Positive Psychology and Transactional Analysis

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Abstract

This articles describes the author's encounter with two "positive" psychologies—transactional analysis and positive psychology—and some of the similarities and differences in their founding, evolution, and branding. Because transactional analysis has remarkable properties as a metalanguage, many positive psychology ideas can be considered from a TA perspective and translated into TA concepts. On the other hand, positive psychology may be able to provide research evidence for concepts from transactional analysis. This comparison highlights the contradictions deeply embedded within transactional analysis theory between a philosophical framework based on the empirical scientific paradigm of the 1950s, which focuses on "objectivity," and a more contemporary constructivist philosophy, which focuses on "subjectivity."

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History may view the twentieth century in ways that we cannot yet imagine. It is likely to credit this era with the development of a myriad of psychological approaches growing out of Freud's late nineteenth-century work on hypnotism and hysteria (from his studies with Charcot, 1885-1886) and hysteria and dreams (from his work with Breuer as articulated in Breuer & Freud, 1895). Bragg (1998) has suggested that Freud had more impact on the world than anyone before or since. A longer-term view of the twentieth-century Western world already puts into perspective the fashionable ebbs and flows of psychological frameworks: humanistic schools arising out of experiences from World War II; cognitive and behavioral approaches gaining popularity alongside the technological developments of the 1960s and 1970s, as humans grandiosely considered that they might be able to control environment and society; a resurgence of notions of the unconscious, with a new focus on the interpersonal and thus intersubjective

domain toward the end of the century, perhaps emerging in response to complexity theory and quantum physics—and that is only to name a few. It was said in my training that there are over 400 named psychologies currently in existence. And now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a collection of research and ideas loosely termed "positive psychology" (PP) is beginning to permeate not only some existing approaches, but also politics, practices within organizations and education, psychotherapy and counseling, and even popular culture. This impact is not unlike the one transactional analysis (TA) had in its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, and many of the ideas within positive psychology echo notions for which transactional analysis provides useful maps and metaphors.

This article offers an overview of some of the developments and range of ideas within positive psychology and suggests links with transactional analysis. It does not attempt to critique coherently the positive psychology movement, although some of my signposts for doing so may be decipherable in this text. At the same time, this article juxtaposes positive psychology with transactional analysis in order to provide some critique of the latter. If transactional analysis is to continue to develop internationally in breadth as well as in depth, we need to pay attention to our strengths rather than put energy into our weaknesses and internal disputes about those. By attending to our strengths, we can continue to build on our excellent history of integrating ides from other psychological domains into central transactional analysis thinking.

My Journey

Noticing the increasing prevalence of the term "positive psychology" and how some of its ideas seemed to connect with transactional analysis, I attended and enjoyed the first British positive psychology conference in April 2007. At that meeting, there were some transactional analysis workshops presented by people who

use but are not trained in transactional analysis, and I noted for sale an early positive psychology text that included a somewhat limited and old-fashioned section on transactional analysis by Linley and Joseph (2004). The conference was organized by the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology, which is linked to the University of Warwick.

I also read a fair amount of positive psychology literature and took part in a global telecourse in positive psychology with one of the key contemporary teachers, who is based in the United States. (Significantly, no one else in the course seemed to have heard of transactional analysis!). In November 2007 I attended a conference offering positive psychology for businesspeople organized by the University of East London (UEL) (the first university in Britain to offer a master' degree in positive psychology), to which the founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, was invited. He is based at Pennsylvania State University in the United States, and earlier in the week he had been asked to speak to 1100 members of the British Psychology Society. At all of these events, I noticed two factors that I otherwise only experience around the best of transactional analysis training and conferences: people adopting an "I'm OK, You're OK" stance and demonstrating authenticity.

Why do I have such interest in positive psychology? As a coach, consultant, and facilitator using transactional analysis to realize the potential of individuals, groups, organizations, and communities, I find my working focus is at odds with many of my psychotherapy colleagues and with authors who focus on the pathological aspects of being human in their efforts to bring about healing or a reorganization of the self. In my work, the contract is different. My focus is on what is already working and how the future could be at its best. This approach is essentially pragmatical and creates hope, which in itself is often considered the most important aspect of counseling, therapy, and coaching .

I was originally attracted to transactional analysis because, unlike many psychologies, it contains concepts that focus on the healthy aspects of individuals and groups and is built on the positive assumptions that people are OK,

everyone can think, and thus they can decide to change if they wish. This resonated for me then and does so now as a reasonable, if utopian, philosophy on which to base an appreciation of humankind's individual and collective psychology. As a late twentieth-century person originally trained in sociology, I am skeptical about the basis of the classically empirical scientific paradigm for studying human beings individually or in groups. Therefore, the evolution of transactional analysis from Berne's early hopes for scientific observation to a more recent trend toward constructivism and meaning making fits well with my own frame of reference.

