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3rd Annual Applied Positive Psychology Symposium

Saturday 20th May 2017

Proceedings of Presented Papers

Edited by

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Introduction

This *Proceedings* represents the contributions to our 3rd Applied Positive Psychology Symposium held on Saturday 20th May 2017. The symposium was first held in May 2015 as an opportunity for the first cohort of graduates of the MSc Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) at Buckinghamshire New University to present their completed dissertation work to a wider audience, and prepare papers for the symposium's *Proceedings* that were based on their dissertations. The intention was, and still is, that students might use this opportunity to prepare a paper for subsequent publication in an academic journal.

We are pleased that we were able to welcome back graduates from the first Bucks MAPP cohort to present at the symposium. For example, Dan Collinson and Lesley Lyle, who met on the course, were able to update us on their international work together as part of their company, Positive Psychology Learning (PPL). In addition, we have a contribution from Ruth Howard, a doctoral student at Bucks, on her work linking positive psychology approaches with support for families of people with autism.

We are excited that, for the first time, we had presentations from students and alumni from the University of East London (UEL) MAPP-CP course (MSc Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology). We also expanded the format of presentations by including a film screening of a short film on positive psychology and space, presented by Dorota Filipowicz of UEL. We hope that future symposia will also attract submissions from students and alumni from other similar courses, such as the MAPP course at Anglia Ruskin University, and hope to expand to include even more presentation styles and learning opportunities, including potentially workshops.

Matthew Smith, Piers Worth, Genevieve Cseh, Ceri Sims

Course Team for the MSc Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP)

Buckinghamshire New University

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May 2017

**Where papers corresponding to presentations are not available, abstracts and/or links have been provided.*

Extraordinary Magic: How a Fragile Centenarian Maintained Her Wellbeing to Overcome Life Threatening Diseases and Disasters!

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Abstract

Death, morbidity and malaise were the expected outcomes of many of the adversities affecting Lily at various times throughout her 103 year lifespan. Those predicting that such depressing disasters would lead her to swift decline were amazed and sometimes even shocked as Lily resolutely and repeatedly bounced back to wellbeing and then moved boldly forward into further happy chapters of her remarkable life. Why did this happen? This study investigates the causes of Lily's resilience by application of qualitative thematic analysis to biographical data on her lifespan, data carefully gathered by the study's author, her nephew. This study reports that gratefulness, love, hope, leadership, faith and vitality were the most frequently observed characteristics associated with her wellbeing and resilience in times of adversity. This report argues, that powerful though these characteristics were it was their confident application that provided the driving force of her perseverance and peaceful acceptance of her difficulties that led to her remarkable and often surprising wellbeing.

Introduction

How did Lily's 103 years of life come to be defined by her wellbeing, resilience, love of life and gratitude? This was, after all, a woman living alone in a small cottage whilst coping with multiple long-term health conditions, adversities and near fatalities. This study investigates the lifespan of this exemplar of wellbeing and resilience by applying qualitative thematic analysis to biographical data of her 103-year lifespan, data carefully gathered by the study's author, her nephew.

Wellbeing and resilience viewed over a lifespan

Human resilience builds over a lifespan through adaptation. Masten (2010) argues that adaptation leads to skills useful to the next stage, e.g. attachment and relationships as an infant enable maturing growth in self-regulation, goal making, and decisions. Protective

systems are built and repeatedly drawn upon with “compelling consistency”, these are building blocks, placed one upon another. There are cascade effects, new individual capabilities and assets now prepared for future challenges, in a similar way to “inoculation” against future infection (ibid.). Resilience viewed through a lifespan lens enables us to see more closely how these protective systems, core abilities and adaptive resources have evolved. We see how both exposure to adversity and the overcoming of it brings us experience and understanding and thus new resources to combat future adversity. “What doesn’t kill us makes us stronger” (Joseph, 2009) even in our early infant years, child-parent relationships, in conjunction with challenges or specific stressors can be observed to have built resources of resilience valuable to subsequent time periods (Masten, 2010). The process of resilience develops from basic adaptation and if protective systems are working, development is robust even in the face of severe adversity (ibid.).

Functional parents, who satisfy a child’s basic material and security needs, provide information, learning opportunities, safe play and adventures. Children with positive relationships with functional adults are consistently found (ibid.) to overcome adversity and recover more successfully (Masten, 1990). They build behaviours of trust, self esteem and efficacy and appropriate socialisation with adults and society. They develop cognitive abilities that enable problem solving and adaptation (ibid.). Children with an optimistic explanatory style are able to mediate the prevention of depressive symptoms (Lei Yu, 2002), they are also less likely to show helplessness and depression when confronted by uncontrollable negative life events, compared to children with a more pessimistic explanatory style (Seligman, 1995). Children taught to count their blessings exhibit greater happiness scores (Lei Yu, 2002).

Psychological resilience present in children who overcome adversity uses multiple assets, uniquely valuable to the individual child and which may not be abundant or attainable to those who fare badly. Children who recover from adversity are good learners and good problem solvers possessing competencies and perceived efficacy seen as valuable by themselves and others. They engage well with others (ibid.). Stress reactivity, the differing individual responses to stress, can form either protective or vulnerability factors. Individually the appropriateness of response to stressors can be pivotal (ibid.). For example a child may react in anxiety and panic to a breathing difficulty with ineffective ability to draw oxygen, causing a worsening condition. Another child, however, may be calmed by an adult or

regulating breathing effectively and gains as much oxygen per breath as possible. Winnicott (2002) describes how psychological growth and maturation in a child is facilitated by periods of challenge, followed by secure safe absorption in happy play. This observation is further developed by Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) who note that tiny infants focus intensely on activities which appear intrinsically rewarding. Whilst in this flow-like state of gratification, enjoyment and creativity, they experience psychological growth (ibid.).

As adults we are observed, like children, to experience flow states (ibid.) where psychological growth and recovery occurs. We build on our lifetime experience of adversities and add new coping mechanisms as we age. We may apply these mature coping mechanisms, e.g. when facing high stress, by identifying its cause and working through necessary steps to alleviate this. Alternatively we may use a faulty coping mechanism such as use of alcohol or drugs, which may indeed provide immediate alleviation of stress but fail to address the cause of the stress and be potentially harmful.

At the outset of this study it is essential to explore the following key questions:

1. Why study an individual?
2. What is wellbeing?
3. What is resilience?

1. Why study an individual?

“The primacy of the individual, the tyranny of the mean” - George Spaeth

Large studies of chronic diseases are used to design treatment protocols and predict likely outcomes. Results of large medical or psychological studies give conclusions based upon the mean, i.e. the averaged calculations of the study population. However within the same study, significant variations in individual response occur for better or worse. George Spaeth’s quote reminds doctors of the priority to fully assess the unique individual in front of them in order to carefully tailor any therapy to their needs and enable their best health outcome. Studying an individual thus has scientific value, especially to the unique individual in question. For example a person diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes may, by making radical changes to their lifestyle over a period of time, no longer exhibit the disease at all, whilst disease progresses in a similarly matched individual who has been unable to change their lifestyle. Linley, Joseph, Maltby, Harrington, and Wood. (2011, pp. 35-47) support this “person centred approach” and

assert a core principle of positive psychology: “Individual Choice”. By studying an individual exemplar of resilience and wellbeing such as Lily over her lifespan it may be possible to identify and make judgements as to how she experienced wellbeing and developed resilience over her lifespan. Thus the investigator asserts that this study has scientific value and validity as it relates to Lily herself and the life choices and decisions she made.

2. What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is formed from the words “well” and “being”; it is observed that both have existential qualities. A “well” is a source of water and thus a source of life and vitality, whilst “being” describes our human consciousness: “I am”. This then forms the investigator's definition of wellbeing: “being connected to the source of life,” simplified further to “connected to vitality” where vitality is defined as ‘the power-giving continuance of life, present in all living things’. Wellbeing sought in this study is thus defined as: “Connection to vitality”.

3. What is resilience?

Helen Levretsky defines “Resilience as vitality” thus emphasising its normal part of our daily living and struggle to survive. Survival depends on vitality and how we engage with our challenges. Thus there is a steady state to be maintained, or a “homeostasis” of vitality and resilience, dependent upon the availability of three essential components:

- Psychological resources
- Physiological resources
- External, environmental resources.

Resilience is often described as “the ability to bounce back” (New Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003). In this study the investigator defines resilience as “vitality applied” and seeks to understand how the subject actively used her vital resources both to survive and to regain wellbeing.

Method

The qualitative method of thematic analysis has been selected as the most appropriate for analysis of biographical data of an individual. When used across the lifespan of an individual it provides the investigator with a rational, observational and analytical skill to identify key

aspects of patterns and clusters of data. This is also informed by historical aspects of events across Lily’s lifespan which add further clarity to the conclusions drawn.

Richie and Lewis (2012) quote the philosopher René Descartes, who focused upon objectivity and evidence in the search for the truth. Thus we are obliged to immerse ourselves in the facts we know of Lily in an attempt to stand in her shoes and understand her as well as we understand ourselves. Thus we attempt to treat others as we treat ourselves, the "golden rule" (Leviticus 19:18). Linley et al. (2011, pp. 35-47) argue that this person-centred approach which in psychology was first advocated by Carl Rogers, provides “a core basis for positive psychology theory development”.

Table 1.

Thematic analysis method outline (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phases of Analysis:	Process employed:
1) Familiarisation with data	Reading & developing ideas, informs this report
2) Generating codes	Coding & collating data
3) Searching for themes	Collating codes into themes
4) Revising themes	Merging & renaming similar themes whilst retaining inclusivity of descriptions of origin.
5) Reviewing themes	Checking themes are valid
6) Defining and naming clusters of themes	Refining specifics of themes & overall story
7) Naming of major themes and their descriptive clusters	Revisions & refinement outlining main clusters in an overall master spreadsheet with subsequent spreadsheet for each major theme detailing all subcategories and initial descriptions themselves
8) Comparison of themes with VIA strengths and final revision and naming of themes.	Comparison of major themes description with VIA signature strengths identified by retrospective assessment (Figure 1)
9) Producing the report	Report of analysis with vivid extracts relating to research question and literature (Abstract, Introduction, Method, Key Findings, Discussion and Conclusion)

Thematic analysis applied to this biographical data thus enables greater understanding of Lily Paterson by identifying patterns, experiences, meanings and her realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identification of themes captures important facts about the data in relation to the research question and represents a level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. The method (see Table 1) supports theoretical freedom and flexibility, thus enabling the judgement of the researcher, who is also active within the research, to decide what a theme is and whether it is important to the overall research question (ibid.). A rich, detailed and complex account of the data set is thus provided. Full ethical approval was sought and granted for this study by the Ethical Review Committee of the Psychology Department, Buckinghamshire New University.

Results - Summary of Findings

1. Six themes were identified in this study and associated with Lily's wellbeing and resilience, they are also identified as signature strengths: Gratefulness, Hope, Love, Vitality, Leadership, Faith.
2. Across her lifespan Lily is observed to have successfully completed each life stage adding new resources and strengthening existing ones (Erickson, 2008).
3. Overcoming of adversities was directly associated with positive emotions, acquisition of new protective resources, e.g. her methods for dealing with low mood and depression. Overcoming adversity was always followed by long stable periods of happy flourishing and wellbeing.
4. Periods of severe adversity were conversely associated with negative emotions and low mood frequently resulting in anxiety, depression, disease and/or disaster.
5. Direct use of individual choice, at 99 years of age, enabled her to escape death from toxic medication. Her forthright decision to stop all her 21 medicines was made against the firm advice of healthcare professionals, carers and family members alike. Surprising everyone by her swift recovery and following a week with no medication, her GP humbly apologised for poisoning her and after discussion with her, reduced her prescription to only three medicines.

6. Her delegation of significant life choices by granting power of attorney to a trusted relative both acknowledged her own reality of vulnerability and her anticipation of future decline. This choice and trust led directly to substantial improvements in her care and the significant structural changes of her home environment, both of which increased her protective resources and sustained her daily quality of life and happiness.
7. Vitality fuelled by connection to others and hope was applied with effort and perseverance to utilise resources leading to successful overcoming her adversities. Lily met all predictor values of successful ageing at the age of 80 years, Vaillant (2002). An exemplar of moderation, she neither smoked, abused alcohol nor was overweight, she exercised daily until unable to do so, exhibited mature defences and had stable long term relationships.

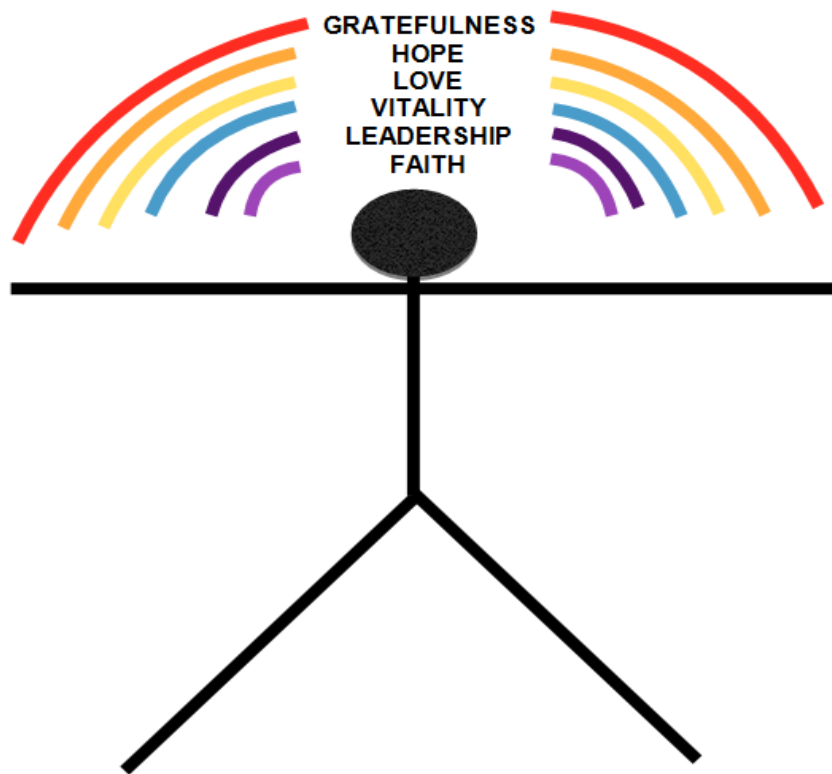


Figure 1. The sources of Lily's life-fullness

Discussion

This study was motivated by observing an increasingly elderly woman achieving good quality of life into advanced old age whilst facing multiple long-term health conditions and life threatening challenges. It identified her six sources of her resilience and wellbeing:

1. Gratefulness

Gratefulness is the attribute recognised by all who visited her: “She was the most grateful person I ever met”. To Lily, “all was gift” and her response was thus gratefulness. Her gratefulness was strongly attractive to others and inspired them to make their best efforts for her. She was happy with what she had, not resentful for things she could no longer have or do. In her last three years, Lily’s happy world was very small, entirely contained in her bedroom. She loved and took intense interest in the small gifts she possessed and by doing so enlarged her world. She engaged with everything at her disposal, e.g. love of people, carers, including her elderly gentleman friend, poetry, songs, memories, stories, photos, flirting with her elderly gentleman friend. At 100 years old she learnt how to use an iPad enjoying YouTube clips of past heartthrobs and singing. She enjoyed music, TV, particularly dancing, fun, laughter, humour, acting out her stories and poems. Stories, poems and songs were observed to be particularly powerful, increasing her gratefulness, positive emotion and enabling deep connection within her family and carers. Her gratefulness was associated with optimism, joy, pleasure, enthusiasm and forgiveness, increased engagement and connection, strengthened relationships and helpfulness. Gratefulness reduced anxiety, improving sleep quality after spending an evening gratefully savouring past memories. Gratitude is believed to strengthen the immune system, lower blood pressure, reduce symptoms of illness and improve recovery from traumatic events and PTSD (Stiendl Rast, Lyubomirsky, and Emmons).

“We must be grateful for even the very smallest blessing” - Lily Paterson, June 2012

2. Hope

Hope appeared pivotal to Lily’s resilience by providing a clear aim, sense of purpose, and confidence in her value and right to enjoy life as a centenarian. Her hope prevailed over medical prognosis to achieve her 103rd year of life. A clear example of the power of hope was in October 2012 when she stopped eating following the death of her beloved cat,

becoming tired and listless. Christmas was mentioned and Lily surprised her carers by saying she was really looking forward to Christmas and her family gathering. The gloom disappeared immediately because we all knew she would see Christmas and we turned her bedroom into “Santa’s Grotto”. At her final Christmas she found her appetite and her spirits immediately lifted. Lily had her family singing carols with her as she sipped a small glass of champagne.

3. Love

Two distinct types of “love” are described as being experienced by Lily, “connected love” (simple connection) and “committed love”(committed support empowered to act decisively on Lily’s behalf). Both are important, both encompass her feelings of belonging, her enjoyment of social stimulation and trust of others. Both types directly increase her levels of engagement and associated wellbeing, health and happiness. However, committed love, whether from family members, friends or long term carers, was directly associated with transformational changes to living standards that ensured her wishes for a happy, dignified life were achieved.

- *Connected love* had an immediate impact on Lily’s positive emotions, experienced through human connection: her safety, sense of belonging, fun, social expression, inclusion and love of life. It was associated with long stable periods of health and appeared to build immunity. Barbara Fredrickson (2013) refers to this type of love as “positivity resonance”.
- *Committed love* was experienced through long term relationships. In Lily this is directly linked to survival from cases of near fatality. Fredrickson (2013) refers to this type of love as “intimate connection”, a relationship of history, frequent connection, trust and openness. It is worth note that inversely, for Lily, the loss of long term committed relationships, through bereavement, was directly associated to subsequent disease, depression and/or disasters.

4. Vitality

Lily applied her vitality wholeheartedly, loved life, trusted life and applied herself to the task of enjoying it. Her sense of fun was like that of a child surrounded by those who loved her. Lily’s wholeheartedness was fuelled by positive emotions, e.g. love, gratitude, hope, and

generated frequent psychologically restorative flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Her sense of command of a limited environment was a key factor in her vitality. Her house had been completely adapted to meet her needs and those of her carers. Her love of nature was satisfied by year round flower baskets and her bird table, directly in view of her window. She had a spacious room with her chosen uplifting pictures. Both her elderly gentleman friend and her beloved cat spent hours daily in her room in addition to the constant encouraging music of reassuring voices of carers and visitors. Her love of life and gratitude was attractive to others, who would wake her from pleasant sleep to receive her warm smile of anticipation of good things to come.

5. Leadership

Leadership in Lily's life was expressed in her ability to take full responsibility for her actions, her ability to influence, lead and manage people. Lily was self controlled, regulating her life with the ability to exercise moderation. Throughout her lifespan she had enjoyed prominence as head girl in both primary and secondary school, leading dancing classes at 18 years old, managing a restaurant with a staff of 65 people at 28 years of age. later managing three record shops and finally her own small hotel in the Isle of Man. She asserted her choices decisively and with effort on a daily basis.

She exhibited agile cognitive function and an exceptional memory, specifically high ability to direct her attention mindfully to employ and regulate today's pleasures and joys (positive restorative resources). Decisive directed attention was particularly noted when following painful nursing procedures; Lily would immediately switch to interests such as poetry. This was effortful work, determinedly exercising choice to enjoy her precious time and to participate in her environment and all the activities offered by her community of carers. Exceptional memory was observed to benefit Lily's resilience by: a) retaining knowledge of pathways of overcoming and recovery from past adversities, b) enabling restorative resources to function, e.g. gratitude and savouring of happy memories stored from past experience, c) expressing private deeper feelings and emotions through poetry and psalms committed to memory, d) memory of adverse experiences led to both post-traumatic growth and post-traumatic stress, i.e. growth and development of new resources and new anxiety alarms. An example of learned growth is her overcoming severe clinical depression following the wartime death of her fiancé by directing her attention wholeheartedly towards positive emotional resources such as dancing and poetry and learned methods of dismissal of gloomy

thoughts or news. Conversely, previous traumas caused stress “alarms” which alerted her to an urgent need to make a decision or exert more effort to manage or avoid a crisis. Thus it appeared true for Lily that “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger” (Joseph, 2011).

6. Faith

Centred on Christ: Lily’s life was centred on her faith in the resurrection of Christ, a historical fact that for her changed everything. Her faith was practiced privately, quietly, and above all sincerely. Lily’s closely held world was liberated and free from the anxiety rooted in scarcity existing in the world around her. Lily’s God was not distant to her but actively participating in the world. Thus she had direct connection to the infinite source of life and vitality. As the child of her creator, Lily felt she must create, change, adapt, each day, each moment. Lily only served her “King”.

Gratefulness: Lily saw everything, every moment, every breath as a “gift”, so her only appropriate response was gratitude, a gratefulness directly nourished by her practice of faith. Her gratefulness overflowed in thanksgiving, e.g. she insisted on a thanksgiving party for carers and family at all her last birthdays; it was preceded by a thanksgiving mass in her home in which she would share the Eucharist. The meaning of “Eucharist” is thanksgiving. For her last 20 years she was largely housebound but each Sunday, a friend from her church community would visit with the Eucharist, her “bread of life”. Gratefulness was at the heart of her daily Christian practice, it was the lens through which she saw her cup overflow, she saw what she had rather than what she had not.

Trust: Trust in life, trust in others, trust that she had purpose and value. The primacy of her inner self (primacy of conscience) exercised in her free will. Her quiet, clear and private daily practice of her faith and spirituality. Trust that all will be well, acceptance of events that were outside her control, lack of fear, and courage are attributes which astonished others: “she just left her front door open all day.”

Mindfulness: Lily lived in the ‘now’, in the moment; it was all she had. She was in control of her mind and directed her attention, with effort, towards activities she found rewarding. Stillness, silence and solitude were all important to Lily, times to replenish, restore and renew. She kept a short reminder of the value and meaning of the moment based on God’s name, “Yahweh”, meaning “I Am”: “Do not look for me in the past with its regrets and

safety, I am not there, my name is not 'I Was', neither look for me in the future with its fears and uncertainties, my name is not 'I Will Be'. Look for me, hope in me and follow me in the present for my name is 'I Am' and you too as my child bear my name 'I Am' also."

Resilience Across a Lifespan

Across her lifespan it is possible to observe the growth of Lily's protective resources, described by Masten (2010). We also see the successful completion of life stages outlined by Erick Erickson (2008).

Factors Relating to Resilience and Wellbeing Emerging from Lily's Lifespan:

Steady state resilience for balanced wellbeing: Normal steady state resilience and wellbeing: utilising resources and coping mechanisms adequate to overcome the challenges of the day. Here a balanced homeostasis of wellbeing is restored, as with many other biological systems, to maintain a steady state. Within a range of variable emotions, euphorias or stresses, peaks of happiness or sadness are all returned to the median steady state of wellbeing. Coping mechanisms and resources emerging through earlier life experiences brought into play efficient pathways of recovery from both adversity and peaks of happiness restoring wellbeing. Previous life experience thus builds robust means of recovery in the same way as if one had been inoculated against disease. Factors associated with Lily's steady state wellbeing:

- Agile cognitive function, ability to engage in the present, mindfully directing her attention to positive resources and to dismiss rather than dwell on negative thoughts
- Daily exercise: eight decades of daily physical exercise, i.e. brisk walking daily and dancing whenever possible
- Healthy weight: lean figure, healthy nutrition, moderate life without excess
- Low alcohol consumption
- Non smoker
- Stability of relationships and ability to build new relationship
- Low set points, content, undemanding
- Possessed mature defences

Critical resilience for survival: Faced by overwhelming adversity or challenge, urgent external resources had to be engaged, e.g. 1) Lily's pneumonia as a 12 year old, 2) sudden death of her fiancé as an adult, and 3) medical poisoning as an elderly woman. In these cases, Lily's functional systems and protective resources were inadequate and alarms developed from previous experience of adversity warning her that urgent action was essential. Either the sudden nature of the adversity or because it has not been encountered before pushes normal protective resources beyond a critical coping range to a tipping point where the stress loading - referred to as the *allostatic load* by Leveretsky (2015) - becomes too heavy and is followed by anxiety and possibly depression, disease or disasters. Thus in severe adversity or trauma, urgent new resources must be employed. These were typically external to Lily but required her free will and choices to employ them.

