

# Skinner's *Walden Two*: An Anticipation of Positive Psychology?

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B. F. Skinner's, 1948 novel, *Walden Two* has some remarkable parallels to the growing Positive Psychology movement which emphasizes the promotion of subjective well being, the development of character strengths, and establishing positive institutions. Despite Skinner's reputation for neglecting emotion and subjective well being, one finds the opposite in the *Walden Two* community. Misunderstandings of Skinner's views have obscured the common themes between his ideas and Positive Psychology including positive use of leisure, value of positive emotions, and seeking happiness through engagement or gratification rather than through pleasure. Moreover, at *Walden Two*, the community develops Positive Psychology's character strengths such as creativity, persistence, humility, love, fairness, and communal gratitude. Particularly memorable was the shaping of self-regulation. The consequences of comparing *Walden Two* and Positive Psychology may be to shed some of the myths about contemporary behaviorism and Skinner's ideas, and to remind workers in Positive Psychology of the power of the empirically documented methods for building the automaticity of behavioral skills which may underlie character strengths advocated by Positive Psychology. Finally, this paper suggests the need for finding common ground in current psychology rather than emphasizing divisions.

*Keywords:* positive psychology, B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two*, character strengths, behavior analysis

B. F. Skinner's utopian novel *Walden Two*, published in 1948 (Skinner, 1976a) was influential in inspiring many youthful psychologists as well as laypersons in the 1960s and beyond. Some might now assign *Walden Two* (and perhaps Skinner also) to the status of an interesting "relic" of mid 20th century psychology; however, if contemporary psychologists read *Walden Two* or other of his works, they would find that Skinner's ideas are currently relevant and they would see deep parallels between the reasons that prompted the writing of Skinner's publically oriented works—which were clearly directed toward the betterment of human beings (Benjamin & Nielsen-Gammon, 1999; Bjork, 1993), and the stated motivations influencing the emergence of the current Positive Psychology movement launched some dozen years ago (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

We might imagine that were Skinner alive today he would be a critic of the new Positive Psychology and its emphasis on subjective well-being and positive emotions, and with its emphasis on behavior emerging *from* character. Indeed, one central difference with Positive Psychology was Skinner's emphasis on principles of nonagentic selection (see Palmer & Donohoe, 1992) leading to the repertoires that constitute "character strengths" rather than attributing one's behavior to some "internal essence" of the person. Nevertheless, the goals of Skinner's *Walden Two* bear notable similarities to those of the Positive Psychology movement—an

interest in subjective well being, character strengths, and mutually supportive institutions. Whereas some might argue that *Walden Two* is not representative of Skinner's other writings, he stood by this view throughout his life (Rutherford, 2009; Skinner, 1987; Smith, 1996). On the other hand, books such as *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, (Skinner, 1971) clearly represent another side of Skinner's method of expression that is clearly at odds with the language of Positive Psychology, even while the ultimate goals for improving society are consistent.

As Positive Psychology enters its second decade following its formal launch in 2000, perhaps this perspective might benefit from a reexamination of the successes of Skinner's work and legacy among current behavioral approaches, as noted by Catania (2001). This article will attempt to elaborate on the parallels between the goals of Positive Psychology and the characteristics of Skinner's fictional account of a community living by behavioral principles. To be sure, these have been noted elsewhere, but only rarely and briefly (Catania, 2001; Rich, 2001), although see Altus and Morris (2004) for a similar view. After introducing Positive Psychology and abstracting the present agenda, this article will illustrate some of the congruence between *Walden Two* (the community) and Positive Psychology while also addressing some of the continuing misunderstandings of Skinner's views, ultimately noting how many of Skinner's basic ideas have been *implicitly* accepted in Positive Psychology's popular books even while behaviorists are explicitly dismissed. Lastly, this article will suggest ways in which Positive Psychology could benefit from behavioral strategies that build automaticity of skills. The overall goal of this essay is to encourage the acknowledgment and inclusion of worthy ideas regardless of the label under which one may find them. If Positive Psychology is to become a major force within psychology, then it will behoove its adherents to draw from any

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successful ideas that promote its goals of developing flourishing persons and institutions.

### Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology formally began when many psychologists joined Martin Seligman and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (2000) in initiating a “science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, positive institutions” (p. 5) which seeks to improve the quality of living for the many rather than emphasizing pathology as has been so prevalent in psychology during the latter part of the 20th century and beyond. Positive Psychology studies subjective phenomena such as hope and happiness (emphasis on engagement and meaning regarding the latter), character strengths such as creativity and persistence, and social characteristics such as altruism and tolerance.

