

Positive psychology: Past, present, and (possible) future

P. ALEX LINLEY¹, STEPHEN JOSEPH², SUSAN HARRINGTON¹, & ALEX M. WOOD²

¹University of Leicester, UK and ²University of Warwick, UK

Abstract

What is positive psychology? Where has it come from? Where is it going? These are the questions we address in this article. In defining positive psychology, we distinguish between the meta-psychological level, where the aim of positive psychology is to redress the imbalance in psychology research and practice, and the pragmatic level, which is concerned with what positive psychologists do, in terms of their research, practice, and areas of interest. These distinctions in how we understand positive psychology are then used to shape conceptions of possible futures for positive psychology. In conclusion, we identify several pertinent issues for the consideration of positive psychology as it moves forward. These include the need to synthesize the positive and negative, build on its historical antecedents, integrate across levels of analysis, build constituency with powerful stakeholders, and be aware of the implications of description versus prescription.

Keywords: *Positive psychology definition; research; practice; applications; future*

Introduction

What is positive psychology? Where has it come from? Where is it now? Where is it going? These are fundamental questions for this first issue of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. It is no small task to try and answer them, but equally no small opportunity.

In this article, we are aiming to achieve several objectives. First, we will give a brief history of the positive psychology movement. Second, we will provide a definition of positive psychology. Various definitions have been put forward to date, and we review them here, developing from them an integrative position that defines the movement on several levels, thereby, we hope, providing a more detailed understanding as we move forward. Third, we will assess where positive psychology now stands. In some respects, as we go on to show, it might be argued that positive psychology stands at a crossroads in its development. As such, we consider some of the issues and decisions that will likely influence its future. Fourth, we go on to offer possible scenarios for the future of positive psychology, at least as we surmise them. While speculative, we hope that these scenarios will allow those who identify themselves with the positive psychology movement to give a careful consideration to *how* they want the movement to develop, and *why*. To this end, we conclude with several pertinent points for consideration for positive

psychology, and provide what we see as some of the key guiding principles for the further growth and development of the movement.

A caveat before we begin

Throughout this article, we will (almost inevitably) talk about “positive psychology”, and sometimes about “positive psychologists.” As the experienced reader may know already, and as the reader new to positive psychology will learn below, these are thorny issues. It may be that in years to come there is no such thing as positive psychology, or that people may be concerned with the topics of positive psychology but do not define themselves as positive psychologists (indeed, this is often the case today). In many ways this would be a mark of the movement’s success. Also, we use the terms positive and negative as shorthand for describing the two poles of the human condition. By doing so, we do not mean in any way to imply or support the dichotomization of human experience into positive and negative; in contrast, we view them as falling along a continuum. While these labels are not ideal because of their value-laden connotations, we have adopted them reluctantly, but with an eye focused very much on the need for these caveats, as we will go on to show more fully in the sections that follow.

A brief history of positive psychology

The advent of positive psychology as we know it today can be traced back to Martin E. P. Seligman's 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association (Seligman, 1999). Following a serendipitous holiday meeting between Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi in winter 1997 (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), and an epiphanic moment when gardening with his daughter Nikki (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), Seligman realized that psychology had largely neglected the latter two of its three pre-World War II missions: curing mental illness, helping all people to lead more productive and fulfilling lives, and identifying and nurturing high talent. The advent of the Veterans Administration (in 1946) and the National Institute of Mental Health (in 1947) had largely rendered psychology a healing discipline based upon a disease model and illness ideology (see also, Maddux, 2002; Maddux, Snyder, & Lopez, 2004). With this realization, Seligman resolved to use his APA presidency to initiate a shift in psychology's focus toward a more positive psychology (Seligman, 1999).

Seligman's presidential initiative was catalysed by a series of meetings in Akumal, Mexico, of scholars who could inform the conceptualization and early development of positive psychology, and the establishment of the Positive Psychology Steering Committee (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Ed Diener, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Chris Peterson, and George Vaillant). From this followed the Positive Psychology Network, later to become the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the first Positive Psychology Summit in Washington, DC, and a special issue of the *American psychologist* on positive psychology to mark the new millennium (see Appendix).

Further, in the 7 years since Seligman's presidential address, there have been numerous positive psychology books, journal special issues (see Appendix), and the establishment of regional positive psychology networks that span the globe (see Seligman, 2005, for a full review of positive psychology activities). Now, in 2006, we have the first dedicated positive psychology journal, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. These are remarkable achievements for any psychology movement in such a short space of time. Many readers may well be wondering why, and below we offer some thoughts in response to this question.

