

**The Good Side of Your Bad Side**

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### **The Good Side of Your Bad Side**

Dr. Martin Seligman (1998) set the mandate for his tenure as the President of the American Psychology Association by saying that one of his initiatives was to emphasize “the understanding and building of the most positive qualities of an individual: optimism, courage, work ethic, future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, the capacity for pleasure and insight, and social responsibility” (para 3). With this, he introduced the “new science and profession of positive psychology” (para. 17) with a view to redirect empirical psychological research toward human strengths and flourishing rather than almost exclusively on pathology and mental illness.

Before the advent of positive psychology, about 90% of all research on emotion focused on negative states such as anxiety and depression (Mendoza, n.d.). While humanistic psychology focused on the wholeness of individual experience (Rogers, 1980), it was criticized for lacking strong empirical research, promoting self-centredness and aligning itself with self-help movements (Waterman, 2013). In Dr. Seligman’s opinion, there had been little attention paid to “the many instances of growth, mastery, drive, and character building that can develop out of painful life events” (Seligman, 1998, para. 16).

Positive emotions, an integral and foundational element of positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), have since been receiving more empirical consideration and there is a significant amount of research of their benefits (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). This is a welcome change to the emphasis on mental illness but it cannot come at the expense of also continuing to investigate the disadvantages of positive emotions as well as negative emotions and their benefits and disadvantages.

This essay will discuss recent research into both positive and negative emotions and their significance in our daily lives, at the individual, organizational and community levels. Further,

one of the criticisms of positive psychology is its segmentation from other branches of the profession (Held, 2004; Lazarus, 2003). These other areas of psychology have significantly contributed to our understanding of positive emotions, not only in terms of their benefits and drawbacks but also related to their formation and structure (e.g., Brooks, 2014). With that in mind, this essay will also touch on contributions from both Narrative and Organizational Psychologies to our understanding of emotions before concluding with an acknowledgement of current research limitations, some cultural considerations and possible ways forward.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The definition of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotion has and continues to be debated (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011) particularly as models of emotion range in time and process from somatic (James, 1884) to cognitive appraisal (Schacter & Singer, 1962) to component (Scherer, 2005). Further, theorists argue the nature-nurture debate of emotions (Boster 2005). Much research has been done on the Big Six emotions, being happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, anger and disgust (Ekman, Sorenson & Friesen, 1969). A quick comparison of several of the models of emotion would show that many of these six are ‘negative’. As it appears there is no current and categorical definition of emotion, this essay agrees with the notion that there exists “an emerging consensus that emotions (both positive and negative) are best conceptualized as multicomponent response tendencies that unfold over relatively short time spans” (Frederickson, 2009, p. 121) and that they “are *about* something” (Boster, 2005, p. 210, *emphasis original*).

Both positive affectivity and negative affectivity refer to the experience an individual has in relation to the respective emotion (Naragon & Watson, 2009). Affectivity also plays a central role in hedonic well-being, or subjective well-being (SWB), defined as satisfaction with life coupled with high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect (Diener, Larson &

Griffin, 1985). Eudaimonic well-being focuses on an individual's sense of meaning and purpose (Carr, 2011), and authentic happiness is created through a pleasant, meaningful and engaged life (Seligman, 2002). Given the range of definitions for 'happiness' across both academic and non-academic literature, this paper uses the definition suggested by Lyubomirsky et al (2005) that happiness is a "shorthand way of referring to the frequent experience of positive emotions." (p. 816)

As 'positive' and 'negative' do not necessarily mean the absence of the other and they can exist in the presence of the other (Naragon & Watson 2009), it is possible to have a positive outcome to a negative emotion and vice versa, as will be evidenced in this paper.

### **Review of Current Literature on Positive Emotions**

In an extensive meta-analysis of 225 papers, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) found that not only are successful people happy but also that positive affect often precedes successful outcomes as well as the behaviors that create those outcomes. Their conceptual model proposes that successful outcomes are caused by happiness and are neither a correlate nor simply an aside to happiness. For clarity, 'success' in their study is defined as "accomplishing those things that are valued by one's culture, flourishing in terms of the goals set forth by one's society." (p. 823) Though the authors acknowledge some limitations to their findings due to a lack of longitudinal studies and a preponderance of self-reporting methodologies, a broad range of cross-sectional findings showed that happy people are more likely to be successful at work and in their relationships along with showing higher levels of physical health.