Mid-decade, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) reported considerable progress with regard to books, conferences, an international society, and a major volume cataloging virtues and human strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), as well as empirical support for interventions that enhance these. A journal for the society arrived in 2006; its length of volumes quickly expanded, and a first world congress in 2009 had impressive attendance. Moreover, Positive Psychology has received major coverage in the popular media. Although Positive Psychology can be said to be thriving, the new perspective is not without criticism of its major tenets (e.g., Held, 2004). The present essay is a critique only in its observations that Positive Psychology has missed an important strategy for realizing its goals by not yet examining the potential of Skinner’s ideas and empirical applications for bringing about the changes Positive Psychology seeks. In this context this article is intended to convince a new generation of psychologists, particularly those interested in Positive Psychology, to include Skinner’s work in their broader reading rather than assuming that it offers nothing that would be relevant thanks to misinformed caricatures from academic folklore (Todd & Morris, 1992).

### Synopsis of *Walden Two*

For those who have not read *Walden Two*, or to remind those who read the book many years ago, what follows is a sketch of Skinner’s fictional community. A professor of psychology (Burris) narrates the story; he visits *Walden Two* along with a philosopher colleague (Castle) and two young WWII veterans (one a former student of Burris), along with their future wives. The visit is prompted by the former student who has read about *Walden Two* and says “we want to find out what people really want, what they need to be happy. . .” (p. 4). Frazier, an acquaintance of Burris from graduate school days, is the designer and a cofounder of *Walden Two*; he hosts the visitors during a 5-day visit.

*Walden Two* is comprised of some 1,000 citizens living in a rural setting where they work 4-hr days (labor credit) in exchange for food, housing and access to a panoply of leisure opportunities. With no cash transactions and no basis for economic or political status, it is truly egalitarian. Men and women are on equal terms; with a communal nursery, women are free to pursue their vocational goals along with men, which is one of Frazier’s “surprises” about how a community such as *Walden Two* could manage with 4-hr work days. One earned more credit for *less* desirable work,

and all were required to contribute to the accomplishment of the least desirable work. That is, no lower strata of *Walden Two*’s members were assigned the most menial and meaningless work. Education was self driven and lifelong based upon an apprenticeship model. Social life was rich and although a strict code was observed, people *felt* free in their social and vocational choices. The novel is obviously a platform for Skinner to discuss ideas about freedom, control, the pursuit of happiness, economics, morality and the raising of children with discussions between Burris and Frazier and rather one-sided battles where Frazier bests Castle on all of Skinner’s arguments about the worth of applying a behavioral technology in an experimental community.

### Relevance of *Walden Two* Today

Skinner’s evident dissatisfaction with the rapid pace of life in the mid 20th century is no less relevant today. He was ahead of his time with regard to “green” values, gender equality, and practical education; saving labor (reducing uninteresting kinds), reducing energy usage, and avoiding overconsumption were central to the *Walden Two* ethos. Skinner’s most important point, however, was his advocacy of explicit experimentation for discovering and evaluating practices to improve the human condition. Whereas particular practices of *Walden Two* may not turn out to work well, an experimental attitude toward living is the only way we can effectively build knowledge to improve our circumstances. This seems particularly relevant to the stated goals of Positive Psychology; however, to cultivate that common ground some misconceptions need to be addressed.

One such misconception concerns Skinner’s use of the term control. Clearly, at the fictional *Walden Two* and in modern Behavior Analysis, methods which influence the relationship between a social environment and resulting behavior are used in a manner that is planned specifically and through empirical testing. However, it is clear that this “control” is positive in its intentions, and in its consequences. Dinsmoor (1992), in reviewing the reactions of the popular press toward *Walden Two* and *Beyond Freedom And Dignity*, suggested that many readers miss Skinner’s point about control and autonomy. He suggested that “confusion of (Skinner’s) opposition of autonomous action as a scientific concept with opposition to behavior described as autonomous” (p. 1454) led some to think of Skinner as totalitarian when in fact his philosophy was much closer to libertarian. What Skinner opposed was the common use of aversive measures; this opposition was explicit, especially as concerning the *ultimate* ineffectiveness of aversive control: “If we hit hard enough we clear a little place for ourselves in the wilderness of civilization, but we make the rest of the wilderness still more terrible” (Skinner, 1976a, p. 245). In Skinner’s own life he continually added features into his personal and family environment to *reduce* aversive control of his behavior and of his family members (Bjork, 1993).

Skinner argued for the development of *self* control which ultimately is derived from the social community. That is, when there is an absence of aversive control, there are still subtle controls elsewhere so why not elucidate what they are and make choices to arrange them in ways to promote productive, enjoyable and community-appropriate behaviors? Thus, one might consider *Walden Two* providing suggestions for the types of institutional changes proposed by Positive Psychology.

