and **satisfaction** with life in non-clinical participants (Impett, Daubenmier & Hirschman, 2006).

3) Positive Psychology and Leadership on the workplace

"A leader is a dealer in hope."

Napoleon Bonaparte, French military and political leader

The influence of positive psychology on Leadership is ever increasing due to a growing **commercial demand** for such an answer to what is an effective leader is. Central to such answers lays a person focussed theory e.g. servant leadership, distancing itself from such traditional leadership styles e.g. 'Great man' theory. Leaders such as **Richard Branson** (http://www.lawrencejones.eu/search-marketing/2010/03/02/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-life-sir-richard-branson-sums-it-up/) embody what a modern positive leader should seek to emulate. Emphasis is placed on an **ethical foundation** focusing on **psychological capital** and the **emotional balance** on the workplace. With such importance placed on hope, resilience and optimism, the leadership styles that will be discussed are, charismatic leadership and servant leadership.

Charismatic Leadership

The question must be asked, how do leaders lead effectively? The answer to such a question continues to vex academics and business professionals alike. Even with the literature being the most heavily studied sub-discipline within social psychology, with over 95,000 scholarly articles being published since 2009 (Bass & Bass, 2009), a definitive answer as to what behaviours or traits constitute effective leadership remains hard to pin down.

A charismatic leadership theory focuses **less on the power** aspect and **more towards the individual's** vision and personal characteristics. In 1989, Conger proposed a four-stage model of charismatic leadership:

1. **Continual assessment** of the environment and formulating a vision
2. **Communication of vision**, using motivational and persuasive arguments
3. **Building trust and commitment:** subordinates must desire and support the goals of the leader and this is likely to be accomplished by more than coercion; rather the leader builds trust in the leader and the viability of the goals; this is likely to be done through personal risk taking, unconventional expertise, and self-sacrifice
4. **Achieving the vision,** using role modelling, empowerment, and unconventional tactics

As is mentioned several times this new leadership style is 'unconventional', it is unlike past theories where there is an emphasis on power (and other such traits) which obtains results through preconceived ideas and an unwillingness to change. Besides such characteristics such as creativity, House and Shamir (1993) detail certain leadership behaviours that make up charismatic leadership

- **Visionary**
- **Empowering**
- **Role-modelling**
- **Image building**
- **Risk-taking**

As can be seen, there are many similarities in models regarding charismatic leadership. However, charisma does **not hold a clear definition** of what it actually is. Without a clear definition there is no means for comparison as each separate study may be testing different aspects/opinions of what charisma actually is.
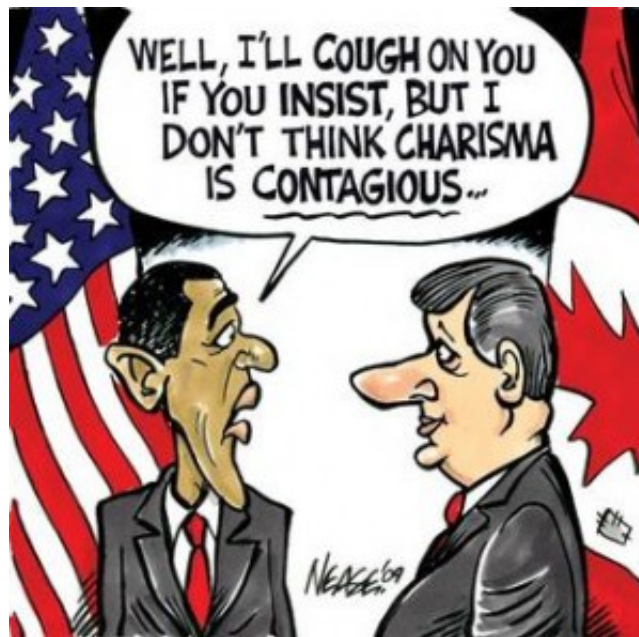
Servant Leadership

The need for a new positive leadership style saw a significant attempt in providing such theory in 1977. Servant Leadership (SL), now practiced in organisations worldwide, was introduced by **Robert K. Greenleaf** (https://greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/). Greenleaf was a teacher, consultant and lecturer with motivation to change what an effective leader looks like. SL boasts a **strong transformative element** to its armoury, although SL has drawn many plaudits, equally as many critics have voiced their concern

Placing employee empowerment as a central factor to its approach, SL underlines the importance of the **needs of followers, personal integrity, morality and maintaining high ethical standards** (Parris &

Peachey, 2012). The central principle of the theory is that if a leader **serves** (be it employees and/or the wider organisation) **rather than being served** (by followers), an impression of trust, cooperation and service will be fashioned, in turn leading to higher employee performance. It is imperative to note that SL is still **largely under-defined**, with various authors using different operational definitions (Anderson, 2009). To best understand the application of SL in the workplace we must look at two opposing papers, Peterson et al (2013) in support of SL and DeWaal and Sivro (2012) against SL.

