Exploring the “Dark Side” in Positive Psychology

The dialogue between positive and negative experiences

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Dr. Kate Hefferton
Dr. Piers Worth
Dr. Tim Lomas
Dr. Itai Ivtzan
Outline of session

- Challenge the current scope of positive psychology
- Examine how positive psychology has begun to explore the ‘darker sides’ of life
- Discuss how we can grow from challenging experiences
- Reflect upon how embracing ‘negative’ aspects of ourselves can act as a route to psychological growth
Just in case

- We will be talking about sensitive topics today
- Please monitor your own emotions and feelings and only participate if you want to
- If anything arises from today's discussions that you would like to speak to someone about, please contact:
  - Mental Health Helpline: 1-866-531-2600
  - [http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca](http://www.mentalhealthhelpline.ca)
  - Seek support from a Clinician or Counsellor within your own country
Background

- 4 lecturers / academics on MAPP programmes
  - University of East London
    - Kate Hefferon
    - Itai Ivztan
    - Tim Lomas
  - Bucks New University
    - Piers Worth

- We asked ourselves where our teaching needed to go / grow / develop
Going to the ‘edge’ of the map (MAPP)…?
Layers or levels of Positive Psychology?

- The dialogue between the positive and negative
- Hope and Resilience
- Eudemonic / Hedonic Interventions
The Process of Embracing the ‘Dark Side’ of our experiences?

- Connecting with meaning and spirituality
- Encountering the emotion with compassion
- Exploring the possible growth through a difficulty
The complex emotional dynamics of flourishing

Dr. Tim Lomas
University of East London
What is positive?

- First wave of PP = Redress negative bias
- First wave: simplistic (Lazarus, 2003)
  - Positive emotions = happiness = good
  - Negative emotions = unhappiness = bad

- Emotions as co-valenced (Lazarus, 2003)

- More nuanced understanding
  - ‘Second wave’ / ‘Positive psychology 2.0’
  - Positive emotions can have maladaptive outcomes
  - Dysphorias can serve to promote wellbeing
Post-traumatic Growth (PTG)

Dr. Kate Hefferson
University of East London
# Resilience and Adversity

## Resilience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recovery</th>
<th>Resistance</th>
<th>Reconfiguration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Bounce back)</td>
<td>(Stand strong)</td>
<td>(Changed)</td>
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Posttraumatic growth (PTG)

“It is through this process of struggling with adversity that changes may arise that propels the individual to a higher level of functioning than which existed prior to the event” (Linley & Joseph, 2004, p. 11)
Narratives of Growth

WHEN WE ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO CHANGE A SITUATION, WE ARE CHALLENGED TO CHANGE OURSELVES

-VIKTOR FRANKL
Mortality

- Omission is a criticism of positive psychology (Burkeman, 2012)

- Terror Management theory (TMT)

- New wave of research focused on the positive repercussions of confronting mortality:
  - Increased gratitude
  - Increased health behaviours
  - Increased meaning
  - Altered goals (growth oriented)
  - Enhanced links to other people (family, friends, communities)
Psychology and Spirituality: The Dark-Side of Self-Awareness

Dr Itai Ivtzan
University East London
The challenge:

Facing oneself, especially our shadow (aspects we tend to ignore), is one of the most courageous, challenging, and frequently painful experiences we could choose.

Dark side:

Self-Awareness
Psychological discomfort
Growth, transcendence, spirituality
Challenging Positive Psychology: Embracing the Dark Side of Life

Itai Ivtzan
Tim Lomas
Piers Worth
Kate Hefferon

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Thank you!
References


References


Contact details

k.hefferon@uel.ac.uk
www.katehefferon.com

piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk
http://bucks.ac.uk

i.ivtzan@uel.ac.uk
www.awarenessisfreedom.com

t.lomas@uel.ac.uk
www.uel.ac.uk