## General Parallels Between *Walden Two* and Positive Psychology

### Originating Conditions

The writing of *Walden Two* and the initiation of Positive Psychology both occurred at times when the U.S.A. appeared to be at the cusp of a new era. Skinner was warily optimistic when writing *Walden Two* in the summer of 1945 after the fall of the Fascist regimes. Similarly, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) were hopeful, yet concerned, while writing during 1998–1999 before the contested 2000 election and some three years before 9/11, when the U.S. was at peace and with an annual budget surplus:

Entering a new millennium Americans face a historical choice. Left alone on the pinnacle of political and economic leadership the U.S. can continue to increase its material wealth while ignoring the human needs of those of its people and those of the rest of the planet. Such a course is likely to lead to increasing selfishness, alienation between the more and less fortunate and eventually to chaos and despair (p. 5).

Some 65 years ago the early postwar era saw many opportunities, but Skinner also foresaw the problems resulting from unchecked materialism. Decades later during the mid 1970s economic doldrums Skinner (1976b) believed *Walden Two* to be even more relevant:

Great changes must be made in the American way of life. Not only can we not face the rest of the world while consuming and polluting as we do, we cannot for long face ourselves while acknowledging the violence and chaos in which we live. The choice is clear: either we do nothing and allow a miserable and probably catastrophic future to overtake us, or we use our knowledge about human behavior to create a social environment in which we shall live productive and creative lives [emphasis added] and do so without jeopardizing the chances that those who follow us will be able to do the same (p. xvi).

Thus, at times when it appeared possible for changes in our society, both Skinner's *Walden Two* and the founding essay of Positive Psychology warned of increasing selfishness and competitiveness. Each argued for creating societies where people flourish.

### Wisdom From The Past

A second parallel regarding origins of Positive Psychology and the fictional *Walden Two* are their arguments that insights for modern living can be found in ancient wisdom. At *Walden Two*, Frazier and another cofounder studied classical writings on morals and ethics and sought to shape those virtues by means of behavioral principles. In his foreword to the reissue of *Walden Two* Skinner (1976b) suggests that "great cultural revolutions have not started with politics. The great men who are said to have made a difference in human affairs—Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, the scholars and scientists. . .were not politicians" (p. xvi). Peterson and Seligman (2004) compiled an impressive collection of works on virtue and character strengths from classic sources as well as more recent ones. They include very few political names (especially if one thinks of Benjamin Franklin primarily as a scientist-journalist-critic). In a more popular venue, Haidt's (2006) Positive Psychol-

ogy book, "*The Happiness Hypothesis*" has a subtitle of "*Finding Modern Truth In Ancient Wisdom*".

### Social Idealism and Anti-Materialism

For some, Positive Psychology appears to embrace utopian goals, and its emphasis on subjective well being in place of materialistic gain has a strong idealistic overtone (although see Ehrenreich, 2009, for a different political view of the movement). For instance, Kasser (2006) critiques materialism's personal costs (more distress), social costs (objectifying others and its classism consequences), and ecological costs (overuse of limited earthly resources); he then offers three principles to overcome materialistic trends. Kasser's position is consistent with the mission of *Walden Two* where the entire enterprise is a "commercial-free zone" (a component of Kasser's Principle 1), the focus on experience is central (Kasser's Principle 2 of engaging in more mindfulness), and there is coherence between people's intrinsic values and the community's values reflecting *time affluence* rather than material affluence (Principle 3).

### "The Good Life," Leisure, and the Economy of Well Being

Both Positive Psychology (e.g., Park & Peterson, 2009) and *Walden Two* assert the goal of finding and living the "good life." If we are truly moving into an era where there is a growing recognition of subjective well being's importance beyond financial well being, then Skinner's (1976b) recommendation is appropriate where he points out that "the effective use of leisure is almost completely neglected in modern life. We typically engage in behavior that leads to little change or growth. In a different environment these same opportunities could lead to developing skills and capacity to their fullest extent" (pp. xii-xiii). Advocates of Positive Psychology might well agree with this critique, for they promote the better use of leisure time in pursuits that promote "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and engagement. Skinner depicts the "good life" at *Walden Two* as consisting of (a) good health, (b) a minimum of unpleasant and uninteresting labor (which is shared equally at *Walden Two*), (c) an opportunity to develop talents and skills, (d) having a pleasant and intimate social life, and finally (e) time for relaxation and rest. Kasser's (2006) point about time affluence versus material affluence is relevant here as well.

