POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENT: A CASE STUDY IN SCIENTIFIC LEGITIMACY

by

Jonathan S. Simmons

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Supervisor:	Joseph Galbo, PhD, Sociology
Examining Board:	Bruce MacDonald, PhD, Biology, Chair David Flagel, PhD, Philosophy Vanda Rideout, PhD, Sociology

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DEDICATION

To my mother.

ABSTRACT

Psychology has always been vulnerable to fads, producing its share of psychological movements and therapeutic cults that blur the borderline between science and non-science. It's important for sociologists of ideas and those who study the social life of scientists and intellectuals to engage with the content of ideas and to take conflicts about scientific legitimacy seriously, both as a measure of how scientists evaluate each other's symbolic products and as criteria for what counts as scientific truth. This research is an attempt to reinvigorate a sociological approach to a debate regarding scientific legitimacy in a case study informed by Frickel and Gross's general theory of scientific/intellectual movements. The focus will be positive psychology's emergence at the end of the last decade and the ongoing debate regarding its scientific legitimacy and how positive psychologists have positioned their movement in relation to past positive psychologies.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In his forward to the *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, psychologist Christopher Peterson argues that "[p]ositive psychology is psychology—psychology is science—and science requires checking theories against evidence.... Positive psychology will rise or fall on the science on which it is based" (Snyder & Lopez, 2009, p. xxiii). Since its official inception in 1998, positive psychology has been subject to an unusual amount of scrutiny regarding its scientific legitimacy. The late Richard Lazarus (2003) wondered if it would end up being yet another fad and other skeptics have been quick to point out its problematic ontological underpinnings, ethnocentrism, ideology of individualism, and its scientific credentialing of the cult of positive thinking.

Positive psychology's acknowledged founder, Martin E.P. Seligman, described his new branch of psychology as a science of positive subjective experience aimed at developing the qualities that make life worth living. He was concerned from the beginning about how to present positive psychology, both to insiders and outsiders, while remaining cognizant of the fact that some elements would necessarily have to be excluded. Rather than a frame, he preferred the metaphor of a firewall, identifying positive thinking literature as distinct from positive psychology and expressing his antipathy towards self-help gurus (Seligman, 1998). While he was wary of non-scientific positive psychologies, he nonetheless acknowledged the need to wade into some shared territory for the purposes of empirical research.

1.2 Research Questions

My investigation of positive psychology will seek to answer the following questions:

1) How did positive psychology emerge as a scientific movement?
2) How are scientific controversies shaped by rational dialectic?
3) What are the consequences of the ongoing debates about positive psychology's scientific legitimacy?

The social conditions of the possibility of knowledge within psychology are being constantly challenged through rational dialectic[1] among psychologists as to which kind of psychology best exemplifies the virtue of epistemic objectivity[2]. These research questions are related to one another by their conceptual focus on positive psychology's emergence as a scientific movement and its ongoing tension with mainstream psychology and past positive psychologies.

1.3 Statement of Focus

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that equality had led to the American idea of an indefinite capacity for improvement. The concept of perfectibility is also reflected in Norman Vincent Peale's book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), which has had a tremendous impact on the self-help industry. Skeptics argue that Seligman's positive psychology continues in this tradition, but with the support of a professional intellectual

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[1] Rational dialectic is a form of disputation involving expert scientists who cross-validate one another's arguments within an autonomous scientific field.
[2] Has to do with the epistemic status of claims (also called methodological objectivity), meaning that sentences can be verified or justified as objectively valid.

culture that circulates content through academic forums such as *The Journal of Happiness Studies* and *the Journal of Positive Psychology*. Seligman (1998) initially defined positive psychology as a new field concerned with positive experiences such well-being, optimism, and flow. His inquiry into the scientific study of subjective well-being has invigorated happiness research, generating a large body of knowledge which has been advertised to the media, corporations, educational institutions, and political organizations. The purpose of this qualitative case study will be to develop an understanding of positive psychology's emergence and debates about its scientific legitimacy by bringing into focus the local institutional conditions and settings that played a role in its development.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

My approach to understanding the positive psychology movement is influenced by a broad theoretical framework referred to as the new sociology of ideas. The "new" in the new sociology of ideas is a relative term, referring to a change in perspective from regarding the study of ideas as a means to a critical end to a concern with ideas separate from their socio-critical implications. Camic and Gross's section "The New Sociology of Ideas" in the Blackwell Companion to Sociology (2001), provides an avenue for transforming broadly held tenets about the study of intellectuals and their ideas into a branch of sociology (Camic & Gross, 2001, p. 97).

2.1 Scientific/Intellectual Movements

2.1.1 Frickel and Gross's General Theory of Scientific/Intellectual Movements

Some recent developments within the sociology of ideas have embraced concepts such as agency, self-concept, and identity. I will be drawing from these contributions with the help of Frickel and Gross's (2005) general theory of scientific/intellectual movements, which are similar to social movements, but their distinctiveness is embedded in their coherency in programming scientific or intellectual change.

Frickel and Gross's general theory outlines four propositions as a starting point to guide empirical research:

1. Scientific movement emergence is largely driven by established scholars who are dissatisfied with the prevailing practices of their field.

2. Success depends on opportunity structures and access to resources, which includes access to employment, ways for securing intellectual prestige, and mobilizing structures.
3. Micromobilization contexts provide local sites in which recruitment can take place and networking can flourish, such as conferences, retreats, and of course, academic departments.
4. In addition to the importance of framing to inspire and guide collective action through boundary-work, intellectual identity plays a fundamental role in the development of ideas.

I will now discuss the two most important propositions to my analysis of positive psychology. The first proposition is that high-status intellectuals with serious grievances drive collective action and the formulation of a scientific movement in opposition to the prevailing or mainstream practices of their field. Frickel and Gross do not believe that dissatisfaction arises primarily from opportunities, in that scientists' strategies are simultaneously political and epistemological, allowing for varied positions and dispositions. The fourth proposition, which concerns movement framing, argues that grievances are not sufficient for sustaining collectivities because participants must also share common understandings about movement ideas.

2.2 Politics of Expertise

The role of experts is important to any conversation about scientific practice, and scientific controversies involving struggles over what constitutes scientific legitimacy are intertwined with moral and political considerations (Frickel & Gross 2005; Latour, 1987;

Fuchs 1992; Shapin & Schaffer, 1985). If we are to explain the processes by which successful and unsuccessful scientific movements develop, then we must take into consideration how the scientific community regards its successes and failures:

> It follows from a rigorous definition of the scientific field as the objective space defined by the play of opposing forces in a struggle for scientific states, that it is pointless to distinguish between strictly scientific determinations and strictly social determinations of practices that are essentially *overdetermined* (Bourdieu, 1975: 21).

Expertise has been approached by sociologists through concepts like authority and power, but more can be said about the high placed intellectuals that spur movement development. The boundaries between experts and non-experts are porous, especially if viewed from a relativistic perspective that denies that scientists have special access to truth; however, that debate is not relevant to my analysis, which should instead be seen as an entry point for an inquiry into the social processes surrounding movement emergence and how leaders channel knowledge and politics when they have placed themselves against the mainstream.

Controversies surrounding positive psychology's emergence concern the boundaries of science, and within that struggle, smaller battles have formed around the politics of expertise and scientific warrant. The demarcation of science from non-science is usually discussed in terms of boundary-work, the purpose of which is to construct social boundaries that distinguish intellectual activities. Lately, scholarship about boundary-work has focused on how scientists pursue credibility with a public audience in mind, rather than other scientists.

The public understanding of science (PUS) tends to focus on political and public challenges to science, such as in the climate change debate or the autism/vaccine

controversy, both of which involve public skepticism. Public skepticism has been excused as a problem for education, suggesting that scientists have failed to effectively engage with the public about controversial issues. While I intend to touch on the lay response to positive psychology, I am far more interested in how controversies are managed within parent disciplines like academic psychology.

Positive psychology appears to be a paradigmatic scientific movement. Seligman, as we shall see, engaged in strategic activities to build and reinforce boundaries between science and non-science, positive psychology and mainstream psychology, and positive psychology and humanistic psychology. Seligman, who already had credibility as a high-status intellectual, leveraged his authority to secure an institutional base, and at least in the beginning of the movement, went to great lengths to diminish any outside threats, labelling other attempts to claim his territory as pseudoscientific or amateurish; however, deliberate strategizing is only one part of this picture, as you will see in the forthcoming chapters.

Boundary-work is not always or even mostly strategic (Knorr-Cetina, 1981, p. 73), a fact which is overlooked in talk about scientific practice from the social constructivist perspective. Within the sociology of scientific knowledge, explanations tend to reduce to either the external forces that shape science or internal negotiations between individual scientists. I don't think either approach satisfactorily addresses the dynamic nature of social action.

We don't really understand the extent to which the content of science is determined by social factors, leaving some sociologists to adopt a priori positions that can't be defended empirically. Chance and a myriad of social processes play a role in the

development of scientific movements, but communally accepted knowledge is different and not fully explained by ideology. Deliberate negotiation and strategizing probably occurs within academic journals and other pseudo-private arenas characterized by rational dialectic, but as soon as a movement progresses beyond specialized audiences, strategizing becomes more difficult, if not impossible.

2.3 Scientific Legitimacy

2.3.1 Intellectual Authority

The focus of my discussion in this thesis is the operation of intellectual authority and the negotiation of scientific legitimacy, which are no doubt influenced by strategic social processes, but not determined by them. As Stephen Cole (1992) writes, "The social variables interacting with cognitive variables do influence the foci of attention and rate of advance, but social variables cannot be used to explain why one model of DNA rather than another was accepted into the core" (p. 30). Scientific legitimacy, as a conceptual tool, is usually employed by scholars in cases where the divide between science and non-science is seen as concrete or where a scientific movement has failed or been banished by the mainstream scientific community. Cross (2004), for example, examines the study of UFOs, and how fringe researchers make their cases for legitimacy using a "science-heavy cultural strategy" (p. 3) that involves constructing scientific-sounding explanations and challenging the "authority of conventional science by framing a different set of activities as scientific" (p. 29). While few scientists would see a need to debate the scientific legitimacy of ufology, which is widely rejected by the scientific community, this is not

the case when dealing with movements that produce actual research like positive psychology.

2.3.2 Consensus within Psychology

The conflict between academic positive psychology and the marketing of positive psychology as a social movement is part of a larger debate about its scientific legitimacy. Psychology, as a discipline, sits astride the line dividing science from non-science, never quite comfortable with its fragmented character and internal debates about disorganization and the problems of unification. The fact that positive psychology is housed within a controversial discipline suggests that simple distinctions between the core and the frontier of scientific knowledge might need to be rethought.

Psychologists have difficulty reaching consensus about new wrinkles in their discipline, with no agreed-upon criteria or norms to guide them in their efforts to demarcate good psychology from bad psychology. Katzko (2002) argues that from the resulting spectacle, the archetype of the scientist-explorer is replaced by a kind of scientist-warrior who seeks to define and defend territory, emphasizing group formation over scientific pursuits and leading in some cases to social organizations that resemble religious movements.

Skeptics of positive psychology have expressed concern about the movement's cult like qualities (Ehrenreich, 2010). Their fears are warranted given that psychology has led to cult like movements in the past, such as Scientology splinter group the Process Church, which began as a neo-Adlerian therapy group (Bainbridge, 1978; Leahey & Leahey, 1983). Other, less obviously religious movements include phrenology,

mesmerism, parapsychology, Emotional Intelligence (EI), graphology, Primal Scream Therapy, and Repressed Memory Therapy, just to name a few. Though it's debatable whether these movements were ever mainstream psychology, psychologists are understandably uneasy about frontier developments within their field, and not just fringe and New Age therapies, but also seemingly well-established approaches such as evolutionary psychology (Confer et al., 2010).

There is a great deal to be gained in assessing how intellectual authority is produced in fragmented fields like psychology, which do not produce the same kinds of empirical and analytical support mechanisms that we associate with disciplines like physics or the biological sciences (Hunt, 2005). Psychologists nonetheless engage in demarcation, seeing pseudo-psychology as wasteful and harmful. There is, however, a danger attached to demarcation: psychologists could make the mistake of labelling genuine scientific psychology as pseudoscience or bad science. Then again, the best ideas are supposed to have a way of cutting through dismissal, usually by providing substantial empirical or analytical support. Proponents of pseudo-psychology on the other hand are unlikely to be able to tolerate scrutiny and will probably dismiss their critics if they address them at all.

2.3.3 Boundary Framing

Erving Goffman described frames as "schemata of interpretation" (Smith, 2006, p. 56) that allow people to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" issues (p. 56). Though not

without its controversies[3] as an analytical tool, framing involves the production and maintenance of meaning for the purposes of collective action, at least in the case of collective action frames, which are "intended to mobilize potential adherences and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). Frames consequently impact how the movement will appear to insiders and outsiders, in a sense acting as "ideational vehicles for the expression" of self-conceptions in ways that "resonate with potential recruits as appropriate or legitimate" (Frickel & Gross, 2005, p. 222).

