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The relationship between Counseling Psychology and Positive Psychology

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Counseling Psychology and Positive Psychology:

Towards a balanced integration

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The aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between the professional specialty of counseling psychology and positive psychology. Following a brief historical overview of counseling psychology we explore its theoretical convergence with positive psychology and examine how the ideas from positive psychology have been received by counseling psychologists. We will argue that although counseling psychology has its roots in ideas that are consistent with positive psychology, the profession has developed a broad practice range in recent decades accommodating a diversity of ways of working, many of which prioritize working with distress and its origins over seeking to enhance and build on existing strengths. As such the positive psychology movement can offer a new impetus for the profession of counseling psychology to reexamine its fundamental assumptions and reflect on its training curriculum. Based on this overview we conclude that further bridges need to be built between positive psychology and counseling psychology. Our goal is to encourage counseling psychologists engage more fully with the ideas and research of positive psychology.

Development and Identity of Counseling Psychology

Counseling psychology first emerged as a separate professional discipline in the USA. where it is Division 17 of the American Psychological Association (APA). Originally formed in 1946 as the Division of Personnel and Guidance Psychologists, it was renamed not long after as the Division of Counseling and Guidance before it became the Division of Counseling Psychology in 1955 and more recently, in 2003, the Society of Counseling Psychology. The earlier names give an indication of the discipline's roots in vocational guidance (Meara & Myers, 1999).

However, practitioners found that the scope of their work went beyond a strictly vocational focus and included the facilitation of general life planning which involved

'encouraging the client to talk about values, beliefs, misgivings, and wishes and by reflecting back to him or her the pattern that can be detected in the combination of feelings revealed' (Tyler, 1992, p. 344). As such, the professional specialty that evolved was concerned with the process of making choices and the facilitation of optimal lifelong development including building on strengths and developing new skills and thus had a decidedly preventative rather than curative function.

The profession tended to deal with the general non-clinic population and had an early-established concern with individuals in their environmental context. This helped prepare the discipline to adopt a commitment to diversity as early as 1974 when, against the background of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the rise of feminism, training needs with regard to diversity and cultural identities were identified (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009). Embracing a philosophy of multi-culturalism in combination with the emphasis on prevention meant that counseling psychology was also able to widen its focus beyond the individual and to include a social justice approach as part of its fundamental concerns (Hage, 2003). Both the educational-preventative core and the emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism have remained central within counseling psychology.

Today, counseling psychology in the USA is defined as 'a psychological specialty [which] facilitates personal and interpersonal functioning across the lifespan with a focus on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related, developmental, and organizational concerns. Through the integration of theory, research, and practice, and with a sensitivity to multicultural issues, this specialty encompasses a broad range of practices that help people improve their well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises, and increase their ability to live more highly functioning lives' (American Psychological Association, 2013a). As Sharon Bowman, the current President of the Society of Counseling Psychology, states '[o]ur philosophy emphasizes developmental, strength-based, multicultural, and social

justice principles, as well as positive psychology and international perspectives' (American Psychological Association, 2013b).

Being a much younger discipline than its American counterpart, the beginnings of counseling psychology in the UK can be traced to the 1970s when an increasing number of psychology graduates with additional training in counseling or psychotherapy were seeking a professional home leading to the establishment of a Section of Counselling Psychology within the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 1982 which eventually became the professional Division of Counselling Psychology in 1994 (see, Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009).

The UK Division of Counselling Psychology has defined counseling psychology as 'a branch of professional psychological practice strongly influenced by human science research as well as the principal psychotherapeutic traditions [which] draws upon and seeks to develop phenomenological models of practice and enquiry in addition to that of traditional scientific psychology. It continues to develop models of practice and research which marry the scientific demand for rigorous empirical enquiry with a firm value base grounded in the primacy of the counselling or psychotherapeutic relationship' (British Psychological Society, 2005). Counseling Psychology in the UK has a strong phenomenological tradition, and in recent years, a pluralistic stance has been put forward (e.g. McAteer, 2010). Central to pluralistic thinking is the notion that there a many factors contributing to clients' problems, and many different possible ways to help clients and facilitate change (and not a 'one size fit all' approach; Cooper & McLeod, 2011).