CEO Servant Leadership: Exploring Executive Characteristics and Firm Performance

Peterson et al (2013) examined the effects of such a positive leadership method in 126 technology organisations. Authors report a **negative relationship** between chief executive officer (CEO) narcissism and SL. Furthermore CEO servant leadership predicted the subsequent firm performance as such they support the hypothesis that SL would result in **increased firm performance.**

This study boasts a large and representative sample size however there are many aspects that this study does not account for. The technology business (as with any business) will often not report any events that could either positively or negatively affect firm performance e.g. the launch of the iPhone may negatively affect firm performance before this study and so any resultant increase in firm performance may have been expected, yet not due to the new leadership style applied.

The Relation Between Servant Leadership, Organizational Performance, and the High Performance Organization Framework

DeWaal et al (2012) argues against SL and proposes that there is no direct link; instead SL has a **positive effect** on the mediating factors of performance, the high-performance organisation (HPO) framework. The sample concerns 116 managers and employees at Vrije Universiteit medical center analysing levels of SL, the HPO framework and the consequent performance.

Researchers found that there was **no direct positive relation** between **SL** and **organisational performance**. However, there was evidence of SL influencing the factors concerning HPO framework yet this affect was different on various organisational levels, thus SL does not positively affect organisational performance. Not to dissimilar to problems faced by Peterson et al (2013), there will be large differences in organisational performance in the medical field due to funding, facilities in addition to seasonal changes.

A Servant Leader

"If anyone wants to be the greatest among you, they should serve others."

Jesus

Conclusion

The implementation of positive psychology into the workplace and leadership is a **step in the right direction**, however there remains several downfalls in such literature which future research should seek to address. The overwhelming **commercial aspect** to research in this field is rife, it appears studies and

books published in this area are produced with the sole purpose of making money, little effort is exerted at a comprehensive and sound leadership theory with positive psychology central to the theory.

The inconsistency with such empirical evidence is another area for development due to many **extraneous third variables** present with such research into businesses. Few studies consider the ergonomics of the office place; this is especially surprising given the field of study. Until the numerous problems surrounding the **methodology, context validity and definitions** (one single agreed definition) in the literature are improved, no further development in this area will be seen.

Three interesting reads...

1. Positive Organizational Behavior in the Workplace The Impact of Hope, Optimism, and Resilience (http://jom.sagepub.com/content/33/5/774.abstract) (Youssef & Luthans, 2007)
2. Positive psychology at work: A conceptual review, state-of-practice assessment, and a look ahead (http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17439760.2013.776622#.UwSgL_l_tAo) (Mills, Fleck, & Kozikowski, 2013)
3. The role of positive psychology in enhancing satisfaction, motivation, and productivity in the workplace (http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J075v24n01_07#.UwSg_Pl_tAo) (Martin, 2005)

4) Positive Psychology on Education

Across the globe, there is a **growing trend** towards positive education, which has been defined as "**education for both traditional skills and for happiness**" (Seligman et al., 2009). Positive education is an applied branch of positive psychology to enhance the **wellbeing and performance** of students, staff and school (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2011).
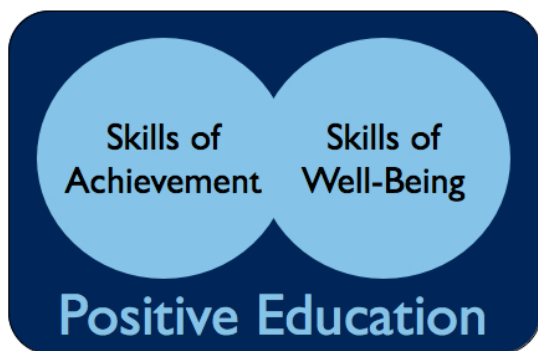
By developing positive education, student can be developed **more holistically** besides the traditional educational goal of academic excellence, with more emphasis placed on wellbeing. This trend has significant implications for the lives of our future generations as schools are more seen as the place to **prepare children and youngsters for adulthood**, especially in developed countries, and by utilizing the concepts of positive psychology in education, they are more likely to enjoy a **more meaningful, pleasurable, engaging and creative life** (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2011).