Positive psychology's framing, reliant as it is on Seligman's dissatisfaction with his field, has raised the ire of those outside of the movement, who vary in their responses, but express concern about positive psychology's standing as a scientific approach to human flourishing. Framing, while strategic, emerges from both epistemological and political concerns as part of a rational dialectic. It is not my intention to assess whether positive psychology's influence will contribute to psychology or if it will be regarded as yet another fad; however, I will show that many of the concerns surrounding positive psychology's scientific legitimacy are based on its proponents' failure to effectively manage the framing of their movement, especially when it comes to separating positive psychology as a science from positive psychology as a social movement.

Frickel and Gross (2005) allow for epistemic cultures that act as repertoires of "thought, action, and technique" (p. 219) in shaping inquiry in particular disciplines, but they see a clear separation between these organizational cultures and influences imported

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[3] See Benford & Snow (2000) for a discussion of the analytic utility of the framing literature for understanding social movement dynamics.

from more macro-level structures[4]. While I agree to a certain extent, scientists are limited in their ability to demarcate with respect to their reliance on concepts which have a conflicted relationship to popular movements or a consistent pattern of reframing the products of past scientific movements.

2.4 Demarcating Science and Pseudoscience

2.4.1 Limitations of the Social Constructivist Perspective

When we examine failed scientific movements, we tend to look for explanations based on personality conflicts, access to resources, and group instability. All of these explanations are important, but we should not ignore disputes that are inevitably tied to scientific legitimacy based on epistemic warrant. The ideas of successful scientific movements, as constrained by the empirical world, become normative regardless of how contentious they are at the time of emergence, i.e., they cannot remain in a conflict state indefinitely without going through revision, being absorbed, or transitioning into new disciplines.

The dominant approach within the sociology of scientific knowledge is the social constructivist perspective, focusing on the social processes that inform ideas. The social constructivist perspective is particularly potent with the so-called Strong Program approach associated with the Edinburgh School in the United Kingdom. Advocates of these perspectives usually hold the view that there are no paradigm-neutral standards of

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[4] Broad socio-economic and political conditions, which Frickel & Gross (2005) avoid because of their tendency to see social order as local productions.

evidence, and as a consequence it is extremely difficult to distinguish between science and non-science:

> Universal and ahistorical ('essential') criteria by which to define science from nonscience and 'pseudoscience' have proven elusive, revelatory of individual, institutional, and political prerogatives rather than universally accepted rational principles; there is no transcendental criteria by which to make such judgment (Lahsen, 2005, p. 138)

The absence of transcendental criteria for distinguishing science from non-science should not lead one to adopt a position of epistemological relativism, but developments within THE SOCIOLOGY OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE have led to discussions that primarily focus on the pursuit of prestige or the relationship between ideas and status. Discussions that focus on ideology tend to result in a type of cynicism when faced with competing paradigms, confusing the social role of science with epistemological issues.

2.4.2 Bourdieu's field theory of scientific practice

Bourdieu's field theory of scientific practice is contrastively in keeping with the post-positive philosophy of science that views knowledge as an embodied carrier with its own requirements for tribal solidarity. The embodied disposition of scientists gives scientists the "specific sense as to what kind of research would most likely bring her the results that would be regarded by her colleagues as important and worth pursuing" (Kim, 2009, p. 48). My position aligns well with Bourdieu's conception of scientific truth, as I do not share the sociology of scientific knowledge's focus on struggles for power. It is important to reflect on scientists' attempts to meet challenges which concern the truth of conflicting ideas. Struggles for power are regulated by rules inscribed in that particular social space and leading to the production of truth which remains intact until "new

evidence points to the contrary" (p. 76). In other words, truth is not transcendental, but collectively embodied in a scientific field, which, through mediation and disputation, produces scientific knowledge.

Traditionally, sociologists have viewed scientific legitimacy as a local, practical, and constructed effort on the part of scientists. Gieryn (1999) and others have proposed the strategic transformation of boundaries as an alternative to realist attempts to understand the production of scientific legitimacy:

> Boundary-work brings social interests and real science together in the mapping, and on these cultural maps both get articulated, altered, appreciated, denied, deployed, reconstructed, and translated in and through the cartographic process. Those features chosen for attribution to science (or to its others) are chosen strategically ... (p. 24)

Shapin and Schaffer (1985) go a little further, moving towards idealism in marginalizing the empirical world:

> As we come to recognize the conventional and artifactual status of our forms of knowing we put ourselves in a position to realize that it is ourselves and not reality that is responsible for what we know. Knowledge, as much as the state, is the product of human actions (p. 344).

I accept that knowledge is a product of human actions, but it is not *only* a product of human actions, and I reject any effort to disguise epistemological relativism as methodological relativism such as in the case of the above quotation. I have adopted what Stephen Cole (1992) refers to as the realist-constructivist view, recognizing that science is socially constructed, but that its constructions are checked or constrained by input from the empirical world. The view that scientific legitimacy rests entirely on the products of persuasion tends to cloud issues surrounding the emergence of scientific movements and distort scientific practice.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Why positive psychology?

The social basis of scientific or intellectual movements has long been an important area of inquiry for sociologists, but the tradition of science studies has been to focus on how natural scientists produce knowledge and the role that the social context of a scientific discipline plays in shaping its intellectual production. Other approaches, particularly within sociology, have been primarily concerned with the activities of intellectuals within the humanities. Without diminishing these substantial contributions it is unfortunate that the positive psychology movement hasn't been studied in a systematic way. While positive psychology is only one small part of the social sciences, it nonetheless has great social significance, serving as an intellectual resource for movements aimed at political or cultural change, and providing vocabularies that shape our understanding of human flourishing and ordinary human strengths and virtues.

3.2 Case Study

This project employs a case-study analysis to positive psychology's emergence and development from 1998-2012. Creswell argues that case studies are a "strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (2009, p. 13). It is the preferred method to use when investigating a contemporary set of events, "over which the investigator has little or no control of" (Yin, 2009, p. 13).

Like all intellectuals, psychologists are especially oriented towards producing decontextualized ideas using the written word. It is through texts that they experience

their creativity and gain cultural capital while also providing a record of discourse through time, permitting studies of intellectual structure and change. My research draws on a variety of data types and sources. The first major sources of data were the Positive Psychology Network Concept Paper (1998), Seligman's APA Presidential Address (Fowler et al., 1999), and journal articles which included the Millennial Issue of The American Psychologist (Anderson, 2000), "Lessons learned from a life in psychological science: Implications for young scientists" (Morgeson, 1999), and "Footsteps on the road to positive psychology" (Gillham & Seligman, 1999).

I identified the initial structure of the positive psychology movement and points of consensus and contention with other psychologists. I documented the trajectory of positive psychology's development, focusing on key debates and important narrative shifts as other psychologists began to interact with the movement. Several texts also played a prominent role in the development of my thesis: *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (Seligman, 2003), *Character strengths and virtues: a handbook and classification* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), *A Primer in Positive psychology* (Peterson, 2006), *Positive psychology: The Scientific and Practical Explorations of Human Strengths* (Snyder et al., 2011), and *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (Seligman, 2011).

I developed a case study database, which contained notes, documents used, and the initial open-ended answers to my research questions and other questions that developed during the course of research. Analysis of this data involved the use of NVivo 9 which maintains a collection and record of analysis. I derived analytical techniques from pattern

matching, relying heavily on contextual evidence and deductive logic to reconstruct causality in addition to the theoretical propositions described in Frickel and Gross's general theory.

Concern about the rigor of case study research is more common in contemporary sociology than in other disciplines, such as anthropology or the more interdisciplinary science and technology studies (STS). Sociology's focus on generalization tends to obscure rather than reveal with respect to social-scientific research. Embedded in this concern with generalisation or external validity are a series of assumptions that remain unquestioned, such as that the social sciences are about generalising and that generalizability is a binary concept, i.e., either you have generalizability or you don't. In addition, the assumption that social scientists, like natural scientists, can offer induction from generalisation is highly problematic given the constraints of the social sciences and the complexity of the phenomena under examination. Rather than addressing the differences between the natural sciences and social sciences, which is beyond the scope of this project, I suggest, like Thomas (2010), that the attempts at generalisation that we have seen in the social sciences "rest on something of a sleight of hand in the presentation of what induction is, what generalisation can be, and what theory is" (p. 576).

3.3 Phronesis and Generalization

What passes for generalization in the social sciences is by the standards embraced by social scientists insignificant at worst and trivial at best. The importance of generalisation to most social scientists rests on its relationship to theory, but not the kind of theory that we associate with the natural sciences. Theory within the social sciences is

often no more than theory-talk, which trivializes theory to the point that the concept embraces everything and anything that addresses "ordinary, contingent, unpredictable, everyday behavior" (Fish, p. 327). This is not the theory of the natural sciences, which involves such things as universal quantifiers, scope modifiers, exacting expectations and procedures, predictability, replicability, etc. There is no genuine social theory and generalisation in the social sciences is little more than the generalisation of the layperson or common interpretive acts:

> It was pointed out triumphantly that people wear similar clothes, eat at specific times of the day, observe common rules of grammar in speaking, drive on the same side of the road and stop at red lights ... Yet it was overlooked that the successful 'prediction' of none of these regularities depends on systematic inquiry by a group of specialists claiming to apply methods to the study of human life in society that have proven astoundingly successful in the natural sciences (Wrong, 2005, p. 11-12).

As Yin (2009) argues, case studies, like experiments, are "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes" (p. 15). Rather than inferring something from a case study, we impose a pattern of meaning, ensuring that the case has been studied properly, in a way that captures its unique features. To accomplish this, there is a need to move towards a particular representation "given in context and understood in that context" (Thomas, 2010, p. 578). Interpretation, then, is beholden to one's own experience. This kind of knowledge is in keeping with the Aristotelian notion of phronesis, which has come to mean something similar to tacit knowledge, i.e., a "judgment made on the basis of experience and without recourse to the external guide that theory putatively provides" (p. 578).

Validation, with phronesis, is not based on generalizability, but the insight and understandability gained from narratives that identify cause while at the same time

accounting for sequence and contingency. Phronesis provides a pragmatic, provisional, and tentative model for interpretation that leads to the production of intimate social scientific knowledge of localized understandings of subjective human relationships (Schram, 2004, p. 422) as opposed to the abstract principles and law-like relationships of the natural sciences.

By introducing the concept of phronesis, I contend that exemplary knowledge is more conducive to addressing the pervasive unpredictability that characterizes the subjects of the social sciences. Sometimes referred to as practical theory, phronesis does not entail any expectations of consistency or tests of validity; rather, it is about understanding and behaviour in particular situations. This raises important questions about objectivity, dependability, and bias, but these are problems that all researchers must deal with in the social sciences, particularly with regard to the bias towards verification.

The case study is no more crippled by a lack of objectivity than other methods, even those of the quantitative, hypothetico-deductive variety which must of course depend on interpretation for its choice of variables and the development of questionnaires. Contrary to verification, the case study is ideally suited to falsification because of its in-depth approach involving a "careful delineation of the phenomena for which evidence is being collected" (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007, p. 86) and as a consequence, the interplay between theory and data is less constrained than in other methods, allowing for revision and the "matching of conceptual intent and empirical evidence" (p. 86).

Chapter 4 The Emergence of Positive Psychology

The following presentation of findings and analysis tells the story of positive psychology's emergence and development. Much of this thesis is concerned with storytelling narratives, and so it is fitting that I begin with Seligman's discussion of the epiphanic moment that launched positive psychology. Seligman recalls a conversation he had with his five-year-old daughter Nikki a few months after being elected president of the American Psychological Association (APA). Following a quarrel with her father, Nikki allegedly said:

> From the time I was three to the time I was five, I was a whiner. I whined every day. When I turned five, I decided not to whine anymore. That was the hardest thing I've ever done. And if I can stop whining, you can stop being such a grouch (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 6).

As a result of this exchange, Seligman claims to have come to the realization that raising children involves "vastly more than fixing what is wrong with them; it is about identifying and nurturing their strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these strengths" (p. 6).

Seligman's simple origin story is a reminder that movement participants are "identity-bearing agents" (Frickel & Gross, 2005, p. 222) and not all of their identities are reducible to their positions within a movement. The processes of emergence may play out differently in fields organized around different "logics of material and cultural production" (p. 209) and movements are "influenced by direct or indirect pressures emanating from the broader cultural and political environment" (p. 209). Seligman's intellectual identity is a necessary starting point for developing a full understanding of positive psychology's emergence.

4.1 Inception

4.1.1 Learned Helplessness

Seligman had a clear public aim, even prior to positive psychology, to build those factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish. Early on, he made a career out of studying depression through his initial work with learned helplessness, which continued from his doctoral studies research in experimental psychology.

Learned helplessness occurs when an animal comes to believe that their actions will have no power to change the conditions in a given situation, or more generally. Dogs sat passively while suffering electric shocks because they learned from their experience that their actions would have no power to change their conditions. Peterson (2000) argues that the most important "recent chapter in helplessness research was the reframing of explanatory style by Seligman" (p. 48). Explanatory style refers to the ways that people attribute causes to a particular event, either positive or negative. Testing of the model in the late '70s resulted in the conclusion that for humans, pessimists were more likely to give in to helplessness, a pessimist being a person who had a habit of dwelling on the catastrophic. Seligman began to consider alternatives to repairing mental illness and the possibilities of prevention, which he metaphorically describes as psychological immunization.

