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Keywords
positive psychology, self-help, Anthony Robbins, well-being

Disciplines
Other Psychology | Psychology | Social Psychology

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Unleashing the Power:

Anthony Robbins, Positive Psychology, and the Quest for Human Flourishing

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University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: James O. Pawelski

August 1, 2011

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Anthony Robbins, Positive Psychology, and the Quest for Human Flourishing

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Abstract

This paper is written to compare two well-being movements: positive psychology and the self-help movement as modeled by Anthony Robbins, a well-known self-help, motivational and empowerment guru, author and speaker who has been internationally popular since the 1980s. This paper will analyze both theories of well-being and associated interventions that lead to more well-being from both schools of thought, including a case study analysis of an intervention conducted by Anthony Robbins at one of his seminars. The author seeks to create a bridge between the two fields and propose future research directions using positive psychology as the framework for measurement and analysis of Anthony Robbins' interventions and techniques.

Finding happiness and fulfillment has been as much a part of the human condition as alleviating suffering. As our human existence evolved and developed, so have our approaches towards creating a happy, fulfilling and flourishing life. However, until fairly recently the study of creating "good" lives has been largely ignored by experimental psychology. This paper is written to compare two well-being movements: positive psychology and the self-help movement, as modeled by Anthony Robbins. This paper will analyze the theories of well-being of the two movements, as well as interventions from each that are intended to enhance well-being. The author seeks to create a bridge between the two fields and open avenues to study the self-help field empirically.

Background

Positive Psychology

The field of psychology had been shaped by the need for classification and treatment for the mental illnesses of the soldiers returning from the First World War. Up until that point, the field of psychology had three distinct purposes: curing mental illness, improving the lives of all people, and nurturing what is best in life. The creation of the Veterans Administration and National Institutes of Mental Heath in 1941 and 1946, respectively, shifted psychology's emphasis onto researching and relieving mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Martin Seligman, in his 1998 American Psychological Association presidential address, argued that up until that point psychology had largely focused only on pathologies and suffering and had ignored the positive side of life. Positive psychology was founded to encourage the understanding and fostering of the qualities of life that lead to human well-being, optimal functioning, and flourishing (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and unite the disparate lines of thought on well-being under one field.

Positive psychology has faced numerous challenges, including psychology's legacy of focusing on mental pathology and damage, which not only trivializes but also oversimplifies the positive to be only the opposite of "negative" or simply the absence of the negative (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In addition, humans seem to have a built-in negativity bias, rendering human problems and suffering as more "real", demanding and memorable in our subjective experience (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), making well-being and happiness seem insignificant to study (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Lastly, defining the positive is complex and multidimensional and leads to numerous disputes within and surrounding the field.

Positive psychology was not founded to conflict with "psychology as usual", or even to make the rest of psychology "negative;" but instead positive psychology was founded to complement psychology (specifically clinical psychology) by expanding its focus (Gable & Peterson, 2005). Positive psychology was founded on the idea that as humans we have the ability, agency and desire to live a happy, fulfilling and flourishing life. Positive psychology argues that not only is flourishing and well-being worth measuring but also that it *is* measurable. Positive psychology serves as both a lens and methodology for studying the flourishing side of life, by applying the scientific methods used to the study mental illness and distress to understand mental health and well-being. Seligman (2011) furthers that the study of positive psychology is really a descriptive process of defining well-being and its levers. So, in positive psychology's infancy, the field's focus has largely been on simply defining well-being, what contributes to well-being (e.g. optimistic explanatory style) and the strengths of individuals (Seligman, Peterson, & Park, 2005). Only recently has positive psychology begun to shift into looking into

interventions, which puts it as a sharp contrast to the self-help movement.

Self-Help

The self-help movement has been growing exponentially since the late 1950's with rises not only in the purchases of self-help books but also in publications of self-help books (Whelan, 2004). Self-help books are non-fiction books that make explicit promises for positive change, understanding of personal goals and self-worth and advice for behavior modification (Whelan, 2004). Self-help is about using advice and insight to live a better life by empowering the individual to feel they have control over one's inner life, expressed behaviors and life outcomes. Self-help books are written for the lay reader and attempt to attract the maximum audience. These titles purport to be of immediate and practical use to the reader, offering instruction and advice. Unlike academic literature, a self-help book derives its credibility more from anecdotal evidence than from scientific data and research (Whelan, 2004). Self-help books fall into various, sometimes overlapping categories including: (a) psychological, dealing with confidence, anxiety and interpersonal relations; (b) spiritual, dealing with religious metaphysics; (c) success, dealing with social achievement and attainment of goals; (d) sexual, regarding physical sexual activity and its emotional ramifications; (e) disease classifications, dealing with depression, addiction and illness; (f) personal image, especially books on weight loss and body satisfaction; and (g) parenting, including behavioral and medical advice on raising children (Whelan, 2004, p. 4).

Self-help texts are believed to have been in vogue since the early 17th century, building on the Puritan ideals of hard work and diligence (Whelan, 2004). Despite most of the self-help literature being religious in nature, Benjamin Franklin's autobiography (1791) seemed to be the secular pinnacle of self-help books of the time and is still reread as a classic of character

development, having influenced much of the 20th century self-help books (Starker, 2004). Despite the early success of a secular book, much of self-help and psychology texts entered the popular stream of thought throughout the early 20th century through the guise of religion (i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous relies heavily on the idea of guidance and strength from a higher power and Norman Vincent Peale's (1952) *Power of Positive Thinking* which offered a sort of spiritual cleansing). As the self-help field developed from the 1930s to the 1950s, the nature of self-help became more secular and pragmatic (however religious and spiritual self-help texts still remain extremely popular) with Dale Carnegie and Dr. Spock rising to popularity. This also marked a shift away from development of character and increased focus on success and happiness as the outcomes of self-help, also marking the shift in American culture to a more commercial and capitalistic frame of mind. In the 1960s through the 1980s self-help began to be directed on the inner self, encouraging individuality and self-reflection. It was during this time the New Age movement, which stresses inner spirituality and understanding of the world, came into vogue. The humanist movement, led by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, was also overtaking psychology, emphasizing the power and authority of the individual. This led to what self-help started becoming in the 1980s and 1990s and for the most part still is today, a discipline which focuses more on personal action and responsibility, which argues that the individual is ultimately responsible in all ways for their distress and well-being (Whelan, 2004). This is the era of Oprah Winfrey and Anthony Robbins, where the individual is in control of their well-being and is expected to not only rise above circumstance but completely overpower it. Individuals seem to be perpetually seeking personal growth.