Examining the identity of counseling psychology in the US and UK as well as in other countries shows the diversity of counseling psychology cross-nationally, which is, at least partly, due to the different stages in the development towards a fully established discipline that the profession is at in different countries (Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2009). It is therefore not easy to strike a balance between local specifics and an overarching understanding of the

profession. While there are exceptions to every broad generalization, some of the philosophical underpinnings that appear to be shared across different strands of counseling psychology could be summarized as taking a holistic perspective on human beings, which includes valuing and respecting subjective – and intersubjective – experience and understanding people as situated within a context. This contextualized view of the person is seen to have both a historical and developmental as well as a socio-cultural dimension and includes particular attention to diversity as well as to formulating presenting issues in a developmental and non-pathologizing way, thus focusing on people's strengths, adaptations and potentialities rather than on deficiencies alone. Furthermore, this includes a commitment to equality and empowerment, for example, as it is embedded in the US emphasis on social justice work at group and systems level and in the UK emphasis on anti-discriminatory practice and pluralism.

Having thus arrived at a broader description of counseling psychology, it is now possible to look in more detail at the discipline's relationship with positive psychology in theory and practice.

Counseling Psychology and Positive Psychology: A Fruitful Dialogue?

The previous section has already provided some pointers to the overlaps between counseling psychology and positive psychology, particularly as the discipline of counseling psychology has developed in the USA, where 'positive psychology' is now mentioned as part of what defines counseling psychology as a profession (see above). Indeed, Division 17 even has a section solely dedicated to positive psychology, and there is an abundance of scholarly output that supports the connection between positive psychology and counseling psychology. It has been observed that positive psychology has not adequately acknowledged counseling

psychology for its particular role in 'embracing a strength-based perspective' (Mollen, Ethington & Ridley, 2006, p. 305), its focus on positive adaptation and optimal human functioning (Frazier, Lee & Steger, 2006) and it was pointed out that positive psychology presented itself as a newcomer in the 1990s when, in fact, it had a history in counseling psychology research and practice (Mollen et al, 2006).

Indeed, there had been an emphasis on developing personal and social resources from the very beginnings of the discipline of counseling psychology in the early twentieth century. Key figures and milestones to mention were Frank Parson's focus on strengths and healthy functioning in educational and vocational counseling from 1908 onwards, the development of goal-oriented student counseling by F.G. Williamson in the 1930s, and most notably the humanistic approach to psychology and the work of Rogers (1951). In recognizing the humanistic roots of counseling psychology, it is of note that the origins of positive psychology can also be seen in humanistic psychology. Shlien, originally writing in 1956, said:

> In the past, mental health has been a 'residual' concept – the absence of disease. We need to do more than describe improvement in terms of say 'anxiety reduction'. We need to say what the person can *do* as health is achieved. As the emphasis on pathology lessons, there have been a few recent efforts toward positive conceptulizations of mental health. Notable among these are Carl Rogers' 'fully Functioning Person', A. Maslow's 'Self-Realizing Persons'… (Shlien, 2003, p. 17).

As such the notion of attending to what people can do, well-being and flourishing is not a new idea that originated only with the positive psychology movement of the last decade but dates back to same roots as counseling psychology itself.

In 2006, *The Counseling Psychologist* dedicated a Major Contribution to counseling psychology's emphasis on the positive, and the leading article by Lopez et al. (2006) charted this focus in the discipline's scholarship through the decades by means of a content analysis. The content analysis by Lopez et al. (2006) revealed that 29% of scholarship in counseling psychology journals had a positive focus, with the most frequent themes concerning values/ethics, followed by self-efficacy, adjustment, coping and empathy. It was noteworthy that the most commonly researched positive processes and constructs concerned either practitioner characteristics and attitudes, positive client resources to draw on in therapeutic practice or some positive outcomes such as achievement, adjustment and actualization. The authors observed that despite the positive focus present in this subsection of the discipline's output, positive psychological constructs and processes as highlighted in the works of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, for example, had received less attention.