Diener and Seligman (2004) promote the idea of an "*economy of well-being*" where verified measures of subjective well being are used rather than broad economic indicators for assessing how well off a society is. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) makes a similar point about objectively judging cultures in terms of psychic entropy and the degree to which the culture supports optimal experience of its citizens. At *Walden Two*, with no personal capital and an egalitarian system, the residents boast of high subjective well being: Frazier exclaims "Our wealth is our happiness" (Skinner, 1976a, p. 255). Implicit in this view is the idea that in a society that promotes subjective well being rather than financial wealth, security comes from *interdependence* instead of financial independence. In contrast, current western society promotes the opposite by producing constant reminders of financial independence. Indeed, priming people with ideas of money leads to asking less for help, preferring

to work alone, and distancing oneself from others (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006).

Implicitly, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) call for something like a “golden age” when they suggest that in our wealth we have had a real opportunity for progress. Because at Walden Two most energy is devoted to art, science, exercise of skills, and satisfaction of curiosity, Skinner’s Frazier asserts that even in a small community one might produce a “golden age” with the “. . . right conditions. Opportunity. Leisure. Appreciation” (Skinner, 1976a, p. 84).

### Strengthening Positive Emotions

Skinner has been criticized for not dealing with the subjective or emotional side of life and of relegating emotions to being merely epiphenomena (Seligman, 2002); certainly one can find quotes to support this view. Nevertheless, Skinner *also* took the position that emotions were important when they were viewed as consequences of our conditions. Thus, he argued that we needed to arrange conditions so that people might enjoy life, show subjective well being, and exhibit positive emotions. He simply argued that our inner subjective life was not the originator of overt behavior, but rather “private behavior” was one leg of the triadic dynamics that also included ourselves as organisms (with our unique learning history and genotype) with the third leg being the social environment which we inhabited. As illustrated earlier, the fictional Walden Two inhabitants were not depicted as emotionless automatons, but rather as a flourishing community of cooperative, creative people who exhibited a healthy profile that included many of the two dozen character strengths associated with Positive Psychology.

At Walden Two, emotions of jealousy and envy are prevented from developing very far and the “meaner” emotions identified with distress are nearly unknown. When one visitor claims that life is not worth living without emotions, Frazier agrees regarding the “productive and *strengthening* [emphasis added] emotions of joy and love” (Skinner, 1976a, p. 92). He goes on to suggest that negative emotions of anger, fear and rage are “out of proportion with the needs of modern life.” Thus, Skinner seems to agree that we may have inherited a negative motivational bias, but he also anticipates Fredrickson’s (1998) view of the adaptiveness of the positive emotions which we ought to foster. That is, positive reinforcement tends to support exploration and variation or creativity just as Fredrickson proposed for positive emotions. In a cooperative society such as the fictional Walden Two, the contingencies do not support jealousy and envy, whereas in a competitive context these emotions are identified with behavior that allows a person to succeed (at the cost to another). Thus, Skinner suggests that our innate negative emotions need not develop far if the social conditions do not support their maintenance. This may be too optimistic a view, but Skinner’s fundamental position was that such issues concern empirical questions to be tested rather than assumptions to be decided by argument.

### Promoting Engagement Rather Than Pleasure

Consistent with his values of making work as meaningful as possible at Walden Two, Skinner later wrote about the strengthening versus pleasing effects of reinforcers (Skinner, 1986). This

analysis is clearly parallel to Positive Psychology’s recent distinction between pleasures versus gratifications (Seligman, 2002). Skinner was critical of the pervasive promotion of pleasing reinforcers which feel good while reinforcing passive behavior. He contrasted these with *strengthening* reinforcers which develop and maintain healthy behavioral skills accompanied by good feelings. He argued that in many of our modern Western contexts there is a lack of contingency between reinforcers and the type of productive behavior which would promote engaged happiness. Behavior (or “will”) is weak because of the availability of pleasing reinforcers such as the pleasures of eating tasty but unhealthy treats, passively spending hours watching exciting movies, or guiltily viewing entertaining yet intellectually vacuous TV shows.

Using Walden Two as a model, Skinner provides suggestions about *how* we could enhance the above noted Positive Psychology points of focus—strengthening emotions, engagement in life and promoting subjective well being, and in short, living the “good life.” It is worth noting that these (albeit fictional) outcomes are based on empirical testing.

### Promotion of Virtue and Character Strengths at Walden Two

The following section reviews the parallels between the virtues and character strengths compiled by early contributors to Positive Psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and the activities and structure of the fictional Walden Two that encourage these *behaviors*. It is notable that although these virtues were described in a fictional setting, they were developed through empirically established principles. For purposes of brevity, included are those most obviously depicted at Walden Two; all page number citations refer to *Walden Two* (Skinner, 1976a).

