

The Impact of Positive Psychology on Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology

A Bibliometric Overview

Introduction / Method

Positive Psychology (PP) is a relatively new school of thought in Psychology, focusing on human strengths and virtues, and on improving well-being and quality of life. In its aim and scope, it bears special relation to the fields of Behavioral Medicine (BM) and Health Psychology (HP). Building upon a recent bibliometric analysis (Schui & Krampen, 2010), we trace the impact, PP had on these larger fields by evaluating the corresponding literature found in the PsycINFO-database.

To identify the important literature in BM and HP, we chose the approach to analyze the contents of the major journals in these fields according to French, Vedhara, Kaptein & Weinman (2010, see below). The resulting literature sets were narrowed down by applying a wide bibliometric definition of PP (see Schui & Krampen, 2010) and then plotted for the timeframe of 1990 to 2009. This illustrates the effects of the emergence of PP since the year 2000, since when numerous contributions on PP are available (see Figure 1).

The PP-related literature published after 2000 was also analyzed regarding contents, authorship, methods and impact. Definition-wise, the literature is almost entirely identified by the APA-Thesaurus terms 'well-being' and 'quality of life', not by occurrences of 'positive psychology' in the index terms, titles, key phrases, or abstracts. Thus, the former terms are not shown in the text clouds below, because they would appear too huge. The text clouds allow a glimpse of the diversity and important themes in the PP-related literature within BM and HP. To facilitate comparison, the clouds are alphabetically sorted from top to bottom.

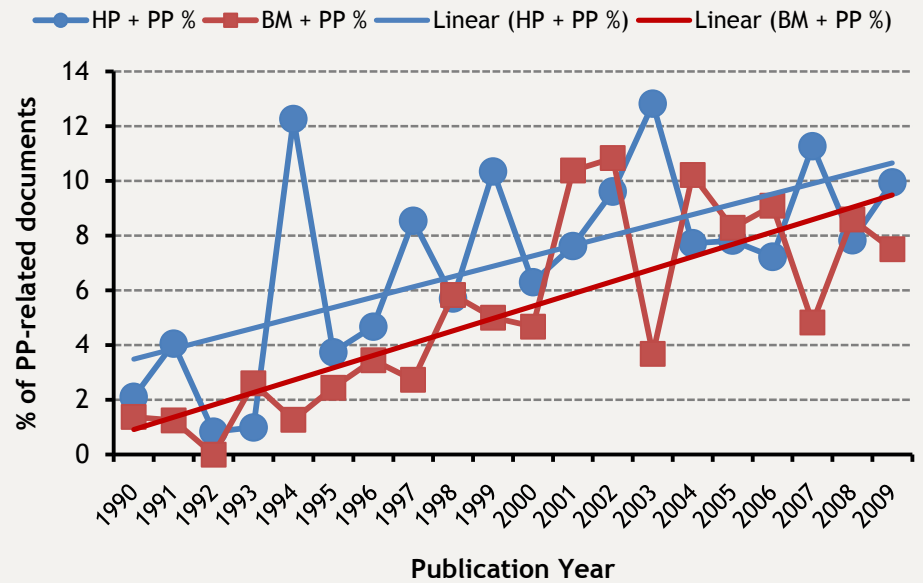


Figure 1: Percentages of Positive Psychology-related literature in major Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology Journals from 1990 - 2009 (Source: PsycINFO)

Health Psychology

- Health Psychology
- British Journal of Health Psychology
- Psychology & Health
- Journal of Health Psychology
- Psychology, Health & Medicine



Behavioral Medicine

- Annals of Behavioral Medicine,
- Behavioral Medicine
- International Journal of Behavioral Medicine
- Journal of Behavioral Medicine

In BM, the number of authors per article is higher, the mode of the distribution being 4 and 5 authors (HP: 2 Authors), which is consistent with the higher author counts in Medicine vs. Psychology.

Both literature sets are almost entirely empirical, BM: 100%, HP: 97% (PsycINFO-Field 'Methodology').

Positive Psychology, Quality of Life & Well-being

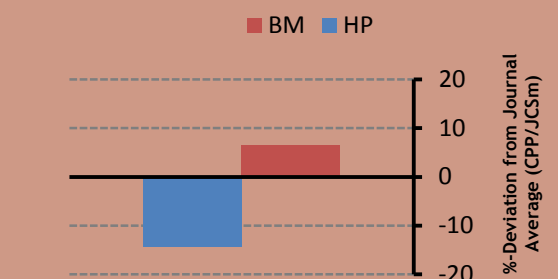


Text clouds created with www.wordle.net

References

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- Van Raan, A.F.J. (2000). The Pandora's Box of Citation Analysis: Measuring Scientific Excellence - The Last Evil? In B. Cronin & H.B. Atkins (Eds.), *The Web of Knowledge: A Festschrift in honor of Eugene Garfield* (pp. 301-319). Medford, NJ: Information Today.

The impact of both literature sets was computed in relation to the combined impact of the journals they were taken from. This was done using the CPP/JCSm-Indicator (van Raan, 2000) for the time period from 2000 until today.



The PP-related literature is cited somewhat below average (ca. 14%) in HP, and slightly above average (ca. 6%) in BM.

Conclusion

The development of literature on 'quality of life' and 'well-being' has continuously risen in the fields of Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology in the last two decades. This increasing interest probably manifested itself in the institutionalization of Positive Psychology. From a bibliometric viewpoint, the related literature has found its place within BM and HP. Despite this, it is to be noted that the term 'positive psychology' itself is seldom used within the analyzed literature. Differences between BM and HP in regard to PP-related literature are small, with BM showing a slightly steeper upwards trend and slightly higher impact. The different CPP/JCSm-values are both to be considered in the 'around the average'-range according to van Raan (2000).

The insight in the thematic emphases within BM and HP provided by the clouds is sometimes consistent with commonly used definitions of the fields, but sometimes surprising, as in BM's focus on spirituality.