While negative emotions tend to narrow our specific action tendencies, Barbara Frederickson (1998, 2001) theorizes that positive emotions broaden and build our repertoire and our adaptive strategies. A recent study also used the broad-and-build model to examine the

extent to which positive emotions, rather than negative, might increase a causal link with religion and spirituality (Saroglou, Buxant & Tilquin, 2008). The researchers found initial results to suggest that positive emotions can lead to increased feelings of wonder and joy along with self-perceptions of spirituality.

June Gruber and her colleagues suggest, however, that the benefits of positive emotions are not that straight-forward, and are more dependent upon degree, context, reason and type (Gruber, Mauss & Tamir, 2011). Further, in another study, she and her colleagues found that the stability of positive emotions (or lack thereof) “plays an important and incremental role in psychological health above and beyond overall levels of happiness, and that too much variability might be maladaptive” (Gruber, Kogan, Quoidbach, & Mauss, 2013, p. 1)

### **Negative Positives and Positive Negatives**

The “*Chrysalis Story*”, attributed to the author Henry Miller and retold in a variety of contexts, metaphorically summarizes the benefits of negative experiences:

A man spent hours watching a butterfly struggling to emerge from its cocoon. It managed to make a small hole, but its body was too large to get through it. After a long struggle, it appeared to be exhausted and remained absolutely still.

The man decided to help the butterfly and, with a pair of scissors, he cut open the cocoon, thus releasing the butterfly. However, the butterfly’s body was very small and wrinkled and its wings were all crumpled.

The man continued to watch, hoping that, at any moment, the butterfly would open its wings and fly away. Nothing happened; in fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its brief life dragging around its shrunken body and shriveled wings, incapable of flight.

What the man – out of kindness and his eagerness to help – had failed to understand was that the tight cocoon and the efforts that the butterfly had to make in order to squeeze out of that tiny hole were Nature’s way of training the butterfly and of strengthening its wings.

Sometimes, a little extra effort is precisely what prepares us for the next obstacle to be faced. Anyone who refuses to make that effort, or gets the wrong sort of help, is left unprepared to fight the next battle and never manages to fly off to their destiny. (Coelho, 2007, paras. 1-5)

The importance of negative emotion in an evolutionary context cannot be underestimated. Indeed, “in a life threatening situation, a narrowed thought-action repertoire promotes quick decisive action that carries direct and immediate benefit” (Frederickson, 2001, p. 122). Further, “...in the abstract, negativity is our evolutionary birthright. Negative evaluations are essential to survival ... and nowhere is this more true than in negative emotions” (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014, p. 55). For example, at the individual level, evolutionary psychologists believe that, through natural selection, anger is part of our biology and that it is a negotiating tactic used by the angry person to either inflict costs or withhold benefits from the other person, motivating the other person to act in alignment with the angry person (Sell, Tooby & Cosmides, 2009). At the social level,

Rage...is essential to the first phase of a social movement. It unifies disparate members of the group against a common enemy; the group becomes defined by its anger. Like the judicious use of private anger, public rages calls attention to an issue and the importance the protesters attach to it. (Tavris, 1982, p. 272)

Yet, at present, there seems to be a theoretical and empirical emphasis on promoting happiness, possibly in an attempt to overcompensate for the dearth of research on well-being and happiness noted by Dr. Seligman (1998). As suggested by the sales of self-help books, which exceeds \$11 billion (US) yearly (Groskop, 2013), it would seem that people just want to feel happy, although research consistently shows that most people already report their subjective well-being to be well above neutral (Diener & Diener, 1996). Unfortunately, the general association between a positive emotion as ‘good’ and a negative emotion as ‘bad’ can have the effect of disregarding that each has a benefit to one’s overall well-being. Rather than attending to one over the other, understanding how each is manifested and managed at an individual and social level creates wholeness (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014).

As already stated, there are indeed benefits to positive emotions (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). There are also various disadvantages, and research confirms that:

1. Happiness can make us sick.
2. The pursuit of happiness can backfire.
3. Trying to be happy can stop us from being successful.

### **Happiness can make us sick**

While it has been shown that extended experiences of anxiety and stress can induce premature aging (Epel et al., 2004), the ongoing suppression of negative emotions could increase the likelihood of negative health outcomes such as bronchitis and cardiac arrest (Harburg, Julius, Kaciroti, Gleiberman, & Schork, 2003).

In addition, Dr. Stephen Joseph (2011) suggests that guilt, frequently labeled as a significant and negative contributing factor to posttraumatic stress disorder (Baker et al., 2012) is

an integral part of the processing of traumatic events and an adaptive element in healing and growth.

