

It is my great pleasure to write about the influence of Dr. Paul Wong, who has been a leading voice in the science of well-being for many years. Paul's focus on meaning as a core variable in well-being - possibly the most important variable - was both prescient and highly influential. I could not possibly cover all of his contributions, so I'll confine my comments to his influence on positive psychology.

When positive psychology was first introduced, the early research had a clear tendency to focus on positive emotions. Many critics correctly pointed out that negative emotions are part of the human experience as well. Paul had already written about the necessity of including negative emotions in any comprehensive model of well-being. Further, while many positive psychologists acknowledged that negative emotions were necessary, they did not specify exactly how they could be integrated into positive psychology. Once again, Paul was ahead of the field with his approach that recognized the necessity of negative emotions and showed how they could be integrated into models of well-being.

Paul life-long focus on meaning has also helped point the way toward a new vision for positive psychology. In the early years of positive psychology, the construct of meaning was not given priority. When the importance of meaning was recognized, it was conceptualized primarily in terms of positive emotionality. That is, meaning provided for hope or a connection to something larger than the self. When the possibility was raised that suffering might be related to meaning, suffering was viewed only as a stimulus for the search for meaning. That is, suffering was only a means toward a final sense of meaning that was defined once again primarily by positive emotionality. In contrast, Paul advocated for a more profound view in which suffering is a necessary component of a richer, fuller, and more mature life; a life that both accepts and simultaneously transcends the simple polarities of positive and negative emotions. Paul reminded positive psychologists that people need to confront the negative existential givens of life and still act with courage, creativity, and faith even in the midst of the full reality of suffering and death. His ideas pointed the way toward a new vision for positive psychology; an "existential positive psychology" that embraces the full range of human experience.

Paul also expanded the boundaries of positive psychology by recognizing that positive psychology had neglected faith and spirituality. Drawing on his Asian heritage,

he drew attention to the elegant perspectives on well-being offered by Eastern wisdom. Integrating these ideas into Western psychology, he presented the idea of “chaironic happiness” which denotes a spiritual gift or a sense of contentment grounded in a deep familiarity with a spiritual or self-transcendent dimension.

Throughout his career Paul has consistently pointed the way toward a new vision of well-being. Although he often swam against the current, the positive psychology of the future will look very much like his model of existential positive psychology.

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