Some may argue that positive psychology may be the new direction of self-help. Positive psychology's interventions are self-help interventions with academic rigor (as demonstrated by

the placement of popular positive psychology books in self-help sections). These interventions are meant to be carried out and maintained by the individual. However, they work at a somewhat small scale and focus on cognitive aspects of well-being. Where self-help has been mainly focused on helping individuals help themselves (or commercial success depending how you look at it), with little regard to empirically established efficacy; positive psychology has been focused on helping individuals help themselves in a *measurable* way. In addition, positive psychology is more focused on observing and describing flourishing in concrete measurable avenues, while the self-help industry justifies its existence is more blindly prescriptive.

At the very least self-help helps individuals feel that they are not alone in their struggle and helps them believe there is escape from their suffering that is within their control. To some degree individuals that seek out self-help books and techniques already believe they have control over their lives and behaviors. It is this desire that leads people to not only seek out self-help texts but to go a further step and attend large conferences and seminars seeking advice and direction in how to live the optimal life.

Who is Anthony Robbins?

Anthony Robbins is a well-known self-help, motivational, and empowerment guru, author and speaker who has been popular since the 1980s. In addition to publishing numerous self-help books, selling 35 million books and audio coaching products, Robbins also claims to have worked with over 4 million people in more than 100 countries. Anthony Robbins conducts multiple seminars throughout the year including the 4-day long “Unleash the Power Within” (UPW) seminar that is held multiple times a year in different locations around the world. During the UPW seminar participants walk barefoot on hot coals at the end of the first evening’s session. The main point of the seminar is that achieving greatness requires the ability to unleash one's

personal power and take action. The Date with Destiny seminar is a 6-day live seminar meant to serve as an immersion experience to "understand why you feel and behave the way you do" and teach strategies that "will help you create the happiness, joy, love, passion, success and fulfillment you desire and deserve (retrieved from www.tonyrobbins.com, July 1, 2011)." Anthony Robbins primarily uses strategies from Neurolinguistics programming (NLP; or his version of NLP which he calls NeuroAssociative Conditioning), a set of therapeutic techniques meant to "reprogram" the individual's mind by acting on various behavioral-cognitive patterns.

Compared to other self-help methods such as books and other self-help seminars, Anthony Robbins takes a much more interactive role with his participants. This is in contrast to other self-help authors and speakers who rarely directly intervene or interact with their participants. Robbins is an interventionist in addition to being a guru. He creates a conversation instead of just talking at individuals. This paper is meant to look at Anthony Robbins as an interventionist and will refrain from analyzing the structure and ethics of the Robbins commercial organization and seminars. In addition, for this paper I will be focusing on Robbins's fundamental ideas around well-being and human motivation, specifically what Anthony Robbins argues are the six human needs to set up the framework in which his interventions operate in. However, I begin with positive psychology's theories of well-being and flourishing.

Theory

What is Flourishing?

Flourishing and well-being are notoriously difficult concepts to fully describe and define, as flourishing is neither the absence of illness and suffering nor the pure presence of happiness and joy (Keyes, 2002). To *flourish* means to live within an optimal range of human functioning,

one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience (Keyes, 2002; Fredrickson, 2009).

In this section we will briefly overview various theories that aim to describe well-being concluding with the most recent theory posited by Martin Seligman.

Theories of Well-Being

There have been numerous theories and approaches to well-being, many of which are not directly connected with positive psychology. Many of these argue that well-being can either be reduced to a number of components (i.e. Ryff: Psychological well-being theory) or that one or two factors are necessary for well-being above all (i.e. Ryan & Deci: self-determination theory). Maslow (1946) argues that the flourishing individual is a self-actualized individual, where an individual only becomes self-actualized passing through toll-gates of lower level needs. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), one must meet the lowest level of their needs, physiological needs and safety needs in order to survive and without these most basic needs being met one cannot even begin to think of striving towards other forms of well-being (i.e. an individual will need to feel secure that they will be physically safe in order to expand past thoughts of survival).

Ryan and Deci (2001) regard autonomy, competence (similar to environmental mastery) and positive relationships as the basic psychological needs, which must be met if we are to experience well-being. Ryff (1989) argues that psychological well-being comprises six components: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Diener (2000) emphasizes the importance of subjective experience and relies on self-reports of subjective well-being (SWB).

SWB normally refers to what people think and how they feel about their lives[1] (Diener, 2000). Huppert (2010) operationalized flourishing to have a set of core features (positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning and purpose) and a set of additional features (self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, self-determination, and positive relationships) mirroring the format of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

There seems to be two distinct theoretical approaches to well-being: the hedonic approach, which is concerned with pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction; and the eudaimonic approach, which is concerned with functioning and the realization of our potential (Ryff et al., 2004; Kahneman et al., 1999). Most well-being theories that aim to be comprehensive have components from both approaches.

Seligman's PERMA. Martin Seligman (2002) initially suggested that well-being research could be organized into three categories: the *pleasant* life, the *good* life, and the *meaningful* life. In *Flourish* (2011), Seligman revised this theory and proposed a broader theoretical framework for individual well-being and flourishing that built upon and added to his initial categories. According to Seligman individual well-being and flourishing encompass five independent components: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (abbreviated as PERMA). Each of these components was chosen based on three criteria: (a) it contributes to well-being; (b) it is pursued for its own sake; and (c) it is independent of the other components.