As the leading advocate of positive psychology, Seligman has been exceptionally successful at catalysing and uniting the efforts of the many distinguished scientists who have become some of the key players in the positive psychology movement. These include the Positive Psychology Steering

Committee (Csikszentmihalyi, Diener, Jamieson, Peterson, and Vaillant) and the leaders of numerous positive psychology research centres, research pods, and grant holders (see Seligman, 2005). Other notable figures include C. R. (Rick) Snyder, who edited the special issue of the *Journal of social and clinical psychology* (2000) and the influential *Handbook of positive psychology* (2002); Chris Peterson, who headed up the Values-in-Action project that led to the VIA classification of strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); and the winners of the prestigious Templeton Positive Psychology Prizes: Barbara Fredrickson (2000) for her work on positive emotions; Jon Haidt (2001) for his work on the positive moral emotion of elevation; and Suzanne Segerstrom (2002) for her work on the beneficial effects of optimism on physical health. A further critical factor in the success of many of these initiatives was the financial support that made them possible, provided by such donors as the Templeton Foundation, The Gallup Organization, the Mayerson Foundation, the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, and the Atlantic Philanthropies, among others. And given the research imbalance between psychopathology and disease, relative to human strengths and well-being, positive psychology also offered excellent opportunities for rapid scientific advances, simply because many topics had been largely ignored (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Thus, the development of positive psychology was clearly shaped and energized by the considerable efforts of Seligman and the other major players in the field. Their deliberate sociology of science approach, recognizing and building on the structural forces that shape the discipline of psychology, cemented positive psychology's place through bringing in major research funding, providing considerable research leadership, engaging the wider public media, and attracting some of the brightest early career scientists through the provision of training institutes, research collaborations with senior scientists, and funding support for their work.

However, it is also eminently clear from a cursory examination of the research literature that positive psychology did not begin in 1997, or 1998, or 1999, or 2000 (see also McCullough & Snyder, 2000). In fact, positive psychology has always been with us, but as a holistic and integrated body of knowledge, it has passed unrecognized and uncelebrated, and one of the major achievements of the positive psychology movement to date has been to consolidate, lift up, and celebrate what we *do* know about what makes life worth living, as well as carefully delineating the areas where we need to do more.

Research into positive psychology topics has gone on for decades, and might even be traced back to the

origins of psychology itself, for example, in William James' writings on "healthy mindedness" (James, 1902). In broad terms, positive psychology has common interests with parts of humanistic psychology, and its emphasis on the fully functioning person (Rogers, 1961), and self-actualization and the study of healthy individuals (Maslow, 1968). Indeed, we note that more than 50 years ago, Maslow lamented psychology's preoccupation with disorder and dysfunction:

The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side. It has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that, the darker, meaner half (Maslow, 1954, p. 354).

Initially at least, positive psychology may not have paid sufficient tribute to its historical antecedents, leading to some criticisms (e.g., Taylor, 2001; Tennen & Affleck, 2003). However, there is now a growing recognition that positive psychology can learn useful lessons from earlier research and theorizing, and we hope that the animosity that has sometimes characterized previous exchanges will be replaced with increasing respect and collaboration (e.g., Joseph & Worsley, 2005), not least so that positive psychology can prosper through integration, rather than whither through isolation.

In the next section, we try to answer the question "what is positive psychology?" As will become clear from our answer, positive psychology can be understood and interpreted on many different levels and, as we hope to show, the level at which one understands positive psychology has profound implications for its possible futures.

What is positive psychology?

In asking this question, one is faced with the inherent danger that 10 positive psychologists would provide 10 different answers. Should this be taken to suggest that nobody really knows, exactly, what positive psychology is? We would argue that this is actually far from the case, yet equally we have a very real sense that positive psychology might often be interpreted as being "all things to all people." Indeed, in the course of numerous presentations to hosts of different audiences, both psychologist and non-psychologist, academics and practitioners, we have the consistent experiences of eyes lighting up and people saying "Ah, positive psychology, that's what we need." And when we ask what they understand by positive psychology, we receive different answers every time. In this sense, positive

psychology is perceived of as a panacea for many modern ills. It is not. But, by providing a different interpretative lens, it offers a different worldview and thereby novel answers to some questions that have been around for a long time, and shines the light of scientific inquiry into previously dark and neglected corners.

Consider, for example, the following definitions of positive psychology, all taken from authoritative positive psychological sources:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

What is positive psychology? It is nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues. Positive psychology revisits "the average person," with an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving...positive psychology is simply psychology (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216).

Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104).

Positive psychology is about scientifically informed perspectives on what makes life worth living. It focuses on aspects of the human condition that lead to happiness, fulfilment, and flourishing (The Journal of Positive Psychology, 2005).

There are certainly core themes and consistencies, but also differences in emphasis and interpretation. In thinking about how best to represent positive psychology, and how best to position its understanding in the first issue of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, we believe it would be helpful to provide what we see as a definition of positive psychology that identifies and delineates the different things that it might mean to different people. We also specify what positive psychology is not, in the hope that we can lay to rest some of the ghosts of criticism that have haunted positive psychology (sometimes with justification, often with misunderstanding) since its inception. Further, as will become clear later in the article, this definition and understanding of positive psychology helps to inform and develop the potential

future pathways and applications of positive psychology that we map out below.

Toward a new definition of positive psychology

The meta-psychological level view

First, we think it is instructive to understand positive psychology at the meta-psychological level. By meta-psychological level, we mean that level at which we understand the *aims* of positive psychology, and the way in which it offers a “grand vision” for the whole of psychology, and beyond. Here, we address the theoretical and philosophical position of positive psychology, as well as commenting on its value base. The *aims* of positive psychology can be understood from this meta-psychological perspective:

The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5; emphasis added).

Hence, a positive psychological perspective on the discipline of psychology (and, by extension, on other areas of scientific inquiry, such as economics, sociology, anthropology, and even the natural sciences) is that the focus of scientific research and interest should be on understanding the entire breadth of human experience, from loss, suffering, illness, and distress through connection, fulfilment, health, and well-being.

