Toxic Positivity: A Concept Analysis

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Introduction: What is *Toxic Positivity?*

Have you ever been told…

× "Just look on the bright side"

× "Everything happens for a reason"

× "But you're a hero …"

× "At least you don't have it as bad as___"

This is TOXIC POSITIVITY

> *Toxic positivity is a response to a situation that does not fully acknowledge a person's negative emotions. No matter how dire a situation is, people recommend a positive attitude* **(Cross, 2022, p. 1168)**

Research Purpose and Questions

Purpose: Post-COVID-19 workforce issues have pushed terms like resilience and burnout further into the forefront of professional discourse. Strategies aimed to improve resilience, decrease burnout, and increase retention appear to be less effective in the current climate. One potential unexplored contributor is toxic positivity.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the concept of toxic positivity and its relevance to nursing using Schatzman's (1991) dimensional analysis method.

Questions:
1) What are the dimensions of toxic positivity?
2) How is toxic positivity used across contexts?
3) How are the dimensions, sub-dimensions, and contexts related?
4) What are the specifically identified contexts, conditions, processes, and consequences of toxic positivity?
5) How is toxic positivity constructed and used in nursing?

Literature Review and Findings

- The literature searched covered the time period **1990-2023**
- The initial literature used only the key word **'toxic positivity'**
- The databases searched included **Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR, and the ETSU library database**
- Out of a combined **7,295 results**, the titles and abstracts were systematically reviewed

Sources were retained that met the following criteria:

1.) the source was available in English

2.) the source explicitly mentioned toxic positivity

3.) toxic positivity was mentioned as discursive construct and not an empirically based scientific form of measurement

Concept Analysis

Dimensional Analysis Phases

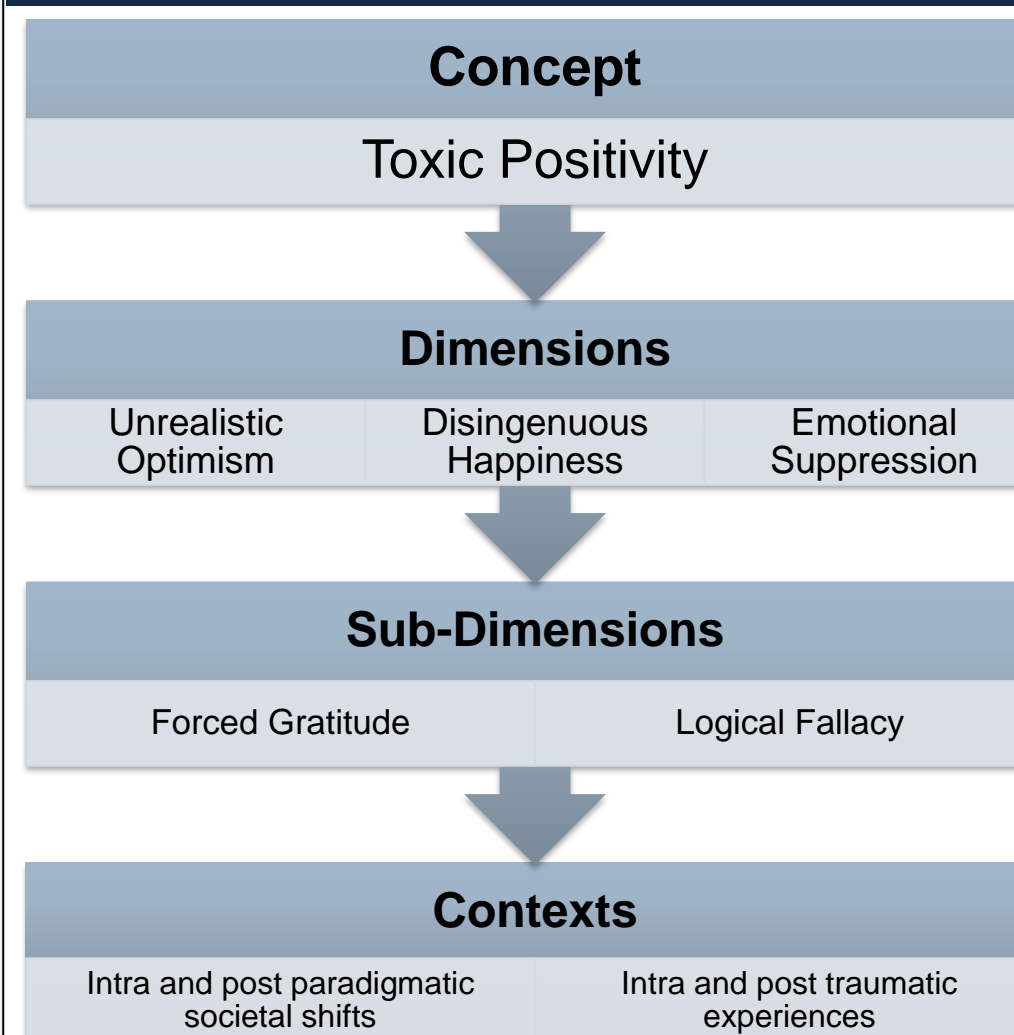*Phase 1: Identification* elucidates relevant conceptual dimensions, sub-dimensions, and contexts.

Phase 2 Logistical Analysis examines relationships among dimensions, sub-dimensions, and contexts.