Furthermore, Lopez et al. observed that only a handful of articles had focused on themes such a hope, optimism, positive emotion or love, and character strengths such as gratitude or wisdom were missing altogether. However, as Linley (2006) pointed out, building a classification of strengths and virtues was an early agenda of the positive psychology movement that may not have a great deal of practical utility, and counseling psychologists may be best placed to further positive psychology scholarship in more applicable ways. Furthermore, cross-cultural differences in what may count as a strength or a weakness 'present a dilemma for proposed universal explanations of happiness and well-being' (Linley, 2006, p. 316), and the integration of cross-cultural concerns into counseling psychology's positive psychology focus has been called for. For example, Constantine and Sue (2006) argue for a recognition of cultural assets as pertaining to people of color in the USA which could include research into collectivistic values such as interdependence, collective self-esteem, community respect and group harmony, a research focus that may

require the employment of (qualitative) methodologies that are able to address limitations of traditional methodologies with regard to cross-cultural validity (Gerstein, 2006).

As such, it is possible to see how counseling psychology has similar roots to positive psychology and had an initial focus on well-being and growth, which involved adopting a non-pathologizing and developmental stance to clients. However, the practice range of counseling psychology has widened in recent decades to include a range of clients and therapeutic approaches drawn from psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral as well as the humanistic traditions. As a consequence, there has been a move towards a focus on 'disease and distress rather than health and well-being' (Hage, 2003, p. 555). Hence, it seems, as Gelso and Woodhouse (2003) said, 'despite counseling psychology's long history of attention to human strengths and positive development, the empirical study of therapies that focus on the positive, as well as positive aspects of traditional therapies, have been sadly neglected' (pp. 195-196).

Also commenting on counseling psychology's stance towards positive psychology, Robitschek and Spering (2013) conclude in the APA *Handbook of Counseling Psychology* that the discipline does perhaps 'not embrace positive psychology as clearly as we profess' (p. 339). As such, it seems clear that counseling psychology has always had a positive focus but needs to reaffirm its identity (e.g. Mollen et al., 2006; Robitschek & Woodson, 2006), which, it is suggested, has been watered down by an increased focus on deficits and allegiance to the medical model. While the closer alignment with the medical model brought with it greater prestige (Tyler, 1992), and employment opportunities (Meara & Myers, 1999), it has also had implications for the identity of the profession and led to a situation where it has become so focused on working with distress that it has at least partly lost sight of its traditional growth orientation.

It is counseling psychology scholars in the USA that have mostly been at the forefront of this debate, and, as we have already seen, embrace positive psychology to a greater extent than their UK counterparts. This is illustrated by several practice-relevant publications by US counseling psychologists in recent years (e.g. Conoley & Conoley, 2009; Magyar-Moe, 2009; Owens & Patterson, 2013). In the UK the impact of positive psychology on counseling psychologists has been minimal. With few exceptions (e.g. Hutchinson & Lema, 2009; Nelson, 2009), there has been a dearth of articles published in national counseling psychology publications which have embraced a positive psychology agenda. As such counseling psychology practitioners remain relatively unaware of the positive psychology movement and other international developments.

There are also cautious or even critical voices within counseling psychology that question the general value of positive psychology, and how its ideas and concepts could be utilized. In her book *Psychotherapy and the Quest for Happiness* (2009), van Deurzen' raises some reservations about the positive psychology agenda. She argues against the view that counselors and psychotherapists should help their clients with 'quick fix' interventions to strive for happiness and eradicate negative emotions at all costs. From her point of view, the therapeutic task is rather to equip clients to cope with the misery and suffering they will inevitably face in their lives, without being afraid of negative emotions.