A common perception has been that positive psychology emphasises the positive at the expense of the negative (Held, 2004; Lazarus, 2003). This may have been an easy juxtaposition to make, given the value connotations of positive psychology, and the early emphasis of positive psychology that it was “independent” from what had gone before (see, for example, Snyder & Lopez, 2002b, *The future of positive psychology: A declaration of independence*).

In the beginning of any new scientific endeavour, there is a need to define one’s remit, and to differentiate from what has gone before to emphasize one’s novelty. This is well recognized within the history of thought, most notably in Hegel’s (1807/1931) identification of the cycle of *thesis* (any idea, belief, or set of arguments), followed by *antithesis* (conflicting, contradictory, or opposing views to the thesis), and then *synthesis* (the resolution of differences between the thesis and antithesis; this synthesis then becomes the new thesis).

Viewed from this perspective, business-as-usual psychology, with its focus on distress, disorder, and dysfunction, provides the thesis to positive psychology’s antithesis, that we should also focus on well-being, health, and optimal functioning. It is natural

and to be expected, then, that in the early stages of the movement, differences would have been emphasized and criticisms made of what had gone before. However, as we go on to demonstrate below, the challenge of the crossroads at which positive psychology now stands is whether it continues as an antithesis to business-as-usual psychology, or whether it achieves synthesis through the integration and resolution of these dialectics, thus evolving into “simply psychology,” with a focus that spans the whole of the human condition, from disorder and distress to well-being and fulfilment.

Thus, viewed at this meta-psychological, even meta-scientific level, positive psychology is an attempt to redress what is perceived as an imbalance in the focus of research attention and practice objectives in psychology. It is undeniably the case that the negative is dominant in psychology (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), and that “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). One need only look at citation counts to establish this beyond any doubt: Rand and Snyder (2003) examined the ratio of positive to negative subjects over the course of psychology publications from 1872 onwards in the PsycINFO database. Using dialectic pairs such as happiness–sadness, hope–hopelessness, and optimism–pessimism revealed a ratio that was consistently more than 2:1 in favour of the negative pole.

As such, the first part of defining an understanding of positive psychology is its meta-scientific value position: that the study of health, fulfilment and well-being is as meritorious as the study of illness, dysfunction, and distress. Equally, that the study of human strengths and virtues is a topic that should be central to a psychology of the human condition, rather than one that is “defined out” of psychological study, as Allport (1937) did, in his seminal definition of what constituted the psychological study of personality (cf. Cawley, Martin, & Johnson, 2000). Further, that these “positive” topics are in no way “secondary, derivative, illusory, epiphenomenal, parasitic upon the negative, or otherwise suspect” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4). Rather, the subject matter of positive psychology is authentic and valuable, and intuitively represents a far greater proportion of normal human experience than does the subject matter of psychology’s more traditional focus on dysfunction, distress, and psychopathology.

A shared language. A second facet of this meta-psychological perspective lies in positive psychology’s “taxonomic influence.” Here, we mean that positive psychology has provided a different lens through which to understand human experience, and perhaps most importantly, has begun the creation of a shared

language and understanding that begins to locate the study of positive states, traits, and outcomes in relation to each other. We use “taxonomic influence” in quotation marks in recognition of the fact that positive psychology does not yet offer a taxonomy within the strict sense of the term (Bailey, 1994; neither, arguably, does any field of psychology), but it has begun to provide a framework in which researchers and practitioners with different interests and agendas are able to communicate with each other, and locate their findings within a broader classificatory context. However, as we elaborate below, the challenge is now to expand our classificatory context in order to synthesize the positive and negative, health and illness, well-being and distress. In this way, positive psychology might do much to bridge the scientist–practitioner divide, through its range of applications and a value position that might be considered more concordant with the needs and aspirations of many practicing psychologists.

In our view, this taxonomic influence represents the greatest achievement of positive psychology to date (but also its greatest future challenge with regard to bridging the positive and negative aspects of human experience). Before positive psychology, researchers in (for example) wisdom, gratitude, humility, creativity, curiosity, and emotional intelligence might have considered they had little, if anything, to connect them. Since positive psychology, these research areas are understood as domains of psychological strengths, sharing a common theoretical heritage and much better able to be understood in proportion to, relation with, and interaction with each other.

Introducing the positive and integrating the negative. Further, at this meta-psychological level, positive psychology offers a different lens through which to study and understand psychological phenomena. Our decisions about which phenomena to study or not study are inescapably value-based (Christopher, 1996), and the implicit value base of much business-as-usual psychology is that the negative is more worthy of investigation than the positive. Indeed, the negative has a pervasive and immediate allure (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), and it is this that has shaped the questions of psychological inquiry typically to become those of “What is broken?” “What doesn’t work?” “What needs to be fixed?” and “How can we fix it?” In contrast, positive psychology asks “what works, what is right, and what is improving?” (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216). Building from this further, we can then ask broader questions, such as “How can we take what we have learned here, generalize it, and apply it more broadly to enable more people to improve their lives?”

As such, positive psychology shifts the implicit value basis of psychological inquiry from only a deficit-focus to also an asset-focus, and thereby reveals what is often new and fertile ground for investigation.

