

What is Positive Psychology?

Lecture 1
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Three Forces in Psychology

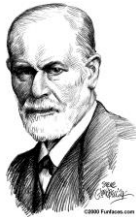
In an attempt to explain human behaviour in the history of psychology there have been three major solutions:

- Psychoanalysis
- Behaviourist Approach
- Humanistic Psychology

This is a simplistic, but a valid, summary of the history of psychology!

Wave 1: Psychoanalysis

Freud: Human behaviour is driven by unconscious elements: drives and desires.



Jung (Analytic psychology): more complex unconscious elements – collective unconscious, personal shadow!



Wave 2: Behaviourism

Pavlov, Skinner, Thorndike...



Human behaviour is basically a response to stimuli in the environment, seeking reward and avoiding punishment.

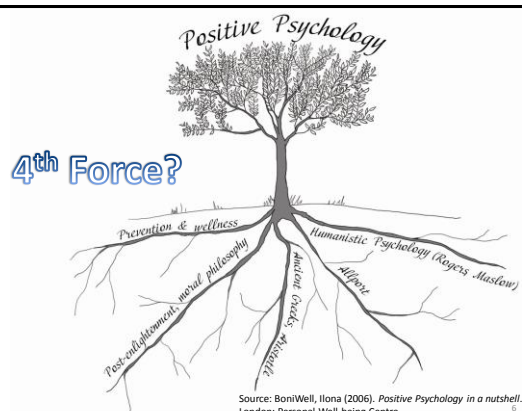


The Third Force: Humanistic Psychology

Maslow, Rogers, Frankl ...

Human beings are intentional... they are influenced by motivation – at different levels.

They seek meaning, value, and creativity.



Source: BoniWell, Ilona (2006). *Positive Psychology in a nutshell*. London: Personal Well-being Centre.

Focusing on Wellbeing & Happiness

“For most of its history, psychology had concerned itself with all that ails the human mind: anxiety, depression, neurosis, obsessions, paranoia, delusions. The goal of practitioners was to bring patients from a negative, ailing state to the neutral normal...” (*Time*, Jan 15, 2005).

“Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005).

The Father of Positive Psychology

Martin Seligman (b.1934)

Chairman of APA in 1998, proposed PP as the annual theme.

His early concepts: learned helplessness and explanatory style (pessimistic/optimistic).



His works include:

1. *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death.* (1975)
2. *Learned Optimism.* (1990)
3. *What You Can Change and What You Can't: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement.* (1993)
4. *The Optimistic Child: Proven Program to Safeguard Children from Depression & Build Lifelong Resilience.* (1996)
5. *Authentic Happiness.* (2002)

Empirical Approach of Positive Psychology 'Movement'

“The generous humanistic vision had a strong effect on the culture at large and held enormous promise. Unfortunately, humanistic psychology did not attract much of a cumulative empirical base, and it spawned myriad therapeutic self-help movements. In some of its incarnations, it emphasized the self and encouraged a self-centeredness that played down concerns for collective well-being” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.7).

- PP embraces the empirical approach!!