While our current cohort of Year 7s will be facing a **bigger threat from depression** than from any other disease by the time they are in their mid-thirties according to the World Health Organization (Haesler, 2010), this **proactive approach to mental health** is to be in line with the rising statistics on psychological distress and mental illnesses in children and youngsters in today's society (Green, Oades & Robinson, 2011).
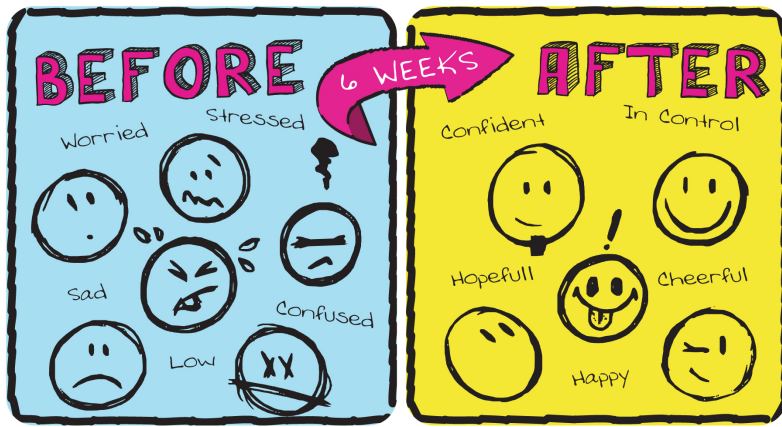
The flourishing interest in positive education has led to a wealth of **research studies in application** to students to **a variety of educational settings** including **primary/ secondary schools**, **high schools** and **university**.

Primary/ Secondary school setting

Mosman Preparatory School in Australia has carried out a pilot study of a **strengths-coaching program** to increase in students' engagement and hope. Significant positive outcomes have been found by the students' completing a self-report questionnaire modified from Snyder's Hope Scale and the California Healthy Kids Survey. In general, the results showed significant increases in the students' **levels of engagement**, **hope** and **wellbeing** as a result of their participation (Ewen & Green, 2010).


Identification of personal strengths

- The students were required to complete the **Values in Action Strengths Inventory for Youth Survey** to identify their **signature strengths**, which are the top five character strengths and virtues of a particular individual. They convey a sense of ownership and authenticity and therefore providing them with strong **intrinsic motivation** to **put the strengths into practice** (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- Then, the students used the survey results to **identify and talk about** their own signature strengths with their classmates, teachers and family. They also create 'strength shields' which **represents** how they were already using their own signature strengths. They showcased the shields in the classrooms and **refer to them regularly** (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- This results in their increase in their **sense of meaning in life** and **life satisfaction** and provides them with **intrinsic motivation in learning** (Ewen & Green, 2010).

Goal-striving exercise

- The students firstly identified their **personal resources** and using them in striving towards their individual goals. Then they were taught how to **identify meaningful goals**, **plan, prioritise, manage time**, and be **persistent** in their goal- striving. They applied these skills in an ongoing assignment focused on finding novel ways to use one of their **signature strengths** (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- The results showed that the students had a higher level of **life satisfaction** and **meaning in life** by discovering their strengths and being able to influence others using their own strengths (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- Moreover, since they are able to do what they naturally do best, this gives them **feelings of autonomy, confidence, and self-esteem** (Ewen & Green, 2010).

Self-regulation exercise

- The students **reflected upon and evaluated** themselves while moving forward toward individual goals. They were given the opportunity to **share their assignment results** with the group and reflect on what they learned (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- Finally, the students completed a **'letter from the future'** that involved writing about themselves at their very best, focusing on **how their needs and values were being met**, and **finding solutions** to allow for **all the things they would like to have happen** (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- A key to successful goal attainment is the construct of **hope**, and this can be engendered in young people by engaging them in such **solution-focused conversations and activities**. Participating in the self-regulatory cycle also allows an individual to see oneself as able to **generate alternative routes to goals**, and as having the **perceived capacity to utilise these routes** to reach desired goals (Ewen & Green, 2010).

