Can positive psychology change the world?

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24th November 2018, Hamilton, NZ

NZAPP Conference
Outline

• Challenges of the present for humans.
• What the future holds for us humans.
• Where is positive psychology going in the future?
• How is it going to get there? – Who, how, when?
• Is positive psychology going to be useful?
Challenges of the present

7,632,819,325 of us...
Challenges of the present

The WORLD as 100 PEOPLE

- 23 have no shelter
- 77 have a place to shelter
- 21 overweight
- 63 adequate
- 15 undernourished
- 1 starving
- 48 live on less than 2 US dollars per day
1. Lots of inequality.
   • Gender.
   • Racial.
   • Political.
   • Global.
   • Social.
   • Economic.
   • Educational.
   • Technological.
   • Inequality of resources.
   • Inequality of opportunity.
Challenges of the present

2. Lots of complexity.
   • At work.
   • Health (mental illness).
   • Social settings.
   • Systems (refugees).
   • Dark web.
   • Rocket science.
   • Rate and pace of change.

“The world is moving so fast these days that the man who says it can't be done is generally interrupted by someone doing it” – Harry Fosdick
Challenges of the present

3. The earth is changing.

• Global warming.
• Air quality and pollution.
• Population control issues.
• Famine and food wastage.
• Clean water.
• Species extinction.
• Re-coding life (messing with viruses and DNA).
Challenges of the present

4. A lot of people are not doing well.
   - Unhappy.
   - Stressed.
   - Depressed.
   - Anxious.
   - Lack a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

   - Mercer (2011) reported that 50% of employees are unhappy at work.
   - 800,000 people die due to suicide every year.
   - 1.1 billion have a mental or substance use disorder.
Challenges of the present

5. Bad fashion sense.
Challenges of the present

So to recap, we live in a world which has major issues with:

- Increasing inequality.
- Increasing complexity.
- Keeping the earth alive and healthy.
- People not doing well (unhappiness).
- Bad fashion sense...
Challenges of the present

It’s not all doom and gloom - good stuff is also happening:

• Remarkable declines in global poverty over the last 40 years...
• 75% have phones, 83% can read and write...
• Medical science is impressive...
• Population is growing rather than declining...
• There are 200 million people less dying of starvation compared to 25 years ago...
• Season 8 of Game of Thrones is coming in 2019 – Winter is coming!
WINTER IS COMING

GAME OF THRONES
Challenges of the present

• So to recap, despite living in a world which has major challenges (inequality, completely, etc.), it’s not all doom and gloom as good stuff is also happening (decline in poverty, literacy levels increasing, etc.).

• All-in-all, some good stuff and some bad stuff – a little bit of both.
What the future holds
What does the future hold for humans

- Personal robots.
- Enhanced communication and knowledge.
- Increased luxury.
- Better transportation.
- Better fashion?
What the future holds

What is almost certain is that it will involve:

• New technologies.
• New ways of working (e.g., flexibly, remotely, multiple jobs).
• New ways of getting around (driverless cars, drones, space travel).
• New ways of getting along (electronic voting, transparency of crime).

Are you excited about our future?

Given what we can reasonably expect to happen in the future for humans, what role can positive psychology play in shaping this future for the better?

How can it “make life better”?
Where is positive psychology coming from?

A Positive Psychology Ancestral Portrait Gallery

Where is positive psychology going?

What is the purpose of positive psychology?

- Martin Seligman’s view.
- Chris Peterson’s view.
- Other key influential positive psychologists.
- Look at journal publications for trends and recommendations.
- Aaron’s 10 speculations...
Where is positive psychology going?

Martin Seligman’s view:

• Seligman: “Positive Psychology is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.”

• 51 percent of the world could be flourishing by 2051 (33 years).
Where is positive psychology going?

Chris Peterson’s view:

- Chris Peterson 2006 chapter “The future of positive psychology”:
  - Positive psychology will fuse into psychology.
  - The negative will always be appealing.
  - Clarity over hedonic set-points.
  - Better longitudinal studies needed.
  - How well will interventions generalise and scale.
  - Happy pills are only a matter of time.
Where is positive psychology going?

Ask other positive psychologists:

• Book series: Positive Psychologists on Positive Psychology (Vol 1, 2, & 3).
• Free at https://www.workonwellbeing.com/pponpp3/
• 44 interviews in total, a selection of 4 from each book:
  • Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
  • Ed Diener
  • Todd Kashdan
  • Barbara Fredrickson
  • Robert Biswas-Diener
  • Paul Wong
  • Ken Sheldon
  • James Pawelski
  • Jane Dutton
  • Felicia Huppert
  • Veronika Huta
  • Lea Waters
Where is positive psychology going?