Thus, the research basis of positive psychology is a challenge to some of my core beliefs, yet it seems to provide some of the very scientific observation that Berne might have wanted to find. What also strikes me are (1) the similarities in development and in some of the ideas of transactional analysis and positive psychology and (2) the differences and how some of these might be of great value for us within transactional analysis if they could be used to build on and strengthen our work.

What's in a Name?
I have never understood why transactional analysis is called transactional analysis. Why not script analysis? Or the psychology of autonomy? I assume that part of the reason is that, at the time it was developed by Berne, it was somewhat radical to suggest that interactions might provide insight into a person's inner world, that the intrapsychic impacts the interpersonal, and that the other's involvement invites another series of internal and interpersonal responses. Thus, the term "transaction" (i.e., exchange) became part of the unique branding of transactional analysis. However, I think this has created problems for TA. "Transactional" is not an everyday word. If I had a penny for every time someone has asked me what it means, I would be rich! Its main association, and literature, is from the financial world. Do a Google search on "transactional analysis" and see what you get. As for the word "analysis," I guess that at the time Berne was writing, it represented both an attempt to underscore the scientific basis of the theory and

also to provide a critical contrast to psycho-analysis. Nowadays, to the lay person, "transactional analysis" often seems to imply dullness and impenetrability. The combination does not indicate a psychology. It is not surprising to find that many educated people have never heard of transactional analysis and find the name unappealing, if not off-putting. While Novellino's (2007) recent critique of English's (2007) comments about cognitive transactional analysis was partly about being overfocused on marketing, there is the reality that a "brand" needs to communicate its values clearly and accessibly. And with hundreds of psychologies to choose from, branding plays a significant part in affecting whether someone develops the motivation to become involved with a given theory and practice.

Within the field of organizational theories, the term "transactional" was used by Blanchard and Johnson (1981/1996) to describe ways leaders work and think that are not "transformational" of staff or services and so do not add value. The term "transactional" is now often used in management settings and has come to mean "old fashioned" and "limited," the "status quo" and "no real change." This is particularly ironic for transactional analysis because it is often taught in management development programs (usually by people who have not learned transactional analysis themselves and frequently with theory that is out of date, if not inaccurate). Consequently, it is not unusual to find a negative response to transactional analysis among managers and management and organizational theorists.

Key authors and speakers within positive psychology are also clear that its name can give the wrong impression because of the emphasis on "positive." It can imply a "Pollyanna," complacent, happy-clappy pop psychology approach that avoids anything negative. As a result, the depth of thinking, realism, and research that prevails among many key positive psychology people may be overlooked because of what is, for some, an off-putting name that has many meanings and associations in lay language. The positive psychology cognoscenti wrangle over alternatives, such as "the psychology of well-being," while most steer away from "the psy-

chology of happiness," which journalists and some authors have seized on (e.g., a well-researched and well-written book about this is Nettle, 2005). Not only is the right to the pursuit of happiness enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, it sells!—unless it touches anti-American rebels! The positive psychologists themselves, discussing this at conferences, are well aware of how the American connotations and the simplistic notions of the term "positive psychology" may be off-putting. (It is worth noting that Maslow used the term as a chapter title in 1954.)

Both names—transactional analysis and positive psychology—seem to have some branding problems, although I would suggest that positive psychology has more going for it in everyday language than transactional analysis has ever had. In the world of commerce, brands are successful if they indicate five core values that are clearly associated with the brand name and that are acted on consistently. We might consider this as the character of the culture (Berne, 1963). From my contact with the positive psychology world, I have found the core values to be positive, meaningfulness, authenticity, strengths focused, evidence based, and applicable. I will explore these further in this article.

And what would we say our five core values are in transactional analysis? I suggest there are these basic assumptions: OKness, choice, autonomy, open communication, and contracting. But how well do we walk our talk? Game playing perhaps? Obfuscation? Possibly. Splits and contaminations? Integrating?

Origins and Development of Positive Psychology

The term "positive psychology" had an immediate impact in the psychology world in 1998 when Martin Seligman was president of the American Psychological Association; the role included the privilege of setting up research into a project in which he was particularly interested (Linley & Harrington, 2006). Seligman had noticed that most post-World War II mental health research had focused on pathology, and he pledged funding to find out more about what makes for psychological well-being. He was adamant that this investigation

would be firmly research based and so not associated with popular or humanistic psychologies; he wanted it to have credence rooted in science. This brings to mind Berne rebellious turning away from preceding frameworks and his emphasis on empirical observations.