Overall, then, at this meta-psychological level of understanding positive psychology, we have argued that positive psychology: first, has the aim of redressing what is perceived as an imbalance in the study of the positive relative to the negative; second, has provided a structure and language that permits communication, understanding, and relation between diverse areas of psychological inquiry and application that were not possible before; and third, offers a different lens through which to view the remit of psychological investigation and practice, calling up a different set of questions to those which business-as-usual psychology has dealt with. However, as we illustrate in more detail below, the big challenge now facing positive psychology is to carry this meta-psychological perspective forward into the synthesis of positive and negative aspects of human experience, such that we really might enjoy a unified, integrated psychology (cf. Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001).

The pragmatic level view

In addition to this meta-psychological aspect of positive psychology, we propose a pragmatic level of what positive psychologists *do* in terms of their research and their practice, rather than what their objectives may be. Here, we distinguish between four levels of analysis for positive psychology.

The *wellsprings* of interest to positive psychology may be defined as the precursors and facilitators of the *processes* and *mechanisms*. They include things such as the genetic foundations of well-being, and the early environmental experiences that allow the development of strengths and virtues.

The *processes* of interest to positive psychology may be defined as those psychological ingredients (for example, strengths and virtues) that lead to the good life, or equally the obstacles to leading a good life (for example, a life of meaning and fulfilment; King, Eells, & Burton, 2004; King & Napa, 1998). Positive psychology should seek to understand the factors that facilitate optimal functioning as much as those that prevent it.

The *mechanisms* of interest to positive psychology may be defined as those extra-psychological factors that facilitate (or impede) the pursuit of a good life. For example, these mechanisms may be personal and social relationships, working environments, organizations and institutions, communities, and the broader social, cultural, political, and economic systems in which our lives are inextricably embedded.

The *outcomes* of interest to positive psychology may be defined as those subjective, social, and cultural states that characterize a good life. Here we may think of factors such as happiness, well-being, fulfilment, and health (at the subjective level), positive communities and institutions that foster good lives (at the interpersonal level), and political, economic, and environmental policies that promote harmony and sustainability (at the social level).

An integrative definition for positive psychology

Hence, we define positive psychology as follows: positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. At the meta-psychological level, it aims to redress the imbalance in psychological research and practice by calling attention to the positive aspects of human functioning and experience, and integrating them with our understanding of the negative aspects of human functioning and experience. At the pragmatic level, it is about understanding the *wellsprings, processes* and *mechanisms* that lead to desirable *outcomes*.

Clearly, our delineation of the pragmatic level of positive psychology into wellsprings, processes, mechanisms, and outcomes is not fixed, but rather a way of understanding the remit of positive psychology, and how different elements may relate to each other. We do not claim that these elements are separate and distinct, but rather recognize that there will be interactions between them. For example, while happiness is considered by many to be a desirable state (i.e., outcome), there is also increasing evidence that it is also a desirable mechanism. It can be said that happiness actually leads, over time, to other valued outcomes (see Diener & Seligman, 2004; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, in press).

Specifically within the definition presented here, and by way of example, positive institutions are viewed as each of a process, a mechanism, and an outcome: positive institutions are desirable in and of themselves, but they also serve as processes that offer coherent and concordant values and philosophies that may guide and inspire their members, and as mechanisms to facilitate and promote other valued outcomes. Understanding positive psychology in this way allows a more systems-oriented appreciation of the interrelations of its various parts, and equally has important implications for the way that we understand where positive psychology is now, as well as how we consider of the possible futures and applications of positive psychology.

Positive psychology in the present

Where is positive psychology now? In this section of the article, we will try and take stock, and assess

where positive psychology is now. As we have shown, it has come from propitious beginnings to establish itself as a popular but serious psychological movement. All the structural elements of a psychological discipline are in place: an impressive and growing research corpus; an array of books, including handbooks (Linley & Joseph, 2004a; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2002a) and college textbooks (e.g., Bolt, 2004; Carr, 2003; Compton, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, in press); numerous journal special issues and journal articles; dedicated conferences and themed sessions at other meetings; funding streams and prizes (e.g., the Seligman Award for Outstanding Dissertation Research; the Templeton Positive Psychology Prizes); international associations representing and promoting the interests of positive psychology; web pages and email discussion lists; wider interest through the popular media, including print, television, and radio (see Seligman, 2005, for a summary); positive psychology courses being included as part of existing degree programmes (more than 100 positive psychology courses on offer by 2003 (Murray, 2003); and at least 27 positive psychology programmes at major US universities (Seligman, 2005); dedicated graduate programmes (e.g., Master of Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania), and now a dedicated journal (*The Journal of Positive Psychology*).

Thus, it is clear from many perspectives that positive psychology has arrived. Yet in our view, this is just the beginning, and what has been achieved so far, while both laudable and remarkable, may be just an historical footnote to what is to follow. Positive psychology now stands at a crossroads, and various factors will likely influence the path it takes. In the next section, we consider some possible future scenarios for positive psychology, and assess the merits and risks associated with each. It is our hope and aspiration that in raising these issues for consideration, positive psychologists both now and in the future will be able to take more informed and reflective decisions on *what* positive psychology should do; *why* it should do it; *how* it relates to psychology more broadly, and to other disciplines, such as economics, sociology, and anthropology; and perhaps most importantly, how positive psychology might be harnessed most effectively in the service of promoting integral human flourishing and fulfilment.