The value of a role model, making clear individual life choices, perseverance: Lily had a favourite, fun and formidable Aunt Jessie, a suffragette, a prominent single woman who cared for Lily's grandfather whilst running his wholesale potato business, with labourers, trucks and railway siding. When Lily was only three years old, in March 1914, Aunt Jessie had famously arranged for Emmeline Pankhurst to be hidden in her grandfather's potato van and transported through a mob to speak at a rally in Glasgow's St Andrews Hall. Mrs Pankhurst was then smuggled into the hall through a rear entrance in a laundry basket and was later arrested. Following her father's death, her aunt sold up and moved away to become a sister of charity nursing the sick. Lily at 11 years and then again at 17 years was head girl of her school; at 28 years, like her aunt, she held the responsibility of managing a large staff. Also like her aunt, at 50 years of age when her last parent died, she sold up and moved away to start a new life, opening a hotel in the Isle of Man. Both were prominent working women at ease with responsibilities of leadership in times of male domination of the workplace where such prominence challenged societal norms. Lily, like her aunt, was comfortably able to take responsibility and make self-directed, life-changing choices and decisions when necessary. Lily, also like her aunt, was able to stand up to authority, e.g. 1) that of her father when leaving University to pursue her love of dancing, and 2) that of medical professionals to stop all medication against advice and surprisingly recover from death's door.

A remarkable memory for savouring peak experiences: Lily had a remarkable memory noted in the Glasgow Herald as "Glasgow's Memory Girl" she used this gift daily both reciting

poems and songs but also to memorise new poetry. She had a lifetime passionate love of poetry, music, dancing, acting and people. Of music, she would often quote Shakespeare: “If music be the food of love, play on. Give me excess of it that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and so die”. She called upon this store of memories capable of lifting positive emotions daily. Use of a lifespan album of photographs was used on a weekly basis by carers to jog these happy memories and would consistently raise her mood to happy states and provoke song and laughter.

Balancing love of others whilst replenishing self love: Lily moderated her life and lived in steady contentment; she loved others whilst maintaining her own self value and her personal interests and loves. This care for self and replenishment of her inner personal needs is seen to directly provide her with positive emotional affect. Conversely when she neglected her self love, usually in bereavement for a loved one, she experienced low mood, depression and illness. Bereavement and low mood were directly associated with shingles following the loss of her friend Bill, her diagnosis of breast cancer following loss of her younger sister, and falls and hospitalisation following the loss of her brother and last sibling.

Building a positive emotional environment: For the reasons given above, maintaining positive emotions, hope and wellbeing was the main goal of her nephew and this goal permeated her home and was strongly supported by her many carers, church visitors and gentlemen friend. The adaptation of her home and physical space to make it ideal to her needs also significantly assisted this aim. One carer visiting her house commented with a deep sigh, “This was such a happy house”. This environment surrounded and supported by carers and nature was reciprocally strengthened by Lily herself with her positive growth mindset and optimistic outlook. This environment became a “wellbeing community” in which all benefited and particularly Lily.

Conclusion

Lily’s wellbeing and resilience in adversity across her lifespan is a result of three major factors:

- 1) “Vitality connected” understood as connection to her life source; this is observed as connection to a generous supply of caring individuals, namely excellent daily carers, additional daily carers, her 20 years of weekly visits from church members and her monthly visit by her priest, her connection to her family and her gentleman friend, her

connection through faith to her inner being, meaning and value, to her professed King and eternal source of life, her gratefulness and enjoyment of all her gifts and loves even in humble circumstances. Love itself is thus seen as key to her wellbeing.

- 2) “Vitality applied”: engagement every day with her world and the people in it. This application was effortful work particularly in times of pain. She persevered doggedly. Her application was reciprocal to the love she received and to the gratitude that was her defining mindset attitude and expression and was so attractive to those who called upon her.
- 3) Her individual free will and choices which steered her safely through stormy waters and led to her enjoyment of such dignity and quality of elderly life. Thus this study adds evidence to support the principle of “the primacy of the individual” and of individual choice, supported in the works of Thomas Aquinas, George Speath and Alex Linley.

Lily had her “life to the full”, she was not to be cheated of a precious minute of it. She was overall grateful for even the smallest blessing and as lucky as she indeed considered herself to be. This study finds that in contrast to the work of Masten's “Ordinary Magic” (2010) that Lily’s resilience was observed as “extra-ordinary magic”, prompting the study's investigator to study its cause and a cascade of emotional uplift and pride in all those who loved and knew Lily. This study gives as its final concluding sentence Lily's own final instruction delivered by her with gravity and sincerity for all the world to take heed:

“We must be grateful for even the very smallest blessing”

- Lily Maria Paterson 1910 – 2013

Reference List on request.

From Academia to Practice: What Do Positive Psychology Coaches Do?

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Abstract

Whilst positive psychologists have been calling for a union with the field of coaching for some time, the call back from coaches has been quieter. This study aimed to give coaches a voice to discover how they interpreted and translated positive psychology into their practice. Ten coaches who had graduated from Masters of Applied Positive Psychology degrees from the UK, US and Australia, were interviewed. Thematic analysis on the data revealed themes on the way of being of the coaches, their toolbox of coaching theories and techniques, and their external identities. Links to solution-focused theory, current criticisms of coach training and future direction of research for positive psychology coaching are discussed with implications for course organisers as well as positive psychologists and coaches.

Introduction

This study aimed to explore how coaches were applying positive psychology (PP) in their practice. Both PP and coaching are relatively new fields that are still emerging. Positive psychology has been defined as the empirical study of human strengths and virtues (Sheldon, & King, 2001). Coaching facilitates individuals in unlocking their potential in order to enhance performance (Whitmore, 1992). With a shared focus on maximizing human functioning (Joseph, as cited in in Kauffman & Linley, 2007), and a desire to move away from psychology's historical deficit approach (Kauffman, Boniwell & Silberman, 2014), it is understandable why coaching and PP have been called natural allies (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011) and why coaching is seen as the perfect vehicle for putting PP into practice (Kauffman, 2006).

Indeed, they have already started to come together to form the field of positive psychology coaching (PPC). Whilst early forms of coaching first appeared in organisations before progressing to academia in the form of coaching psychology (Allen, 2016), PPC has followed the reverse path. Now, in order to progress further, PPC needs empirical 'notes from the

field' to feedback on what PP coaches actually do in their practice (Biswas-Diener, 2010). This research looked to graduates from the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) degrees who were coaching or had coached since graduation to explore what they had taken away from PP and how they used it in their practice. The aim of the study was to discover what PP concepts and tools worked, when and with whom, using qualitative research methods.

Literature Review

Positive psychology has come a long way since its inauguration in 1998 when Martin Seligman called for a change of focus in psychology research (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). He urged psychologists to redress the imbalance that 50 years of focusing mostly on the negative side of human existence had done, and to build a positive version of the DSM-IV (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is important to note that psychology has not been wholly devoid of positivity up until then (Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006). Indeed, PP has many similarities with humanistic psychology, which had been around since the 1950s (Resnick, Warmoth, & Selin, 2001), and which too values positive emotions, and sees individuals as 'fully functioning' rather than in need of fixing (Williams, 2012).

Humanistic psychology has also been credited for being the birthplace of coaching (Allen, 2016). With such overlap between the three fields, what is PP offering that is new, and what differentiates PPC from other types of coaching?

Kauffman et al. (2014) explain that "at the core of PPC is a belief in the power of science to elucidate the best approaches for positively transforming clients' lives" (p. 157). It seems then one of the defining features of PP is its empirical approach (Linley et al., 2006). Positive psychology has approached previously under-researched, 'fuzzy' concepts such as optimism, wellbeing and gratitude with as much deliberate scientific rigor as it did with concepts such as anger, depression and anxiety (Seligman, 2002). As a result, PP has contributed greatly to our understanding of these concepts, how they relate to each other and how to measure them (Grant, 2006). It has also developed 'empirical self-help' exercises called positive psychology interventions (PPI; Parks, Schueller, & Tasimi, 2013) which individuals can practice in order to cultivate positive cognitions, habits, and feelings (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Although PP and its interventions can be self-administered (see Lyubomirsky, 2007), positive psychologists have identified coaching as the best vehicle for delivering PP and have been calling for a union of the two (Kauffman & Linley, 2007). In turn, PP promises to bring credibility to the coaching profession that has received criticism for its lack of theoretical grounding (Grant, 2006), and lack of empirical proof of its effectiveness (Kauffman, 2006).

The resulting field of PPC is in its infancy, with the first book dedicated wholly to the topic published only in 2007 (see Biswas-Diener & Dean). Most of the literature on the subject of PPC has come from positive psychologists (Passmore & Oades, 2014), encouraging coaches to incorporate PP in their practice and feed back on findings (Biswas-Diener, 2010).

Feedback from coaches has been scarce. A literature search on experiences of coaches using PP revealed an unpublished capstone project (see Berridge, 2011) and a Ph.D. in progress by Ebbe Lavendt. The former did not engage in empirical research methods, but reported on findings from interviews with 7 coaches who used PP in their practice. The latter is an empirical research study specifically on effective factors of change in PPC. Literature on how PP is used by coaches in their practice was not found.

This could be due to coaches not reporting findings or it could be due to lack of uptake of PP by coaches. Grant (2009) points out that whilst a lot of progress has been made in the realms of PP research, an area that has been overlooked is how exactly coaches can operationalize PP in their practice.

Biswas-Diener (2010) admits his first book on PPC missed this crucial element of PP delivery:

..as an academic I have always been excited by ideas, and I realized, all too late, that coaches are generally excited about action.....Although positive psychology is, itself, an applied science, there is as yet, no coherent or consistent methodology for delivering positive psychology services. (p. 2)

Coaching-appropriate methodology is scarce with the only PPC model to choose from being Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson's (2005) Authentic Happiness Coaching model (AHC). Whether coaches use this model is yet to be found out. This qualitative study hoped to discover more about which models coaches used and generally about how coaches were using PP in their practice.

Method

As the nature of this research question is one of exploring the subjective, lived experience of the participants, the adopted epistemological stance of the researcher is a social constructionist one. This position believes that individuals each take their own ‘reading’ of the world, interpreting what they see through their own social and historic lenses, and using language to relay their construction of reality (Willig, 2008; p. 7). This study accepted that each participant experienced coaching, PP, and the MAPP degree differently and therefore was interested in capturing as much of their perspective as possible. A qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews was adopted for its fit with social constructionism, and ability to capture in-depth, rich and descriptive data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) point out that open-ended questions have the power to “evoke responses that are unanticipated by the researcher” (p.4), and capture the nuances of the human experience such as non-verbal language, hesitations, contradictory behaviours and beliefs, making it the most suitable approach for exploring an emerging field such as PPC.

Participants

In order to control for the type of PP training participants received, this study recruited graduates from credible providers of the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) degree (Biswas-Diener, 2010). Originally graduates from University of East London (UEL) were interviewed, but when the initial themes started to emerge, the decision was made to expand the sample to include graduates from Australia and America to see if there were notable cultural differences (see Figure 1). Participants were recruited via an email that was sent out to the MAPP alumni network or via direct contact. Ten participants were interviewed in total, six of which were female. Their ages ranged from 28 – 65 with a mean age of 44.7 years.

Number of participants

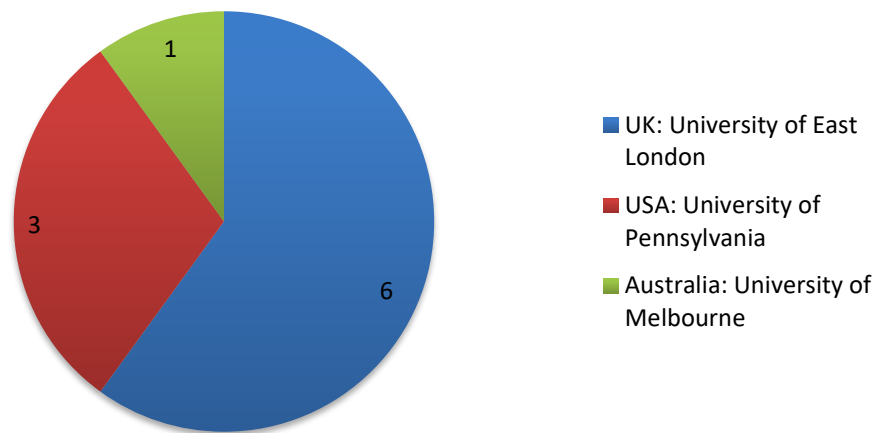


Figure 1. Number of participants interviewed and the university of their MAPP degree

Data Collection

After the study received ethical approval, participants were contacted with an invitation to participate explaining the nature of the study. Each invitation email provided more information on confidentiality and right of withdrawal. Upon agreement to interview, participants were emailed a consent form and a link to a survey of six closed questions ascertaining their coaching experience.

As geographical location of participants varied from the researcher, the interviews were recorded via Skype ($n = 8$) and phone, depending on participant preference. Field notes were taken on body language and notable intonation during the call, and reflections were noted after.

The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Eight open-ended questions were used as a framework, but the interviews allowed for flexibility.

Data Analysis

This study was interested in seeing if there were commonalities, or themes, that emerged across the data set. Thematic analysis was deemed the best method of achieving this for a number of reasons. Other qualitative data analysis methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis place importance on the individual's unique experience of the phenomenon, and typically work with small sample sizes (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007)

making it a more idiographic approach (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). Thematic analysis on the other hand, looks across the data set, not solely at the individual, so it can identify repeated patterns of meaning (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015) and is able to go beyond description and answer the research question at hand (Braun & Clark, 2006). Due to its theoretical flexibility and epistemological freedom, thematic analysis lends itself perfectly to exploring new concepts and is able to relay rich data concisely (Braun & Clark, 2006). Analysis was approached inductively which meant that theme development was steered by the content of the data rather than by existing ideas, which is a more deductive approach and not one employed for exploring novel areas (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). Braun and Clark's (2006) six step guideline to thematic analysis was followed and entailed immersion in the data, generation of codes, development into themes, refinement and constant checking between themes, codes and data set.

Results

The themes that emerged from the data grouped together in three related concepts as shown in Table 1. Each theme will be illustrated with relevant quotes from the interviews with a letter indicating participant, followed by transcript line number e.g. (D. 112)

Table 1.

Thematic Analysis results: summarized explanation of sub-themes and major themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Summary
Way of Being	1) Solution-focused	The worldview and coaching approach of the participants
	2) Confidence	Belief in self and in technique
Coach's Toolbox		The participants' store of coaching techniques
External Identity of coach	1) Reassurance to others	Why the participants chose an academic degree
	2) Varied professional identities	The multiple skillset and roles of the participants
	3) Marketing	How participants relayed their varied professional roles to the public

Way of Being

1) Solution-focused approach

The most consistent way PP appeared in the sessions and the lives of the coaches was in their attitude. All the coaches had a solution-focused approach, which explored what was already working in the client's life. For some, this 'direction of focus' (E. 156) was a shift from how they previously were with clients, and occurred as a result of going through the MAPP course:

In the past, I might have been much quicker to send somebody to therapy, and now I would not ever do that because I don't look at them as having something wrong. I just figure we haven't figured out what's right yet (H. 168-171)

For others, MAPP did not cause a drastic change in their coaching, because they had a solution-focused attitude prior to enrolling, but it seemed to solidify their approach even more:

I was already working with strength, resilience, things like that, but what I wasn't so focused on was effectively an appreciative inquiry approach....so looking for where it was already working, looking for where it was already at its best, and I focus very specifically on that now. (B. 31-4)

2) Confidence

As part of the MAPP course, the coaches had to apply PP theory and tools to their lives, and reflect on this in their portfolio. This application allowed them to explore the different techniques and interventions to discover their personal preferences and to see how they could use them in their worlds with their clients. Some developed their own models, labels, or strategies for using the tools and so were much more confident in talking about these with clients, and introducing them in sessions:

Confidence in it [PP] has changed, in that, I felt like I had built my own opinions on what worked and what didn't (F. 95-6)

So through personal experience there are things that when clients ask for possible strategy suggestions, these are things that I can flag up if they want them. (E. 142-3)

Coach's Toolbox

Every coach made reference to their toolbox, describing it as 'a store that you take from' (C. 200). This store contained techniques, models and theories the coach had learnt and amassed throughout their professional development. These ranged from non-academic tools such as neurolinguistic programming (NLP) and business tools, to tools from the career coaching or psychology fields, such as motivational interviewing, happenstance theory and cognitive-behavioural therapy. Positive psychology tools were added to the collection, but they didn't necessarily dominate:

I guess the way I would put it is positive psychology is a tool for understanding people, but it's not the only tool in the toolbox. (G. 116-7)

Which specific PPIs the coaches used and how was particular to the type of clients they had and to their 'way of being'. Some coaches didn't use PPIs as their 'way of being' was more humanistic and client-centered:

When I first started coaching, I found it actually to be difficult to put positive psychology and coaching together because there's such a strong push in coaching that you let the client lead the way. The client brings the agenda. The client is the one who knows what the client is going to want to do. It isn't like teaching. It's not like coming and saying, "Well, I've got this positive intervention that you should do." (G. 285-290)

How much the coaches took from the MAPP course varied with the individual. However the theme behind all the choices was that they had selected the tools and theories they liked and felt comfortable and confident using so their way of doing fit seamlessly with their way of being.

External Identity

1) Reassurance to others

Out of the ten participants, six used the words 'credibility' and 'academic rigor' when speaking about the reason why they decided to do the MAPP course. It seemed that having an academic qualification was there to provide reassurance to potential clients:

So being able to demonstrate, to show that with studies of evidence base, with graph, with numbers, where possible....being able to use that just allows groups, I think to feel a bit safer (F. 246-9)

It's just another professional credential that you're using to meet the needs of your target market (H. 232-3)

2) Varied professional identities

Coaches had many professional identities as no one coached full-time. Alongside coaching, their professional interests ranged from running training programs and facilitating workshops to writing and speaking at conferences. Their external professional identity was also something that was not fixed and changed depending on who they were talking to (e.g. personal coaching vs. business coaching).

Like when I approach businesses I'm generally a bit careful about positive psychology terminology. Same with existentialism, you need to be a bit careful about that, but, in life coaching, that's definitely a selling point. (A. 241-242)

3) Marketing

The external, public facing identities evolved as the coaches evolved, which is why the marketing theme came up. The coaches needed to find a way to explain to the world who they were and what they did.

I mean ideally I would call myself a coach and I would work with anybody. But, uh, in this world, with the positioning of marketing, that's just not on...I just don't end up with any clients because people don't find you and they're just really confused because there's too many different coaching approaches. (A. 245-7)

In 50% of the interviews, there was a theme of confusion around what classified as coaching and what fell under the PP umbrella. This confusion led to three coaches employing brand specialists to help them clarify their external identity for target clients.

Discussion

This study has helped shed light onto what coaches have found useful from a PP master's and what they use in their practice with implications for coaches curious about PP, positive psychologists and course organisers.

This research sought to find out how PP appeared in coaching. It found a strong solution-focused (SF) theme amongst the participants. Whilst SF and PP have similarities, they are viewed as separate fields in psychology (Bannick & Jackson, 2011). SF coaching and PP are

both positively focused, and search for what is already working for a client rather than problem-solving. However, SF has been described as being “more art than science” whereas PP is science first and foremost (Bannick & Jackson, 2011; p.8). Positive psychology from the outset aimed to be empirical and followed academic protocol, rigorously testing all its theories (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Solution-focus practitioners however, have not been as focused on examining how SF processes achieve their results (Grant, 2011). They look at the client’s personal resources for answers, searching for solutions within individual contexts instead of introducing academic theories and exercises from outside the individual’s life (George, Iveson, & Ratner, 2013). The participants in this study graduated from a PP course, so one might expect their approach to be more science driven. However, the science of PP played a less prominent role within the actual coaching sessions, with participants making more references to their broad SF worldview when discussing their coaching approach within sessions.

The question then becomes, if PP shows up as SF in practice, has having a solution-focused worldview improved their coaching? Grant and Palmer (2015) argue that it is the practitioner’s worldview, and in particular a PP mindset, that has a significant impact on clients. Having a positive, solution-focused frame of reference steers practitioners’ worldview, enabling them to help their clients get from languishing to flourishing. In other words, knowledge of the multitude of benefits of being in a flourishing state (Seligman, 2011), makes flourishing the end goal for coaches, and not the absence of a dis-ease or bad habits.

The participants seemed to have a stronger belief in the SF approach after graduation, than before MAPP. Confidence in their technique was identified as a theme. It seems that knowledge of the theories and concepts behind PP gave participants greater conviction in the efficacy of being SF in their coaching practice and greater confidence in applying it in their sessions. Confidence in own coaching ability is one of the elements that make a coach effective (van Niewerbergh, 2014). However, it could be argued that it was not PP in itself that boosted the confidence of the coaches, but rather completing a master’s degree. Could the participants have felt as confident if they had finished a master’s in coaching psychology instead? It seems Seligman (2007) is correct about the usefulness for coaches to have “a scientific, evidence-based backbone and a theoretical backbone” (p. 266), as this provides credibility to one’s practice (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007), and therefore could lead to

increased confidence. However, this does not necessarily need to be a PP backbone. This confidence could potentially occur as a result of completing a psychology course, or another related evidence-based subject. Especially as the ‘toolbox’ that all the participants referred to seemed to be a mixed bag of approaches, where PP was only one of many tools used. Future studies could compare the levels of confidence of coaches graduating from a MAPP degree with those completing a non-academic coaching course.

There is support for the benefits of having a mixed toolbox in the literature. Coaching psychologists such as Grant (2006) argue that staying theoretically-flexible is essential to being an effective coach as it allows for the coach to truly be client-centered and work case by case, applying the theory that best suits each individual client. This was what emerged in the study as none of the participants relied singularly on PP and instead used a breadth of theories, tools and techniques. Indeed, Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007) encourage coaches to view PP not as a dominator, but as an addition to existing approaches.

Positive psychology was inaugurated as an applied science (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000) whose application came in the form of PPIs aiming to increase positive variables such as subjective well-being (Parks & Biswas-Diener, 2013). Examples are three good things, gratitude visit (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and random acts of kindness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). As part of finding out how PP appeared in sessions, participants were asked which PPIs they used, with which clients and how. There was no unanimous winner, or method of delivery, with a couple of participants voicing surprise at finding they actually did not use or need PPIs. Terni (2015) points out that as PPIs, by design, can be self-administered, a coach is not needed to deliver them. Indeed some coaches in this study preferred to set PPIs as homework, using the session to have a coaching conversation. The absence of in-session PPIs can be due to coaches preferring to interact with the client. This is understandable as it has been found that the presence of another, actively listening, without judgment, practicing unconditional positive regard, can have a powerful effect on the client (Wilkins, 2009) and is in itself a positive intervention (Biswas-Diener, 2009). McKenna and Davis (2009) found that the therapeutic relationship plays a more active ingredient in change in therapy than theory or techniques, accounting for 30% compared to 15% respectively.

However, ignoring PPIs because they can be executed autonomously misses the value that coaching can bring to these exercises. Terni (2015) believes that current PPIs “do not fully

tap the potential offered by the interactive nature of the coaching session” (p. 8) because they lack a clear framework from which to operate with. Indeed, PPIs were not originally intended for coaching, so in order for them to have a life in coaching, Grant (2006) suggests that further work is needed to develop them specifically for use within a one-to-one relationship.

There are many coaching frameworks to choose from (e.g. GROW, CBC), however which models coaches are aware of depends on their coach training. Whilst this study was interested in exploring how PP looked in a coaching context, what became apparent along the way, was that the coaching context itself warranted further exploration. Interestingly, none of the participants in this study were accredited by the three recognised professional coaching bodies, and none mentioned an intention to be. Some did say they had coach training through an NLP program, however NLP has been called a pseudoscience (Corballis, 2012) due to its antitheoretical nature so is not classified as academic (Tosey, Mathison & Michelli, 2005). This desire for credibility and lack of coach training was an interesting dichotomy that surfaced. Extending the toolbox metaphor, a plumber, for example, may have many tools and may have been instructed in their individual use, but if their knowledge of how the drainage system works is surface level, how effective and long-lasting will their results be? The unregulated nature of coaching means the barriers to entry are low – “One has only to decide that they will become a coach and secure their first client to begin coaching” (Spence, Cavanagh, & Grant, 2006, p.78). Coach training varies in length, quality and curricula (Spence, Cavanagh, & Grant, 2006) – from “fast-food poor-quality coach trainings” (Whitmore in Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; p. 243) to academic courses that offer advanced practical skills grounded in empirical research. This results in a huge variation of experience and qualifications in individuals who call themselves coaches. The benefit is that coaching is informed by vastly different professions, which creates a rich diverse field with a wide range of methodology (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010). However, this also results in no unified standard of practice (Grant, 2006) with some coaching being likened to self-help (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007) and being as empirically sound as the field of alternative medicine (Furnham in Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). This diversity in coaching creates confusion both for practitioners, as was found in this study, and for potential consumers of coaching (Whybrow & Palmer, 2006). How then to clarify the confusion and elevate standards of coaching practice?