In the past 9 years, a number of research psychologists—initially in the United States but increasingly in other parts of the developed world—have turned their attention to many different facets of human well-being in an attempt to learn how this originates and can be developed further. There is a strong focus on the applicability of research findings to the real world, and it is notable that positive psychology conference workshops often have themes related to education, organizations, counseling and psychotherapy, and health. Transactional analysis is often applied to the first four of these fields, although the literature and perhaps practice is dominated by psychotherapy, at least in English-speaking countries.

Positive psychology has grown quickly in under 10 years, just as transactional analysis did between Berne's first article on ego states in 1957 and the publication of *Games People Play* in 1964 (with its serialization in the women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*). The difference is that *Games,* Berne's first pop psychology book, symbolized the beginning of the decline of transactional analysis, at least in the United States, where it had worked to avoid the establishment and universities.

In contrast, positive psychology is rooted in academic research, and Martin Seligman and others are invited to talk with prime ministers and presidents about the potential for positive psychology to impact education and health systems. Seligman (2007) talked at the UEL conference of wanting to see a positive psychology approach to economics, politics, and education schooling. In fact, in the summer of 2007, he and his colleagues brought about the training of 900 teachers in the United Kingdom and the United States focusing on what makes young people flourish as well as on life satisfaction and resilience. The master's and doctoral programs at Pennsylvania State University are structured so that people can and do attend easily from all over the world. Seligman has

steered funding toward researching the neuroscience of well-being, and he seems personally committed to using positive psychology for the benefit of society.

When I began training in transactional analysis, the potential for social action and social justice was central to my choice of this social psychology. It is why after training as a transactional analysis psychotherapist I undertook a second round of training in organizational TA and went on to qualify in the organizational and educational fields. I want to see the value of transactional analysis ideas permeate everyday life, as it does with Diane Salter's and Karen Pratt's work in South Africa and George Kohlrieser's (2006) work in hostage negotiations and organizations. I am disappointed at how often there seems to be a pecking order within transactional analysis that puts psychotherapy at the top. For example, when I was in India, I was told by at least a few Indian transactional analysts that they do not want to continue to be known as focusing on poverty and social unrest. The Indian transactional analysis community is proud of how in the past few years, the roles of counselor and psychotherapist have grown and developed, along with the economy, call centers, and stress in response to increasing disruption of more traditional patterns of living. I felt saddened that these imported ways of working with individuals have overtaken historic and systemic ways of working with families and communities (see, for example, Drego, 1983 on using the oral tradition in Indian villages) to deal with difficulties (such as shift working to global timetables that had been imposed by the dominating Western world). From my experience of what local people had to contribute at the 2004 International Transactional Analysis Conference in Bangalore, there are many ways of working from which we in the West can learn.

A key element in the success of positive psychology is what Seligman (2007) refers to as "disconfimability." He is careful to dissociate positive psychology from the humanistic psychologies, in particular, probably aware of the connections between the best of them but concerned about the lack of evidence for humanistic concepts in general and the questionable

thinking, practices, and behaviors within some of the humanistic movements at the further reaches (including, historically, transactional analysis, according to anecdotes and also Jorgensen & Jorgensen, 1984). Thus, credibility is central to positive psychology, and in a short time, this has helped it to establish a well-regarded reputation and an increase in research and application along with entry into government and public service across the English-speaking world.

Exploring the Roots of Positive Psychology

Although the field of positive psychology was launched by Seligman in 1998, the roots are ancient and begin with Aristotle and his notions of eudaimonic well-being ("daimon" means true nature and has recently been reintroduced as a popular idea in Phillip Pullman's novels and the film *The Golden Compass*). Aristotle considered happiness vulgar and thought that not all desires are worth pursuing; although some may produce pleasure, this does not produce well-being. He considered realizing one's potential to be the human goal, and true happiness comes from leading a virtuous life (Boniwell, 2006). Snyder and Lopez (2007) trace the history of hope from ancient Greece via Judeo-Christian developments into the Renaissance, the scientific revolution of the Enlightenment, and the ensuing industrial revolution. For them, hope fuels positive psychology.

Interestingly, there was a key book published prior to Seligman's and others' pronouncements about psychology not yielding enough knowledge of what makes life worth living. It was *Flow: The Psychology of Happiness* by Csikszentmihayli (1992). Clarke (1996) incorporated the idea of flow in a 1996 workshop to describe the "I'm OK, You're OK" (I+U+) life position. She contrasted it with fight (I+U-), flight (I+U-), and freeze (I-U-) and linked these life positions with paleomammalian or instinctual parts of brain functioning, which evolutionary psychology suggests receives a stimulus a fraction of a second before the later-developed cerebral cortex where we ("everyone can") think and flow. These "instinctive" reactions are not only OK but extraordinarily valuable when there is danger. However, in modern life

there is rarely real danger, although the brain is still wired to respond as if there were. Some suggest that modern-day stress is due to the fact that the brain is not able to switch off these functions quickly enough; consequently, we are flooded with adrenalin and other chemicals, some of which have addictive qualities.