Similarly, Lambert and Erekson (2008) suggest that positive psychology interventions may be 'most appropriate for persons who are not in psychotherapy' (p. 225), echoing van Deurzen's (2009) critique. While we would agree that many of the interventions in positive psychology are no substitute for psychotherapy, we would argue that van Deurzen's critique of positive psychology seems to ignore that there are in fact many scholars and researchers within positive psychology who adopt the view that therapy needs to help clients cope with negative emotions. Indeed, we would draw attention to client-centered psychotherapy and

counseling which is a good example of an established, widely practiced form of therapy which has the ideology of positive psychology at its core, and increasingly recognized as a positive therapy (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Another increasingly popular model that has come to counseling psychologists' attention in recent years is Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a mindfulness-based third-wave CBT approach that seeks to enhance people's resilience to suffering through opening up to experience and acceptance while helping clients move in the direction of living a life in accordance with their values (Hayes, 2011; Hayes et al., 2006). It thus includes a strong positive focus; in fact the paradoxically positive act of embracing negative emotions rather than trying to get rid of them is seen to lead to positive outcomes for clients.

Apart from reservations as expressed in Van Deurzen's critique, it is possible to speculate about the reasons for the relative absence of positive psychology in counseling psychologists' output, and the potential reasons are not exclusive to the UK but could be seen as latently present elsewhere. These are particularly related to counseling psychology's rootedness in and continued connectedness with humanistic psychology. Although positive psychology now regards humanistic psychology as one of its historical foundations (Waterman, 2013), there was much conflict between the two fields. For example, in its early years positive psychology sought to present generalized understandings of positive attributes and virtues using a positivist framework. This was seen as conflicting with an emphasis on subjectivity and individual understandings and experiences around 'the good life', 'truth' and personal fulfillment, a focus that counseling psychology shares with humanistic psychology.

Positive psychology was also criticized for being less contextualized and reductionistic in contrast to humanistic psychology's holism (Friedman, 2008; Friedman & Robbins, 2012), for taking a narrow-minded view of its subject matter and ignoring important

scholarly fields altogether (Tennen & Afflick, 2003) and for oversimplifying the role of emotions (Lazarus, 2003), human flourishing and adaptiveness (Schneider, 2011).

A different strand of critique, as voiced by Rennie (2012) has suggested that positive psychology is not really a separate discipline but could be seen as part of humanistic psychology, and he observes that positive psychology has sought to dissociate itself from humanistic psychology mainly for methodological reasons, which Rennie suggests are ill-founded due to the strong empirical traditions within humanistic psychology that may have been overlooked. A reason for this could be that much high-quality research done within humanistic psychology is published in journals not connected with the movement, similar to counseling psychologists in the UK who often publish their work in journals relating to their field of research rather than to their professional discipline, which makes it more difficult to trace back their output.

However, now that the humanistic background to positive psychology is increasingly recognized and positive psychology has matured these criticisms are not as pertinent as they once were. While an extended discussion with regard to these issues has not taken place within the discipline of counseling psychology, it is argued here that it is important to re-open this debate and to address these criticisms in order to advance a fruitful collaboration between the two fields and to build bridges of understanding (Joseph & Murphy, 2013).

It is also suggested that counseling psychology has a contribution to make to positive psychology and psychology as a whole through 'a positive psychology that matters' by furthering 'socially significant strength-based research and practice' (Lopez & Magyar-Moe, 2006, p. 323) and by making its presence felt beyond the confines of the discipline. Similarly, Linley (2006) suggests that counseling psychologists 'might contribute much in terms of the important questions to ask and how to ask them' (p. 315), particularly due to being situated 'at the interface of individual strengths and environmental factors' (p. 319). Positive

psychology can learn from counseling psychologists' focus on person-environment fit rather than on changing people's personality structures in order to fit them to a particular environment and its contextualized view of the person and commitment to social justice.

Positive Psychology in Counseling Psychology Practice

The previous section focused on theoretical overlap between counseling psychology and positive psychology. In the following section we will focus on how ideas and concepts from positive psychology have impacted on the counseling psychology practice, and what the possibilities and limitations are for positive counseling psychology.