One solution is to deliver coach training in tandem with psychology training, as UEL are doing with their world-first Masters in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology (MAPPCP) launched in 2015, so that future practitioners have the depth of coaching in place to be able to utilize the nuances of PP.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

By their very nature, qualitative research findings cannot be generalized. However, qualitative research interviews are extremely valuable when exploring new concepts as they are able to capture rich, descriptive data of an individual's experience (Denscombe, 1998). The themes that emerged are useful springboards for further exploration for academics, and for action points for practitioners. Findings from this study also point to the opportunity for academics and practitioners to work together to develop specific methodology for delivering PPIs within a coaching context. More work is needed in the area of developing PP within a coaching framework. Passmore and Oades (2014) started work in this area with their series of papers published in *The Coaching Psychology*, which introduced a PP technique in each issue and explained how it may be used within a coaching session. While such tangible examples are useful, more practitioners sharing their experiences would open up a much-needed dialogue in this area, which may speed up development of coaching with PP.

With an increasing number of organisations employing coaches, there is great potential for using these opportunities to conduct further research. Specifically, quantitative studies that use reliable and valid scales to measure coaching success, and longitudinal research studies, two methods that coaching research could benefit from (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007).

It is also worth noting that this study consisted of participants with mixed-level experience in coaching. Some had coached for decades, others had only been coaching for a year. Whilst common themes emerged, grouping themes together across the sample may have overlooked the nuanced differences between the novice and the mature coaches. Clutterbuck and Megginson (2011) believe coaches transition through four levels of coaching maturity, and that these levels are sequential, meaning that a strong focus on interventions, for example, is natural and is to be expected of novice coaches. This may explain those participants who did use PPIs frequently in sessions. Those that did not use PPIs as often may have been in the second level of maturity which is process-based, and where coaches view the emotional relationship between coach and coachee as the instigator for change (Clutterbuck &

Megginson, 2011). Further studies could investigate whether there is a notable difference between coach maturity and PP use.

Conclusion

This study aimed to feed back on coaches' experience of applying PP to their practice. It found that although the appeal of PP is in its empirical grounding, and for some of the participants in this study, the appeal of a PP masters was in the credibility the academic rigor provided, science did not take center stage in the coaches' practice. Instead, PP was integrated into their approach and was an additional tool to their toolbox. It boosted participants' self-efficacy, however it is uncertain whether this had an impact on coachees or whether this was any better or longer-lasting than a boost one would receive from going through any type of professional development. The study also supported previous findings that as a result of the unregulated nature of coaching, there are vast differences in coaches' accreditation, training and experience (Grant, 2006), with some individuals coaching without any professional coach training. Whilst PP can be taught or delivered without a coach (Terni, 2015) the complementary nature and shared goals of the two fields mean that delivering PP using coaching techniques can really help coachees achieve a flourishing state (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). Grant (2009) points out that the field of PPC is still missing research on appropriate methodology of PP to coaching. Programs such as MAPPCCP are a step in the right direction and will shed more light on to how exactly the two fields can work together in practice.

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What is the Intersection of Creativity and Positive Psychology in Organisations?

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Abstract

From the earliest days of the positive psychology movement, creativity was listed as one of the most positive and life affirming traits of humanity, an expression of eudaimonia and strengths in action. However, whilst there has been much research on creativity, it has received little attention from a positive psychology perspective. The study explored the processes and experiences of creative people, from the perspective of positive psychology. The research was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, exploring the participant's experience of creativity within their life world; data was gathered by means of eight semi-structured interviews and analysed through thematic analysis. The research demonstrated that positive psychology and creativity are inextricably linked, drawing out the extent to which creativity is a cognitive, affective, and relational expression of positive psychology in action. Creative individuals are able to thrive within the emergent, paradoxical and, at times, emotionally difficult process of creativity, and able to balance the polarities of human existence. Creativity is being both hedonic and eudaimonic, a source of well-being, purpose and meaning.

Introduction

The vision for positive psychology was an approach to psychology that focused on human strengths and potential, on what makes individuals and communities flourish, and on what makes life worth living (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Creativity is listed as one of the most positive, life-affirming traits of humanity, and people in all walks of life report that they feel at their peak and in flow when they are being creative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

In the intervening period, whilst creativity has been the subject of much research, it has received very little attention or development from a positive psychology perspective. The aim of this research was to step into and address this gap, to discuss the creative processes and

experiences of creative individuals from a positive psychological perspective. The findings were contrasted with existing theory and research on positive psychology to learn more about where it overlaps with creativity.

Creativity is often perceived as being something that only applies to an elite group of people and unattainable to most, or as relating purely to artistic ability (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). An alternative perspective is that, far from being elitist, creativity goes to the heart of what makes us human (Sawyer, 2006; Soriano de Alencar, 2012) and is a fundamental part of our psychological well-being (Richards, 2007).

Creativity is frequently conceived of as principally a cognitive process, and much of the research to date has focused on the cognitive aspects of creativity. However, this study demonstrated that it is a cognitive, affective and relational process, working together, all part of what it means to be human, and all part of creativity.

Literature Review

Interest in the concept of human creativity is certainly not new, with the quest to understand creation dating back to the Bible and ancient eastern cultures (Runco & Albert 2010). It is J. P. Guilford (1950), however, who is broadly credited with inspiring the scientific study of creativity through his 1950 Presidential address to the American Psychological Society.

Whilst there is an abundance of literature about the attributes of creative individuals (e.g. Barron & Harrington, 1981; Feist, 1998; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) and collective creativity (e.g. Amabile, 1988; George, 2007; Klijn & Tomic, 2010), there is less that directly explores the relationship between positive psychology and creativity. That which does exist predominately explores singular concepts that fall into the domain of positive psychology, such as flow and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and positive affect and creativity (e.g. Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Isen & Reeve, 2005) rather than the broader contribution of positive psychology to creativity. The field of Positive Organizational Behaviour (Luthans, 2002) begins to integrate positive psychology concepts and organizational behaviour with a focus on state-like psychological capacities that can be measured and developed such as efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism.

The purpose of this literature review, therefore, is to explore creativity and its intersection with Positive Psychology, specifically with regards to affect, hope, optimism, intrinsic

motivation and meaning. It will first explore the complex nature of creativity and then begin to place creativity in the context of the core positive psychological constructs indicated above.

What is Creativity?

Creativity is difficult to precisely define and there is much debate about what constitutes creativity (versus concepts such as originality and innovation, for example). Fryer (2012) describes it as a “fuzzy concept” (p.21). Sawyer (2006) explains that creativity is hard to define since the concept of ‘creativity’ is subjective, sensitive to contextual, cultural and temporal norms and expectations.

The generally accepted definition seems to be that creativity is “the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain” (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996, p.1155). Creativity in the workplace is broadened to include the production of novel and useful ideas or solutions concerning products, services, processes, and procedures (Amabile, 1988; Amabile, 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Zhou & Shalley, 2003).

However, this definition does not encompass the breadth and complexity of creative thinking, creative attributes or organizational conditions that are most likely to enable creativity to thrive. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) adds an important component to defining creativity by adding field (social) and domain (cultural) into his systems approach. He posits that creativity happens when a person makes a change in a domain, and that this change will have relevance over time. In order to have longevity, the change in domain must be recognized by the field as being novel. The social and cultural recognition is therefore critical in this model.

This is an interesting question; to what extent can something be considered creative if there is no third party judgement of it being so? Can something be creative just because the creator believes it to be? The researcher posits that it depends on the purpose for which the individual is being creative. Certainly for societal advances or, as Runco (2004) puts it, as “an engine of cultural evolution” (p.658), lasting change will occur when others perceive the novelty to be useful and worthy of acceptance into the field. However, that perception is subjective and is influenced by many factors such as historical context, whether the domain is ready to accept change (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

This type of eminent creativity, referred to as “Big C” creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) is what people often conceive of as creativity, an elitist concept applying to a select few. However, “little c” creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) or “Everyday Creativity” as Richards (2010) defines it, is that originality that manifests itself at work and leisure across the broad range of activities found in everyday life which can contribute to better psychological health and give us a greater sense of meaning and life satisfaction. In an organizational setting, “little c” creativity also corresponds to employee’s ability to problem solve and adapt to change. Beghetto & Kaufman (2007) also identified the concept of “mini c” creativity to include the creative processes that are involved in the development of an individual’s personal knowledge and understanding.

Where Positive Psychology and Creativity Intersect

Creativity is seen as being a positive and life-affirming trait that contributes to physical and psychological health and to optimal functioning, an activity that contributes to psychological wellbeing, one that is frequently the source of feelings of pleasure and satisfaction (Soriano de Alencar, 2012). That there is a link between affect and creativity is clear from the literature. However, whether it is positive affect, negative affect or a combination of the two is more nuanced. There have been a number of studies linking affect to creativity, positing that positive affect results in increased levels of creativity. For example, Amabile et al., (2005) hold that a core component of creativity is that it is something new, and that newness occurs predominately as a result of cognitive variation. As such, an activity that increases cognitive variation is also likely to increase creativity. Affect is seen to be one such source of cognitive variation.

A similar view is held by Isen (2001), who links positive affect with increased cognitive flexibility and problem solving. Her laboratory research (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987) showed that positive affect, induced by positive events such as a small gift or a film clip, lead to higher levels of performance on dimensions linked to creativity.

However, it is not as simple as positive affect increasing creativity; negative affect plays a part too. Martin and colleagues, in their “mood-as-input” model (Martin, Ward, Achee, & Wyer, 1993), theorized that when in a positive mood, individuals are more likely to feel safe, which motivates them to think expansively and more flexibly; however, negative moods indicate that there may be an issue that motivates individuals to think more analytically and

precisely which can help creativity in certain circumstances. Similarly, research by George and Zhou (2002) found that, in certain circumstances, negative mood was positively related to creative performance by signaling that additional effort needs to be put into the task, or that creative solutions need to be found to solve the problem.

Fredrickson and Losada's (2005) positivity ratio suggests an optimum level of positive to negative affect, with optimal functioning occurring when positive experiences outweigh negative ones at a ratio of 2.9. However, the authors also propose that there is an upper limit to positivity beyond which performance declines.

Whilst the ratio itself (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005) has been discredited by Brown, Sokal, and Friedman (2013), who challenged the mathematical calculations that lay behind the ratio, from the research explored to date, it would seem that a delicate balance of positive and negative affect exists. However, rather than being a precise ratio, the researcher proposes that the balance is likely to be different for each individual, dependent on their motivations and emotions, working independently and together.

One of the myths of creativity is that it is somehow a 'flash of inspiration' that occurs effortlessly. A less attractive, yet more accurate picture is one where creativity involves considerable effort over sustained periods of time and frequent failure. Creativity, by its nature, requires pushing boundaries and coming up with new ways of approaching things – which can be threatening to the social context in which the creator is working.

Given the degree of difficulty associated with creativity, it seems unsurprising that those likely to succeed in creative endeavours are those who combine, as Seligman put it "reasonable talent with the ability to keep going in the face of defeat" (Seligman, *n.d.*, as cited in Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p 209).

Rego, Sousa, Marques and Cunha (2012) found through their study of 595 employees across 37 retail organizations in Portugal, that optimism relates to creativity both directly and through the mediating role of positive affect and the positivity ratio. They also propose a positivity ratio associated with higher creativity of 3.6, beyond which creativity is seen to decrease. Their findings also support the view that a certain amount of negative emotion is important in promoting creative outcomes. One of the interesting things about this study is the way it highlights the nuanced role of emotion and creativity, in juxtaposition to the view

of Amabile et al. (2005) that there is a linear relationship between positive affect and creativity.

Rego, Machado, Leal, and Pina e Cunha (2009) also make the connection between hope and creativity at work either directly or indirectly through the mediator of happiness. They posit that given the difficulty and personal risk of creative endeavour, high hope would seem likely in a creative individual. They also make an important connection with the tendency of high hope individuals to be happier (Youssef & Luthans, 2007) and that happier individuals are more likely to be creative (Fredrickson, 2001).

The role played by efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience, individually and collectively, on performance of a creative task is explored in research by Sweetman, Luthans, Avey, and Luthans (2011). Their study of 899 working adults from a range of industries, job types and job levels showed a correlation between psychological capital (PsyCap) and creative performance on a specific exercise.

However, the study did not look at the impact of affect on creativity or PsyCap. The participants' assessment of their PsyCap was self-reported and it does not explore the extent to which positive or negative affect might influence the subjects' level of PsyCap and, more broadly, the impact of affect on creative performance. The authors acknowledge that they cannot infer causality from their results and that PsyCap and creative performance could be predicted by a third construct. It is also possible that it is, in fact, creative performance that leads to PsyCap rather than the other way around. A further concern was that the creative test used was a generic, divergent thinking task that was not specific to the domain in which individuals were working.

At the heart of any discussion about creativity is what drives an individual to want to create. The desire to create, despite all of its difficulties and challenges, is driven out of a passion for the work, a passion that is, at times, harmonious, and, at times, obsessive (Vallerand, 2008), a sense that being creative is not optional, but something that has to be done (Gilbert, 2015).

Intrinsic motivation is essentially about an individual's passion and interest, defined as the motivation to work on something for the love of it and the personal challenge involved, rather than for any extrinsic rewards (Amabile, 1997). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to experience flow, the sense of being completely engaged in the present

moment with no sense of time passing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) and that most creativity occurs when an individual is in a state of flow (Sawyer, 2006).

Ryan & Deci's (2000) perspective of intrinsic motivation is that it is an innate ability that humans are born with, and which environmental, or indeed organizational, conditions can either sustain or diminish. Similarly, Amabile (1997) posits that the social environment influences intrinsic motivation and therefore, the frequency and level of creativity that manifests itself. Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that the types of environmental conditions that can diminish intrinsic motivation include methods routinely deployed by organizations such as deadlines, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals. Their Self Determination Theory proposes that when the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are met, individuals experience increased psychological well-being, happiness and self-esteem (Linley & Joseph, 2004).

What gives life meaning and purpose is a profound existential question, sitting as a core pillar of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011). The meaningful life is described as using the best of oneself for a broader or higher concern (Park, Peterson, & Ruch, 2009; Seligman, 2002), which is also an expression of eudaimonia (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Eudaimonic well-being has been conceptualized as flourishing and self-actualizing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2013).

Self-actualization was considered by both Maslow (1971) and Rogers (1961) to be a facet of creativity. Maslow (1971) considered creativity and self-actualization to be interdependent, each one facilitating the other and even went as far as to speculate whether they may, in fact, be the same thing. In their study of the correlation between creativity and performance on tests of creativity, Runco, Ebersole, and Mraz (1991) confirm the association between self-actualization and creativity.

Richards (2007) draws an important comparison of self-actualizing creativity with everyday creativity, emphasizing that self-actualizing creativity is present in the ordinary, everyday activities, not just present in elite creativity, and, as such, creativity is linked to psychological wellbeing (Runco & Mcgarva, 1999).

Creativity is seen as being a part of human development (Worth, 2010), with self-actualising people able to hold in balance the polarities of existence (Erikson, 1963; Maslow, 1968). It is

an expression of self-actualisation (Worth, 2010) and the process of creativity, the means through which individuals better understand their sense of purpose and meaning.

Positive psychology is defined by Gable and Haidt (2005, p.104) as the study of “the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions”. The researcher asserts that one such process of optimal functioning is creativity. This review of literature has highlighted the close links between creativity and fundamental aspects of positive psychology, such as emotions, hope, optimism, intrinsic motivation and self-actualisation.

Method

The purpose of the research was to explore the phenomenon of creativity, both at a personal and organisational level, and to better understand the relationship between creativity and positive psychology. The objectives identified for the study were as follows:

- Explore what is meant by the term Creativity
- Explore what aspects of Positive Psychology are present when individuals are being creative
- Explore the enablers and inhibitors of creativity, at both a personal and organizational level

The research was conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, which situates ‘reality’ in the interplay between the individual and their social context. The research is phenomenological, exploring the participant’s lived experience of creativity within both their personal and organisational lives. As such, it assumes that meaning is socially constructed from past and present experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007) and that the research process is dynamic, with the researcher playing an active role in the process, both as interpreter of the data and as a data source.

Given the subjective nature of the data, a qualitative research paradigm was selected, which is described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013, p.11) as being “well suited for locating the *meanings* people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting *these* meanings to the *social world* around them” (italics are in the original text).

The analysis of qualitative research is a creative process (Patton, 1999), with the output depending, largely, on the analytical and interpretive ability of the researcher.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, as the data subjects needed to be individuals who could reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and experiences of creativity. The participants were individuals who described themselves as being creative and were working in a range of organisations all of which believed that creativity is fundamentally important to their business success.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) as a conversation with structure and purpose, with the intention of obtaining descriptions of the interviewee's life world so that the meaning of the phenomena being described can be interpreted.

Thematic analysis was used as the method of data analysis which was selected as, whilst not tied to a particular theory or epistemology, it can provide a rich and complex analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to explore the data phenomenologically, understanding the reality and meaning of creativity for the participants.

Once the researcher had familiarised herself with the data, it was coded and initial themes were identified, which were further refined, resulting in four themes: Creativity from the Inside Out (with sub-themes of 'Shapeshifters'; Hope, Optimism and Resilience; The Connectedness of Creativity); The Emotional Rollercoaster; The Motivation to Create; and The Creative Leader.

Findings and Discussion

The following section is an abridged version of the findings and discussion from the research, woven together to present a picture of how the participants experienced creativity both personally and within their organization, and how that experience links to positive psychology.

The term 'creativity' can be used to describe both the outcome (product) and the process (Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). The focus of this research was on the process of creativity and made no attempt to assess or assign value to the creative product.

Shapeshifters

The analogy of ‘Shapeshifters’, characters from mythology and science fiction, seemed an appropriate description of the way that the participants were able to adapt and transform their physical attributes according to the context of their situation. They were able to hold in balance thought-action tendencies that appeared, at times, to be contradictory. They seemed to be comfortable with balancing polarities - two opposing parts of themselves not as an ‘either / or’, but as part of a continuum, dynamically moving along it as the situation required. Barron & Harrington (1981) describe the ‘core’ characteristics of creative people as including an attraction to complexity, the ability to resolve antinomies, and self-confidence with a firm sense of one’s self as creative.

The findings from the research painted a slightly different picture. Rather than being an ‘attraction’ to complexity and resolving antinomies, which feels more of a cognitive response, the love of complexity was a more fundamental motivator for their creativity and a fundamental part of the participant’s sense of self.

Whilst the participants did demonstrate self-confidence, it was not observed as such an absolute as literature would imply (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Feist, 1998; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). They balanced, and implicitly managed or dealt with the polarity of confidence and self-belief, and also self-doubt, their inner critic, and the fear of being perceived as a failure.

It appeared that the participants were seemingly able to hold in balance structure and chaos, the need for both the ability to be expansive in their thinking, but also a recognition that a certain degree of structure was helpful in ensuring that their ideas crystalized. It was the balancing of what the researcher has termed the ‘fuzzy front end’ of creativity, the process of exploring possibilities without necessarily a clear idea of where it is taking them, with the ‘creative landing’ of an idea and knowing when generative thinking needed to move into execution.

The participants did not appear to have a clear and firm sense of themselves as creative. Paradoxically, they both perceived themselves as being creative (choosing to participate in an interview which explored their creativity), yet, at the same time, described creativity as typically being associated with artistic ability or on a scale that would be described as ‘Big C’ creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009), as changing society on a macro level.

The view of creativity as being linked to artistic ability and a requirement for it to be domain changing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; 1999), goes to the heart of the debate about what creativity is (Richards, 2007; Sawyer, 2006). It is also a reflection of the extent to which systemic evaluation of creativity has reached a point where, unless something is ‘Big C’ creativity, it somehow does not appear to really count as being creative.

The collision of the antinomies may, at times, create tension for the participants, both internally and externally (Kaufman, 2004); however, they appear to have an ability to cope with conflicting emotions, accepting them as part of the process of creativity. Baron (1963) proposed that creative individuals were more willing to explore, and more accepting of the complexities of their own personalities. The natural curiosity of the creative person extended to curiosity about the light and the dark of their psyche. The plasticity (Fürst, Ghisletta, & Lubart, 2016) or flexibility of the creative person enables them to adapt, to psychologically shapeshift, to the context in which they find themselves – be that contemplating a tricky problem, or navigating the emotional tensions of their creative process. Using the analogy of electrical polarity, the balancing of opposing charges can neutralize the electrical charge, but it can also produce a spark, a bolt of lightning. The participant’s ability to balance the opposing aspects of their personality is what enables the creative spark to happen.

Hope, Optimism and Resilience

The willingness of creative people to take risks in pursuit of their goal (Baron, 1963) and accept failure as an inevitable part of creativity would suggest that creative people may also be hopeful (e.g. Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Rego, Machado, Leal, & Pina e Cunha, 2009; Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Cunha, 2012).

Hope, optimism, and resilience enable people to cope with the risk and uncertainty of creating, to be open to the emergence of new possibilities. The participants demonstrated an ability to remain open to letting the future emerge. This manifested itself both in remaining open to the outcome and an openness to changing their approach as new information presented itself.

They were seemingly optimistic, having a general belief that things would work out, however, that optimism could be a double-edged sword, needing to be balanced and grounded in realism to ensure that the creative output was delivered.

The expression of hope that was observed had two facets: firstly, the hope that the participants demonstrated that they would be able to find suitable pathways to achieving their goal, even when there was no clarity on what the specific goal was. Snyder's theory (2000) appears to imply that, first, there is a 'goal', and then pathways are identified to pursue that goal. What the researcher observed was something more; it was hope as a response to life and potential ambiguity, where pathways thinking was used to find and firm up what the goal becomes; secondly, hope is the act of reimagining the future, drawing on creative resources that enable individuals to search for new possibilities (Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997).

Ludema et al. (1997) closely align hope and creativity, describing creativity as an expression of hope inherent in everyday creativity, a positive and generative process that is deeply relational, requiring a fundamental belief that the future is open to being discovered and influenced.

Hope implies a dissatisfaction with the present or a desire to find something new and better – an internal, as well as external searching. The researcher postulates that the participant's love of discovering the new is an expression of hopefulness, an internal and external searching of what may be possible, what they may be capable of achieving.

Hope was described by Marcel (1951, p.31) as where the "soul turns towards a light which it does not yet perceive, a light yet to be born". Creativity is the ability to conceive of something that does not yet exist and to pursue it with both the cognitive and emotional expression of hope. The researcher suggests that hope is required for creativity to exist and is a fundamental part of the creative process.

Hope, and its alter ego, anxiety, are described as future-facing emotions (Kast, 1991), with thoughts of the future capable of instilling hope and/or anxiety. Hope implies forward momentum and, the researcher proposes, enables the creative person to balance the dark side of the creative process, the fear of failure, with the light of hope.

As well as demonstrating personal resilience in their ability to bounce back from setbacks, creativity was also seen as a source of resilience, and as a mature defence mechanism (Vaillant, 2000), the energy and positive qualities of creativity being restorative. However, the participants' natural optimism and resilience was not just a coping mechanism, they were motivated by the process of being creative itself, and their resilience enabled their creativity

to thrive. Creativity is circular and self-propagating, building an upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2001) of emotion and creativity. Setbacks and failure did hurt the participants, but they had an ability to bounce back and, in some cases, to use them as a springboard for trying again.

The Connectedness of Creativity

Having trusting relationships was seen as a key enabler of creativity and is a reflection of the emotional maturity or bravery that helped the participants to navigate polarities. This was expressed both as relationships with line managers who trusted them to take risks, as well as with colleagues, with whom the participants could discuss ideas and get feedback, helping them to develop those ideas further. As such, a breadth of social relationships was also seen as an enabler of creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003), with connections outside of the participants' normal work group, helping them to expand and develop their thinking. The range and breadth of relationships with others and with the social context enabled the participants to make connections between seemingly disparate concepts and ideas, things that they have heard or seen from other sources that could be adapted for their purposes.

The extent to which creativity is social was apparent, not just in the context of the relationships as described above, but in the participants' social context, their own relationships towards the environment in which they are located, the sights and sounds around them. The tendency of Western society towards an individualistic perspective or approach belies the extent to which creativity is, largely, a social process (Amabile, 1983, 1996; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993), the result of a complex interaction between an individual and their social context (Amabile, 1983; 1996; Ford, 1996).

The participants' interaction with, and a curiosity about, the wider world inspires adaptive creativity and divergent thinking that participants apply to their creative problems (Kirton, 1976). They demonstrated an ability to make connections between the problem they are facing and what has been done in other sectors. Such problem solving requires a relationship with the social environment, whether or not that creative process was followed individually or collectively, the environment is providing stimulus and potential solutions to new problems.

The connectedness displayed by the participants could be said to be an expression of emotional maturity. Their sense of self is such that they are able to look to the wider world for inspiration, confident in who they are, and further developing their sense of self through assimilating information from relationships and external sources.

Creativity does not happen in a social vacuum, and the researcher postulates that connectedness is vital for creativity to flourish. Through dialogue with their environment, it is possible for individuals to find new combinations to existing problems, to notice more deeply the world around them and to access a deeper source of collective creativity that, in turn, creates new possibilities within the world (Gruber, 1998; Scharmer, 2009).