Snyder and Lopez (2007) suggest that some Eastern thought and philosophies also influence and are compatible with positive psychology. These include ideas of enlightenment and the cycle of life from Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, which emphasize virtues and transcendence, in particular, through collectivity and the virtues of compassion and harmony. In recent years, cognitive behavioral psychology has also aligned itself with the concept of "mindfulness," which is rooted in Eastern traditions. It is notable that this notion has also been picked up in positive psychology conferences (Boniwell, 2007).

Considering such Eastern and Western philosophy might enhance contemporary transactional analysis if we had better communication channels among ourselves internationally. For example, there were excellent opportunities to consider the connections between Hinduism and transactional analysis at the 2004 International Transactional Analysis Conference in Bangalore, India. In the United Kingdom there are at least two transactional analysis trainers who are significant contributors to a master's degree program in mindfulness. Positive psychology itself seems to have created an infrastructure for debate among a wide variety of practitioners and a way of publicizing itself through both the academic and popular press. Despite our belief in the value of open communication, we in transactional analysis do not seem to have managed such a level of debate. For example, not all transactional analysis practitioners receive *The Script* newsletter or the *Transactional Analysis Journal*, some complain about difficulties in getting their ideas published, and it is not unknown to hear trainers proudly proclaiming that they do not read the *TAJ* or criticizing it as boring or inaccessible.

Approach to Life

It is readily apparent that much of positive

psychology is imbued with a moral position emphasizing virtue, but then the values explicit in transactional analysis and other humanistic psychologies also lead beyond philosophy to a moral stance with regard to being human. Seligman (2003) put forward a hypothesis that suggests there are three approaches to living:

- The pleasant life
- The engaged life
- The meaningful life

These imply an ascending order of virtue. All are considered to provide a sense of well-being, with the second and third providing greater life satisfaction over time. Within transactional analysis, the concept of "physis" (Berne, 1972) is imbued with aspiration and dynamism and implies that growth and development are inevitable and desirable. And while Berne did not expand much on this concept, there is a sense of what he found virtuous in all his writings.

Clearly, the notion of these three approaches to life could be thought of in the transactional analysis terms of life script and might provide useful insights into categorizing scripts. The banal script described by Berne (1972) has some links with the pleasant life. Within transactional analysis writing about scripts or life plans, since Cornell (1988) and up until and including Newton (2006), there has been a shift to more realistic thinking about the more positive and useful aspects of scripting that underpin our strengths and talents in the wider world. This is in contrast to a sole focus on the pathological aspects of script or Berne's earlier implications that autonomy is being free of all scripting. These ways of thinking about script can lead us to ask our clients the following kinds of questions: In what way do they find their lives pleasant? How are they engaged with and stretching their strengths? In what ways do they gain meaning out of being alive and contributing to their wider world?

The engaged life can also be thought of within transactional analysis as transactional within two-way relationships that satisfy the hungers of contact, stimulus (including incidence and sexuality) structure, and recognition, whereas the pleasant life suggests a more one-way and passive receiving of the strokes that "feed" these hungers. Time structuring might suggest that the engaged life is particularly about activity and intimacy, whereas the pleasant life is perhaps involved with withdrawal, ritual, and pastiming.

The meaningful life includes and goes beyond being engaged with others because it involves gaining meaning out of contributing in some way to a greater social whole. This picks up on the importance of belonging (Moiso, 1998), homonomy (Tudor, 2003), and autonomy involving interdependence and the stories we tell ourselves about our individuality, others, and the quality of life.

The Value of Positive Emotion

While the overall balance of positive to negative emotions has been shown to contribute to people's subjective well-being and optimal functioning, Frederickson (2005/2007) argues that people should cultivate positive emotions in themselves and those around them not just as an end state, but also as a means to achieving psychological growth and improved psychological and physical well-being over time. Unlike negative emotions, which are associated with specific action tendencies, positive emotions are vague, underspecified, and triggered by personal meaning. Frederickson argues that positive emotions are not to be confused with positive sensory experiences or positive moods. As with negative emotions, they are fleeting and in response to some personally meaningful circumstance.

Not only do positive emotions appear to operate as signals to approach or continue in some way, but Frederickson's (2005/2007) "broaden and build" (p. 217) theory and research suggests that positive emotions do more than this in broadening people's thought-action repertoires (while negative emotions narrow these to those quick and decisive actions that may be needed to adapt to threatening environments). They build their enduring resources in order to play, explore, savor, and integrate.