Seligman envisioned the creation of Optimism Institutes, the research from which would be conducted and then applied to various social settings, his main requirement being that these centers be staffed with individuals of an optimistic persuasion. Buoyed by the notion that one could be psychologically immunized against mental illnesses such

as depression, at the 106th Annual Convention of the APA, Seligman set out four broad initiatives which he saw as being representative of what he wanted to change about the field of psychology: (1) ethnopolitical warfare[5], (2) prevention, (3) effectiveness of therapy, and (4) wiring the association. Of these initiatives, Seligman's focus on the second, prevention, led to the emergence of positive psychology.

4.1.2 The Origin Myth

Positive psychology's fast growth and startling success can be attributed to Seligman's access to existing networks. He relied on his bonds with other psychologists, some of whom were previous collaborators, to organize a six day gathering titled Akumal 1, named after a tourist resort in south Cancún, Mexico. The purpose of Akumal 1 and future meetings was to initiate young researchers from the social sciences into positive psychology.

Preparations for the Akumal gathering apparently began a year earlier as a result of Seligman's request for nominees from leading social-science researchers around the world. Early collaborations were foundational for building the positive psychology network, the goals of which were to establish collaboration between researchers for the purposes of holding conferences and meetings. Rather than limiting the scope of his new network to positive psychology, Seligman hoped to forge a positive social science with interdisciplinary collaborations based on his familiarity with both successful and failed scientific movements, and he took on the responsibility of giving speeches and raising

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[5] Escalation of ethnic conflict leading to genocide and warfare.

funds, referring to the experience as a "walk in the park" compared to his previous efforts to secure funding (Seligman, 1998).

Seligman reveals that when he was president-elect of the APA in 1997 he received a mysterious e-mail requesting a meeting, the only identifier being the author's initials "PT." He was advised by Judy Rodin, then president of the University of Pennsylvania, to go see the e-mailer. After developing a relationship with two-lawyers representing an anonymous organization, Seligman was provided with a cheque for $1.5 million dollars to pursue his positive psychology research. The mysterious foundation funding his work later took the name Atlantic Philanthropies, tasked by the billionaire Charles Feeney to do good work.

Seligman secured $30 million U.S. dollars by 2003 from non-profit organizations, and positive psychology eventually became self-supporting, but he still credits Atlantic Philanthropies for positive psychology's early momentum. In a letter to the new CEO of the organization, he wrote "You came along at just the right time and made just the right investment in the offbeat idea of a psychology about what makes life worth living" (2011, p. 8).

4.1.3 The Positive Psychology Network Concept Paper

Putting aside the support of Atlantic Philanthropies, positive psychology's early success is due less to the novelty of its epistemological concerns than by design: in 1998 Seligman published the Positive psychology Network Concept Paper (hitherto referred to as the concept paper) which clearly outlines his plan for positive psychology.. The concept paper discusses a network consisting of three nodes chaired by prominent

psychologists: Ed Diener, University of Illinois; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, University of Chicago; and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, then Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Positive psychology recruitment was based on the criteria of an "ideal young person: ages 25-40, assistant to young associate professor at a good university, well-published and with grant money in a field related to positive psychology; articulate, creative, ambitious, with academic leadership qualities (future department chairs)" (Seligman, 1998). Of the researchers courted, all who were chosen attended the first Akumal meetings where they discussed the future of positive psychology. The three nodes of the network, later to become Positive psychology Centers (not unlike Seligman's earlier Optimism Institutes), were located at the University of Illinois, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to the responsibilities already mentioned these nodes hosted graduate students from other universities, usually in the form of post-docs or short-term visits. These young scholars, in addition to more senior researchers, were invited to present at colloquia at each university, fostering a fairly constant stream of meetings and events targeted at promoting positive psychology.

4.1.4 The Positive Psychology's Network

The concept paper and initial building blocks of the positive psychology movement were based on narratives or story lines that were repeated in publications, presentations, and as part of positive psychology's recruitment strategies. The most popular and consistent narrative goes something like this: During the beginning of the

twentieth century, psychology had three missions: "treating mental illness, making life more fulfilling for all people and identifying and nurturing high talent" (Raymond et al., 1999, s164). With the onset of World II and continuing through the cold war, the last two missions were put on the backburner as psychology became more concerned with damage. Positive psychology's mission was to redress this imbalance by fostering high talent and making life more fulfilling for all people (s168).

Seligman's concept paper divides positive psychology into three levels: subjective, individual, and group. These levels correspond to the three nodes of the positive psychology network, each with a set of defining concerns:

- Positive subjective experience or positive emotion such as well-being, optimism, and flow.[6]
- Positive individual or positive traits (character strengths).
- Positive community or positive institutions.

While each node is concerned with some aspect of human flourishing, Seligman makes it clear that he intends positive psychology to be a *descriptive* endeavour rather than a *prescriptive* endeavour, in that it cannot tell society what to value. I will only address the first two nodes as their concerns have generated the most attention.

The first node, positive subjective experience, chaired by Ed Diener, is described in the concept paper as having the most extensive scientific tradition already in place. It is broadly concerned with happiness, which has traditionally been the purview of philosophy and religion (Taylor, 2002). Seligman (2002a) defines happiness as having a

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[6] Single-minded immersion in an activity.

high positive affect with a low level of negative affect (p. 34). Snyder et al. (2011) define happiness as a "positive emotional state that is subjectively defined by each person" (p. 118). Diener uses subjective well-being as a synonym for happiness, and considers it a combination of positive affect with general life satisfaction.

4.2 Major Concepts

4.2.1 Happiness and Well-Being

Well-being, for Seligman, comes from "engaging our strengths and virtues" and this well-being is "anchored in authenticity" (2002, p. 14). Peterson (2006) elaborates, arguing that one cannot "study happiness per se but only particular manifestations of it, defined in specific ways and measured accordingly" (p. 80) though he does identify hedonism, eudaimonia[7], and engagement (flow), as routes to happiness.

4.2.2 Pleasure and Gratification

Hedonism concerns short term and temporary pleasures, while eudaimonia, derived from Aristotle, refers to something longer lasting. Seligman (2002) mourns the loss of the distinction between pleasure and gratification, seeing the latter as much more a source of happiness than the former: "Eudaimonia, what I call gratification is part and parcel of right action. It cannot be derived from bodily pleasure, nor is it a state that can be chemically induced or attained by any shortcuts. It can only be had by activity consonant with noble purpose" (p. 112)

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[7] Influenced by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and loosely defined as happiness or human flourishing as the good for man.

The second node, positive individual, chaired by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is concerned with strengths of character and generating a "viable empirical agenda around the notion of the Positive Individual and the Good Life" (1998). Gratifications are about enacting personal strengths and virtues and Seligman credits Csikszentmihalyi with its scientific illumination through the concept of flow. Flow is a state of engagement associated with psychological growth because it is characterized by a loss of self-absorption. An individual that lacks self-absorption is less depressed than one who is mired in self-pity and reflection, and coupled with his or her signatures strengths, can obtain longer-lasting gratification.

4.2.3 Strengths and Virtues

Central to positive psychology is the classification and measurement of strengths and virtues. Neal Mayerson, head of Cincinnati's Manuel D. And Rhoda Mayerson Foundation, worked with Seligman to sponsor the "creation of a classification of the *sanities* as the backbone of Positive psychology" (2002, p. 131, emphasis added). He persuaded Christopher Peterson to relocate to the University of Pennsylvania to create a scientific knowledge base of human strengths. The resulting Values in Action Classification of Strengths are intended to be psychology's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) or Un-DSM.

Peterson (2006) believes that people possess strengths of character that they own, celebrate, and frequently exercise. He presents a list of possible criteria for signature strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004):

- a sense of ownership and authenticity 'this is the real me') vis-a-vis the strength

- a feeling of excitement while displaying it, particularly at first
- a rapid learning curve as themes are attached to the strength and practiced
- continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength
- a sense of yearning to act in accordance with the strength
- a feeling of inevitability in using the strength, as if one cannot be stopped or dissuaded from its display
- the discovery of the strength as owned in an epiphany
- invigoration rather than exhaustion when using the strength
- the creation and pursuit of fundamental projects that revolve around the strength
- intrinsic motivation to use the strength (p. 18)

The exercise of signature strengths is linked to specific values as defined in the Values in Action classification. In other words, strengths are moral traits that can be used to attain virtues, but while a strength may produce good consequences, each strength is "morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes" (p. 19).

Virtues are universal characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers, and they include wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Each virtue can be achieved through strengths, but a given individual need not possess all the strengths of a particular virtue group to be considered of good character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Peterson and Seligman's classifications include 24 strengths, but they are not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive. These 24 strengths, by virtue group, are listed below:

- Wisdom and knowledge: Creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective.
- Courage: Bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality.
- Humanity: Love, kindness, and social intelligence.
- Justice: Citizenship, fairness, and leadership.
- Temperance: Forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, and self-regulation.
- Transcendence: Appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, and spirituality.

Seligman argues that the virtues are abstract, but strengths can be measured and acquired. Certain strengths are supported by cultural institutions, rituals, and role models and they are ubiquitous rather than universal. Some of the strengths can have prodigies and idiots, but Seligman (2002) believes that each person possesses signature strengths or "strengths of character that a person self-consciously owns, celebrates, and (if he or she can arrange life successfully) exercises every day in work, love, play, and parenting" (p. 160).

4.3 The Theories

Woolfolk and Wasserman (2005) separate the positive psychology movement into two generations. The first generation, they argue, was concerned with hedonism, while the second generation is concerned with the good life:

> In morphing from students of hedonism into inquirers into the broader and deeper currents of human well-being, Positive psychologists, in all likelihood, were reacting to or anticipating the challenge that the movement sometimes comes off as a shallow 'happiology' (p. 82).

A generational distinction is tempting, but in Seligman's concept paper, he talks about the good life, life satisfaction, the failure of hedonism to maximize positive experience for most people:

> Subjective experiences are an important component of a positive life, but not the only component. Suppose we had a hypothetical experience machine that could provide a lifetime of pleasurable virtual experiences. Would we choose to stay plugged in such a machine? Presumably we would also want to have the personal traits that make such experiences possible, to have real connections to other people and to the world, to actually engage in certain activities, and not merely to have the experience of doing these things (1998)

Later, in the special issue of American Psychologist devoted to positive psychology, Seligman was clear about distancing himself from hedonistic interpretations of happiness in his discussion of enjoyment and pleasure: "Enjoyment, rather than pleasure, is what leads to personal growth and long-term happiness" (Seligman, 2000, p. 12).

4.3.1 Authentic Happiness Theory

There may be different generations in positive psychology's development, but it's far more likely that these generations emerged as a consequence of research emphasis and rational dialectic rather than doctrine, which has remained strikingly diffuse.

The one area where distinctions might be relevant is theory. Seligman's original theory, which is described in *Authentic Happiness,* is one dimensional, in that it is disproportionately focused on feeling good. Happiness is described as the centerpiece of positive psychology, and is defined by the measurement of life satisfaction. Authentic

happiness theory is not a hedonic theory[8], instead borrowing from Aristotle's view that human action is targeted at the achievement of happiness.

Happiness and well-being (used interchangeably) have three elements: positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. Like strengths, each element can be chosen for its own sake. Positive emotion leads to what Seligman refers to as the pleasant life (Seligman, 2000). Engagement involves the concept of flow, which in turn requires the employment of your highest strengths. Meaning of course leads to the meaningful life or the purpose driven life to borrow the title of Rick Warren's devotional book.

Seligman's combination of positive emotion, engagement, and meaning fulfills positive psychology's purpose of increasing life satisfaction. He is working against the a priori belief that happiness cannot be increased and that happiness is somehow inauthentic, a view of human nature he refers to as the "rotten-to-the-core dogma" (2002, p. x), which in the Christian tradition manifests itself as the doctrine of original sin: "Motivations like exercising fairness or pursuing duty are ruled out as fundamental; there *must* be some covert, negative motivation that underpins goodness if the analysis is to be academically respectable" (2002, p. xi).

Seligman is careful to distinguish between momentary happiness and enduring happiness. He argues that focusing on momentary positive feelings will not suffice in raising your level of happiness because of what is referred to as the hedonic treadmill. Once you get the next material possession or accomplishment, you adapt and the bar is

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[8] Concerned with feelings of pleasure and displeasure and usually coinciding with particular dispositions or desires.

raised again. Happiness may refer to feelings, but it may also refer to activities in which nothing is felt.

Positive emotions are divided into feelings directed toward the past, such as pride and serenity; positive emotions directed toward the future, such as optimism and hope; and positive emotions about the present, which I have already mentioned in terms of pleasures and gratifications.