The Effect of Affect

Participants described the huge emotional ‘highs’ they felt when being creative, the joy and excitement. They also described huge lows, typically frustration and anxiety, a sense that the task was overwhelming and might not be possible. The source of the negative emotions encountered at the start of the creative process appeared to be a creative tension (Senge, 1990), the realization of the gap between current reality and future state. This resulted in negative emotions such as frustration and self-doubt. However, the participants were seemingly comfortable living with emotional polarities that the creative process implied. The degree of risk involved heightened the buzz of creativity and the intense positive feelings experienced when something worked.

There was a clear picture from the participants that their mood affected their creativity. Some participants felt that their (positive) mood was a precursor to their creativity, although this was also described as being a circular process, with both mood and creativity building upon each other. At times, creativity itself was seen as a source of resilience, with creativity being used to help lift participants out of a negative mood state or as a coping mechanism. Creative expression was also seen as a means of exploring difficult emotions and helping to make sense of those emotions, for example, sometimes observing them at a distance and exploring them through the media of art, music, or novels. Irrespective of mood, the participants' energy levels affected their willingness or ability to be creative. At times their depleted energy was as a consequence of their negative mood state, at other times, external circumstances or indeed physical factors such as diet and caffeine affected their energy level, which impacted on their creativity.

Senge (1990) describes a 'creative tension' that exists when a vision for something new comes into being. The point at which a new possibility is imagined requires holding in balance the gap between current reality and the creative vision. The researcher postulates that this creative tension may be the source of some of the negative emotions that the participants felt, that sense that the task ahead feels so large that it feels almost impossible, the recognition of the gap between their current state and their creative vision. Theories concerning the link between emotions and creativity have tended to test for the effects of either positive or negative emotions occurring separately (e.g. Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987) postulating that they lead to different outcomes (George & Zhou, 2002; Martin et al., 1993). The researcher noticed that the emotions present tended to be simultaneous. The range of emotions present, the excitement about discovering something new, the self-doubt and possibility of failure, were held in balance by the participants without it affecting their motivation or overwhelming the excitement of discovering new things. It was seen as an accepted part of the process.

Emotions played an important and multifaceted role within the creative process of the research participants. Negative emotions occurred both at the start of the creative process with the realization of the gap between current state and future desired vision, and during the creative process when roadblocks were reached. However, at the same time, the positive emotions of hope, passion, and joy provided an upward spiral of creativity and positive momentum.

The individual, leader or organization's ability to accept and normalize that emotional tension will, the researcher proposes, be a determinant in whether or not creativity is more likely to flourish. An inability to cope with emotional tension is likely to result in the lowering of creative ambition so that the gap between the status quo and the imagined future becomes more palatable and less scary.

The Motivation to Create

This discovery of the new and different was a key driver for the participants' creative work. At the core of what appears to motivate them was a palpable interest in discovering new things. The participants' love of the new demonstrated an openness to change and being able to make progress as a key enabler. Equally, on the flip side, an inhibitor of creativity was a reluctance on the part of organizations to take the necessary risks and to be slow to change.

It is not surprising that a love of the new was a key motivator for creativity, given that part of the definition of creativity is that it is something new. However, what the researcher observed was the motivation for discovering the new was not related to the output or product; instead, it was the motivation that sat at the heart of their drive to be creative in the first place. The precursor to creativity was a desire to find something new or better, being excited and curious about what might be possible, a motivation that came from within (Runco & Mcgarva, 2013). The participants were motivated by the *process* of being creative, the uncertainty of where their creativity would take them was as exciting as the end product, and, for some participants, even more of a motivator than the output. Whilst output was important from an external validation perspective (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), the fundamental motivation came from the process of being creative itself. Achievement, as assessed by others, was the happy by-product of the creative process, rather than being the intended goal.

What lies behind the motivation to create is a complex question; however, on one level, it is because it is an expression of hedonia. The participants described an almost addictive quality to creativity, a hedonic mix of positive emotions and endorphins that spiralled upwards, described by one participant as an alternative to drink and drugs. The risk of creativity and the possibility of failure made the positive emotions that much sweeter and that much more intense.

However, the motivation to create was also an expression of eudaimonia, a sense of creativity as part of their ego identity (Erikson, 1963). The researcher is intrigued by the etymology of eudaimonia as ‘good spirit’ and the subsequent Roman translation of daimon to genius. Heraclitus wrote, “man’s character is his daimon”, and daimon was understood to be one’s innate ability or talent. It is only in the mid-17th century that the meaning of genius became something exceptional. It could, therefore, reasonably be assumed that creativity is an expression of one’s daimon, one’s own genius, and creativity is good (eu) for the soul (daimonia).

The Creative Leader

Half of the eight participants were, or had recently been, leaders of significant teams (>40 people), and all of the participants discussed the impact their leader had on their creativity. As leaders, the participants appeared to be demonstrating an ability to balance the polarities of organizational life, managing risk and creating environments of psychological safety

(Edmondson, 1999), enabling their teams to be the best they could be, giving 'permission to create' by facilitating conditions where individuals felt trusted to take risks and challenge the status quo.

A fundamental role of a creative leader is to support a creative environment and action (Gardner, 2006) and to foster positive and supportive relationships that have been associated with creativity (Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). It is usually unrecognized within organizations, or indeed society more generally, that people who are influencing are expressing a form of creativity. Like creativity, bringing about a change of mind is a process that percolates over time (Gardner, 2006). Leadership, as a creative act, is dynamic and displays interpersonal energy. The leaders are brave enough to energetically support their team, acting as buffers from the bureaucracy that hinders creativity (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). The 'instrument' through which their creativity is expressed is other people. The creative leader helps people to express their passion and provides the freedom and safety for them to explore it.

The leader sets the tone for the extent to which creativity was seen as elitist or democratic. The humanistic conceptualization of creativity as a fundamental aspect of humanity (Sawyer, 2006; Soriano de Alencar, 2012) and a form of self-actualization (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Runco, Ebersole, & Mraz, 1991) contrast with the view that the word 'creative' has lost its meaning (Tusa, 2003), both sides of the debate being expressed by participants.

A frightening aspect of management theory is the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968; Tierney & Farmer, 2004). Sutton and Woodman (1989) suggest that the Pygmalion effect may even be stronger when the task requires a higher degree of challenge and uncertainty, such as creativity does. Expectation of creative performance from supervisors is likely to encourage creative performance (Amabile, 1988; Ford, 1996). Similarly, if leaders believe that creativity is required from only a subsection of individuals, it is likely to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Tierney and Farmer (2002) found that leaders who engaged in behaviours that were supportive of creativity had employees that demonstrated a higher ability to be creative in their work.

Creative leaders need to have the vision to be able to lead for an uncertain outcome and to be comfortable with the inherent risk involved in managing that uncertainty, creating an environment where their teams feel comfortable to take the risks necessary to push

boundaries. As a leader, they shape the new normal, and what that means is breaking through the rules and hindrances, all of the things that say that it is 'not OK to behave like this' and they make it safe to do things differently. That requires creative vision and a willingness to live with uncertainty and risk. Leadership traditionally comes from a positivist epistemology, where there is a 'truth' to be known or found. Organizations typically have a 'prevention' orientation, with rules designed to minimize risk and reduce complexity and uncertainty (Plowman et al., 2007). Leaders who are creative and encourage creativity, thrive on complexity and uncertainty, they appear able to accept, and work within, the polarities of life and the ability to balance creativity with risk.

Conclusion

Creativity is a complex and nuanced phenomenon. It is emotional and hopeful, and is the process by which individuals cope with the myriad challenges that life throws at them, enabling them to adjust to challenging circumstances and to express their true self. Hope helps people to cope with the risk and uncertainty of creating, and was identified as a positive response to life and potential ambiguity, a means of identifying and firming up goals when the future remained unclear. Creativity was also identified as a source of resilience, the psychological refuge it offers bringing a sense of comfort and well-being.

Creativity is part of the fundamental human condition; however, some individuals have the courage to express that creativity, knowing that the system will be quick to judge their output. Creativity is highly relational; it is in the interaction with other people and the social context that creativity is born.

From the earliest days of positive psychology, creativity was seen as a reflection of optimal functioning and a cognitive expression of positive psychology in action (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Simonton, 2000, 2005). However, since that time, positive psychology's attention to 'creativity' appears limited or inferential in focus. The researcher asserts that the interpretation of creativity is a broader cognitive, affective and relational expression of positive psychology. It might also reasonably be inferred that the expression of creativity is a reflection of human strength and eudaimonia.

One of the striking things the researcher noticed was the ability of the creative people interviewed to live with, and thrive within, uncertainty. However, what the researcher observed was a willingness to sit with the uncertainty, fear and vulnerability that being

creative can require. The participants' mastery of a growth mind-set (Dweck, 2008), together with their ability to balance polarity, enables them to thrive in an uncertain and ambiguous world. In the context of Positive Psychology, if one can learn to live with this growth mind-set and ambiguity, one is not just seeking out purely positive experiences, which, in turn, enables life to be lived with both the light and the dark as a broader perspective of positive psychology.

Whilst creativity may not have found a comfortable home within positive psychology to date, the researcher postulates that creativity, in all its messiness and ambiguity, sits at the heart of second wave positive psychology (Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferon, & Worth, 2015; Wong, 2011) which calls for acknowledgment of life not as binary, but as a balancing and potential integration of the light and the dark of human existence (Wong, 2015).

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Flourishing Fashion: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Wearing a Happy Outfit

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Abstract

Little research has been conducted into the relationship between fashion and psychology, even less on how individuals create wellbeing through appearance and clothing. In this study the subjective experience of wearing an ‘outfit which makes you happy’ was analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Six participants who love fashion, both male and female, were interviewed wearing an outfit which ‘made them happy’. The semi-structured interviews highlighted the importance of ‘intentionally managing identity’. Analysis found subordinate themes: shaping identity, coping strategies and social identity. These were broken down into ‘knowing who I am’, ‘matching my outsides to my insides’, ‘creating my best self’, ‘managing moods’, ‘resilience’, ‘fashioning positive relationships’ and ‘shared values’, and linked to the concept of flourishing in positive psychology (PP). The results suggest that how the participants dress plays an active part in their wellbeing through expressing positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA).

Introduction

Fashion has been largely ignored by positive psychology (PP); only one paper has been published which addresses the topic explicitly. Masuch and Hefferon’s (2014) study looked at dress and PP, connecting fashion to hedonic and eudemonic wellbeing, and considering how experiencing dress in relation to the body, selfhood and mood improves wellbeing. We accept anecdotally that the way we dress can make us happy. However, most literature infers that fashion, as a personal experience and as a system, is problematic; fashion is linked to depression (Howlett, Pine, Orakcioglu, & Fletcher 2013), eating disorders (Trautmann, Worthy, & Lokken 2007), narcissism (Larrain, & Arrieta 2007), over-dependence on others’ approval (Freeburg & Workman 2016), and loss of autonomy (Hardy, Merckelbach, Nijman & Zwets 2007). As a cultural influence it is seen as greed-inducing (Entwistle 2016),

environmentally destructive Allwood, Laursen, Maldivo de Rodriguez, & Bocken 2006) and prioritising profit above individual wellbeing (Beard 2008). According to González and Bovone (2012:167), contemporary psychology has generally viewed fashion enthusiasts as shallow and frivolous histrionic personality types who pay too much attention to others' opinions and obsess unhealthily about creating a fashionable appearance.

Apart from Masuch and Hefferon (2014) there is no theory to connect fashion and PP. Searches failed to find a study that starts from the premise that fashion is good for our wellbeing. My rationale for undertaking this study is to fill those gaps. But it is also influenced by my positive relationship with fashion and experience, that it can create meaning and achievement and strengthen interpersonal connections.

Fashion as an everyday practice is most easily accessed by engaging with the intersection between the garment (material dimension) and the assembling of clothing on the body to understand what it means and how it feels to 'wear fashion'. Entwistle (2016) describes this as an embodied material system; Hajo and Galinsky (2012) reinforce it with a theory of enclothed cognition, where clothes influence the wearer's psychological processes based on two variables: the meaning we create for particular clothing and the concrete somatic sense that wearing clothing has. Twigg (2014) considers: 'Identity and dress are intimately linked. Clothes display, express and shape identity, imbuing it with a directly material reality'.

This view of dress, and its connection to identity in the context of ever-evolving choice, has been under-researched. Tseelon (1995) questioned the lack of empirical evidence in women's understanding of themselves through their clothes; when Guy and Banim (2000) conducted a grounded-theory study into clothing as a lived experience, they found participants exhibited strong connections between clothing and self-identity.

This relationship is an established theme in dress studies. Postmodernism's focus on the constant options of 'being' available to us through the choices we make has been explored by theorists looking at expressiveness, adoption of style and agency (e.g. Finkelstein 2013, Polhemus 2010). The formation of positive identity through clothing is highlighted in the findings of Masuch and Hefferon (2014), though Clarke and Miller (2002) argue that postmodernism's focus on constant change creates anxiety as much as pleasure. Cushman (1990) supports this but offers a contrasting manner of looking at identity, arguing against the positive value of a postmodern position in which a fluid identity is created from an

abundance of choice, in that there is problematic dissonance between a desire for a coherent identity-narrative and a dearth of external support to maintain that continuity. Thus the pressure to experience fulfilment through identity merely encourages consumption of fashion which never reaches the core of that need. From this angle, self-curating identity could be seen as detrimental to wellbeing. Hall and Du Gay (1996) consider identity as a way to traverse intrinsic and external need; postmodernity's focus on choosing identity is again implied to be unhelpful to wellbeing, as the challenge creates contradictions as individual identity becomes fragmented.

In the Masuch and Hefferon (2014) study, sameness was considered to be a positive effect of fashion, whereas creating difference as a way to increase wellbeing does not seem to have been investigated. Previous studies which explore the tension between fitting in and standing as negotiated by daily dress practices have seen this as an approach to alleviating identity crisis and conveying group belonging (Polhemus 1994, Evans 1997). These studies seldom focus on conventional society. In these, the relationship between the body, positive body image and the way in which participants experienced hedonic pleasure from dressing was considered a key proponent to maintaining wellbeing, as was the ability of fashion to regulate mood. Emotional self-regulation via clothing practices were highlighted as needing further research.

Craik (1994) advocated that as fashion creates choices, it offers multiple manners in which to perform identity, and this could be considered a manner in which psychological adjustments could be said to be negotiated through dress choices. This is supported by Goffman (2002), who suggests that people in their daily routines organise their dress (amongst other things) to confer a dynamic, unstable impact based on social interactions, an idea that aligns with Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory. This model implies that identity happens because of an active conversation between internal and external experiences and constantly changes as the wearer responds to the opinion of an observer, a feedback loop which adjusts clothing choices in response to the needs of identity formation.

Additional research proposes that not only does fashion communicate our identities and influence others' opinions, but affects how we see ourselves, moulding our attitudes and actions. (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Zimbardo, 1969).

Building on these themes and seeking to redress the lack of attention given to the relationship between clothing choices, identity and wellbeing, this study will shed light on how fashion, mediated by identity, positively impacts the happiness of the wearer.

Method

In order to achieve the desired understanding around ‘clothes that make you happy’, IPA, which focuses on the ideographic lived experience of a specific topic (Smith 2015:27), was selected as the methodology for understanding how individuals feel about wearing a precise outfit at a moment in time. IPA allows the researcher to take an active interpretative role in producing the knowledge that is acquired (Smith 2015). My position as researcher means I was as much a participant in the study as those interviewed. Aware of my vested interest, the reflexivity encouraged in IPA allowed me to acknowledge bias without it having a detrimental effect on the results. IPA also recognises that participants are the experts on their experience of the question. The relationship between the author and the participants was deliberately equal, discovering in a spirit of adventure, with participants and authors co-creators of what was discovered (Smith & Eatough 2015:52).

Design

The data was procured through six semi-structured interviews with male and female participants aged between 23 and 74. The interviews, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, were conducted in London over two months. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants

Participants were recruited via Facebook. The author asked her existing network for volunteers who felt their clothes made them happy to take part in a research study. The author had a social connection to one participant; the other five were unknown. All were linked to fashion through their careers. However this wasn't reflected in their style of dress, as each had a distinctive and idiosyncratic visual identity. The author approached each interview with a fresh perspective and sought variety, deliberately choosing male and female participants from a wide age range.

Table 1.

Participant demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Profession
Janie	F	25	English	Theatre costume designer
Grace	F	42	Latvian	Vintage boutique owner
Sara	F	74	American	Wearable artist
Paul	M	25	Kenyan	Fashion blogger
Ray	M	30	Indian	Model
Frank	M	23	French	Womenswear designer

Data Collection

The participants were asked to wear, or bring, an outfit that they considered made them happy and to discuss how this made them feel. No further interview details were divulged. The rationale for asking participants to wear a specific outfit was that this would increase a connection to the research question by enhancing the interview and making it a tangible experience. This is supported by Chamberlain et al. (2011) who discovered that objects enhanced research interviews, especially the relationship between researcher and participant. The interviews were conversational and informal. The author was aware of the influence her choice of clothes was likely to have on participants. Reflecting on how she chose to present herself at each interview furthered her understanding of identity projecting clothing decisions, and the impact of the researcher on the study (Frost, 2016). It was an unexpected discovery that participants were consciously dressing to create happiness for both people. All six mentioned the author’s dress and reflected that they had dressed in a manner they thought would fit the purpose of the conversation, or would generate a happy experience for both people. It made the author aware of her responsibility and the effect that generating these conversations was having on how the participants see themselves.

Analysis

The guidelines on how to analyse IPA data are flexible. The author applied a creative approach to viewing the data, initially following the ‘typical’ method outlined in Smith

(2015): read then re-read transcripts, note initial thoughts, develop emerging themes, look for connections and make links for each set of data before moving on to the next transcript. Each transcript was full of rich language, nuanced emotions, in-depth personal history and endless paths to themes. The author focused intensely on details, individual words and sentences, before analysing each transcript. Smith (2011) talks of finding gems in transcripts. Each participant provided one gem which summed up their experience of the research question, and every theme that emerged contained one gem from different transcripts that highlighted where that idea grew from. This feeling of expanding and contracting continued as superordinate and subordinate themes developed. The process of analysis was a constant appraisal of what was emerging with checking against original transcriptions to clarify its validity (Smith, 2015). The iterative process led to three main themes within the overarching idea of intentionally managing identity.

Results ¹

See Figure 1 for a map of the superordinate and subordinate themes that emerged, and Table 2 for how these themes arose in each participant's interview. The first superordinate theme, 'shaping my identity', is concerned with how participants understand their needs and express them through dress. Three subordinate themes, 'knowing who I am', 'matching my insides to my outsides', and 'creating my best self' expand the ideas of understanding, expressing and taking control of identity through clothing choices.

The 'coping strategies' superordinate theme is concerned with the way fashion is connected to handling emotional responses to external circumstances; 'managing moods' relates to emotions expressed in dressing and 'resilience' deals with how situations have created ways of responding with dress practices.

The final superordinate theme, 'social identities' looks at relationships created through the way we dress. 'Fashioning positive relationships' uncovers the duality of sharing fashion as a common language, whilst 'shared values' is about the meaning that bonds participants to others.

¹References to page and line numbers of participant transcripts have been removed for the purposes of this record.

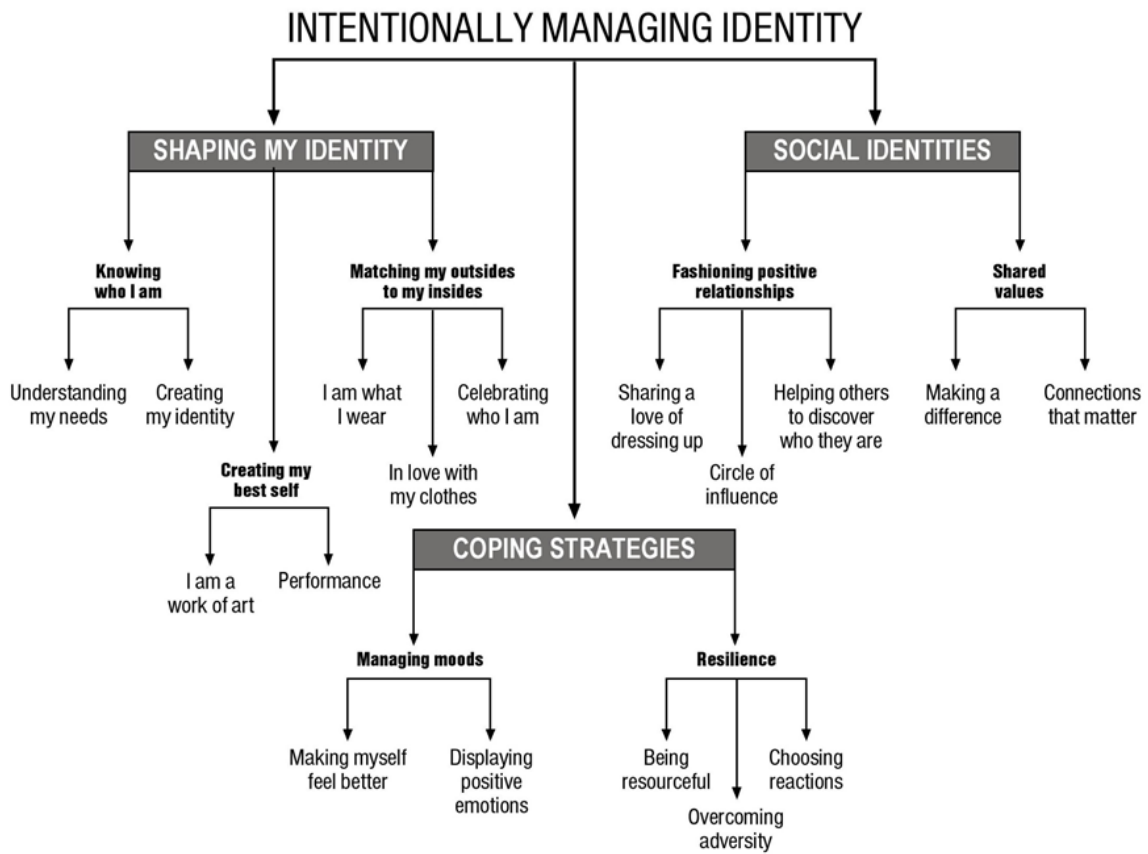


Figure 1. Superordinate and subordinate theme

Table 2.

Occurrence of themes within participants' transcripts

	Janie	Grace	Sara	Paul	Ray	Frank
SOCIAL IDENTITY						
Fashioning positive relationships						
Sharing a love of dressing up	X	X	X	X	X	X
Circle of influence		X	X		X	X
Helping others to discover who they are		X	X	X	X	X
Shared values						
Making a difference	X	X	X	X	X	X
Connections that matter	X	X	X	X	X	X
SHAPING MY IDENTITY						
Knowing who I am						
Understanding my needs	X	X	X	X	X	X
Creating my identity	X	X	X	X	X	X
Matching my outsides to my insides						
I am a what I wear	X	X	X	X	X	X
In love with my clothes	X	X	X	X		X
Celebrating who I am	X	X	X	X	X	X
Creating my best self						
I am a work of art	X	X	X	X	X	X
Performance	X		X	X	X	X
COPING STRATEGIES						
Managing moods						
Making myself feel better	X	X	X	X	X	X
Displaying positive emotions	X	X	X	X	X	X
Courage	X		X	X		X
Resilience						
Being resourceful	X	X	X	X	X	X
Overcoming adversity	X	X	X	X		X

Shaping my identity

This theme deals with the relationship participants have with themselves through the way they dress. All expressed an awareness of their emotions, emotional intelligence, and how they can dress to reflect what they are feeling or change their feelings from negative to

positive. Shaping identity seemed to take three steps: mindful self-awareness, acknowledging emotions before choosing what to wear, and making decisions based on internal processes.

Knowing who I am

All the transcripts show an intention to think before dressing. Paul states it most explicitly:

Know yourself and start from there, match the situation with your feelings. Take the space to think about yourself before you get dressed. (Paul)

Grace had been going through a challenging time and spoke more than any other about self-knowledge as a foundation to getting dressed; understanding her needs was fundamental to her choice of outfit for the interview:

.... That's who I want to be. And I want to feel better. I have had few days of being down and today I want to wear my shiny shoes and, OK, sad is part of life... but today I need to take control. (Grace)

Frank acknowledged his need to be 'true to myself' and to 'have to know how I feel'.

Phrases such as 'feeling right' and 'this is me' were widely used. This self-knowledge allowed them to create an identity that fitted their feelings:

Matching my outsides to my insides

This was the second part of shaping identity; once needs were recognised, dressing-decisions could be made. All participants expressed an intense relationship with their clothes, to the extent that they said 'I am what I wear':

... I put myself together. A version of Janie. (Janie)

For Sara, this way of matching internal needs with dressing 'became how I was. All about colour. And joy, so much joy'. Ray connected his sartorial choices with his need to express his 'free spirit'.