As discussed above, counseling psychology and positive psychology have shared roots in the humanistic paradigm. As such, it would not be realistic to expect that ideas and concepts from positive psychology have triggered a radical paradigm shift in the practice of counseling psychology (Gerstein, 2006), but positive psychology can help to re-focus the profession of counseling psychology onto its roots in the humanistic paradigm and its self-understanding that it is traditionally a discipline concerned with the promotion of fully functioning behavior and the cultivation of strengths rather than the cure of deficits.

As described earlier, the identity of counseling psychology as a discipline has been formed over the last five decades and is grounded in a value base shaped by influential political and social movements and developments in psychology and psychotherapy during that time. Whilst positive psychology has now been identified as one of the influential and defining factors for counseling psychology, it is still a relatively new movement with a short research history. Hence, more time and efforts on both sides are needed to establish a productive exchange and stronger and flourishing relationship between these two traditions. However, what can be found in the current practice of counseling psychology are examples

for areas where interventions grounded in positive psychology theory and research have been developed and practiced. Below, we give four examples of areas where positive psychology research is burgeoning and taking hold within counseling psychology.

First, one of these areas is the clinical work inspired by the concept of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Joseph, 2011; Linley & Joseph, 2004), a term coined by Tedeschi and Calloun (1996) referring to positive changes in individuals that occur as the result of attempts to cope in the aftermath of traumatic life event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, this volume). The concept of posttraumatic growth, and related positive psychology research, has been employed and integrated into counseling psychology practice. Hutchinson and Lema (2009), for example, discuss the dominant negative and pathological narratives of the effects of trauma (with labels like 'victims' and 'damaged'). They describe how drawing on a positive psychology framework in their work with trauma can enable counselors and psychotherapists to focus on strength and competencies and develop rich meaningful alternative stories together with their clients. Steffen and Coyle (2011) have explored posttraumatic growth processes as a consequence of spiritual and religious meaning-making following sense-of-presence experiences in bereavement, an experience that has traditionally been pathologised in bereavement scholarship and in clinically-orientated psychology and grief therapy approaches (see also Steffen & Coyle, 2010; 2012). Drawing on positive psychology theory and research and his clinical experience in working with trauma, Joseph (2011) provides comprehensive practical information on how to aide and nurture posttraumatic growth in a therapeutic setting.

Second, a further area is the promotion and cultivation of resilience in counseling psychology practice by increasing the likelihood for positive emotions such as humor, serenity, trust, and compassion. Experiencing these kinds of positive emotions is assumed to help 'people cope with adversity and improve the possibility of emotional wellbeing and

coping better in the future' (Fredrickson, 2005, p. 22). Hutchinson and Pretelt (2010), for example, present their preventative work with children in the context of a primary school-based group work program. Based on Fredrickson's (2003, 2005) 'broaden and build' theory, the aim of this group work is to create opportunities for positive emotions to occur, ideally leading to a reflexive 'upwards spiral': Positive emotional experiences can lead to increased personal resources which in turn increase the opportunities for the experience of positive emotions and so on (Kok, Catalino & Fredrickson, 2008).

Third, counseling psychologists can begin to emphasise the notion of 'build what's strong' as a supplement to the traditional 'fix what's wrong' approach (Nelson, 2009, p46) - a view that is also supported by research findings. Based on their investigation of mainstream therapies, Scheel, Klenz Davis and Henderson (2012) point to the importance to give equal attention to both problems and strengths. The therapists involved in their research 'saw problems and strengths as comprising two different continuums, making it possible to simultaneously concentrate on the client's problems and his or her strengths' (p. 423). Gassman and Grawe (2006) found that 'successful therapists' tend to focus first on resources and strengths before working with the presented problem, thus broadening their clients' perspectives of themselves as well-function individuals. In contrast, 'unsuccessful therapists' work with their clients' strengths either too late in the session, or not at all.