Positive emotion. Experiencing more positive emotions in relation to negative emotions has been shown to predict subjective well-being (Diener, 2000; Kahneman et al., 1999). If we

[1] Schwarz &Strack (1999) argue that measures of subjective well-being are largely on-the-spot reactions heavily influence by mood and not large, stable, and global evaluations of one's satisfaction with life.

placed all emotions on a spectrum ranging from pleasant to unpleasant, positive emotions (also referred to as positive affect or positivity) include emotions on the pleasant end (e.g., feeling grateful, upbeat; expressing appreciation, liking), while negative emotions (negative affect or negativity) represent the unpleasant end (e.g., feeling contemptuous, irritable; expressing disdain, disliking) (Fredickson & Losada, 2005). Most of the literature focuses on positive emotions in the following ten forms: joy, gratitude, serenity, interest hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love (Fredrickson, 2009). The relationship between positive and negative emotions over time is reflected as a *positivity ratio*, the ratio of pleasant feelings and sentiments to unpleasant ones over time (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).

Emotions have been explained from an evolutionary perspective because they tend to lead to specific action tendencies. For example, a negative emotion like fear can lead people to escape or attack a potential threat. According to broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions trigger upward spirals that allow one to broaden awareness and encourage exploration and building of personal coping resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Compared to negative emotions that narrow focus towards survival-oriented thoughts and behaviors, as necessitated when one is not meeting one's physical needs. Positive emotions have driven humans to evolve and flourish, in social surroundings when one is safe and secure in meeting one's physical needs. Positive emotions are often times fleeting and sometimes mild compared to negative emotions, but must be present for well-being to exist and ultimately to flourish (Fredrickson, 2009).

A wide spectrum of empirical evidence documents the adaptive value of positive emotions: including in marriage, friendship, income, work performance, and health (for reviews see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Pressman & Cohen, 2005). Evidence suggests that

positive emotions are not only a product of positive outcomes and well-being but in some ways positive emotions beget positive outcomes and well-being (Fredrickson, 2001).

For example, at the cognitive level, experiments have shown that positive emotions (normally induced through showing the participants a specific video or giving the participant a gift) widen an individual's scope of attention (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Rowe, Hirsch, & Anderson, 2005), broadens behavioral repertoires (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and increases intuition (Bolte, Goschkey, & Kuhl, 2003) and creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). Positive emotions have also been shown to predict resiliency in the face of adversity and to promote psychological growth (Ong et al., 2006; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). In the physical body, experiments have shown that induced positive emotions speed recovery from the effects of anxiety on cardiovascular system (Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000), and increases immune function (Davidson et al., 2003). In addition, there is also link between frequent positive emotions and longevity (Pressman & Cohen, 2005; Moskowitz, 2003; Levy, Slade, Kunkel, & Kasl, 2002; Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001; Ostir, Markides, Black, & Goodwin, 2000).

Positive emotions are, by nature, a subjective component of PERMA and can only be observed by asking the individual (Seligman, 2011). Even though it can be argued that well-being is reducible to positive emotions and happiness, it does not completely capture all of well-being (Seligman, 2002). Specifically it does not allow for those who have inherited lower positivity ratios or are not outwardly expressive to be considered to be flourishing (Seligman, 2011). In addition, people focused solely on attaining positive emotions find themselves on a hedonic treadmill, where people adapt rapidly to positive changes in their world and soon return to their baseline levels of happiness (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Kahneman, 1999; Lykken &

Tellegen, 1996). Positive emotions are an important aspect of flourishing but positive emotions are not *all of* flourishing.

Engagement. The engaged life is a life that pursues engagement, involvement and absorption in work, intimate relations, and leisure (Seligman, 2011; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that ultimately the self interprets the information and that our intentions can guide and focus our attention. When all the information taken in aligns with an individual's goals, passions, purpose and enjoyment, and when the activity's challenge level matches an individual's skill level, the individual experiences "flow." When a person is in a state of flow they are in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. In flow, time passes quickly, attention is completely focused on the activity and the sense of self is lost (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Living in a state of flow is sometimes thought of as the extreme end of engagement, and is difficult and exhausting to maintain. Getting into a state of engagement or flow is difficult to fully describe and operationalize. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that the good life is one where we experience flow and are engaged with life as much as we can. The engaged life is one grounded in the present. Maximizing states of flow and engagement is associated with reduced levels of depression and anxiety (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Engagement is also an aspect of PERMA that can only be assessed subjectively but is different from positive emotion in that by its inherent nature you only notice flow and engagement retrospectively.

Relationships. Having positive relationships has been cited as the most important life goal and social support has been shown valuable for recovery from illness, physiological functioning and mental health (Cohen & Herbert, 1996; Reis & Gable, 2003).

At the most basic level relationships move toward well-being in providing a support network that contributes to an individual's feeling of security, which allows them to broaden out and flourish (Fredrickson, 2002). Social support is the feeling of connectedness and comfort given to us by our peers, family, friends and significant others (Carver, Schier, & Weingtraub, 1989). It is the feeling that at 3 a.m. when you are in trouble, you have someone that you can call for help (Isaacowitz, Valliant, & Seligman, 2003). It is feeling and knowing that someone is there for us in both bad and good times. Seeking social support for instrumental reasons is seeking advice and information. Seeking social support for emotional reasons is seeking understanding or sympathy and tends to be used more for outlets for ventilation of one's feelings (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Feeling that one has social support greatly influences their feelings of well-being and can buffer against depressive symptoms (Bebbington, 1996; Brugha, 1990).

On the negative side, relationships can be one of the most powerful causes of distress (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). For example, death of a spouse and close family members are some of the most traumatic life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). In addition, troubled relationships and loneliness tend to be most common presenting problem in psychotherapy and have been linked to increased proclivity to depression and suicide attempts (Zayas et al., 2009; Cacioppo et al., 2006; Belle & Doucet, 2003; Pinsker, Nepps, Redfield, & Winston, 1985).

Although it is clear that relationships contribute towards well-being and are independent of the other components, it is unclear whether relationships are sought for their own sake or for positive emotions (Seligman, 2011). However, as demonstrated by the debilitating and unique suffering created in a relationships' absence, there is a force around relationships that drive

humans to seek others out and rely on them. People need other people; individuals generally will not flourish in isolation.