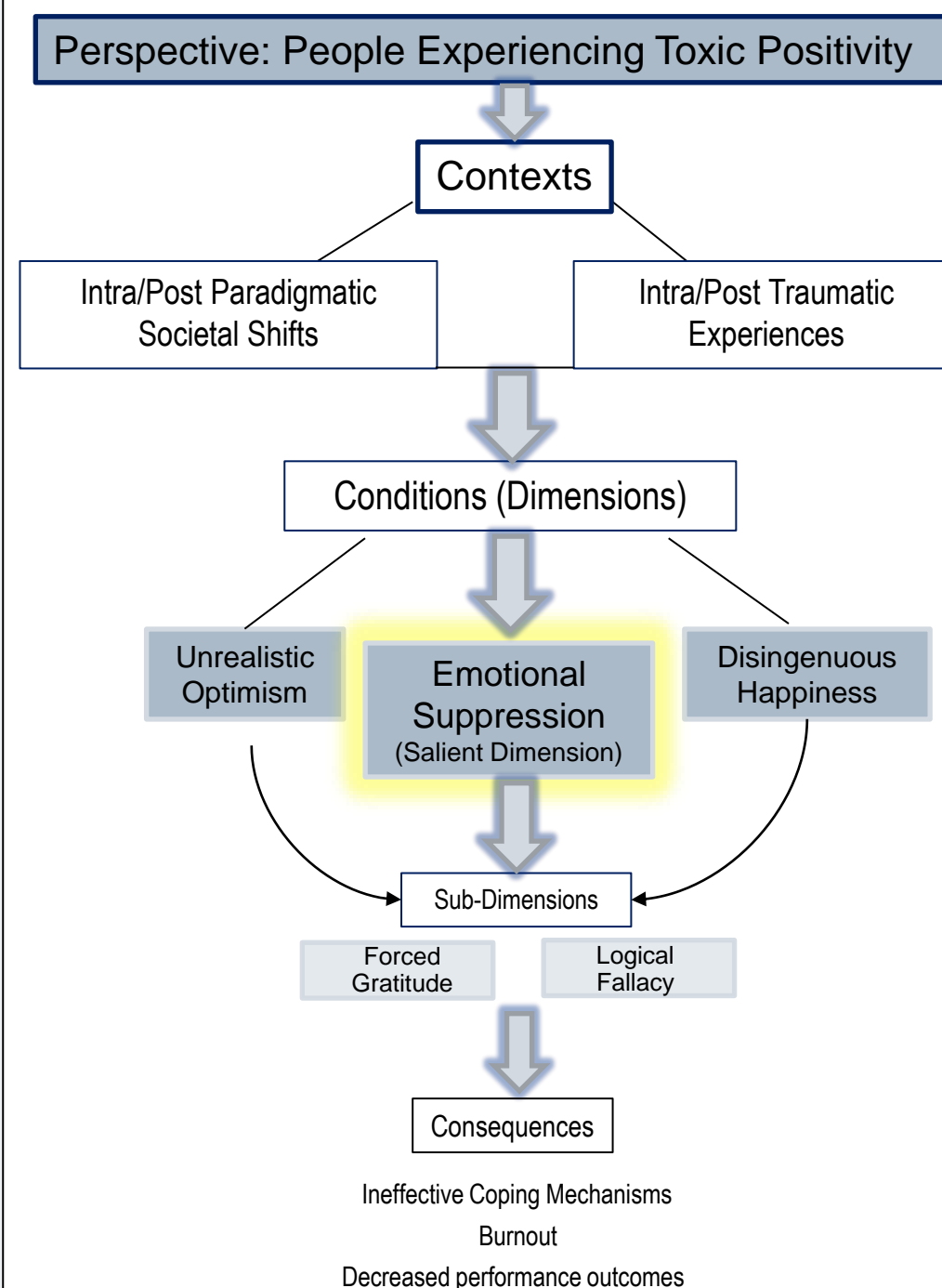*Phase 3 Dimensional Explanatory Matrix* provides conceptualization of toxic positivity for nursing.

Dimensional Matrix Components

- *Contexts-* demonstrates the boundaries for inquiry
- *Conditions-* facilitates the various contextual interactions
- *Processes-* describes unintended or intended actions or interactions caused by the conditions.
- *Consequences* - indicated the outcomes of these specific actions or interactions which reflect the identified perspective (Kools et al., 1996; Schatzman, 1991).

Identified Dimensions, Subdimensions, and Contexts

Concept

Toxic Positivity

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Dimensions

Unrealistic Optimism | Disingenuous Happiness | Emotional Suppression

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Sub-Dimensions

Forced Gratitude | Logical Fallacy

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Contexts

Intra and post paradigmatic societal shifts | Intra and post traumatic experiences

Explanatory Dimensional Matrix

Perspective: People Experiencing Toxic Positivity

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Contexts

Intra/Post Paradigmatic Societal Shifts | Intra/Post Traumatic Experiences

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Conditions (Dimensions)

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Unrealistic Optimism | Emotional Suppression (Salient Dimension) | Disingenuous Happiness

↓

Sub-Dimensions

Forced Gratitude | Logical Fallacy

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Consequences

Ineffective Coping Mechanisms
Burnout
Decreased performance outcomes

Findings and Relevance to Nursing

> *Toxic positivity takes positive thinking to the extremes that could be considered harmful. And healthcare can be a breeding ground for it* **(Trueland, 2021, p. 67)**

- Results indicate the lack of prevalence of nursing perspectives in the literature about toxic positivity.
- Identifying toxic positivity as a phenomenon in nursing work environments has potential to inform future research and theoretical work related to nursing workforce burnout, retention, and coping strategies.
- Toxic positivity should be meaningfully explored within the nursing work environment to move from toxic positivity towards realistic hopefulness.

> *You cannot demand positivity of people who are standing in the burning wreckage of lived experience* **(Collins, 2022, p. 271)**

Nursing is in desperate need of courageous leaders and learners that acknowledge the profession's brokenness and in doing so pursue realistic hopefulness as opposed to toxic positivity so that meaningful healing, restoration, and transformation can occur.

Toxic Positivity → *Realistic Hopefulness*

References

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