The participants' relationship with their clothes was seen through expressions such as 'In love with my clothes' (Janie), and 'this makes me happy because I have a deep relationship with this suit' (Paul) Sara's clothes indicated she was 'still alive'.

The relationship to the outfit also reflected self-love; looking after a garment was an extension of being good to oneself. This respect both for personal needs and for clothes was

evident in the care taken with their garments. The participants suggested 'my clothes are special and therefore so I am. My clothes are respected and I don't allow others to disrespect me'.

Creating my best self

Every participant expressed playful creativity in shaping their identity, in having fun forming who they wanted to be; '*I am a work of art*' (Sara), '*I create the look*' (Ray) '*I make me the project*' (Frank). Once the best self has been created it can be performed:

I can perform my best if I feel right... (Ray)

Janie dresses to present the view of herself as glamorous and sophisticated:

...So she occupied this suit to be someone else. Someone more than who she is really...And now I occupy it. (Janie)

Coping strategies

This was situated between 'shaping my identity' and 'social identity' as it appeared to connect the two elements of intentionally managing identity.

Managing moods

This encompasses reflecting feelings and changing feelings, especially making oneself feel better:

...That human being has to make the intention to feel happy, to want to feel that getting dressed matters (Ray).

Sara said '*colour is my Prozac*' suggesting that dressing '*keeps me sane*'. Displaying positive emotions through dress was expected to be part of all transcripts - the idea of courage as a positive force was unexpected:

It takes a lot of confidence to go out like this... I can't let other people determine who I am. I am going to be carrying on being exactly who I am. This is what I want to be. It's my choice, what's it got to do with anyone else anyway? But it does take guts to stick to it sometimes. (Janie)

Conversely, Sara considered:

For me it would take terrific courage not to dress this way, it would make me ill. I am what I am; I'm not pretending this is what I am (62-64)

Resilience

This is the second theme from ‘coping strategies’; being resourceful with dressing was expressed by everyone. For Grace it was a response to her financial situation:

It was necessity that I dressed from car boots and charity shops. I couldn’t afford otherwise when the children were little. But now it’s part of me. (Grace)

Frank had experienced abuse in the street because of his clothing but, as with Ray, felt that he could react to it positively:

Say someone says, ‘oh mate you look weird’, then you just smile. It’s ok, it doesn’t affect who I am or how I feel about myself. Always a conscious choice. (Ray)

Social Identity

The third superordinate theme connects how participants dress to their relationships and shared values. Wearing the outfit they had chosen to discuss increased casual friendships, including connecting with the researcher; Frank declared:

I have worn this today for you... it is my gift to you. But I will never wear it like this again. I wanted to be happy today, I wanted to make you happy

Finding an exterior fit, a tribe, a subculture, where they can be authentic and share values was a need that fashion filled, allowing strong bonds to be created

Fashioning positive relationships

The participants dress in unusual ways; this can add positivity to chance encounters. Janie put it simply: ‘people do smile at me....they do but I’m so used to it I don’t always notice it’. She was smiling as she spoke and was clearly happy to make a difference, however small, to strangers’ lives.

Paul commented on the duality of those small connections:

...it’s an amazing feeling for me to give that compliment and they like it too. Win win.
(Paul)

Friendships are created through a love of dressing up, providing positive experiences for all: *'I've found a sense of community with that. My tribe'* (Sara). These friendships form a *circle of influence*:

This has brought more into my life as we all become friends, we are a group. I get to know them, we wear for each other. (Frank)

Shared values

These reflect participants' needs to make a difference - a common need is to reflect values of caring and sharing alongside a desire to show that being authentic is available to all. Sara says:

I assemble myself. People say 'I couldn't do that' as if there is something different about me. (laugh). I'm a slightly overweight old lady, come on, you can do it.

Inspiration, influence and collaboration were goals to aspire to:

It's inspiring people in hope when I am daring. Not only dressing, but energising people with my motivation ... (Frank)

Making a difference can lead to connections that matter:

I think I can make people strong by giving them the confidence to dress differently. I can make people feel better...It's like when the girls that come into the shop say 'oh I couldn't wear that!' But then they try it and feel great and change. It gives them a sense of freedom... I like that. (Grace)

The oldest member of the study, Sara, was very aware of having a position of authority, because her style and way of dressing connected her to others:

And the secret is you have to make it work for others as well. You have to make it happen for them. It's the most wonderful life. I love the young people around me, I'm very lucky. (Sara)

The last word in this section goes to Ray, who summarised intentionally managing identity in his own flourishing manner:

It's intentional, this version of me. It's comfortable and I feel good and I have created this look for myself...I am good at this stuff that makes me happy. (Ray)

Discussion

The results selected for discussion are the author's interpretation of the experience of the participants in response to a conversation generated by wearing their 'happy' outfit. Three superordinate themes emerged: 'shaping identity', 'coping strategies' and 'social identities', connecting the idea of intentionally managing identity. While the interviews began with one outfit, the conversations felt more universal; the data produced dealt with the participants' broader view of how they dressed and their feelings around identity. This process echoes the narrowing and widening of the analysis of IPA, from specific to general.

The results endorse Masuch and Hefferon's (2014) findings on the impact of clothing on wellbeing; the idea of negotiating selfhood is echoed in the findings of 'shaping identity' whilst managing mood resonates with 'coping strategies'. There is some crossover in 'social identity' and shared identity as expressed by group style within the negotiating selfhood category. Whilst current research is consistent with the claims made by Masuch and Hefferon - their study generated data that led to the category of befriending the body - this was absent in my interpretation of data produced by my participants.

Identity and flourishing fashion

This study has produced results which strengthen identity issues as a legitimate exploration of how PP connects to fashion. The relationship to choosing who one wants to be, what they wish to communicate and how that meets psychological needs are all encountered in a positive manner, which expands Guy and Banim's claim (2000) of a distinct connection of clothing to self-identity as a way to negotiate autonomy. The participants' intentional management of their identities, awareness of the intrinsic processes occurring and decision-making about their response to those feelings depending on external conditions reflects social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), as well as supporting Hall's (2003) self-curating identity as a way to balance internal and external needs.

Intentionally managing identity and consumption

Identity as performance (Crak, 1994; Goffman, 2002) reflects a playfulness and sense of choice which could be seen as a positive of postmodern identity. However, the participants in this study have chosen to communicate a stable identity. To some extent they have side-stepped the postmodern problem of profusion of choice (Cushman, 1990; Goffman, 2002)

and replaced it with an articulate identity-narrative. The pressure to experience fulfilment as fashion consumption is negated; fragmentation is replaced with insight and emotional intelligence (Mayer & Geher, 1996), something transferred to clothes as objects of consumption which become ‘love objects’. Garments take on existential energy, creating a meaningful relationship with the self and others, as they communicate core values.

Ahuvia and Friedman (1998) advocate that ultimately, (fashion) consumption is an unsatisfactory exercise; materialism studies also fail to show a connection between income and happiness (Kasser and Ahuvia, 2002). The care and affection that this study’s participants show towards their clothes illustrates that their love for fashion is emotionally rewarding (Cushman, 1990).

Richins (1997) finds that love is a shared emotion frequently expressed when participants talk about material possessions. My participants were explicitly ‘In love with [their] clothes’. This finding has potential ramifications for sustainability in fashion; the participants had a bond with their clothes that surpasses the need to replace. As far back as 1989 Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan (1989) asked consumers to list feelings about objects they had an emotional attachment to; happiness was the most usual emotion, with love coming second. It seems that when we love our clothes they create an influence on our sense of self; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) made links to identity-as-consumption related to loving exceptional owned objects; this study’s findings suggest fashion garments can be an example of this.

Cushman’s perspective on postmodern consumption supposes a need to personalise the meaning of owned objects. That need spans internal meaning, incorporating them into one’s life story, and outward-looking meaning, as a shared experience or through cultural connections. This study shows that personal fashion-as-flourishing can challenge contemporary forms of consumption to enhance a meaningful life and generate sustainability-as-flourishing.

Flourishing Fashion and PERMA

Connecting my data to existing PP theories of flourishing highlights an important relationship between fashion and wellbeing. The aspects of intentionally managing identity from this study coincide to produce flourishing as explained by PERMA, (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) - the five features which create

flourishing as authentic and sustained happiness and wellbeing (Seligman, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; see Figure 2).

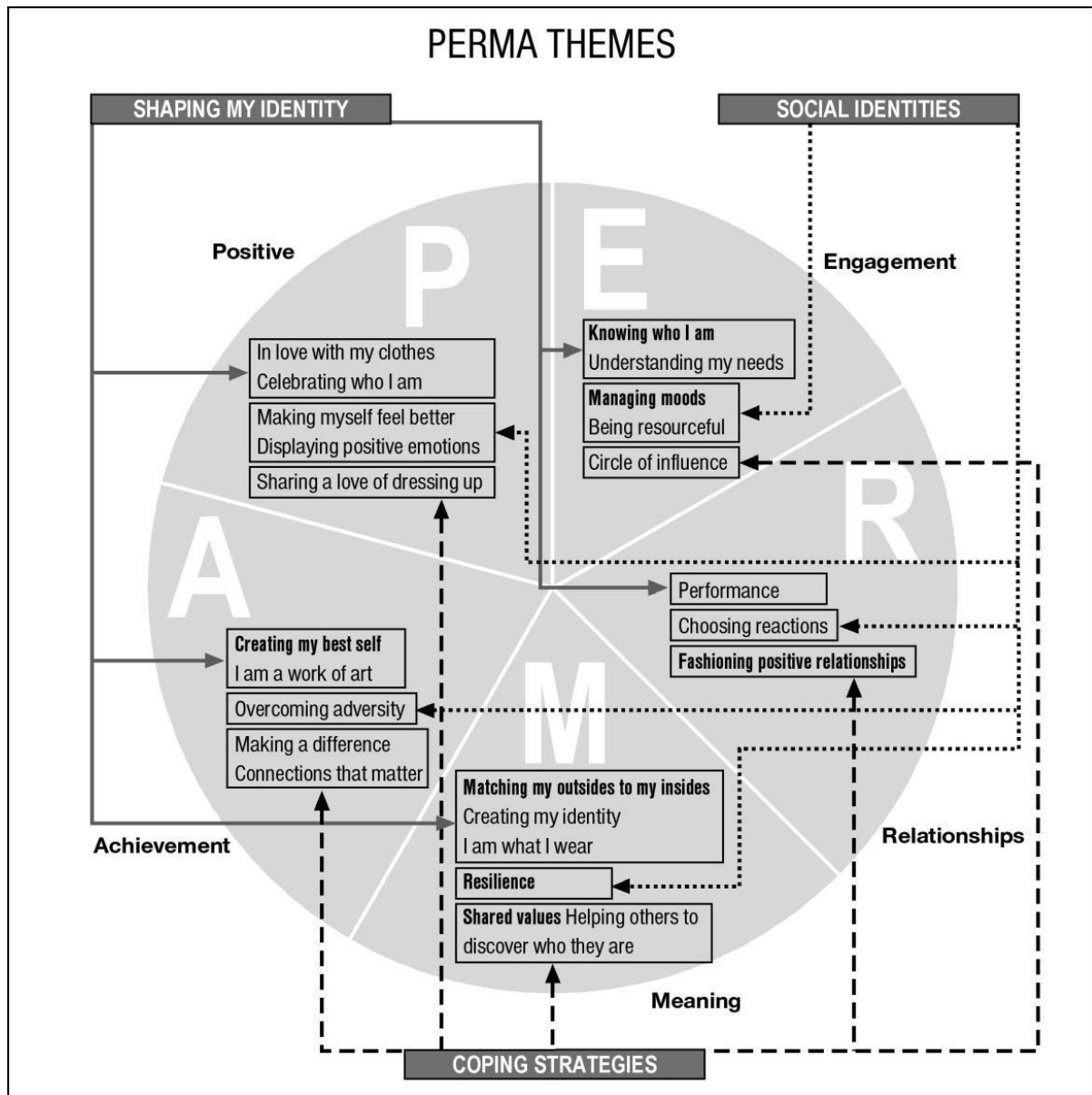


Figure 2. PERMA and theme connections

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions underpin wellbeing. Masuch and Hefferon (2014) found that hedonic pleasure was part of daily dress practices. Positive emotions were referenced most overtly in ‘shaping my Identity’, but occurred in managing mood in ‘coping strategies’ and sharing a love of dressing-up in ‘social identities’. Fredrickson’s ‘broaden and build’ theory (2001) cites positive emotions as increasing wellbeing through expanding interests and engagement,

whilst positive emotions correlate with creativity and problem solving (Fredrickson, 2009) and are able to nullify the effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Fredrickson (2009) also supposes that it is possible to influence not only personal feelings but the feelings of others; all participants believed how they dress improves their wellbeing as well as others’.

Engagement

Engagement is about being totally absorbed in a task, in flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Emotional intelligence has been linked to engagement and flow in musicians by Heller et al. (2015); the current study shows that emotional intelligence displayed as emotional awareness, using emotions to enable problem-solving and creativity, understanding the relationship of emotions to others and managing emotions with observation and adaptation, all occur when the participants choose how to dress. Their mindful approach to dressing offers a unique avenue to generating flourishing as a daily practice that could be investigated further.

Relationships

When we sustain solid affirmative relationships we are happier; this is considered to be one of the fundamental aspects of wellbeing (Guay et al., 2013). Data from this study unambiguously links the way we dress with the aspect of ourselves as ‘social beings’, for whom it is essential to connect with others. Cohn et al. (2009) highlights the significance of micro-moments of a chance encounter in the street and Wong (1988) discusses the importance of finding one's identity in a community, an aspect of which occurs throughout the participants’ relationship to dress. Guy et al. (2000) found that shopping for clothes creates connections and enhances friendships; this research shows positive relationships can be formed without consumption but through shared values and a love of dressing up.

Meaning

Discovering a purpose in life can be crucial to wellbeing; to establish a meaningful life that fulfils an existential need is necessary for flourishing. Resilience as expressed by all the participants is linked to meaning and flourishing by Ryff and Singer (2003). Every participant felt a sense of purpose by being involved in fashion in a way that supports and helps others. Fashion as an expression of values is discussed by Entwistle (2016) linking sustainability,

respect and responsibility as personal beliefs which can be shown through the way we dress. Participants all felt that setting an example for others is important to the way they dress.

Achievement

Having and attaining goals encourages flourishing (Butler & Kern, 2016). Participants took pride in the way they presented themselves and felt a sense of achievement. Maddux (2009), believes that self-efficacy has an impact on health, engagement, resilience and persistence in overcoming adversity. Coping strategies displayed by the dress practices of the participants could be linked to the aptitude for self-efficacy to cultivate from feedback generated with performance of identity, resourcefulness, and making a difference.

Ambition, hopes for others and the likelihood of achieving goals have also been shown to be relevant to wellbeing. Hope theory emphasises the importance of unearthing things that bring joy, finding social connections that support values and growing hope through resolution-based narratives (Lopez et al. 2004). The participants in this study all anticipate continued wellbeing through their relationship to fashion.

Study Limitations

The small sample size of any IPA study is a possible limitation; however Hefferon and Gill-Rodriguez (2011) endorse a sample size of three to six participants to enable enough data to produce themes which link but maintain distinct voices without overwhelming the researcher.

Another possible limitation could be the heterogeneity of the participants, which owing to age, gender and cultural influences brought such a variety of background experiences to the data that it could have been difficult to create cross-theme reflections (Lyons & Coyle, 2016).

My data could have been analysed in many ways, not only by a different researcher but also by me at another time with different experiences; the interpretation of this data is particular to a certain time frame and mind frame (Shaw, 2010).

Relevance and Implications

Future research could test the hypothesis that when we learn to ‘match our outside to our insides’ we would create longer-lasting bonds with our clothes, when mindful dressing changes the relationship we have with consuming identity imposed from external sources.

This link of emotional contentment to personal needs via daily clothing practices could be a response to the growing call for a consumption pattern of flourishing- as-sustainability as expressed by Niinimäki (2015). Another possible avenue is a study that extends the idea of flourishing personal fashion to intentionally managing the identity of the business of fashion.

Links to dress and flourishing could be explored using social media, especially visual platforms such as Instagram; for example analysing hashtags which correspond to the themes of PERMA. There is also the possibility of applying IPA findings to design and exploring how data could be used to create garments that reflect identity needs. Using research on how we feel when we dress rather than how we look would be a novel approach to a design project for fashion students who could call on their own experience of wellbeing as well as creating garments that embedded PERMA-wear.

A quantitative study, which measures flourishing before and after intentional dressing, could provide evidence to support the outcomes of this study, as could combining a study of this kind with a diary project to gauge the effect of dressing daily to match feelings.

Conclusion

William James (Watson, 2004) linked fashion with wellbeing in 1890. He understood that our clothing was an extension of ourselves that could lead to psychological happiness. Over time research within psychology focused on the pathology of fashion (Hefferon, 2013), while within fashion using psychology to explore how dress and feelings are connected has received little attention (Ruggerone, 2016).

The findings in this paper suggest fashion plays a significant role in flourishing among the six participants. The results generated questions requiring further exploration, including: is the manner in which my participants intentionally manage their identity relevant to other groups? How can this help us to understand the way in which dressing connects to wellbeing? Do all the themes need to be in place for flourishing to occur? Exploring how the participants experienced wearing an outfit that made them happy has contributed to the possibility of viewing fashion from a positive psychology position which could impact further research. This includes whether having a relationship with our clothes, a deep attachment to knowing who you are and how you express yourself sartorially, can affect the amount of clothes we buy. If we are satisfied with how we feel in our clothes then would we consume less? Does

individual flourishing fashion translate to a way in which the fashion system could change?
What would it take to create a ripple effect of thriving throughout the fashion industry?

This small study doesn't begin to challenge the prevailing position of extensive overconsumption of clothes (Fletcher & Tham, 2014.). My hope is that continued research will emphasise how certain fashion consumption practices, which may be currently viewed as negative, create wellbeing and convince those responsible for creating fashion that flourishing is good for business as well as individuals.

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Courage: Is it an Innate Virtue, or Can it be Learned?

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Abstract

Courage is something that has the potential to help us face fear and move towards danger - even though our instincts may be screaming at us to move away! Courage inspires us when it is seen in others, and elevates our self esteem when we find it hidden within ourselves. We seek out stories of courage to entertain ourselves and raise our spirits. What is courage, where does it come from, is it innate, or learned? These questions are considered within this paper - together with a review of literature which has explored this virtuous human strength. Courage can be found in the naturally brave, but also the meek, and it oft surprises, rouses, and galvanises us when displayed by the latter... One thing is certain, we admire this virtue, and we aspire to it - which in itself may suggest that it is a rare and precious thing indeed! Understanding courage to be able to mine it, tap it, and access it when we need it could have profound benefits to us which this paper explores.

Introduction

“Courage is a selfless madness which descends on us in a dichotomous haze where we see the ugliness of the outcome and yet choose to walk towards the beauty of the sacrifice.”
(Coker, 2017)

What is courage and when, where, why and how do we experience it?

The above series of linked questions have occupied an increasing space in my mind since the concept, and central theme of ‘courage’ dropped out of my dissertation project on the road to completing my Masters in Applied Positive Psychology. My dissertation explored the subject of hope and fear, and set me on a journey into many of my own hopes and fears as I dared to gaze inwards. The following poetic episode is a meaningful glimpse into the conclusion of my work in this area, and the beginning of an entirely new chapter.

This paper explores and discusses the concept of courage as a central theme which emerged from an earlier study forming part of a dissertation project. To give context, some of the dissertation work is shared within this paper, specifically the exploration of hope and fear which gave birth to the interest in courage. This exploration should be viewed as a precursor to detailed research within this area, together with an eventual literature review. Initially, the bulk of this paper explores the concept of courage from the writer's viewpoint, whilst delving into some of the detail to emerge from the dissertation.

Excerpt from Dissertation

For my lighthouse:

Fear is an ocean wide and vast. Its roaring waves dwell in all temporal planes reaching the shores of the future, present and past. Fear can divert us from the course of our dreams of the future. Its currents can paralyze us in the present and halt our forward momentum. Its draw can pull us back into the past. Hope is a lighthouse in this ocean, and its light penetrates the fogs of fear. Hope shows us the way and gives us the will to move forwards. Its whisper can be heard above the roar for those who listen! (Coker, 2016)

My conclusion that hope is a lighthouse which gives us direction and binds us to our deeply meaningful goal. The function of hope is to attenuate the fear of non-attainment, and to show us that the end is within our grasp. For some, the lighthouse may be represented by a person, their own self-efficacy, or by the gravity and magnetism of the goal itself. What if we have no hope, or a hope that is eclipsed by fear? Why do some still continue to put one foot in front of the other without the positive force? My polar model explained this in the way that hope pulls us towards it, whereas fear pushes us away. Where the two are in balance, they can be powerful. If fear generates too much magnetic force, it can fix us in place and halt our forward momentum. Even more force, and it can start to pull us backwards and we can fall into despair, which for me is the absence of hope. Interestingly, through my study of hope and fear, the theme of courage dropped out, and seemed to appear constantly where hope and fear were experienced.

In an attempt to define courage, I would suggest that it be categorised as a virtue, or an intrinsic trait which has positive moral components, and an altruistic nature. Courage, for me, is the ability to choose to move forwards, hold steady, or move away in the presence of a dominant sense of fear, lack of control, and where the balance of probability is a negative outcome which affects us in a meaningful way. In simple terms, I believe that courage is the

measure of our resistance to fear. The concept of walking towards a personal loss, or away from a personal gain in favor of doing the right thing, and acting altruistically would suggest that courage is certainly a virtue!

The choice element of courage is a fascinating idea, and one which suggests that where we have no choice, and the fear is imposed on us, we may turn to hope, and not courage to attenuate the fear and break away from its “draw”. In this instance perhaps we deal with the threat because we have to deal with it, and we cannot run away from it. Imagine being told that we, or someone we love is going to die... My hope and fear research suggested that we immediately turn to hope – whether in the form of prayer, delusion, or the quest for knowledge in order to gain a sense of control. Where courage surfaced was in the instant that fear started to win, or hope started to fade, and the individual chose to face their greatest fear in the form of acceptance, and walk towards the outcome, embrace it, or make peace with it. So if hope pulls us towards a goal, and fear pushes us away from one, courage has the ability to overcome the push of fear where we choose to walk towards it. The polar model of hope and fear suggested that where we “hoped that it wouldn’t” happen, we would “fear that it would”. Imagine a scenario where we turned around and walked towards this fear by choice – when we could choose to walk away, or delude ourselves by focusing on the hope aspect. This would essentially go up against our most basic and selfish survival instincts. It is courage that gives us the ability to fight against this. Essentially, this is madness and entirely altruistic. Altruism of course, in its purist form always benefits the greater good, or the needs of the many, and this suggests that courage is an advancement mechanism, in the same way that fear is a survival mechanism. Maslow, (1943) suggests that for transcendence to occur, we have to be free of danger, and the basic needs. Courage may well be a nemesis to this theory, and those who operate altruistically have maybe discovered an ace-card, or way of cheating this concept

Hopeful Fear and Fearful Hope - Is There a Link?

When considering the concept of hoping that something “will” happen, there is an inference that it goes hand in hand with fearing that it won’t. Similarly, when we fear that something “will” happen, we, I would infer that we tend to hope that it won’t. This presents the possibility of a link, and potentially more than this, that the two are fundamentally joined in a way that may be impossible to separate. Some of the suggested evidence for this is summarised below:

- They are both motivators, one towards something and one away from something (Snyder, 2003).
- They are both felt when an event has either positive or negative outcomes that are impactful and, or meaningful to the individual. (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990)
- Physiology doesn't lie! They both cause anticipatory physiological responses which are uncannily similar, i.e. sweaty palms, excitement, and trepidation. The only difference is the fact that one outcome is desired and the other is not! (LeDoux, 2003)
- They are both felt where meaningful consequences require action from the individual, yet where total control of the outcome is not possible and therefore there is an element of speculation. (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990)

Perhaps the question that will lead to the ultimate answer is 'why'? Why hope, and what is it for? For me, hope is something that I turn to when the consequence and gravity of something that I want to happen, or want to avoid, is of a certain size and level of intrinsic meaning. Essentially, I often experience fear towards the outcome - particularly where I have no perceived ability to exert control or influence. In order to deal with this fear, I simply switch perspective and start to hope. The ingredients of this hope are explained in the following personal account:

Personal Account of the Experience of Hope, Fear, and Courage

My mother announced that she had cancer and that the prognosis was highly negative. Initially there was shock, followed by fear and a sense of helplessness and loss of control or influence. Then, I looked for second opinions, searched for information, educated myself on the condition in order to gain some kind of control – in some way. When the second opinions echoed the first opinions, and even more helplessness set in, I even turned to searching for anecdotal evidence of miracles and where medical opinions had been wrong, and I prayed. It was almost as if hope was a life raft to me in a sea of fear. Some may say that I was in denial... Now that may be true, perhaps hope is a form of denial, but I would argue that it is a denial of giving in to fear and a suspension of fear. Hope for me attenuated the fear, it didn't stop it, there was always a background noise of fear, but through hope, I could function, I could keep going, I could gather my strength, rally round... If not for the hope, I would have to face and deal with the grief of losing my mother whilst she was still alive, and

notwithstanding the fact that I believed that I had to be strong and supportive – for her. In this instance, delaying dealing with the outcome was useful.