#### Virtue 1: Wisdom

**Creativity.** Skinner has written often about creativity, and Peterson and Seligman (2004) list Skinner among eminent psychologists having an interest in creativity. Skinner argues that art and scientific innovation can quickly follow once basic needs are fulfilled. Walden Two provides ample leisure time for artists and scientists to “play” continually with their craft, and for more modestly talented individuals to use their time to develop their skills. Skinner was *not* proposing a blank slate mentality; obviously some will be more gifted than others through random genetic variability and the vicissitudes of early experience, but even so, all can *cultivate* talent when the conditions are right. Novel operants are seen as the well springs of creativity, and in an experimental community new arrangements of the contingencies can be identified that enhance these (Smith, 1996).

**Curiosity.** The strength of curiosity is seen as a natural condition of a playful young human, and the Walden Two mode of education is designed to promote that natural “drive.” In a discussion of education Frazier asserts “We appeal to the curiosity which is characteristic of the unrestrained child, as well as the alert and inquiring adult. We appeal to the drive to control the environment” (p. 115). Again, contrary to caricature, Skinner is depicting people as interactive and engaged rather than passive automatons.

**Love of learning.** As previously discussed, productive *and* enjoyable use of leisure is one of the pillars of the Walden Two

community. In one sense education is the heart of Walden Two; “Education should be only life itself” (p. 115); learning about whatever one chooses is a continual option that (at least fictionally) is exploited fully. One of the “rules” of Walden Two is that one is expected to describe one’s work to anyone who asks; thus, one has opportunities to learn about all aspects of interest in the workings of one’s surroundings.

**Open-mindedness.** Walden Two promotes, indeed requires, an experimental attitude toward all aspects of living conditions; nothing is held absolute and the code is subject to change by empirical evidence. Walden Two members are also encouraged to be open toward the outside world rather than provincial about their “advantages” of living at Walden Two.

### Virtue 2: Courage

**Bravery/valor.** Whereas there would seem to be little need for valor in a safe and insular community, Skinner comments that bravery normally occurs by the coincidence of particular personality traits and an accident of experience. In several of his works Skinner repeatedly questions the “virtue of accident”—certainly selection in accidental circumstances can contribute to the development of valorous individuals (or contribute to a variety of other psychological strengths), but why wait for accident when one might systematically control adversity in ways to make many people brave? Thus, children are given doses of adversity that can be handled such that they become willing to take risks and try new things.

**Persistence.** This strength is taught directly at Walden Two. Tolerance for annoyances is part of children’s training starting very young. In fact, toys for young children are set up using Skinner’s empirical data on schedules of reinforcement to shape persistence (e.g.,) toys which require multiple pulls of a string to activate motion, etc. (see p. 114). Interestingly, Skinner points out the possibility of obsessiveness or “stupid” persistence, and that the psychologists of Walden Two were attentive to this possibility after some initial mistakes.

**Vitality.** At one point Frazier is asked about whether people would “fall asleep” at Walden Two with so few problems. He suggests that whereas some people might prefer to live more simply and would gladly give up the need to plan and struggle, others (himself obviously included) would be always full of zeal for improving the community. With the self-driven values for education, boredom simply would not exist; elsewhere in the novel the children are described as “energetic curious, and happy” (p. 110). Near the end of the book Frazier argues with Burris about not being “done” despite the seeming success of Walden Two; he asks: “Could you really be happy in a static world, no matter how satisfying it might be in other respects? . . . We must never be free of that feverish urge to push forward which is the saving grace of mankind” (p. 273).

### Virtue 3: Humanity

**Love.** Many would be surprised at Skinner’s sentimentality in his descriptions equating love (in the biblical sense of charity) and positive reinforcement: “What is love except for another name for the use of positive reinforcement?” (p. 282). Frazier describes that friendship and relationships are all important at Walden Two with

“abiding affection on a very high plane” (p. 129). Although it is Skinner’s work that is at issue it bears mentioning that Bjork’s biography (1993) referred to Skinner’s sentimentality on numerous occasions in contrast to his cold public image.

**Kindness.** Throughout the Walden Two society people are kind and friendly; the code discouraged gossiping (especially in the case of a broken marriage), and contexts where domination provides any positive outcomes are rare. Frazier notes: “We discourage attitudes of domination . . . Our goal is a general tolerance and affection” (p. 148).

### Virtue 4: Justice

**Citizenship.** Walden Two is a paragon of potential for citizenship through its emphasis on interdependence and in the sense of collective goals and work. Communication among the planners, managers and other people is open for constructive criticism so that all in one sense have a voice in the well being of the community even as there is a lack of traditional democratic structure (e.g., voting).