Guilt is an important emotional warning light telling us about ourselves (para. 4). After trauma, as people struggle with the meanings and the significance of their own actions they then make new choices for how to behave. Seen this way [guilt], it is often through such inner conflict that posttraumatic growth can arise. (para. 6)

Optimism, considered a character strength associated with hope (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), can be defined as an expectation that future outcomes will be positive (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). There is much evidence to support that optimism is linked to effective problem-solving, good health, positive mood and occupational success (Peterson, 2006). However, some studies suggest excessive optimism may be damaging. For example, taking into consideration stressors occurring within the 12 months prior to a study, optimism was shown to aggravate the effects of accumulated negative life stress and increase the likelihood of poor physical and psychological outcomes whereas pessimism did not show the same outcomes (Chang & Sanna 2003). Further, research has shown that people beginning cognitive-behavior therapy already demonstrate an optimism bias tendency (McGuire-Snieckus, 2014). A meta-analytic review of the 75 depressive realism studies involving over 7300 participants noted that both dysphoric/depressed individuals as well as nondysphoric/non-depressed individuals showed a substantial positive bias (Moore & Fresco, 2012). Given that one of the desired outcomes of positive psychology interventions is to increase optimism (Peterson, 2006) and it appears that an optimism bias already exists, there is potential for interventions to inadvertently lead to excessive optimism, which has been associated with poor individual health and financial choices (Puri & Robinson, 2007).

It has been shown that diverse emotions create advantages. For example, a 10-year longitudinal study found that mixed emotional experiences (of both positive and negative emotions) were strongly associated with positive health outcomes including a reduction in typical age-related health declines (Hershfield, Scheibe, Sims & Carstensen, 2013).

### **The pursuit of happiness can backfire**

At the 2013 Stanford Roundtable, “*Are You Happy Now? The New Science of Happiness and Wellbeing*,” Sonja Lyubomirsky remarked “If you’re constantly asking yourself, ‘Am I happy yet?’ that can actually backfire and make you less happy” (McKelvey, 2013).

Schooler, Ariely and Loewenstein (2003) suggest that the pursuit of happiness, and its motivation for various behaviors, may be self-defeating in three ways:

1. People are not clear on what will actually make them happy.
2. People tend to focus on the extrinsic activity to gain happiness rather than an activity for its own intrinsic value.
3. People pay too much attention to whether or not they are feeling happy in the moment.

Indeed, Czikszentmihalyi (1999) acknowledges that monitoring for happiness actually detracts from feelings of flow. Further, the goal-oriented action of pursuing happiness alters its affective state. Happiness, then, becomes a series of action steps, or boxes of activities to be ticked off a list, rather than an internal evaluation or appraisal (Ford & Mauss, 2011).

At the same 2013 Stanford Roundtable, Ian Gotlib stated that the “old power of positive thinking is real...Changing the way one thinks is the bedrock of probably the most effective form of treatment for emotional disorders” (McKelvey, 2013). Positive thinking has long been suggested as a remedy for improving low mood (Peale, 1952). However, in a recent study by

Joanne Wood and her colleagues, positive self-statements were actually shown to be ineffective for some people and can make others feel even worse (Wood, Perunovic & Lee, 2009).

All participants in their study began by completing the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (as cited by Wood et al., 2009). Results showed that those with high self-esteem used positive self-statements more often than those with low self-esteem. Both high and low self-esteem participants rated positive self-statements to be helpful. However, those with higher self-esteem rated the statements as more helpful than those with low self-esteem. The results also confirmed that positive self-statements were being used commonly by all participants and were widely thought to be effective.

The researchers posited that, in line with social judgment theory, people with low self-esteem would resist the positive statements as falling outside of their current self-concept. In turn, this contradiction of statement to self-concept would, at best, not have a positive impact on their mood or, at worst, have a detrimental effect.

Across two experiments, this hypothesis was confirmed. Indeed, results showed that those with low self-esteem reported “worse mood, lower state self-esteem, and less happiness with oneself...” (p. 864) when presented with positive self-statements. Any benefit to people with high self-esteem was measurable but did not approach significance in either experiment.