Tudor (2007a) suggests that transactional analysts should use active verbs rather than nouns (which have a distancing effect) to describe what we do and our purpose and goals. The list just mentioned (i.e., play, explore, savor, and integrate) describes many of the

goals of classical transactional analysis, and we have metaphors (e.g., the Free or Natural Child and the integrating Adult ego states) that expand on these notions, which are embedded in transactional analysis.

Frederickson (2005/2007) identifies positive emotions as (1) joy, a high activation state that creates the urge to play, push the limits, and be creative; (2) interest, which creates the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences, and expand the self in the process; (3) contentment, a low activation state that creates the urge to sit back and savor current life and circumstances and integrate these into new views of the self and the world; (4) love, which is an amalgam of the aforementioned three experienced within the contexts of safe and close relationships, creating in the process recurring cycles to play with, explore, and savor our loved ones. Frederickson also reviews other emotions that can be positive when authentic, such as pride, elevation, and gratitude.

These ways of functioning have some parallels with functional ego state theory, perhaps most clearly with Temple's (2004) research-based investigation into functional fluency and the five positive modes. Frederickson (2005/2007) makes the case in her research that these ways of functioning, which result from positive emotions, build physical and social resources, social bonds and attachments, social support, and intellectual resources (including creativity and theory of mind) as well as fuel brain development, knowledge and intellectual complexity, self-insight, and thus, potentially, the alteration of worldviews. She emphasizes that the importance of these personal resources that accrue during states of positive emotion is their durability: They outlast the transient emotional states that led to their acquisition and can be drawn on in subsequent difficult emotional states. Further and wide-ranging research shows that positive emotions fuel psychological resiliency and "bounce back," and it may be that resilient people use positive emotions to achieve effective coping strategies, such as humor, creative exploration, relaxation, optimistic thinking, amusement, and hope, all of which can create positive emotions in oneself and others. The outcome may be an upward spiral of

flourishing. For example, the famous research study into nuns' mortality indicated that those who expressed the most positive emotions in an autobiographical piece in their twenties lived 10 years longer than those who expressed the least positive emotions (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001).

"Flourishing" describes a state of optimal human functioning in positive psychology and is contrasted with pathology and also with languishing. Research into how much positivity is needed to counterbalance negativity has been carried out by video observation of interactions and their long-term effects (Snyder & Lopez, 2005, 2007). If only this had been done with transactional analysis concepts of transactions! Every speech act was coded into (1) positive (support, encouragement, appreciation) or negative (disapproval, sarcasm, cynicism); (2) inquiry (questions aimed at exploring or examining a position) or advocacy (arguments in favor of the speaker's viewpoint); and (3) self (referring to the speaker, the group present, or the company it forms part of) or other (if referencing an individual or group that was not part of the company). The results show the complexity of the dynamics involved. High-performing teams had the highest ratio of positivity to negativity and the broadest range of inquiry to advocacy. Medium performance teams showed less of both and did not show behavioral flexibility that helped them to be resilient in the face of adversity; rather, they tended to calcify with extreme negativity and ended up languishing in a cycle centered on self-absorbed advocacy. In transactional analysis we might think of this as a racket system. Finally, low-performance teams were stuck in this loop from the start and came to a dead stop.

Further research was carried out on the ratio of positivity to negativity. It turns out there is a precise ratio of 3.2:1 (positive to negative response) for flourishing individuals and 2.3:1 (positive to negative response) for languishing individuals (Frederickson, 2005/2007, p. 233). Likewise, Gottman's longitudinal studies (as cited in Snyder & Lopez, 2005, 2007) of marriage focused on positive and negative speech acts and emotions. Gottman suggested that it was possible to predict which marriages would

flourish with an early ratio of 4.9 positive utterances for every 1 negative utterance. This sort of research is important when considering stroking and the balance between positive and negative conditional strokes as well as the importance of positive unconditional regard. Although the term "strokes" is not specifically used in Gottman's work, this research seems to provide evidence for the outcomes of positive and negative strokes.

The Reality of Positive Thinking Patterns

One of the most useful findings to emerge from positive psychology is how negative events and feelings can improve through in-depth analysis and learning from them. However, an analytical approach to positive emotions and events may take away from their positivity and capacity to enhance and begin to incite negativity. Instead, savoring positive times is more helpful in creating current positive feelings and accessing the brain states most conducive to effectively being in the world. This may seem counterintuitive and is at odds with transactional analysis, where anything and everything can be analyzed. Using this positive psychology research suggests that it may be better not to analyze the transactions involved in a positive stroke or how a bull's-eye transaction operates. Rather, savoring it again and again as a snapshot in the memory may be more enhancing.. This indicates that analyzing positive experiences may, in itself, trigger negative thinking and emotional responses because analyzing raises the possibility of critiquing, which can slide into criticizing.