Bodily pleasures are attached to momentary sensations, like sexual feelings. Higher pleasures, while also momentary, are more nuanced and achieved than sensory pleasures, like bliss and relaxation. Given the difficulty of operationalizing a concept such as bliss, or even the diversity of sexual pleasures, the pleasures are subjective feelings, the pursuit of which leads to the pleasant life. Even though Seligman acknowledges the subjectivity of pleasures, he argues that his measures of positive emotion are "repeatable, stable across time, and consistent across situations—the tools of a respectable science" (2002, p. 262).

Distinct from pleasures are the gratifications, which are not feelings but activities that "absorb and engage us fully; they block self-consciousness; they block felt emotions, except in retrospect ('Wow, that was fun!'); and they create flow" (p. 262). Gratifications, dependent as they are on personal strengths and virtues, are not completely subjective and are the route to the good life. In addition to the pleasant life and the good life, Seligman discusses the meaningful life, which is based on using one's signature strengths and virtues in the service of something larger. In combination, these routes lead to the *full life*.

4.3.2 Well-Being Theory

Seligman's Authentic Happiness theory presupposes that the goal of positive psychology is to increase life satisfaction, but he has since made the shift to thinking that the topic of positive psychology is well-being and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. He identifies three deficiencies in his authentic happiness theory: Happiness is "inextricably bound up with being in a cheerful mood" (2011, p. 13), perhaps leading to accusations that positive psychology is nothing more than happiology. The second inadequacy has to do with life satisfaction, which is prejudiced by how people feel when they are asked about their level of satisfaction.

Life satisfaction is subject to the influence of moods, disadvantaging people with a low positive affect. One need not be cheery to be satisfied with life. Introverts, Seligman argues "are much less cheery than extroverts, but if public policy is based on maximizing happiness in the mood sense, extroverts get a much greater vote than introverts" (p. 14). The third inadequacy has to do with the fact that positive emotion, engagement, and meaning do not exhaust the possible elements that people choose, e.g., the choice of achievement.

Seligman's new well-being theory moves away from monism[9] and contains five elements, each chosen for their own sake, and each containing the following three properties:

1. It contributes to well-being

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[9] A unified idea of happiness as opposed to having a number of elements.

2. Many people pursue it for its own sake, not merely to get any of the other elements
3. It is defined and measured independently of the other elements (exclusivity)

The five elements are positive emotion, engagements, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. In contrast to the monism of previous attempts to understand happiness, Seligman argues that well-being theory embraces plurality, meaning that there is no single measure, but it does have elements which are measurable. Positive emotion remains from authentic happiness theory, but as Seligman argues "Happiness and life satisfaction, as subjective measures, are now demoted from being the goal of the entire theory to merely being one of the factors included under the element of positive emotion" (2011, p. 16). Engagements remain important, but it is assessed subjectively and retrospectively.

Meaning is defined and measured independently of the other elements. While it has a subjective component, it is not solely a subjective state as it depends on how someone is judged in retrospect. Accomplishment and achievement are pursued for their own sake, and for Seligman, their inclusion in well-being theory emphasizes that the task of positive psychology is to "*describe*, rather than *prescribe*, what people actually do to get well-being" (p. 20).

4.3.3 Hope and Optimism

Both authentic happiness theory and well-being theory advocate for hope and optimism, which also serve as extremely popular concepts in the national ideology of American society (de Tocqueville, 1988; Lasch, 1979). Seligman's inclusion of hope and

optimism in his theories is a consequence of his early research on the findings of learned optimism, which led him to conclude that these two positive emotions have a major impact on mental and physical health. Seligman associates hope and optimism with positive emotions about the future, offering some resistance against depression when bad things happen.

Peterson (2000) defines optimism as "a mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future—one which the evaluator regards as socially desirable, to his advantage, or for his pleasure" (p. 44). Optimists tend to believe that the causes of bad events are temporary but that the causes of good events have permanent causes. This generalized expectation is "both motivated and motivating" (Peterson, p. 45), making it difficult to separate from hope because optimism leads to hope and the ability to recover from misfortune quickly, particularly where situations or outcomes are uncertain: "When there is room for doubt, people should fill the gap with hope" (p. 51).

Chapter 5 Positive Psychology's Scientific Legitimacy

5.1 Positive psychology movements

It's trivially true that there's nothing new about positive psychology, in the sense that it reflects concerns familiar to the ancient Athenians and has explicitly drawn inspiration from Aristotle (Fowers, 2008). The tedium of countering the "newness" or originality of a movement is not lost on me, but it is difficult to talk about positive psychology without situating it historically, especially with regard to humanistic psychology, which has a more direct connection to contemporary positive psychology than anything Hellenistic.

5.1.1 The New Thought Movement

The pioneering American psychologist and philosopher William James was concerned with the study of human flourishing and well-being, though he would have used different concepts. He defended the mind-cure or New Thought movement at the turn of the twentieth century, speaking positively about the religion of healthy-mindedness, which promoted "the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, and trust, and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry, and all nervously precautionary states of mind" (James, 2008, p. 76). Coupled with his defense, which valorized happiness as human life's chief concern, James was also a critic, writing "I am not fond and cannot understand a word of their jargon except their precept of assuming yourself well and claiming health rather than sickness which I am sure is magnificent (as cited in Caplan, 2001, p. 86).

James's internal conflict over New Thought has been played out socially on a number of occasions, one of the major peaks being a new approach to psychology developed by Abraham Maslow in the mid-twentieth century. Initially excited by John B. Watson's behaviorist program, Maslow turned towards developing a theory of human nature. His shift away from behaviorism may have come as a result of his infatuation with Alfred North Whitehead and Henri Bergson, but Maslow credits the birth of his first baby: "When my first baby was born, that was the thunderclap that settled things. I looked at this tiny, mysterious thing and felt so stupid. I felt small, weak, and feeble. I'd say that anyone who's had a baby couldn't be a behaviorist" (as cited in King & Wertheimer, 2005, p. 299).

5.1.2 Humanistic Psychology

Stifled by behaviorism, Maslow attended lectures conducted by Max Wertheimer, who emphasized a broader conception of psychology that allowed for the study of healthy individuals. Maslow also studied with Kurt Goldstein, a psychologist and neuroscientist, adopting his concept of self-actualization. Maslow's interest in holism prioritizes the subjective experience of conscious creatures. The study of these experiences, phenomenology, resisted the kind of reductionist psychological methods concerned primarily with empirical facts. Phenomenology was not anti-scientific, but it called for a different kind of empiricism that took into account a more comprehensive approach to individuals, subjective experience being a core component of its attempts to capture the complexity of experience

Maslow's new approach, which he labeled humanistic psychology, drew from the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger, in that he was critical of reductionism and sought out a more holistic psychology. In 1943, he published "A Theory of Human Motivation," which would later serve as the foundation for his book, *Motivation and Personality*, published in 1954. Maslow attempts to formulate a positive theory of motivation which he describes as being in the "functionalist tradition of James and Dewey, and ... fused with the holism of Wertheimer, Goldstein, and Gestalt psychology, and with the dynamicism of Freud and Adler" (as cited in King & Wertheimer, 2005, p. 303)

Maslow borrowed Kurt Goldstein's simple theory of motivation, self-actualization, for his hierarchy of needs, a pyramid in which the highest level of need is described as self-actualization, or the desire for self-fulfillment. Humans are innately motivated to reach their fullest potential, moving up the pyramid, ascending through needs. As soon as one need is achieved, the next needs come into focus. Self-actualization is perhaps the fulfillment of one's ultimate potential.

Humanistic psychology operated in opposition to the orthodox conception of science at the time, which Maslow saw as mechanistic and ahuman. He wanted a discipline that could rediscover human needs and aspirations (rehumanizations), emphasizing a positive view of human nature with an individualistic perspective regarding personal happiness and growth as opposed to more communitarian goals.

5.1.3 From Humanistic Psychology to Positive Psychology

Imagine the surprise of humanistic psychologists when they discovered that they hadn't developed a research tradition and that positive psychology was meant to correct their past mistakes because of its scientific superiority. Some psychologists might agree that humanistic psychology wasn't successful as a scientific movement, but the influence of the movement still pervades contemporary research, whether it has been co-opted by positive psychology or not.

Even if we accept that humanistic psychology failed to penetrate the core of scientific psychology, and that this necessitated another positive psychology movement, we should expect some significant differences between positive psychology and humanistic psychology on the grounds that positive psychologists have gone to great lengths to separate themselves from other well-being focused research traditions.

Humanistic psychology was concerned with human growth and development, adopting a more positive outlook on humanity than the pathology obsessed psychology of positivist behaviorism. Not content to be viewed as the softer cousin to rigorous science, humanistic psychology also set itself against ideological psychoanalysis[10]. Maslow was certainly indebted to Freud, but he reacted against psychoanalysis's ambiguity and negative determinism.

As a scientific movement, the path that humanistic psychology followed in its early development shouldn't be surprising when compared with contemporary positive psychology's development. Like positive psychology, humanistic psychology attached

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[10] Ideological psychoanalysis became a political tool for exposing unconscious and distorted self-interests.

itself to a longstanding scientific and philosophical tradition, including the works of William James. Humanistic psychology marketed itself not as a replacement of other psychologies, but as a change in focus or orientation. Both movements distinguished themselves from their contemporaries by drawing attention to their different research methodologies. Admittedly, humanistic psychology rebelled against the quantitative methods now embraced by positive psychologists, but the responses of skeptics are similar.

Humanistic psychology and positive psychology have been accused of making naive assumptions about human nature and for failing to address conceptual ambiguities. Critics point to the difficulty in operationalizing their terms and concepts, leading to concerns about testability. Movement reactions to these criticisms are also similar. Carl Rogers, like Seligman, considered real science to be objective, exact, and rigorous, and he valorized the experimental method when faced with objections from his contemporaries (Kristjánsson, 2010; Martin, 2007; Elkins, 2009).

The similarities I've just mentioned might be seen as too general and possibly applicable to any scientific movement's development; however, there are also doctrinal similarities between humanistic psychology and positive psychology. The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths Survey identifies traits of character consistent with Maslow's being values (b-values) and Rogers' self-actualized individual has many of the qualities as Peterson and Seligman's (2004) character strengths and virtues. Seligman's concept of psychological immunization is in part a rewording of Maslow's self-actualization, in that the self-actualized existence is a "matter of having those qualities

that enable one to fully take on both the anxieties and thrills of life" (Robbins, 2008, p. 102).

As we will see in what I have labeled the Lazarus Debate, not everyone agrees that positive psychology is an exemplar of objective and rigorous research; however, we need not wade into that debate just yet in order to raise a question about the methodological separation of positive psychology from humanistic psychology.

At least one important figure in humanistic psychology's development used the quantitative methods of natural science. Is Rogers an anomaly? Let's say that he is or that he at the very least occupies a distant wing in the humanistic psychology household. Positive psychology still has to address the fact that it is engaging in a neo-Aristotelian form of normative ethics. I am not going to suggest that a eudaimonic concept of ethics can't be reconciled with science, but how can positive psychology consider itself a value-neutral descriptive science while being simultaneously engaged in an activity of prescriptive valuation?

Robbins, a humanistic psychologist, writes that if eudaimonic happiness is used to define happiness, any suggested "causal link between happiness and virtue would be tautological, because in that case virtue could not be said to be an independent variable distinct from happiness" (2008, p. 104). If positive psychology's methodological separation from humanistic psychology is to have any meaning at all, its criticisms of past positive psychologies must go beyond concealing its normative ethical stances. In the final section of this chapter we will see how positive psychology has dealt with the ethical implications of its research when faced with questions about its scientific legitimacy.

5.2 The Lazarus Debate

Scientists go to great lengths to avoid fooling themselves, but on occasion they attribute significance to unremarkable or even spurious results. Murphy and Sideman run with this idea, discussing the extent to which fads influence psychology. They mention positive psychology as one of the fastest growing movements in psychology, though they don't conclude that positive psychology is fad, instead pointing to the ongoing debate about its scientific legitimacy.

5.2.1 What is a fad?

Murphy and Sideman developed an aggregate list of signs indicating that an emerging idea is likely to be a fad:

1. Sudden emergence and fast growth
2. True believers
3. Reliance on public press
4. Intense and bitter debates over the legitimacy of the idea
5. Substantial promises based on weak evidence
6. The failure to develop over time
7. Imperviousness to disconfirmatory evidence (p. 294).

If a movement doesn't possess any of these characteristics it's unlikely to be a fad, but beyond that Murphy and Sideman make no claims about how many of the characteristics are necessary or in what combinations to diagnose a fad with confidence. These are more like warning signs that should lead one to adopt a skeptical position, rather than cut-and-

dry criteria, which is not unlike the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Murphy and Sideman warn about the consequences of "fad bashing" (p. 292), which they see as being a negative and unproductive response to fads within psychology because of its tendency to avoid seriously addressing theories, interventions, or ideas. With Murphy and Sideman's warning in mind, I will now provide an analysis of the key debates about positive psychology's scientific legitimacy. The first debate that I will examine took place during the early stages of positive psychology development.