Fourth, gratitude is one of these positive emotions conceptualized and investigated within the positive psychology paradigm that has received attention within the field of counseling psychology. It can be conceptualized in different ways, from a momentary feeling of appreciation and recognition of benefits to a long-term disposition (Bono, Emmons & McCullough, 2004; Bono & Froh, this volume). People with a grateful disposition are characterized by an appreciation of smaller pleasures and the contribution of others, and a sense of abundance (Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003). Positive psychology

research into the nature and importance of gratitude has indicated two possible ways in which a grateful mood can promote well-being, either directly via a causal link or indirectly as a buffer against negative states and emotions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Watkins et al., 2003). Nelson (2009) has reviewed the concept of gratitude and the research findings on the impact of this positive emotion on individual well-being, with a specific focus on the potential therapeutic value of this concept and implications for the practice of counseling psychology. The conclusion she draws from the gratitude research is that counseling psychologists should not exclusively focus on elevating negative states and emotions but equally use interventions with the aim to foster and encourage positive emotional experiences like gratitude. However, studies to evaluate direct gratitude inventions in counseling psychology practice are lacking, and Nelson (2009) seems to question the compatibility of these programs with the more traditional person-centered approach often employed by counseling psychologist when working e.g. with bereavement and crisis.

Despite these four examples of how ideas and concepts from positive psychology have been applied in counseling psychology practice, the positive psychological perspective hasn't been truly and comprehensively embraced and integrated in counseling psychology practice so far. There is still a gap between the original strength and growth-oriented philosophy of counseling psychology and the deficit-focused reality of counseling psychology and training as it has subsequently evolved (Hage, 2003; Meara & Myers, 1999). Many counseling psychologists in the Western world work in medicalised settings dominated by an 'illness ideology' (see, Maddux & Lopez, this volume) where deficit models of behavior and intervention are integral part of the organizational culture. Insurance based health systems, like for example in the USA and Australia, favor a focus on pathology and dysfunctional behavior with their reimbursement policy (Gerstein, 2006). Similarly,

counseling psychologists working in the UK's National Health System (NHS) are expected to think in pathological categories and submit diagnostic codes for payment (Pilgram, 2010).

The medical dominance is certainly hampering the possibilities to integrate positive psychological thinking in counseling psychology practice, and also has an impact on training provision in counseling psychology. As we have already mentioned, main psychotherapeutic approaches now taught in counseling psychology training programs, like psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral therapy, are rather deficit-oriented, and it has become one of the core aspects of counseling psychology training and practice to try to manage the difficult balance of working in a medicalised setting while holding on to a humanistic value base. One consequence of this balancing act is that many training programs are no longer able to educate counseling psychology trainees in specific strength-based ways of working that can be applied to deficit-centered practice settings. As such practitioners and trainees 'lack the specific behavioral skills to effectively display a strength-based, developmental paradigm of conceptualization and action' (Gerstein, 2006, p278; see also, Bedi, Klubben & Barker, 2012).

A reorientation of counseling psychology towards its original roots can help the profession deal with these internal and external obstacles. Our view is that counseling psychology needs to re-evaluate ideas and concepts developed in positive psychology for counseling psychology practice, and particularly to make clearer what distinguishes it from clinical psychology now that this profession too has begun to question the dominance of the illness ideology and to embrace concepts from positive psychology (e.g. Wood & Tarrier, 2010).

A first step towards a more balanced and strength-oriented way of working in counseling psychology would be a stronger emphasis and recognition of positive elements inherent in traditional therapeutic approaches. Using and building on client strengths is, at