The (possible) future of positive psychology

Does positive psychology have a future? That is not so much of a bleak question as it might at first seem. Indeed, some eminent figures in the

positive psychology actually hope that it will disappear:

My hope is that positive psychology is a movement that will eventually disappear because it becomes part of the very fabric of psychology. Thus, it will fade as a campaign precisely because it has been so successful (Diener, 2003, p. 120).

However, this is where an understanding of the differences between the meta-psychological and pragmatic aspects of positive psychology is instructive. At a *meta-psychological* level, we too hope (and expect, if we may be so bold) that positive psychology will disappear. That is to say, with the increasing embedding of positive psychological thinking and methodology in many areas of psychology, and the maturation of young scholars who have grown up in a positive psychological context, positive psychology's aim of redressing the balance will have been achieved.

The shared language and social structures will be in place, and psychologists will take the understanding of the interrelations of strength and weakness, positive and negative, for granted, just as the current generation of psychologists does not blink when considering the association of conscious and unconscious aspects of personality and processing, but which were just as novel in Freud's time. To extend Gable and Haidt's (2005) terminology, the train will have changed direction, but the new passengers will not even have noticed, instead having just been carried along on their way.

In contrast, when we consider the *pragmatic* aspects of positive psychology, our view is that the journey is just beginning. We are in the early stages of beginning to develop understandings of strengths and virtues, to grasp and build the interpersonal and social infrastructures that facilitate good lives, and to appreciate the nuances of happiness and well-being, their effects as well as their causes. But again, this journey is just beginning. It has taken psychology 100 years to arrive at what we now know; can we even imagine what psychology might look like with another 100 years focused on building the things that make life worth living?

Positive psychology at the crossroads

At this stage, as we suggested above, positive psychology stands at a crossroads. While building on what has gone before, positive psychology has a remarkable opportunity to do things differently, to ask the questions which deserve to be asked (see Sternberg in Morgeson, Seligman, Sternberg, Taylor, & Manning, 1999), to create a science of

psychology that realizes the discipline's early promise which has somehow got lost along the way (cf. Maslow, 1954; Seligman, 1999).

In our estimation, there are three possible routes for the future of positive psychology. First, it could simply disappear because it has brought about the meta-psychological integration that was its aim. As such, there would be no need for positive psychology, because all of psychology would be fully appreciative of the full range of human functioning. Second, it could bring about *some* of the meta-psychological integration, enabling researchers and practitioners to understand both the positive and negative, but could continue as an area of research focus on topics such as strengths and happiness, much as there are specialist divisions of psychology today. Third, it could fail to bring about the desired integration, and continue as a specialist, but increasingly marginalized area, locked out of the major psychological agendas. We go on to explore each of these scenarios more fully in turn.

Meta-psychological integration. Considered from the meta-psychological perspective that we defined earlier, positive psychology may engender a change of lens and a shift in emphasis for existing psychology research and applied psychology professions. This would be achieved through infusion, namely, incorporating the principles of a positive psychological perspective into existing professional psychological practice, and thereby achieving a genuine and powerful integration of the positive and negative aspects of human experience, and an understanding of their interactions and interrelations.

It might be legitimately argued that some professional domains of psychology do this already, for example, health psychology and its emphasis on prevention, and counselling psychology and its emphasis on human development. Other professional practices are more grounded in dysfunction models, but there are still perceptions of what they may look like when infused with a more integrative positive psychological perspective that synthesizes both positive and negative. Consider, for example, what clinical psychology might look like if it were to adopt a dimensional as opposed to a categorical model of psychopathology, seeing problems in human living as falling at points along a continuum, rather than being categorically different, and viewing the positive clinical psychologist's remit as being as much about building strengths and resilience as it was about repairing weakness and damage (Maddux et al., 2004). Consider "positive organizational scholarship," which is "concerned primarily with the study of especially positive outcomes, processes, and attributes of organizations and

their members” (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003b, p. 4). Consider the applications of positive psychology within school settings, based on the principles that school psychology can serve as a point of connection between positive psychology’s promotion of optimal human development, and schools as the a priori institutions that can serve as the vehicles for this development (Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal, & Riley-Tillman, 2004; Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh, & DiGiuseppe, 2004).

Seen in these ways, the future of positive psychology may be one in which it increasingly permeates the professional practice of psychology, becoming almost silently infused into the status quo for professional practice. That, surely, would constitute positive psychological success, with positive psychology having achieved its meta-psychological objective “to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation *only* with repairing the worst things in life to *also* building positive qualities” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5; emphasis added). Then, positive psychology would be “simply psychology” (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216).

Integration with continued specialization. Understood in this way, positive psychology may engender shifts in psychological thinking that do serve to integrate the positive and the negative aspects of human experience, but where structural barriers still remain that block a full integration. For example, it is not difficult to imagine a funding situation that dictates the role of the psychologist as being to “alleviate distress and dysfunction,” but where the funding does not extend into the genuine promotion of well-being and optimal functioning. Hence, while the practicing psychologist may support the principles and aims of an integrative psychological practice, these structural barriers may remain. However, even to have brought about this shift in psychological thinking so that these issues are even considered as issues could be considered a major achievement.