**Fairness.** Skinner’s philosophy regarding promoting practices that enhance the happiness of all rather than the few is a model of utilitarian fairness. Without marked status differences and financial distinctions, and with a policy for revolving “power” positions, the distribution of goods, privileges, and any other “perks” is scrupulously egalitarian. Even on a long term scale, there is fairness with regard to a “green” attitude about not over-using resources.

**Leadership.** There is an emphasis on shared leadership at Walden Two. Frazier often refers to the dangers of leadership turning into domination (let us keep in mind the broader world context of the 1940s!) and, thus, in Walden Two leadership would necessarily be a matter of teamwork. Frazier warned against depending too much on one skilled person and that it is the system (institution) that is more important than individual prowess.

### Virtue 5: Temperance

**Humility/modesty.** At Walden Two there is general respect for the common “man”; Frazier argues vehemently against elitism. The whole ethos of Walden Two is to support all rather than that of our current culture, which selects winners (few in number) at the expense of the many (losers). Heroes are *not* seen as role models; as Frazier puts it “Fame is . . . won at the expense of others . . . . Our decision to eliminate personal aggrandizement arose quite naturally from the fact that we were thinking of the whole group. We could not see how the group could gain from individual glory” (p. 156).

**Self-regulation.** This is one of the signature strengths promoted at Walden Two through a very precise training structure in the early education (see chapter 14). Skinner emphasizes that internalized control is much more effective than policing individuals regarding their adherence to the Walden Two code. At ages 3–4 children are given specific instruction in a delay of gratification task very reminiscent of Walter Mischel’s subsequent work (e.g., Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989); children wear a lollipop around their neck (with powdered sugar on it for detecting surreptitious licks) for long periods before they are allowed to consume it. For older children, they are left standing before hot

bowls of soup watching while one half of their group gets to sit and eat (after a long tiring outing). Peterson and Seligman (2004) actually make a brief reference to this context from *Walden Two* in their chapter on Temperance.

Frazier describes how children are encouraged in various strategies to maintain self control and that “new horizons” are available due to the lack of frustration and failure after the *Walden Two* regimen for shaping self regulation; children find “*happiness, freedom, and strength*” (emphasis added, p. 102) as they are weaned from negative emotions born of frustration and failure. Skinner also uses this example to assert that despite its private nature, self control always is derived ultimately from the control of society.

### Virtue 6: Transcendence

In general this virtue is the least well described at *Walden Two*. Although one can find instances to align with some of the character strengths within this virtue (e.g., awe), most consideration has been given to one character strength where Skinner takes a unique stance.

**Gratitude.** *Walden Two* (Skinner) has a singular view about the value of gratitude. On the one hand Frazier asserts “we overflow with gratitude—but to no one in particular . . . for all and none” (p. 157), and yet expressions of individual gratitude (thanking people for doing their normal work) are forbidden. Skinner suggests that signs of gratitude (especially awards and recognition) given to one person always take away from the contributions of the others. This rule is part of an antihero attitude at *Walden Two*. Although gratitude is seen less as an emotion than as a behavioral tendency, the inhabitants of *Walden Two* appear to *feel* universally grateful for their happy situation.

### Caveats and Distinctions

Those who have been inspired by *Walden Two* must occasionally remind themselves of the obvious—*Walden Two* is *fiction*. Many of Skinner’s assertions at that time had no empirical support from studies of human behavior, although the validity of reinforcement principles under controlled conditions was clearly supported and remains as such. Many real-life models inspired by Skinner’s *Walden Two* were unsuccessful and none have grown into a large community the size of *Walden Two*. On the other hand, Rutherford (2009) describes communities such as Twin Oaks in Virginia and Los Horcones in Mexico (both some 40 years old now) which were formed by *Walden Two*-inspired founders and which have remained viable and in at least one case maintained behavioristic principles. Regarding the many abandoned features of *Walden Two* at Twin Oaks, Skinner commented in a letter to the Twin Oaks founders: “the whole point of *Walden Two* was to experiment with the good life” (cited in Rutherford, 2009, p. 137) rather than use *Walden Two* as an exact blueprint.

There are obvious distinctions between Skinner’s *Walden Two* and Positive Psychology’s emphasis; *Walden Two*’s interest in character strengths centers on how to shape them, rather than suggesting that they are “essentialistic” structural inner causes of behavior. Advocates of Positive Psychology appear to put a lot of emphasis on character strengths as being something other than a product of one’s environment (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 11).

Positive Psychology’s emphasis on exemplars of virtue and on heroes clearly is distinguishable from Skinner’s warning at *Walden Two* against promulgating heroism.