Meaning. When an individual understands their unique fit in the world and identify what they are trying to accomplish in their lives, they are said to have the presence of meaning in their life (Steger et al. 2009). Meaning refers to belonging and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self and is inherently outward driven.

Several investigations have established a positive link between meaning in life and well-being (Steger et al., 2009; Steger et al., 2008; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del-Gaiso, 2006; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Reker, 2005; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Urry et al., 2004; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987). Those who have a sense of meaning to their lives have been found to be more optimistic (Compton et al., 1996) and have higher self-esteem (Steger et al., 2006). Those with a sense of meaning also report less depression and anxiety (Steger et al., 2006) and less suicidal ideation (Harlow et al., 1986). However, search for meaning, activity of people's desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives, tends to be associated with a lack of meaning and those individuals that identify as searching for meaning are less satisfied with their lives (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008).

Part of meaning is subjective in that you determine what *feels* meaningful for your own life but logic and reason can also weigh the meaning of your life. People find meaning in their lives through various means including positive relationships, accomplishment, and altruism. Meaning becomes a target for the individual to strive towards, and without it the individual does not thrive. Having a sense of meaning in one's life is what will keep the person living versus

purely trying to survive and also seems to be what helps pull people through adverse situations. Without meaning the person will be grounded in the past and present and will not be able to push into the future (Seligman, 2011).

Accomplishment. Accomplishment and achievement represents an individual's ability to exert mastery over their environment (Seligman, 2011). Accomplishment allows the individual a measurable way to know their actions are meaningful and to allow them to feel efficacious in their actions. This provides the individual a sense of control in the path of their lives and gives feedback to the individual that they are on the right path. Unlike meaning, accomplishment is more focused on the feedback being given back from the environment than it is on what the individual is contributing (Seligman, 2011).

Self-efficacy is one's belief that their actions will produce what they want them to produce (Maddux, 2009). Similar to "the little engine that could" developing your beliefs of self-efficacy, ideas of what we can accomplish, we can increase what we actually accomplish (Maddux, 2009). Another way to frame achievement in a way that is conducive to the other elements of well-being is to focus on developing grit, perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). By developing and sticking to long-term goals this gives an individual meaning in one's life while also giving a way for the individual to achieve in one's life.

Where accomplishment and achievement might be dangerous for well-being is similar to the dangers of having a life purely seeking positive emotions. Constantly living a one-up achievement life leads to a different form of a hedonic treadmill, as they rise in their accomplishments and possessions, their expectations also rise. Soon they habituate to the new level, and it no longer makes them happy. Similar to relationships, it is difficult to discern if

people seek accomplishment to make themselves happier or for the sake of accomplishment itself. However, people seem to go through great lengths and risk for accomplishment, specifically in sport where athletes push beyond physical pain for sometimes very little reward, just for the chance to accomplish something.

PERMA as a whole. The components of PERMA are not only are important to well-being individually, but also in how they interact and contribute as a whole. Oftentimes, in one's life people will be thriving in one area but languishing in another, which can still lead to well-being. An individual can live purely the achieving life or the meaningful life and be flourishing in her own way. However, languishing in one area can cause a vacuum and permeate to the other areas of your life. For example, an individual can be accomplishing a lot in your work life by sacrificing your relationships. In the short term this strategy could lead to more accomplishment and more flourishing for that individual but in the long term the individual can be left unfulfilled, disconnected, and burnt out. The same can be said for the reverse. If an individual focuses solely on relationships and ignores the other aspects of PERMA, the individual could lose their sense of self and become highly dependent on the relationship. Despite the fact that it seems that individuals tend to fall into the trap of living in one component of PERMA, individuals tend to flourish the most when they have all aspects of PERMA.

PERMA is not without its constraints. First, each of the components of PERMA is only good up to a point and seems to function best in moderation. Second, PERMA only serves to describe what a flourishing individual looks like in individual components but gives little insight into why individual flourishes with all the components or how the components within PERMA interact. Lastly, PERMA describes outcomes and how the flourishing individual appears but little insight into how an individual knows they are flourishing. There is no real bright line in

how much each of the components is necessary for flourishing, if an individual needs a minimum of each component or if an individual can flourish by focusing on one component. PERMA is also similar to the other multi-component well-being theories (i.e. Ryff & Huppert). What distinguishes PERMA from other theories is the independence of the components as pathways towards well-being. In theory, an individual could live solely the meaningful life, for example.

Despites PERMA's weaknesses and similarities to other well-being theory it is the best for our purposes in that it allows the individual to interpret each of the components in their own way. PERMA serves well as outcomes that can be measured without prescribing specific ways to reach them. In addition, in the components are independent of each other, they allow for clean measurement of each component and also each exists independently and subjectively within the individual. In other words PERMA is ultimately rooted at cause in the individual. There are however some caveats to that.

Well-being in context. Even though much of our well-being is within our control, well-being exists in a social interactive context where an individual can flourish most when their needs for flourishing align with their culture's ideals. An individual's well-being is often dependent on the group's well-being and how they fit into their group. An individual's psyche does not live in a solitary vacuum away from everyone and everything, living in a positive happy delusion. Invariably people interact and influence each other's emotions and overall well-being. For example, Fowler and Christakis (2008) describes how happiness can spread through social networks, suggesting that the people you are closest to have an impact on your happiness. It highlights that those around you can influence something as personal as your emotions. This study also brings up how an individual can influence their social network. In the study, the happiest people were in the center of their social network.

The environment interacts with other aspects of PERMA and well-being. For example, one's sense of meaning or values in their lives is primarily within the control of the individual but can still be influenced by the environment. Many times the culture and community shape the values of the individual and what one feels give them purpose to their lives, but in some cases the individual may have values that deviate from that of their community. If one finds meaning in doing something that is not approved of in their community, it may hinder their degree of flourishing because of the level of distress created. For example, a woman lives in a community with extremely conservative gender values that believes a woman should stay in the home and raise a large brood. This would be fine if the woman finds meaning in solely raising a family; however, if the woman finds meaning in her life by being an entrepreneur or a scientist and not raising a family this raises conflict. The woman will be forced to decide between being unfulfilled raising a family in her community or being ostracized from her community. This woman may have to ultimately leave her community to flourish, but that could also be extremely distressful.