Investigating how optimism is learned is part of the work that Seligman (1991) did prior to the emergence of positive psychology as a field. It is built on ideas about learned helplessness that he had researched in the 1980s. These can be linked with transactional analysis ideas about passive behaviors and scripting or learning involving a Victim position. The winners' triangle (see Choy as modified in Napper & Newton, 2000, p. 9.8) is one attempt to create something of positive strategies within transactional analysis. When teaching about the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968) in a TA 101 or in management development work, I see clearly

how participants clamor for an antidote to a depressing yet familiar analysis of what has gone wrong. Reviews of many psychological approaches have continuously emphasized the importance of hope in the process of change.

Signature Strengths

The notion of individual strengths is a core strand of thinking in positive psychology and was considerably boosted by the research arm of the Gallup organization (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) when they took an interest in and provided funding for research in this area (which has applications in all aspects of life). As a result of the interest provoked by the notion of strengths, several strengths inventories have been developed (Linley, 2008), some of which can be found online. These have provided considerable research data derived from over 2 million interviews (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 8). Buckingham and Clifton describe strengths as talents and as a "recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behaviour [that] is enduring and can be productively applied" (p. 20). They also suggest that what might seem a frailty may incorporate strength. An example of this might be dyslexia as it was reframed by David Boies, the lawyer in the antitrust suit against Microsoft (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, p. 42); he suggested that it leads to mistrusting long and complicated words and so those with dyslexia may develop a facility for using plain English.

Various lists of "character strengths" have resulted from research into optimal development. These range from 24 strengths on Seligman's (2006) signature strengths questionnaire (known as VIA, for the Values in Action Institute, the foundation researching this area) to 34 themes on the Clifton Strengthsfinder profile (Rath, 2007), which was funded and promoted by Gallup and is constantly being developed and refined. The Centre for Applied Positive Psychology (CAPP) in the United Kingdom seems now to be taking a different tack from these two methods of profiling strengths so as to incorporate more of a personal construct notion by asking people who want to explore their strengths to self-define strengths. (Their tool for doing so will be published in the future.)

The lists of strengths found in these two contexts read like a list of virtues. They are sometimes referred to as "themes" or "talents," and in my view they are culturally biased toward a U.S.-oriented individualistic society. Nonetheless, they are proving inspiring to individuals and radical in application with schools and organizations. There is also some interesting work being done on staff recruitment that considers the strengths required for specific jobs and invites applicants who have such strengths to apply. When such a process is used, often interviewees decide for themselves during the job interview whether they really want the post.

The phrase "signature strengths" is often used with the kinds of inventories just described. It implies that each individual has a unique blend of strengths, although it turns out that the five most dominant are the most significant. The original research of VIA involved a literature search across cultures and religions for universal values and virtues. Inspired by this and the lack of existing empirical tools, a classification of strengths emerged in the VIA research. This list of strengths does not, as yet, have an underlying theory of "good character," although "natural conversations" (i.e., everyday conversations) tend to include specific terms for character strengths rather than abstract virtues. The criteria for selection as a strength (Petersen, 2006a, 2006b) include:

- Ubiquitous—recognized across cultures
- Fulfilling—contributes to broadly construed happiness and satisfaction
- Morally valued in its own right and not for tangible outcomes it might produce
- Does not diminish others and elevates others who witness it, producing admiration, not jealousy
- Has obvious antonyms that are negative
- Trait like
- Measurable
- Distinct, conceptually and empirically
- Has paragons—is strikingly embodied in some individuals
- Has prodigies—is precociously shown by some young people
- Can be selectively absent
- Has enabling institutions in that it is the deliberate target of social practices and rituals that try to cultivate it

These criteria could be construed within transactional analysis as relating to script, especially when considering ideas in TA about cultural scripting (e.g., Drego, 1983) and the development of notions about life plans and positive scripting (Cornell, 1988; Newton, 2006).

The result of the VIA selection criteria are 24 strengths organized under six core virtues (summarized from Seligman, 2003, pp. 137-161):

Strengths of wisdom and knowledge
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Love of learning
- Open-mindedness
- Perspective

Strengths of courage
- Authenticity
- Bravery
- Persistence
- Zest

Strengths of humanity
- Kindness
- Love
- Social intelligence

Strengths of justice
- Fairness
- Leadership
- Teamwork

Strengths of temperance
- Forgiveness/mercy
- Modesty/humility
- Prudence
- Self-regulation

Strengths of transcendence
- Appreciation of beauty and excellence
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humor
- Religiousness/spirituality

