

Book Review

Positive Psychology in Practice

Edited By P.A. Linley & S. Joseph (2004, John Wiley & Sons)

Reviewed by Jeffrey Froh

With a clear lineage as far back as William James (Froh, 2004), positive psychology is the study of how human beings prosper in the face of adversity. It focuses on identifying and enhancing the human strengths and virtues that make life worth living (i.e., "The good life") (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and allow individuals and communities to thrive (Sheldon, Frederickson, Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi, & Haidt, 2000).

Psychology has largely adhered to a disease model for the past half century. Though numerous advancements were consequently born as a result (e.g., clinical taxonomy, empirically supported treatments) (Seligman, 2002), the field had developed a negativity bias (Sheldon & King, 2001). We unfortunately ignored Jahoda (1958) when she maintained that, "... the absence of mental disease is not a sufficient criterion of mental health" (p. 73). However, in his 1998 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, Seligman rescued psychology from its problem-focused lenses and made a calling to "go back to its roots" (Froh, 2002). Indeed, psychology is not just about curing mental illness, it is also about the realization and identification of human excellence (Seligman, 2002).

Until *Positive Psychology in Practice*, the exact application of positive psychology has remained hidden from mainstream psychology and somewhat elusive. The book consists of 42 chapters and is divided into 13 Parts (e.g., Values and Choices in Pursuit of the Good Life, Strengths and Character in Practice, and Positive Developments Across the Life Span). Aside from Parts I and XIII, in which Linley and Joseph open and close the book, respectively, each section contains several chapters representing the overarching topic. To illustrate, Part IV (Lifestyle Practices for Health and Well-being) centers on specific strategies for breaking past one's happiness set-point (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) with a particularly well-written and thought provoking chapter by Sheldon and Lyubomirsky entitled, "Achieving Sustainable New Happiness: Prospects, Practices, and Prescriptions". The quote, "... relieving people's suffering may only return them 'back to zero' and do nothing to help them achieve their optimum happiness potentials" (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004, p. 128) is positive psychology in a nutshell. Moreover, Part IX (i.e., Strengths of Character in Practice) is aimed at discussing some of the fruits from the Telos Taxonomy Project, in which *Character Strengths and Virtues* (aka the first *un*-DSM) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) was created. Specifically, chapters are written on the signature strengths of emotional intelligence, gratitude, curiosity, and wisdom.

Positive psychology is broad in scope. A cursory review of the table of contents unequivocally illustrates this point. Indeed, being that "practice" is the operative word in the book's title, one may feel disappointed with the chapter topics selected and view this breadth as a shortcoming. However, being more positive, I view this as a strength. Indeed, such negative affect would only be felt if one were to rigidly think of "psychotherapy" and "treatment" as the sole services synonymous with "practice." Is teaching not "practice?" And what about public policy, research, and I/O? Are these not common psychological service deliveries? Moreover, the genius and attraction of introducing positive psychology to practice is the very fact that it *is* so welcoming. Specifically, positive psychology reminds us of

the "gestalt-ness" of the individuals with whom we work. In echoing Jahoda (1958), we are reminded that an absence of illness does not equate to optimal functioning and that helping people to maximize their happiness and well-being is just as complicated and fascinating as ameliorating distress. Furthermore, we are forced to realize that to treat the whole person, the "gestalt," if you will, we *must* embrace *all* of the facets of positive psychology presented to us by these authors.

Linley and Joseph have done a fantastic job in helping to realize positive psychology's practical potential. With a well-organized framework and detailed chapters, the editors provide us with interventions that we as a field desperately need to embrace in order to flourish as both a discipline and science. "Those who are professionally qualified to deal with patients are understandably more sensitive to the manifestations of disease than to those of health. It will take special efforts to introduce concern with health into clinical work with the sick. But such efforts may well be worthwhile" (Jahoda, 1958, p. 75). In exercising my signature strength of gratitude, I would like to thank and applaud Linley and Joseph for taking such "special efforts" and bringing positive psychology from lab to clinic. ♦

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