

29th World Summit on

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY, MINDFULNESS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

May 21-22, 2018 | New York, USA



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The relationship between positive, coaching and clinical/counseling psychology

Over recent years, the emergence of Coaching Psychology (CP) and Positive Psychology (PP) as methods to improve wellbeing and happiness have grown rapidly. From their initial starting point, the two disciplines have matured and are now developing a growing evidence base as effective interventions for the improvement of ill-health, an area that has traditionally been the domain of Counseling or Clinical Psychology (C/CP). However, this growth has not occurred without debate, tension and misunderstanding. One area yet to be fully explored is how do CP and PP sit along side their therapeutically orientated sister disciplines of C/CP and under what circumstances should one approach be used over another so as to ensure maximum efficacy and client safety. Through the analysis of over 100 hours of clinical and coaching session notes, this paper explores the possible link and divides between the different approaches. The use of thematic analysis led to the identification of a number of common and different themes between the approaches. By adopting the notion that these different approaches were conceptual maps of phenomena, with different ranges and focuses of convenience, allowed possible overlap and difference to be coherently explored and integrated. This culminated in the creation of a Wellness Staging Framework (WSF) based upon a dual continuum model of “wellbeing” and complexity and severity of presentation. This staging framework was then retrospectively applied to the data set. Results indicated that the WSF could provide a way in which allocation to C/CP or CP/PP could be decided. Exploration of the data also revealed that mindfulness (used implicitly or explicitly) was common in all approaches and was often central to a hermeneutic growth cycle that underpinned changes in wellbeing, happiness and goal attainment. Several methodological issues and avenues for future research were identified and are discussed.

Biography

Patrick G Gwyer is a Chartered Scientist, Associate Fellow of the British Psychology Society and Chartered Psychologist. He completed his PhD in Applied Cognitive Psychology in 1997 after which he worked as a Research Officer for a UK law enforcement agency. Subsequently he taught and researched Applied Psychology at the University of Winchester. In 2006, he completed his Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsychol) at the University of Southampton. Upon completion of an MSc in Applied Positive Psychology and Coaching Psychology, he specialized in consultancy for individuals and organizations across the adult wellbeing spectrum, focusing on resilience, recovery, wellbeing and happiness. He is also the Clinical Advisor for The Mountain Way a specialist veteran mental wellbeing charity that promotes post traumatic growth for veterans who have experienced trauma as part of their military service.

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