Similarly, if one's personality does not match with the dominant personality of the culture she is living in they also have significantly lower chances at flourishing and lower well-being and self-esteem (Fulmer et al.'s, in press). Imagine the experience of an immigrant entering a new country dramatically different from their home country. The person can feel extreme distress from not feeling like a part of his or her new culture, even if it seems as simple as eating a new cuisine and as dramatic as not speaking the language. In extreme cases, those in the new country discriminate against immigrants and their culture, sometimes even systematically by the new country's government. Imagine having immigrated to a country seeking a better life and finding that even speaking your native language or wearing your

customary dress is not permitted outside of the home. In a way, it is as if the new culture is telling the individual that personal values and identities are not respected in their new country. The individual is ostracized and discriminated against for it until she assimilates to the new culture. If one's environment does not provide opportunities to do what makes them flourish and happy, you cannot expect flourishing to occur.

Well-being in a group can boil down to how you take care of a fish. You have to clean the fish but you also have to clean the water the fish is in. Helping the individual could be fruitless and possibly even detrimental without helping his or her environment. Even though it may be impossible to completely change an environment to meet all the individuals' needs, there should be at least more discourse between various fields in increasing well-being for the individuals in their group and creating a group that encourages flourishing.

Robbins's human needs psychology.

"All human motivation is directed by the drive to meet six basic human needs" –Anthony Robbins, 2010

At the foundation of Robbins's philosophy is the idea that humans are driven by six human needs, four basic human needs include:

- Certainty- the need to be safe and comfortable
- Variety- the need for mental and physical stimulation
- Significance- the need to feel special and worthy of attention
- Love and Connection- the need to feel loved and connected to others

And two spiritual needs:

- Growth- The need to develop and expand
- Contribution- the need to contribute to something larger than themselves

Robbins argues that it is the interaction and ranking of these human needs that largely determine how an individual lives and makes decisions towards their well-being. This is different from Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs in that there is no progression towards a self-actualized person, individuals are always needing to meet these needs.

Of the four basic human needs certainty and variety are constantly conflicting; in addition, significance and love and connection are constantly conflicting. For example, an individual that ranks significance above connection will often sacrifice love and connection to feel significant, because in order to feel unique you have to give up your connection with others. The six human needs and how they rank in the individual serve as a sort of mental blueprint for the individual's life. He also argues that when an individual's life circumstances do not align with your mental blueprint an individual will experience distress.

Human needs psychology is not without its criticism. At first glance, Robbins's theory of the six human needs seems to be too simplistic to be comprehensive. However, the human needs (unlike PERMA) exist in an interactive context that may actually make it almost overly complex to be able to truly understand each individual's motivations fully. It also noted that no one can truly understand an individual's motivations and cognitions, and Robbins largely simply asserts these needs. Robbins also never explains if an individual is flourishing and optimal when they're meeting all their needs or if there is any particular threshold for them. However, human needs does provide a sort of neat heuristic to frame people's behaviors and motivations, that provides slightly more depth for explaining what drives some individuals differently than others.

PERMA and the Human Needs. Even though some of the six human needs fit neatly within Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework (e.g. love and connection can be seen as synonymous with positive relationship), the human needs also can all feed into each of the different categories

of PERMA. One can look at the human needs as different forms of positive emotions: one can feel significant, loved, secure, stimulated, growing and altruistic. Engagement and flow can primarily represent the interaction between uncertainty and certainty and can also be represented by the interplay of connection with self, significance, and growth. As we will see in the case study positive relationships are those that meet our six human needs. Not only do we need to feel loved and connected by others we also need to feel significant, stimulated, secure, and growing in the relationship. Meaning and achievement seem to be most closely related to significance but both meaning and achievement can be found with any of the needs. PERMA is describing the outcomes of what a flourishing individual may have or strive towards, while the six human needs and their interacts serve as both pathways and tollgates for the different categories of PERMA. By combining these two frameworks we are able to understand Robbins's interventions better and also possibly create powerful ones that could be used in positive psychology.

Interventions

Positive Interventions

In addition to describing the flourishing individual, positive psychology has relied on the idea that an individual is able to create the flourishing life for herself through building on various components of well-being. Positive psychology has spent nearly as much time on showing that individuals are ultimately at cause of their well-being as positive psychology has spent describing what well-being is. In sum, individuals have been found to be able to understand their motives and emotions and direct their behavior toward their most personally-valued goals (Brown & Ryan, 2004; Salovey, Caruso, & Mayer, 2004). Individuals are capable of directing their attention to shape their thoughts, feelings, and subjective reality (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Individuals can self-regulate, choosing more highly valued, deliberate responses instead of those automatic to them (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006). All of this can be affected by the individual's beliefs on their self-efficacy and hope for the outcome (Maddux, 2009; Lopez et al., 2004). This increased focus on what individuals *can* do instead of what they *cannot* do, allows positive psychology to contribute more than just a happiology to "psychology as usual." Positive psychology contributes a sense of optimism to psychology by showing that an individual's well-being is more in their control than initially thought.

Positive interventions are intended to increase well-being by cultivating the components of PERMA both separately and cohesively. Interventions can take two approaches, alleviation of the bad (red cape) and enhancement of the good (green cape: Pawelski, MAPP 602, September, 2010). Interventions can also be implemented in two different contexts: clinical populations (severe weather) and non-clinical populations (normal weather)[2]. In the four possible combinations of capes (method) and weather (context), three result in what could be defined as a positive intervention. Positive interventions may be: green cape in normal weather (i.e. enhancing a strength), green cape in severe weather (i.e. well-being therapy), and red cape in normal weather (i.e. shoring up a weakness). Traditional interventions are "red cape" in "severe weather" (i.e. psychotherapy for crisis). Another way to think of positive interventions versus traditional interventions is to align it with physical health. Traditional interventions are more like emergency medicine where the bleeding has to be stopped before they can focus rehabilitating the individual. However, interventions that are focused on well-being like exercise can both help a type 2 diabetic (severe weather) and someone free of illness (normal weather).