5.2.2 Does the Positive Psychology Movement Have Legs?

The late Richard Lazarus, professor emeritus at University of California, Berkeley, is best known for his work on emotion, placing him in the same camp as many humanistic psychologists. It is from this standpoint that he wonders if the positive psychology movement has legs. He argues that the movement is in "danger of being just another one of the many fads that come and go" in psychology, and "which usually disappear in time, sometimes to return again in another form because the issues addressed are important but unresolved" (2003, p. 93)

The substance of Lazarus's target article concerns positive psychology's research methods and apparent conceptual problems. He argues that most if not all of positive psychology's studies can be characterized as cross-sectional research, which does not convincingly demonstrate a causal relationship between emotions and health. Any kind of research that's dependent on cross-sectional research designs, whether it's housed in positive psychology or not, is open to question. Lazarus is particularly concerned about

how easily the public is affected by media reports which discuss the effects of emotion on health or well-being: "In newspapers, television news, and magazines, the public is constantly misled about the health implications of a correlation obtained from this kind of research because a correlation does not, per se, provide evidence of causality" (2009, p. 98).

Lazarus's concern about the media cannot be separated from the movement itself because the marketing of positive psychology is in part responsible for its success in multiple arenas, including public spaces where the research that gets attention is not subject to scrutiny. Lazarus also takes positive psychology to task for its marketing to fellow psychologists, which suggests that researchers should abandon the negative and focus instead on "positive human qualities" (2009, p. 105). Even if this isn't the intention of movement participants, he contends that collapsing "several discrete emotions into two broad categories and labeling them as positive and negative is unwise and regressive" (p. 99)

5.2.3 Psychologists Respond

Lazarus's criticisms of positive psychology produced a flurry of responses from proponents of positive psychology and other members of the psychology community. Campos (2003) argues that positive psychology's approach to emotion is flawed, sharing Lazarus's concern with the dichotomization of emotions into positive and negative. Harvey and Pauwels (2003) find it ironic and troubling that positive psychology neglects the fact that much of what is positive or admirable about people comes from human loss and tragedy. They also echo Lazarus's observation that positive psychology's

sloganeering falsely presents the movement and its research as a new or original approach to psychology. Young-Eisendrath (2003) agrees, even going so far as to praise negativity, and to argue that complaints about negative psychology are a red herring. In addition to sharing Lazarus's perspective regarding the positive psychology movement, she contends that it's actually through the study of disease and disorder that a full understanding of health and order is developed: "When we become aware and accountable for our negative evaluations, we can begin to free ourselves from difficult emotional states, as well as draw on the strengths of critical mindedness" (p. 172)

Tennen and Affleck (2003), despite being associated with positive psychology, agree with Lazarus's criticisms to a certain extent, noting the similarities between the current positive psychology movement and past positive psychologies. They distinguish between the research and the movement, observing that the main distinguishing feature between the new positive psychology and past positive psychologies is its methods, which it claims are firmly grounded in science. There are good reasons for thinking that positive psychology, rather than differentiating itself along methodological grounds, has inherited the same problems as past positive psychologies such as its "enthusiastic reliance on nomothetic study designs [11]and its frenetic generation of redundant findings" (p. 167). Tennen and Affleck (2003) also express concern about movement proponents' tendency to distance positive psychology from its predecessors and dismiss criticism as "suspicious or closed-minded" (p. 168).

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[11] The study of the abstract, usually referring to universal characteristics. Nomothetic studies are conducted on groups, the purpose of which is to accumulate averaged characteristics.

Matthews and Zeidner (2003) see much of the work being done within positive psychology as important for the discipline of psychology as a whole, but they're wary of its popular culture connections, particularly those elements associated with what they see as a zeitgeist in American culture that emphasizes personal growth. They draw parallels between positive psychology and emotional intelligence (EI), noting that the latter's founder Daniel Goleman touched on many of the same topics as Seligman, and many of the criticisms of EI anticipate criticisms of positive psychology, including "conceptual incoherence, neglect of measurement issues, and a tendency to make grandiose claims without supporting evidence" (p. 138).

Supporters of positive psychology take a variety of approaches to Lazarus's target article, but one consistent theme is positive psychology's promise and perspective. King thinks that Lazarus's characterization of positive psychology is myopic, emphasizing the "promise" of the positive psychology movement, which serves as an organizational umbrella for diverse research programs (2003). Even if positive psychology is a fad it won't necessarily be a failure because it could make an important contribution to psychology through its focus on the positive character of human life.

Like King, Ryff (2003) also credits positive psychology for integrating a number of research programs, but she warns that the studies sitting under the umbrella of positive psychology are not new. This is a familiar criticism of positive psychology's marketing machine, but Ryff expands her critique by calling attention to its ahistorical character which ignores past contributions to psychology if it's aware of them at all:

> This myopia about past and present is damaging not for the superficial reason of taking credit for advances already contributed by others but for more serious

> problems of increasing the likelihood of reinventing wheels, both conceptual and empirical, such that science fails to be incremental and cumulative (p. 155)

Ryff's statement challenges the usual narrative presented by positive psychology's proponents about psychology-as-usual, noting that psychology has long been concerned with the positive aspects of life and that even the positive-negative contrast was always present, even if it was only implied. In response to the question Lazarus asks in the title of his polemic, Ryff argues that positive psychology does indeed have legs, but rather than being a new movement, well-being focused research within psychology has a long and robust history.

5.2.4 Countering the Curmudgeon

Some of the responses just described include positive commentary mixed in with criticism, but not all of the responses to Lazarus's target article take this approach. The more strident rebuttals come from several important movement leaders.

Csikszentmihalyi (2003) describes Lazarus's article as "ill-tempered and self-serving" (p. 113), and expresses his innocence regarding the particulars of the movement. He takes the opportunity to introduce a historical narrative about the movement's beginnings, recalling a serendipitous meeting of the minds with Seligman. Seligman has a different perspective, describing in *Authentic Happiness* his meeting with Csikszentmihalyi as a mutually beneficial strategic choice (2002, p. 265). Csikszentmihalyi is also careful to ignore Seligman's aggressive fundraising initiatives or Atlantic Philanthropies' boost to the movement, describing positive psychology's emergence the rather unexpected result of an untapped demand for its ideas (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 114). He goes on to write that Lazarus embraces what

"sounds suspiciously like a conspiracy account, given the enormous response to positive psychology" (p. 114).

Csikszentmihalyi expresses his surprise about positive psychology's development:

> I would have preferred developing theory and research for a few more years before entering the public arena to defend positive psychology against the charges of Johnny-come-lateism that entrenched interests were sure to bring up against it. I know full well that new ideas can be killed just as soon by uncritical acceptance as by opposition (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 114).

Returning to the implication that Lazarus is jealous of positive psychology or at the very least threatened by the movement because of its success, Csikszentmihalyi once again removes himself from responsibility for the movement's success. He argues that the possibility of positive psychology turning into an ideological movement or a fad is beyond the reach of movement leaders or participants. He further argues that Lazarus's criticisms are, rather than a critique of positive psychology, a commentary on the limitations of all psychological research, a point which Lazarus admitted in his target article.

In response to Lazarus's more substantive criticisms of positive psychology's methods, Csikszentmihalyi argues that "no meaningful longitudinal research can be expected in such a short time" (2003, p. 114) and that positive psychology is not restricted to the study of emotions. He also accepts that positive psychology isn't new, but that it is nonetheless necessary because even though past attempts to build a positive psychology are still around, humanistic psychology has been too adamant in "rejecting the scientific paradigm, which, for better or worse, defines the epistemology of our age" (p. 115).

Diener's response to the "curmudgeonly" Lazarus is similar to Csikszentmihalyi's, though he takes an interesting approach in labelling Lazarus a positive psychologist, setting the stage for his attempt to find some common ground. He goes on to argue why positive psychology is necessary: "there are many, many more studies conducted on unpleasant and undesirable emotional states such as depression and anxiety disorders than on joy, fulfillment, and contentment" (p. 117). Diener responds to Lazarus's theoretical and methodological criticisms by arguing that they're "endemic to most of psychology" (p. 119) though he values Lazarus's skepticism and goes to some length in defending positive psychology's "open intellectual atmosphere" (p. 118). He has raised questions about Peterson and Seligman's (2002) Values In Action taxonomy of virtues and his commission in the positive psychology movement hasn't been revoked as a consequence:

> I am concerned that Lazarus (this issue), and perhaps others, are likely to see positive psychology as a monolith in which there is a specific orthodoxy and clergy. This would make fears about positive psychology justifiable. However, my view is that positive psychology is simply a loosely confederated group of psychologists from many different subdisciplines who share the beliefs that positive topics should be studied more and that psychology can help people achieve a better quality of life. Therefore, the concern that positive psychology is a fad seems misplaced because it is actually not an orthodox set of propositions that one must follow but instead is a platform for including strengths in our science (p. 119).

Murphy and Sideman recognize Diener's final thoughts regarding the movement as unusual for a fad, in that he hopes positive psychology will eventually be absorbed into psychology: "Thus, it will fade as a campaign precisely because it has been so successful" (p. 120).

Lyubomirsky and Abbe resist the notion that positive psychology is divisive, arguing that it does not "compete with or negate so-called negative psychology" (2003, p. 132) and that the only message of the movement is the refocusing of research energies on the "positive side of life alongside the negative side of life" (p. 132). They take a personalized view of the positive psychology movement, not claiming to speak for anyone else's research except their own, and that the positive psychology movement provides a research environment that allowed their own work to thrive.

Lyubomirsky and Abbe dismiss the idea that positive psychology is happiology, but then disagree with Lazarus's claim that pessimism is no less adaptive that optimism, arguing that on the one hand that "[o]ptimists appear to show advantages over pessimists in a variety of domains" (2003, p. 134) and on the other that this disagreement "can only be resolved with well-controlled empirical investigations" (p. 135). In this regard, Lyubomirsky and Abbe agree with Lazarus that positive psychology must adopt the highest standards of evidence while assuming that it has already done so, which is of course the issue under debate.

Peterson and Park (2003), like many of positive psychology's proponents repeat that the impetus of positive psychology was no more than the premise that "psychology since World War II has joined forces with psychiatry and focused much of its efforts on human problems and how to remedy them" (p. 143). The cost of this emphasis on pathology is that other aspects of human experience have been neglected, hence the need for positive psychology.

Peterson and Park accept that positive psychology does not have a monopoly on past or present research dealing with human goodness and excellence and that positive

psychology is just an "umbrella term for what have been isolated lines of theory and research and to make the self-conscious argument that the good life deserves its own field of inquiry within psychology" (p. 144). However, they do see the academic skepticism of positive psychology (as opposed to the public embrace) as being informed by assumptions that human nature as flawed, e.g., the rotten-to-the-core dogma or original sin. Having said that, proponents of positive psychology mean no disrespect in juxtaposing their movement with its implied opposite, negative psychology:

> We prefer the term business-as-usual psychology to describe work that focuses on human problems. As we have emphasized, business-as-usual psychology is important and necessary and, in any event, what we have spent most of our own careers pursuing (p. 144).

In this respect, positive psychology should not be viewed as an ideological movement or a "secular religion" (p. 145), but instead as a unique scientific movement with the goals of "description and explanation as opposed to prescription" (p. 145).

Conscious of how positive psychology looks to outsiders, Peterson and Park warn skeptics to not confuse the science produced under the umbrella term positive psychology with the particulars of the movement:

> Perhaps the infrastructure—a steering committee, conferences, training institutes, special issues of journals, edited volumes, handbooks, a teaching task force, awards, seed grants, electronic mailing lists, and Web pages—strikes some as too elaborate and deliberate at this early stage in the field's development. Regardless, positive psychology should not be confused with its infrastructure (2003, p. 145).

Many proponents of positive psychology share some of the same concerns as critics over what positive psychology is and what it ought to be, particularly with regard to its increasing identification with the self-help movement and "dangerous popular

literature that oversells research findings and promotes dubious claims about positive thinking and health" (Aspinwall & Tedeschi, 2010a, p. 27).

Positive psychologists distinguish the self-help movement from the published scientific literature of positive psychology and individual researchers who are driven by Seligman's stringent scientific expectations for the field:

> Positive psychology is the scientific study of positive phenomena from the neurobiology of positive emotions to public-policy efforts to promote well-being. It has applications to health psychology, but does not claim that positive thinking will create wealth or cure disease (p. 27).

The last sentence of Aspinwall and Tedeschi's defence is in reference to positive thinking movements like the New Thought movement. Seligman himself distinguishes positive psychology from positive thinking and these previous movements by arguing that while there are philosophical connections, positive psychology is contrastively "tied to a program of empirical and replicable scientific activity" (2002, p. 288).

5.2.5 Reframing the debate

Like Peterson and Park, Seligman and Pawelski's response to Lazarus's criticisms downplay the juxtaposition between positive and negative psychology:

> Lazarus's juxtaposition is his own, and it is unfortunate; positive psychologists intend no disrespect to the many academics and practitioners who have spent the bulk of their careers investigating negative states (Seligman is one of them and is proud of the accomplishments of this field; contrary to Lazarus's invention, we have written no 'diatribes' against 'negative' psychology) (2003, p. 159).

