

Implementing Positive Psychology in Therapeutic Approaches

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I was first enrolled in therapy when I was eleven years old. My mom decided to arrange a therapy and psychiatry appointment conveniently in the same building. It was only days before the arrangement that I began to label myself “different” from the others. I had no idea that my ways of dealing with various issues were viewed as irregular, and I didn’t fully grasp the idea of normality at the time. With these considerations in mind I attended my first therapy meeting. I arrived with my parents, and they were both eager to begin the healing process. We began the session with my family present and discussed surface area behaviors. After the therapist finalized her file of me, my parents were asked to leave halfway through the session. I recall my sense of vulnerability. Her first question towards me regarded my relationship with my parents. I opened up and shared with her each and every memory I could think of with them. I talked for so long with nothing in response, except for the occasional head shake or sigh. When I was done she asked me if she could have moment alone with my parents. The next thing I remembered was how upset my parents were driving home. They kept saying “so you think this is our fault”. I never fully understood this.

Through the introduction of positive psychology I have been optimistic towards the pathways of therapeutic remedies. Growing up in and out of therapy I always noticed that blame was due somewhere. Whether it be on my parents, myself, or my surrounding environment, therapy was always trying to figure out whose fault it was. My sessions revolved around what was wrong, and once we identified the “issues” we remained focused on how to resolve them. I became obsessed with what I was doing wrong and ignored what made me “right”. I started to contemplate why I couldn’t do things and forget the argument for why I could.

Suffering from social anxiety, I was bestowed upon an excuse that satisfied me sufficiently. I did not attend social events, I made no effort to engage in relationships, and I often had extreme emotions that shifted throughout the day. I was told that I suffer from social anxiety and displayed it as a reason for all my faults. However, I was never told that I was funny, caring, friendly, and many other characteristics that display to me a reason why I can attend social events, engage in relationships, and even take control of my emotions. By consistently being reminded of my disorder, it made me timid and prevented me from participating in a social life. In psychology, it is well known that people, to a certain extent, live up to the expectations of the people around them. If you are told you are stupid your whole life, you will never challenge yourself to learn. If you are told you are smart, challenging yourself to learn will become a pleasure of yours. Ultimately, the same thing applies to therapy. By failing to acknowledge and emphasize the qualities that makes you “right”, it renders more room for thoughts on what makes us wrong.

The Values in Action (VIA) survey that I completed was the first entity to ever describe to me what I did well. I remember a couple questions on the survey asking if we were ever told that we were loving, courageous, or spiritual. At this point, I realized a crucial problem in the way people think. People are often focused on flaws in humanity, and rarely consciously consider the beauty in it. The influence of positive psychology, and the components of it (such as the VIA), must be established in therapeutic remedies to remind adolescence, and even adults, that we all have “positive characteristics”. The VIA and positive psychology should be applied for adolescence in a worldwide fashion. Through the recognition of character strengths, our new generation will be better equipped in leading a happy life.

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Following the completion of the VIA survey, I have taken with me a variety of learning lessons. Although everyone is different, each person contains their own strengths and weaknesses. By uncovering the opaque curtains of our minds, we can emphasize our strengths and minimize our weaknesses. This emphasis of strengths will lead us to success. This was shown to me over this past weekend. On Saturday, I attended Oktoberfest in Downtown Denver. I was initially terrified at the thought of surrounding myself with drunk hooligans that aren't interested in calming my nerves. However, my girlfriend pointed out to me the fact that I am so concerned with what will go wrong, and never think about what will go right. I ignored her comment until after my time spent at the festival. I was ecstatic by the fact that I, someone with social anxiety, was able to attend a gathering of that many people. On top of this, I had a blast. The VIA helped portray to me that I can do it. It made me consider my strong areas rather than obsess over my weaker ones. I hope to consistently apply this thought process throughout the remainder of my life.

References

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification. New York: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.