With full integration not achieved, it may be envisaged that positive psychology research would continue into the positive side of human experience, continuing to redress the imbalance in psychological inquiry and research output. While this in itself may not be considered unduly problematic, it is subject to an important caveat: such research must be conducted from an integrative perspective that seeks to understand the positive in relation to the negative, and continues to strive to take the positive psychological message more broadly. Seen in this way, one might consider that the positive psychology journey continues, rather than that it has concluded and either succeeded or failed.

Marginalization. In contrast to these perspectives, one can consider positive psychology as a stand-alone discipline, marginalized and fragmented. What would be its remit, theoretical underpinnings, and professional objectives? In brief, one might legitimately suggest that positive psychology would be concerned with the facilitation of optimal functioning in any sphere of life, with the professional objective of raising the health, fulfilment and well-being of people and their institutional or organizational contexts. It would not be able to locate its findings in relation to psychopathology and distress, and would find itself in the same situation as it now criticizes business-as-usual psychology for: focusing too much on only one side of the human condition.

If this is *all* that positive psychology achieves, our view is that it will have failed. We believe it will have failed because it will have become just another variant of professional psychological practice that is concerned with the “worried well,” but which is not considered to have anything to offer to people who are in distress or suffering with disorder of dysfunction. In this way, it will have lost its meta-psychological imperative, betrayed its grand vision, and squandered its genuine opportunity to catalyse a step-change in psychological thinking and practice.

Which way now?

In recognizing the crossroads at which positive psychology stands, we have considered what we see as the three alternative roads that are open to us. Our view is that positive psychology offers a grand integrative vision that could change the face of psychology. It could also become little more than a psychological sub-discipline concerned with strengths and happiness that is ultimately marginalized and largely ignored, as happened to humanistic psychology. Or, it could fall somewhere in between. What are the factors that will likely influence the direction of these developments?

We suspect that within the next few years, and possibly sooner rather than later, positive psychology will reach a tipping point. This tipping point will be the moment in time when the decisions made have an irrevocable influence on the direction of positive psychology’s evolution and development. We believe there are three major factors that will constitute these tipping points: professional psychology training, research output, and funding and stakeholder decisions. Below, we consider each of them in turn.

Professional psychology training. If positive psychology is to alter the future direction of psychology and create a more integrative and holistic approach to the human condition, this will only lastingly come about

through changes at the grass roots level. Young psychologists in professional training will have to be educated in the positive psychological perspective, and trained to balance their understanding of the human condition through the lens of both positive and negative. What we see determines the hypotheses we test and the approach that we take. Look for disorder and you will find it. Look for fulfilment and you will find it. Look for both, and we may begin to understand how they fit together. If academic and applied psychology trainings begin to infuse the positive psychology perspective, the meta-psychological aspirations may be achieved.

Research output. The positive psychology perspective needs to produce quality research that is characterized by methodological rigor and practical relevance (i.e., *pragmatic* research; Anderson, Herriot, & Hodgkinson, 2001). Positive psychology has immense popular value. People are interested in factors such as strength, virtue, health, and happiness. They want to know more about what is best about themselves, and what they can do to be happier, healthier, and more fulfilled. As such, there is an immense temptation for positive psychology to descend into popularist science; relevant and highly interesting research questions, but which lack the scientific rigor that should define our discipline. These temptations have to be resisted, in our estimation, if positive psychology is to have a future.

Similarly, this very journal has a central role to play here. If *The Journal of Positive Psychology* becomes nothing more than a home for studies on the correlates of happiness, it will have squandered its opportunity to become the beacon of the positive psychology movement. If, in contrast, it is recognized for its integration of the positive psychological approach into psychology more broadly, through the publication of first class empirical work combined with insightful theoretical integration, it will likely be recognized as one of the major journals shaping the future evolution of psychology.

Equally, with the advent of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, we also caution that a dedicated positive psychology journal should not be taken as an excuse not to take the positive psychology message to other areas of psychology, both academic and applied. Indeed, that is one of the great dangers of a specialist journal, and one that we hope will be avoided. Centrifugal forces within psychology will continue to push us towards ever more specialization and fragmentation, but we strongly believe that *The Journal of Positive Psychology* should strive to be a centripetal force for integration, offering a home for the best theoretical ideas and empirical research

findings of our discipline. These centripetal forces already exist, and we are greatly encouraged by the fact that many of the advocates for them may be identified with the positive psychology movement (e.g., Snyder, Tennen, Affleck, & Cheavens, 2000; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001).

Funding and stakeholder decisions. Positive psychology does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a multi-faceted, multi-layered social and political context that is driven by agendas that are often not determined by the interests of psychology and psychologists. As such, psychology is beholden to its funding providers and other powerful stakeholders, such as governments, educational institutions, commercial organizations, and healthcare providers. As positive psychologists, we need to engage with them and make the case for why the positive psychological perspective matters, in order to enable stakeholders to develop an understanding of what it brings that is new, and what human and financial benefits it offers over and above what has already been done. In this way, and if such initiatives are successful, positive psychology can begin to shape and determine funding and stakeholder imperatives, bringing about a shift in funding and support emphasis from repairing weakness and treating pathology to *also* building strength and facilitating wellness. If this fails to happen, the risk is that simple economics will dictate that positive psychology falls by the wayside. If it does happen, the future for positive psychology may look very bright indeed.