The juxtaposition under discussion might be a minor point given Lazarus's other criticisms, but it is telling how many words have been devoted to dispelling this misunderstanding. Seligman and Pawelski are engaged in some revisionism because

Gillham and Seligman (1999) do discuss the origins of negative psychology, even providing "Negative psychology" as a heading. The authors wonder why psychology has been so focused on the negative, offering one possible explanation:

> Beginning with World War II and continuing through the cold war, American society became increasingly concerned with defense and damage. This is reflected in our media, children's books and in the topics studied by our social sciences. Local evening news shows exemplify this negative focus. Lead programs typically concern violence, arson, robberies, accidents and other atrocities. Stories of human kindness, courage and virtue are typically relegated to the end of the newscast, buried among dull items labeled `human interest stories' (s164).

Gillham and Seligman claim that differential attention to negative emotions is dangerous for a science, limiting and biasing psychology's theories (p. s165). Psychology's negative focus has also "contributed to a culture of blame and victimology" and this in turn may breed "anger and violence in our young people" (p. 168). Negative psychology has also contributed to a pessimistic view of human nature and balance is needed.

5.2.6 Defending Seligman

The most biting response to Lazarus comes from Rand and Snyder, who accuse him of denigrating certain people within the field of positive psychology before providing an impassioned defense of Seligman:

> Martin Seligman is a magnificent scientist who may be an even more stellar leader in his ability to get scholars to undertake the study of human strengths. In this regard, Seligman already has marshaled copious monetary and human resources to study and advance the positive psychology view. As such, this represents the interaction of an environment that was ready to embrace positive psychology and an exceedingly capable person who could serve as a prime mover in this environment (2003, p. 149)

This interjection is out of place given that the bulk of Lazarus's commentary addresses methodological issues shared not just by positive psychology, but psychology in general.

When Rand and Snyder do get to Lazarus's methodological critique, they request Lazarus's patience because of the movement's newness and then go on to discuss what they hope to do within positive psychology. Regardless of their idealization of positive psychology, they do caution towards the end of their response that "[p]ositive psychology will lose its credibility within psychology and the public sector if it moves too quickly with skimpy research, along with claims that are too bold" (2003, p. 148).

Lazarus's repeated assertion that positive psychology's problems are psychology's problems in general has been taken up by some proponents of positive psychology as a shield from further criticism, especially when it comes to their movement's scientific legitimacy. Their reasoning is that to undermine positive psychology's methods or axioms is to undermine the entire discipline of psychology. Lazarus argues that his criticism "does not imply a double standard-that is, that positive psychology must do better than psychology .... On the contrary, its logic is merely that both positive psychology and psychology in general need to improve" (2003, p. 177).

5.3 Policing Psychology

Lazarus's call for psychology to improve joins a cacophony of critical voices. Even though psychological research is seen as accessible to the public due to its ubiquity, many people regard psychology's scientific legitimacy with skepticism (Lilienfeld, 2011). Public skepticism can be excused on the basis of misunderstanding, but psychologists themselves have been outspoken critics of their own field. Much of this criticism has to do with psychology's difficulty in policing itself, especially in clinical and educational practice (Lilienfeld, 2011, p. 7). The prevalence of self-help books is a particularly

challenging issue as only a small percentage of them provide scientifically legitimate advice. This problem is further exacerbated by the influence of media personalities that make non-scientific claims, such as Dr. Phil McGraw.

While many scientific researchers within psychology may try to distance themselves from self-help and media personalities, the APA nonetheless presented Dr. Phil with a Presidential citation and featured him as an invited speaker. Given this organizational support, the resistance of major psychologists to adopting evidence-based practices, the hesitancy of academic psychological researchers to present good science to the public, and their reluctance to confront pseudoscience, it's not so surprising that psychology is frequently under attack or greeted with suspicion by both the public and members of the scientific community.

Positive psychology's quest for scientific legitimacy is further complicated by its use of culturally embedded concepts, in that its proponents are faced with an uphill battle to develop and acquire symbolic profit[12] in lieu of their movement's attachment to past positive psychologies and its treading of a "narrow line between the requirements of scientific or expert jargon, and popular discourse" (Yen, 2010, p. 70). This is not to say that the popular face of positive psychology undermines its scientific research, but as Coyne et al. (2010) argue, it has been hampered as a movement by its sloganeering, separatist impulses, and close association with "self-help materials, personal coaching, and training programs to the lay public, industry, and the military" (p. 36). In this context,

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[12] A form of symbolic recognition such as wealth and authority.

positive psychology's scientific legitimacy is an open question, and not just within pseudo-private spaces like academic journals.

5.3.1 The Cult of Positive Thinking

Barbara Ehrenreich, a PhD in cellular immunology and political activist, directly challenges positive psychology's tendency to link optimism and happiness to health. Her discussion of positive psychology builds off of a historical portrait of the roots of American optimism, which she attaches to an ideology of positive thinking. She situates systematic positive thinking, i.e., positive thinking without warrant, in the nineteenth century, and she follows its development into the twentieth century as it becomes wrapped up in nationalism and religion.

Calling upon Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Ehrenreich draws a line from Calvinism to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, Mary Baker Eddy, and a general post-Calvinist way of thinking associated with the New Thought movement. While Ms. Eddy's Christian Science and New Thought are similar, the latter emerged as a repudiation of the harshness of Calvinism, while Christian Science still placed a great deal of emphasis on redemption. New Thought writers did not in general "regard the mortal condition as radically distorted. Indeed, they did not speak of sin, sickness, and death as radical evils at all" (Gottschalk, 1973, p. 120).

By the time Ehrenreich gets to positive psychology, she has established that positive thinking was a popular movement, separate from academia, until Seligman became president of the APA. Regardless of Seligman's own motivations for his movement, Ehrenreich sees positive psychology as the shade under which self-help

entrepreneurs can rest because they no longer needed to rely on gods and mysticism for their emphasis on the relationship between positive thoughts and positive results; they could "fall back on that touchstone phrase of rational, secular discourse—'studies show ...' (2009, p. 148).

The "studies shows" phrase is also identified by Lazarus, who, in response to King writes "One of my messages in the target article was that the problem of that movement is not so much what it studies but the way the studies are designed. She keeps insisting that research has shown this or that, to which I react that given the typical methodology, it may well not have been shown at all" (2003, p. 177). Lyubormirsky and Abbe similarly support what they say with a "long list of studies without any information about methods or any reasons for conviction or doubt that a good case had been made" (p. 177).

Ehrenreich acknowledges positive psychologists efforts to distinguish themselves from pop positive thinking, but she expresses concern about positive psychology's relationship with life coaching, motivational speaking, and self-help. Having ties to the lucrative corporate world isn't a sufficient reason for dismissing positive psychology research, but it does pose some problems for framing the movement to other psychologists and the public:

> Scientific research programs require adherence to standards of evidence that inevitably conflict with what best serves social movements and marketing. Moreover, leaders of positive psychology as a research paradigm substantially overlap with its leaders as a commercialized social movement, and so, outsiders are left not knowing which standards to apply to their pronouncements (Coyne & Tennen, 2010, p. 36)

Positive psychology's proponents are also unsure of which standards they should be applying to their own movement. As Seligman repeatedly notes, positive psychology is not interested in prescribing that people be more optimistic or hopeful. Those kinds of statements are value-laden, and not the responsibility of science. Instead, positive psychology merely describes the consequences of having certain dispositions.

5.3.2 Happiness and Health

Seligman describes an exchange with Ehrenreich, in which he sent her an article about baseball player's longevity. The authors of the article establish that the intensity of smiling in photographs predicts how long baseball players will live, determining that those players with a Duschenne smile (authentic smile) lived seven years longer than those not smiling. When Ehrenreich responded with "I guess I'm doomed" (2011, p. 201), Seligman took the opportunity to direct her attention to well-being theory, explaining that her lack of positive emotion might not impede her longevity as she can could have many of the other elements of included in Seligman's new theory. He then accuses Ehrenreich of failing to address the breadth of scientific literature and claims that she cherry-picked her way through research rather than taking into account the full-range of studies, but his main rebuttal is to Michael Shermer, historian of science and the founding editor of *Skeptic Magazine*, who wrote a positive review of Ehrenreich's book:

> "Ehrenreich systematically deconstructs—and then demolishes—what little science there is behind the positive psychology movement and the allegedly salubrious effects of positive thinking. Evidence is thin. Statistical significance levels are narrow. What few robust findings there are often prove to be either nonreplicable or contradicted by later research. And correlations (between, say, happiness and health) are not causations" (Shermer, 2009)

The correlation between happiness and health is one of the major bugbears of the positive psychology movement and goes beyond questions about positive psychology's novelty or framing strategies. While the happiness and health connection has some political utility for the positive psychology movement, it is not as necessary a component as tying human flourishing to positive mental health, as opposed to physical health. The happiness/health connection is somewhat of an anomaly in this regard, in that positive psychologists have placed a great deal of emphasis on studies which many other psychologists and scientists reject.

Describing Shermer's review as "egregious," Seligman leaves the reader to decide, based on his chapter "Positive Physical Health: The Biology of Optimism," whether the evidence for positive psychology's claims are robust and sound. When Seligman gets around to addressing cancer, which is after all the focus of Ehrenreich's critique, he briefly mentions a meta-analysis done in the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* which concluded that more optimistic people have better cancer outcomes. He leaves the heated exchange that followed between to the footnotes. Seligman concludes that "hope, optimism, and happiness may well have beneficial effects for cancer patients when the disease is not extremely severe. But caution is in order before dismissing positivity altogether even here" (2011, p. 203).

Aspinwall and Tedeschi (2010) attribute the growth of the positive psychology movement to an interest in the role played by positive feelings and thoughts in improving physical health. They draw our attention to meta-analyses which conclude that optimism has a relationship to health outcomes. On the issue of cancer and mortality they are careful to note that the protective benefits of positive phenomena vary by disease and that

the results for cancer mortality were either "weaker or nonsignificant" (p. 6). In order to explain how positive thoughts and feelings can impact health, Aspinwall and Tedeschi consider behavioral and social processes:

> [O]ptimism predicts multiple forms of preventive health behavior and self-care, including greater exercise, healthier diet, and not smoking, whereas fatalism shows consistent prospective and reciprocal associations with multiple serious health compromising behaviors, such as unsafe sexual activity, suicide attempts, and fight-related injuries (p. 6)

Though Aspinwall and Tedeschi acknowledge that the results for cancer mortality were weaker or nonsignificant than other illnesses, they nonetheless think that the results from interventions with cancer patients suggest a link between psychological adaptive capability and consequent physiological benefits:

> [I]llness may be transformed from a miserable, frightening event to be endured to one that has meaning. When this occurs, there may be more of a focus on intrinsic goals, leading to a reduction in anxiety and more positive affect. Both intrinsic goals and positive affect, in turn, have been associated with more robust immune system responses (p. 7)

Later, they conjecture that breast cancer patients reported increased empathy and improved relationships as a consequence of particular dispositions to find meaning in adversity. The implication here is that these positive effects might be linked to health outcomes. As far as the promotion of these kinds of positive thoughts and feelings, Aspinwall and Tedeschi address the dangers of popular positive psychology, condemning the attempt to blame people with serious illnesses for not thinking positively enough:

to avoid promoting false hope to patients and their families and contributing to a new generation of 'saccharine terrorism,' health psychologists may need to become more proactive in countering exaggerated popular claims based on their own and others' work (p. 11).

Coyne and Tennen's article, "Positive psychology in Cancer Care: Bad Science, Exaggerated Claims, and Unproven Medicine," argues that positive psychology has gotten ahead of the evidence and that they have jumped into benefit finding interventions before "gaining a solid conceptual understanding of the phenomenon, creating fundamentally sound measures, and using elegant prospective study designs" (2010, p. 20). Interventions are developed to facilitate desirable consequences such as enhanced well-being.

5.3.3 Evidence before Interventions

Coyne and Tennen want positive psychologists to show some restraint and for the leadership of positive psychology to offer a more "sober—and scientifically accurate—tone on their websites, in press releases, when discussing research in their seminars, at their international summits, and in their writings" (2010, p. 19). Aspinwall and Tedeschi back away from any association with popular literature, while accusing Coyne and Tennen of constructing a straw man linking positive thinking or stress reduction to the curing of disease: "In fact, an important element of such interventions is the active debunking of the popular notion that positive thinking will cure disease and discussion of the burden this poses to patients for them and others to hold this belief" (2010, p. 27).

Like Lazarus's target article, the thrust of Coyne and Tennen's critique concerns conceptual and methodological issues, which Aspinwall and Tedeschi choose to ignore, instead emphasizing links between participation in group interventions for cancer patients and improved immune functioning, the evidence for which is slim and implausible. They bring the discussion back to the relationships between optimism and other disease

outcomes, even though Coyne and Tennen's (2010) attention, like Ehrenreich's, is directed at cancer. Coyne and Tennen's desire for caution with regard to interventions is met with a similar kind of dismissal: Aspinwall and Tedeschi argue that it's not necessary to understand the exact mechanisms before moving forward with interventions, prioritizing the experiences of people who report benefits and growth while enduring life-threatening illnesses rather than the causal links under discussion.

