

Positive Psychology

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The following are some thoughts arising from reading a recent issue of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, where the content seems relevant to DTA.

Hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being

Vittersø & Sørholt (2011) explain why they think the distinction made by the early pioneers of positive psychology are supported by their recent research with students in Norway (ages 18-31, 88 women and 54 men).

They used a range of measures in order to show that eudaimonic well-being, meaning a fully functioning life, is distinct from hedonic well-being, meaning a pleasant life. They contrast Rogers (1961), for example, who pointed out that individuals who made progress towards a “good” life were not necessarily happy, with Kahneman (1999) who proposed that well-being could be categorised along one dimension only of bad to good.

Vittersø & Sørholt report that statistical analyses of their study showed that life satisfaction was a significant predictor of pleasure and that personal growth was the sole predictor of interest. They caution that these results are for a Norwegian group and are based on recollections rather than measures of emotions in-the-moment.

From this, as developmental transactional analysts, we might suggest that:

- ◆ An I’m OK You’re OK life position relates to pleasure. The authors refer to a ‘Pollyanna principle’ that leads people to see neutral stimuli as positive (Matlin & Stang 1978) and vice versa (Weitz 1952).

- ◆ Physis, and the opportunity for it to be active, will impact on our interest and engagement – at work or school.

The impact of activities

Sergeant & Mongrain (2011) report on research where subjects listened to uplifting music, practiced feeling grateful, or recalled early childhood memories, for one week. They found that ‘self critics’ found the gratitude intervention particularly helpful and the music intervention also helpful. Unexpectedly, the music intervention was found to decrease self-esteem for those subjects classed as ‘needy’, as did also the gratitude intervention which was not expected to help this group. They suggest that the impact of positive psychology activities may be heavily influenced by the nature of the participants.

As developmental transactional analysts, we may need to consider how to design and use activities that allow positive involvement across a range of ‘personality’ styles. For instance, a fun-based activity might be enjoyed by those with Try Hard working style, and by those with Please People if it involves pleasurable interactions, but may leave Be Perfects feeling annoyed at the lack of focus on task achievement and Be Strong uncomfotable with the fun and the contact.

And maybe playing music as participants arrive in the training room may irritate some participants and distract others.

References

Kahneman, D (1999) Objective happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N Schwartz (Eds.) *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (3-25) New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation

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