Exploring the Untapped Potential of Positive Psychology in GLBTI Communities
About Me

BCom
(Accounting & Finance)

MBusIT

BCom(Hon)
(Org. Psych.)

MAppPosPsych

PhD Candidate
(Pos Psych)

Exploring the Untapped Potential of Positive Psychology in GLBTI Communities
AGENDA
What will we cover?

① What is Positive Psychology (PP)?

② Underpinning Assumptions and Principles

③ The Relevance of PP in GLBTI Contexts

④ Having a go! Gratitude Intervention
What is Positive Psychology?

Historical Context

- Post-WWII, psychology had become a science devoted to repairing and healing psychology dysfunction:
  - Adopted a disease model for human functioning;
  - Neglected the possibility that building strength is the most potent weapon in the arsenal of therapy;
  - Shed little light on what it means to be a fulfilled individual and how to foster thriving communities.

“

The aim of positive psychology is to catalyse a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life.”

Martin Seligman
(Handbook of Positive Psychology)
The Paradox of Happiness
In search of happiness

Our brains are hardwired to seek happiness

Yet
We’re extremely bad at predicting what can sustain it

When I get____, I’ll be happy
When I achieve____, I’ll be happy
The Paradox of Happiness
How would some of your clients respond?

- **Affective Forecasting**
  - We are terrible at predicting how we will feel in the future.
  - Our feelings in the present blind us to how we’ll make decisions in the future.
  - Are lottery winners happier?
  - Are terminally injured or disabled people miserable?

If I ever contracted HIV, my life would be ________
If I was more attractive or fitter I would be ________
The Paradox of Happiness
The negativity bias

- **People tend to focus on what is broken/wrong rather than what is right-going well**
  - Pay more attention to and give more weight to negative experiences than positive experiences or information.
  - Unpleasant childhood experiences are recalled more often than pleasant childhood experiences.
  - Why? Negative emotions are our first line of defence against external threats.
Some Studies:

- **Marriage:** One destructive act requires five constructive acts to make up for it.
- **Money:** Pain of losing is greater than the pleasure of winning the same amount.

Source: Cited in Haidt (2006)
The Negativity Bias in Science

The study of the ‘worst’ things in life

Source: Haslam, 2009
The Breadth and Reach of PP

Where are we today?

Source: Rusk & Waters (2013)
The Breadth and Reach of PP
Where are we today?

Source: Rusk & Waters (2013)
AGENDA
What will we cover?

① What is Positive Psychology (PP)?

② Underpinning Assumptions and Principles

③ The Relevance of PP in GLBTI Contexts

④ Having a go! Gratitude Intervention
What is Happiness?
A holistic conceptual definition

With the person next to you, define in your own words what happiness means.

- In positive psychology, we seek to understand **psychological wellbeing** which comprises of:
  - Hedonic wellbeing → pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. *Examples?*
  - Eudaimonic wellbeing → meaning, self-realisation and degree to which a person is fully functioning. *Examples?*

Source: Ryan & Deci (2001)
What is Wellbeing?
The prevailing notion

- In many disciplines areas, there is a prevailing notion is:
  Absence of illness = Presence of wellbeing
- Positive psychology proposes an expanded view of wellbeing:
  Absence of illness + Presence of positive qualities = wellbeing

THE ‘WAR ON MENTAL ILLNESS’

Excerpt from Molecular Psychiatry, 2014, 19(1):
“We propose that it is now the time for a ‘War on Mental Illness’ to be officially and rapidly launched... efforts to promote wellbeing, such as POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY and resilience building... ought to be an integral part of the ‘War on Mental Illness.’”
Psychological Wellbeing

Two-Factor Theory

Removing negative states
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Insecurity
- Addiction
- Self-harm

Promoting positive states
- Happiness
- Hope
- Optimism
- Empathy
- Gratitude

Take Away Obstacles
- CBT, ACT, Affirmative Therapy

Brining in enables
- Positive Psychology Interventions
Positive emotions prompt individuals to engage with their environments

- **Joy** creates the urge to play, push the limits and be creative;
- **Contentment** creates the urge to savour current life circumstances;
- **Gratitude** propels us to reciprocate kindness, thus bonding us to others.

Understanding positive emotions is a **worthwhile** and **important** pursuit in translational science!

