

Evaluation of positive psychology



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Positive Psychology

Positive psychology can be defined as the scientific study of human thoughts, behavior, and feelings focusing on what brings happiness or rather what makes life worth living. The theory was developed by Martin Seligman in the 1960s. According to him, the theory seeks to achieve a deeper understanding of positive emotions, intuitions, and traits. Over the last three decades, the field of psychology has directed its efforts in researching the causes of mental disorders and human suffering. Traditional psychology defines happiness as the absence of human suffering. Seligman's research on human psychology was not aimed at replacing traditional psychology but, as the desire to develop a better picture of human experience. Over the years, this approach has transformed the field of psychology, shifting it from analyzing psychological issues to much diverse analysis; which including happiness and mental health (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Over the years, positive psychology has induced research in many areas such as happiness, hope, mindfulness, optimism, self-esteem, strengths, virtues, and well-being, among others. Even then, this research focuses on three specific areas: the past (satisfaction and well-being), the present (flow and happiness), and the future (optimism and hope). Additionally, researches have led to the development of positive interventions to improve human happiness and well-being. Discussed in this paper are the main concepts of the positive psychology theory.

Authentic Happiness Theory

Before coming up with the positive psychology theory, Seligman explored the idea of authentic happiness. According to Seligman, there are several types of experiences that can initiate happiness among humans, including: the pleasant life which is the tendency of exhibiting positive emotions or rather having pleasant sensations in the most intuitive way (Seligman, 2004). A good example of a pleasant life is riding a horse because it is fun, or eating pizza because it tastes good. It takes relatively little effort to gain happiness at this level. Next, is the engaged life that Seligman notes that engagement is closely related to flow. Flow is the experience or rather the happiness a person gains after engaging in an activity regularly (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). At times, people get engaged intensely to what they are doing to the extent of losing track of time. Some of the activities that can result in such an experience include playing baseball, playing soccer, or even dancing. In most cases, flow occurs when a person is facing some sort of challenge when they are using their signature character strengths optimally. Also, Csikszentmihalyi notes that activities with clear objectives or feedback will influence more flow than those with few or no objectives. In this regards, flow results in intrinsic reward and inner motivation. Unlike pleasant life, the engaged life requires more effort. Finally, the meaningful life is the happiness gained from engaging activities. These at times may fail. For example, after playing football for an hour, a person may still feel worthless, especially if something is disturbing them mentally. To guarantee happiness in an engaged life, a person must get involved in something that serves beyond their goals such as family, politics, or even religion (Seligman, 2004).

Well-Being Theory

Seligman developed Well-Being Theory after his “ Authentic Happiness Theory” received multiple criticisms from psychologists. He made few alterations to the authentic happiness theory to come up with the Well-Being Theory. Unlike the Authentic Happiness Theory, the major on achieving happiness, the Well-Being Theory focuses on the goals that help to achieve well-being. He came up with the theory because many people engage in activities that do not improve their happiness immediately (Seligman, 2004). For example, parents may report relatively low happiness when their children are young, but at the same time, they have higher overall well-being.

According to Seligman, there are six factors of well-being, which includes positive accomplishments, emotions, engagement, meaning, purpose, and relationships. In his previous theory, character strengths were only important for engagement. In this theory, character strengths help to maximize the overall well-being of a person, not necessarily their happiness (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). The result of optimal well-being is a state of flourishing. Seligman defines flourishing as the state of being full of vitality, thriving and prospering individually or as a group.

In conclusion, the field of positive psychology is one of the most important fields that can be used to improve a person’s life across the globe considering that it’s major on finding what maximizes a person’s happiness and well-being. In particular, professionals in counseling, field coaching, teaching, and other related subjects can benefit from positive psychology by

ensuring they always keep an eye on what trends in this field. There are many types of research taking place in the field of positive psychology; meaning the world is soon set to benefit from the insights provided by these researches after completion. To improve our happiness and overall well-being, we must all develop an interest in this field.

References

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