An important corollary to note is that when given an opportunity to focus on how the positive self-statement may or may not be true for the participant, rather than only true, those given this flexibility showed higher state self-esteem, happiness with self and self-reported mood than those only given the option to focus on the truth of the positive statement. The study suggests that allowing for both the affirmative and contradictory thoughts inferred that both were to be expected and that an integrated approach of both positive and negative may have broader

utility than an emphasis in one direction or another. Wood et al.'s (2009) research showed that an inflexible emphasis on positive thought created negative mood and that:

Perhaps positive self-statements invoke the standard that one should think only positive thoughts. If one then has difficulty keeping out negative thoughts, one may infer that one cannot meet the standard of thinking positive thoughts – and this inference may be more problematic than the negative thoughts themselves (p. 863).

Further, in recent research, people with the strongest desire to achieve happiness also report high levels of stress, depression and less purpose while having lower levels of positive affect (Mauss, Tamir, Anderson & Savino, 2011). More specifically, Mauss and colleagues posited that striving for happiness may have a negative impact on personal relationships and increase feelings of loneliness. Their study found that the more people valued happiness (initially or induced), the more lonely they felt (Mauss, Savino, Anderson, Weisbuch, Tamir & Laudenslager, 2012).

### **Trying to stay happy can stop us being successful**

The affect-as-information hypothesis (Oishi & Kurtz 2011) suggests that emotions are a necessary signal, and that in relation to negative affect, it tells us that “something in our environment is awry and needs addressing” (p. 106). Using the negative emotion of boredom as an example, Peter Toohey of the University of Calgary states the affective feeling of boredom acts as a functional tool, signalling us that perhaps we are feeling unsatisfied with our current, often predictable and/or unavoidable, situation. Further, “simple boredom has a direct bearing on our ordinary emotional lives, keeping company ... with depression and anger while protecting us from their ravages” (2011, p. 6).

As mentioned earlier in this essay, optimism is often seen as more desirable than pessimism. However, recent research indicates that not only can optimism have negative results but that pessimism can be an adaptive strategy for creating positive results. For example, when expecting feedback, optimism has a more limited benefit than intuitively anticipated (Sweeny & Shepherd, 2010). If optimists' feedback falls short of desired outcomes, negative affect is higher. Further, optimists proactively anticipate higher levels of disappointment should feedback be poor, apparently in an attempt to mitigate negative affect.

In situations one could perceive as risky or a threat to self-esteem, both optimists and pessimists may utilize defensive pessimism as a strategy to lower expectations of a successful outcome and therefore mitigate the potential anxiety associated with the possibility of failure (Norem & Cantor, 1986). This strategy has improved performance and mood (Norem & Illingworth, 1993), thereby indicating an adaptive cognitive process for emotion regulation.

A purely optimistic outlook has been shown to be unrealistic when pursuing goals (Oettingen, 2014). Mentally contrasting the ideal future with a more accurate present reality can positively impact the degree of goal commitment, when goals deemed feasible get fuller engagement. This strategy should ultimately assist someone in allocating their personal resources of time and energy (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010). People also show a desire to feel a range of emotions, including anger and fear, based on a sense of utility toward their longer-term goals (Tamir, 2009).

Guilt, considered a basic emotion (Ekman, 1999), has been shown to reduce re-arrest rates (Tangney, Stuewig & Martinez 2014), reduce drunk driving (Tibbetts, 2003) and improve social attachments (Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton, 1994). In another study, Baumeister and his colleagues (1995) found that, as a form of action control in interpersonal relationships, guilt

produced higher rates of changes in behavior, including increased rates of apologies, confessions of transgressions and demonstrations of empathy for the partner.

### **Narrative and Organizational Psychology**

#### **Narrative**

Narrative psychology, which studies the “storied nature of human conduct” (Sarbin, 1986), is concerned with the way in which people manage their life experience by constructing stories and listening to and interpreting the stories of others. The fundamental premise is that the meaning one attributes to their experiences via constructed stories guides their cognitive, affective and behavioral responses, rather than these responses being the result of internal logical arguments. The structuring of discourse is therefore foundational to Narrative Psychology. Though positive psychology aligns more with empiricism, wherein knowledge is based more in actions and sensations, it still acknowledges the constructivist perspective (Bauer & Perciful, 2009).

Given the extent to which self-reporting is a prominent research method in positive psychology, there is a relationship to Narrative Psychology. In addition, the influence of narrative in emotional experience, both oral and written, has been examined at length (Niderhoffer & Pennebaker, 2009). As such, it is worthwhile for this essay to briefly identify some findings regarding discourse and its relationship to the learning, formation and expression of emotions, both positive and negative.