5.3.4 Movement Story Lines

Both Lazarus and Coyne and Tennen offer some explanations for why positive psychology is the way it is and why it's meeting so much resistance. Lazarus makes an institutional argument, addressing the consequences of the publish-or-perish mindset affecting faculty members who may not have the time to refine their methodologies and are under pressures related to granting agencies. He argues that in order to succeed, "faculty members must gain the attention of others in the same field" (2003, p. 187), leading to movements like positive psychology:

> [I]n a crucial sense, institutional arrangements affect the kind of research most of us, as researchers, end up doing. It seems unfair, therefore, to blame researchers for a pattern that is not easily changed. The current incentive system has evolved over a long time. Occasionally, one hears about a proposal for change but nothing ever seems to be done. To change would require a nobility of spirit to which all but the most visionary persons would be unlikely to commit themselves (p. 188).

Also employing their sociological imaginations, Coyne and Tennen make the following suggestion:

> Perhaps, we need a sharper distinction between the scientific research program of positive psychology versus positive psychology as a social movement with a closely associated marketing of self-help materials, personal coaching, and training programs to the lay public, industry, and the military (2010, p. 36).

Coyne and Tennen also point out that the idea that cancer can be influenced by positive emotions and optimism, rather than being supported by evidence, functions as a *movement story line* characterised by being resistant to data and tending towards oversimplification:

> Story lines become self-perpetuating, confronting new data with a strong confirmatory bias, exaggerating the consistency of any new data with the storyline, and keeping out potentially disconfirming data. Story lines often have the quality of a promissory note preserved in a time capsule, having given favorable data more credence than is yet justified while uninfluenced by the weight of subsequent accumulating evidence (p. 40).

Gieryn might have had something similar in mind when he argued that science "can be made to look empirical or theoretical, pure or applied" and selection of one description or story line depends on which "characteristics best achieve the demarcation in a way that justifies scientists' claims to authority or resources" (1983, p. 781). Attempts to demarcate have failed and might even be counterproductive for sociologists, pointing to science's ambiguous boundaries and the role of boundary-work as a stylistic resource for ideologists: "when the goal is expansion of authority or expertise into domains claimed by other professions or occupations, boundary-work heightens the contrast between rivals in ways flattering to the ideologists' side" (p. 782).

The ideologists in this case might be considered the proponents of positive psychology in that they claim territory through the monopolization of ideas and resources, their rivals being popular psychology and psychology-as-usual. To protect their autonomy, movement insiders engage in boundary-work to exempt members from "responsibility for consequences of their work by putting the blame on scapegoats from outside" such as popular psychology (p. 792). Of course, skeptics and movement

outsiders also engage in boundary-work to exclude positive psychology by referring to it as bad science or pseudo-science. Gieryn focused on ideology because he found demarcation to be a poor heuristic for sociologists, but he did not lapse into epistemological relativism, acknowledging that scientific knowledge is at "once theoretical and empirical, pure and applied, objective and subjective, exact and estimative, democratic (open for all to confirm) and elitist (experts alone confirm), limitless and limited (to certain domains of knowledge)" (p. 792).

5.3.5 Legitimizing Positive Psychology

Complementary to Coyne and Tennen's conclusions about the positive psychology story line, Yen (2010) discusses positive psychology's historical narrative, drawing from Gieryn to discuss how narrative can serve as a powerful tool of legitimization:

> By its own definition, positive psychology is an objective, value-neutral science, and its proponents insist that all they are doing is describing what makes people happy rather than prescribing what people should be doing. At the same time however, because of its critical stance toward the negativity of mainstream psychology, it prescribes a focus on the positive aspects of human life (p. 74)

This contradiction, coupled with confirmation bias, leads positive psychology researchers in certain directions. Yen refers to this as the descriptive/prescriptive dilemma, which is to blame for the revolutionary and moderate presentations that positive psychologists struggle with in making their claims. This tension plays out in positive psychology's treatment of cancer research. On the one hand, positive psychologists like Peterson warn about the temptation for "those of us associated with this new field to run ahead of what we know," reminding us that psychology is "science—and science requires checking

theories against evidence...." (as cited in Snyder & Lopez, 2009, p. Xxiii), but on the other hand Aspinwall and Tedeshi implicitly agree with Coyne and Tennen that they are running ahead of the evidence, but explain this away by complaining that "only recently has there been support for studies in this field given the previous bias toward disease models" (2010, p. 32) and that one of the consequences of looking into neglected areas is that initial research lacks subtlety, nuance, and sophistication: "We would like to see more prospective studies, using both well-validated quantitative measures and qualitative approaches that allow researchers to remain open to the experiences of the people they study" (p. 32).

Positive psychology, as a relatively new scientific movement, does not yet have the kind of empirical support required to alleviate the pressures of skepticism, particularly from those outside of the movement who identify positive psychology by its insularity and indifference to scientific evidence.

Proponents of positive psychology have at the very least failed to make a strong case for their movement to others within the psychology community. Peterson and Park (2003) acknowledge this, hoping that as the movement develops it will accumulate the empirical findings so desired by both positive psychologists and critics. The implication here is that critics should give positive psychology the chance to develop into a mature science. If positive psychology fails as a movement, will it be because of its inability to deliver on its scientific promises or because it failed to persuade skeptics of its novelty and necessity?

5.4 Positioning Positive psychology as Novel Science

Important decisions for positive psychology's emergence as a scientific movement were initially made at the local level in Seligman's department at the University of Pennsylvania, but its continued progression was based, like all movements, on historically contingent opportunity structures. Though Seligman's access to resources improved once he became president of the APA, he was already part of an influential network including Ray Fowler (CEO of APA) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a leading researcher on creativity and one of Seligman's most significant influences. Don Clifton, the owner of the Gallup Corporation, later supported the Grand Cayman meeting, the goals of which were the "enumeration of potential components of a good life, which would form the basis of a research agenda on positive psychology and positive social science" (Seligman, 1998).

Seligman continued to populate positive psychology with other intellectuals with whom he had departmental links such as the previously mentioned Kathleen Hall Jamieson, then at the University of Pennsylvania, and Christopher Peterson, originally engaged in doctoral training in Social and Personality Psychology at the University of Michigan before respecializing in clinical psychology and experimental psychopathology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Since Seligman's presidential address, positive psychology has amassed many of the trappings of a mature science. It is credited with numerous books, journal special issues, conferences, meetings, centers, courses, and interventions. It has its own journal, the *Journal of Positive psychology*, and proponents of positive psychology publish widely and prolifically. Despite positive psychology's advantageous structural arrangements and

Seligman's strategic planning, the framing of positive psychology, to both insiders and outsiders, has been an integral part of both its speedy rise to prominence and the continued skepticism of movement outsiders.

5.4.1 Framing Positive Psychology

The framing of positive psychology has been fairly consistent, offering a distinct history that is repeated in most introductions to the movement. In the first phase of positive psychology's framing Gillham and Seligman (1999) explicitly refer to psychology up to the emergence of positive psychology as "negative psychology," which they explain in terms of human evolution and the history of the discipline. The historical argument is as follows:

> Since the onset of World War II psychology's focus has shifted to assessing, curing and preventing individual suffering. There has been an explosion in research on psychological disorders and the negative effects of environmental stressors such as parental divorce, death and physical and sexual abuse (1999).

A year later, other than imbuing the social sciences with a negative focus, they abandon the negative psychology label:

> Psychology has, since World War II, become a science largely about healing. It concentrates on repairing damage within a disease model of human functioning. This almost exclusive attention to pathology neglects the fulfilled individual and the thriving community. The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5).

Two years later, Seligman (2002) repeats the same narrative, also softening his concerns about psychology's preoccupation with protection:

> For the last half century psychology has been consumed with a single topic only—mental illness—and has done fairly well with it.... But this progress has come at a high cost. Reliving the states that make life miserable, it seems, has

> made building the states that make life worth living less of a priority... The time has finally arrived for a science that seeks to understand positive emotion, build strength and virtue, and provide guideposts for finding what Aristotle called the 'good life' (p. xi).

Seligman polemically claims independence from "psychology-as-usual" or the so-called disease model in the first two narratives. In the third narrative, he heralds the arrival of a new science while keeping one foot in the past with his reference to Aristotle.

In the second phase of framing, there is a slight shift to accommodate for positive psychology's growth and the increasing responsibility of other movement leaders:

> It is our view . . . that the first stage of a scientific movement—one that we would characterize as a declaration of independence from the pathology model—has been completed. The broader field now realizes that the positive psychology perspective exists. This handbook, which is built on our belief that a vital science and practice of positive psychology should grow alongside the science and practice of the pathology model, is yet another marker of this declaration of independence (Snyder & Lopez et al., 2002, p. 752).

In the 2011 second edition of the textbook *Positive psychology: The Scientific and Practical Explorations of Human Strengths* this narrative continues:

> [T]he applied psychology of yesteryear was mostly about mental illness along with understanding and helping the people who were living such tragedies. Positive psychology, on the other hand, offers a balance to the previous weakness-oriented approach by suggesting that we also must explore people's strengths along with their weaknesses (Snyder & Lopez et al., 2011, p. 3).

These historical narratives offer more than historical commentary. Movement proponents have a vested interest in articulating their movement in ways that will increase the likelihood of growth and continued success, and this involves shaping historical narratives about its origins as well as its relationship to competitor movements.

5.4.2 The Separatist Message

In August of 2002, Barbara Held, a professor of psychology at Bowdoin College, presented a paper at the 110th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association in Chicago titled "The Negative Side of Positive psychology." She talked about positive psychology's dominant separatist message, suggesting that Seligman's distinction between positive psychology and negative psychology "did not exist as such until Seligman ... so labeled and separated a large segment of the field" (2004, p. 15).

Seligman isn't the first psychologist to separate the field of psychology into positive and negative approaches. Maslow wrote the following in 1954:

> The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side. It has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illness, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that, the darker, meaner half (Maslow, 1954, p. 354).

Maslow's humanistic psychology is just one historical reference point in positive psychology's development. As I noted earlier, there have been numerous "positive psychologies" over the years, going back at least as far as William James.

It is no coincidence that Maslow is the source of the phrase positive psychology, which is drawn from the chapter heading of *Motivation and Personality*. His holistic perspective of human psychology encouraged many humanistic psychologists to avoid overly rational and instrumentalist approaches to research, but despite their resistance, humanistic psychologists had difficulty maintaining the momentum of their movement. According to Seligman, humanistic psychology did not attract a strong cumulative empirical base and he blames it for spawning the lucrative self-help industry, which he

vilifies in his concept paper, making it clear how real science will be demarcated from non-science (Seligman, 1998).

Seligman (2000) argues that the "'psychology' section contains at least 10 shelves on crystal healing, aromatherapy, and reaching the inner child for every shelf of books that tries to uphold some scholarly standard" (p.7). He blames humanistic psychology for these developments because of what he claims to be its suspicion of the scientific method:

> What distinguishes positive psychology from the humanistic psychology of the 1960s and 1970s and from the positive thinking movement is its reliance on empirical research to understand people and the lives they lead (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4).

By both drawing from past positive psychologies and vilifying them, Seligman, in an effort to draw attention to the uniqueness of his movement, isolated psychologists who might have been sympathetic to his aspirations. Perhaps cognizant of this fact, Seligman has since revised his views of his movement and its relationship to humanistic psychology, accusing the mainstream psychology of the 1960s of being constipated and painting positive psychology as the movement Maslow would have wanted had there been more collegiality among psychologists.

Seligman expresses impatience with what he claims is the "overused notion of 'paradigm shift' to characterize new wrinkles in a discipline" (2003, p. 266), describing positive psychology as a "mere change in focus" (p. 266). This is a radically different position than the one he adopted in his President's Address from the APA 1998 Annual Report, in which he regarded these wrinkles far more seriously, anticipating the

possibility of a "new science of positive psychology" that could be the "'Manhattan Project' for the social sciences" (Seligman, 1998).

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1.1 The descriptive/prescriptive dilemma

Yen argues that positive psychology presents itself as both revolutionary science and part of an intellectual tradition stretching back to antiquity. It has an ancestry, both in terms of recent attempts to address the same subject matter, such as humanistic psychology, and distant attempts such as those that we would associate with the ancient Greeks. The revolutionary focus of positive psychology, as I stated earlier, are its methods, which are described as part of a project dedicated to "objective, value-neutral science" (2010, p. 74). Yen refers to this as the descriptive/prescriptive dilemma. It's a dilemma because positive psychology has to justify its existence, and it does this primarily by setting itself against humanistic psychology. If positive psychology is nothing more than humanistic psychology rebranded, its existence would be called into question even more so than what we've seen in current controversies about its scientific legitimacy.

Positive psychology is meant to be more empirical, less political, less narcissistic, and above all else, rigorously scientific. For movement proponents, this means being descriptive rather than prescriptive, i.e., avoiding normative content. Since positive psychology is apparently free from normative concerns, there need not be any conflict between positive psychology's academic face and its popular incarnations: "[P]ositive psychology's popularity and applicability to everyday experience—far from contaminating proper scientific inquiry—are celebrated as evidence of its authenticity" (Yen, 2010, p. 74). Of course, positive psychology's resistance to mainstream psychology

in prescribing a "focus on the positive aspects of human life" (p. 74) is a value-laden position. In fact, it isn't possible to do value-neutral research, and even if it was, it's not clear why a researcher would want to, especially when dealing with issues like well-being and happiness.