- Hope has been shown to correlate positively with **self- esteem, perceived problem-solving capabilities, perceptions of control**, and **positive outcome expectation.** In educational settings, higher levels of hope have also correlated positively with **perceived scholastic competence,** greater **academic satisfaction** and even better **academic performance** (Ewen & Green, 2010).
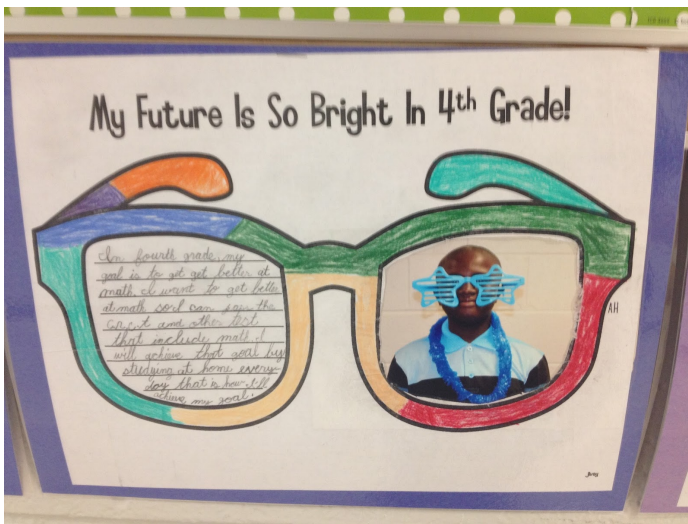
High school setting
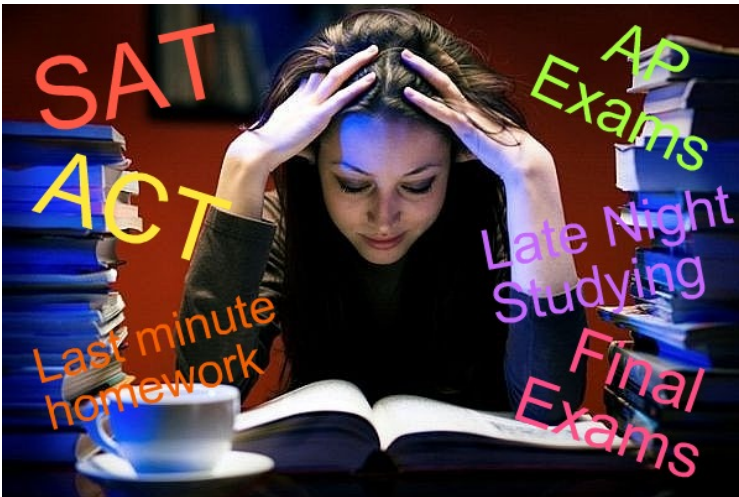
- According to the pioneer in positive education, Seligman et al. (2009), well-being is an important topic in secondary school education because youngsters have a higher tendency towards developing **depression** at this major life transitional period, and they are under **enormous pressure** to excel academically as **academic performance** during high school has a huge implication on their **university entry** and **future career prospects** (Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007).

- A **large-scale survey** in Sydney, Australia, which involves more than 400 high school students, demonstrated that **more than a half of the respondents** suffered levels of anxiety, depression and stress **higher than the normal range** (Smith & Sinclair, 2000).

- On the other hand, research has proven that people **high in cognitive hardiness** have a **lower level of stress**, as well as **better mental health** and **academic results** (McHenry, 1993) due to more effective coping strategies to and perceived controllability of the stressors. On the other hand, people **high in hope** have **higher self-esteem, more problem-focused coping**, as well as **better mental health and academic results** (Snyder et al., 2002). Hope is also a very important for **goal-directed behaviors.**

- In view of these, there was a study in a randomised controlled experimental design to apply the concept of positive psychology, to examine **enhancement of cognitive hardiness and hope construct of 'normal'** senior female high school students in a **holistic life coaching intervention**. 56 participants were randomly allocated to an individual life coach or to a wait-list control group

(Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007).