Sources: Fredrickson, 2010; Compton & Hoffman, 2012
Promoting Positive Emotions
The Broaden-and-Build Theory

- **Negative emotions** arrow people’s attention and cognitions

- **Positive emotions**:  
  - Generate positive interactions  
  - Broaden attention and thinking  
  - Build personal resources (i.e., psychological, cognitive, social, and physical)

- The broaden effect has now been supported experimentally across multiple labs.

Sources: Fredrickson, 2010
Promoting Positive Emotions

Your Practice and Clients

What percentage of your work is focused on ameliorating negative emotion vs. promoting positive emotions?

- Some positive Interventions that promote emotions
  - Mindfulness
  - Best possible self and mental imagery
  - Gratitude letters/visits
  - 3 good things
  - Strengths coaching
  - Music
  - Learning / curiosity → flow → skill–challenge mix
AGENDA
What will we cover?

① What is Positive Psychology (PP)?

② Underpinning Assumptions and Principles

③ Relevance of PP in GLBTI Contexts

④ Having a go! Gratitude Intervention
Relevance to GLBTI Communities

Conditions for Wellbeing

What do you think?

▲ Civil liberties + ▲ Social Acceptance = ▲ Wellbeing

Are extrinsic factors enough?

- Public policy and social norms are required to create an environment that provides equal opportunities for GLBTI individuals to flourish.

- **BUT**, the existence of opportunities *does not* in itself mean that there will be increased wellbeing among GLBTI.
  - Learning to live?
Mental Health in Australia
What more can we be doing?

- **Mental Illness**
  - Depression precipitates a variety of negative mental health outcomes
  - Avg. of 6.9 suicides a day in Australia, 75% are male
  - Suicides accounted for 1.7% of death from all causes

Sources: ABS, 2012
Studies have shown:

- 75% of mental disorders emerge by age 25
- Untreated disorders during childhood and adolescence could become more acute and difficult to treat
- Early life intervention is critical in the prevention of mental illness

Have you found this to be the case with your clients?

Sources: Kessler et al., 2005; McGorry et al, 2011
Mental Health among GLBTI Youth

My Passion

- Studies suggest that mental health disparities exist among youth sub-groups:
  - GLBTI youth face a number of stressors more often than their heterosexual counter-parts
  - Higher prevalence of internalized psychopathology

Suicidality

Heterosexual Youth (12%)

Smy (28%)

Smy found to be 2.3 time more likely to experience suicidality (Marshal et al., 2011)
Why do we need PP?
Historical discrimination and injustices in the name of science

- **Past DSM Classifications:**
  - Sociopathic personality disorder
  - Sexual deviation
  - Ego-dystonic illness

- **Lack of scientifically robust interventions**
  - Since the declassification from DSM → fewer studies on GLBTI
  - Legacy of the DSM → Harmful practices such as reparative therapy

"Homosexuality is a form of sexual perversion... an arrest at, or regression to, an immature level of psychosexual development."

Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1955
Why do we need PP?
Where does PP sit in relation to therapy for GLBTI?

![Diagram showing risk factors and protective factors]

- Risk Factors: Self-Hatred, Stigma, Prejudice, Hostility, Victimization, Discrimination
- Protective Factors: Social Support, Positive Self-Esteem, Family Affirmation, Psychological Well-being, Religiosity & Spirituality

Traditional Interventions vs. Positive Interventions
Why do we need PP?
What are the merits of focusing on the positive?

I am hard pressed to identify any data-based positive attribute that characterises the lives of same-sex oriented pre-adults relative to heterosexuals. Can this possibly be true?

Savin-Williams, 2008

Are there merits in focusing on the positives when it comes to the mental health of GLBTI?

How can therapists and clinicians incorporate PP into their practice?
AGENDA

What will we cover?

1. What is Positive Psychology (PP)?

2. Underpinning Assumptions and Principles

3. Relevance of PP in GLBTI Contexts

4. Having a go! Gratitude Intervention
Having a Go
Gratitude Interventions

- Silent conversation
- **Gratitude essay** – Write an ‘essay’ about someone whom you’re grateful for. Explain:
  - Why are you grateful for that individual?
  - The impact that individual has had on your life
  - What that person means to you
  - Why is this person a source of gratitude for you?
Gratitude Interventions
The scientific evidence

Experimental Evidence
Increase Self-love, Decrease Stress, Increase ‘Happiness’
Positive Psychology Therapy
Resources for Self-Directed Learning


Thank you for your attention

QUESTIONS?