There are also times that I can remember, whilst serving in the military, where the ultimate fear that we all share, in the form of death, came up more than once. I remember turning to hope in these instances. Frankly, hope was the only thing that kept me going, and it is a good job that I did, as help arrived and I am alive to tell the tale. At one point, I recall that the temptation to gain some control by “choosing” to give up started as a small voice whispering in my head, and rose to the volume of an orchestra until hope arrived and dampened the sound. There are many survival stories where people have given up and died, and yet unbeknownst to them, they were a few miles from salvation. There are also stories, where others have kept on and survived. Is it hope that has kept them going? If it is, then clearly hope is a powerful tool for survival and one that is not just an opposite to fear, nor is it something working against fear, it is a motivator that pulls us towards a goal, whereas fear is a motivator pushing us away. If one is pushing and the other pulling, then double the force is created to overcome inertia, get us going, and keep us going through adversity! So perhaps, if hope is a survival tool, its evolutionary origins may be shared with fear.

Imagine a situation where there was no such thing as hope, and we were faced with an overwhelming perception that we are about to die, or that someone we loved was about to die. How would we continue to function without hope? Ultimately, all hope in the world was not able to change the outcome for my mother, and yet we kept on, we coped with the eventual outcome, and hope gave us time to adjust, time to rally round, and the strength to deal with things - eventually.

Fear is a very expensive emotion to feel. Fear takes a lot of resources and causes massive hormonal and chemical changes in the body. Fear is meant to motivate quickly and in the short-term, fear is a sprint! Fear drains resources rapidly. Hope, on the other hand is a marathon! Hope is designed to be energizing, exciting, and for the long haul.

When we are terrified that something may happen, we are experiencing the fear mentioned above. This fear may be all consuming. When we turn to hope instead, we shift perspective and rather than fearing that it will happen, we start to “hope that it won’t”. In the case of an event or goal that we want to avoid, it may be a goal that we have not chosen, it may be one

that has been imposed on us and that we have to deal with. For me, the characteristics of this hope are:

- Telling myself that it will not happen (denial which can be productive and can lessen the fear)
- Asking myself if there is anything that i can do to stop it from happening (productive and leading to ingenuity)
- Deluding myself, which may be enough to keep me going rather than acting like a rabbit in the headlights and freezing!

When we switch it around and consider a goal that we choose and that we really want, we “hope that it happens”. In this instance, it is potentially the “fear that it won’t” that galvanizes us and keeps us focused on the goal. The interesting thing for me, is that I find that it takes more courage for me to choose to hope for something than for me to deal with fear that is imposed on me without a choice. I believe that the reason for this is that when one is born, the other is invoked at the same instant. If I hope for something, I will instantly fear that I may not get it, and if I fear, I will hope my way out of it. Now this sounds absolute, but if I am really experiencing hope, and not wishful thinking or nice-to-haves, then this hope invokes fear and in turn, if I fear for something, it invokes hope. For me, this represents further evidence that hope gives rise to fear, and that in choosing hope, I infer you are opening the door to fear, and who let fear in? Perhaps, only the brave! To explain this further; I believe that for hope to exist, the goal has to have real meaning to the individual. The goal could be an avoidance goal, or a move towards goal. This goal would not simply be a “nice to have” like “I hope it doesn’t rain today – because I want to wear that dress”. It may on the other hand be “I hope it rains, because if not, I cannot grow my crops and feed my family”. The stakes are much higher with the latter, and with the latter, there is no control, no ability to choose an alternative pathway. In this context, if I am hoping, and maybe even praying for rain, I must also consider that there is the possibility that rain will not come, and the result of that could be life-changing, or even life-ending! If we are talking about goals, another example may be an athlete dreaming of winning the Olympics, training, eating, sleeping, breathing the very thought of what it would mean to win that medal. Putting everything on the line, family suffering, relationships suffering because of the focus needed... What would it mean to lose, to not win after all of that? Surely it would take courage to dare to hope at this level, and if so, would the prospect of failing potentially invoke fear?

Hope and fear seem to be two aspects resulting from a deeply meaningful goal. Courage is something that has to be present when we choose to walk away from something we want, or towards something that we want to avoid in order to act in a selfless way. Courage cannot be felt just because fear is present, or imposed on us. When we use courage to “dare to hope” we are not being courageous in order to face hope, it is actually because we fear not achieving our goal, and in failing, we risk embarrassment, a sense of loss or any one of the other fears that we all share. As the polar model suggests, when we “hope that it will” we “fear that it won’t”. The hope triangle provides a model which suggests that each axis is an element that has to exist in order that we are able to exercise choice in relation to choosing a hope journey and direction towards hope or fear.

Results²

Courage was a central theme emerging from the study on hope and fear. This emergence is outlined below:

Main Theme: Emotional

This theme contains the sub-themes of: vulnerability, courage, resilience and cognitive.

Participant 2 states that hope is not an emotion, it is a composite: *“I don’t think it is an emotion. I think it is a composite.”* Participant 2 then expands on hope as a complex construct: *“I think hope comes with uncertainty, optimism, fear, I think, you know – denial, I think that when it happens, I think it comes with a release and joy and happiness – when it’s the way you want it. If it doesn’t happen then it’s sadness. I think it’s a complex emotion for want of a better phrase, it’s a complex construct – in and of itself. I think, depending on which way the dice falls – it leads to different emotions”.*

Participant 2 talks about hope requiring you to be vulnerable: *“I think – as I was listening to you talk, a word that came into my mind was vulnerability. And I think that hope requires you to be vulnerable. If you are expressing your hope, and you are communicating it, it requires you to be vulnerable”.* Participant 2 expands on vulnerability and the presence and need for courage in the process of feeling hope: *It requires you to be vulnerable, and that takes*

² References to participant transcript pages and line numbers have been removed.

courage for me, to be prepared to be vulnerable. I think that if you are hoping in secret, and you are not communicating then I don't think it takes courage, as much. I think it takes courage to face how you are feeling, and to allow yourself to hope. Once you are hoping, it's a process of allowing yourself to hope that I think requires courage".

Participant 2 talks about being afraid and using courage and actively making a choice or avoiding based on the risk and reward: *"It's that, I am prepared to hope for this, I am prepared to, it's a bit like if you decide, I am not going to fall in love because I don't want to get hurt, and you can't, you know, you can choose not to fall in love because you are afraid of getting hurt, or you can get the benefit of falling in love and risk the hurt, and deal with it if it happens".*

Participant 3 states that courage was an ingredient involved in hope where you invest into something that you have no control over: *"If you're gonna invest in hope and gonna put your heart into something that you have no control over, then it does take courage".*

Participant 4 talks about the function of hope and its ability to keep you working. Perhaps resilience and courage can be inferred from this statement: *"I think that it keeps you trying and it keeps you working and it keeps you, it's like that never give up until the last minute, you know so, I think that you're driven".*

Participant 5 talks about daring to believe and hope requiring courage as a component: *"A sense of daring to believe and I know if that sounds like a daft thing to say but when you've had your hopes smashed and your trust battered like I have, daring to believe is actually kind of a massive thing",* and adds: *"so actually it's more scary to hope than it is to fear".*

Discussion

The Polar Model of Hope and Fear

The polar theory of hope and fear is represented within the polar model, see Figure 1.

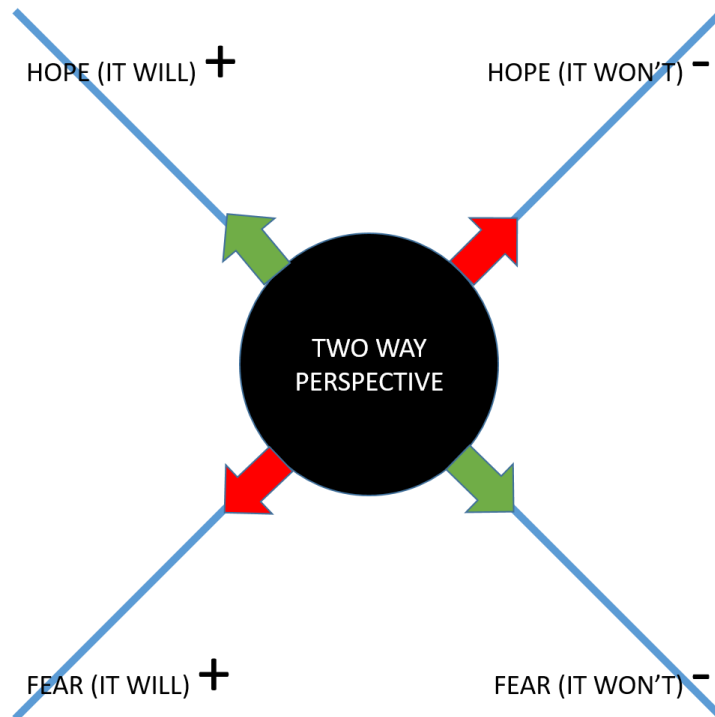


Figure 1. Polar model of hope and fear (Coker, 2017)

Within this model, where one hopes that something *will* happen and therefore experiences Hope+ one will be simultaneously fearing that it *will not* happen and therefore experiencing Fear –, or visa-versa. When you look at the opposite axis, where one fears that something will happen, they will also hope that it will not, and visa-versa. The polar model is simple, and yet the message is quite profound in as much as it displays magnetic polar attraction in the two emotions of hope and fear, and the fact that the positive and negatives attract, whereas two positives and two negatives actually repel and would not tend to naturally attract each other. An example of this is that if you hoped for an outcome, and were sure that you wanted it, you would not also fear that outcome, and if you did – it may suggest a lack of clear resolution on the goal, or conflict within the individual. The model also demonstrates, and suggests that hope and fear are not only linked, but that they are essentially aspects of the same emotion separated by perspective. An example would be hoping that something is going to happen becoming fearing that it won't simply by changing the perspective along the emotional axis.

Linking Hope and Fear Through Purpose

Perhaps in considering that hope and fear are linked, we may look at *hope positive* as the focus on a positive goal or event actually happening, which could be viewed as hope in its

pure form. *Hope negative*, on the other hand, is hoping that something does not happen. *Fear positive* would be the fearful focus on the possibility of an unwanted event occurring, which could be considered as a common perspective of fear, and perhaps a fairly pure form. *Fear negative*, however would be the focus on the possibility that a wanted event may not happen, when we hope that it will, and this type of fear will be seen at the opposite axis of hopefulness.

Perhaps one purpose of hope is to overcome the crippling inertia and “freeze” effect so often invoked when the weight of fear is simply too much to move us. In this context, hope can be considered as an agent to lessen the weight of fear. Hope can also be reinvigorated by fear as the hope levels start to waiver. When we hope that something will happen, the fear that it may not can drive us harder and with renewed vigour to be able to stay motivated!

Which One is the Better Motivator?

Perhaps one of the biggest differences between hope and fear is the fact that fear tends to motivate us to act far more rapidly. An example would be whereby we hope for health, but this hope does not tend to motivate us to go and see a dentist or doctor preventatively, perhaps it is the choice element, where we have to actively choose to go to the doctors, and in doing so – we have to face our fears. As soon as we are faced with illness, and the choice is taken away, we will rapidly go to the doctors and take action. We therefore react to our fears rather than choose to follow our hopes, unless we can find courage. It is an interesting question: How much better would our lives be if we reacted to our hopes rather than our fears? Perhaps some people actually do and perhaps this is what separates those courageous, and hopeful, inspirational achievers from the fearful, reactive masses.

Does Fear Dominate Hope?

Science has gathered evidence of primary and secondary emotions and positive and negative emotions. The science suggests the separation and evidence due to the different neuro-psychological origins and, so far, fear is considered to be a primary emotion which does not require cognitive intervention and processing, and hope a secondary one requiring cognitive processes. This argument can be challenged by considering that whilst there are primary fears, there are also fears that are born of cognitive processes which can be demonstrated in the creation of phobias and the potential for the cure of these phobias by psychological interventions. There is a solid argument therefore for both primary and secondary fears. If

this is true, then hypothetically, there is also an argument for primary and secondary forms of hope.

It is suggested that fear as a primary emotion will override hope as a secondary emotion in times of extreme perceived threat, and that this emotion is activated spontaneously and based on past and present affective experiences (LeDoux, 2003). The emotion of hope, however, requires complex secondary cognitive processes based on deliberate thinking and positive affective components (Snyder, 1991). Snyder suggests that hope has a rationality to it, and that it is felt when a positive goal is expected. The limitations with this approach, and indeed the counter argument is suggested where hope is felt in the yearning of relief from negative conditions (Lazarus, 1999). Perhaps Snyder's theory on hope and the affective components of goal directed agency and pathway thinking suggest a complex cognitive process which contains both positive and negative components. The negative components may involve the individual's perceptions of the potential struggle, size of the issue and the weight of their own abilities in contrast and this "weighing up" may result in a positive or negative estimation of ability to reach the goal. In the positive form, hope can spring and in the negative form, fear can emerge. This is where the argument becomes dichotomous, however as in the most extreme negative form, whereby the weight of the individual's own will and "agency thoughts" and way forward "pathway thoughts" are dwarfed by and no match for the weight of the issues, one would expect fear of certain defeat to be the victor, and yet, hope can emerge victorious and completely irrationally, perhaps courage is one of the forces at work here.

The Hope Triangle

The Hope Triangle (Figure 2) is a concept that I have created to model the findings and main themes within the data in terms of how hope and fear operate. The emerging themes have suggested that certain elements seem to be present when either polar aspect of hope is experienced, i.e. hopeful or fearful perspective.



Figure 2. The Hope Triangle

Within the Hope Triangle model, it is suggested that the sides of the triangle have to be complete and joined for hope or fear to exist. The sides themselves are labelled as: Influence, Virtues, and Motivation, and these sides house specific components that have emerged during the thematic analysis. Hope or fear sit in the middle and are interchangeable depending on the perspective taken.

Influence (Difficulty/Control)

The influence axis houses the levels of perceived difficulty and control that exist when compared to the hope or fear goal. Within the levels of difficulty and control, which are related, also lie additional elements such as: Certainty and uncertainty levels that directly relate to how difficult the task is and therefore how much control we have over the influence. If the difficulty increases, the control that we have lessens and certainty becomes uncertainty. The reverse is also true, inasmuch as when the difficulty lessens and we gain control, the certainty increases. There is an interesting link to how the flow model operates, and in particular how the levels of difficulty compared to the ability and skill of the practitioner directly influence the levels of flow that are experienced (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Hope theory created by Snyder (1991) suggests that the perceived pathways and their levels of difficulty influence hope levels and that our inner agency, or motivation also play a part.

Motivation (Risk/Reward/Want)

The motivation axis houses the levels of risk, reward and want. The risk and reward together will have a direct impact on how much an individual wants something to happen, in the case of hope, and not want to happen in the case of fear. If we consider a choice goal, where we want something to happen and have a free choice to pursue it or not, where this goal carries a huge risk, against a huge reward, the choice that we make will depend on our virtues and influence, which are explained below and above in more detail. We may proceed where we have high levels of courage. Where we have low courage but high levels of faith in god, for example, we may still pursue that goal. The same may be true where we have trust in a process, or individual. In the case of a goal or event that we want to avoid - that is imposed on us, again the risk and reward is considered and our actions influenced by our virtues. Do we have enough to keep marching forwards when the outcome looks bleak? The part that motivation plays in hopefulness forms a fundamental part of hope theory (Snyder, 1991).

Virtues (Courage/Faith/Trust)

The Virtues axis houses the intrinsic virtues that exist within the individual. Trust can be placed in others, or ourselves, faith can be placed in people and circumstances, or something more spiritual. Faith and trust are similar, and at times interchangeable, and yet there is something distinct and as such, they are being treated as so. Courage is often seen to be synonymous with fear, and yet the research has shown that courage is required to dare to hope. Interestingly, when trust levels drop, trust can be replaced with doubt and when doubt exists, fear creeps in.

Tying It Together – Summary of the Model

The Hope Triangle (Figure 2) demonstrates how the levels of influence that we have over a goal, together with the motivation that we have based on the risk and reward and our internal virtues such as courage, faith and trust, will dictate whether or not we experience a hopeful fear or fearful hope perspective. The triangle also considers whether or not we keep marching forwards in the presence of fear, or have the courage to follow our own hope goals where we have a choice. The model makes the assertion that, as per the polar model, hope and fear are always experienced together and that they are not always in harmony, nor are their volume levels always the same. The polar model (Figure 1) suggests that where they are in harmony,

hope can pull at the same time that fear pushes and they can therefore operate powerfully together. Where they are out of balance, fear can push us without the steering direction of hope.



Figure 3. The Courage Triangle.

In Figure 3, the Courage Triangle, it is suggested that for courage to exist, the other elements must first be in place. The presence of hope/fear, the act of staying put, holding on, moving forwards, doing the right thing, making a sacrifice, or walking away, combined with risking something meaningful or facing the consequences = courage.

Conclusions

The Hope Triangle (Figure 2) goes further to capture the themes that emerges through the research. Participants of the research recounted very different experiences of hopefulness, fearfulness, and courage, and whilst the experiences themselves were very different, each participant recounted similar experiences of the two perspectives of hope and fear working together, fighting with each-other and being linked. There were many common triggers and elements that were present during the experiences, and these emerged as central and sub-themes which are captured within this model. Courage seemed to be the ability to step forwards, or hold fast in the face of an overwhelming desire to succumb to fear. Courage could therefore be seen as a level of resistance to fear, and perhaps it could therefore be measured as thus.

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Autism: The Case for a Family Intervention Employing Adapted Positive Psychology Approaches

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Abstract

Autism is suggested to affect approximately 1 in 100; however, one study found the prevalence rate may be as high as 1 in 29 children by age 11 years. The financial cost to the UK is suggested to be £32 billion per year, in treatment, lost earnings, care and support for both adults and children. Despite this huge financial burden, autistic children and adults show a high prevalence of comorbid mental health conditions. Our³ review of the literature highlights a cycle of delayed development and anxiety in children, which lead to parental over-responsivity, stress and anxiety. Our focus groups with parents reflect these findings. Despite the cost of resources, children face poor outcomes. We therefore suggest that there is a need to change the way children and families are supported to generate better outcomes. Positive psychology has proven effective in enhancing well-being in general populations and has been adapted for people experiencing both depression and psychosis, yielding promising findings, which signifies that positive psychology approaches may be adaptable for use within autism. Parents suggest that there is a need for a post-diagnosis parent programmes which address the needs of the child and the wider family. We aim to develop a post-diagnosis parenting programme which enables parents to understand their child's developmental differences, support functional skill development, and utilise adapted positive psychology approaches, which, in combination, we postulate will lead to enhanced outcomes for all.

Introduction

Autism is said to be the costliest condition within the UK and the LSE reports the financial cost to the UK is £32 billion per year, in treatment, lost earnings, care and support for both

³ Note from Proceedings editors: Ruth's use of the term 'our' or 'we' was to reflect three PhD supervisors, Drs. Piers Worth & Matthew Smith, and Prof Colin Martin. However, this paper is primarily Ruth's work and output.

adults and children. (Buescher et al., 2014). To put this into perspective, the *combined cost* of cancer, heart disease and stroke to the UK are £25 billion per year, with research spend of £791 million, whilst autism research receives just £4 million, and there is a real need for research that enhances lives (Buescher et al., 2014). The rate of diagnosis has increased, and while some suggest that 1 in 100 are affected (Buescher et al., 2014), research from the Millennium Cohort Study, which tracked UK children born in the year 2000, found the prevalence rate may be as high as 1 in 29 children by age 11 years (Dillenburger et al., 2015).

Despite the huge costs associated with autism within the UK, the outcomes for children, adults and families are of cause for concern and there is evidence of delays in the development of functional skills, high instances of comorbid mental health problems, higher suicide rates and polypharmacy. With regard to parents, we find stress and mental health problems, and ‘over-responsiveness’ (Close et al., 2012; Dillenburger et al., 2015; Drahota et al., 2011; Levy et al., 2010; K. Magnuson & Constantino, 2011; Mattila et al., 2010; Mazefsky, Conner, & Oswald, 2010; Paquette-Smith, Weiss, & Lunsy, 2014; Raja, Azzoni, & Frustaci, 2011; Strang et al., 2012). There appears to be a cycle of family stress and anxiety which increases over time.

The Millennium Cohort study also reported concerning findings regarding outcomes for children and families (Dillenburger et al., 2015) suggesting risk of poor mental and physical health, poverty and social exclusion, both pre- and post- diagnosis. They claimed that detrimental impact would increase with time, and autistic children’s rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are not being met.

How did we get here? And why, despite such high costs, is there such a poor picture of life outcomes? Insight can be gained from the history of the diagnosis and the journey of research and support.

History

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is considered to be a neurodevelopmental condition diagnosed on the basis of difficulties or differences in social interaction, communication and flexibility of thought/ repetitive behaviour (Aylott, 2000).

Autism was first described in 1943 and 1944 by Kanner and Asperger respectively (Garcia-Villamizar & Rojahn, 2015), however, it has been suggested that Asperger first described autism in his 1938 paper (Silberman, 2015). Asperger considered the condition to be an inborn difference and as a continuum that was ‘not at all rare’ (Silberman, 2015). A multidisciplinary team worked with the children and Asperger saw a route to success was to meet the children halfway by not expecting the children to completely alter their behaviour in line with social norms and conventions, but rather understand that the children have an inborn difference leading to behavioural differences. The clinic treated and taught children in a holistic, non-medicalised manner, seeking to understand the whole child and draw upon their strengths and talents whilst combining medicine with pedagogy in a person centred approach (Michaels, 1935). Asperger believed that by enabling the children to absorb themselves in their interests may lead to future employment and successful outcomes. Asperger considered the condition to be commonly occurring and children were affected to varying degrees.

In contrast, Kanner who was working within the field of child psychiatry, considered the condition that he called ‘early infantile autism’, to be a psychosis and of rare occurrence. Whilst Asperger and his colleagues had noted that families of the children had a tendency for high intellect and eccentricity, Kanner created the space for ‘toxic parenting’ theories, and lay the path for potentially decades of misdirected research, treatments and societal shame (Silberman, 2015). During the following decades, the controversies continued as mothers were blamed for their children’s differences with theories such as the ‘refrigerator mother’ syndrome (Cohmer, 2014).

During the 1960’s Lovvas developed applied behavioural therapy to alter the children’s behavioural presentation. Lovvas developed a ‘treatment’ he initially called ‘behavioural engineering’ and would later describe as ‘applied behaviour analysis’ which included the electrocution, ammonia, hitting, physical restraint of children and adults when they presented unwanted behaviours (Bowman & Baker, 2014; Chance, 1974; Nordquist & Wahler, 1973; Silberman, 2015; Tanner, B. A., & Zeiler, 1975). These decades would see children being institutionalised and uneducated, while writers such as Rimland began the quest for a ‘cure’ (Silberman, 2015). The use of negative reinforcement to extinguish unwanted behaviours continues in some countries, with the use of isolation and electric shocks (Ahern, Laurie. Rosenthal, 2010). It was not until the late 1980’s that Autism Spectrum Disorders were recognised as developmental disorders rather than being psychiatric in nature (Aylott, 2000).

Alongside this change, autism began to be described as being on a ‘continuum’ or ‘spectrum’ of functioning, further to the work and research undertaken by Lorna Wing and her team onwards from the 1980s in the UK (Wing, 1993).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4 (DSM-4) included Asperger’s, Autistic Disorder, Pervasive Development Disorder and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, all under the umbrella of autism spectrum conditions (“Autism Spectrum Disorder,” n.d.). The diagnostic criteria were based on observable differences in behaviour, communication and interaction, and these areas were known as the ‘triad of impairments’, it is worth noting that the diagnostic criteria and practitioners understanding of the nature of the condition were based on the presentation of particular behaviours and the absence of others. Recent years have led to a greater understanding of people’s experience, leading to acknowledgement that many autistic people have differences in the way in their sensory systems function. The increased understanding has been supported by autistic adults sharing their experiences, for example Temple Grandin, one of the world’s leading autistic speakers and advocates for autism, has raised awareness of the sensory and neurological differences that can occur (Kalbfleisch, 2013). However, the diagnostic criteria failed to account for the presentation of sensory differences within the population.