- The programme allowed the participants to holistically reflect upon aspects of their lives and identify one academic and one personal issues they hoped to be coached on. They were then taught to **identify personal resources** that could be utilised in gradually achieving their goals, and to **develop self-generated solutions and specific action steps**. They systematically worked through the **self-regulation cycle** of setting goals, developed action plans, **monitored and evaluated progress** (Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007).

- The results showed that life coaching was associated with a **significant rise in levels of cognitive hardiness and hope**, and a **significant drop in level of depression**, implying life coaching can be an effective mental health promotion strategy for high school students. It may be **better** than the **traditional remedial counseling** because life coaching adopts **a preventive and proactive approach to mental illnesses** and it **does not attach any stigma** to the involved students (Green, Grant & Rynsaardt, 2007).

University setting

4 key concepts in positive education including positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, and accomplishment can be core-organizing principles to be applied to the **formal learning environment** of a university for **better educational results** of the students (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

Positive education also has special significance in university setting. Due to the high striving culture of universities, students are prone to **neglect social relationships, emphasize extrinsic motivation** of academic excellence over intrinsic interest of learning, **work excessive hours** and engage in **behaviours diminishing well-being,** for example, drug use and lack of sleep (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

Positive relationships

- It is important to cultivate a positive **lecturer–student** relationships so as to enhance **well-being**, **pro-social behaviours** and **learning outcomes** of the students (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

- **Intrinsic motivation** of the students can also be enhanced by having **fun** with students through the use the **humour or games** and by providing students with chance for **autonomy and choice in assignments** and **discussions** about the way they would like their **learning surroundings** to be

created (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

Positive emotions

- Positive emotions enables **broader attention**, as well as **more creative and holistic thinking**, and therefore **better learning outcomes** (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

- To create positive emotions in students, there are a number of ways, for example, **beginning lectures or tutorials with relevant musical content**, using **movie or intriguing literature** to bring **course material** 'to life', and using **humour** and actively encouraging it (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

Engagement

- **Mindfulness practice** can be used to increase the engagement of the students in the lectures, and hence **enhance their learning experience**. For example, **short awareness exercises** such as body scans and focused breathing can be used to **begin lectures and tutorials** (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

- The philosophy and practices of mindfulness can be used to inform **curriculum development**, for example, the formal training of **medical students**. It led to a variety of positive impacts, such as **better emotional regulation, enhanced feelings of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance**, as well as **better academic results** (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

Accomplishment

- In university setting, group work assignments require the students from **diverse backgrounds** to cooperate and work together. Using the concept of **strengths** in group assignment can **facilitate teamwork** and lead to **better team outcomes** (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

- For example, **strengths assessments** such as the VIA can be used to help them understand which strengths are **most usefully employed** during group work, and hence enjoy a **greater sense of accomplishment** (Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011).

5) 3 Key readings

For many, the area of positive psychology is relatively new, and may be somewhat unclear, particularly with regards to how its theories may be beneficial in non-clinical settings. As a result of this, we have examined the current literature, and selected three papers which we believe best represent this topic. These were selected to cover as wide an area of this topic as possible, but by no means cover all the information available, and should be considered more as a brief overview of the topic, rather than an exhaustive analysis.

The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology

Fredrickson, B.L. (2001) The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. (http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/amp/56/3/218/) *American Psychologist, 56 (3),* 218-226

The first of these, a paper by Fredrickson (2001) seeks to establish and develop some of the basic theories involved with the area of positive psychology, suggesting that "the capacity to experience positive emotions may be a fundamental human strength central to the study of human flourishing." The key features of this paper are as follows:

- It begins by discussing definitions of **emotions** and **affect**, and the functions they serve:
  - Emotions are intrinsically related to our abilities to assess and respond to our experiences, and are related to our neurological, cognitive and physiological features.
  - Affect facilitates action and behaviour; it describes how we experience our emotions, and the behavioural aspects they can cause in us.
  - It must also be noted that, while some emotions are more clearly linked with action (i.e. anger and urge to attack), some do not have such a clear link, especially positive emotions, like joy and happiness.