A series of studies points to a relationship between narrative and the learning of affective responses. Jeanne Tsai and colleagues found that children as young as three years old, in both Taiwan and the United States, who were exposed to stories of ‘excitement’ subsequently showed

a preference for ‘exciting’ activities. They were also more likely to show a preference for an ‘excited’ smile versus a ‘calm’ smile (Tsai, Louie, Chen & Uchida, 2007).

In an interesting study on emotional reappraisal, Alison Brooks (2014) also found discourse to have an impact on the formation of subjective emotional responses. Participants who simply reframed physiological sensations, such as increased heart rate and perspiration, from ‘anxious’ to ‘excited’ did not experience a change in the underlying sensations but did create “an opportunity mindset, which improved subsequent performance” (p. 1154).

To further demonstrate the validity of narrative and its impact in forming our emotions, Dr. Stephen Joseph (2013) writes:

Trauma creates a rupture in a person’s life story. Assumptions about ourselves, our place in the world, and our expectations about the world are shaken, even shattered. Through telling new stories that we are able to rebuild our sense of self – to reconstruct an understanding of who we are, our place in the world, and what our expectations of the world are. (para. 1) Human beings are storytellers. It is human nature to make meaning of our lives by organizing what happens to us into stories. (para 2) Stories help us to bind together our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a way this is continuous with our view of ourselves and our past history. (para 3)

In expressing our emotions, analysis shows that words with positive emotional content are used more often than those with negative content (Garcia, Garas & Schweitzer, 2012) yet, as evidenced through the “attention-grabbing power” of automatic vigilance, we have innate tendency to notice negative social stimuli, including words, ahead of positive (Pratto & John, 1991). “Bad is stronger than good” was also seen by Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001) across a broad review of literature. However, the hedonic contingency model

(Wagener & Petty, 1994) suggests that pre-existing positive affect will lead people to prioritize new positive information to maintain the positive mood.

### **Organizational**

Positive emotions at work are generally correlated with better work evaluations, more promotions and improved organizational citizenship (Lyubormirsky et al., 2005) along with higher levels of employee engagement (Bakker, 2009). Evidence of broaden-and-built theory in organizations (Vacharkulksemsuk & Frederickson, 2013) suggests that various elements of the theory existed prior to Frederickson's identification of the model in 1998.

However, it has been shown that happy people, with their tendency to focus on the big picture and optimistic outcomes, are more likely to disregard details. This leaves them open to deception but we are less gullible when we are sad (Forgas & East, 2008). Optimistic bias can also prevent learning from our mistakes (Baron, Hmieleski & Henry 2012) which can exacerbate tendencies toward individual human error along with the latent and active failures associated with organizational error (Reason, 1990).

Emotional display rules in the organizational context have been studied for a long time (Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011). Surface acting, on the one hand, involves the overt display of contextually appropriate emotional expressions, such as a service representative smiling at an angry customer while hiding their own feelings of frustration. However, Hochschild found the strategy does not change one's own internal emotional response (as cited by Kiely & Sevastos, 2008). Deep acting, on the other hand, is an attempt to alter one's own feelings, by evoking or suppressing emotions, in order to create an authentic emotional display. The emotional labor expended in faking one's emotions through surface acting, and the subsequent prevalence of emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction and emotional dissonance, has led researchers to

suggest that training people to deep act through, for example, role play may be a viable mechanism for reducing the stress associated with emotional display rules generally and surface acting specifically (Kiely & Sevastos 2008). However, as mentioned earlier (Harburg, 2003), long-term emotion suppression through deep acting may also have detrimental health outcomes.

Emotional contagion research abounds (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1993) with a view to more deeply understand the influence emotions have on teamwork and employee/customer relationships. Recent research shows that although a leader's positive affect can positively impact followers' performance on creative tasks, a leader's negative affect can positively impact followers' performance on analytical tasks (Visser, Knippenberg, Kleef & Wisse, 2013). Further, displays of anger strategically delivered by a leader can improve worker performance, though context and frequency are important predictors of effectiveness (Lindebaum & Fielden, 2011).

### **Discussion and Future Opportunities**

Given the infancy of the research in positive psychology, study reliability and validity is often questioned (Lazarus, 2003; Held, 2004). Most research 'conclusions', including many of those in the studies mentioned in this essay, make suggestions for improved veracity.