The most common severe weather setting where positive interventions are used is in the

[2] For the purposes of this paper this is an simplified view of interventions, but it is important to acknowledge that there a lot of grey area in these categories.

treatment of depressive disorder symptoms. Positive interventions have been found to decrease depressive symptoms and oftentimes serve as an effective complement to traditional psychotherapy (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Examples of positive interventions that have been found to decrease depressive symptoms and increase well-being include:

> Gratitude visit: Participants were given one week to write and then deliver a letter of gratitude in person to someone who had been especially kind to them but had never been properly thanked,
> Using signature strengths in a new way: Participants were asked to take our inventory of character strengths online at www.authentichappiness.org and to receive individualized feedback about their top five ("signature") strengths (Peterson et al., 2005a). They were then asked to use one of these top strengths in a new and different way every day for one week.
> Three good things in life: Participants were asked to write down three things that went well each day and their causes every night for one week. In addition, they were asked to provide a causal explanation for each good thing (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005, pg 416).

Anthony Robbins Interventions A Case study: Sandra

Anthony Robbins in collaboration with Cloé Madanes, a psychotherapist that has set up a intervention and coaching training program with Robbins, occasionally post videos on their blog (robbinsmadanescoachtraining.com) from some of their live events of interventions performed by Anthony Robbins. These videos are then narrated by Madanes and break down some of the intervention aspects and theories employed my Robbins in the intervention.

This intervention is of an 18-year-old girl from Australia named Sandra who raises her hand identifying as being suicidal at Robbins's Date with Destiny event (retrieved from http://robbinsmadanescoachtraining.com/?p=148). Overall, Robbins is brutally straightforward, bordering on offensive at times. He does this in addition to using humor to create a shock in both the crowd and Sandra to break theirs and her behavioral patterns. Sandra seems to be both self-aware and honest about her feelings and thoughts, which Robbins acknowledges and

rewards by regularly cheering and hugging her for her admissions. It is important to note that anyone that raises their hand at such a large event admitting suicidal thoughts, wants help (or at the very least attention) and is willing to be honest and open. This highlights the importance of commitment on the part of the participant for interventions to work. Sandra is standing up making an extremely public commitment to change and improve her well-being, which in turn can produce stronger results than if she were making a commitment while reading a book (Wheelan, 2004). This may be the most important aspect of interventions in the Robbins setting, in that participants make very public commitments to change.

Robbins asks Sandra what she uses suicide for, implying that suicidal ideation is really just a means to an ends. Robbins believes that suicidal behavior and depression, much like other behaviors, are used to meet an individual's basic human needs. When an individual does not feel like they can meet their needs in healthier or positive ways they find negative ways that although painful, meet at least two of their needs. Sandra says she uses the suicide to get attention from her mother, which meets her need for significance but more importantly meets her need for love and connection. According to Anthony Robbins, Sandra had both significance and love and connection as her top needs that both creates an almost paralyzing consistent conflict where she is not fully being able to meet one need without also meeting the other. For example, in order for Sandra to feel like her need for love and connection is being met she has to also feel significant in the relationship.

Throughout this intervention, Robbins refers to Sandra's "true nature." This is a common theme for Robbins, an optimistic belief in that all individuals are good at heart. Robbins repeatedly frames an identity for Sandra as a compassionate and thoughtful but pained individual that would never be able to pain her family by going through with suicide. Robbins holds Sandra

to high standard of being unique by not taking the average path of using negative behavior like suicidal ideation to meet her needs. He uses his knowledge of what needs she ranks highest to create leverage against suicidal thoughts.

Robbins does not spend much time trying to understand or question Sandra's inner dialogue or suicidal thoughts but instead focuses on alternatives to suicidal ideation and creating a positive identity for Sandra to align with, while dissociating her from the identity that uses suicidal ideation. Ultimately, what Robbins is doing, is associating more pain to suicide and more benefit to meeting her needs other ways. He is also indirectly using a positivity ratio (Fredrickson & Lombardo, 2005), by spending much more time on the positive than on the negative. This highlights that a heavier focus on building the positive in an individual's life can pull people further than just focusing on fixing the negative.

Once again, Robbins's blunt style is a bit disconcerting but is heavily balanced by him willing to reward Sandra for her honesty by being affectionate and laudatory of her. Robbins dances on a line winning her over but also being brutally honest. He is also very careful to avoid sounding judgmental, but Robbins repeatedly says that everyone needs to meet their needs and will do whatever it takes, so while being accepting of the behavior he also does not condone it.

At this point Robbins brings up both Sandra's mother and her older sister Candy. What is interesting is that Sandra's mother did not know Sandra was suicidal. Sandra claims that she was hoping that she would not have to say anything, that some how "she would just know." Robbins injects backhanded humor (which Robbins does often) and claims that if she was trying to get significance she was doing a bad job at it.

You can immediately see the difference between Sandra and the rest of her family. While her family is bubbly, enthusiastic and extroverted, Sandra is calmer, restrained and

introverted. Robbins points out the differences in communication styles between the mother and daughters and asserts that there is not absence of love or significance in their relationship but a miscommunication of that love and significance between the family members. Robbins then continues to work with family using unconventional methods to foster communication, specifically non-verbal communication between the mother and daughters. What really distinguishes Robbins from other interventionist is his proclivity in engaging the whole body in his interventions, which stems from Robbins's belief that emotional state resides in the triad. The triad claims that emotional state is determined by an individual's beliefs, language and physiology. Beliefs are what individuals choose to mentally focus on a persistent basis. Similar to ideas in cognitive behavioral therapy, Robbins believes that beliefs ultimately serve as heuristics in our lives that help us sort information and make quick decisions on how to behave, but once they become limiting, beliefs block human potential. Robbins believes how we use our language to ask questions to ourselves, dictates our focus and our beliefs. Lastly, Robbins argues that emotion is stems from physiology and what an individual does with their body. At both his seminars and during the interventions he engages the body almost over dramatically to produce emotions. Robbins also highlights body language cues throughout the interventions.