least to some extent, common across all major therapy theories (Scheel et al., 2012). Gelso and Woodhouse (2003) have identified strength-oriented-processes in cognitive-behavioral therapy (reinforcement and support) and humanistic-experimental approaches (working towards self-actualization, congruence and self-acceptance), and see the promotion of insight as the primary positive process in psychoanalytic-psychodynamic approaches therapy (albeit this approach seems generally rather focused on pathology). In Solution-focused therapy, the positive methods to bypass problems in favor of solutions (e.g. miracle question, exception finding; de Shazer, 2005) have the potential to amplify strengths and construct new goals and meanings (Vossler, 2012). Similar positive processes are employed in systemic family therapy where therapists use techniques like 'reframing' to develop new and positive meanings for problematic emotions or behaviors (by describing them in a fundamentally different and positive frame; Vossler, 2010). This technique can be utilized as a form of gratitude intervention, for example in trauma therapy when discussing the potential positive changes and ways of functioning in the aftermath of trauma (Nolen-Hoeksema & Davis, 2005). A lot of the work experienced counseling psychologists do with their clients is about building strengths rather than exploring weaknesses, and developing the positive potential of their clients. However, this brief overview also illustrates how counseling psychology is in danger of losing sight of its traditional focus on strength and resources. Engaging more with positive psychology offers the chance for the profession to reflect on its meta-theoretical assumptions (Joseph & Linley, 2006).

A second step towards a more positive counseling psychology practice would be a stronger focus on strengths and optimal human functioning in counseling psychology training curricula. As already noted, this would involve an assessment and revision of the underlying philosophy and educational strategies for training programs (Gerstein, 2006). Ideas and interventions based on positive psychological theory and research, like for example the

philosophically-oriented concept of 'the Good life', could be integrated into teaching on lifespan development. Existing modules on 'psychopathology, 'mental illness' or 'human distress' could be reformulated to include material on strength-oriented interventions, and trainees could be provided with guidance on assessment and interventions to employ when conducting therapy from a positive psychological perspective (see e.g. Joseph & Worsley, 2005; Magyar-Moe, 2009).

These two steps could provide a better balance to the increased focus on pathology and disease model which has crept into counseling psychology training and practice, and could help the displine recommit to a more growth-oriented model. Accomplishing these steps, together with more research and examination of strength-oriented therapeutic practice (Scheel et al., 2012), can lead the way to the development of a more coherent framework for a positive counseling psychology. The work on such a framework can benefit from groundwork that has been laid by the discussions around positive psychological approaches to therapy (e.g. Joseph & Linley, 2006; Hubble & Miller, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, positive psychology and counseling psychology can stimulate each other to further develop their fields 'guided by their shared philosophy of human strengths and optimal functioning' (Gerstein, 2006, p. 289). Specifically, positive psychology can serve as a reminder to counseling psychology about its roots in humanistic psychology and that a focus on positive development has been a defining feature of the discipline. The framework of positive psychology poses a challenge for counseling psychology 'to transcend our rhetoric and integrate into practice a model of thinking and intervention consistent with the basic tenets of counseling psychology' (Gerstein, 2006, 278). However, to fully embrace a

positive perspective in counseling psychology, it will be necessary to overcome the powerful obstacles mentioned in the previous sections which have led to an increasing allegiance to medical and deficit approaches by counseling psychologists. As such we propose that there is a need for counseling psychologists to reflect on their fundamental theoretical assumptions, and for training programs to integrate a more positive perspective of human behavior. Simultaneously, it is important for positive psychologists to recognize that there is a long tradition in counseling psychology of a growth-oriented approach. Hence, a more extensive exchange between both fields could be stimulation for the future development of positive psychology.

Summary points

- Counseling psychology traditionally emphasizes the facilitation of optimal lifelong development including building on strengths and developing new skills and has originally had a decidedly preventative rather than curative function.

- Recent decades have seen a shift in counseling psychology practice towards a focus on disease and distress rather than health and well-being.

- Both counseling psychology and positive psychology have shared roots in humanistic approach.

- Counseling psychology could develop a more balanced and strength-oriented way of working with a stronger emphasis and recognition of positive elements inherent in traditional therapeutic approaches.

- A stronger focus on strengths and optimal human functioning in counseling psychology training curricula is recommended.

- News areas of positive psychology research, such as hope, gratitude, strengths, and posttraumatic growth offer new ways of working that will be of interest to counseling psychologists.

- In engaging with the positive psychological framework, counseling psychology has the chance to reflect on its fundamental assumptions and move the balance towards a more growth than deficit-oriented discipline.

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