- With the aim of furthering our understanding of this area, the author then proposes the **'broaden-and-build'** theory of positive emotions, which essentially states that positive emotions serve the distinctive function of broadening our personal and intellectual resources, and enriching our ability to engage with the world.
  - Previous work by the author influenced this theory by demonstrating that positive emotions broaden out **"momentary thought-action repertoires".** (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001)
  - This theory also has evolutionary relevance, as those with a greater "momentary thought-action repertoire" would have a greater ability to gather resources, and ability to thrive in their social environment.
  - An example of this can be seen in the positive emotion of **joy**, which is often associated with the urge to share this emotion with others, leading to greater socialisation and attachment. (Aron, Norman, Aron, Mckenna & Heyman, 2000)

- In this paper, **empirical evidence** available to support the theory is also discussed.
  - One issue with this is that much of the evidence is drawn from other psychological disciplines, and adapted to fit the current theory.
  - Much of the work is derived from that of Isen (reviewed in Isen, 2000), who has discovered that those who experience positive thought patterns are more unusual, flexible, creative, integrative, open to information and open to information than others.

- In conclusion, the author notes that **positive emotions** may thus be able to play a role in a number of areas, such as:
  - Undoing the effects of negative emotions
  - Feulling psychological resiliency
  - Positive effects on emotional wellbeing

Why is this a key paper?

This paper gives a good introduction to the topic of **positive psychology**, by highlighting some of the popular basic theories, the ways in which it may have **relevance in non-clinical areas**, and by giving a

taste of the style of theories which have emerged from the main branch of positive psychology. It also demonstrates the manner in which theories are often presented, and the empirical evidence they cite as support.

The Health Benefits of Writing About Intensely Positive Experiences

Burton, C.M. & King, L.A. (2004) The health benefits of writing about intensely positive experiences. (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0092656603000588) *Journal of Research in Personality, 38,* 150-163

The second introductory paper to this topic is one which we selected in order to give an idea of the sorts of **practical experiments and empirical results** that are available in this area. This is a study carried out by Burton and King (2004), in which they sought to establish what benefits exist as a result of **frequent positive thinking**.

They did this by carrying out an experiment with the following features:

- It was based on a writing paradigm developed by Pennebaker
- 90 undergraduate psychology participants participated
- All participants performed three 20-minute writing sessions, in which half wrote about **positive experiences** and half wrote about **neutral topics.**
- Measures of mood were taken before and after each writing session
- Measures of health centre visits were obtained 3 months later

A number of **results** were reported from this experiment:

- Writing styles, in terms of content, length, mood and language, were different between the two groups
- Those who had written about **positive experiences** reported **enhanced positive mood** across the study
- They also suffered **significantly fewer illnesses** and had **fewer visits to health centres** following the writing experience in comparison to the control group.

Why is this a key paper?

This study demonstrates well that positive psychology techniques can have **benefits in non-clinical populations**, both for **emotional** and **physical health**. However, with regards to the positive health effects this task seemed to have, it must also be noted that in their analysis, the authors of this paper were **unable to identify the underlying mechanism** of this effect. It may well be that **positive emotions have positive health benefits**, but further research would need to be carried out in order to confirm this. This demonstrates a common problem in the literature regarding positive psychology: data and results such as this are reported, but often the underlying mechanism or cause of such results remains unclear.

Making People's Life Most Worth Living: On the Importance of Passion for Positive

Psychology

Vallerand, R.J. & Verner-Filion, J. (2013) Making people's life most worth living: On the importance of passion for positive psychology (http://www.scielo.cl/pdf/terpsicol/v31n1/art04.pdf). *Terapia Psicológica, 31 (1),* 35-48

The third paper which we believe best demonstrates a particular area of positive, is one which is more recent, demonstrating the current course of thought on how positive psychology relates to non-clinical populations, and what future directions may be taken in this area. In this 2013 paper Vallerand and Verner-Filion seek to adapt the Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand, Blanchard, Mageau, Koestner, Ratelle & Leonard, 2003) to current lines of thinking in positive psychology, in order to highlight the important roles that the emotion of passion can play in human functioning.

