

Positive, Cognitive and Health Psychology: An Introduction to Three Traditions

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Layout demonstration — sample record, not a published paper.

Tradition	Unit	Usual evidence
positive	states and strengths	self-report and longitudinal
cognitive	processes and biases	experiment and reaction time
health	behaviour and outcomes	cohort and intervention

Table 1: Three traditions, their unit of study and their usual evidence. Layout demonstration only.

Abstract

What does each of three psychological traditions actually explain, and what does each tend to overstate? This introduction sets their questions and standards of evidence side by side and gives four steps for reading a study.

Keywords: positive psychology; cognitive psychology; health psychology; wellbeing

1 Introduction

Positive, cognitive and health psychology are often presented as three answers to the same question. They are better read as three questions that overlap at the edges, which is why a single study rarely settles a claim that spans them.

This introduction gives each tradition one section, one standard of evidence and one characteristic failure. The failure is included on purpose: knowing what a tradition tends to overstate is part of knowing how to read it.

The book is a specimen. No finding is reported; the tables and the reading steps show how a finished introduction would be arranged.

2 Three traditions, one question

The question all three approach is what makes a life go well, but each answers a different part of it. Table 1 keeps the three side by side with the evidence each one usually produces, so that the comparisons stay fair.

Reading the middle column across the rows is what shows the traditions are not interchangeable: a self-report cannot substitute for a reaction time, and a reaction time cannot substitute for an outcome.

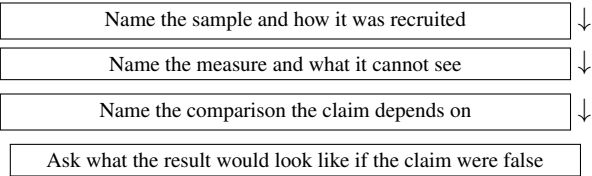


Figure 1: Four steps for reading a study from any of the three traditions.

3 Evidence and its limits

Each tradition has a characteristic failure that appears when its method is used outside its range. Naming the failure is more useful than listing the method’s virtues, because the failure is what a reader will meet in the wild.

Self-report measures the story a person tells about themselves; an experiment measures behaviour under conditions the experimenter chose. Both are evidence, and neither replaces the other.

The introduction therefore asks the reader to check one thing before accepting any claim: which of the two columns of evidence the claim actually rests on.

4 Reading a study

The four steps below are the reading method the book uses throughout. They are ordered so that the easiest check comes first and the hardest comes last.

The last step is the one that changes a reader’s habits. A study that cannot describe its own null result is making a claim that has not yet been tested.

5 What a finished book adds

A completed introduction would add one worked reading of a real paper per tradition and a short appendix on effect sizes. The specimen keeps the method and leaves the papers to their authors.

References

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