In order to simplify the assessment and provide consistency, revision was necessary with the development of more accurate diagnostic criteria (McPartland, Reichow, & Volkmar, 2012) The development of the DSM-5 criteria enabled these challenges to be addressed and a single diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder replaced the previous multiple diagnoses. The domains of ‘social communication’ and ‘fixated interests/repetitive behaviour or activity’ replaced the triad of impairments. Other changes included ensuring the diagnostic criteria were appropriate for a wider age range, as well as the inclusion of sensory differences, under the domain of repetitive behaviour. The sensory differences within the criteria now include low level sensory motor behaviours, for example rocking, serving as a sensory soothing behaviour, and more complex higher order features such as routine and insistence on sameness (Boulter, Freeston, South, & Rodgers, 2014).

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Dillenburger et al. (2015) found that autistic children had higher rates of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, behavioural issues, lower overall happiness scores, school reluctance,

higher levels of bullying and social isolation. Autistic children frequently experience one or more co-morbid condition, and a number of these are psychiatric in nature (Close et al., 2012; Gadow et al., 2008; Garcia-Villamizar & Rojahn, 2015; Levy et al., 2010; Mattila et al., 2010). Table 1 shows comparison of studies which aimed to find the prevalence of co-morbid conditions in children and adolescents, with the most commonly occurring conditions being anxiety, depression and behavioural disorders.

Table 1.

Comparison of studies identifying co-morbid psychiatric conditions in children/adolescents with an ASD (^c = current; ^p = past; ^{pd} = psychiatric diagnosis; ^m = mild; ^s = severe)

Study	Mattila et al., 2010 (Finland)	Levy et al., 2010 (US)	Close et al., 2012 (US)			Mazefsky et al., 2010 (US)	Strang et al., 2012 (US)
Sample Size	50 (combined community & clinical)	2,568	154	373	386	31	95
Age of Cohort (yrs)	9 – 16	8	3 – 5	5- 11	12- 17	10 – 17	6 – 18
Diagnosis	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Anxiety	42 ^c 56 ^p	3.4	1.6 ^{c/m} 22.3 ^{c/s} 7 ^p	10.3 ^{c/m} 21.1 ^{c/s} 8.3 ^p	16.4 ^{c/m} 27.6 ^{c/s} 4.2 ^p	39	56
OCD		2					
TIC	26 ^c /38 ^p						
Reactive Attachment Disorder		0.3					
Depression		1.1	0 ^{c/m} 0.3 ^{c/s} 0.5 ^p	3 ^{c/m} 8.4 ^{c/s} 12.8 ^p	9.8 ^{c/m} 7.9 ^{c/s} 11.7 ^p	32	44
Bipolar		0.7					
Mood Disorder	6 ^c 14 ^p	2.3					
Emotional Disorder		2.4					
Behavioural	44 ^c 50 ^p		1.9 ^{c/m} 12 ^{c/s} 0.3 ^p	12.3 ^{c/m} 28.3 ^{c/s} 8.7 ^p	7 ^{c/m} 25 ^{c/s} 4.6 ^p		
Conduct Disorder		0.2					
Mutism		0.5					
Psychosis		0.3					
Schizophrenia		0.1					
1 or more PD	74 ^c 84 ^p	10					
Current 1 PD	32 ^c						
Current 2 PD	20 ^c						
Current 3 PD	14 ^c						
Current 4≥PD	8 ^c						

Depression

Depression is commonly reported within the ASD population, a recent study by Strang et al. (2012) found that of the 95 children aged 6 to 18 who participated, 30% had depressive symptoms within the clinical range of depression, and 40% presented with borderline levels of symptoms. Another study attempting to find prevalence rates have ranged from 1.4% to 38% (K. M. Magnuson & Constantino, 2011), highlighting the difficulty that researchers and practitioners have identifying depression within the population.

Depression is characterised by having less interest in activities, feelings of being worthless, guilt, difficulty with decision making and concentration, thoughts of suicide and death (Magnuson & Constantino, 2011). Magnuson and Constantino suggest that children may display irritability or engage in play activities which centre around themes of death or dying. Many autistic children have difficulty identifying and expressing how they feel which can lead to difficulty in identifying and diagnosing a depressed state. In these instances, there is a reliance on observable behaviours and parental reports. The documented observable behaviours are suggested to be increased sadness, crying, negative affect and apathy. Other differences include increased sleep, weight changes, decreased performance and loss of skills. Additionally, there can be an increase in self injurious behaviour, which is reported to decrease upon treatment.

Peer relationships seem to be particularly important factor in the development of depression, with Williamson, Craig, & Slinher (2008) finding peer approval can be a predictor. Self-perceived peer approval and social competence are also suggested to predict global self-worth scores. Furthermore, a study with college students found a link between higher autistic traits and external locus of control, which is said to contribute to self-perceived helplessness (Koegel & Mentis, 1985). It has long been suggested that learned helplessness is involved in the development of depression, however to date there have not been any studies which have evaluated this concept empirically. Barnhill (2001) describes the variables of high IQ and high functioning ASD, presenting with increased levels of functioning may result in the blame for social failure being explained by lack of ability, rather than other explanations, such as chance. This is suggested to result in increased depressive symptoms (Barnhill, 2001). Magnuson & Constantino (2011) suggest that this leads to the consideration that learned helplessness is involved in the development of depression. This raises an important issue for consideration in the development of interventions for the population with ASD. It

would be essential to ensure that interventions address these issues through the development of positive self-appraisal, self-perception, and aim to decrease learned helplessness.

A further variable to the development of depression is the role of family. Both depression and anxiety are observed in family members of autistic children, with reported rates higher than is usually found in the general population (Brimacombe, Xue Ming, & Parikh, 2007). A history of family depression tends to be significant in depressed autistic children (Mazefsky, Folstein, & Lainhart, 2008) and there is an association between maternal depression and ASD (Daniels et al., 2008) who found that parents are more likely to have been hospitalised for mental illness than was found in the control group. Building on previous research, in a study examining the relationship between depression and anxiety in high functioning adolescents, Mazefsky et al. (2010) found that 33% met criteria for a lifetime history of depressive disorder. The study found a relationship between the mothers' symptoms of depression, anxiety, phobic anxiety, hostility and interpersonal sensitivity and co-morbid depression and anxiety within the children. Specifically, maternal measures of anxiety were predictors of co-morbid depression in children. Again, it is not clear whether the mothers are developing anxiety because their children are depressed, or if the mother's anxieties are contributing to the development of the child's depression. Whilst there are limitations and further investigation is clearly needed, the relationship between parental and child mental health provides further evidence for the need for family interventions, which could enhance life and improve outcomes for all family members.

Depression has also been linked to suicidal thoughts, attempts and completed suicides within the population. An online survey questioned 50 autistic adults and found that 35% had attempted suicide in the past. This compares to the rate of 4.6% in the general population (Paquette-Smith et al., 2014). This extremely high rate of suicide within even a small sample is alarming and gives rise for concern. However, it is not clear that the rate is truly reflective of the population. It is unclear how potential participants were informed at the advertising stage that the study's focus was mental health. If this is the case, adults who had not experienced mental health difficulties may have been put off participating and decided not to engage. In addition to this, study participants were recruited through ASD support organisations and websites. It could be argued that adults who are not experiencing difficulty are less likely to be accessing these services, and therefore not be aware of the study. The study found that those who had previously attempted suicide had a history of depression and

reported more severe symptoms of autism in the areas of communication and attention switching. This interesting finding, suggests that the more significant communication difficulties led to people facing greater challenges communicating their feelings. Taking into account the findings from Hare, Wood, Wastell, & Skirrow (2015) regarding the nature of thoughts and length of time spent on thoughts being significantly longer, it could be postulated that difficulty switching attention leads people to ‘get stuck’ in internalised thoughts that they find difficult to communicate to others or make sense of them, which leads to a self-perpetuating cycle.

Further insight into suicide can be gleaned from a 15year study into ASD and suicide with autistic adults. This was undertaken by clinical practitioners (Raja et al., 2011) who provided an adult diagnosis of ASD. Of the 26 autistic adults studied, 30.8% presented with suicidal ideation, 3.8% attempted suicide and 7.7% committed suicide. These findings mirror those of Gadow et al. (2012) who found that depression was more severe when there were co-morbid diagnoses.

Raja et al. (2011) reported difficulty undertaking assessments of suicide risk with autistic patients. The 2 patients who completed their suicide were deemed to be not at risk in the preceding months. They suggest that there are clinical variables which may mislead clinicians. There is also suggestion that typical symptoms are possibly hidden due to autism and the difficulty communicating and interacting can mislead clinicians to consider the person to be calm and stable, cause for concern with high rates of suicide and attempts of such within the population.

Anxiety

Anxiety is common (Soussana et al., 2012) and findings from the studies described in Figure 1. reflect this. However, prevalence rates indicated from research are widely fluctuating, from 3.4% (Levy et al., 2010) to 56% (Strang et al., 2012). Age may contribute to the variations, as anxieties may increase with age as the child encounters more difficult experiences. Close et al. (2012) found that 1.6% of 3-5 year olds were mildly anxious and 22.3% severely. This rose to 10.3% with mild anxiety and 21.1% with severe anxiety in the 5 – 11-year-old group, and in the 12 – 17 age group, 16.4% experienced mild anxiety and 27.6% experienced severe anxiety. These findings are reflecting greater levels of anxiety than those of Levy (2010) and these increasing rates appear to highlight how anxieties may well

increase with age. An additional explanation for the discrepancy between the findings could be study design; Levy extrapolated the data from existing medical and educational records, whilst the other studies utilised various methods, including parental interviews and checklists to identify conditions within their samples. The difference in findings may be reflective of an under-diagnosis of anxiety related conditions, resulting in lack of recording on medical records, hence the lower rates of prevalence in Levy's findings.

Clinically, anxiety presents with behavioural, emotional, cognitive and physiological features. The latter includes complaints such as nausea, headaches and muscle tensions, while emotional features can manifest as fears, worries and irritability. Behaviours may include hypervigilance and avoidance, while cognitive features can present as the expectation of not coping, as well as catastrophic explanations and expectations (Ozsivadjian, Knott, & Magiati, 2012). Ozsivadjian et al. also suggest that anxiety leads to restrictive activity, with children becoming less exposed to the world as they avoid potentially ever more experiences to avoid situations that are perceived as confusing and threatening. Greenaway and Howlin (2010) found that ASD children had more cognitive distortions, perfectionism and dysfunctional attitudes than typically developing children.

Insight into state anxiety and the characteristics of thoughts has come from a real time study by Hare et al. (2015). They found that significantly more time was being spent on thoughts than participants in a control group, with 22% of the autistic group spending between 5-10 minutes and 30% spent over 10 minutes on the same thoughts, significantly longer than the 8% (5-10 minutes) and 3.5% (>10 minutes) found in the control group. This suggests that autistic people ruminate, and may highlight difficulties problem solving and making sense of events. Negative affect rumination has been linked to the development and maintenance of mental health problems (Bijttebier, Raes, Vasey, & Feldman, 2012). The study found that there were also differences in the focus of, and forms of thoughts. The control group had an internal focus of thoughts for 4.6%, in contrast to 34% of the ASD group, and these thoughts were shown to be related to anxiety. With anxious thoughts involving 6.3% for the typical group compared to 16.3% for the ASD group. Surprisingly, the autistic group reported finding 36.5% of thoughts distressing in comparison to 20.6% for the typical group.

An insightful finding from this study was that visual thoughts (40%) were unrelated to anxiety, while 'self-talk' thoughts were, and taking just 37.5% of thoughts, in contrast to 68% found in the typical group, highlighting a preference for visual thinking and processing.

These findings may also be indicative of lasting difficulties with language and that using language, even with self-talk, may be involved in inducing stress and anxiety.

The Hare et al. study also highlighted that people reported the need to have rules and structure in order to be able to manage in daily life. Unexpected changes led people to either do nothing (not undertake the intended task or activity), or led to symptoms of anxiety.

Supporting the findings of Hare et al. regarding the need for rules and structure to engage and cope is the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and anxiety. Boulter et al. (2014) suggest that intolerance of uncertainty (IU) leads to anxiety, though there is acknowledgement that there is an overlap between IU and the core deficits of autism of restrictive and repetitive behaviour.

Other aspects of autism may increase the challenges faced by the children, for example, difficulty understanding social rules may increase anxiety about social situations, while sensory differences may increase anxieties around different activities and environments. Pugliese, White, White, and Ollendick (2013) found that in comparison to peers who experienced social anxiety disorder (SAD), oppositional defiance disorder(ODD)/conduct disorder (CD), autistic children had levels of humiliation and rejection fears similar to children with SAD, and exhibited aggression to the level that was similar to those with ODD and CD. Considering anxiety as a consequence of IU, lead Boulter et al. (2014) to suggest that the core deficits of restrictive and repetitive behaviours may in fact not be a core deficit at all, but a consequence of anxiety resulting from IU. They suggest that the behaviours of adherence to routine and insistence on sameness may be an effort to make sense of an uncertain world, a coping strategy, while restrictive interests may be to ensure you know all there is to know about a subject and won't face any surprises, another coping strategy. Exploring the relationship between anxiety and 'insistence on sameness' (IS) within children, (Gotham et al., 2013) found that there was an association between anxiety and IS, age and IQ, but there was not a correlation between these and other core 'deficits'.

This is indeed a significant challenge to the role of restrictive and repetitive behaviour as a core feature of autism, leading to implications in how we understand autism and focus interventions and support. Existing practice lends support to the IU theory, with the wide use of visual schedules and supports in approaches such as TEACCH (Butler, 2007), which minimise children's behaviours that challenge others and self-imposed routines and rigidity.

This is achieved by ensuring a child knows what to expect and what is expected of them, enabling children to not have to face uncertainty in daily life which subsequently decreases self-imposed rigidity, routines and refusals.

The relationship between anxiety and sensory over-responsivity (SOR) has been investigated in a year-long study of toddlers (Green & Ben-Sasson, 2010) and is supportive of the explanation that sensory differences may also lead to anxiety. Assessing SOR over time, the research found that SOR rates were stable, whilst anxiety increased, reflecting the findings of Close et al. (2012) where anxiety increased with age. Regarding the prediction of anxiety, they found that SOR was a more accurate predictor of anxiety over age, ASD severity, non-verbal development quotient and maternal anxiety. The study also found that it is developmental level that is related to anxiety development. This is suggestive that further to children being exposed to adverse events and environments, they become anxious about future exposure and may develop strategies to decrease such experiences in the future by imposing rigid routines and refusals.

SOR may also explain the role of stereotypical behaviours which may serve as self-regulation or self-soothing. The role of Intolerance of Uncertainty, insistence of sameness and sensory over-responsivity, suggests that anxiety and restricted and repetitive behaviours are a consequence, which completely changes the landscape of how we think about autism and how we propose to support children and families.

The work of Wigham, Rodgers, South, McConachie, and Freeston (2015) lends further support to this proposal. They investigated the relationship between sensory processing differences, anxiety and restricted and repetitive behaviours, and found that sensory differences (hypo and hyper sensitivities) were significantly associated with repetitive motor behaviours and insistence on sameness and these led to intolerance of uncertainty and anxiety.

It could be suggested that intolerance of uncertainty is not a core feature of autism, but rather a result of challenging or uncomfortable experiences in daily life due to sensory over- or under-responsivity, therefore, a coping strategy. Alongside this, the social and communication difficulties could be explained by sensory over- or under-responsivity. Differences in visual perception, processing and memory may lead to the child to 'miss' key development opportunities in early life.

Shic, Chawarska, Bradshaw, & Scassellati (n.d.) studied the eye movements of autistic and typically developing 2 and 4 year olds. They found that as age increased, the typical group showed increased attention to stimulus regions of faces, such as eyes and mouth, and face scanning strategies change the focus attention on areas of the face that are more informative for socialisation and communication. In contrast, the older autistic group looked more at non-stimulus regions of the face than younger autistic children, showing a decrease in attention and focus with age. The decreasing attention highlights a different developmental trajectory to typically developing peers and this difference may lead the child to miss these development opportunities leading to delays in the development of social communication and subsequent deficits that are features of autism presentation (Figure 1).

If restricted and repetitive behaviours and social and communication deficits are a *consequence* of anxiety, neurological and sensory differences, diagnostic criteria are not reflecting core features of autism and mislead support and interventions. With a focus on SOR and neurological differences creating missed development, we create room for support to enhance development and decrease anxiety, no longer are anxieties and developmental delays inevitable.

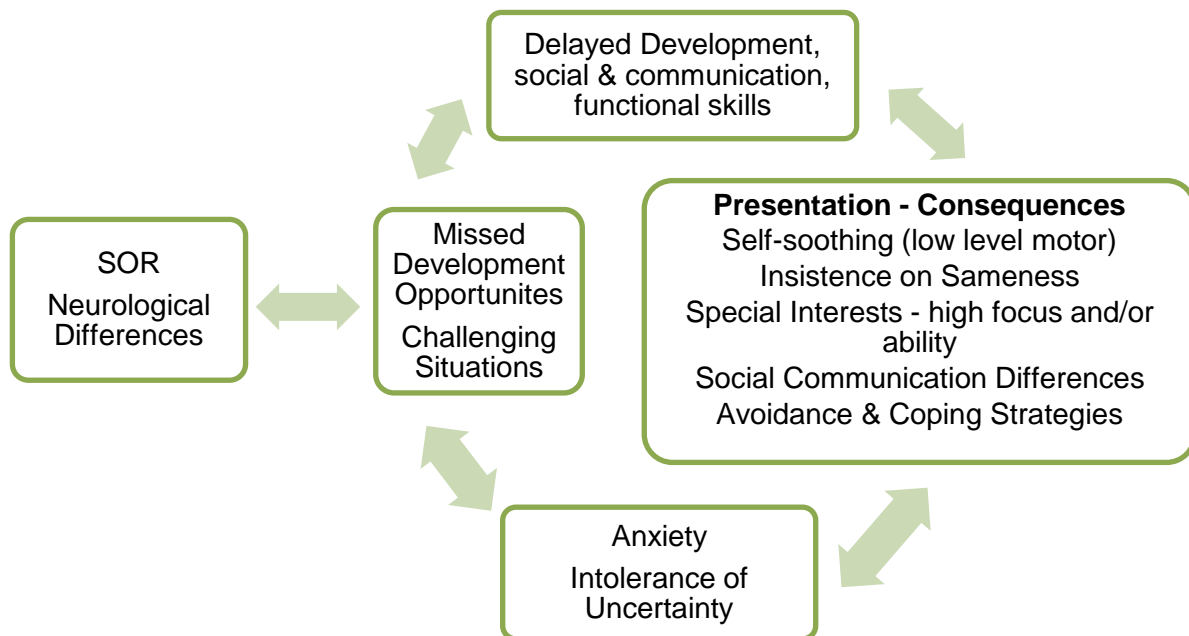


Figure 1. Proposed Model of Autism and the Development of Autistic Presentation

Further support for this proposed model can be found in some sub-groups of autistic children and adults where traditional understanding of autism sit uncomfortably. The model explains the differing presentation in women and girls, and Pathological Demand Avoidance Syndrome and young adults who no longer meet diagnostic criteria but continue to have different neurology and senses. Considering this model as an explanation of the differing presentations and sub-groups, we could suggest that the autism is not a spectrum as we currently understand.

Instead of a spectrum of affectedness, from high functioning to low functioning, it could be suggested that the differences between the groups are learnt coping mechanisms, brought into play by children and young people because of challenging experiences and anxieties. The level to which they do so, *is not a spectrum of autism, but a spectrum of intelligence*, the ability to learn from experience and generate strategies to decrease or manage situations that challenge. For example, women and girls learn to ‘mask’ and quietly avoid situations, PDA children learn to mask, manipulate and present differently depending upon the demands and context, while ‘low functioning’ children, may be immersed in their sensory worlds as they may have difficulty creating strategies due to general learning difficulties. Using the model as a starting point for intervention strategies, we could postulate that interventions would be concerned with management of sensory differences to decrease challenges and anxieties, the development of anxiety coping strategies that are not life-limiting and explicit teaching of skills that are being missed. Focus would be to enable children and young people to harness their sensory differences and interests to create life opportunities.

Anxiety & Parental Needs

Studies that have focused attention upon parents have found that parental state anxiety was significantly correlated with the parental reports of the adolescent’s anxiety (Conner, Maddox, & White, 2013). Furthermore, the treatment of the child’s anxiety with techniques to reduce anxiety and develop social skills, led to a decrease in parental anxiety. It is not clear whether parental anxiety escalates child anxiety or child anxiety escalates parents’ anxiety, nevertheless there is an association. Anxious parents may be more able to identify with their child’s symptoms and be more able to report the difficulties that their child faces. Conner et al. suggest that interventions aimed to decrease anxiety in children should include interventions for parents.

Whilst anxiety is distressing and life-limiting and can lead to difficulties for the whole family, there are other consequences of the condition. Drahota et al. (2010, as cited in Drahota et al. 2011) found that autistic children who also have an anxiety disorder are at high risk of their daily living skills being poorly developed. These are essential skills that need to be learnt to function independently. Daily living skills include personal self-care, such as washing and dressing, cooking and cleaning. Other skills involve the community and wider society, for example managing money, shopping, travelling on public transport, planning and understanding safety issues, such as stranger danger. Drahota et al. (2011) suggest that whilst the children are capable of learning and undertaking these tasks, they do not, and this could be due to lack of motivation and difficulties with perspective taking, for example, they may not be aware of social norms regarding developmental behaviours and expectations. Linked to the lack of motivation and understanding (Lucker, 2009), is over-involvement of parents (Drahota et al., 2011) in the children's self-care tasks. They reported that parents can find it difficult to teach their children these tasks and prefer to undertake these themselves, with the children rarely going against this input. Parental over-involvement is unsurprising given the level of stress and anxiety that families live with, however the development of these skills is directly related to life outcomes. It is suggested that the over-involvements limit the child's ability to master the tasks, leading to dependence and over-reliance, which serves to maintain anxiety and lack of development. A further example of the self-perpetuating cycle of maintenance of anxiety and highlights the need for intervention programmes to support the development of these skills and increase parental confidence in their ability to teach them to their child.

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is the science of positive individual traits, positive subjective experience and positive institutions, and aims to improve life quality and help people to reach higher levels of wellbeing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Theoretical developments within the field have led to a number of evidence based practices which help to reach the overarching aim to increase wellbeing (Bolier et al., 2013).

Traditionally, Mental Health services have treated mental illness, focusing upon the deficit driven medical model of illness and disease. Recent years have seen the prominence of Positive Psychology (PP) snowball and begin to change thinking and practice within traditional Mental Health services. Slade (Slade, 2010) welcomed the advances and

contributions of PP to Mental Health, and suggested the integration of wellbeing practices into provision to encourage mental health rather than focus upon treating conditions. These changes in thinking reflect the changes within the arena of 'disability' and social care, away from traditional medical models towards the social-ecological model of disability, which recognises that often there is a mismatch between the persons needs and their environment, creating barriers and limitations for people (Shogren, 2014). The movement towards the social-ecological model focuses upon an individual and a strength development approach to difference, which is aligned with the ethos of PP and subsequent interventions from the field. There has been a shift in how people with support needs are supported and enabled, with a move towards personalisation and strengths-based support, and away from programmes which offer a 'one size fits all' approach to a particular condition or difference (Buntinx, 2014). This has led to a change in role of the 'professionals' who work with people. Buntinx suggests that personalised support is now aiming to use community resources, now the professional's role has moved away from 'expert' provider of programmes, towards a partner role, helping a self-determined person to plan and create a life that is meaningful to the individual, within their natural environment and community. The shift away from professionally led support and interventions towards naturalistic, community resources lends to our proposal of support which involves the family, especially parents, being provided with the resources that they need to lead the process themselves.

The move towards person-centred support is global, with the World Health Organisation offering the concept of 'Quality of Life', which considers quality of life to be at an individual and psychological level and since it's conception, three frameworks of quality of life have been developed which consider the person's needs in a subjective and objective way (Schalock et al., 2007; WHO, 1997; QOL Research Unit, cited in Buntinx, 2014). Buntinx suggests that the construct introduces positive values and the opportunity to develop positive goals.

This change in thinking is reflected in the article 'Positive Psychology & Autism' by Zager (2014) who suggests that Positive Psychology has the potential to provide good outcomes for autistic people and suggests that interventions could be aligned with other interventions such as Applied Behaviour Analysis and TEACCH, which have been discussed previously. Whilst this is positive in concept, there is a cautionary note regarding the recommendations. Zager suggests that positive psychology may be useful to develop pro-social behaviour in autistic

people and discusses the ‘treatment’ of autistic people. Throughout the chapter, there is a plethora of medicalised and deficit-focused language which is contradictory to the ethos of positive psychology which advocates strengths based development.

Applying positive psychological approaches to enhance the lives of autistic young people fits with national and global policy and the call for the move towards preventative support for young people, a move away from the deficit focused traditional reactive approach to mental health and educational support that is the usual approach to interventions for autistic people.