The Dualistic Model of Passion, which this current paper is based on proposes that people display **two forms of passion**

- **Harmonious passion:** observed with individuals engage in activities or behaviours in which they gain great pleasure and joy, with the activity playing a major role in their life
- **Obsessive passion:** observed when an individuals' need to engage in an activity becomes overwhelming, and it becomes integral to their identity. In this case some people may report they they still get enjoyment from the activity, but often it becomes a dominant force in their life, at the expense of other areas, and this can result in often negative circumstances or emotions. This exemplifies one of the issues with positive psychology: that some positive aspects of functioning, if taken to extremes, can become detrimental to our health

In this paper however, the authors focus more on **harmonious passion**, and discuss some of the ways in which it can be beneficial to human functioning. They note a number of features and benefits of this:

- They report that **84% of people** indicate at least a moderate level of passion for an activity they engage in
- Harmonious passion can be related to **psychological well-being**, **greater life satisfaction** and **vitality**, while also **decreasing** symptoms of **anxiety** and **depression**
- Engaging in harmonious passions can also be beneficial to **physical health**, particularly if that passion is a sport of some kind. Further to this, engage in non-physical passions can still leave the individual feeling **vitalised** or **less tense** after engaging in the activity
- Engaging in harmonious passions can also benefit **interpersonal relationships**, particularly among individuals who share similar passions

Why is this a key paper?

Overall, paper demonstrates the current climate of positive psychology, and areas in which it is being investigated and expanded, specifically with how the theories can be adapted and examined with regards to 'normal' or non-clinical populations. It is also important because it causes us to notice the 'darker side' to some of the theories positive psychology advocates. In this instance, **harmonious passion** can be seen to be beneficial, however if that passion is engaged in too much, it

becomes **obsessive,** leading to difficulties and negative emotions being experienced by the individual.

6) Non-clinical benefits: Positive Psychology exercises to make you happier

Counting kindness

This exercise was first proposed by Otake et al. (2006). The idea is to become more **aware of your own kind behaviour** towards others, and keep track or note down each kind act you carry out. In the study, Otake et al. (2006) asked participants in Japan to report the number of kind acts they performed every day for a week. The authors found that there were significant **improvements in happiness** scores from baseline to follow-up in the counting kindness group compared to the control group. Similarly, Gander et al. (2012) tested a number of positive psychology exercises, including counting kindness. They found that over a period of 6 months, there was a significant **increase in happiness** levels and a decrease in depression levels following a counting kindness intervention. Therefore, it seems that by noticing and **noting down your own kind behaviour** towards others, you can improve your overall well-being.

Mindfulness

Another exercise that can be carried out at home is one that has already been mentioned; mindfulness meditation. This involves **paying attention in a non-judgmental way** to experiences as they arise and subside (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In recent years, there has been a large increase in study of mindfulness, particularly mindfulness-based interventions for anxiety and depression, however it is also something which can be carried out at home in order to increase well-being and decrease stress. For example, Brown and Ryan (2003) found that those who had high dispositional and state mindfulness have a greater amount of **positive states**, and also in cancer patients, increases in mindfulness over time lead to **declines in mood disturbance and stress**. Carmody and Baer (2008) looked at participants taking part in a Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction programme, and found that compared to baseline, at post-treatment participants had **increased mindfulness and well-being**, and decreases in stress. There are many ways you can practice mindfulness, using **online tutorials**, **CDs** or **podcasts**. One type of exercise you can carry out is called the body scan. This involves lying down, and begin by focussing your attention at the top of the head, and move attention down the body (*Body Scan Practice,* n.d.). An example of these online resources is from the University of California, Los Angeles, (http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22%20)http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22 (http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22) .

Here is a mindfulness meditation practice conducted by Jon Kabat-Zinn:

7) Criticisms

Flawed Basis

One such argument made against positive psychology is that **many of the founding theories and arguments concerning positive psychology are flawed**. One of the main proponents of this line of thinking is Miller (2008), who argues that the whole area of positive psychology is based on flawed, fallacious arguments, believing that it **naively attempts to answer age-old philosophical questions regarding happiness**, and **how true happiness can be obtained**. He notes that positive psychology has proved to be very popular over the course of the past couple decades, primarily as it promises empowerment, success and personal betterment to anyone who follows its prescriptions, but that these are **hollow promises** that it cannot truly fulfil. One further issue noted with positive psychology is that it assumes that everyone is able to adapt their personality characteristics and traits to develop a more positive attitude, which may not be entirely true, as some people may find it very difficult, or impossible, to adapt and change their personality. Ultimately, Miller believes that:

> **"Instead of demonstrating that positive attitudes explain achievement, success, well-being and happiness, positive psychology merely associates mental health with a particular personality type: a cheerful, outgoing, goal-driven, status-seeking extravert."**