It is interesting to note a similarity between this list and Tudor's (2003) writing about the neopsyche. He focuses on an integrating Adult ego state that is organismic, vibrant, and pulsating and that incorporates qualities that extend beyond Berne's notions of ethos, pathos, and logos to include a list of qualities that Tudor suggests may be extendable. Elsewhere, Tudor (2007b) describes homonomy and strengths

that are about being in community. In a keynote speech, Erskine (2008) also emphasized relational aspects. He wrote about how relational processes are about cooperation, which depends on our interpersonal connections and involvement. He described how our shared experience has led to the development of certain qualities, including tolerance, humility, compassion, conscientiousness, curiosity, graciousness, creativity, and optimism. All of these, when embedded in cooperation, create the opportunity for change. When I initially heard Erskine's speech, I was struck by the resonance between his list and the positive psychology notions of strengths, although when I asked him about this later, he indicated that he had not been aware of the focus in positive psychology on strengths.

In my own work, I have found it useful to use Schmid's (1992/2006) concept of roles to stimulate individuals to investigate the strengths they have forged during their life journey. He posits that personality develops solely out of relationships, and any relationship involves inhabiting a role. He clusters these roles into arenas of private, professional, and organizational, to which Mohr (G. Mohr, personal communication, 8 August 2004) has added community. I find that it is through both the authentic expression and vitality in these roles and also out of the clashes, contaminations, confusions, and conflicts between these roles that people often identify how their particular strengths were developed and forged.

Linley (2007) defines a strength as "a preexisting capacity for a particular way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is authentic and energising to the user, and enables optimal functioning, development and performance." These words immediately bring to mind transactional analysis descriptions of an ego state as "a consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behavior" (Berne, as cited in Stewart & Joines, 1987, p. 15). In practice, many transactional analysts nowadays explain ego states as a consistent pattern of thought, feeling, and behavior.

In his presentation at UEL, Linley (2007) suggested that strengths use and strengths knowledge are associated with:

- Organismic valuing (authenticity, in touch with self)
- Psychological well-being (fulfillment)
- Subjective well-being (happiness)
- Vitality (positive energy)

He reports, as do many other positive psychologists, that focusing on both performance strengths and personality strengths improves and increases performance, while focusing on weaknesses (as much performance appraisal tends to do) triggers a decrease in competency. Within transactional analysis, this is familiar to us in terms of stroking theory. Linley also suggested that a volume control may be needed with strengths in order to use them optimally and, he stressed, authentically. Linley indicated that others in positive psychology have suggested that positive recognition of personality strengths increases self-esteem (i.e., unconditional strokes), positive recognition of performance strengths increases competency (i.e., conditional strokes), and a combination of the two is essential to increase confidence.

However, as Linley's definition of "strength" highlights, the emphasis in positive psychology is perhaps still heavily influenced by a focus on the individual (perhaps a faint echo of the individualized happiness stressed in the U.S. Constitution). While this highlighting of happiness has also been a refrain within transactional analysis, consideration of the political and social contexts that may promote a lack of happiness have not been a significant strand in the transactional analysis literature, despite the fact that it is referred to as a social psychology and contains writings on organizations, societies, and groups. Perhaps this is because Berne's work provoked investigation by the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s and he subsequently took an apolitical stance with regard to social justice (demonstrated by the lack of emphasis on such issues in his writing). However, in the past decade or so there has been an increase in awareness of our interconnectedness as a result of issues such as global warming. At the same time, professional transactional analysts have been giving more consideration to the relevance of our theories for living in communities. If Linley's definition (quoted earlier) had been extended to include

energizing not just the user or self but also others and the community, what difference would this make to the notion of strengths?

Interventions and Applications

Positive psychology has borrowed many of ways of working with individuals and groups from other modalities, such as solution-focused brief therapy (MacDonald, 2007) and appreciative inquiry (Cooperider & Whitney, 2005), just as transactional analysis has often borrowed techniques from elsewhere (e.g., gestalt chair work, constellations for exploring family history and imago, psychodrama processes in groups, etc.). However, one criticism of positive psychology is that it has not yet developed a methodology, and the research focus has not yet included interventions. But this work seems to be in progress. Meanwhile, the work in education and with strengths has been picked up and used on several continents, and the applications are being researched for effectiveness.

There are many areas of research and application within positive psychology that I have not addressed here, partly because of space. The positive psychology literature is broad ranging, with a focus on everyday life and ordinary contexts and situations as a reaction to the focus on extremes and abnormality in much of psychology. There are positive psychology writings on such subjects as aging (in Huppert, Baylis, & Keverne, 2007); the value of setting goals (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006); economics and happiness (Bruni & Porta, 2005); marriage and friendship (Peterson, 2006); applications to leadership, recruitment, and staff selection; and coaching (Diener-Biswas & Dean, 2007). Another area of research is social comparison (Popovic, 2005), which is often investigated using thought experiments in positive psychology. These indicate how as human beings we compare ourselves to others within particular dimensions and how, in only some aspects of life, we will do so favorably or unfavorably and with an emotional response. This has resonance with the life positions within transactional analysis.