Issues and directions for the future of positive psychology

In thinking about the future of positive psychology, we have identified several pertinent areas that the movement may do well to consider. We do not set these out as any kind of manifesto (especially in light of point five, below, about description versus prescription), but rather as suggestions that positive psychologists might choose to consider as the movement advances. Neither do we claim that these are the only issues that the movement faces; indeed, there will likely be others that are not even now on the horizon, and our hope and aspiration is that *The Journal of Positive Psychology* will continue to serve as a forum for informed debate.

1. *Synthesize the positive and the negative.* Perhaps most importantly in light of the points made above, is the need to strive for integration, and to carry the positive psychological message as far and as wide as we can. In our own work, we have taken great efforts

to emphasize this synthesis of the positive and negative within positive psychology (e.g., Linley & Joseph, 2003, 2004), and have striven to show how positive psychological approaches can speak to both trauma and suffering (Joseph & Linley, 2005) and existential issues (Bretherton & Ørner, 2004).

Perhaps one of the most important points to take from this is the need for positive psychologists to be active in connecting with other areas of psychology and other disciplines (see e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005, for an example of how to achieve this). This invites us to write for their specialist journals offering a positive psychological perspective, speak at their conferences to elaborate what positive psychology can say, and conduct research that transcends these artificial boundaries of positive and negative.

As but one example, in our own work we have developed a positive psychological theory of how people adapt following trauma and adversity (Joseph & Linley, 2005), and have cast this theory in such a way that it draws from and speaks to both the posttraumatic stress disorder (business-as-usual) audience and the posttraumatic growth (positive psychology) audience. We did so by using the language of posttraumatic stress disorder and integrating it with the language of posttraumatic growth, thereby knitting together an understanding of adaptation to trauma that was able to account for both posttraumatic stress and posttraumatic growth. If positive psychologists can strive to do the same in their own research areas, the outcomes could offer a powerful movement towards more integrative understandings of the human condition.

2. Build on historical antecedents and existing knowledge. There is also much that can be learned, we suggest, by revisiting earlier humanistic and existential ideas (methodological concerns notwithstanding), and seeing what insights they might offer us about positive psychology's current remit (e.g., Joseph & Linley, 2004; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Rathunde, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). However, let us be clear that by saying this, we are in entire agreement with Peterson and Park (2003, p. 145), that positive psychology is not "but a footnote to Lao-tzu, Confucius, Aristotle, Aquinas, William James, John Dewey, Carl Rogers, or Abraham Maslow." Positive psychology does bring a unique identity and novel perspective to the study of optimal human experience, but one that should rightly build on what has gone before. Quite simply, not to do so would be academically dishonest and intellectually fallible: positive psychology should be neither of these things.

We believe that positive psychology can also learn much from other areas of scientific inquiry, and should be more active in opening dialogue with other areas of psychology, economics, sociology, anthropology, science and practice more generally. For example, the resilience literature offers many insights into successful functioning despite adversity (Yates & Masten, 2004). Some areas of social work have for over a decade been practising strengths-based interventions (Noble, Perkins, & Fatout, 2000; Saleebey, 1992). Economists have become interested in the subject of human happiness (e.g., Frey & Stutzer, 2000; Layard, 2005), and this is even filtering through to government interest (Donovan & Halpern, 2002). What these examples clearly suggest is that positive psychologists could gain much from making links with researchers and practitioners in other areas of psychology and beyond, including other areas of science and social science (e.g., economics, politics, sociology, anthropology).

3. Integrate across levels of analysis. We can equally gain much by striving to understand positive psychological phenomena more holistically, through integrating the insights of neuroscience at the biological level with an understanding of their psychological and social markers. Indeed, work of this nature is already going on, and represents some of the best positive psychology research. For example, consider the advances in the understanding of how their social connections allow women to cope with stress that were achieved through the integration of biological, psychological, and social data (Taylor et al., 2000); or the development of social neuroscience, which has allowed understanding of the interactions between biological processes and social psychological processes such as sociality, spirituality, and meaning making (Cacioppo, Hawkley, Rickett, & Masi, 2005). We can hardly do justice to the rigor and complexity of these research programmes within the context of this article, but they do provide insightful examples of how scientific integration can produce novel insights that integrate and explain findings from diverse areas of psychology. Positive psychology could learn much from them.

4. Build constituency and reach out to powerful stakeholders. Good pragmatic science allows us to build constituency: funding bodies will support positive psychology work that is well-conducted and leads to meaningful outcomes that have a real relevance for people. The more that positive psychology can produce deliverables, that is, research that not only advances understanding but also

demonstrates applied benefits, the easier it will be to build this constituency. As positive psychologists, we are in an enviable position. Not everyone will be clinically depressed or schizophrenic during their lifetime, but it's a fair assumption that (almost) everyone will want to be happy, or to be good parents and friends, or to be effective students, or to be productive and satisfied at work. As such, positive psychology has an appeal that is probably as broad as one could get. We should capitalize on this, and use the impetus it provides to facilitate constructive change and improvement.

As we begin to think about how positive psychology may become a constructive force for social improvement, we are reminded of the third pillar of positive psychology research, positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As has been noted elsewhere (Gable & Haidt, 2005), this is the area of positive psychology that has received least attention to date. Why may that be? It is arguably the case that most positive psychology researchers are from a social psychological tradition, and so are more concerned with personality, individual differences, and group processes. As such, there was not a natural foundation on which to build a science of positive institutions and communities, and the early enthusiasm for partnerships with a "positive sociology" and a "positive anthropology" has largely not come to fruition.