### Benefits From a Reexamination of *Walden Two*

#### Recognition of the Power of Positive Reinforcement

A reexamination of Skinner’s work, and particularly *Walden Two*, could provide those in the Positive Psychology movement with effective practices for bringing about positive changes. An examination of some recent work in Behavior Analysis shows parallel interests with those in Positive Psychology. For instance, Hayes’ contextual behavioral work (e.g., Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda & Lillis, 2006) links Behavior Analysis practices to Positive Psychology-like functioning (e.g., mindfulness and acceptance). In addition, the Positive Behavior Support application to education in the Behavior Analysis tradition dovetails with the goals of Positive Psychology as described by Carr (2007). Following the inauguration of Positive Psychology several researchers from a Behavior Analysis background drew this parallel and urged those in the Positive Psychology movement to consider the role for positive reinforcement principles in promoting many behaviors of interest to Positive Psychology (e.g., Catania, 2001; Follette, Linnerooth, & Ruckstuhl, 2001; Wiegand & Geller, 2005). Catania (2001), in responding to the inaugural articles on Positive Psychology, was the first to point out the omission of positive reinforcement theory and suggested that Positive Psychology could benefit by drawing upon the successes in the Behavior Analysis field. He made a brief reference to *Walden Two* and noted that:

We all shape each other’s behavior, and the more we know about how positive reinforcement works, the more likely we will use it productively . . . . A mutual reinforcement society in which reinforcers are delivered reciprocally and openly is likely also to be a happy society (Catania, 2001, pp. 86–87).

Regrettably, this suggestion was not heeded and in the response to Catania’s comment (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001), there seemed to be a misunderstanding regarding the arbitrariness of reinforcement. Certainly, Skinner used arbitrary reinforcers in deprived animals for precision of measurement and experimental control, but he clearly argued that positive reinforcers in society (where they could not be experimentally controlled) are often social and subtle. As used optimally, they correspond closely to Positive Psychology’s interests (perceiving control, making meaning, smiles, attentiveness, etc.). Implicitly, the control advocated in Seligman’s more popular writings (Seligman, 2002) is consistent with positive reinforcement. Indeed, the attack on the self-esteem movement in *The Optimistic Child* (Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox & Gillham, 1995) sounds as if it were written by Skinner himself: “By emphasizing how a child *feels* at the expense of what the child *does*—mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom, and meeting challenge—parents and teachers are making . . . children more vulnerable to depression” (p. 27). There seems to be agreement with Skinner that feelings are important, but not as causes of behavior—rather they are the fruits of mastery based on the contingencies (which is implicitly accepted as these authors urge parents to take careful *control* in child care).

### Contribution to the Modern Debate Regarding Freedom and Determinism

Given the new surge of interest on the freedom and determinism question in recent years (Bandura, 2006; Baumeister, 2008; Dennett, 2003; Wegner, 2002) a reconsideration of Skinner's works may be timely. Elaboration of this point is beyond the scope of this article, but it is appropriate to present Skinner's position as contemporary rather than lumped with other mid 20th century "neo-behaviorists." Skinner's emphasis on "contingencies" of reinforcement having effects on the "probability" of behavior, always recognized the inherent variability or "looseness" (Neuringer & Jensen, 2010) of operant ("voluntary") behavior and in one sense provided room for "freedom" as noted by Fallon (1992). Clearly, Skinner talks of making "choices" with regard to self control and the selection of environments which we inhabit. Thus, despite the popular caricatures, Skinner did *not* advocate an S-R "mechanical" view of determinism (Chiesa, 1992; Moxley, 1992). Rather, his functional analysis acknowledged multiple variables, only some of which could be controlled outside an efficient laboratory context. To illustrate this in the context of *Walden Two*, consider Frazier's paradoxical remark regarding *Walden Two*'s people: "their behavior is determined, yet free" (Skinner, 1976a, p. 279).

Skinner's description of the self as a "locus—a place in which a number of variables come together in a unique confluence to yield an equally unique achievement" (Skinner, 1957, p. 313) is a dynamic perspective consistent with recent views in Behavior Analysis such as Hiline (1992), who remarks that rather than feeling threatened by the loss of the Cartesian or unitary self we might find fulfillment in "viewing oneself as a multiply scaled loosely bounded locus" (p. 1284). Similarly, Ainslie's (2001) dynamic account of the "will" and the self as a "population of interests" is consistent with Skinner's views; moreover, Ainslie's emphasis on recursive principles in an operant context is empirically testable and is applicable to the problem of why we too frequently fail to carry out our best "intentions" such as developing virtue.

