

## Positive Psychology in Spain: A portrait of a vigorous field of research

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**Título:** Psicología Positiva en España: Un retrato de un pujante campo de estudio.

**Resumen:** La Psicología Positiva tiene casi dos décadas de vida y es buen momento para hacer balance y, quizá lo más importante, reunir un conjunto de artículos que permitan pulsar las tendencias, intereses, metodologías y resultados que se están generando dentro de nuestras fronteras. Este monográfico es por tanto una invitación al lector, ya sea investigador o profesional, para acercarse a este territorio y para que su lectura sea un punto de partida hacia una mayor profundización en la literatura de la Psicología Positiva.

**Palabras clave:** psicología positiva; monográfico; bienestar; intervenciones positivas.

**Abstract:** Positive Psychology has been alive for almost two decades and it is a good moment to take stock and, most importantly, present a set of studies that allow us to identify trends, interests, methodologies and results that are being generated within our borders. This monograph is thus an invitation to the reader, either researcher or professional, to explore this territory and use this as a starting point for further investigation in the Positive Psychology literature.

**Key words:** positive psychology; monograph; well-being; positive interventions.

Perhaps we should start with the question: What is Positive Psychology (PosPsy)? Of the many definitions of PosPsy, one defines it as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p.104). PosPsy belongs to and has roots in Psychology and therefore shares with it both its methodology and epistemology. If someone asked what the label "positive" means, a short answer might be that it refers to issues related to optimal functioning. The fact is the boundaries of PosPsy are blurred, in other words, the term, "positive", cannot be defined precisely. However, in my opinion, it does not pose a limitation for developing this field of research. PosPsy is not separate from other fields (e.g. educational psychology, work psychology or clinical psychology). On the contrary, it is intertwined with them. Moreover, the quality and usefulness of a research area is not related to the lack of well-delimited boundaries, but to the lack of well-delimited concepts. In my opinion, PosPsy should preferably concentrate on the latter.

Nevertheless if we take a look at other research areas, for instance, cognitive psychology, ergonomics, or third-wave therapies, their boundaries do not seem to be clear-cut and yet this does not seem to be an obstacle for their development. Third-wave cognitive-behavior therapy represents an interesting example because this is not only delimited by the concept of acceptance, among others, but also because it has a place in how Clinical Psychology has historically evolved. Additionally, PosPsy is mainly defined by terms such as optimal functioning, strengths or well-being, but it also represents a key step in the evolution of psychology from a deficit-oriented historical period toward a more balanced discipline today (see Wong, 2011).

PosPsy is not just a research area, it is also a movement. A group of both academic and professional psychologists have joined forces to try to recapture and better understand the positive aspects of the human being. It is important to underline that the beginning was marked by the commitment to gather and work on the previous literature related to positive topics; there were no hidden agendas or dogmas about positive emotions, optimism or any other trait. Afterwards research findings helped to develop theories, which in turn have been progressively refined. Thus, the cornerstone of PosPsy is, above all, the strong commitment with the empirical methods of science.

Some authors consider necessary that PosPsy develops a more integrated research agenda between positive and negative elements (e.g., Wong, 2011). Although at this stage it is somewhat inevitable that PosPsy focuses mainly on positive aspects, it is true that almost any aspect of human functioning can have positive and negative outcomes. Grant and Schwartz (2011) reviewed the literature describing how positive traits may have negative effects to extreme degrees. I am sure that most researchers in PosPsy have a balanced approach in this respect although, not surprisingly, it may be a different story for some practitioners without a scientific background.

In this monograph, two studies that include variables for addressing positive and negative functioning are presented. Both studies are related to positive emotion regulation, a multidimensional construct that has gained attention recently in psychopathology (Carl, Soskin, Kerns, & Barlow, 2013). In the first study, the effect of positive mood regulation strategies, including dampening, on optimism after a happy mood induction is examined (Etchemendy, Herrero, Espinoza, Molinari, Corno, Carrillo-Vega, Botella, & Baños, this issue). The second study explores how extraverts maintain high levels of positive affect through mood regulation. Specifically, it examines differences in mood regulation between extraverts, ambiverts and introverts when facing a sad vs. a happy mood (Hervas & López-Gómez, this issue).

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One of the difficulties PosPsy faces is breaking through the boundaries of the well-known research territories. The challenge is to define new constructs or variables that permit capturing phenomenon that at the present moment are highly unperceivable, if not invisible. In this monograph, we have an example on the experience of “shared flow”. Using a longitudinal design, the effects of collective ritualized gatherings on positive variables as happiness, collective efficacy, identity fusion, and social integration were examined (Zumeta & Bobowik, this issue). Beyond PosPsy, defining a new phenomenon is an act of bravery and commitment to science. In this regard, the observable trend in recent times of harsh criticism, occasionally bordering on harassment, in the scientific field through blogs should be a matter of concern. Within science, we should demand the same level of transparency and rigor as respect and appreciation. Among other relevant aspects, creativity is at stake if this hypercritical trend continues (see Amabile et al., 1996).

Being creative may increase the possibilities of opening new avenues for the study of positive change, another topic of great interest and rapid development within PosPsy. In fact, positive interventions have been refined in recent years and, as expected, when they were put together their long-lasting effects have been more evident. For example, a recent trial comparing cognitive-behavior therapy to a positive intervention program for clinical depression has yielded compelling results (Chaves, López-Gómez, Hervas, & Vazquez, 2016). In this monograph, three studies proposing interventions and examining their effects are presented. First, the efficacy of a combined positive intervention plus cognitive-behavioral therapy for enhancing subjective and psychological well-being in a non-clinical sample was examined (Marrero, Carballeira, Martín, & Mejías, this issue).

Although clinical trials for children are less frequent, in this monograph we have included a randomized controlled

trial testing an intervention to promote resilience for children with depressive symptoms (Sánchez-Hernández, Méndez, & Garber, this issue).

Lastly, another intervention study is presented that explores the effect of a mindfulness-based intervention. The focus of the applied research on mindfulness has evolved from health psychology in their origins, to clinical psychology later, and is now increasingly moving towards well-being. In this case, an intensive three-week mindfulness intervention was conducted for testing an Integrated Model of Mindfulness. The hypothesized model postulated that the practice of mindfulness meditation significantly leads to increases in mindfulness and self-compassion, which in turn enhances positive mental states towards others and oneself (Rodríguez-Carvajal, García-Rubio, Paniagua, García-Diex, & de Rivas, this issue).

PosPsy confronts important challenges and at the same time, it remains very necessary both from the theoretical and applied points of view. In the academic field, research topics that are now acknowledged and respected, such as forgiveness, well-being, gratitude, meaning, growth and many others, were until recently dismissed as irrelevant. If it were not for PosPsy, these topics would not be under study now and, at the worst, they would have remained neglected for decades. We have worked and we will work for PosPsy because we honestly and profoundly believe that it is a complementary perspective crucial to understanding human existence in all its complexity, and as such, it is vital for our profession and the society as a whole.

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