Positive psychology is being researched and written about and its outcomes applied in counseling and psychotherapy, in organizations, and

in education (Huppert et al., 2007). Interestingly, in the 1960s Berne saw the same broad scope for transactional analysis. However, his aversion to academic institutions meant that the credibility of both the thinking and applications of transactional analysis in a wide range of settings has not developed with the acceleration, breadth, depth, and financial resources that positive psychology has had in the past few years. Positive psychology is now firmly located within universities, and the references for this article demonstrate the amount of literature —much of it in from academic presses—that has been published in the past 3 years. One result of such credibility is that while in London in 2007, Seligman apparently met several times with Prime Minister Gordon Brown to discuss how positive psychology could be embedded in public policy.

In his presentation at the University of East London Conference on positive psychology in 2007, Linley made a case for positive psychology as an approach, rather than as just a body of research about happiness and human strengths. Fundamental to this approach is the nature of the questions being asked, and while this is not a new approach—for example, neurolinguistic programming has posited this frame for a long while, and solutions-focused approaches also work this way—the perceived credibility of positive psychology means that this sort of questioning is permeating places that can affect societies in a way that has not happened before. Such questions include:

- What is working?
- How can we learn from what worked before?
- Am I being the best I can be?
- What has been my best experience of the last week?

Fox Eades (2008), in her practical positive psychology book for teachers, suggests the use of what she calls the "www question," that is, what went well? Perhaps the most powerful questions of this nature, although not rooted in positive psychology as such, are suggested by Block (2001) and can be used with a 1-10 scaling response at the beginning of any event or process (meeting, learning, counseling, consultancy) and repeated at any point to highlight change:

- How valuable an experience do you plan this to be?
- How engaged do you plan to be?
- How much risk are you willing to take?
- How interested are you in the quality of experience of those around you?

Conclusion

Within transactional analysis there have been calls for more research over the past few years, in large part because that was the twentieth-century scientific paradigm. Yet Kuhn (1970) pointed out nearly half a century ago that there has been a scientific revolution, and experimental and research-based science is a methodology of the past. Despite the emphasis on empirical research, some of what is under the positive psychology umbrella are hypotheses awaiting the underwriting and in-depth research (e.g., notions about the three ways of living). However, because there is a considerable body of research findings related to positive psychology, there is an aura of credibility about it that, wittingly or otherwise, positively affects its impact in the world. Transactional analysis does not have this, although it could certainly borrow some positive psychology research findings to support transactional analysis concepts.

What transactional analysis does have are powerful maps and metaphors that communicate well across diverse cultures and all levels of educational background. Perhaps we need to recognize that we missed the boat in the 1960s and 1970s in terms of research, even though Berne and many after him created constructs that impact individuals in finding new and different perspectives on themselves and their work, learning, lives, and societies. Does it really matter if there is any empirical data to provide "truth" behind the constructs? Perhaps the answer to this question is "yes," but only if we are considering marketing transactional analysis to people who have faith in empiricism. Stephen Law (2007), the British philosopher, gratifyingly tore empiricism's rationale to shreds for the British Institute of Transactional Analysis (ITA) trainers by showing that the creationists have as much logic as do Darwinists from the frame of reference of empiricism!

I find one of the most appealing strands of transactional analysis thinking to be the constructivist approach (Allen & Allen, 1997; Newton, 2006; Summers & Tudor, 2000). From that perspective, being "right," and having evidence to prove one's position, becomes irrelevant, and holding on to a position of "my thinking is OK and yours is not" becomes transformed into a different kind of debate, with the knowledge that the future is uncertain and everyone psychologically will inevitably hold a different subjective meaning with regard to any word, object, or process. However, it is important to note that Law also demolished such relativism for the benefit of the British transactional analysis trainers in terms of its philosophical premises!

Nonetheless, my own pragmatic approach is to borrow from what research there is when it is useful to do so, and positive psychology provides some satisfying links with transactional analysis, offers some empirical evidence for those who find this important, and posits some new ideas that we can usefully take on board. In turn, perhaps transactional analysis can offer positive psychology some areas for research and some practitioners among whom to do research, particularly in the area of methodology. One of the riches of transactional analysis is its breadth, from behavioral and cognitive ways of working to psychodynamic and self-psychology approaches. Rather than fight about the righteousness of any nuances of these, let us celebrate the richness of transactional analysis and communicate its value in all areas of contemporary life.

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