### Automaticity: A Missing Ingredient in the Recipe for a Flourishing Positive Psychology?

A current limitation of Positive Psychology is that its advocates have not yet explained sufficiently how to transfer consistently the inspiration from positive emotion and subjective well being into steady behavioral practice (habits). How regularly do we bring about these positive states that we so desire when our typical environments support passive or maladaptive activities earning pleasures rather than strengthening gratifications? Therein may be the value of Skinner's lessons and the proven efficacy of methods long used in Behavior Analysis; that is, the building of fluency and automaticity of adaptive behaviors and thinking through operant/selection principles. Although automaticity has also been emphasized by social-cognitive researchers who acknowledge that action precedes reflection (e.g., Bargh & Morsella, 2008), they too have ignored Skinner and Behavior Analysis's emphasis on selection principles and have conformed to the academic folklore (Todd & Morris, 1992) habit of declaring behaviorism irrelevant or dead (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000).

In the popular Positive Psychology literature, Haidt (2006) addresses the importance of automaticity. He uses the Buddhist

metaphor of the rider and the elephant to discuss the relationship between controlled processes or one's "reasoning" self (the rider), and the automatic processes in our behavioral-emotional repertoire (the wild elephant) that have deep genetic and conditioning roots, thus leading us to follow the rules of our evolutionary contingencies and automatic sociocultural mandates. Haidt implicitly advocates behavioral approaches when he suggests that happiness results from the rider realizing he must "train" the elephant, having learned that the rider's "will" cannot impose much change on the elephant's ingrained tendencies. Thus, solutions in building virtue must come from tacit knowledge: "skills of social perception and social emotion so finely tuned that one automatically *feels* the right thing in each situation, *knows* the right thing to do, and then *wants* to do it." (Haidt, 2006, p. 160). Frazier could not have said it better regarding control techniques for educating children and *Walden Two* inhabitants to be good citizens. One cannot impose control, but the subtle use of reinforcers can "control" others such that they *want* to do the right thing.

This need for automaticity of skills is applicable in educational settings where flourishing students need a behavioral regimen to build the skills needed for developing character strengths. Martens and Witt (2004) describe a positive psychology of behavioral skill instruction where operant principles are used in a hierarchal instructional scheme for building *persistence* and competence for success in educational contexts. They make the point that *creativity* emerges from skill building, fluency, and automaticity. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) also described how creativity and rote learning are not incompatible; rather the potential for the flow experience is enhanced by a reservoir of behavior and thoughts established by more than ample practice. Thus, flow or optimal experience requires well practiced *behavior* that becomes associated with subjective well being, and positive emotion. Conversely, operant principles also provide for another avenue toward creativity through reinforcing variability (Neuringer & Jensen, 2010); thus, both automaticity and variability of responding which are explainable by a functional analysis may provide foundations for different types of character strengths (e.g., persistence, creativity and self regulation).

### Conclusions

Perhaps Positive Psychology needs no inspirational nudge from a reading of *Walden Two* or other works of Skinner's, and will continue to grow while promoting positive emotions, virtue, and positive institutions. Yet, the most important message of *Walden Two* may be that working to change institutions through putting them to an "experimental test" is where we will find the *recipe* (cf. Catania, 1987) needed to change human societies in the direction Positive Psychology envisages. It may be that much of the misunderstanding and lack of acknowledgment across areas noted here is mostly a matter of *language*; Field and Hiline (2008) point out that psychological phenomena are nearly always explained in "bipolar locutions," as in agent-action or cause-effect when, in fact, our subject of interest is "intrinsically tri-polar" with behavior or covert activity being one dynamic aspect and the others being organismic variables (unique genotype and learning history) and the current environment. Clearly, Positive Psychology tends to put more emphasis on agent-action descriptions whereas Behavior Analysis tends to focus on environment-action view-

points. However, if we could broaden our language and descriptions to be more “tri-polar” we would see more confluence of positions rather than seeing the in-group and out-group biases that were fictionally ameliorated at Walden Two. Consider Seligman’s words in the foreword to an early volume of Positive Psychology work: “Civility moves you out of a defensive mode of arguing and into a creative, tolerant, and expansive mindset in which both parties benefit” (Seligman, 2003, p. xvii).

This perspective is being offered for one main purpose: to motivate contemporary psychologists to actually read (or reread) Skinner’s ideas as offered in *Walden Two* (and other works). By reminding those in the Positive Psychology movement and others in psychology of Skinner’s real positions, myths can be dismantled so that his ideas and those in Behavior Analysis may become more accessible for current “mainstream” psychological researchers working toward the betterment of the human condition. Perhaps in this era with hopes of a green technology, trends toward local purchasing, distrust of large money systems, and doubt regarding what large government can accomplish, fashioning Walden Two-like communities “. . . would not be a bad start” (Skinner, 1976b, p. xvi).

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