Method

Focus Groups

As part of our research, we presented the rationale for the proposed programme to parent focus groups to enable involvement of parents in the design of the intervention. Three groups were facilitated, parents of primary aged children, secondary aged and young adults. The rationale was explained to the parents, as were adapted Positive Psychology Interventions. Each group session was recorded and transcribed and the subsequent transcripts were analysed using Thematic Analysis, harnessing a Social Constructionist approach. Whilst there is limited space to discuss the analysis in this article, we report the main themes and group responses.

Results

Parents of all groups responded positively to the suggested intervention, and suggested that the intervention should be offered to parents post-diagnosis. Parents wanted a whole family approach, with a balance of strength development alongside support for the child’s differences.

All groups shared the following themes:

- Proposed Programme Feedback
- Child/Adult Presentation
- Parental Concerns/Needs
- Previous/Current Provision
- Education
- Adapting Parenting Style

While there were shared main themes, there were differences between groups in the focus of sub themes. Parents of primary aged children were concerned with a ‘need to know’, a quest for knowledge, information, support and guidance. They expressed difficulty regarding what to expect for the future. Parents of secondary school aged children expressed more difficulty with the behaviours that their children presented, appeared more stressed and frustrated and reported co-morbid diagnoses and polypharmacy. This group wanted to know how to cope and what to do. In contrast, the parents of adults, discussed less about the present, and more about the past, and were reflective of cycles of family stress and anxiety. All groups expressed challenges and inadequacies in current support and provision, from paediatric services, social care and educational provision. The cycle of escalating stress and anxiety for parents and children, highlighted in the literature review was acknowledged by the groups, to varying degrees.

Some parents reported the challenges they faced when their child received a diagnosis, with some expressing a process of ‘bereavement’. Evidently, parents are going through a process, which is reflective of the differences between groups, and the suggestion of bereavement. It could be suggested that rather than bereavement, parents are experiencing a process of change. The diagnosis of a child leads parents to report not knowing what to expect, what to do, and what the future holds. Parents are facing an unexpected life transition, a move away from their expected path of parenting, onto a path which is unknown. The process of change is well documented as being challenging for individuals and as a journey which involves various stages. There is suggestion that sudden or unwanted changes may cause discomfort, which may lead to avoidance of change or difficult events to avoid confusion, uncertainty, distress, pain or fear, however, embracing it can lead to insight, growth and transformation (Worth, 2016).

To the best of our knowledge, there are no programmes which support parents to come to terms with the diagnosis of the child and help parents through the change process. We suggest that the proposed programme should that help parents through the transition and lessen parental uncertainty about the future.

Conclusion

The literature review and focus group analysis present a need for a new intervention for autistic families to help them to support their children’s developmental trajectory, decrease

developmental delays and increase well-being. There are limited outcomes for children and families, and despite the huge costs of autism within the UK, the provision is currently not meeting needs or enhancing outcomes.

Recent developments enable us to gain insight into the core features of autism. We postulate that autism is not a social and communication disorder, but differences in neurology, including sensory differences, which result in delayed development, anxiety and related coping mechanisms and propose, to our knowledge, the first model of autism and development of autistic presentation.

Our intention is to develop an intervention programme for parents to engage with, which is led by the needs of the families and children which has been highlighted by the focus groups participation and review of literature. We propose that the programme will enable strength based development, development of coping strategies for the whole family, as well as support for parents to transition through the change process. To achieve this, we will draw upon the evidence based interventions from the field of positive psychology, and strategies such as TEACCH and that the combination of these robust strategies and parental support through the change process, will lead to enhanced outcomes for children and families and increased well-being.

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The Place of ‘Virtues’ in Positive Psychology: Exploring a Missed Opportunity and a Potentially New Contribution

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Abstract

This presentation shared early work being undertaken by Scott Tower and Piers Worth. The work recognises that ‘virtues’ had a primary place in early positive psychology theory, yet considered from two perspectives, the potential contribution has been missed. First, within positive psychology theory itself. Second, by exploring a link with ‘Virtue Healing’, a specialised lineage within Chinese medicine, we see a potentially powerful connection with ‘second wave positive psychology’.

Introduction

This paper is a summary of a 20 minute presentation given at the May 2017 Positive Psychology Symposium at Bucks New University. The content is offered in the spirit and as a way of sharing an idea for the purposes of feedback and responses from a new audience. The exploration of this content and possibility came about in the personal and professional relationship that exists between Scott Tower (ST) as a Chinese Medicine practitioner and Piers Worth as a Psychologist and a Psychotherapist. ST had encountered a lesser-known discipline within Chinese medicine named ‘virtue healing’, initiated by a man named Wang Feng Yi. Scott had seen within this discipline the capacity to look at physical illness and how psychological insight and action might have a profound and measurable effect on their trajectory. Virtue healing looks at deeper emotional influences and roots of some illnesses. A text on the subject (Wilms, 2014) calls the work ‘medicine of the heart’ influencing and changing the energy named ‘chi’ in Chinese medicine. This prompted Piers Worth (PW) to consider the place and influence of ‘Virtues’ on Positive Psychology, and whether ideas and information contained in ‘Virtue Healing’ might indicate areas for theoretical development in their use in psychology.

Where are ‘virtues’ now in Positive Psychology?

The concept and reality of human virtue were considered a ‘gateway’ into an exploration and shared language for human strengths. In their ‘tour de force’ exploration Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe a focused effort to identify shared definitions and language for 24 human strengths recognizable across all cultures. The foundation of this work came from detailed research undertaken by Dahlsgaard et al. detailed in their 2005 paper to identify six virtues considered cross-cultural, and seen as under-pining of the 24 character strengths. They undertook a methodological study of the world’s ‘wisdom traditions’ (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Athenian philosophy) focusing on a question of what defined moral behaviour and the good life. They identified six core virtues which they believed were consistent across cultures: Humanity, Temperance, Wisdom, Courage, Transcendence, and Justice. They believed this provided a systematic foundation for the subsequent definition of human strengths that comprised these virtues. A key aspect of the definition of these virtues is the researchers were not endorsing the moral value of the virtues; they are asserting their presence across cultures, and a contribution to individuals and their societies.

The subsequent definition of human strengths within the six virtues became embodied in the ‘VIA’ questionnaire. A practical point that needs emphasis is the questionnaire does *not* assess their development in an individual, it assesses their prioritization by the individual at a point in time.

In feedback from the VIA questionnaire, we are encouraged to develop our top (five) strengths, presumably because they reflect what is most important or active to us at a point in our lives. A question I (PW) am posing is whether this may point to a restricted development of ‘virtues’ (e.g. strengths clustered in some virtues, not others). If we ask ourselves, based on the questionnaire feedback, which ‘virtues’ are represented in our top five strengths, I believe we are likely to see two, perhaps three. If virtues are as important for the ‘good life’ as proposed, what does this tell us about the other virtues and us in relationship to them?

If we try and work this through as an example based on PW’s feedback, I realized that the virtues of ‘Humanity’ and ‘Justice’ are not represented in the top five strengths. But as a teacher, PW would hope that he practices humanity and also justice all the time.

This does imply that the VIA questionnaire feedback may have more nuances, dynamics and possibility in its meaning than implied in encouraging us to focus on our ‘top five strengths’. More of the strengths and the virtues are present in our lives than the top five. The authors propose there is a need to work more with virtues, and focus on their development, and not just focus on strengths. If we start talking about virtues, it changes the questionnaire. A ‘top five’ might be the strengths you will see in a day, the other 19 are there somewhere.

Check for yourself with your own questionnaire results? As you look at your ‘non-top’ strengths do you find they (and other virtues) are more developed than you think?

The virtues have a strong presence in the theories associated with Eudaimonia. If we accept that Eudaimonia is associated with being and becoming our best, then the traits, behaviours and choices associated virtues are mirrored and part of this process (E.g. Ryff and Singer 2006).

A broader perspective from Chinese Medicine and ‘Virtue Healing’

Within Chinese Medicine, health is not an absence of symptoms, but rather a dynamic balance of all the facets of the individual – physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual. Chinese Medicine seeks to find the cause of a problem and treat that. Western Medicine generally treats the symptoms, and often does that extremely well. Unless practitioners find and treat the underlying cause, the symptoms may return, or reappear in a slightly different form. The system of Virtue Healing looks to uncover and resolve the deeper emotional roots to illness.

To contrast the cultural perspectives, Scott used a small number of pictures to illustrate where Chinese medicine and Virtue Healing may work from.

A Western perspective (Figure 1) views the world through the proportions of the human being – the natural world is viewed in terms of us.

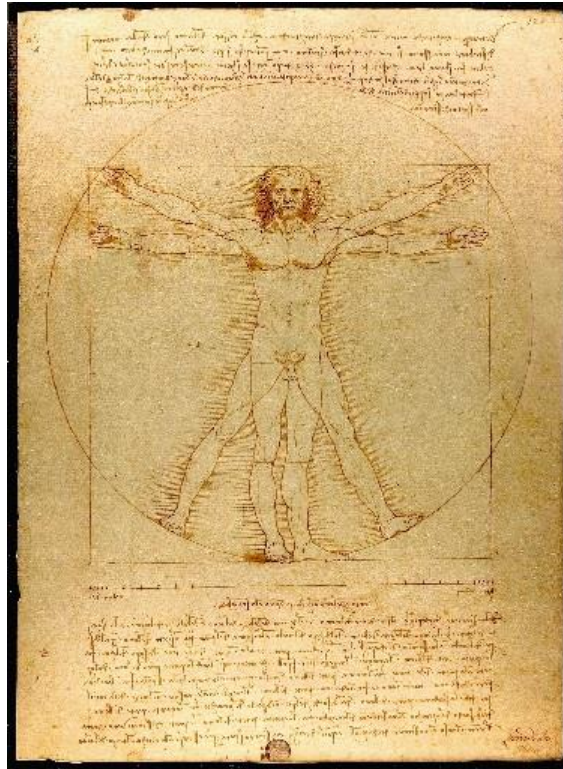


Figure 1. A drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci, ‘Vitruvian Man’ that is located in the Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice.

A Chinese perspective (Figure 2) is a broader view of natural landscape, with a (usually) small reference to the human form – a figure, or bridge or structure.

The individual is seen as existing within nature, and in the context of a larger landscape.



Figure 2. Picture of an antique Chinese landscape painting (artist unknown) owned by Scott Tower.

The commonly known ‘Yin-Yang’ (or Taiji: Figure 3) symbol provides an important illustration of the relatedness in Chinese thought. The most important thing in this image is the two dots – this is the Yin within the Yang and the Yang within the Yin.

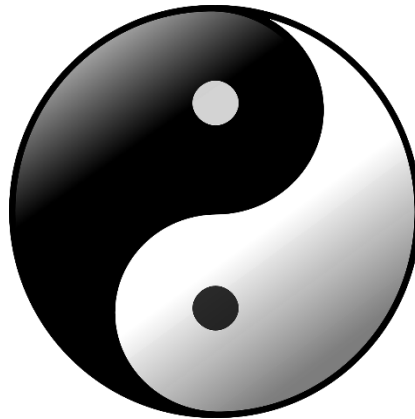


Figure 3. Traditional Yin-Yang/Taiji symbol.

In Chinese Medicine and Philosophy the theme is one of constant change, there being no stasis, rather alternations within an underlying harmony. This is also coming out in modern western thought and physics, e.g. in Dr David Bohm, who spoke of an Explicate and an Implicate Order.

Chinese Medicine is rooted in the cultivation of the individual, including the physician, as a ‘whole’ which points is to how both practitioners, professionals, and ‘patients’ can be influenced by these ideas. This is common in psychology – we have to work on ourselves in order to be of help to others.

Background to Wang Feng Yi and Virtue Healing

Scott encountered a not very well known branch of Chinese Medicine - Virtue Healing (and its originator, ‘Wang Feng Yi’) - a number of years ago. It had a profound impact on him personally and professionally – in personal relationships, especially in family. He saw changes that within our normal perspectives were not supposed to happen – and was deeply touched by the speed and depth of change that occurred.

WFY lived from 1865-1937 and grew up during a Confucian time. He was a model citizen who looked after everyone – his family, his neighbours and the community. People would say to their children or relatives – how come you don’t act like him?

WFY got very sick in his 20s, much sicker than patients in modern clinics. He could not work – he spent time where travelling teachers would stop to tell stories. He had a personal revelation in one story – one in which people were fighting to take responsibility. He saw this as a great contrast to the time and world he was living in, where most people were trying to blame others. He realised that he himself had been full of blame and judgment toward others, with thoughts such as ‘how come you are not taking care of your parents as I am?’ WFY made a commitment to not blame another person for anything under any circumstances. His advanced illness vanished in less than 48 hours.

It is important to note that this illustrates a standard of behaviour – the virtuous life. This was seen as beneficial not only to the individual but also to the community. It is very important to see the ideas proposed within this paper as relational – not just something one does by oneself. They are based on the connection with other people. The key issue here is *Virtue without action is no virtue at all*.

The section that follows turns to consider how VH may be contrasted with more current ideas and theories within Positive Psychology.

Summary of Virtue Healing contrasted with Positive Psychology

This section offers a summary conceptual overview of four elements of Virtue Healing that are considered to be inter-connected (Table 1).

Table 1. *Summary of Virtue Healing elements vs. Positive Psychology*

Wang Feng Yi & Virtue Healing – 4 Elements	Possible Positive Psychology examples?
Heavenly Nature	Actualising tendency Eudaimonia
‘Xiao’ (Filial Piety)	Social Connection Gratitude Love
Virtues	Virtues as a means of social good and connection
Associated ‘negative’ emotions	Polarities in emotions. ‘Second Wave’ positive psychology

Heavenly Nature

The first concept is Heavenly Nature, which is considered the essence of humanity and of each individual. VH assumes we are inherently good and pure and positive. This essence is always there, perhaps reflected in the image of a majestic snow-capped mountain, possibly covered by clouds, but always present. Our heavenly nature is the bedrock of our true essence.

Ill health, in this discipline of practice, is considered to be consequence of the 'heavenly nature' being clouded, obstructed, by things that are part of our human nature – our desires, our attachments, our pain, our attachment to our pain, our blame, our anger - all the things that are very much part of most human beings' experience.

Moving towards health, moving towards meaning, within this discipline is not about creating something that is not there, but about uncovering something that is already there and might be obscured and allowing it to unfold. So it is a cleaning away of things that are obscuring the Heavenly Nature.

Understanding that underneath all of these ideas is that these obstacles of our Heavenly Nature, these struggles are part of life, there are not 'bad', they are part of our experience and they are there to give us an opportunity to learn from them.

How would a psychologist (PW) interpret or make sense of this perspective; what in psychology might be a comparable idea? Carl Rogers' (e.g. 1980) proposed that we all have an 'actualizing tendency' – we are reaching for the best in us, the unfolding of the best in us, given the right conditions for growth. He suggests developmentally if we are given trust and empathy and support, the actualizing tendency will be active and unfold. PW proposed, as an educator, he believes strongly that this is seen week in and week out

In thinking about this concept of Heavenly Nature, where else does Psychology describe the best in us, the whole in us? The concept of Eudemonia is potentially the other primary way in which virtues theoretically involved and their practice considered (e.g. Ryff and Singer 2006).

As we look at different perspectives it argues that this principle is not a destination, it is a process, and Heavenly Nature is a process, a journey, an unfolding

The next section explores a central perspective on relationship that becomes a ‘crucible’ through which virtues and the heavenly nature may be explored and brought about.

‘Xiao’

‘Xiao’ is usually translated in Chinese as ‘Filial Piety’. The Chinese Character is seen as the child at feet of mother / elder, and as respect and care for one’s elders.

Yet the translation is potentially broader and more profound, that it is a reflection of fundamental relationship and connection. Xiao is not just ‘child to parent’, but rather about connectivity. Xiao points towards appropriate and nourishing roles – as a child, parent, sibling, employee, and employer. If we are in correct alignment expressing these roles and relationship there is ‘order’ externally, and also within oneself.

Xiao points towards and reminds us of a connection with one’s lineage, one’s ancestry, and with one’s place in the universe. If this pillar of connection between oneself and one’s parents and grandparents is acknowledged and is strong, then we are not only living an individually-oriented life, but one that also relates to the family lineage, the ‘family tree’ of which we are a part. This does not mean that you have to do what they did or to be like them, but you do have to acknowledge them and what their existence and being brought to you.

Whatever our parents have been or done, they have first and foremost given us as individuals ‘life’ and for that Virtue Healing proposes we owe them unconditional gratitude and that this deserves and needs expression. The gratitude is not just for one’s gratitude journal or letter (unsent), its highest use and value is when it is expressed and is relational, i.e. to express gratitude directly to the other person – it’s interactive and relational – there is a very powerful healing nature to this.

Piers proposed that within positive psychology there is a further and broader interpretation that is possible and helpful.

Piers explained that Xiao created a strong kinesthetic reaction when first described to him – a connection to family and also to the people he relates to in his life – almost an energetic sense of where those connections go. He got an energetic sense of the lineage to his parents, and grandparents and they in turn had brought him to where he is now.

Reflecting, Piers realised that the core motivations he had within his life, of meaning, purpose and contribution, come from his parents. He is exploring questions that fascinated his parents but which they, within their own cultural upbringing, were unable to press far. He felt it was as if he was carrying and living out the questions that were incomplete for his predecessors.

As a psychologist he believed there is a way of working with this to recognise Xiao, to give it honour. He believed it related to Barbara Fredrickson’s work on love (Fredrickson, 2013) and he wondered if there is room for a loving kindness meditation for the generations? Or perhaps a ‘family tree’ exercise of gratitude, strengths and questions of meaning that cross the generations.

Scott describes Xiao as multi-directional, that it may go both ways. We think of it as the younger respecting the elder. There is an appropriate role of protection and care from the parents towards children. Xiao works in all directions.

Virtues

It is important to understand a definition of ‘virtue’ in this context related to Chinese Medicine. Virtues are seen as inherently relational, how you function in relationships. They form the highest expression of our human experiences and represent an alignment, balance and harmony within us. It is appropriate to note that there is a tradition of understanding and exploring virtues in both the Eastern and Western worlds, yet they are different – and the Chinese culture has these as more relational. Virtues in Chinese medicine are seen as energetically related to physical organs (Table 2).

Table 2.

Virtues in Chinese medicine.

Element/Phase (related organ)	Virtue
Wood (Liver)	Compassion, Empathy
Fire (Heart)	Propriety, Ritual Politeness
Earth (Spleen)	Integrity, Trust, Forgiveness
Metal (Lungs)	Selflessness (Righteousness)
Water (Kidneys)	Wisdom, Humility

The left-hand column of Table 2 looks at Five Elements or Phases – principles of Chinese Medicine, and philosophy. There is also an associated organ considered to be linked to the emotions in parenthesis, which is not terribly relevant to the discussions here.

Summarizing the virtues:

- *Wood: The virtues of Compassion, Empathy*
 - There is also a sense of fulfilment of purpose, clarity of direction
- *Fire: Propriety (Li) “Ritual Politeness”*
 - It is not just ritual politeness. The classical Chinese character involved carving jade; good quality jade has veins in it and structure, it has complexity. The art of carving jade involves making a form that is in conversation with the internal structure of the material. There is that feeling associated with this virtue connected to the heart there is the sense of carving something out of the structure within the jade.
- *Earth: Integrity and Trust, also involves forgiveness*
 - We can have Integrity within oneself, to be true to ourselves, on our ‘mountaintop’.
 - Also be trustworthy – this is inherently relational, as is forgiveness – forgiving of others (and we have not to forget the need to forgive ourselves).
- *Metal: Selflessness – also sometimes translated as Righteousness*
 - Righteousness is perhaps a strange term here, but it is in the sense not self-righteous. It is, more accurately, standing up for something in a righteous manner.
 - Not working for oneself, but rather in the service of others, but of standing up for something. In service of something greater than oneself, in service of others.
- *Water: Wisdom and Humility*
 - Humility that comes from wisdom, and wisdom that comes from humility – understanding one’s place in the world and in relation to others – one’s position in the larger Chinese landscape painting.

Table 3.

How do these virtues ‘map’ to those in Positive Psychology (VIA virtues)?

Chinese Virtue	VIA Virtue?
Compassion, Empathy	Humanity (Strengths of compassion and nurturance and altruism)
Propriety <i>Ritual</i> Politeness	Justice (Strengths of fairness and teamwork)
Integrity, Trust, Forgiveness	Temperance (Strengths of forgiveness, humility, self-regulation.)
Selflessness (Righteousness)	Humanity (Strengths of kindness, nurturance and compassion)
Wisdom, Humility	Wisdom

‘Leaks’ and ‘Transformers’

One of the most useful aspects of this VH system of thought is the relation between virtues and specific emotions perceived as ‘negative’ (and called in this paper “leaks”).

We propose that virtue inherently exists in a polarity with an opposite of its expression. If we seek the presence of a virtue, we are likely, even prone to encounter their challenging opposites, their polar opposite. The following table, within VH, proposes what this might mean, and what in turn might, developed, contain or transform the negative expression of the virtue.

Table 4.

Virtues, emotions/‘leaks’ and ‘transformers’

Element / Phase (Organ)	(Positive) Virtue	(Negative) Emotion or ‘Leak’	Potential ‘Transformer’
Wood (Liver)	Compassion, Empathy	Anger	Containment
Fire (Heart)	Propriety, Sacred or Ritual politeness	Hatred	Respect
Earth (Spleen)	Integrity, Trust Forgiveness	Blame	Commitment
Metal (Lungs)	Selflessness, Righteousness	Judgment	Discernment
Water (Kidneys)	Wisdom, Humility	Arrogance, Distain	Awareness

Two examples:

Emotion linked to the Liver, and Compassion or Empathy, is counterbalanced with Anger

Anger is not evil – it is part of life – the question is what are we going to do with it, how long are you going to hang on to it? If you hang on to it, are you are poisoning yourself?

It not so much our experiences, but our reactions to those experiences that shape how we are in the world.

Integrity, Trust, Forgiveness, is counterbalanced with Blame

If someone has a big issue with blame, in this system of medical thought it is likely they have digestive issues. It is not surprising that if you have an issue with blame, then you potentially need to work on forgiveness.

What we need to clear away through this is the ‘cloud’ covering our ‘Heavenly Nature’.

Life is a work in progress. It is not just about becoming Happy and that’s the end of it.

Placing VH perspectives in 'Second Wave Positive Psychology'?

These views have attempted to offer an overview of Virtue Healing and illustrate how they may feed or resource some psychological understanding to make psychological perspectives richer or more nuanced, and in turn potentially more usable in a wider audience. These ideas are complex and need further development and articulation. If any reader would like further details or discussion, please email the first author.

This perspective is a beautiful expression of what the 'Second Wave Positive Psychology' (2015) text portrays - that life is full of opposites.

Being able to perceive, anticipate and respond to these potential emotional and behavioural polarities is a developmental step that the first author is now exploring. For example, what might our actions be when encountering polarities of emotions such as these?

Scott acknowledged this perspective is inherently grounded in the individual, and also inherently relational. The values it reflects are those expressed by Wang Feng Yi (the originator of 'Virtue Healing') and Mahatma Gandhi – change the one person you can – and that is only yourself, and 'be the change you seek'.

The process of clearing away the 'clouds' in front of one's 'Heavenly Nature' is not necessarily a solitary pursuit. This really needs to be done in relation to others, in our relationships.

If there is something that is really getting to you, start by searching for and then expressing gratitude.

Virtue is not the same as happiness – Happiness is a by-product, not itself the goal.

Authors' notes:

Scott Tower is one of the world's leading Chinese medicine practitioners and is collaborating with Piers and contributing to the development of this theory and practice.

This work is still being developed in at least two further forms. Any interested reader may contact Piers Worth for additional and updated information.

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Additional Presentation Abstracts & Links

A Journey Beyond the MAPP

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Abstract

Lesley Lyle and Dan Collinson were students on the first cohort of the MAPP programme at BNU. Determined that graduation would mark the beginning, not the end of their interest in Positive Psychology, they formed their company, Positive Psychology Learning, became Associate Lecturers on the MAPP course and Academic Partners with the University. Since then they have embarked on numerous projects working with a variety of companies, associations and individuals in the UK and abroad. They are the co-founders of 'The Positive Psychology People' website and Facebook group with over 29,000 followers and have worked with government departments in UAE and the GNH team in Bhutan.

_ + : Space Positive (Film Screening)

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Abstract

Space Positive tells a story of passions and dreams, and of what lies at the heart of human exploration. In a series of interviews, space professionals and enthusiasts bring the viewer closer to the essence of the force that allows humankind to turn fantasy into reality. It's a tale of inspirations, positive emotions, and sound advice on how to use astronauts' training to fulfil one's potential. The film can be seen on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/VZeyO7JSoL0>