One of the general criticisms of positive psychology is the primary use of self-reports in research methodology. While some studies are utilizing more quantitative and physiological measures (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Cunejt, Alper & Skoner, 2003), most studies still rely heavily on qualitative research such as discourse analysis. Higher levels of credibility are being associated with discourse analysis (Jaipal-Jamani, 2014) and other research is looking in to mapping methodologies for discerning semantic narrative relationships across cultures (Boster, 2005). Outside the scope of this paper, but worthy of a mention in the discussion of the future of rigorous research in emotions, is the contribution of Janos Laszlo and his colleagues at the

Hungarian Narrative Psychology Group (Laszlo et al., 2013). More specifically, they have developed a quantitative methodology, namely Narrative Categorical Analysis, and an associated measurement tool, NarrCat. This tool creates narrative categories that can be statistically processed for language use and meaning and may be applicable for use within positive psychology.

A broader research and application base is also suggested for positive psychology. For instance, a brief review of literature found only a handful of studies looking at the role of positive emotions in the lives of the cognitively and/or developmentally disabled (and their families), though this demographic makes up approximately 4.5-7.5 million people in the United States alone (Bethesda Institute, n.d.).

To confound creating definitive constructs that would assist in the advancement of research into the benefits of positive (and/or negative) emotions, strong cultural differences in outlook to ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ have been found in a variety of research (Chang, Asakawa & Sanna 2001). For example, Lau, White & Schnall (2013), using a novel willingness-to-pay model, found that people are willing to pay to re-create the experience of positive emotions as well as to avoid negative. Cross-culturally, however, what participants would be willing to pay for varied significantly. Overall, those in the United Kingdom would pay more to re-create positive emotions generally. They would also pay more to re-create positive emotions than they would pay to avoid negative. However, Chinese participants in Hong Kong would pay significantly more to avoid key negatives over positives. Lau et al. (2013) suggested that this difference reflects the idea that people have an implicit understanding of what emotions they are expected to feel in their respective culture. Cultural differences were also seen in the aforementioned study on learned affect (Tsai et al., 2007) wherein Asian cultures are likely to

view emotional experiences as a mixture of both positive and negative and not give significant weight to one group of emotions over another. Further, ‘the good life’ appears to be more of a western construct rather than eastern (Scollon & King, 2004) in that westerners place higher value on an easy life versus a hardworking life.

Other extensive research again shows that happiness is not always deemed a positive thing cross-culturally (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009; Uchida, Norasakkunkit & Kitayama, 2004). In this research, constructions of happiness varied significantly in relation to meaning, motivators and predictors between European-American and East Asian cultures.

Fundamentally, diversity of emotions leads to emotional, social and psychological agility (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014) and when emotions, both positive and negative, are viewed as signals rather than states, they can provide us with information from which we can learn and grow (Toohey, 2011; Joseph, 2011; Joseph, 2013).

Within the profession of positive psychology itself, the integrated balance of both positive and negative emotions and their interdependence on overall well-being is understood (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). However, on the face of it, positive psychology appears to promote what some refer to as “the tyranny of the positive attitude” (Held, 2004, p. 11) and tends to segment itself (Lazarus, 2003). To possibly mitigate this impression, a direction in future research could be one that emphasizes the utility of emotions rather than the description of ‘positive’ or ‘negative’.

Interestingly, in *A Way of Being*, one of Carl Roger’s last publications in 1980 before his death, he pondered the future of psychology:

It will become a science based on careful observation of inner cognitive processes...It will involve the exploration of inner, personal, emotionalized meanings...It will be based

upon understanding the phenomenological world of man, as well as his external behavior and reactions...It is to be noted that in all of these trends toward a newer science, we do not push the individual into some contrived situation to investigate some hypothesis we have imposed on him. We are instead opening our minds and our whole selves to learning *from him*. (p. 239) (*emphasis original*)

In Dr. Seligman's presidential address, he stated that positive psychology "holds the potential to create ... an understanding and a scientifically informed practice of the pursuit of the best things in life..." (1998, para. 25). There is no doubt that positive psychology has swung the pendulum of research toward this impressive desired outcome. It is also apparent from the breadth of research presented in this essay, particularly from other psychologies, professions and cultures, that the 'pursuit' may in and of itself create detrimental effects, that the 'best things in life' have not yet been clearly or globally defined, and that the definition may, in fact, remain elusive for some time to come, given the subjective nature of life experience.

While researchers continue to advance rigorous empirical studies in positive psychology, integration of positive psychology with other forms of reliable and valid research, both well-established and emerging, inside and outside psychology, may augment and accelerate future research in a way that moves us all closer to understanding what constitutes and creates individual, organizational and societal flourishing (Seligman, 2011).

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