So what did they say? Themes:

• Importance of interdisciplinary collaboration.
• Training and enabling (funding) the young scientists.
• Some cool new topics (psychological flexibility, positive parenting, time perspective).
• Some topics are getting too much attention (e.g., strengths) at the expense of others.
• Very high quality science needed.
Where is positive psychology going?

What do the publications focus on and recommend?

- Other than introductions (‘Positive psychology: An introduction’ cited 16,000+ times) and discussion of the field:
  - Positive emotions and the broaden-and-build theory.
  - Positive psychology interventions.
  - Strengths.

All recommend more research needed.
Where is positive psychology going?

There are other views also:
Where is positive psychology going?

My view of the adventures in store for positive psychology.

• Not so new-ish areas:
  • Positive neuroscience.
  • Positive education.
  • Positive health.
  • Military.
  • Positive organisations.
  • National accounts of wellbeing.
  • Culture and wellbeing.
Where is positive psychology going?

My view of the adventures in store for positive psychology.

• 10 new-ish areas of focus for the future:
  1. Discomfort.
  2. Strategic laziness.
  3. Play.
  4. Sex.
  5. Slowness.
  7. Wellbeing technology.
  8. The most disadvantaged.
Where is positive psychology going?

My view of the adventures in store for positive psychology.

• If could go beyond 10 I would speculate at things like:
  • our attentional resources and their impact on wellbeing.
  • the media and wellbeing.
  • urban design and wellbeing.
  • wellbeing literacy and wellbeing.
  • positive therapy and complete mental health.
  • sport and wellbeing.
  • Personalized wellbeing planning.
  • leisure centers (gyms, cafes, bars) and wellbeing.
  • retirement and wellbeing etc.
Where is positive psychology going?

1. Discomfort as a pathway to wellbeing:
   • Embrace and utilise negative emotions.
   • Comfort addiction? (technology enabled?)
   • See Robert Biswas-Diener youtube talk.
Where is positive psychology going?

2. Strategic laziness:

• You can’t be good at everything and use your strengths all the time – that’s exhausting!

• Professor Grant Schofield from AUT
Where is positive psychology going?

3. Play:

• Kids are good, adults are terrible!
• We need to play at work more...
Where is positive psychology going?

4. Sex:
• We can’t ignore the link between sex and wellbeing.
• Positive emotions as the glue for social disconnect.
• Cue sex video:
Where is positive psychology going?

5. Slowness:

• Stopping stuff and doing less.
• “These days even instant gratification takes too long” – Carl Honore.
Where is positive psychology going?

6. Nature:
   • Strong links with:
     • Getting outside and sunlight.
     • Green spaces.
     • Caring for growth.

Flourishing in nature: A review of the benefits of connecting with nature and its application as a wellbeing intervention

Colin A. Capaldi · Holli-Anne Passmore · Elizabeth K. Nisbet · John M. Zelenski · Raelyne L. Dopko

Abstract: From the increasing number of people living in urban areas to the continued degradation of the natural environment, many of us appear to be physically and psychologically disconnected from nature. We consider the theoretical explanations and present evidence for why this state of affairs might result in suboptimal levels of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing by reviewing the large body of research on the mental health benefits of connecting with nature. The advantages of contact with nature as a potential wellbeing intervention are discussed, and examples of how this research is being applied to reconnect individuals to nature and improve wellbeing are given. We conclude by considering the limitations of, and proposing future directions for, research in this area. Overall, evidence suggests that connecting with nature is one path to flourishing in life.

Keywords: nature, nature connectedness, flourishing, subjective wellbeing, hedonic wellbeing, eudaimonic wellbeing, human-nature

1. Introduction
   From ancient Chinese healers to Western writers such as Henry David Thoreau, the belief that
Where is positive psychology going?

7. Wellbeing technology:
   - Remember increasing complexity – humans are the bottleneck.
Where is positive psychology going?

8. The most disadvantaged:

- To increase global wellbeing we need to target the poor and disadvantaged.

Where is positive psychology going?

9. Physical health and wellbeing:

• Eat.
• Move.
• Sleep.
• Popole who are flourishing are eating well, sleeping well, and moving a lot, and conversely, people who are languishing are not eating well, not sleeping well, and not moving a lot.
• Sovereign Wellbeing Index
Where is positive psychology going?

10. Parenting:

• Positive parenting.
• Free range kids.
• Risk and positive failure.
• Can we have wellbeing across a community without positive parenting (or positive education)?
Where is positive psychology going?

So there are some exciting areas for future focus on the horizon:

1. Discomfort.
2. Strategic laziness.
3. Play.
4. Sex.
5. Slowness.
7. Wellbeing technology.
8. The most disadvantaged.
“How are these areas going to help with the problems we humans face?”
Discomfort
Strategic laziness
Play
Sex
Slowness
Nature
Wellbeing technology
The most disadvantaged
Physical health and wellbeing
Positive parenting

Increasing inequality
Increasing complexity
Keeping the earth alive and healthy
People not doing well (unhappiness)
Bad fashion sense...