Problems with Research

There are many issues with research in the area of positive psychology, as many of the empirical studies relied upon are **derived from that of related areas**, or the **results are unclear or highly open to interpretation**. In a review of this subject Lazarus (2009) notes a number of these issues:

- Much research in the area has problems involving **causality**, and while note that some positive

- Much research in the area has problems involving **causality,** and while note that some positive psychology theories and techniques are positively related with human functioning, they cannot determine if this is the direction of causality, or if people who are already improving themselves simply are more able to adopt positive psychology techniques.
- Another common problem is that of **identifying underlying causes:** for example, while writing about positive experiences may enhance mood and physical well-being, positive psychology is unable to propose any mechanisms for this.
- The **measurement of emotion** is another significant issue: emotions are complex features of human functioning and cognitive systems, yet they are often reduced to simple, on-time checklists designed to measure how people feel **at an exact point in time,** rather than a true evaluation of their underlying emotions across time.

Relation to Other Areas

Another criticism that can be levelled against positive psychology is that it is **heavily derivative of other areas of psychology**, or that it is simply a **'rebranding'** of theories and ideas which are far from new. One particular area of psychology which has argued that many of its theories have been unfairly or poorly incorporated into positive psychology is the **humanistic psychology movement** (Waterman, 2013). One of the main areas of discontent among humanistic psychologists is that they feel that, despite the fact that positive psychology has derived many of its theories and bases from humanistic psychology, positive psychologist do not pay proper respect to this fact (Robbins, 2008). Humanistic psychologists have pointed to a number of areas of psychology which they believe are simply humanistic theories, altered slightly, despite the arguments and attempts of **Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi**, who **sought to distance themselves from humanistic psychology**, arguing that, while it had good vision, **it had been a corrupting source on psychology as a discipline** (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). On top of this are the arguments that positive psychology has simply taken many age-old theories, particularly religious ones, on positivity and happiness, as noted previously in this article, and adopted them into its' own movement, claiming many of them as their own.

Too Happy?

As noted in Vallerand and Verner-Filio's 2013 paper on passion, while passion is generally considered beneficial to human functioning, taken to extremes, or given the wrong personality style, it can become **detrimental to the individual's health**. This issue can be applied to a number of areas in positive psychology, particularly in the question as to **whether or not too much happiness can be a bad thing** (Pelechano, Gonzalez-Leándro, García, & Morán, 2013). Some researchers have argued that, while it may not be that too much happiness is necessarily a bad thing, that the level of happiness desired by an individual to achieve their goals can vary, depending on the context they find themselves in (Oishi, Diener, & Lucas, 2007). One important issue raised by Held (2004) is that of the **'tyranny' of positivity** in positive psychology. She believes that so much emphasis is placed on individuals thinking and acting positively that the **balance of human nature** is neglected, and that the **importance of negativity** is overlooked. It can easily be argued that true appreciation of positive emotions or events can only be achieved when an individual has also experienced the opposite. Furthermore, when people inevitably have 'bad days' or experience negative feelings and emotions, they may feel **guilty,** as positive psychology posits that **success depends upon total positive thinking**, thereby leading to greater negative emotions, effectively creating a **downward spiral** for that individual. Indeed, there are also many critics of positive psychology, such as Held and Bohart (2002) who contend that as positive psychology only focuses on positive thoughts and emotions, they neglect the benefits and balance that

seemingly negative thoughts and emotions can bring.

8) Conclusion

The area of positive psychology is one which continues to grow, particularly in its ability to be applicable to an increasing number of non-clinical areas, such as leadership (Mills, Fleck, & Kozikowski, 2013), sport (Beattie, Lief, Adamoulas & Oliver, 2011), education (Weare, 2010) and health (Borghesi & Vercelli, 2012), as well as providing us with a number of practical exercises which individuals can utilise in order to promote their individual physical and mental wellbeing. Indeed, the main researches promoting the area of positive psychology have made claims that the interventions and techniques they have developed can make people **"lastingly happy"** (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). However, there are also many who argue against positive psychology, citing a number of issues which they believe positive psychology does not effectively counteract. Overall though, positive psychology is still a relatively recent development in the area of psychology, gaining popularity in recent years, as more theories are developed and research carried out in this area (Rusk & Waters, 2013). As such, we believe that while positive psychology must always be considered with these limitations in mind, its current benefits, and potential future benefits, should not be disregarded.

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