Physiology is probably what distinguishes him most from other interventionists. He never relies on just the cognitive to create emotional change. Robbins does this with Sandra and her family in two ways. First, by having Sandra (and later her mother) pass her hand repeatedly over the word courage printed on another participant's shirt, while reading it over and over again. Even though this is partly a hypnotic pattern [3] he engages the body to get the message across that Sandra (and later her mother) needs to internalize courage and live with fear instead

[3] The hypnotic patterns used by Robbins are outside the scope of this paper, but are used heavily in both the forms of metaphors and explicit trance instructions

of trying to live in certainty. The second example where Robbins uses the body is when he instructs Sandra and her mother to lock eyes for an extended period of time (around 20 minutes) and communicate their feelings through their eyes and then instructs Sandra to later do the same exercise with her sister. This seemed to be an extremely powerful exercise that built intimacy and trust between the family members, but cannot be verbalized.

Towards the end of the intervention, Robbins emphasizes a few points, specifically the idea that each of the women in this family need to develop courage in giving love without the certainty that it will be returned. He repeatedly mentions through his seminars that the quality of an individual's life is in direct proportion with how much uncertainty an individual can be comfortable with. Towards the end of the intervention, the intervention becomes less about Sandra and more about the mother. This could have happened for a number of reasons including the daughters being representative of two parts of the mother and also because Robbins understood that without taking care of the family dynamic there is little he can do to help Sandra stop having suicidal thoughts. At the end of the intervention there is a visible difference in the demeanor of each of the women but there is no follow up to this intervention so it is unknown how the women turned out.

The main messages Robbins communicated with this intervention is first there are healthier ways to meet human needs however the needs must be met. Second, the importance of dealing with the context the individual functions in (i.e. Sandra's family) in addition to helping the individual. Lastly, that individuals need to develop courage in the face of uncertainty in order to be giving first instead of waiting to receive.

Why Robbins's interventions are difficult to test and the Robbins Social Context.

There is no denying that Anthony Robbins is a charismatic individual and most of his success in self-help can most likely be attributed to that. There is a strong possibility there is something just about Anthony Robbins that makes his interventions powerful. Up until this point Robbins and other self-help interventions have largely been left untested because of legal and proprietary reasons in addition to the fact that Robbins interventions do not lend well to testing and replication in the traditional way.

Beyond Anthony Robbins's unique personality as an interventionist, there are also qualities about his seminars that may magnify the results of the interventions (some of which that have already been touched on). First, it's the high energy dynamic of the event itself. Robbins seminars are reminiscent of rock concerts, with high-energy popular music blasting at entrances, club like lighting with bright colored lights and animations all over the room and dancing on stage and in the audience. This creates an atmosphere of play and high energy in addition to lowered inhibitions. It also makes it permissible for individuals to play and be a different person in this environment than they would normally have been (Eret, 2001).

The Robbins seminars are also immersive. Instead of traditional therapy where a patient attends once or twice a week and then reentering their context, possibly undoing all work done in session. In contrast, at a Robbins seminar, most individuals travel to these conferences, leaving behind obligation from family and work. The participants are then living, breathing and eating this seminar and their personal behavior for 4-7 days. This highly focused time void of most distractions, gives the individual the freedom and ability to create a new and better identity (Eret, 2001).

In addition to physically being in a new environment you are also in a completely new social environment, with different people and different standards and models of behaviors. In

the Robbins environment it is encouraged to be zestful, enthusiastic and sometimes almost manic. People are physically more affectionate and intimate with each other. In addition the other participants (especially those that have repeated the events multiple times) are constantly discussing lessons from the seminar and are integrating new behavioral patterns in their lives. The event is an example of where the Robbins event not only changes the individual he also changes the environment, thus taking care of both the fish and water. He provides a context for the individuals to be "optimal versions of themselves"

There is no doubt that the experience of the seminar itself is an intense experience. However, because of how dramatically Robbins takes individuals out of their normal context, does the change seen at the seminars stick? Once the music stops and all the participants go their separate ways are the participants able to take this new person with them?

From personal observation, having been involved and connected with the Robbins environment for almost a decade, there tends to be three scenarios: First, an individual successfully is able to maintain the momentum from the conference and is able to take massive steps towards increasing their well-being; second, the individual feels the need to repeatedly return to events to tap into this social group and the identity they hold in the Robbins environment; third, the individual returns home and returns either to baseline or only slightly above or even below ("after event burn out"). The latter seem to be the most likely scenario as most people at the seminar you never hear back from again and seem to just go on with their lives. There is also a fairly significant following of people in the Robbins environment that regularly return to events to volunteer ("crew"), some even attending Robbins events 10-20 times a year. These individuals often cycle through all the Robbins events and seminars and "move up" to leadership positions as volunteers and sometimes eventually becoming paid Anthony

Robbins corporation coaches. The line between dependency and dedication of these individuals is thin as they live, breathe and eat Robbins and have made the Robbins environment their life. These are extreme cases but there is a group of people that are not dependent on the Robbins environment per se but do repeatedly return to events.

The question still remains of if having these seminars or Robbins's interventions create lasting change and contribute to individual's well-being.

Future Research Directions

The need to measure and develop empirical evidence is what positive psychology contributes to self-help. Positive psychology developed a methodology and language to measure flourishing and well-being that was not in place before. Since most people that go to self-help books and seminars, like the Robbins events, are not part of the clinical population and are focused on going beyond neutral, positive psychology works well as a methodology and line of thought in measuring the effects of positive life-changing events like going to an empowerment seminar. Studying self-help and interventions used in the Robbins environment could help positive psychology create a Robbins like movement and improve the well-being to a wider spread audience.