However, there are certain trends that suggest this may be beginning to change. For example, positive psychologists are now starting to address the issues of happiness, health, and well-being from national and societal perspectives (e.g., Huppert, 2004; Veenhoven, 2004). The advent of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003a) suggests that a greater understanding of positive organizations may be on the horizon, which could in turn inform further understanding of positive institutions and communities more broadly.

There is also recognition that psychologists are, unfortunately, not powerful stakeholders within public policy, and as such their influence is limited. However, there are increasing collaborations between economics and positive psychology (in relation to the measurement and achievement of happiness), and this offers a powerful way forward. Indeed, work is already underway to promote the idea of national well-being accounts to complement economic indicators such as the gross domestic product (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004). Within the UK at least, the government has an expressed interest in the state of the nation's happiness (Donovan & Halpern, 2002), and there is also a growing social agenda to promote well-being (e.g., *A well-being manifesto for a flourishing society*;

Shah & Marks, 2004). These are promising developments, and speak to the potential for a positive psychological contribution through partnership and collaboration with established stakeholders.

5. Description or prescription? In dealing with all of these issues, we must be very mindful of the difference between describing something as good or prescribing it as good (Held, 2004). On this distinction rests the difference between a *descriptive* science of positive psychology, and a *prescriptive* science of positive psychology. A descriptive science simply defines, delineates, and documents its findings, leaving them free of value judgement or admonition as to how they should be used. But, as we have noted elsewhere, positive psychology is far from value free (Linley & Joseph, 2004b), and even inherent within the name positive psychology is the implicit value assumption that positive equals good (Christopher, 2003). However, we agree with Diener (2003, p. 116) that, "Positive does not have to be a simple, monadic concept to be a useful heuristic one."

Medical researchers may be prescriptive e.g., eating fruit and fresh vegetables is good for you; eating too much fatty food is bad for you), since within medicine there is almost universal agreement on what is good (e.g., living healthily, for longer). Yet within psychology, defining something as good is much more of a subjective enterprise (Christopher, 1996), and definitions or bases for deciding the basis of "goodness" may often not be consistent with each other.

For example, Diener and Suh (1997) built on the philosophical work of Brock (1993) to suggest three possible bases from which people may determine what is good. First, people's choices may indicate what they perceive to be good. If people consistently choose something, it must be because they think it is good (an economic perspective). Second, people's experiences and judgments of positive subjective states serve as an indicator to them that something is good (a subjective psychological perspective). Third, people may use value systems that are based on norms, religious beliefs, or cultural precedents, and the like, to determine what is good (a social psychological perspective). While these three perspectives may sometimes be concordant, equally they may not (e.g., filling up one's gas tank may be chosen repeatedly, but is neither subjectively enjoyable or consistent with an environmentally-supportive value system; Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Thus, defining something as good is no easy task, requiring the recognition and balancing of complex and multidimensional factors that may vary according to individual, situation, culture, and time.

With this in mind, positive psychology ought to be very mindful of erring into the trap of prescription without the necessary critical reflection, and assuming that a positive psychological position would ever be right for all of the people, all of the time. On the other hand, “Although we cannot pretend to be the final arbiters about what is good, at least we can be ‘players’ in helping society define what is positive” (Diener, 2003, p. 117). In this way, positive psychology can open up a vigorous debate about what is good and desirable, and under what circumstances, and in which cultural settings, of which historical periods. Looking to the future, our aspiration would be that positive psychologists may even be able to discover principles that unite different conceptions of the positive and good, thus allowing movement toward a taxonomic understanding of positive psychological phenomena that would provide a meta-theoretical foundation for optimal human existence.

Conclusion

These are lofty aims indeed, and it is our hope and aspiration that *The Journal of Positive Psychology* can, and should, be at the forefront of these developments over the years to come. Positive psychology has certainly arrived, we have documented where we see the field as it stands now, and we have offered some thoughts about how we think it may evolve in the future. Readers of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, the future of positive psychology, if not psychology, is within your grasp; seize it with both hands, and do with it as you will.

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Appendix

Journal Special Issues (or Sections) on Positive Psychology.

Journal	Publication year	Volume (part)	Editor(s)
American Psychologist	2000	55 (1)	Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi
Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology	2000	19 (1)	McCullough & Snyder
American Psychologist	2001	56 (3)	Sheldon & King
Journal of Humanistic Psychology	2001	41 (1)	Rich
Journal of Clinical Psychology	2002	58 (9)	Held & Bohart
American Behavioral Scientist	2003	47 (4)	Fowers & Tjeltveit
Psychological Inquiry	2003	14 (2)	Lazarus (target article author)
School Psychology Quarterly	2003	18 (2)	Huebner & Gilman
The Psychologist	2003	16 (3)	Linley, Joseph, & Boniwell
Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science	2004	591	Peterson
Journal of Psychology in Chinese Societies	2004	5 (1)	Cheng
Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Series B	2004	359 (1449)	Huppert, Keverne, & Baylis
Psychology in the Schools	2004	41 (1)	Chafouleas & Bray
Ricerche di Psicologia	2004	27 (1)	Delle Fave
Review of General Psychology	2005	9 (2)	Simonton & Baumeister
Revue Québécoise de Psychologie	2005	26 (1)	Mandeville