And of course the knowledge base positive psychology has already produced...
How is it going to get there?

Now I have painted a picture of where positive psychology is likely going, so how is it going to get there?

• 10 (mostly new-ish) ways positive psychology can thrive and impact:
  1. Simplifying messaging.
  2. Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory.
  3. Start a movement - beyond academia.
  4. More people (let’s teach it), more passion.
  6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better: supercharge them, focus on the individual.
  7. More collaborative plan.
  8. Address the critics.
 10. Make some friends.
How is it going to get there?

1. Simplifying messaging:
How is it going to get there?

2. Better studies:
   • Complex research design – observational data, self-report, biological markers, behavioural data, time-series studies.
   • Social network analysis.
   • Sophisticated measurement.
3. Start a movement:

• Beyond academia...

• Watch Derek Sivers.
How is it going to get there?

4. More people, more passion:
   • Let’s teach it.
How is it going to get there?

5. Better dissemination:

- Social media, public policy, organisations, schools.
- International ‘Wellbeing and Public Policy’ conference series.
How is it going to get there?

6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better:

• One-size-fits-all interventions.
• Authentic delivery.
• More experiential learning (activities).
• More group based learning.
• Supportive environments for change.
• Better evaluation.
• Longer term impact (e.g., china).
• Efficacy vs effectiveness.
How is it going to get there?

7. More collaborative plan:

• We needed everyone in the room...

• We need to understand how change happens - change management frameworks...

• At the moment we have thrown things up in the air and don’t know where they are going to land...
CRITICS
How is it going to get there?

8. Address the critics better:
   • Regardless of their bad fashion sense.
How is it going to get there?

9. Become entrepreneurial and embrace technology:
   - E.g., Noba Project.
   - E.g., Happify, Work on Wellbeing.
How is it going to get there?

10. Make some friends:

• With the helping professions:
  • “Slade, Oades, and Jarden have fostered a long-overdue conversation within this book – between clinicians focusing on recovery, and positive psychologists focusing on well-being. Although the first group has traditionally focused on returning clients to baseline, the other group has tried to leave the baseline behind, for new heights of well-being. The upshot of the conversation is this: That the processes bringing recovery and the processes bringing well-being are much the same, though they have been focused on in isolation”. – Ken Sheldon

• With coaching psychologists:
  • Motivation theories can help us understand how to get the best out of ourselves and others – one of the essential goals of positive psychology.

• With the social psychologists:
  • Just because they are fun to hang out with...
How is it going to get there?

So:

1. Simplifying messaging.
2. Better studies - going beyond anecdotal evidence, and a focus on theory.
3. Start a movement - beyond academia.
4. More people (let’s teach it), more passion.
6. Tailor wellbeing interventions better: supercharge them, focus on the individual.
7. More collaborative plan.
8. Address the critics.
10. Make some friends.
“We need to focus more on what success looks like for positive psychology”
“And in particular how this success helps with real world problems!”
“Especially if we want to make positive psychology great again?"

Too soon?
Summing up…

• My recipe:
  • Invest time and effort in family connections.
  • We are social creatures so be enmeshed in a community of friends - deep and meaningful relationships.
  • Know your personal values and live by them. Similarly, know your purpose and what derives meaning for you.
  • Know you strengths and find ways to exercise them every day.
  • Develop and optimistic thinking style.
  • Invest your money in experiences rather than things.
  • Be in work or study that you enjoy.
  • Be grateful.
  • Savour the now regularly – rather than the past or future.
  • Slow down and do less.
  • Be curious.
  • Look after your health (eat real food, exercise regularly, get sleep).


Summing up...

• And of course, good fashion sense...
• Me in a suit; very rarely happens...
Summing up...

- I think we have gone from “good” to “not good” to “not good enough” (as Seligman said) to “maybe, not bad”. There is still a long way to go to “awesome” and 51% flourishing.

- There are many new areas of focus that will come into the research agenda which is exciting – we have to put them to good use.

- With regard to building a better future for the world and positive psychology, if we simplify our messaging, design better studies, teach about our topic more widely, go beyond academia, focus on how we disseminate our messages, tailor our interventions better, front up to the critics, embrace technology, and make some conceptual friends, this is a good way to get there and make an impact on some of our global challenges.
Summing up…

• Let’s think big, be bold, be creative, be authentic, and most of all be collaborative.

• Sure we all have problems, but there are a lot of things on the horizon to be optimistic about and hopeful for – both for humans and for positive psychology.

Nothing GREAT was ever achieved without enthusiasm
Emerson
And an apology to...

The always dapper Denise Quinlan who I think has great fashion sense ....
Thank you

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