It is important to note that Robbins's audience is dramatically different from the participants primarily seen in both traditional psychology and positive psychology. Most of the participants in psychology research have been undergraduates, so to some degree above average intellectually. This is not to say that Robbins does not attract intellectually minded people to his conferences but he does attract a wider net than those that participate in typical intervention research. This is important because by testing at these conferences we are adding diversity to the

field just from a population standpoint. It is also important because it highlights that positive interventions may have more of a cognitive focus than they should have.

An important first step in investigating Robbins is to look at Robbins holistically and then tease apart interventions. This is important for future research directions, as we would first have to measure the degree of change in a Robbins event. We are first looking at Robbins seminars as a form of short-term therapy, where ideally we would measure well-being immediately before and after events and preferably long term after events. Normally, therapeutic interventions are focused on parsing out variables and participants as much as possible, but by doing that too early we could lose important insight into how Robbins seminars as a whole work as an intervention. It possible that on their own the specific interventions used by Robbins have no effect when replicated by another practitioner or even by Robbins outside one of these seminars. The more we can parse this out the more knowledge we can get about this dynamic. Ideally, doing longitudinal studies that are more focused on effectiveness instead of efficacy will lead to parsing out specific interventions or programs that can be replicated by other interventionists (Seligman, 1995).

Unfortunately, there is one element in the nature of self-help that could severely limit these two fields is that self-help and Anthony Robbins seminars are driven by profit, so attempts to measure their interventions have been limited. It is also important to note that these seminars spend a lot of time advertising and pitching for the participants to go to the next seminar and constantly trying to prove to the participants that their seminars work. Ideally it would be best to measure the effectiveness of Robbins interventions by focusing measurement on the participants that stand up and receive one on one interventions in front of the audience or test the effectiveness of Anthony Robbins's not for profit foundation, that was founded to teach

empowerment methods used by Robbins to underprivileged groups events instead of at Robbins's for profit events.

The Anthony Robbins Foundation presented its first UPW-Youth Leadership Program in Orlando, Florida in 2004. Hundreds of students, ages 12 through 17 have since participated in this worldwide program. UPW-Youth Leadership is a three-day program (the youth participants do not participate in the final day of the seminar that focuses on physical health) held in conjunction with the UPW seminar. 10-20 youth participants participate fully in the Unleash The Power Within event with over 3000 other adult participants but are also isolated in their own group.

The Anthony Robbins Foundation Global Youth Leadership Summit (GYLS) is a five-day program providing an environment designed to boost summit participants into leadership roles that will change their lives and that of their community. Over 100 youth participants representing 20 countries come together as youth ambassadors, alumni, youth leaders, and youth coaches annually join together in San Diego. The participants are mentored by various Global Youth Leadership Summit's format includes small group discussions, hands-on service learning experiences, leadership simulation games and exercises. The summit often also includes a board break ceremony and ropes courses. Keynote speakers from around the world present topics designed to enable summit participants to identify their own particular leadership strengths. At the conclusion of GYLS, participants are encouraged to identify personal goals and a commitment to community service. Robbins does not normally present at these events, but his ideas are at the foundation of the camp.

Studying Anthony Robbins's strategies through their foundation's youth camps gives a more diverse sample than their massive seminar. This also isolates the strategies away from the sales pitches typical of for profit seminars.

Interventions that could possibly isolated

There are a number of interventions that could be isolated outside of events that do not seem pertinent to Robbins's ability as an interventionist.

The Dickens Process

At the Unleash the Power Within seminars, Robbins guides participants through the Dickens's Process, so named after its inspiration from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol.* Robbins begins by asking the participants what limiting belief has held them back the most in the past. He then guides (Robbins is guiding the participants through a waking state hypnotic visualization trance) the participants through an intense and emotionally painful process of having them associate not only to the past pain that resulted from that limiting belief but also to the future pain that will result if they were to hold onto that belief. He then engages then guides them through changing that limiting belief and guiding through the same timeline but associating them to the positive emotions they would experience after casting away that limiting belief. This process is prerecorded and can easily be replicated outside the lab, but it is an intense and should be supervised.

Firewalks and Board Breaks

Robbins became known for having massive firewalks at his Unleash the Power With seminars, where over 3000 participants walk across hot coals. At other events, including his youth events, he teaches board breaks, where participants break through a piece of wood with the heel of their hand. Both these activities are meant to represent overcoming obstacles to reach

your goals and better self. In both of these activities he teaches participants to get "into state," by which he means eliciting a powerful positive emotional state by doing a power move (which normally looks like punching the air), which "rapidly changes physiology."

Both of these interventions are normally the big points in the Anthony Robbins seminars and could be taken out of the context of the seminars, replicated, and tested independently, using well-being measurements and interviews to measure changes in the individuals.

Conclusion

Anthony Robbins, self-help and positive psychology all share the common goal of helping people flourish and live full lives. Unfortunately, there has been a significant amount of animosity between self-help and both traditional and positive psychology despite having significant overlap in their ideas and goals. Despite Anthony Robbins being largely distant from and unfounded on traditional empirical evidence, his ideas have touched on something deep in human nature, even if it is only in what people are seeking when they look for well-being and personal growth. In addition, I am not claiming that all or even any of Robbins's ideas are completely unique. Robbins may not be explicitly citing where his theories and interventions come from but it is no secret they come from various traditions including from traditional and positive psychology. However, they are unique in their presentation and commercial success. What Robbins has been able to do is condense and present ideas from various schools of thoughts in a way that affects and possibly even transforms people. He makes psychological growth and empowerment partly into entertainment and there seems to be some power in that.

The purpose of this paper was to begin a discourse on ideas and research of creating well-being with different methodologies. Anthony Robbins and the self-help world can learn more about ways to become more empirically sound and thus more respected by the fields of

academia, while positive psychology can learn from Anthony Robbins and self-help world to speak to a wider audience and develop more powerful interventions. Overall, in order to reach the most amount of people there needs to be more discourse and open collaboration where both fields put aside their egos and discuss and learn from each other. Not everyone is happy in the same way and that is why we need a diversity of opinions and interventions that may not be able to be replicated to every single individual but be at least able to reach plenty in powerful ways.

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