From a philosophical standpoint, many of the proponents of positive psychology are confused about the fact-value distinction[13]. Science, according to this view, can only be descriptive: it may describe the consequences of certain actions, but it cannot tell us what to pursue. It cannot tell us what to care about. The fact-value distinction is also abused by mainstream psychologists, who are mistaken about the relationship between morality and science. Statements can be normative in the sense of being evaluative without being prescriptive, i.e., it is possible to tell someone that an action is morally wrong without telling them to avoid the action; furthermore, it's possible to make empirically grounded moral evaluations. It is "only prescriptions—imperatives to act—that undermine objectivity and violate the 'is—ought' distinction" (Kristjansson, 2010, p. 308).

To give you an idea of how concerned positive psychology's leaders were about making normative claims, consider how Peterson addresses the issue of character in positive psychology: "[B]ecause good character and its components are morally esteemed, we worried that we were entering a domain so value-laden that our project was doomed from the start" (2010, p. 139). Peterson's initial uneasiness stems from the fact

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[13] See Kincaid et al. (2007), especially chapter one, Face and Value, for a discussion of how values are inescapably embedded in the language we use to address scientific questions.

that while proponents of positive psychology want to promote human flourishing, which is strongly connected to character, they also want to avoid normative claims.

The bulk of character strengths and virtues are descriptive and the reader is expected to accept the authors' conclusions without substantial analysis. What are the goods that character strengths make possible? What is the good life? These questions go unanswered, but Peterson and Seligman do offer a defense, stating that while their classification is about values, "it is descriptive of what is ubiquitous, rather than prescriptive" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 51). How can Peterson and Seligman write about moral values without being prescriptive? Fowers (2008), who is sympathetic to the movement, writes that this "inarticulacy about what is good is deeply consequential in a movement that places character in such prominence, because character strengths are defined by the goods we seek. This impoverished theory of the good imposes unnecessary limits on positive psychologists' understanding of the virtues" (p. 633).

Positive psychology's inability to provide more than a subjectively defined concept of what is good leads positive psychologists to "repeatedly revert to pleasure and satisfaction as the markers for virtuous action, without clarifying why virtuous activity is pleasurable" (Fowers, 2008, p. 635). This denial of the presence of values in positive psychology while taking a value position represents a rhetorical strategy that allows positive psychologists to present their movement to psychology and the public as objective science while uncritically selecting research that has an optimistic bias—the story lines Coyne and Tennen mentioned. These story lines emerge from the fact that the positive psychology movement supplies values not connected to research, such as the pressure to obtain findings that square with the "dominant message of the movement—

for example, an optimistic bias is not only good for you; it also imparts wisdom and realism" (Held, 2005, p. 18).

6.1.2 Intellectual Self-Concept

Positive psychology is political, constituting a collective effort to pursue a research program in the face of actual or perceived resistance from others in the scientific community. To strengthen the collective identity of positive psychology, Seligman appropriated sets of beliefs as his exclusive domain, constructing his movement in relation to its opposition to the mainstream pathology model and past positive psychologies. If we look beyond Seligman's epiphanies, an immediate question should spring to mind: Why did Martin Seligman, who was already a highly placed intellectual, create positive psychology?

Gross (2008) provides an analytical-tool to help us get a handle on how intellectuals construct self-narratives. Rather than relying on prestige driven explanations alone, he argues that intellectuals will seek out those ideas which are continuous with their self-narratives. Gross doesn't want to separate self-concept too much from status-based approaches to intellectual life because identity might be strongly associated with status, but he does recognize that self-concepts and their formations are crucial to a scientific movement's success, as they provide the basis for the movement's collective identity.

Most research regarding framing takes "little account of where a movement's ideas come from and how its leaders actually generate and come to embrace the ideas that prompt them to take action" (Schurman & Munro, 2006, p. 6). The relevance of self-

concept or identity to framing rests on the importance of challenging instrumental approaches to the social aspects of scientific knowledge production. When asked why he wanted to be president of the APA by Ray Fowler, Seligman responded "Do you remember that image at the end of 2001: A Space Odyssey? The enormous fetus floating above the earth, not know what was to come? I think I have a mission, Ray, and I don't know what it is" (Seligman, 2003, p. 25). He eventually found his mission in the anecdote he shared about his daughter Nikki:

> I found that teaching ten-year-old children the skills of optimistic thinking and action cuts their rate of depression in half when they go through puberty. So I thought that the virtues of prevention and the importance of promoting science and practice around it might be my theme" (p. 27)

Seligman's intellectual self-concept is inexorably linked with his epistemic or scientific concerns, which arose from what he refers to as the analytic-synthetic failure, positioning himself as a courageous rebel in "one faculty battle after another" (Morgeson et al., 1999, p. 108) trying to convince his colleagues that synthesis is a valid form of scientific activity.

Seligman describes himself as working at the border of the light and the penumbra of what is known, presumably the reason why he identifies himself in opposition with the public, Congress, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Echoing Maslow, he considers the normative expectations of his field as being too invested in reductionism, and he implies that his role as a synthesizer initially left him at a disadvantage in his department at the University of Pennsylvania, which he categorizes as "one of the three or four scientifically traditional, rigorous—constipated—of any department" he has encountered (Morgeson et al., 1999, p. 107). He also tellingly refers

to himself as the "left wing" of his department, reinforcing the necessity of challenging conservative tendencies within science in order to make advances.

Unlike the positive psychologies that have come before, Seligman differentiates his movement by drawing on this notion of synthesis, uniting "scattered and disparate lines of theory and research about what makes life most worth living" (Seligman, 2005, p. 410). For Seligman, positive psychology is meant as a supplement rather than a replacement for other research, the goal of which is to provide a balance to psychology within an explicitly scientific framework. Gable and Haidt (2005) have a more modest view of their roles, emphasizing that they are housed in traditional psychology departments and publish in mainstream journals. These are not the only contradictions to be found within the movement, which moves back and forth between humility and hubris.

6.1.3 Conclusion

Many movements position themselves through the characterizations of alternatives that they oppose, their discursive activities revolving around the "fundamental problem of polysemousness, or the fact that movement participants and others disagree as to the meaning and interpretation of its knowledge core" (Frickel & Gross, 2005, p. 223). The contradictions and disagreements within positive psychology become particularly evident when its credentials as a scientific enterprise are challenged. Put in such a position, a scientific movement is "frequently forced into overstating its claims in order to differentiate itself from the position it argued against" (Cole, 1992, p. x). It's not necessary to separate the political from the epistemic to see how this can

occur, though critics are correct in stating that the "social element has acquired undue weight in shaping the epistemic product, partly because the epistemic procedures themselves have been misconstrued" (Katzko, 2002, p. 269).

A scientific movement is held together by more than the knowledge it carries. The social glue, to use Kim's term, acts as a selector, "sacrificing more truthful representations of the external referents in favour of those that facilitate the maintenance and continuity" (Kim, 2009, p. 46) of the movement. The positive psychology movement has a life of its own beyond its subject matter. While not necessarily independent from psychological science, the movement does have a distinct mission, the parameters of which lead to inconsistencies and contradictions. The motivational character of a movement is revolutionary and as a consequence highly resistant to referential logic: "Some statements are used strategically to develop and sustain the movement's identity. Functionally, these strategies work at a level other than simple referential logic" (Katzko, 2002, p. 674).

Gieryn (1999) argues that people use science to gain legitimacy by claiming themselves as credible while distancing themselves from others, whose efforts are dismissed as non-science, "junk" science, or pseudoscience. This distinction based on epistemic authority achieves boundary-work, which Gieryn defines as "the discursive attribution of selected qualities to scientists, scientific methods, and scientific claims for the purpose of drawing a rhetorical boundary between science and some less authoritative residual non-science" (p. 4-5).

Boundary-work is used to pursue several different goals including: 1) expansion; 2) expulsion; and 3) protection of autonomy (Gieryn, 1999). Expulsion pits established

science against revolutionary science, but as Gieryn notes, "the issue in dispute is who and what belongs on which side. Neither side wishes to challenge or attenuate the epistemic authority of science itself, but rather to deny privileges of the space to others who—in their pragmatic and contingent judgment—do not belong there (p. 16).

Seligman had a schemata, which he systematically followed, establishing borders and territories to "pursue immediate goals and interests of cultural cartographers and to appeal to the goals and interests of audiences and stakeholders" (Gieryn, 1999, p. 23). From this vantage point, it is easy to see positive psychology's aggressive framing campaign as an attempt to protect its borders, painting humanistic psychology as unscientific and jeopardizing its credibility.

The downside of emphasizing rhetoric is that it reduces psychology to discursive interactions shaped by ideological concerns. It's not necessary to dichotomize boundary discourse and epistemological concerns. In other words, I accept positive psychologists' versions of what they're doing, even if they manifest as inconsistencies and contradictions.

Seligman and other influential positive psychologists believe in the legitimacy of their movement and are driven by scientific concerns and an implicit or explicit dissatisfaction with mainstream psychology's apparent reticence to study the positive aspects of human experience. Held (2004) does not doubt Seligman's motivations and she recognizes that there is a nuanced message within the positive psychology movement, but its dominant message, she contends, is ideological rather than driven by epistemological concerns.

I differ with Held in that I think that growth of empirical knowledge is compatible with the pursuit of symbolic capital[14] and the ideological motivations attached to movement interests. Positive psychology's two sides, the "talk about the movement and talk about the subject matter of the movement's doctrine" (Katzko, 2002, p. 674), are bound up with one another. Positive psychology seeks to redraw the boundaries of psychology, and from the outside, this appears to be arbitrary and driven by strategic motivations. For both proponents and critics, it becomes difficult to recognize what counts as good psychology, but that is part of the rational dialectic of the field and the "social conditions of the possibility of knowledge are being constantly challenged and overcome through the argumentation among scientists as to which of the competing social constructions can be counted as the most plausible representation of reality" (Kim, 2009, p. 54).

Seligman did not initially intend to make positive psychology exclusive and he acknowledged the influences of predecessors as long as they fit with his conception of scientific psychology, i.e., replicable and cumulative. It's tempting to view this labelling and separation as the performance of a kind of cynical boundary-work, in that positive psychologists rhetorically frame their field as constituting a polarity between its scientific face and its public face. Framing is an important concept for developing an understanding of movement dynamics and is tied up with scientific legitimacy. Unlike other processes which manifest more organically out of the structures of movements, framing is seen as a productive process of maintaining socially negotiated meaning and engagement with

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[14] Symbolic capital refers to distinction or esteem.

movement goals. While there are a number of different ways to look at framing, this thesis was most concerned with boundary framing in terms of how movement participants distinguish positive psychology from past and current positive psychologies and the resulting counterframing of movement opponents.

The answer to Lazarus's question about whether or not the positive psychology movement has legs is difficult to answer because the success of scientific movement is socially negotiated through mutual criticism and persuasion, so one must take into account the fact that scientific knowledge is embodied in a social space where multiple competing forces struggle for the "imposition of a particular definition of science as the universal one" (Kim, 2009, p. 47). It is entirely possible that positive psychology has a mixed status, in that it might have a core which produces good research, while sustaining a public face and periphery that resembles a fad. Data and evidence matter to the outcome of a scientific movement, but as constructions they are limited by the scientific field's available interpretations. The pitfalls on the road to positive psychology, in addition to not being unique to the latest movement, are symptomatic of deeper problems within the social sciences.

> ***I do not doubt that it would be easier for fate to take away your suffering than it would for me. But you will see for yourself that much has been gained if we succeed in turning your hysterical misery into common unhappiness (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1955, p. 305).***

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Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name: Jonathan S. Simmons

Universities attended (with dates and degrees obtained):

University of New Brunswick, 2010-2012, Master of Arts

University of New Brunswick, 2006-2010, Bachelor of Arts

Publications:

Simmons, J.S. (2010). "The Pervert's Guide to the Birds." *Bright Lights Film Journal* 69. http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/69/69birds_simmons.php

Simmons, J.S. (2010). "Modest Intentionalism and the Replicant Debate." *Magazine Americana*. http://www.americanpopularculture.com/htdocs/film.htm

Simmons, J.S. (2011). Study Guide to Accompany Karen L. Anderson's *Thinking about sociology: A critical introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simmons, J.S. (2011). Test Bank to Accompany Karen L. Anderson's *Thinking about sociology: A critical introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Conference Presentations:

Simmons, J.S. (2011). "New Thought and American positive psychologies in context" as part of the Science and Politics session. The Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Science Annual Meeting, May 28-31, Fredericton, New Brunswick

Simmons, J.S. (2011). "Positive psychology as a scientific/intellectual movement" as part of the Sociology of Technology session. Canadian Sociological Association Annual Conference, May 31 - June 4, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Simmons, J.S. (2011). "Positive psychology's emergence and the new sciences of happiness." First Annual Social Sciences and Humanities Student Conference, February 18-19, Saint John, New Brunswick.